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CONCURSO FEVER: THE EPIDEMIC SWEEPING BRAZIL

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates public sector work and the desire for *concursos* in northeastern Brazil. It considers the meaning of civil service to "new" middle class Brazilians and seeks to understand how standardized entry tests are used to further aspirations of upward mobility. The desire for public sector work has its roots in histories of economic instability, paternalism in the private sector, and neoliberal state-craft. Neoliberalism alters the dynamics of the labor market, making available positions in the public sector through the expansion of the penal state. For many participants in this project, the desire for public sector work is at once a proactive alignment with the neoliberal project of the state and a reaction to shrinking public entitlements and instability in the labor market, arising from an environment in which social insecurity threatens families perched precariously on the boundaries of middle class. In Brazil, the system of *concursos* overlays on previously established forms of governmentality in the labor market and higher education, linking individuals, families, and the state in the construction of desire. This desire shapes patterns of consumption in education, travel, and home ownership, as well as discourses in the moral economy—where critiques of the public sector are most prevalent by participants in this project, despite their own participation in *concursos* and continued expressed desire for public sector work.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Get a public sector job and you'll have it for the rest of your life. Doesn't matter if you lie, cheat, steal, or don't show up for work. They can't fire you. The only way you can lose your job is if you kill someone. And even then, it's negotiable…"

Or so I was told by a Brazilian taxi driver in the summer of 2011. I was in the capital city of Recife in the northeastern state of Pernambuco. I had gone to study the relationship between higher education and income earnings, but upon my arrival, I was swept up by the *"febre do concurso"*—the fever surrounding entrance exams for public sector work. The intensity of *concursos* in public discourse seemed to me a recent development since my previous visit to the area during 2003, and certainly since my childhood in northeastern Brazil during the 1980s and 1990s. Working for the government had become *the* dream job, now within grasp of ordinary Brazilians. There were countless stories of the perks of public employment: Work one day a month—payday! Show up to retrieve your paycheck and then disappear until the next cycle of disbursement. Maintain a public job in a neighboring state (you do not have to be "present" for work if you live out of state!). Hold multiple positions in the public sector (work only a handful of hours a week for each job!).

Talk of *concursos* dominated popular conversation: upcoming examinations for public employment were posted in newspapers and announced on the radio, street performers danced on the corners of busy intersections twirling advertisement posters for the newest *cursinho* (a preparatory course for an entrance exam), and billboards for test prep centers lined the highways and main bus routes (Figure 1). While riding in a taxi one afternoon, my driver summed up the obsession with the public employment

epidemic sweeping the country. “It is,” he said, cupping his hands and lifting them reverently to the sky, “the great pearl of the labor market.”

Figure 1. Billboard advertising *cursinho* (author 2012)

I returned to Recife the following year to study this gem and the participants, technologies, markets and discourses with which it was supported. I spent the greater part of 2012 conducting fieldwork in the city, received multiple participants in my home during their own vacations to the United States in 2013, and returned to the city in 2014 for follow-up fieldwork. I talked to hundreds of Brazilians—on busses, in taxis, at gyms, in grocery stores, in neighborhood parks—about these standardized tests. I asked people, young and old, if they would like to have a public job. One hundred percent answered affirmatively. If they had children, I asked if they would like their children to have public jobs. Again, the responses were overwhelmingly affirmative. But when I asked people to explain why they desired public employment, their replies were less certain. Nearly every person cited stability (*estabilidade*) as the source of desire for

public sector work, but few could articulate what stability meant in their own lives or readily explain how it would change their current situations.

What is the significance of public employment to the families who participate in Brazil's entrance exams? A staggering number of resources were devoted to the passing of *concursos,* which were increasingly selective and expensive endeavors. Moreover, *concursos* often competed with other items in the household economy, including higher education, home ownership, and consumptive practices. Nevertheless, on examination days, thousands of test takers filed into designated testing facilities around the city to compete for employment positions.

The odds of selection were not in their favor. Participants interviewed in this project often found themselves one among tens of thousands. I accompanied one such young woman to an exam for employment as a customer service attendant for the local municipality. She was one of 21,209 examinees competing for 405 openings (*vagas)*—a selection rate of less than 1.9 percent. Another young woman tested for a position as a teller at one of the national banks. There were no openings advertised for the job and, therefore, no guarantee of employment. Instead, examinees were placed on a "reserve" list, to be considered as positions became available. In the previous *concurso* for the same job title in 2010, approximately 200 applicants were called to fill teller positions from among 11,696 examinees (a selection rate of about 1.7 percent) before the time limit on the reserve pool "expired" and a new *concurso* was scheduled for 2012.

During the time of my fieldwork, low selection rates between one percent and five percent were not uncommon in entrance exams, especially for mid-level (*nível médio)* positions. By the time of the writing of this dissertation, the selection rates were

even more overwhelming: in one single *concurso* in the state of Minas Gerais, 134,270 examinees tested for 32 openings in the labor court (Colitt 2015). Why families continued to pursue *concursos*, allocating significant portions of their household economy to the construction and reproduction of desire for public employment, is central to this dissertation.

Explaining Desire

Where does the desire for public sector work come from? There have been two explanations traditionally referenced when investigating the preference for public employment in Latin America. The first has to do with wage premiums. Grounded in quantitative data, proponents of this view highlight the appeal of public employment benefits including, "participation in a different pension fund regime (without an upper limit), a raise in salary every three or five years, paid leave, near-absolute job security, lack of incentive structures that interfere with productivity, and even a wage premium over the corresponding private sector" (Mattos and França 2011:45). Brazil has the highest wage premium in all of Latin America (Love and Baer 2009). The average public employment wage premium has been estimated at 28 percent based on earnings data for positions at the municipal, state, and federal levels (Pessoa and Martins 2006). That is to say, the average wage in the public sector is nearly a third more than a comparable position at a private firm. When wage premiums are broken down at the local, regional, and national levels, the premiums can range as high as 250 percent for high ranking administrative positions (Macedo 1985) and 230 percent for federal positions in the southern part of Brazil (Foguel et al. 2000).

These are striking figures and certainly suggest a potential motivation Brazilians may hold for pursuing public sector work. In actuality, however, positions affording large premiums are the exception rather than the rule and often benefit the political elite rather than those in the middle ranks of the public sector hierarchy. For example, teachers working in public schools generally experience a negative wage premium over their private sector counterparts (Vaz and Hoffmann 2007). Most mid-level positions in state and municipal governments have a negative premium as well (Panizza and Qiang 2005). Employees occupying the middle of the hierarchy in public employment regularly register low to negative wage premiums over their private sector counterparts. Indeed, for most of the participants in this study, the *concursos* chosen had wage premiums that were significantly depressed, if not actually negative, compared to positions in the private sector. Moreover, participants in this project *knew* that these positions paid less than comparable positions in the private sector. One young woman working as a teacher at a prestigious private secondary school tested for a position as a public elementary school teacher. Upon passing the entrance exam and ranking high enough to assume the job, she asked to be terminated from her position at the private school. In sheer financial terms, her decision could be considered "irrational." Her two children had received free tuition at the private school as a condition of her employment—a monthly benefit package totaling more than R$5,700. Her termination meant that expenses for private schooling would have to be assumed by the family and paid out of pocket. Additionally, her monthly salary was reduced by nearly half, dropping from R$2,300 to R$1,200 in moving to the public sector. Thus, wage premiums appeared to have little to do with her desire for public sector work. They

were, at best, a theoretical rather than actual incentive of public employment. The problem with the explanatory framework of wage premiums outlined above is that it privileges the maximization of economic capital and obscures the social and cultural factors some Brazilians consider when navigating the labor market.

The second framework offered to explain the preference for public employment in Latin America has to do with class identity. A quick survey of the literature on class identity in Brazil establishes the relationship between class and occupation (Chilcote 1990, Goldstein 2003, Owensby 1999, Ribeiro 1995). This is not to say factors such as phenotype, income, and consumptive practices do not matter to class belonging—there is plenty of evidence that they do (Burdick 2013, Caldeira 2000, Edmonds 2010, Dent 2012, King-Calnek 2006, O'Dougherty 2012, and Alves and Evanson 2011)—rather, it is to say that occupation is central to class identity in spite of these factors. Some would argue this is a classic Marxist argument: ownership of production shapes occupation, which in turn shapes class identity and motivates social actors. Indeed, Marxist frameworks have enjoyed (and continue to enjoy) broad appeal in Brazil among academics and activists alike. But occupation has been a longstanding component of class identity in Brazil (and in Latin America more broadly) since the colonial era. While the effects of the colonial legacy remain the focus of many research projects, most social scientists agree that there are temporal and spatial consequences of colonialism that remain to this day (Shohat 2006). Wacquant frames state-craft as "structurally conditioned but historically contingent" (2012:74) and thus shaped by the colonial legacy.

Colonialism first linked elite classes with the public sector through colonial governments, allowing elite families to consolidate land holdings, control access to resources, and command indigenous slave labor in the frontier territories through their positions in the public sector. In the 1800s, elite classes used public employment to foster the maneuvering and exploitation of political and economic institutions and protect the intergenerational transmission of wealth among citizens (Metcalf 2005). In contemporary contexts, elites continue to use the public sector to drive class identity in Latin America. Occupation in the public sector grants public employees access to public resources, cash flow, and informal economies (Aron-Schaar 2002, Nutini and Isaac 2009).

Since Brazil has not experienced the kind of social revolution that occurred in other parts of Latin America, many conceptions of class identity remain tied to the colonial legacy in general and the public sector in particular. For the greater part of the twentieth century, the link between occupation and class identity remained strong in Brazil despite changes in class configurations. Social mobility during the 1960s and 1970s was largely acquired through occupational status (Conniff and McCann 1989). Approximately 72 percent of upper-lower class Brazilians—those on the verge of entering the middle class—secured entrance into the middle class by the 1980s through larger processes in the labor market that reconfigured class membership and social organization after the military dictatorship (Pastore 1982). In other words, in addition to benefitting the elite, the initial expansion of the public sector during these decades established a small, albeit precarious, middle class. In the 1990s, when employment in the formal economy became increasingly important to middle class identity, pursuing

public sector work was one of the only strategies tempering the effects of hyperinflation, economic uncertainty, and currency devaluations (O'Dougherty 2002). The cultural significance of occupation and the significance of particular types of employment (informal versus formal, public versus private) only fueled the desire for public employment.

Proponents of the second explanatory framework maintain that employment in the public sector signifies upward mobility and is therefore most often pursued by the middle and upper classes who have the resources available to compete for public employment (Panizza 2002). When evaluating the preference for public sector work, then, the prevailing argument is that Brazilians desire public jobs due to their class identity—that is, they pursue public employment because of its historical association with elite classes and the contemporary associations between class identity and occupation. A middle class graduate in engineering, for example, would pursue a high-level *concurso* in the field of engineering. Any wage premiums in the public sector would further motivate the individual to prefer public sector work. A lower class individual, on the other hand, would opt for a mid-level or entry-level *concurso* requiring less specialization, such as a customer service attendant in a municipal building. Any wage premiums for the position in the private sector would motivate the individual to pursue work in the private sector, since the desire for public sector work is cultivated by class identity. In other words, choices of occupation would be driven by class identity, as individuals would be conditioned to desire particular professions because of class-based aspirations, experiences, and expectations.

At the outset of my fieldwork, I adopted the aforementioned framework, viewing the desire for public sector work as a product of class identity. I quickly discovered, however, that many Brazilians were more concerned with attaining public employment *at any cost* than they were with attaining a particular occupation or earnings level. Twelve of the fourteen participants in my student cohort pursued *concursos* for which they were "overqualified"—in terms of education, income, and class. Many Brazilians were willing to accept employment in occupations traditionally associated with classes lower than their own, and this was not for a lack of jobs in the private sector. In the private sector, however, students were much more discerning about the occupation and less willing to accept employment in areas outside their field of study. Take, for example, the following excerpt from an interview with Rafaela, a young chemistry major:

L: Have you already thought about taking a *concurso* in an area other than your field of study? Tell me about this.

Rafaela: Yes. I wanted to take one in banking. I like banking.

L: Like, *Caixa Econômica*?

Rafaela: That is right. Or *Banco do Brasil*.

L: That one was just a few months ago, wasn't it? And did you take the *concurso*?

Rafaela: I took it, but I did not pass.

L: You did not pass. Did you study? Do you take a *cursinho*?

Rafaela: No, because at the time, I was, it was during my capstone to complete my, my degree.

L: Because this was a mid-level job, wasn't it?

Rafaela: It was mid-level.

L: But do you plan to take more mid-level *concursos* outside your field?

Rafaela: Yes.

L: Like what? Give me an example.

Rafaela: When the next banking one opens, it appears that *Banco do Brasil* is going to open one now. An administrative technician. I will see. It is like this: I will have to see if there are openings, no openings, lots of openings, few openings, things like that. To see if it is worth it.

L: So these two *concursos*? And do you have examples of other *concursos* that you have heard about?

Rafaela: Advanced or mid-level?

L: Could be either, that you would take just to get a public job.

Rafaela: There are mid-level *concursos* with the courts, but they are very difficult. Municipal courts, regional courts, criminal courts, also agricultural courts.

L: So, if you passed, any one of these would be good?

Rafaela: If I passed, it would be good!

L: And give me an example of the private jobs that maybe you are thinking about doing even though they are not in the field of chemistry.

Rafaela: There are none.

L: There are none?

Rafaela: Well, there are banking jobs in the private sector. But I think it is fairly complicated. So there are none. If the job is in the private sector, it needs to be in the field of chemistry.

Rafaela considered, and indeed tested for, multiple mid-level positions in the public sector outside her field of study. She named a handful of job titles for which she would accept employment that had nothing to do with her area of expertise. She was overqualified educationally for the public positions, and the employment for which she applied had negative wage premiums compared to the private sector. Moreover, the occupations for which she tested (bank teller, customer service attendant) were mid-level positions requiring little specialization and associated with lower class earnings. However, when asked to consider comparable mid-level positions outside her field in the private sector, her answer was immediate: "There are none." She maintained that employment in the private sector would have to meet certain standards; namely, offer specialized work in the area of chemistry and "good" pay. Her responses were not unique. I spoke with a number of students who expressed similar strategies about job selection. It became apparent that public sector work of any kind was desirable to these individuals—having less to do with earnings or occupation than with securing public employment at any cost.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation investigates the desire for public sector work and offers a framework that does not root desire in income maximization or class-based sentiment acquired through class culture, but rather presents it as part of a learned subject position—cultivated in citizens by "governing" (Foucault 1991) aspirations though

subjectivation and state-crafting projects rooted in education and work. Since *concursos* are inherently competitive in nature, the desire for public sector work motivates social actors to participate in "fields" of competitive relations (Bourdieu 1994a) that maintain social differentiation and constrain access to resources. Thus, the public sector offers a location at which the moral economy, consumptive practices, and competing investments in the household economy (investments in education and disciplinary technologies such as standardized testing) intersect. I argue that public employment is a central pursuit to Brazilians who view themselves as the "new middle class"—a term recently popularized in public discourse—and a critical component to the development of an emerging class consciousness. In this sense, the desire for public sector work is part of larger "learned position" (Steedman 1987:13) through which subjectivity is constructed as Brazilians grapple with the meanings of a label ("new middle class") regularly applied to their households. Rather than framing class consciousness as being learned upon entry to the labor market, I take the labor market as an object of desire in class consciousness, featured in "imaginings" of success (Ortner 2003), which are themselves discursively constructed and grounded in a particular history of social movements and economic markets. Ultimately, I want to demonstrate how the desire for public sector work is constructed, reproduced, and governed as Brazilians form "temporary attachments" to subject positions which are themselves discursively constructed (Hall and Du Gay 1996). These positions are greatly shaped by social and historical contexts, including accumulated histories of identity production, and they exist in constant tension with the state (Holland et al. 1998).

In this dissertation, I consider the desire for public sector work as it is advanced by the state and reproduced by individual participants in ways that are both complicit and oppositional to state-crafting projects. I understand the state to consist of the institutional frameworks performing the actual bureaucratic functions of governing, as well as the larger apparatus of power regulating subjectivity and economy through accumulated histories of citizenship, economic exchange, and ideology. I identify state-crafting projects in Brazil, cautiously, as neoliberalism—"cautiously" due to the frequency with which the term is presently applied to the Brazilian case among scholars from many fields in academia to describe the effects on the market, morality, and subjectivity (Caldeira and Holston 2015, Hunter 2010, Kingstone and Power 2008, Love and Baer 2009, Reid 2014, Zibechi 2014)—but also because the term is descriptive of structural changes underway in Brazil since the 1990s. Drawing from Wacquant (2012), I define neoliberalism as a political project associated with commodification, individuality, and the reformation of the state through the expansion of the penal wing and the reduction of the welfare wing. Neoliberalism, in Wacquant's view, "actively [fabricates] the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real and consequential" (2012:68). This form of state-crafting entails an increase in flexible labor markets, economic insecurity, and social insecurity, all of which contribute to, and help explain, the desire for public sector work. Additionally, I recognize the neoliberal project as internally contradictory (Dent 2012)—a "deeply consolidated *and* crisis driven form of market rule…marked by compromise, calculation, and contradiction" (Peck 2010:106). In this environment, the desire for public sector work is at once a proactive alignment

with the neoliberal project of the state and a reaction to shrinking public entitlements and instability in the labor market. That is, employment by the penal state offer a refuge from the anxieties of the market.

Methodology

Why study the northeast? Anthropologists have largely located themselves in the southeastern part of Brazil investigating a wide range of topics including race, class, diaspora, religious identity, nationalism, public health, and violence. But how any of these issues are experienced in the northeast has been largely ignored. Regional differences are sure to exist: the northeast is marked by the colonial legacy and builds its industry of tourism on this reputation. It is also a region that has experienced severe discrimination and marginalization, both politically and economically, from the more "modern" cosmopolitan south. It would be foolish to paint an ethnographic portrait of subjectivity in the United States with data limited to New York City. Such a project would not only ignore variation in other parts of the country, such as the southern United States, but it would also be misleading in its characterization of lived experience. By the same token, the ethnographic literature in Brazil lacks the regional representation portraying variation of subjectivities, often at the expense of those in marginalized areas. Thus, one reason to locate this study in the northeast has to do with my desire to address this gap in the literature.

The second reason has to do with economic development. Historically, the northeast has been associated with "a dense rural population, the severest poverty, and intermittent droughts…[as well as a] history of out-migration" (O'Dougherty 2002:173). It contains "the largest single concentration of poverty in Latin America"

(Reid 2014:166). However, in recent years, and indeed, since the presidency of northeasterner (*nordestino)* Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, the northeast has transformed from the most economically depressed, poverty stricken region in Brazil to one of the most thriving regions in terms of economic growth. This economic development presents a unique opportunity to observe the evolution of work and desire as it is experienced on the ground, during periods of massive structural change. Large inflows of capital and development initiatives stimulating privatization in the past decade have created a multiplicity of jobs in the private sector (Beluzzo et al. 2005). During my conversations with northeasterners, many made a point to comment on the irony that those from the state of São Paulo (*Paulistas)*, once thought of as the modern breadwinners of Brazil, were now migrating in droves to the northeast where they, as one woman put it, "take our jobs and our money because they cannot find work where they live." This critique was regularly leveled at northeasterners just a few decades earlier in the 1980s and 1990s and characterized the discrimination toward the region. But the tables have turned and, at the time of my fieldwork, the capital city of Recife was thriving. Home prices had tripled in less than two decades and preparations to host the FIFA World Cup promised to bring heavy investments in infrastructure, transportation, and security. In 2012, the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV), a leading center for political and social research in Brazil, released a publication identifying economic development in the northeast as the primary driver of the reduction of inequality for the entire nation of Brazil (Neri et al. 2012).

Finally, this ethnographic project affords the opportunity to investigate subjectivities largely neglected in the anthropological literature: middle class Brazilians.

The expansion of *concursos* put public sector work within grasp of the "common" Brazilian, or so it seemed, shifting the labor paradigm from "who you know" to "what you know." The significance of this transformation of the geopolitical landscape cannot be overstated. The city of Recife is well suited to study the effects of *concursos* on subjectivity at the local level, as many of these changes are recent (within the past decade) and still evolving. I am fortunate to have conducted my fieldwork over a span of four critical years (2011 to 2014) in which emerging subjectivities among the "new" middle class shifted from a spirit of optimism to one of mass protest against the state. During the first few years of my fieldwork, the *real* was trading strong, averaging R$1.30 to the USD. By the writing of this dissertation, it had dropped to R$3.80. It is my hope that the contribution of ethnographic data in the northeast during this time will provide a glimpse into the personal lives of Brazilians undergoing rapid change and the ways in which large-scale structural movements such as class mobility, remaking of the state, and economic changes are experienced by individuals themselves.

With respect to participant selection, I wanted participants who not only afforded insight into the decision-making processes of social actors but also grounded larger, national movements of education and public sector work in "ethnographies of the particular" (Abu-Lughod 1993). It was especially important to me to maintain a small sample size in order to devote more time to families, following participants in depth over a longer-term project. When I initially drafted selection criteria for this project, participation was limited to 1) twenty students who were enrolled in local institutions of higher education in Recife, Brazil, and 2) their parents. I focused recruitment on organizations that functioned as a bottleneck for students preparing for

concursos. One, for example, was a test center offering *cursinhos* for entrance exams to public employment. It was widely recognized as one of the best test prep centers in the city and charged some of the highest rates for specialized classes. Another was a center offering courses for the English and Spanish components of standardized tests at more affordable rates. Since many mid-level and upper-level *concursos* have a language component, I theorized that a language prep center would be a reasonable place for recruitment of students competing in multiple fields (higher education and public employment) as well as families with more limited resources. I only selected participants if they were actively engaged in the pursuit of public sector work.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was introduced to participants from personal contacts. It was through one of these contacts that I came to teach English at a language prep center. My pool of students greatly increased upon teaching and I was able to observe informal conversations in the classroom and public discourse about aspirations for employment in larger groups. At the end of my fieldwork, I had 19 participants, with whom I devoted most of my time to participant observation: staying in their homes, getting to know their families, accompanying them on errands, going to church services, birthday parties, and social events, and observing their household economies. While I did not enter the study to explore race or religion, these emerged as important topics. My sample was too small to permit systematic exploration of these issues, but did include some relevant diversity I discuss throughout the dissertation. My focus on tertiary students came from a desire to contribute to larger discussions about the lack of skilled labor in the private sector and the apparent lack of returns on investments in higher education (both topics discussed below), and I intended to follow

the student cohort through an academic calendar year—February to November—highlighting the changes in their attitudes toward public sector work as they graduated and experienced job procurement thereafter. However, the year of 2012 was one in which nearly every federal organization went on strike, including university professors and employees, and the research design of my project was altered considerably as I had to shift my focus away from higher education (Figure 2). I followed the lead of many students who found themselves in a "holding pattern" during the strikes: I put my efforts into investigating their preparations for standardized testing and their pursuit of public sector work.

Figure 2. University television message: "We are on Strike" (author 2012)

In 2013, I was able to host two families in my home during portions of their vacations in the United States, accompany them on their travels, and observe firsthand their perceptions of travel and subjectivity abroad. Finally, I had the opportunity to

return to Recife for a brief period in the summer of 2014. I conducted follow-up interviews with 12 of the 19 original participants.

Broader Context

Why study the desire for public employment? This dissertation frames public sector work as a site where aspirations about class identity, economic stability, and education intersect and can be investigated in more detail. The frenzy surrounding *concursos* is a recent phenomenon and gets at the heart of what "development" really means in the Brazilian context. The desirability of public jobs dominates narratives of postsecondary students in the northeast and the discourse about "why" they participate in higher education. Moreover, the subject of *concursos* consistently comes up in conversations in a number of public spaces, reflecting a growing interest among Brazilians in issues of higher education, privatization, and economic development. Advertisements in billboards, newspapers, and television spots for *concursos* permeate the propaganda for higher education, and a growing number of peripheral markets are emerging in support of the increasing demand for public sector jobs. Included in these are for-profit tutoring and test centers offering *cursinhos*. Studying desire informs larger questions about identity: How is it constructed and reproduced among Brazilian families? How is it used in particular sites to contest, reconstruct, and reproduce identity in Brazil?

Additionally, this dissertation investigates the desire for public sector work in an effort to contribute more broadly to discussions about the lack of skilled labor in the private sector and the questionable value of higher education. The lack of skilled labor in the private sector is thoroughly researched in more "quantitative" social sciences.

There is not as much data from qualitative sources. Despite the expansion of private industry in the northeast and record numbers of graduates entering the labor force, there remains a national shortage in the supply of skilled labor in the private sector. This is due in part to an overwhelming preference for public sector employment, even in positions where employees earn less than their private sector counterparts. This dissertation contributes more broadly to the question of why recent graduates prefer employment in the public sector even in contexts of lower wages, limited professional mobility, and intensified recruitment efforts by private businesses.

The questionable value of higher education has been discussed in multiple disciplines. While Brazilian anthropologists have studied extensively institutions of higher education, especially with respect to elite cultures and affirmative action policies, there is little on the relationship of higher education and public sector employment. Higher education is generally associated with upward mobility and increased opportunities for employment and income earnings. It is increasingly common in many Brazilian contexts, however, that investments in higher education are not demonstrating the economic returns expected in the labor market. Global initiatives in economic development have traditionally privileged education as a means of increasing income on the statistical premise that those with higher levels of earnings in developed economies also have greater levels of educational attainment. However, the relationship between upward class mobility and higher education is less clear than many economists and policy makers would like. So it is in Brazil, where persistent inequality, paternalistic models of employment, corruption, and public sector privilege constrains the income-raising potential of higher education.

The context of higher education in Brazil has changed dramatically over the past 20 years. Schwartzman (2004) notes that enrollment numbers have more than doubled in two decades, resulting in an exponential increase in the numbers of Brazilians with educational attainment at the tertiary level. The privatization of higher education over the past three decades drastically increased the accessibility of postsecondary institutions and contributed to an educational environment in which private institutions outnumbered public institutions 10 to 1 (Bertolin and Leite 2008). However, there remained a shortage in the supply of skilled labor in the private sector in Brazil. Mattos and França (2011) note that the public sector workforce contained approximately 40 percent more skilled laborers than the private sector, even though the public sector was targeted for budget cuts under deficit-reduction programs and the private sector was expanded through initiatives in privatization and economic liberalization.

The shortage of skilled labor in the private sector amidst a labor market full of postsecondary graduates presents an unusual dilemma. Models of economic development suggest that skilled laborers should be exogenously allocated by market forces to sectors with the greatest demand for them (which, in the case of northeastern Brazil, would be the private sector). However, as discussed above, college-educated laborers end up in the public sector. Since *concursos* and higher education compete in the same social and economic spaces, this dissertation will contribute to questions about the value of higher education more broadly. How are resources shifted when families consider investments in higher education versus investments in the public sector? How is higher education changed if it is perceived of (and used) as a credentialing technology to access public employment (that is, it is only achieved for the purpose of getting a

public sector job)? What happens to the value of higher education if it is rendered unnecessary to obtain public sector work (as in the case of many mid-level *concursos* that do not require college degrees)?

This dissertation aims to investigate these questions and contribute to larger discussions about the anthropology of work, education, and subjectivity. A note on the contents and organization of this dissertation: Chapters 2 and 3 sketch historical overviews of the labor market and higher education in Brazil. In Chapter 2, I examine how longstanding economic instability, shifting models of corporate management, and legal frameworks protecting civil servants heighten the desire for employment in the formal economy and in the public sector. I explore the notion of near absolute job security and meanings of "stability" for participants in this project, focusing in particular on the link between public sector work and the capacity to consume and accumulate in the fields of education, travel, and home ownership. I investigate these concepts at the familial level as collective aspirations reproduced through job selection and exchanges in the informal economy, whereby individuals act as extensions of the family and families act as collective extensions of the state. Chapter 3 considers higher education in Brazil in light of the colonial legacy. I explore how the desire for public sector work overlays on previously established foundations of governmentality and politics of exclusion in institutions of higher education. In particular, I examine why markers associated with class identity and mobility, intergenerational transmissions of wealth, and cosmopolitanism are easily transferred from higher education to public sector work. Like job selection in the labor market, I take the pursuit of higher

education at the familial level and offer ethnographic examples illustrating how higher education is at once complementary and in competition with public sector work.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain the bulk of my theoretical framework and bridge the "historical" chapters on the labor market and higher education with "case studies" on travel and home ownership. Chapter 4 considers technologies of power dominating conduct and objectivizing the subject. I investigate how state-crafting projects and changes to the horizontal strata produced an environment of social and economic insecurity for many participants in this project, and I consider the role of anxiety in shaping subjectivity. I suggest neoliberalism, as articulated by the Brazilian state, shapes subjectivity and interactions with the market. This is especially visible in the emergence of the union/government/corporation bloc as it alters class consciousness and the ability to organize politically, as well as in the advancement of commodification, individuality, and the reformation of the state through systems of penality. Chapter 5 considers technologies of self practiced by participants in constructing themselves as ethical subjects. I focus on *evangélicos* as a category of practice and draw from Weberian frameworks outlining the protestant calling and interpreting the will of God to examine subjectivation through moral discourses. In particular, I investigate why some participants find public sector work morally objectionable and how they navigate the ambivalence they feel about corruption in the state whilst pursuing their own desire for public sector work.

Chapters 6 and 7 offer case studies in which I explore accumulated histories of state-crafting projects and technologies of conduct as they link the desire for public sector work to travel and home ownership. At the outset of my fieldwork, I was

surprised to find that Brazilians most often cited travel and home ownership when expressing their desire for public sector work. In Chapter 6, I consider travel as a behavior associated with the kind of person participants envision themselves becoming with public sector work. I suggest that flexible citizenship, conspicuous consumption, and experiential value drive the desire for public sector work since travel has less to do with an actual quantifiable amount of money and more to do with the perception of public employment facilitating that travel. Chapter 7 sketches the relationship between public sector work and home ownership. I examine why owner occupancy has become integral to middle class identity and how the Brazilian state has facilitated this transformation in citizens and in the market through the public sector. I consider new meanings of home ownership in the domestic sphere (with special attention to the decline of domestic workers in middle class homes), in fields of conspicuous consumption, and in the production of "leisure" lifestyles.

Finally, I conclude this dissertation with an overview of my main points and a discussion of the shortcomings of my research design. I reflect on the "lessons learned" during fieldwork and offer a brief summary of the potential areas in which this research project could be expanded in the future.

Chapter 2: Labor Market

The desire for public sector work has roots in the longstanding instability of the labor market in Brazil. Instability is an enduring feature of post-colonial economies in Latin America, and Brazil is no different in this regard. A complex history of debt crises, budget realignments, and privatization shaped the labor market from its early days as an export economy built on slave labor, to import subsidized industrialization and state protectionism, to the crisis and currency devaluations of the 1980s, to the "neoliberal" reforms of the 1990s (Bulmer-Thomas 2003). As of the writing of this dissertation, Brazil was on the cusp of yet another recession, with high unemployment and political instability. Despite a history of volatility, employment in the private sector was relatively stable during the period of industrialization, from the 1930s to the 1980s. Laborers in the private sector were often employed in industries protected by the state—such as manufacturing—and worked in businesses patterned after familial models of corporate management: paternalistic, personal, and stable employment for members of the family and its extended social network.

This model of organizational behavior is well documented in Latin America by development organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and it is often linked to agrarian models of social organization. It remains the dominant form of corporate management today in Latin America and is partly responsible for shaping a moral economy in the labor market that is widely recognized as "quintessentially" Latin American: a moral economy in which the expropriation of public sector resources for private use is broadly accepted and practiced whilst theft in the private sector is strictly

forbidden and representative of a personal affront against the family (Elvira and Davila 2005, Evans 1995, IFC 2014). Differences in attitudes toward the public and private sectors are relevant to discussions about *concursos* because they help explain the desirability of the public sector work. This chapter investigates how the desire for public sector work in contemporary contexts emerged from a history of political volatility and paternalism in the private sector.

As mentioned earlier, the private sector afforded relative stability during the period of industrialization. With the implementation of liberalization policies in the mid 1980s, state protections on domestic enterprises were gradually removed, and domestically produced goods were required be more competitive in the "free market." Within a decade, projects aimed at eliminating import taxes and quotas, privatizing national industries such as automobile and mining, and participating in international bond markets resulted in more "flexible" labor markets. That is to say, the private sector experienced a shift in corporate management models as businesses emphasizing familial interests and social status cut employees and benefits to maximize profits and compete in a marketplace less protected by the state. By the 1990s, the number of businesses operating under a familial model was further reduced with the arrival of foreign investment and management. Brazil was the largest recipient of direct foreign investment in Latin America, second only to China in the world, illustrating the sheer scale of the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the inflow of foreign companies (Bulmer-Thomas 2003). Among the top 30 percent of the largest private corporations in Brazil, for example, the familial model of corporate governance went from being used in two thirds of companies in 1997 to about half in 2007 (IFC 2014, Silveira et al.

2007). As private sector businesses became less dominated by inward-looking familial concerns and more infused with external interests (whether domestic or foreign), anxiety about loyalty to the company, stability, and job security increased.

By the turn of the twenty first century, more than half of the labor force (62 percent) was employed in the informal economy due to this shift, as well as hyperinflation, recession and unemployment averaging 14 percent (Love and Baer 2009, Reid 2014). The informal economy has long been an integral segment of Brazil's exchange system, but it is often ignored or understudied in the literature because of uncertainty about its definition and difficulty in measuring its qualities and forms. Hart (1973) first coined the term "informal economy" in an effort to distinguish between productive activities characterized by wage labor (which were reported to the state) and self-employment (which were not). Danesh (1991) defined the informal economy as unregulated exchange activities, including those that could potentially take place legally ("grey" markets) and those occurring in direct opposition to the state ("black" or "shadow" markets). In this sense, moonlighting, clandestine employment, household economies, bartering, tax evasion, drug trafficking, trading illicit goods or service, and bribes or grafts were all sectors of exchange in the informal economy, meaning that almost everyone participated in the informal economy in some form or another.

The International Labor Organization (ILO 2012) differentiated between informal employment and informal sectors in Brazil—the former being representative of work in any sector without a formal labor contract, taxation, or legal protections, and the latter being representative of unregistered, and thus unregulated, enterprises including (but not limited to) self-employed small vendors or peddlers producing goods

for sale or barter, informal cooperatives of producers, unregistered domestic workers, and prostitution, drug trafficking, and other "illegal" enterprises. In Latin America more broadly, Portes et al. (1989) identified the informal economy as the whole of unregulated "income earning activities" that occur in markets in which similar activities are practiced within the purview of the state. In this definition, participation in the informal economy was defined by one single feature: employment. That is to say, informal economies were characterized by the presence of wage laborers working apart from state regulation, but in positions paralleling those in the formal economy. This definition privileged production activities (and "legal" activities), and traditionally, economists in Latin America have focused on sectors like subcontracting in their considerations of the informal economy. In Brazil, subcontracting has occurred at the most basic level of production and has included activities responsible for gathering and assembling primary inputs for production. Benería and Roldán (1987), for example, observe that subcontracting in the informal economy regularly involved labor such as picking cotton, transporting cotton, working in cotton mills, and sewing garments in homes. None of these forms of labor were regulated by the state, and the laborers were usually without labor contracts or legal protection, even though their products eventually ended up exchanged in the formal economy.

While a production-focused definition of the informal economy is helpful to tracing relations of production within globalized contexts, it is problematic in that it ignores the sum of exchange actions that occur informally for purposes other than income earnings. Thus, it fails to capture the motives people hold for engaging in the informal economy for consumption. To these ends, Pahl (1984) argued that the majority

of participants engaged in the informal economy around the globe participated to procure goods and services rather than employment. The role of consumption in the informal economy is significant to understanding broader relationships between the market and social organization (Baudrillard 1997). De Soto (1989) argued that informal economies in mercantilist societies in Latin America arose as creative responses to the state's inability to provide for the popular classes. Instead of linking informal economies to formal labor markets, de Soto suggested "informalization" was tied to consumption. The state's failure to provide adequate food supplies, health services, and public works drove people to engage in informal economies to meet their basic needs.

This was certainly the case in Brazil at the turn of the twenty-first century. In an ethnography of a Rio slum (*favela*), Alves and Evanson (2011) tracked the informal exchange activities of residents through the *mutirão*—the informal work organized by neighbors to construct sewer systems, pave roads, build houses, or extend "stolen" electric and cable networks in communities where basic necessities were not provided by the Brazilian state. Often, the materials used in these projects were acquired on the informal economy and donated by drug lords and militia leaders in the community. Moreover, in highly bureaucratic systems in Latin America, the informal economy bypassed bottlenecks, accessed luxury goods, and made basic health services accessible (Clark 1988). Thus, the informal economy not only paralleled production and consumption in the formal economy, but it also functioned to legitimate those who opposed the state's claim to authority and governance via labor, unregulated enterprises, and private provisions of infrastructure and basic services.

Portes (2010) argued that the further away informal economies operate from the control of the state, the more important cultural systems of organization, hierarchy, and behavior were to maintaining relations of exchange. Although some economists maintain that the informal economy represents a "true" market unencumbered by regulation, it is often the case that social structures intervene and constrain market principles in ways similar to the role of the state in the formal economy (Doukas 2010).

In Brazil, the informal economy reproduced social hierarchies and inequities in much the same way as the formal economy. Zlolniski (2010) observed that informal work reduced the amount of interaction participants had with the state, distancing them from formal avenues of recognition in terms of citizenship, civil rights, and personhood. Racial and gendered identities were also appropriated to the sphere of informal work, undermining the status of participants as "first class" citizens (King-Calnek 2006). Historically in the Brazilian labor market, women have tended to participate in informal employment more than men, even in formal sectors such as manufacturing, transportation, construction, and trade (ILO 2012). This trend continued at the time of my fieldwork, suggesting that gender remained a powerful factor in the labor market. Thus, in Brazil, as elsewhere, informal economies were rooted in culturally specific exchange systems.

At the same time that over half of the labor force was employed in the informal economy in Brazil, the public sector increased at an average annual rate of five percent and government consumption as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) doubled (Rodriguez et. al 2008). The growth of municipalities alone was staggering: almost 1,200 new municipalities were founded since 1990, an increase of 27 percent

and an industry some termed “lucrative” due to the privileged employment of several hundred thousand Brazilians (Reid 2014:276). Moreover, in nominal terms, the average monthly income of a public employee rose from R$2,000 to R$3,299 in the first decade of the millennium—R$4,342 if the end-of-year disbursement (*decimo terceiro*) was included! In other words, adjusted for inflation, the average monthly income of a public employee rose almost R$1,000. In the years between 2004 and 2014, public sector wages rose 55 percent, while private sector wages rose only 35 percent, and GDP, a mere 12 percent (The Economist 2015).

It is in this context that I suggest the desire for public sector employment has became increasingly feverish. While arguably inconsistent at maintaining real wages during periods of hyperinflation and currency devaluation, public employment functioned to buffer some of the ill effects of economic and political turmoil and offered generous protections under the law and benefits from organized labor. In her examination of the labor market during the 1990s, O’Dougherty (2002) maintained that employment in the formal economy constituted middle class identity, even though many families were unable to subsist without earning additional income informally during economic crises. When forced to enter the informal economy to supplement earnings from the formal economy, O’Dougherty argued that other forms of consumption became more rigid. Thus, it was imperative to utilize private education, maintain particular consumptive practices, and travel internationally (e.g. trips to Disney World) when other markers of social class (e.g. occupation) became more flexible. O’Dougherty provided a particularly helpful analysis of the cultural significance of occupation and the significance of particular types of employment (informal versus

formal, public versus private). But by the time of my fieldwork, her findings were more than two decades old and the context of the labor market had changed considerably. For example, in the decades prior to 2000, hyperinflation in Brazil constrained the capacity to consume and employment options were flexible, with social actors participating heavily in the informal economy to access resources necessary to maintain consumptive practices. In the decade following 2000, however, both public and private sector labor markets experienced significant growth—creating jobs, expanding education, extending domestic credit, and, ultimately, thrusting a new group of social actors into the "middle class."

Private versus Public

Public work provides stability (*estabilidade*). But what does stability mean? When asked to define the stability afforded by the public sector, every single person I surveyed during my fieldwork responded, "You can't get fired" (*não pode ser demitido*). Families went to great lengths to achieve public employment, even when employment in the private sector offered greater pay. So what does job security actually mean and why does it seem to matter so much more than monetary income? Contrary to popular opinion, it was not the case that the private sector offered no assistance upon termination. Employees in the private sector had access to ample unemployment benefits including pay, health care, and resources for job procurement. In fact, during my fieldwork, I observed many Brazilians request to be terminated when they were ready to leave their jobs, in order to collect unemployment benefits. There was often a great deal of negotiation between the employee and the business owner about whether or not termination would be initiated by the employee ("I resigned") or the employer ("I

was fired"). The consequences were substantial—determining who would pay or who would get paid. Nevertheless, for many Brazilians, unemployment benefits did not equal stability, and the private sector did not provide job security. Consider the language used by Rafaela in expressing her anxiety about the private sector:

> Let me tell you the history of private business. Because there are businesses that do not fire an employee for any reason, but there are businesses that fire at will. So, if you go with a business that does not fire at will, you get fired anyway. Because one day the business wants, who knows, like maybe, someone who is more specialized. So you are fired. If you are not serving their interests anymore, you are fired. The business does not care. Then you are going to be unemployed and too old to work! If the business fires you at age forty, then you are not going to be able to find another job. Finding a job at forty years old is very difficult.

Rather than keep an employee around regardless of performance, as might have been the case historically in familial models of corporate management, the private sector now functioned as a representation of maximizing capitalist principles. Rafaela's accusation of duplicity—that a business with a history of loyalty and favorable job security would turn on a dime and fire its employees—revealed an underlying anxiety about the uncertainty of private sector work. The word trade (*trocar*) used in this context as the verb acting on an employee carried a sense of the subject being disposable, like the trade-in of a used car. Private employees were servants, only useful in so far as they accomplished the purposes of the company. Perhaps even more stinging in this narration was the choice of the word for company (*empresa*). The gendered word selection required the repetition of the feminine pronoun "her" (*ela)*, and it was used to striking effect since it invoked a subject identity most commonly associated with concern, nurturing, and protection. She (the company) was devoid of

feeling; the phrase *tá nem ai* is a common expression used to communicate the lack of concern, or rather, the *lack of presence* to be concerned in the first place.

Gender is a powerful factor in the labor market. Of the women employed in the formal economy in Brazil, almost half of them worked in the public sector compared to only a quarter of men (Panizza and Qiang 2005). In other words, the public sector itself was privileged as a site of work (and production) among women. Whether or not this trend represented agency among women is less clear. It is possible that job security was a gendered value, holding greater weight for women than men. Indeed, for many of the families in this project who lived through the instability of the 1990s, one parent maintained employment in the public sector and the other in the private. Of the eight families in this project with both parents actively employed in the formal sector, women worked in the public sector in six of them. It is also possible that employment in the public sector was a form of gendered work. That is, the job positions themselves were perceived as more fitting for women than men. This may certainly be the case with entry-level and mid-level positions, many of which were administrative, secretarial, and support staff roles. But it is not clear that the women I surveyed intentionally chose these forms of work, or experienced gender bias more broadly. It is worth mentioning that at the time of my fieldwork, the public sector remained a largely paternalistic work environment, where power was organized from the top down and the state assumed the "traditional" role of the father (Chilcote 1990, Conniff and McCann 1989, Silveira and Crubelatte 2007). Structurally, then, the higher rate of participation among women in the public sector may point to historically-situated mechanisms funneling women into forms of work that reflected and reproduced the paternalistic system.

Returning to the topic of job security, another participant, Tiago, a 40-year-old mail carrier, expressed similar ambivalence about private sector work while relating a story about a *concurso* his sister-in-law had just passed:

Tiago: She is doing well there.

L: How is she doing well? Explain it to me.

Tiago: Financially well. It is guaranteed income, every month.

L: Right, she will receive it, won't she?

Tiago: Exactly, it is not contract work: "Oh, I got a contract job for one or two years." Then the year is over. And if the contract is not renewed and they go after another employee, what then?

L: Right, that is a problem, isn't it?

Tiago: Contract jobs are problematic. Contracts end. You think it is not going to end. Then one year, two years, or a month is over, and you have no hope, you have to start filing for what we call "unemployment." Because when you are unemployed, that money you put into the pool will support you while you find another job.

Like many Brazilians I surveyed, Tiago framed the stability of public sector work *in contrast to* private sector work. Contract work (e.g. work in the public sector contracted by private companies) carried the constant threat of uncertainty. Unlike contract work in the US, for example, where laborers might be optimistic about finding work upon completion of a contract, Tiago demonstrated just how pessimistic Brazilians felt about job prospects in the private sector. He suggested that actively recruiting new employees indicates the private sector's partiality for instability. Or, put

another way, that private businesses *prefer* instability. Furthermore, Tiago's assertion that the essential "problem" with contracts was that they had an end date was revealing. Even though job descriptions and requirements were spelled out in the legal terms of employment to which laborers consent, Tiago argued that there was no way to know for certain when a contract would actually end. The only certainty for the laborer (or, perhaps, the most pressing certainty) was that employment would end. Thus, at least from the perspective of many Brazilians, the private sector was viewed as less concerned with honoring terms of employment and providing for the employee. Finally, and most telling in the quote above, was Tiago's simple statement that contract workers had no hope (*não tem esperança*). Thus, labor in the private sector was no longer about familial models emphasizing loyalty, protection, or concern. Rather, it had become a source of anxiety, uncertainty, and instability for laborers.

Public sector work, on the other hand (and, perhaps, curiously), embodied the familial model for many of the participants in this study: loyalty, protection, concern for the social welfare of its members. That is, the public sector assumed the role previously held by family businesses in the private sector. In his examination of the making and remaking of the state, Bourdieu (1994b, 1998) argued that the state is comprised of two bureaucratic fields—one serving the interests of the public and the other serving the interests of the market. Neither of these fields is homogenous, and sometimes their larger purposes overlap, but they represent spaces where officials compete for power and determine how the state allocates its resources and energy. Wacquant (2012) further defined Bourdieu's conceptualization by associating the left hand of the state with public welfare, education, and societal health and the right hand with discipline,

elevation of market principles, and the penal system. He suggested one consequence of neoliberalism is the actual expansion of the state rather than its paring down, as the penal system grows to manage the effects of neoliberal policies such as deregulation, protection of property rights, establishing flexible labor markets, and "punishing the poor" (Wacquant 2009). Drawing from the characterizations of these two authors, I suggest that the qualities associated with the left hand of the Brazilian state—public welfare—are now available to Brazilian citizens through the expansion of the right hand—in ever increasing numbers of public jobs supporting (directly or indirectly) the penal functions of the state.

In Brazil, neoliberal state-craft did not result in the reduction of the overall size of government, but rather, of particular sectors within the government. In the first decade of the millennium, for example, the public sector in Brazil added some 600,000 positions (growing from 2,080,000 to 2,650,000, IBGE 2014a). Of these, approximately 450,000 (or 75 percent) were positions linked to the expansion of the penal wing. That is to say, about 75 percent of the growth of the Brazilian state consisted of positions related to 1) policing—federal police, military police, municipal police, army, navy, air force, firefighters and the like; 2) legal functions—judicial, legislative, and municipal court administrators; and 3) expanding structures of governmentality—public enterprises associated with governing and maintenance of order in new municipalities. On the whole, the growth of the public sector labor market was concentrated in systems of penality. Thus, while it may appear counterintuitive, neoliberal policies implemented by the Brazilian state in the first decade of the millennium actually increased state

involvement in the market and expanded the state—the latter of which had a direct effect on the size and composition of the labor market at the time of my fieldwork.

Neoliberalism, then, induced anxieties (labor flexibility, economic insecurity, and social insecurity) and prescribed solutions to them (public sector work). Or put another way, anxieties introduced through the market framed the penal state as a refuge from instability, insecurity, and individuality. I will examine the meanings of neoliberalism to participants in this project in more detail in Chapter 4, but for the purposes of this chapter, I want to stress that public sector work in Brazil has come to reflect the "protective (feminine and collectivizing) pole" of the bureaucratic field (Wacquant 2012:73).

Job Security

Employment in the public sector in Brazil is provisioned by the constitution and provides a range of benefits related to court arbitrations, collective bargaining rights, upward mobility, and secure work environments (Panizza 2002). Employee benefits in the public sector in Brazil are governed by two pieces of legislation: the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLL) of 1943—*consolidação das leis do trabalho*—and the Public Service Statute (PSS) of 1990—*lei n° 8112 dos servidores públicos civís*. While informal, direct appointments to positions of public administration can secure a job in the public sector, these positions do not afford in Brazilian legal frameworks the benefits packages and workers' rights available through formal hiring channels. Under the CLL, *celetistas* (CLL "employees") secure a job by participating in an application process outlined by the employer. For private sector firms, this process can vary considerably and usually involves the Brazilian *jeitinho*—the (cunning or clever)

practices used in everyday life to secure access to privilege (DaMatta 1979). Recall that familial models of corporate management facilitated these practices in the past. In the public sector, on the other hand, most positions require applicants to complete an entry exam specific to the job opening and rank in the top tier of test takers to be offered the position of employment. Entry exams often have their own requirements depending on the job description, but include language qualifications, proficiency in subjects relevant to job tasks (like math, science, or reading), and broader competencies in ethics, customer service, and vocabulary. Entry exams are ranked by levels (entry, intermediate, advanced) based on the minimum qualifications required of test takers to take them, and applicants must demonstrate work experience or educational attainment credentials prior to registering for the exams. Employees hired under the CLL are granted benefits such as social security, partially paid leave, and annual bonuses equal to one month's wages. Additionally, the constitution requires that public employees who are laid off continue receiving salaries even if they are not required to report to work. Entry-level public employees, such as those in custodial positions, typically work an average four hours in a six- or eight-hour work day (Zylberstajn 1994), while attendance in mid-level and upper-level positions can vary wildly.

While the CLL governs public and private sector employees, the PSS is limited to employees in the public sector and governs the most coveted public employment positions (Zylberstajn 1994). Many of these positions are upper-level state and federal job openings, but they also include mid-level positions. Applicants follow the same application procedures outlined for public sector hires under the CLL and participate in entry exams. Employees hired under the PSS (*estatutarios*) receive the greatest range of

benefits including guaranteed pay raises, paid leave, full salaries through civil service pensions in retirement, and protection from termination. The latter benefit has become the defining characteristic of public sector work in Brazil.

In the first formal interview I conducted in this project, Rafaela addressed the topic of job security. Her treatment of the subject was so "typical" that I missed the importance of her comments until months after returning from the field. The fact that protection from termination was often cited as the definition of stability reveals just how salient it is to the many who pursue to public sector work. The following excerpt is from her first interview:

L: Why do you think public work is valued in Brazil?

Rafaela: Because of its stability.

L: And what does stability mean?

Rafaela: That you cannot be fired. Like, after the probationary period. You cannot be fired.

L: And why is that important? What is the benefit?

Rafaela: You will always have a job. You will always have income, even if it is a small income, it is guaranteed. It is better than earning a lot but getting fired at any time and becoming unemployed.

This exchange was echoed by hundreds of Brazilians I surveyed in informal conversations during my fieldwork. Their responses read like a script. When asked about why public employment was so desirable, respondents immediately cited stability (*estabilidade*); when pressed about the meaning of stability, respondents always pointed to job security, exclaiming: "You cannot get fired!" The agreement in public opinion

was staggering. Even when I invoked legal frameworks outlining the conditions for dismissal of public employees, respondents firmly defended their positions citing examples of protection from termination in even the most extreme cases. In one student's words, "You cannot get fired for any reason except murder, and even then, the chances are pretty good you will keep your job!" The overarching perception of public employment was that it provided indefinite, irrevocable job security.

Whether or not this is actually the case is debatable. During the crisis of the 1980s, public employment was reduced as a larger effort of austerity and debt reduction. Lucinete actually lost her public sector job due to budget cuts during this time. Laws governing public sector work are regularly presented in the legislative houses challenging or reducing public sector benefits. Pensions are increasingly likely targets for reform, as they account for a huge percentage of GDP—approximately the same percentage of national income as pensions in Greece, even though Brazil has less than half the proportion of elderly (Reid 2014). As the Brazilian population becomes more geriatric (and draws heavily from the pension system), the topic of reform for civil service will certainly become more prominent. During my fieldwork, the Brazilian Senate passed a piece of legislation eliminating a portion of retirement benefits for public sector workers. The pension reform "[raised] the years of service required to retire and [capped] pensions for public-sector workers" (Reid 2014:145). The bill was limited to those making about R$3,900 or less a month—concerning, essentially, entry-level and mid-level positions of the public sector hierarchy—but reactions were by and large unfavorable (Diário de Pernambuco 2012). Ironically, laborers in the private sector were especially vocal in their disapproval, perhaps interpreting the legislation as

an attack on their own aspirations for public work. Laborers in the public sector were equally concerned but more dismissive, attributing the move to political tactics aimed at convincing foreign heads of state that Brazil was serious about economic health. In the end, the prevailing sentiment was that public employment was not in any real danger of being constrained, and the government would not cut any more benefits for fear of public discontent.

I remember discussing this issue with a friend, Maria, who was also a public employee. I remarked about how unsustainable the ever-expanding public sector seemed to be and was surprised that she appeared to be unconcerned. "The Brazilian public," she reasoned, "has a lot more leverage now than they did in the 1990s because of their status as consumers and the reliance on consumption for economic growth." Her rationale for the permanence of public employment? A severe reduction in the size of the public sector would never happen because the outcry of "consumers" would be too great. So, at least collectively, the threat of cutting the public sector was considered untenable by the Brazilian public.

While public sector work was literally representative of economic stability in its guarantee of employment, it was also figuratively representative of stability. Consider the following excerpt about job security from Ricardo, a 27-year-old environmental engineering student:

L: Ok. In your opinion, what does stability mean to a Brazilian?

Ricardo: To a Brazilian?

L: To a Brazilian in general. Because it is different for you, isn't it?

Ricardo: Public work! Public work!

L: Public work? Why?

Ricardo: The certainty of not being fired tomorrow.

L: But why is this so important for stability?

Ricardo: Family, responsibility, education of children, travel.

L: And all this comes through public work? Can it not come through private work?

Ricardo: Whoever works in a private job can make payments for a maximum of four months.

L: Make payments?

Ricardo: Make payments on purchases. For a maximum of four months on credit cards. Whoever works in the public sector can take on debts indefinitely. Twelve years, or sorry, twelve months of payments. The fear of being fired tomorrow is restrictive. I cannot, I cannot, cannot plan a trip five years from now with the private sector job I have today. Because private sector work is urgent, it meets my immediate needs. It does not satisfy my desires. For the Brazilian, a public job is going to satisfy the desires of tomorrow, not just my immediate needs.

When asked to explain the importance of public work in securing stability (*estabilidade*), Ricardo immediately identified job security—a quality synonymous with public sector work in the Brazilian context. But when pressed to articulate specifically the benefits of job security, he framed public work in very particular terms: the ability to carry debt indefinitely (*a perder de vista*). This sentiment was repeated over and over

by Brazilians I surveyed and reflected in advertisements, shopping malls, and retail stores. Participants characterized public sector pay as extending into old age (*velhice*) or for "the rest of your life" (*o resto da vida*), suggesting that the meanings of stability went well beyond financial security in the present to include the "symbolic provisioning" for a complete and full life in the distant future (Demerath 2009). This is enormously important to getting at the heart of what public sector work, and ultimately, economic development, meant to Brazilians themselves. The ability to maintain expenditures (*gastos*) directly reflected the importance of consumptive practices to Brazilian families.

During my fieldwork, a local television news station reported that 49 percent of Brazilians were *equilibristas*—maintaining a debt to income ratio of one to one. In other words, their income was just enough to cover liabilities but not to build any savings. The economic condition of these families was increasingly fragile because of growing, excessive debt (Souza and Lamounier 2010). In fact, in a report on the rise of the middle class across Latin America, the World Bank identified middle class households in Brazil in particular as "over-indebted" (Ferreira 2012:141). The trend to live as an *equilibrista* speaks to why having a guaranteed income was so important in gauging exactly what expenditures, or monthly payments, were sustainable at the household level (Figure 3). Aspirations to live as *equilibristas* necessitated the certainty of future employment. While private sector work afforded a mere four months of guaranteed pay *upon* termination, public sector work offered a permanent income, guaranteed *without* termination.

Figure 3. Window display advertising by monthly payments (author 2012)

The quality of permanence was so closely related to public sector work that the young man interviewed above framed employment in the private sector as offering only emergency (*emergencial*) relief. Essentially, Ricardo's comments reflected the popular opinion that four months of pay upon termination from employment was a precarious and risky situation. Moreover, he argued that public work had the potential to "satisfy my desires" (*satisfazer os meus desejos*) rather than simply meet basic needs. Thus, public employment was closely linked to consumptive practices and class identity (a point to which I will return Chapters 6 and 7). There is an additional value of public employment implied in the characterization of private work as urgent or necessitated by crisis. "Emergency" employment was preferable only in situations where participants must provide for basic, immediate needs. It was a short-term solution: a form of sustenance that was base, instinctual, and almost primitive in its inherent limitation to

satisfy more lofty, long-term desires, such as aspirations of success and markers of class identity.

During my fieldwork, I observed that aspirations of success were also tied to notions of financial responsibility. In this conceptualization, *concursos* were reflective (though sometimes contradictorily) of an ideal of financial responsibility. In Brazil, identifying someone as responsible (*responsável*) was commonly used as a statement about his or her financial responsibility. A young woman, when explaining what she was looking for in a man, often included this quality: that he be *responsável*. The implication was that he was financially able to care for a family and maintain a (very particular) standard of living. Many participants used this phrase to describe the meaning of stability in their own lives. Though the ever-growing expansion of the public sector might not appear to be a financially responsible project on behalf of the state when evaluated in economic terms, it was used by Brazilians to achieve financial responsibility in their own lives. Thus, I suggest it represented an alignment of interests—among Brazilians aspiring to be *responsável* and in a state aspiring to produce (govern) *responsável* citizens.

Collective Aspirations

Aspirations of success comprise the core of the "new middle class" in northeastern Brazil. Ortner (2003), in her examination of class mobility in the US during the latter half of the twentieth century, suggests that employment acts as a general indicator of class identity but that *aspirations* to particular social classes actually form the experience of that identity. Through life histories and success narratives—what she terms "imaginings" of success—she argues that the expansion of

the middle class during the middle of the twentieth century was fueled by the *practice* of collective aspirations. In the Brazilian context, I am less concerned with investigating the structure of class as a natural object than I am with exploring the discourses surrounding it. Collective aspirations to public employment formed a shared experience of identity for the participants in this project. While I hesitated to frame their narratives in class terms—as a class "project" for example—I found that all participants, both parents and children, readily identified their own class belonging when asked, even if they did not regularly bring it up in conversations about their motives, choices, or dreams. Moreover, all of the participants identifying as middle-class Brazilians shared in the *febre do concurso* (*concurso* fever). At the time of my fieldwork, the pursuit of public sector work was described in epidemiological terms: feverish, all-consuming, often irrational. In popular discourse, a person caught up in the *concurso* fever could not be reasoned with, as if their senses had been dampened. The reasons behind this local category were often explained in terms of the outcomes of landing a public sector job. Parents used words like "opportunity" and "stability" to describe the meaning of public sector jobs for their children, while their children used words like "competition" and "pressure." Both spoke of their desire for public sector work. There were generational differences in aspirations of success: Tiago, the mail-carrier mentioned earlier, tied public sector work to aspirations of building a savings account—a common topic for parents I interviewed—while none of the students discussed stability in these terms, but talked about public sector work in terms of consumptive power: using the popular phrase "house, car, and computer" (*casa, carro, e computador*). In a study of mobility among the middle class, Newman notes that, "Class is clearly a critical factor…but it is

not the only one. Generation is at least as powerful a source of conflict" (1998:110). Similarly, the family members I surveyed were often at odds about how best to allocate the household economy and distribute the "winnings" of successful *concursos* passed by adult children. Certainly, students wanted to maintain the consumptive markers of class identity displayed in their parents' generation; but by the time of my fieldwork, some of these markers (like maintaining domestic workers in the home) were increasingly out of their reach, while other markers (such as home ownership) were increasingly available. I will examine these two markers in more detail in Chapter 7. But in this section, I want to suggest that even though the desire for public sector work remained strong among parents and children, differences in the "imaginings" of success (Ortner 2003) revealed generational shifts in the meaning of public sector work.

Public employment is a central pursuit to Brazilians who view themselves as part of the "new middle class" and a critical component to the development of an emerging class consciousness. I use the term "new" or "emerging" because there are massive changes that have occurred in the horizontal strata of Brazilian society, especially in the northeast. While there is disagreement about how to characterize these strata in class terms, there is wide consensus that it exists. In the past decade Brazilian researchers themselves have coined the term "new middle class" (*nova classe media*) to describe the aggregate changes in income classes (Neri 2010). Thus, even though the term "emerging" may reflect an infusion of rhetoric (many times, foreign) into public discourse, it also reflects the growing awareness among a particular subset of middle class Brazilians who are using the term to describe themselves and employing particular strategies to obtain and maintain middle class identity. In this sense, the desire for work

is part of larger "learned position" through which subjectivity is constructed (Steedman 1987) as they grapple with the meanings of being labeled "new middle class." Rather than framing class consciousness as being learned upon entry to the labor market as Willis (1981) famously argued in his examination of the working class, I take the labor market as a learned object of desire in the emergence of class consciousness, one that competes with other fields of accumulation (such as education, home ownership, travel, and other consumptive practices) to produce the experience of class.

In Brazil, income classes are characterized by monthly household earnings (see Table 1). The most recent data from the OECD indicates that the number of people belonging to the middle class, represented by income class *Classe C*, has nearly doubled in the first decade of the 2000s from 66 million to 115 million (Arnold and Jalles 2014). The growth was fueled by upward mobility among the lower income classes, *Classe D* and *Classe E.* However, very little upward mobility has occurred between *Classe C* and higher income classes (Arnold and Jalles 2014).

Table 1. OECD Income Classes

Income Class:	**Household Income (monthly, 2011 BRL)**
Classe A	More than 9,745
Classe B	7,475-9,745
Classe C	1,734-7,475
Classe D	1,085-1,734
Classe E	Less than 1,085

Source: data adapted from Arnold and Jalles 2014.

Even though Brazil has not experienced the same kind of social revolution that has occurred in other parts of Latin America, there have been remarkable changes to the horizontal strata in the past two decades. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) estimates the percentage of Brazilians belonging to the middle class

has nearly doubled in the years between 2003 and 2011 (IBGE 2012). The growth reflects upward movement into the middle class from socioeconomic groups traditionally marginalized and located in the demographic labeled by the Secretariat of Strategic Affairs `(SAE) as "lower" class: residents of rural areas, those with little or no primary education, workers in the informal economy, and black Brazilians (SAE 2012). In my fieldwork, it became apparent that much of the class mobility experienced by Brazilian families coincided with a "capitalist revolution" of sorts (Berger 1986): the expansion of the private sector, the opening of domestic consumer credit, commodification, and the growing importance of consumptive practices to class identity. That capitalism is capable of producing social and economic transformations is not a new argument, but few have investigated how it has altered every day life for many Brazilians and intensified the desire for public sector work among families pursuing upward mobility.

In the years between 2003 and 2011, the number of Brazilians belonging to the middle class grew from 66 million to 115 million (IBGE 2012). The expansion of the middle class was not particularly unique to Brazil—multiple countries in Latin America experienced growth after the turn of the century—but it reflected one of the highest rates of growth in Latin America and, aside from Ecuador, the largest change in class composition for a single nation since the turn of the century. Development initiatives aimed at expanding the labor market through privatization and formal work in the public sector greatly fueled this growth. While upward mobility among these groups represents a decrease in inequality, at the time of my fieldwork, it was too early to see if it guaranteed a long term change to class composition. For example, even though

newcomers maintained "*Classe C*" income levels, class belonging was precarious in many ways: their consumptive practices were financed by indebtedness in a country with household debt levels near 21 percent of disposable income and high interest rates near 34 percent (Arnold and Jalles 2014). Moreover, in periods of economic stress, these families would most likely be the first to "fall out" of the middle class, as material markers become increasingly important to maintaining identity.

Changes to horizontal strata in societies are certainly not new phenomena in Latin America. Pastore (1982) charts changes to class composition in Latin America during the period between 1960 and 1980 and finds that the expansion of the middle class most often reflected upward mobility of families occupying the "upper tier" of the lower class. Although Pastore ascribes class identity to "occupational status"—a product of educational qualifications and income levels within particular occupations—he nonetheless finds that 72 percent of intergenerational upward mobility in the decades leading up to the 1980s occurred among "upper-lower" classes. In Brazil, families on the verge of middle class status during the 1960s and 1970s had secured entrance by 1980. However, with the poor economic conditions of the 1980s and 1990s, many of these families experienced downward mobility as the middle class contracted (Portes and Hoffman 2003). In our own North American context, this phenomenon has been observable most recently in the declining values of home ownership, higher education, and relative income during the 1990s and 2000s (Newman 1999, Jensen 2002, Graeber 2011).

With the exception of two families, all of the participants in this project would be characterized in *Classe C* according to their monthly incomes. Curiously, though, all

participants self-identified as middle class, even though the household incomes of two families exceeded Classe C levels—placing one in *Classe B* and the other far above the threshold for *Classe A*. Thus, it is important to note that the income class scheme can obscure notions about class identity that are affected by other aspects, like race, ethnicity, education, and occupation. It is also important to note that the income schemes used to study class in the aggregate are relatively arbitrary and vary widely for the middle class. For example, the income range for *Classe C* is especially large, estimated at some R$6,000! Thus, it would be reasonable to expect that a variety of lived experiences are lumped together and categorized as "middle class." I do not want to challenge this characterization as much as I want to explore the different strategies families employ within this classification system, as they face being told they have arrived at the "middle class" after years of being labeled "developing" or "poor" families. That is, I am curious about their experiences aspiring to a particular identity (the "new middle class") and reproducing desire among their children.

Family Histories

While stability in the labor market is grounded in larger historical processes, for many of the families in this project, it is also expressed in family histories of job selection and employment experiences. Aspirations of success and strategies for intergenerational transmissions of wealth can inform larger movements in Brazil privileging the individual as an extension of the family. For example, the process of job selection among many students in this project was especially shaped by the employment experiences of their parents. One mother explained how she chose a profession in the

banking industry for her son, after her husband enjoyed a successful career at one of the state-owned banks:

Fatima: We knew it was good work. Stable work. So I enrolled him in *cursinhos* for *Caixa Econômica*. He studied for two years. Then I registered him for the next *concurso* that came out for upper management, which happened to be in the state of São Paulo. When he passed, I flew down there and got him a nice apartment. He worked for one year and then my husband arranged for him to be transferred here.

L: How did your husband do that?

Fatima: He worked with the regional manager several years ago. He asked for a favor.

More important than having the intellectual aptitude to pass *concursos*, perhaps, is having the informal connections and insider knowledge necessary to navigate the labor market. Fatima's son passed a highly competitive test in a system intended to be a meritocracy. Participation in the public sector, especially at higher levels, grants entry to circles of privilege, capital, and accumulation in the informal economy. Parents regularly operated in the informal economy to obtain advantages for their children—a practice observed in multiple social contexts (Kipnis 2011, Lareau 2000, Peshkin 2000, Shore and Nugent 2002). Daniel secured a job for his daughter, Sandra, at a prestigious private school in an upscale neighborhood by circulating her resume among church members and calling on affluent contacts to arrange for an interview with the director. In an effort to measure social mobility, some have argued that the socioeconomic

identity of an individual is defined through kinship; in other words, social mobility is not solidified until everyone in that individual's family achieves the same status (Newman 1993). Consider the following discussion about job selection with Lucia, a 28-year-old graduate student in elementary education:

L: Did your mother and father want you to be a teacher? Did they pressure you or have an opinion?

Lucia: Dad had that dream, I guess. It was his dream that his children would be doctors.

L: Oh right. Why?

Lucia: I don't know. It is that old dream, that parents want their child to be a doctor.

L: Why?

Lucia: I do not have the slightest idea why he wanted that.

L: So why is it the Brazilian dream?

Lucia: I don't know. I think it is because medicine has a certain glamour. "Oh! He's a doctor!" Maybe that is why. That is what we see most in medical and law graduates.

L: Mhmm. So, how did you become a teacher?

Lucia: My mother, my aunts, my two grandmothers, all are teachers.

L: All? Like teachers in school? Or teachers…

Lucia: High school teachers. Elementary teachers. Junior high teachers. All are teachers. I never saw myself as a teacher. I never wanted to be a teacher. So I think, like they say, it was in my blood. It must be.

> Because when I got into the classroom, I liked it. I decided I would be a teacher.

When I first met Lucia, she was teaching grade school at several private schools in the city. She had passed two *concursos* for employment in public schools, but had turned one down and requested to be terminated from the other after having worked for a few months. When I asked her to explain her employment decisions, she said public employment was not fulfilling and insisted that she did not really want to be a teacher. However, after one afternoon with her family, I quickly noted that all of her closest female relations were teachers. Her mother was a high school Portuguese grammar teacher, her maternal aunt was a university professor, her maternal grandmother was a Portuguese grammar teacher, and her paternal grandmother was a history teacher in secondary education. I commented on this correlation and asked the women why they all seemed to have followed in the same profession. Her mother remarked, "It's in our blood." Thus, despite Lucia's insistence to the contrary, her own process of job selection, and indeed her aspirations for stability in the labor market, was heavily influenced by the professional experiences of her family.

Her example was also illustrative of how privilege was passed down intergenerationally. Her mother and aunt both negotiated tutoring and test preparation resources for Lucia from contacts in their social networks, some of whom were public sector employees, but all of whom agreed to provide the services in exchange for some other goods or services in the informal economy (making favors for birthday parties or tutoring for their own children). Rafaela recounted similar strategies at the familial level. Her father regularly sought information about public sector work from the

attorneys and professors he shuttled around the city as a taxi driver, obtaining, on more than one occasion, complimentary *cursinhos* for his daughters from the passengers who served as part time instructors at local test preparation centers.

Meanings of stability in the labor market go well beyond one's immediate financial security to include "symbolic provisioning" for a stable life for one's family in the distant future (Demerath 2009). Consider the following comment from Tiago explaining stability in the labor market:

L: So, why is public work so valued?

Tiago: In my case, I am holding on to it because of the insurance plan for my mother, daughter, wife, and myself. If everyone gets sick, and there is a huge expense, I can pay it. They can spend money, and I do not even notice. The money comes in every month. There may be an expense here or there, but I will be fine that year.

During my fieldwork, I found that families with a history of public employment continued to pursue public sector work via *concursos*, allocating significant portions of their household economy to the construction and reproduction of desire. Additionally, I observed many families of the "core" middle class—those solidly established in the middle class but for whom there has been almost no upward mobility despite the growth in the sector as a whole—grappling with "newcomers" to both their socioeconomic status and their sector of employment. Lines which historically distinguished families had become blurred with the expansion of the public sector in the Brazilian labor market. In the following chapters, I examine the strategies, moral economy, and

combinations of capital accumulation demonstrated by individuals, families, and the state itself in renegotiating these boundaries and identities.

Chapter 3: Higher Education

At the outset of my fieldwork, I intended to study the relationship between higher education and income earnings in Brazil. In particular, I was drawn to inconsistencies in the correlation between higher levels of education and increased earnings. Grounded in literature review, my initial focus was on the instances in which higher education failed to generate greater pay in the labor market. However, after my first visit to Brazil in 2011, it was immediately clear that any investigation of higher education without consideration of the public sector labor market would be incomplete. In fact, for many of the participants in this project, the desire for public sector work trumped the desire for higher income levels afforded by a postsecondary degree. As I quickly discovered, any investigation of the public sector labor market without consideration of higher education was equally incomplete, especially in light of Brazil's unique history with respect to higher education. The following sections examine why this history is critical to understanding the desire for public sector work and explore how inequality, aspirations of success, and the present context of higher education in Brazil shape the families of participants in this project.

Colonial Legacy

Portuguese society was strictly hierarchical in the colonial period. The family was the central unit of organization and familial networks determined social standing and income distribution (Skidmore 2004). An aristocracy ran the state, organized under a monarchy. In the Portuguese colonies, these structures of power were replicated in the social order. Initially, this meant the colony was peopled by an aristocracy of colonial outsiders exercising control over a population of indigenous peoples. Not long after the

"discovery" of the Americas, however, Africans were incorporated into these lower ranks as the Portuguese imported the largest number of slaves in the Western hemisphere to work their sugar and coffee plantations (King-Calnek 2006).

The elite family was a powerful force in colonial Brazil. In 1534, the Portuguese divided the entire landmass of Brazil into 15 sections and distributed the territories to a handful of royal officials (Wolford 2003). In the centuries that followed, through networks of patronage and practices of squatting, a class of wealthy landowners emerged from this small number of colonial elite. Elite families were adept at consolidating land holdings, controlling access to resources, and commanding indigenous slave labor in the frontier territories. Families developed a system of maneuvering and exploiting the colonial political and economic institutions established by the Portuguese to regulate the economy and extract profit through taxation and exports. They infiltrated town councils, local militias, and the church by strategically marrying their daughters to powerful merchants and royal officials and requiring their sons to participate in the priesthood and positions of colonial governance. They maintained well-endowed kinship networks and manipulated complex inheritance laws by arranging familial ties to preserve large family land holdings. Thus, "family life in colonial Brazil…was critical to the formation and perpetuation of the elite" (Metcalf 2005:6).

Education was primarily available to elite, male colonialists whose investment in education served the greater purpose of maintaining the social hierarchy. Consequently, inequalities of access to higher education were correlated early on with distinctions of race and gender. Citizens of marginal races, gender, religion, sexual

preferences, or legal status were denied full participation in colonial institutions, including those of higher education. The elite family controlled both the purpose of and access to higher education in colonial Brazil.

Inequalities in higher education were present at the outset of colonialism in Brazil. Unlike colonies in Spanish America, where universities were founded in Mexico and Peru as early as the sixteenth century, the Portuguese refused to establish universities in Brazil during colonial rule (Skidmore 2004). Higher education in Brazil was virtually non-existent for three centuries, and opportunities for advanced training in the nineteenth century were limited to about a dozen Jesuit schools offering courses in Theology and Philosophy for entrance into the priesthood (Teixeira 1999). Colonial subjects who wished to participate formally in higher education were required to do so through institutions outside the colony—in Spanish Latin America or Europe. In other words, while higher education was available to colonialists abroad or through religious seminaries, it was not offered through the state in the form of an institution (such as a university). The official position of the Portuguese crown, as recorded in royal documents, was to force colonial dependency in Brazil by limiting the availability of services in order to regulate the autonomy of colonial elite (Russell-Wood 2001).

The Portuguese monarchy repeatedly rejected petitions from the colony for the expansion of higher education. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, the crown denied requests from the governments of Bahia and Minas Gerais for universities on the basis that "liberal movements" posed a threat to the long-term viability of colonial rule (Figueiredo-Cowen 2002:471). In fact, the Portuguese crown was so concerned about teaching and learning in the colony that it prohibited the

operation of a printing press, "with the result that no books, newspapers, or magazines were ever published in colonial Brazil" (Skidmore 2004:138). Severe restrictions on the production and dissemination of printed information only exacerbated the challenge to educational attainment.

That colonial Brazil was without a printing press, however, is not to say that printed works were unavailable. As early as 1618, colonial histories such as Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão's *Diálogos das grandezas do Brasil*, were compiled in the colony, even though the texts had to be exported to Portugal for publication before they could be brought back to the colony for distribution. Ecclesiastical works were available in Brazilian parishes, monasteries, and (by the end of the eighteenth century) national archives. Despite this presence, the educational purposes of texts were often limited to training for the priesthood or official positions. As Angel Rama (1996) demonstrates in *The Lettered City*, written documents in the colonial period were often the intellectual domain of a privileged few. Colonial texts were accessed only by those qualified to do so; official scribes (*letrados*) did not provide written works for the instruction of colonial citizens and printed sources did not necessarily function to educate.

The limited visibility of higher education in Brazil fostered the colony's reliance on institutions abroad and reinforced an "aesthetic and cultural uniformity that reflected hierarchy, virtue, and royal splendor" in colonial society (Schultz 2000:9). Higher education functioned to serve the interests of the crown by preparing members of the aristocracy for a highly stratified society. Only the elite had access to higher education, and apart from universities and religious training, the only option for higher education in the Brazilian colony took the form of "royal lessons"—private instruction provided

by Portuguese tutors. Universities remained located in the Portuguese metropolis until the nineteenth century, regulating the autonomy of colonialists by redirecting them to the crown and preserving the integral role of the colonial motherland.

In 1807, the Portuguese royal court moved to Rio de Janeiro in response to the Napoleonic invasion (Schultz, 2001). Official letters from elite colonialists noted that the move challenged "long-standing political, cultural and economic hierarchies of empire" (Schultz, 2000:7). The printing press was established in Rio de Janeiro in 1814, as well as a school of medicine, a royal library, and royal lessons for education and professional training. However, the establishment of a university remained unrealized. Universities were forbidden in the Portuguese colony, even though the development of such institutions was promoted in neighboring colonies. The first universities in Spanish Latin America were modeled after the University of Salamanca and encouraged the political participation of students in self-governance within the university (Figueiredo 2002). To a certain degree, institutions of higher education in Spanish America fostered autonomy and critical consciousness in the colonies. In the early nineteenth century, Spanish colonial universities adopted a French Napoleonic model. The university became "a fundamental element of national reconstruction…aimed at strengthening the national political identity through the preservation and enhancement of the national culture" (Magalhães and Amaral 2000:439). Universities fashioned after the Napoleonic model promoted nationalism and prepared the students of elite members of society in intellectual, non-utilitarian methods (Figuierdo 1986).

By the nineteenth century, while there were approximately 26 universities in Spanish Latin America, colonial rule in Brazil had yet to establish a single university

(Figueiredo-Cowen 1987). In stark contrast to the multiple university offerings of the Spanish crown, the University of Coimbra and the University of Évora—both in Portugal—were the only formal universities accessible to Portuguese subjects. The pattern of Spanish preeminence in higher education was striking.

In 1932, a full century after independence, the first university was founded in Brazil. While the ideology of higher education in Brazil generally followed the Spanish-American university model, Brazil did not necessarily replicate the efforts of institutions of higher education to promote social equality. In 1918, for example, students and faculty at the *Gaceta Universitária of Córdoba* in Argentina issued the Córdoba Manifesto, a document challenging authoritarianism in university administration and demanding greater self-governance for students and faculty alike (Schultz 2001). The document, and the student strike that ensued, resulted in increased freedoms in the university experience through the participation in democratic elections of the university rector and dean, a greater say in course development and offerings, and the cessation of a policy requiring attendance at lectures. Institutions of higher education in Brazil, however, remained committed to the Napoleonic model for most of the twentieth century. Aside from basic educational programs, like those of Paulo Freire targeting literacy and fundamental education for adults during the 1960s, Brazil did not invest in institutional designs that were especially progressive.

Higher Education in the 21st Century

The colonial legacy remains visible in the distribution of inequality in modern Brazilian contexts. In present-day Brazil, a small number of elite, approximately just 3 percent, still own almost three-quarters of the arable land (Wolford 2003). Just as elite

families used colonial institutions to protect their interests and reinforce the hierarchical order of colonial society, the modern landowning elite of Brazil exert influence in political and economic institutions through a system of political patronage, governance, and clientelism. Likewise, the preeminence of education initiatives in colonial Spanish America appears to still affect Brazil to this day. Spanish American countries such as Argentina and Chile boast literacy rates near 100 percent. Brazil, however, has the worst record of literacy and school completion rates among major Latin American countries (Birdsall and Sabot 1996). Of Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and Chile, for example, Brazil has the lowest percentage of educational attainment at the tertiary level. The Brazilian economy, as it appears to many economists, lacks an adequate supply of skilled labor (Giovannetti and Mendezes-Filho 2006). Approximately 12 percent of the total population in Brazil has completed training at an institution of higher education, and of those in the labor force, only 15 percent are college or university educated (Manacorda et. al 2010). Just as colonial subjects were required to enroll in institutions of higher education abroad and export scholarship to European systems of publication and distribution, scholars in modern Brazil overwhelmingly pursue higher education abroad, especially in the "soft" sciences (Bernasconi 2008). Dissertations, theses, and academic works by Brazilian nationals are published at much lower rates in their native countries than are the works of their North American or European counterparts (Russell-Wood 2001). Much of the archival material from the colonial period is still held in Portugal, requiring Brazilian scholars to travel to the "motherland" for research and educational projects. Moreover, until recently, expert scholars on Brazil were not

even Brazilian themselves, but imports from academic traditions in the United States and Europe.

In institutions of higher education, upper class white (*branco*) males are still overrepresented (Schwartzman 2004). Even though Brazilians on the whole reject the concept of race (Hasenbalg 1991), inequalities in educational attainment remain tied to racial categories and are greater among women than men. Brazilian institutions suffer from an "urban bias" whereby those of urban origins are more likely to pursue higher education than those of rural origins (Fernandes and Neves 2010). On average, only 1 in 12 students gains entrance into federal universities (Schwartzman 2004). While tuition at federal universities is free to Brazilian citizens, enrollment in these institution is appointed through an entrance exam—the *vestibular*—the passing of which generally requires attendance at expensive private primary and secondary schools. At the time of my fieldwork, Daniel paid R$990 per month in tuition for his son to attend a prestigious high school known for its successful test preparation program. In fact, the number of students without prior education in the private sector and who are enrolled in high-earning degree programs such as medicine or law, is statistically nil (McCowen 2007). In other words, the great irony in Brazil is that those who would benefit most from public university education cannot afford the private education necessary to get into federal universities. Advantages in economic hierarchies are maintained through consumptive practices in educational hierarchies (Rutz and Balkan 2009). Thus, class identity and income levels continue to act as gatekeepers to tertiary education. While most students are aware of these inequalities and are themselves able to identify educational hierarchies, they remain active (re)producers of the distinctions on the basis

of their own educational experiences—federal or private universities, day or night classes, for-profit or public institutions. As one student put it, "I am lower class because I have to pay for college."

Elite families still prepare their heirs for estate management through professional degrees from public institutions of higher education and maintain social status with markers of educational attainment. Educational attainment has long been recognized as a major determinant of income distribution, job procurement, and socioeconomic status (Comitas and Dolgin 1978; Silva 1977; Tsang 1988). University students in Brazil are strikingly similar to those involved in higher education in colonial contexts, "the majority of whom could afford to pay part or all of the university tuition costs" (Skidmore 2004:137). Structural inequalities of class, race, and social status continue to perpetuate inequalities of educational attainment in Brazilian society.

That class and income markers are observable in the enrollment at federal universities is not to say that for-profit institutions are not avenues of upward mobility. Some have argued that the middle class has seized private education as a class project of its own (Wisdahl 2013). Initiatives to privatize higher education in Brazil provided a greater number of Brazilians the opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions without (or perhaps, in spite of) the completion of the *vestibular* entrance exam. In fact, in the past 20 years alone, the total number of enrolled students in higher education has more than tripled, primarily as upwardly mobile families seek to participate in higher education (Bertolin and Leite 2008, Reid 2014).

Targeting economic inequality through "investment in human capital" (e.g., increasing the creative thinking, knowledge potential, and personality attributes of

individuals) has gained popularity in the last century as Brazilian scholars and public officials alike have focused on education as means of increasing human capital and reducing income disparity. Many of these strategies are based on the argument that education is the single most important long-term measure for raising income (Psacharopoulos et al. 1997). The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United States government contend that the production and consumption of knowledge in the knowledge economy is the "main driver of [economic] growth…and that tertiary education is central to knowledge creation and production" (Peters and Besley 2006:24). Institutions funded by the Brazilian state are, by extension, funded by these entities and driven in their political agendas accordingly. Thus, private institutions of higher education have multiplied rapidly, unable to keep up with growing numbers of postsecondary students eligible for enrollment though government subsidies and repayment programs (Albrecht and Ziderman 1995). They represent 90 percent of the 2,400 institutions of higher education in Brazil and enroll three-fourths of the student population in Brazil (Reid 2014 and Schwartzman 2013, respectively).

While enrollment numbers among the top 10 percent and lower 50 percent of income distributions have declined, students from middle class backgrounds have comprised the greatest demographic of growth in higher education (Schwartzman 2004). This phenomenon is a direct result of the growth of the "new" middle class discussed in the previous chapter. Unprecedented access to credit and the expansion of the public sector not only grants many families the funds necessary to participate in higher education, but also the "imaginings" of success (Ortner 2003) via upward

mobility and new class identities. Consider the following narrative explaining Ana Paula's dream (*sonho)* to enter higher education:

> I thought about going to college, but I thought it was such a long shot, such an unlikely possibility that I stopped dreaming about it for a while. And I said, I, I do not want to plan for this anymore, I do not want to dream about something I cannot do. I need to, like, to keep my feet on the ground, right, in reality, right?

Imagery invoking "dreams" is integral to constructing desire for higher education and public sector work. A well-known slogan of a local prestigious test prep center—"Seizing Your Dreams"—emphasized "imaginings" of success among many of the Brazilian families in this project (Figure 4). Another boasted "absolute success" in all of test prep courses offered that year.

Figure 4. *Cursinho* pamphlet with slogan "Seizing Your Dreams" (author 2012)

In some ways, test prep centers form a bridge between the two, allowing families who once aspired to higher education to transition to aspirations of working in the public sector. This is especially true spatially, as the actual physical locations inside test prep centers (classrooms, lecture halls, and study spaces) function as sites of production for the cultivation of desire—desire of both higher education and public sector work.

Classroom Experiences

During my fieldwork, I accompanied most of the student participants in this project to classes at their respective universities. The following section draws from several such experiences in the classroom in an effort to "study up" (Nadar 1972) and contribute to the ethnographic material on identity formation, exclusion/inclusion, and the process of ethical subjectivation in institutions of higher education.

Social scientists recognize that institutions are ascribed to segregated tiers (e.g., Ivy-Leagues versus Community Colleges) that keep them from competing outside of their respective "class status" through funding, administration, and disciplinary measures (e.g. boycotts) by the community in which the institution is based (Williams 2002). Brazil is no different in this regard, and with the privatization of higher education, a hierarchy of institutions exists with respect to institutional status and prestige (McCowen 2007). These hierarchies are not inherent in the institutions themselves, but rather discursive constructions—part of a "prevailing value system" which, some have argued, reproduces social inequality and inferiority through higher education (Williams 2002:34). In recent decades, the purpose of the university in Brazil has become splintered: "elite" public universities are endowed with federal funds for

research and development leaving for-profit institutions to be financed by a small, usually "proletariat" student body. Some private institutions have capitalized on the lack of regulation by the state, infusing market principals and corporate governance into university management. Recent legislation has allowed universities to profit from joint ventures with businesses, furthering the entanglement of corporate and academic interests (Reid 2014). They have branded themselves as prestigious institutions, investing in large capital projects for new campus buildings and state of the art technology, and recruiting from the most affluent families. In the northeast, there are very few private universities with this characterization, as national trends expanding private education and work have lagged in the regions considered "peripheral" to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Consider the following comments from Rebeca, a 25-year-old graduate student, about the quality of private universities in the northeast:

> Here in Recife there are none. In São Paulo, for example, there are some big universities that are private. But here, we do not have any. We only have the Catholic University, which only has good programs in humanities. Some professors who worked there formerly went to public universities. They passed *concursos* for a public university, so the quality of education decreased.

Rebeca raises two important concerns about the structures of higher education that shape the identities of individuals in the classroom: first, private institutions are not well-rounded. In other words, they offer expertise in specialized areas. Because of the draw of public universities, the expertise at any given private university is unpredictable. Professors may not last through the entire educational career of a student.

Secondly, private institutions are second-class spaces for professors and, by extension, students. "Good" professors at private universities will eventually gain entrance into public universities and leave their original institutions underperforming

and understaffed. For many of the participants in this project—for students of both private and federal institutions—public universities represented the best of higher education, despite complaints about the quality of the facilities and professors not required to be present for class or held accountable for the quality of their instruction. Federal universities remain associated with affluence. Consider the following comments from Laura, an 18-year-old law student, reflecting the bias against private universities in favor of public ones:

L: What is the difference between the federal universities and the private ones?

Laura: The name.

L: What do you mean? Explain.

Laura: The name means if you go for an internship somewhere, for example, and you say, your curriculum says you graduated from the Federal University, and another says you graduated from the Catholic University, NASSAU or some place like that, the Federal University graduate will be chosen. Without a doubt. The others will not even be considered.

The prevailing perception of public institutions in Brazil could be likened to the estimation of the so-called "ivy league" universities in the United States. The name alone is a credentialing technology, and gaining entrance to one of these institutions confers prestige on the individual. Even though Laura was enrolled at the Catholic University—one of the most prestigious and expensive private institutions in the city—she doubted her own competitiveness as a job candidate. The hope for her own

employment prospects, she later commented, is that her resume would not be considered alongside that of a federal university graduate. Thus, student participants not only inhabited institutions of higher education, but they also internalized cultural assumptions about inclusion/exclusion through their affiliation with those institutions (Nathan 2005).

One of the most pressing topics concerning inclusion/exclusion in higher education arose in discussions about recently implemented "affirmative action" programs. I use the phrase "affirmative action" because participants themselves actually used it—in English—perhaps to stress the origin of a strategy popularly believed to have been transplanted from the United States to institutions of higher education in Brazil. Participants regularly expressed resistance to the quota system at federal universities, demonstrating the permanence of racial and class-based divisions in higher education. Consider Rafaela's following comments:

Rafaela: It just changed, the Federal University now has a 50 percent quota, the quota is 50 percent. I think it is absurd!

L: Why?

Rafaela: Because race has nothing to do with it. A person is black and has to have a quota? Because there may be black and white people studying in the public schools, but on paper, only the black person gets the higher ranking.

L: But do you not agree that there are more blacks studying in the public schools?

Rafaela: But the government could place the quota on public schools in general. Because as it stands now, half of the students are admitted through the quota and half are admitted without it. So think about how it lowers the standards in the classroom, not because of the black person, but because of the quality of education that he had. Public schools do not have the same standards as the federal universities, do you understand?

With the exception of one student (who had herself been granted entrance to a university through a quota program), I heard iterations of this rationale from every student I interviewed and from many of the Brazilians I surveyed, including those identifying as black (*negro*). Sometimes, the discussion was less heated than my discussion with Rafaela, but other times it was openly hostile. Complicating discussions was the correlation between race and socioeconomic status, a longstanding feature of class identity in Brazil. The single student participant who expressed support for racial quotas in formal interviews was also the participant from the lowest income-earning household in my project.

Racism continues to be veiled as socioeconomic disadvantage, and rather than support efforts to reduce inequality by targeting racial and socioeconomic barriers, many Brazilians do not consider legitimate the distinction of the two in higher education. However, the inequity is obvious in the classroom. For example, when I accompanied student participants to classes, I observed very few students of color and confirmed my counts in subsequent interviews by asking participants to estimate how many black students (*raça negra*) were in their year group (*turma*). None of the student

participants enrolled in public universities had more than one student they personally identified as a person of color in their class. Students at the private Catholic university had similar numbers. But in the classrooms of smaller for-profit institutions, many of whom serve nontraditional students via night course offerings, the diversity was slightly better at three to four "*negros*." While my observations can by no means serve as statistical samples, they do in fact reflect demographic data collected at the national level at that time estimating participation of black students in higher education at 2 to 5 percent (McCowen 2007). So, at the time of my fieldwork, institutions of higher education created rigid structures for mobility by refusing to recognize and validate the participation of certain students (e.g., by limiting enrollment, impairing degree completion, or denying educational qualifications for the labor force). But the underrepresentation of minority students in higher education is expected to change. In 2012, the president passed a series of legislative measures establishing quotas based on race and socioeconomic identity. In public universities, quotas required 50 percent of all enrollment be filled by students from these disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally, during my fieldwork, one frequent classroom experience highlighted the methodological complexity of studying the student as a subject both *shaped by* and *shaping* the university setting. On multiple occasions accompanying student participants to their evening classes at smaller private colleges, I observed groups of students actively organize themselves and pressure professors for answers to the upcoming test. Usually, the organizing began before class, as students discussed the upcoming exam and expressed insecurity about its contents and/or their preparedness. Once class started, the group was directed by a "ringleader"—a student who was particularly vocal

on behalf of the students—to press for hints (*dicas*) for the test. Requests generally became more demanding as the class went on, and students incorporated additional strategies to interrupt, ignore, converse, and even shift their chairs turning their backs to the professor. In one such class, the students became so loud that the professor could not continue his lecture. In all three instances where I observed this behavior, the professors ceded the test answers before the end of class. Under different circumstances, I might have attributed my experiences to an unruly class. But what struck me as odd was the procedural nature of the escalation: the disruption in the classroom was actually very orderly and predictable—it happened in the same way on multiple occasions, despite occurring at different institutions. When I commented to Sandra, a 20-year-old secondary education student, about my observation, she proudly remarked:

> Yes, we got a professor fired once. He was horrible. He did not know how to teach. We got together, signed a petition, and 15 of us marched into the office of the director of the university and showed him the petition. We told him we would withdraw and go to another university if he did not do something. We are paying for these classes. It is our money! We deserve to have good professors. The professor did not come back the next semester.

I did not realize the significance of these stories until I accompanied student participants to classes at the federal university several months later. Professors at the federal university had been on strike for nearly six months during my fieldwork and I was unable to observe their classrooms until much later in my project. In fact, there was a running joke at the time that students at federal universities took twice as long as their counterparts in private universities to complete their degrees due to the regular, frequent striking of the federal university workforce. In any case, my classroom experience was entirely different from the evening classes I had visited months earlier. First, there were very few distractions in the classrooms. Students did not converse with each other

during lectures and most cell phones were left in purses or bags. Secondly, professors governed desirable conduct by conferring advantages in credentialing technologies. At the beginning of one class, for example, one professor stated: "If you pay attention, I will give you hints (*dicas*) about what will be on the test. So, no conversation while I am teaching!" For students already familiar with the use of standardized testing to advance familial agendas and feed their sense of self, embodied practice in the classroom was altered with this reward system and appeared very different from that observed in the private universities I visited.

When I asked João about this, he said simply, "Students can fail at federal universities. They cannot fail at private ones." In other words, since students (or their parents) pay for education at private universities, it is in the best interest of the institution to retain students and bolster enrollment by giving passing grades. Public universities, on the other hand, benefit from the enormous investments of personal finances and time that families have made to secure entrance into the federal universities. Credentialing technologies—whether they be national exams or final exams—privilege the individual as an extension of the family. Student performance is both a reflection of family status and a contributor to it.

I do not wish to read too much into these classroom experiences, but I want to suggest that they play a part in ethical subjectivation: forming identities through what is considered "right" behavior in the classroom. This process begins with learning how to "organize" within institutional walls and extends to organizing along professional identities beyond higher education. During the mass protests against the government that began in the southern part of Brazil late in 2012 and eventually swept the country,

it became clear that demonstrations were increasingly organized around class lines. Though some of the participants in this project supported the movement in its initial stages and indeed were very active on social media promoting in its cause, by the end of 2014, most were openly critical of the demonstrations and used social media to advocate the dissolution of the movement. Between 2012 and 2015, the middle class appeared to distance itself from protestors, associating discontent with working class professions, trade groups, and those perched precariously on the lower boundary of the middle class: public school teachers, garbage collectors, bus drivers, and the like.

My point here is simply to note that strategies of organizing are performed in classrooms of higher education and contrast the differences reproduced at the institutional level. Students in federal institutions of higher education may have learned to organize by observing their professors on strike. Even though disruptions to their degree programs were to their own (the students') detriment, organizing maintained privilege and established authority by accessing formal channels of unions and national governance. Students in private institutions, on the other hand, may have learned to access power by seizing a consumer identity, organizing themselves as consumers, and bypassing perhaps more traditional forms of authority, appealing to the corporate interests of the university.

Familial Pursuits

Institutions of higher education are structurally situated social forms (Bourdieu 1988), but as several authors have observed, they have "yet to be constructed as an object of analysis (Fahy 1998:15). Moreover, while a handful of ethnographic works devoted to the topic of higher education are presented here, there is virtually no

ethnographic data directly addressing higher education in the Brazilian context. But higher education remains central to discussions about social changes underway in Brazil. According to the *Pesquisa Social Brasileira* (PSB), "having or lacking a university education is the primary determinant of the social chasm dividing Brazilians" (Almeida 2008:241). Higher education is at once complementary and in competition with public sector work, so evaluating higher education at the familial level defines a space in which to observe contestations and assertions about the moral economy, consumptive practices, and class identity. Securing access to higher education was one of many potential projects families considered when managing the household economy. Parents and students were sometimes at odds as to how this distribution should take place or what success looked like. Being present in the homes of the participants of this study afforded a unique opportunity to observe the negotiation and construction of desire as it related to higher education. However, it is important to note the bias in my ethnographic sample: since the research design for this project stipulated enrollment in higher education as a condition for inclusion, I did not interview any families for which public sector work did not interact with postsecondary education in some manner.

To illustrate this point, I want to draw from two ethnographic examples of the complex relationship between higher education and public sector work. The following observations arose in direct response to a project linking the practice of breastfeeding to enrollment in higher education (Barros et al. 2008). Initially, the project caught my attention because of its longevity. Researchers followed a cohort of children born in southern Brazil in 1982 and indicated a correlation between breastfeeding and educational attainment. The study suggested breastfeeding serves as a socioeconomic

marker for Brazilian families in addition to providing greater nutrition and increasing neurological development among infants. Postsecondary students who were breastfed as infants were more likely to come from families in which the mother was not required to enter the labor force immediately after giving birth. The study speculated about the nature of the correlation between breastfeeding and higher education, concluding that in two-parent households, where financial stability was such that one parent did not have to work, greater resources were available for educational pursuits. While this rationale could certainly account for higher levels of educational attainment among breastfed babies, I was struck by the simple fact that the researchers privileged explanations in masses of data that individual Brazilians could never express themselves. I knew from my own conversations with participants that it was both possible and plausible to consider ethnographic material from unrelated projects to inform findings of more quantitative projects such as the cohort study.

For example, of the eight confirmed breastfed student participants in my project, five had mothers who were not working at the time of their birth and two had mothers working in the public sector. So with respect to the above-mentioned study, in addition to not participating in the labor market, it is possible that mothers were employed in the public sector.

Secondly, public work could have afforded greater flexibility in work schedules for mothers in the cohort and allowed them to remain at home after the birth of a child without fear of termination. For example, when Fernando and Michele were expecting their first child about ten years ago, she had passed a *concurso* as a medical technician in the local public hospital. Recounting the story of the birth one evening, they

explained her decision to “take off” for several years to raise him. Somewhat incredulous, I repeated their statement:

L: Several years?!

Fernando: Truly. Six years.

L: Six years?! Did you still receive your salary during this entire period?

Michele: Well, I asked to be dismissed in the third year. Then, when I decided to return, I called my boss, and she said that my job was still held for me, since it was a public job, because I was on the reserve list. Then I returned, continued receiving my salary and my benefits.

Through public sector work, Fernando’s household remained a two parent, dual income family, even though Michele did not physically participate in the labor market for three of the six years and she did not work. In other words, employment in the public sector facilitated the optimal environmental conditions for breastfeeding, providing a steady source of income and time to prepare her children for elementary education. When their children reached school age, Fernando enrolled them private elementary schools at the cost of about R$180 a month. Both parents regularly stressed their expectations for their children to eventually participate in higher education.

Of the two families in this project with mothers working in the public sector at the time of the birth of their children, both families had children enrolled in federal universities. While this may not seem striking in itself, I think it speaks to the tacit knowledge involved in securing access to higher education. Consider the following

exchange with Juliane. Note the intergenerational knowledge her parents passed on to reproduce educational attainment in her family.

L: And where are you going to college?

Juliane: I am studying physical education at the Federal University of Pernambuco. I also was doing physical therapy at the Catholic University. But I took a leave of absence there.

L: So you were at the Catholic University?

Juliane: Also. I did both.

L: Is that common? Is it common?

Juliane: It is not like, common. In my family, it is. It is not common here. But in my family it is common, because this is how it is: my sister studied at both the Federal and Catholic universities.

L: Really?

Juliane: My sister studied social work at the Catholic University, and did law at the Federal University. And I did physical therapy at the Catholic University and physical education at the Federal. And my mother did law at the Catholic and education at the Federal. My father did mathematics at the Rural Federal University and physical education at the Federal. Because in times past, you could go to two federal universities at once. Now, you can no longer do that… My family has always done this. When it cannot be done, we take a leave of absence. We can take leave for a period of six months, and then go back.

L: And what are the advantages in doing that?

Juliane: We get two diplomas. We can take a *concurso* in either field.

Juliane and her sister completed their secondary education at one of the top private military schools in Recife, where their father had studied. Through private education, Juliane's parents not only utilized financial resources to get their children into the best public and private institutions, but they also employed "insider" knowledge from their own experiences in higher education to help their daughters maintain simultaneous enrollment in two universities. Each family member alternated attendance on a semester basis through the leave of absence system. At the time of our interview, the monthly household income of Juliane family was R$6,200—solidly *Classe C* but clearly upwardly mobile once the adult children succeeded in landing public jobs. Thus, Brazilian families who could afford private education used it to further familial goals and maximize income. Practices such as these among middle class families are part of larger aspirations to seize public resources, whether it be public education or public work.

This is an important point since it speaks to why private education has appealed so powerfully to the middle class. While private elementary and secondary schools have been available in Brazil since the 1970s, they did not become fetishized until the arrival of the "new" middle class and consumer culture. This is visible in the sheer number of private schools now available, the emergence of elite school "franchises," the branding of which is heavily advertised in newspapers, on billboards, and on street corners. In this sense, the desirability of higher education and public sector work are rooted in

similar histories. The director of a prestigious test preparation center in Recife explained it in the following terms:

> In the case of the *vestibular* and the *concurso*, this new consumer culture we have in Brazil has created symbolic capital for test takers. This has resulted in the rising demand for experts—tutors, test preparation centers, test courses—and the infusion of new players on the free market. This, in turn, has fueled growth in the labor market, whether it be in the area of education—for teachers, professors, and administrators to work in the new private high schools and colleges—or in areas related to industries like construction—which is in the business of expanding the size and quality of campuses, for example.

According to this perspective, public sector work and higher education are interconnected precisely because of the commodification of their activity. The fetishization of private education and standardized testing confers celebrity status on those students who excel in these fields (Figure 5). In the *vestibular* of 2011, for example, João passed in the top position of test takers from the state of Pernambuco. He quickly gained recognition in the local community of aspiring middle class families as his test results granted him first place (and first pick) among tens of thousands of students. The symbolic capital accumulated with his fame—giving interviews to newspapers and television stations and offering informal seminars on test taking tips (*dicas*) at his local church and community center—strengthened interactions with the test prep market. Both in the market and in their utility to the Brazilian family, public sector work and higher education complement and reinforce each other.

Figure 5. Top student being interviewed by reporters (author 2011)

In Brazil, private education is the pathway to public education, which has traditionally been the pathway to class belonging. With the expansion of the public sector, however, several structural changes occurred, making stability and upward mobility accessible to people without a college degree. The director quoted above noted an increase in the number of students enrolling in *cursinhos* without a college degree. This is significant because it suggests that parents may prefer to pay for prep courses that will land their adult children public jobs rather than pay for college classes that may not have as clear a return. If this holds true for the foreseeable future, *concurso*-mania holds the potential to impact the relevance of higher education in Brazil. While education was once the avenue to social mobility, public sector work now offers mobility and stability to more Brazilians. This competition has changed higher education in two ways: first, degrees of higher education are no longer necessary to achieve stability in the labor market. Many *concursos* do not require undergraduate

degrees. Thus, families can forego investments in higher education and choose instead to invest in test prep and inscription fees for entrance exams. Once secured, the public positions offer students the job security and guaranteed income necessary to pursue a degree of higher education or a better paying public job. In any case, this strategy allocates resources from the household economy to public sector market rather than that of higher education. Consider the following discussion with Flavia, a 52-year-old mother of three sons:

L: So what about your other boys?

Flavia: João got into the federal university. But his brother does not know what he wants to do. I do not know if he is even going to take the *vestibular*. He has not studied for it and this is his third year [of high school]. We enrolled him in a *cursinho* for a *concurso* that opens next year.

L: Really? What for?

Flavia: It is for a midlevel position at the technical college.

L: And then?

Flavia: Then, he could have some stability and maybe he will be ready to study for the *vestibular*.

L: And what about the youngest one?

Flavia: It is too early to see what he wants to do. His grandmother said she would help with the cost of materials if he gets into the federal university. By then, João and his brother should have a public job too and can help.

I asked João about his brother's attitude toward higher education. "He does not want to go to the federal university," he said simply. While regular school days are relatively short (running in four hour shifts from 8:00 to noon or 1:00 to 5:00), *vestibular* classes usually run in the evening three times a week for three hours each night and on weekends for up to 12 hours (6:00am to 6:00pm). Without a certain return on her investments, it made more sense at the familial level for Flavia to invest in her second son's test preparation for public sector work since he was not showing interest in studying for the national university exam. Preparing for *concursos* was a reasonable alternate use of funds—interchangeable with preparing for federal university. When he was ready to pursue employment requiring the completion of a college degree, João noted that his brother could attend a private university, bypassing the process of preparing for the *vestibular*. So, while there remained disagreement between parents and children about the pathway to stability, the expansion of public sector work offered an alternative route, rendering postsecondary education less compelling at the familial level.

The second way that the expansion of the public sector has changed higher education is with respect to the data on income earnings. Recent numbers from the IBGE suggest higher education is becoming less and less effective in raising income levels. Higher education has steadily lost its value as an income raiser—and, in some cases, an inequality reducer—during the past three decades (Crespo and Reis 2009). My suspicion based on my own fieldwork is that this data is misleading since many graduates are opting for public sector work at any cost rather than seeking employment in their field with corresponding greater pay, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Higher education, then, has not lost its income-raising potential as much as it has "lost out" to the desirability for public sector work. In the competition for household resources, the claim for time and funds for higher education is weaker than that of public sector work for the first time in Brazil's recent history. Essentially, some families are opting to delay potential growth in income earnings through postsecondary education because it is only realized in the long term and instead participate in the public sector because it provides steady income in the short term.

Chapter 4: Technologies of Power

The previous two chapters sketch a brief history of the labor market and higher education in Brazil with the aim of providing a context in which the desire for public sector work is historically rooted, constructed, and reproduced over time. While this dissertation is not about the labor market or higher education per se, it is important to demonstrate how the desire for public work overlays on preexisting, established forms of governmentality (Foucault 1991). Governing conduct via credentialing technologies, for example, is a longstanding feature of higher education in Brazil, and extending these technologies to the labor market through *concursos* is both familiar and enticing to many *Classe C* families. Moreover, when meritocracy and stability associated with higher education and the public sector, respectively, gain mass appeal through the expansion of *concursos*, the demand for public sector work among upwardly mobile families is greatly intensified.

In this dissertation, I frame the desire for public sector work as part of a larger learned subject position, cultivated in citizens by governing aspirations through "technologies of power" and "technologies of self" (Foucault 1988). This chapter examines structural elements that have shaped the desire for public sector work by dominating conduct and objectivizing the subject. In particular, I focus on mechanisms in the political economy—state-crafting projects often referred to as "neoliberalism" in Brazil—and class identity, both of which introduce anxiety to the process of subjectivity. In the most fundamental sense, I take anxiety as central to subject making since, at both the individual and collective levels, subjectivation is inclined to make orderly and interpretable the material and symbolic surroundings. In other words, I take

the formation of cultural subjects, at its core, to be an interpretive process in which subjects alleviate "anxieties of interpretation and orientation" (Ortner 2006:119). In the Brazilian case, anxiety has come most recently through significant changes to the political economy and class structure. Neoliberalism, for example, has altered markets, social organization, and household economies relatively quickly (in the span of a few decades). The exponential growth of the middle class has altered consumption patterns, success narratives, and symbols of class identity. Together, neoliberalism and class identity have shaped bureaucratic fields, work, and pathways of upward mobility. Thus, new technologies of power have made disorderly and opaque that which was previously orderly and interpretable. Geertz, in his famous discussion of Balinese subjectivity, terms this "chaos"—a condition defined by "a tumult of events which lack not just interpretations but *interpretability"* (1973:100 emphasis original). Drawing from his insights, I suggest that dramatic shifts in the political economy and class structure of Brazil create an environment lacking interpretability for many families in this project and link the desire for public sector work to neoliberal state-craft and class identity.

"Chaos"

Brazil experienced substantial economic growth in the first decade of the new millennium. According to the OECD, approximately 40 percent of the economic growth experienced was due to the expansion of labor force (Arnold and Jalles 2014). While the significance of this statistic may be lost in the average news bit about the Brazilian economy, it actually has enormous consequences in technologies of power governing many of the participants in this project. In the late 1980s, after the fall of the military dictatorship, the Brazilian state began shifting policies to stimulate growth via trade

liberalization, privatization, and foreign investment (Bulmer-Thomas 2003). While the overall market system after the dictatorship could not be labeled as capitalist, state-crafting projects did indeed draw from "free market" economics to severely curtail protectionism in many sectors and expand trade.

In the 1990s, after a "lost decade" of hyperinflation, high unemployment, and economic stagnation, the Brazilian state continued to incorporate capitalist policies as it deregulated the economy, privatized large sectors of industry, and implemented fiscal measures aimed at reducing public expenditures. Unfortunately, public services were already underfunded and these measures only soured the attitudes of many Brazilians toward foreign intervention. One of the strongest critiques of the Cardoso administration among participants in this project was the perceived link he forged between the Brazilian state and neoliberal policies from the north. The *Plano Real*, for example, tied the currency directly to the US dollar. Though it had the effect of reducing inflation (which had neared 3,000 percent at the beginning of the decade!), it also increased foreign investment and, in the minds of many Brazilians, subjected the country to foreign agendas and interests abroad. The political economy underwent significant changes during this time, demanding more "flexible" forms of labor from the labor market. That is, employment boomed among the self-employed and workers without legal contracts (*carteira assinada*), formal benefits, or protections by the state. Recall from the chapter on the labor market that almost half of all Brazilians held employment in the informal sector near the end of the decade. While the definition of informality may be debatable, it is my position that the sheer number of families who experienced economic and social insecurity during the transition to flexible labor in the

1990s brought about a staggering shift in the collective aspirations of Brazilians going into the twenty-first century.

At the turn of the millennium, the Brazilian state experienced a decade of relative stability and implemented a hybridity of economic policy—intensifying capitalist activities while maintaining state control over capital and production. Brazil repaid its IMF debts early, the Central Bank cut interest rates, and the *real* traded strong against the US dollar. Steady growth in commodity exports and demand for raw materials (especially from China) benefitted "leftist" governments across most of Latin America (Miroff 2016). While the labor market of the 1990s expanded flexible labor in the private sector, the labor market of the 2000s enlarged the public sector exponentially. In one decade alone, the public sector in Brazil added some 600,000 positions—an expansion of almost 30 percent (IBGE 2014a). The northeast experienced the greatest percentage of growth in public employees relative to other regions in Brazil—approximately 2.2 times greater than the south (Pochmann 2008). The public sector increased at an average annual rate of five percent in the four decades preceding my fieldwork, while government consumption as a percentage of GDP nearly doubled (Reid 2014). At the time of my fieldwork, 15 percent of all Brazilians were engaged in public work (Ferreira et. al 2012) and in some metropolitan areas—municipalities with populations greater than 250,000—public employees constituted 28 percent of the labor force (Pessoa and Martins 2006). A large number of these jobs were obtainable via *concursos*.

Neoliberalism

The economic model in Brazil is widely recognized as state capitalism or bureaucratic capitalism, but I would suggest a characterization along the lines of neoliberalism-managed-by-the-state. In other words, in the years since the turn of the century, neoliberal state-craft has emerged as the political project of choice in Brazil—robust, encompassing, and targeting the formation of cultural subjects—but also firmly located in the public sector. Drawing from Wacquant (2012), I define neoliberalism as a political project associated with commodification, individuality, and the reformation of the state through the expansion of the penal wing and the reduction of the welfare wing. The desire for public sector work in Brazil is a direct result of these three technologies of power.

Commodification involves the transformation of goods, social relations, and people into objects of trade available for sale or purchase on the market. It is the product of a number of calculations by the state—some economic in scope (e.g. deregulation or liberalization of markets) and others social or political in nature (e.g. desocialization of wage labor or hyperconsumerism). It includes the extension of private property rights to immaterial entities such as intellectual property and bodies of virtual data (Dent 2012). The circulation of information on the so-called knowledge economy is one such example that has resulted in the creation of new markets for the supply, exchange, production, and consumption of information and has made "human capital" and "knowledge production" buzzwords in the fields of higher education and labor management (Peters and Besley 2006, Shumar 1997). Recall from Chapter 3 that

investments in human capital have been the primary focus of initiatives targeting economic inequality and disparity by Brazilian scholars and public officials alike.

The expropriation of public entitlements for private exchange in the open market is another example of commodification. For instance, in Brazil, safety is no longer a component of public welfare available to all citizens, but instead an object obtainable through sale and purchase by citizens with the necessary capital. About this, Pereira notes, "the purchasers of private security are often buying state protection, because private security firms are staffed, managed, and sometimes owned by police officers" (2008:202). Even though the state technically continues to provide security, it does so through the market. That is, the market mediates public entitlements. While commodification is primarily located in the market, its effects extend far beyond the circulation of capital when, as in the case above, consumption of security and surveillance shape class identity, politics of exclusion, and markers of elite status (Caldeira 2000). Commodification, at its core, advances "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003); that is, it alienates marketable dimensions of public welfare, personhood, public welfare, and belonging and requires monetary payment for the return of those components.

During my fieldwork, commodification was a principle driver of domestic credit, and credit was central to the desire for public sector work. Recall from an earlier chapter Ricardo's characterization of the public sector as affording the "ability to carry debt indefinitely." Public sector work at once qualifies consumers for credit and drives the expansion of that credit by facilitating consumption levels that are unsustainable without debt. "House, car, and computer," (*casa, carro, e computador*) as the popular

saying went, were the most desirable markers of stability and overwhelmingly purchased on credit (Reid 2014). With respect to debt, commodification transforms what was once fundamentally a social relation—the exchange between creditor and debtor—into a circulation of capital (Graeber 2011). That is to say, commodification not only acts on material goods purchased through credit but also "informational commodities" now assembled in virtual sites of production (Lace 2005).

In what some have termed the "virtual debt factory," consumer profiles and databases of credit worthiness enable the sale and purchase of the creditor-debtor relationship. At the time of my fieldwork, access to consumer credit was at its peak: few of the Brazilians I surveyed were leery of debt, none had personal knowledge of the "virtual" debtors prisons created by defaulting on debt (bankruptcy, repossession, or "bad" credit histories, for example), and the commodification of mortgage securities was fueling a housing "bubble" that distracted many Brazilians from the indicators of economic recession and instability quickly appearing on the horizon. Speaking to the link between neoliberalism, commodification, and credit in the US, Manzerolle (2010) argues:

> Easy access to credit acted as a stabilizing mechanism while a patchwork of neoliberal policies rolled back workers' wages, and protections. Consumerism on the whole acted to channel all desire and affect into consumption of commodities; distractions of various kinds (video games, reality television, internet surfing) therefore counterbalanced social anxieties. (226)

Manzerolle's insights are useful in the Brazilian case because they highlight the role of consumption in distracting Brazilians from social anxieties. Ten years ago, many Brazilians defined their personal stability with the phrase "house and car" (*casa e carro*). At the time of my fieldwork, however, the phrase had been modified to include

"house, car, and computer" (*casa, carro, e computador*). Examining the link between technology, commodification, and neoliberalism in Brazil is a formidable project, but one that would be worthwhile, as commodification has changed the definitions Brazilians themselves hold for stability.

In Brazil, it is still hotly debated if neoliberal policies have indeed resulted in diminishing wages (recall that the expansion of the labor market accounted for almost half of the economic growth experienced in the country!). Certainly, wages among many Brazilians actually increased in the decades preceding my fieldwork. In the years between 2004 and 2014, for example, public sector wages rose 55 percent, private sector wages rose 35 percent, and GDP rose 12 percent (The Economist 2015). However, these figures do not reflect calculations accounting for reductions in social benefits, pensions, or other social protections. So it is quite possible, as some have argued (Wacquant 2003), that wages have actually diminished in Brazil during the past four decades. In any case, the thrust of Manzerolle's argument, which is relevant to this project, is that neoliberal state-craft links desire and affect to commodification in environments of social insecurity. In other words, the desire for public sector work overlays on existing structures of governmentality shaping subjectivity—namely the "structural dependency on commodified consumer debt" (Manzerolle 2010:234). Comor (2008) identifies commodification globally as a primary structuring institution, facilitating "efforts to rule" though consent—consent that is obtained through active participation in commodification. For many of the participants in this project, consumption of commodities like security, housing, healthcare, and education affirmed (and perhaps legitimized) the relocation of entitlements from the realm of public

welfare to the market. Recall from Chapter 1 the notion that the desire for public sector work motivated participants to engage in "fields" of accumulation (Bourdieu 1994a). *Concursos* themselves are commodified, available for sale to aspiring families, and they compel students to actively participate in related markets, such as education and test preparation, while at the same time reproducing anxiety through competitive relations. Participating in consumption signals a form of consent. Thus, neoliberalism itself is reworked, reproduced, and made acceptable to many Brazilians via consumerism and commodification.

I opened this chapter with the argument that the formation of cultural subjects is an interpretive process inclined to make sense of symbolic and material environments and alleviate anxieties. The expansion of domestic credit is just one way commodification has made opaque class belonging, social organization, and household economies involving participants in this project. The shift to individuality has also had the effect of producing social and economic anxieties. In Brazil, as in many places in Latin America, modalities emphasizing familial or collective belonging have dominated subjectivation for decades. But, for many of the participants in this project, neoliberalism has advanced individuality as central to subject formation, by way of capitalist social relations and state-ordered institutions and apparatuses (such as education and consumer credit). The desire for public sector work is reproduced at the level of the individual, enacted by individual social actors, and expressed in narrative form by individual subjects. For example, credentialing technologies in higher education, and indeed, in public sector work, necessitate individuality for enrollment in preparation courses, participation in standardized tests, and personal accumulation of

social capital (status) in the attainment of public sector work. Consumer credit profiles privilege the monetary value of individual income over the unremunerated value of household production. Legal structures overwhelmingly favor personal and intellectual property rights over collective identities (French 2009). Since public sector work inheres in the state, the individual desire for public sector work is both a function of and a contributor to neoliberal state-craft.

Many students displayed clear ambivalence toward the focus on individuality. Recall from Chapter 2, parents used words like "opportunity" and "stability" to describe the meaning of public sector jobs for their children, while their children used words like "competition" and "pressure," reflecting much more individualistic and internalized structural pressure. Many students verbalized fear rather than celebration of the market. Consider Rafaela's anxiety about landing a public sector job. When I returned to Brazil for a follow-up visit in 2014, she still had not obtained a position in the public sector. To the contrary, she had taken a part time internship in the private sector to help finance an elite test prep course for an upcoming *concurso*. In our final interview, she sheepishly confided:

> I am anxious to get a job. My parents have spent so much money. And I am under a lot of pressure to get a return [on their investment]. All I do is study for this *concurso*. Study, study, study. I work Tuesday and Thursday and then I study. It is all on me.

In securing access to highly selective institutions of higher education or public sector positions, anxiety is often expressed by the individuals under pressure to compete (Demerath 2009). When the collective does not assume and diffuse this pressure, individuals are forced to make sense of it themselves. Like Rafaela, many of the student participants in this project interpreted the quest for public sector work through the lens

of neoliberalism. That is, they were aware of the individualistic nature of the quest and the structural obligation to provide a "return" on the economic and social investments of their parents. Framing success in highly individualistic market terms is indicative of how pervasive individuality is in constructing and reproducing the desire for public sector work. In fact, a long-term ethnographic project in southern Brazil recently published about this very change. Fieldwork conducted with participants between 1969 and 2001 highlighted changes in "the ability to distinguish rights from duties…[showing] that structural change did indeed change people's cognitive maps" (Perlman 2008:269). Individuality is not simply a structural imposition on passive subjects, but one internalized by social actors.

Of course, this is not to say that individuality eliminates solidarity. Solidarity remains a project of neoliberal state-craft. Nationalism, public sector work, and the union/corporation/government block (which will be explained shortly) all function to build solidarity amidst the internally contradictory and often fragmenting effects of neoliberalism in Brazil. In an examination of neoliberalism in Italy, Muehlebach (2012) tracks the evolution of the "moral neoliberal" through the rise of volunteerism. She argues that the state incorporates "an actively oppositional leftist culture" by employing moral discourses that make some forms of work more desirable than others, especially unwaged labor (Muehlebach 2012:51). Unremunerated labor—referred to by volunteers as "relational labor"—distances people from the monetary underpinnings that taint wage labor and allows the state to craft an "anticapitalist narrative at the heart of neoliberal reform" (Muehlebach 2012:8). Volunteerism, as a form of work, mobilizes the participation of traditionally oppositional political groups by using moral discourse

to draw them into volunteer projects co-opted by the state. Many of these projects include "highly feminized forms of work that are today decreasingly provided by the state," including those serving the elderly, disabled, and socioeconomically disadvantaged (Muehlebach 2012:8). Recall from the discussion with Rafaela about business as a gendered form that sentiments like loyalty, protection, and concern for social welfare are accessible in the public sector. That is, for many Brazilians, the public sector undermines individuality central to the neoliberal project, emphasizing affect rather than market rationality in its laborers. Thus, the state makes use of individuality to produce solidarity. In much the same way that volunteerism in Italy represents both participation in the neoliberal project and resistance and struggle against the state, public work in Brazil also functions as a site of struggle against neoliberalism, even though participation in the public sector facilitates solidarity with the state.

Finally, following Wacquant's (2012) discussion, the last consequence of neoliberalism considered in this chapter is the actual expansion of the state rather than its paring down, as the penal system grows to manage the effects of neoliberal policies such as deregulation, protection of property rights, establishing flexible labor markets, and "punishing the poor." Recall from Chapter 2 that in Brazil, neoliberal state-craft did not result in the reduction of the overall size of government, but rather, of particular sectors within the government. In the first decade of the millennium, the public sector in Brazil added some 600,000 positions (growing from 2,080,000 to 2,650,000, IBGE 2014a). Of these, approximately 450,000 (or 75 percent) were positions linked to the expansion of the penal wing. That is to say, about 75 percent of the growth of the Brazilian state consisted of positions related to 1) policing—federal police, military

police, municipal police, army, navy, air force, firefighters and the like; 2) legal functions—judicial, legislative, and municipal court administrators; and 3) expanding structures of governmentality—public enterprises associated with founding new municipalities. Public employment in education and health sectors—that is, those positions associated with the welfare wing of the state—comprised the smallest segment of growth in the public sector. This is not to say strides were not made in improving public health and access to education for many Brazilians. Minimum wage rose by 50 percent in the first decade of the millennium (Reid 2014) and a handful of government transfer programs, like *Bolsa Familia*, greatly improved education, literacy, and healthcare for elementary and secondary students while raising household incomes for their families. During the first decade of the millennium, the Lula administration founded 14 federal universities and 214 public technical colleges and increased enrollment in higher education (Reid 2014).

On the whole, however, the growth of the public sector labor market was concentrated in systems of penality. Thus, while it may appear counterintuitive, neoliberal policies implemented by the state in the first decade of the millennium actually increased state involvement in the market and expanded the state—the latter of which had a direct effect on the size and composition of the labor market at the time of my fieldwork. Bourdieu (1994b) argues that the state is comprised of two bureaucratic fields—one serving the interests of the public, the other serving the interests of the market. Neither of these fields is homogenous, and sometimes their larger purposes overlap, but they represent spaces where officials compete for power and determine how the state allocates its resources and energy. Wacquant (2012) further defines

Bourdieu's conceptualization by associating the left hand of the state with public welfare, education, and societal health and the right hand with discipline, elevation of market principles, and the penal system. Drawing from these characterizations, I suggest that the qualities associated with the left hand—public welfare—are now available to Brazilian citizens through the expansion of the right hand—the ever increasing numbers of public jobs supporting (directly or indirectly) the penal functions of the state. Wacquant concludes, "Neoliberal penality is paradoxical in that it purports to deploy 'more state' in the realm of the police, criminal courts, and prisons to remedy the generalized rise of objective and subjective insecurity which is itself caused by 'less state' on the economic and social front" (2008:56).

Neoliberalism induced anxieties (labor flexibility, economic insecurity, and social insecurity) and prescribed solutions to them (public sector work). Ortner terms this process the "new-old concept of culture" and argues that acceptance of the cycle of build-up/collapse in market rule is constantly reworked and embedded "in a narrative of capitalist reproduction" by participants themselves (2006:14). Additional cuts to public entitlements after years of repression under the military dictatorship functioned to associate neoliberalism with a sentiment of fear in the public psyche. It is possible that the desire for public sector work arose from a place of fear in the public psyche: an environment in which "social insecurity" threatened to pull down anyone perched precariously on the boundaries of middle class (Newman 1999). Finally, recall Rafaela's discussion about accepting a position for any public sector *concurso* she passed. The positions for which she was testing—bank tellers and bank receptionists—were a direct result of the influx of foreign investment and expansion of domestic credit

in the banking industry. While comparable expansion occurred in the private banking sector, banking *concursos* grew exponentially due to the unique ways in which neoliberalism was managed by the Brazilian state. I will discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 7, but consider the example of mortgage securities: prior to the real estate boom, the Brazilian state tied public banks to the housing market by requiring they allocate R$0.65 of every *real* deposited in a savings account to financing housing (Martins et. al 2011). As the number of savings accounts doubled and the demand for mortgages increased, so did the amount of employment positions at public banks. In other words, job positions in the public banking sector were made possible by neoliberal policies implemented within the context of state capitalism. So, in this environment, the desire for public sector work was at once a proactive alignment with the neoliberal project of the state and a reaction to shrinking public entitlements and instability in the labor market.

Class Identity

Class is one of the most powerful analytics used to investigate subjectivity and meaning. Much has been made about the emergence of the so-called "new middle class" in Brazil and its involvement in higher education and the labor market. Since the burgeoning of the public sector is associated with middle class Brazilians, it is worth examining the designation and changes to the horizontal strata that have occurred in the past twenty years. In this section, I will sketch the development of middle class identity in recent years and discuss theoretical approaches that have gained traction among social scientists investigating class identity.

The term "new middle class" was first coined by Neri (2010) in an article documenting the entrance of some 50 million Brazilians to the middle class in the first decade of the millennium. The newcomers were assigned middle class status based on their income levels—having achieved the designation *Classe C* in the classification scheme outlined by the OECD. Usage of Neri's terminology by major media outlets and leading think-tanks, especially the *Centro de Politicas Sociais* (CPS), further popularized the term in public discourse and facilitated identification with "new" or "emerging" middle class identities by Brazilians themselves.

In formal interviews, participants themselves seldom invoked the phrase "new middle class." Instead, they spoke of work, education, home ownership, and travel. Outside of formal interviews, however, the phrase pervaded public discourse. It was featured in news reports and magazine articles; I heard it in conversations on the bus, at the mall, and around the table at mealtime. So, the infrequency of mentions of class in formal interviews does not indicate a lack of relevance or awareness to participants. On the contrary, multiple authors have observed the absence of overt class references in structured interviews. Though structurally constraining, class is often indexed on other markers of identity when expressed in narrative form. Race, gender, education, and consumptive practices, for example, provide some of the richest texts for the expression of class. In Brazil especially, class is written on racial identity in ways that are exceptionally complex, a point to which I will return later in the chapter. For the purpose of this section, however, my focus is the objectification of the subject via class identity. Class itself is a form of domination—representing (whether objectively, abstractly, or constructively) power afforded by primarily economic positions in the

sociopolitical strata. Thus, more than any other category of identity, class is an economistic marker concerned with quantitative expressions and exchanges taking place in the market. This is an oversimplification, of course, but insofar as it expands our understanding of income, *concursos*, and aspirations, it is useful to organize technologies of power under the theme of class.

During my fieldwork, much of the public discourse about the "new middle class" concerned its link (perceived or real) to economic growth. Consider the following use of the phrase by Cristiane, a 25-year-old student in tourism:

Cristiane: Tourism helps the local economy, the national economy. So it is really important.

L: Why do you think it is so important, at this moment, here in Brazil?

Cristiane: Because tourism has grown a lot in Brazil, in comparison to other countries. Today it is much easier, um, to have, you have more people visiting Brazil than you have leaving. I can tell. So Brazil has a really high growth rate of annual visits from tourists. And this has the result of growing the economy. And also helping various social classes. Like the new middle class. This is important for Brazil. For cultural and economic growth in Brazil. Especially Recife. Even more so with the coming of the [World] Cup.

This was one of the few explicit references to the "new middle class" by participants in structured interviews. While Cristiane's narrative is not entirely clear as to how the tourism industry aids the "new middle class," it is obvious that she links the two via "economic growth." This is important for two reasons: first, it demonstrates

how Brazilians themselves make sense of state-crafting projects employing capitalism and neoliberalism. Second, it reveals larger notions about how class is defined and operationalized as a theory of identity in Brazil.

Acceptance of the relationship between the "new middle class" and "economic growth" illustrates the efficacy of recent state-crafting projects employing capitalism and neoliberalism. Cristiane's explanation is based on the assumption that tourism represents opening markets, attracting foreign visitors to Brazil, not because of any attraction that is culturally unique, but because of an attraction that is rooted in the market: globalization, opening of the economy to "trade." Explanations for economic growth are constantly reworked and "embedded in a narrative of capitalist reproduction" (Ortner 2006:14).

Secondly, linking economic growth and the new middle class speaks to larger beliefs about how class is defined and how it is operationalized as a theory of identity. The exact nature of the "new middle class" continues to be a point of contention among social scientists. At some point, every anthropologist is introduced to the familiar, often overused, metaphor of the anthropologist's toolbox. In its strictest sense, the toolbox contains a collection of conceptual approaches—analytical constructs—which aid the professional in understanding and deconstructing lived experience in the cultural context. While these "tools" are utilized in multiple disciplines, such as sociology, political science, and economics, there are particular uses within anthropology that merit consideration in this dissertation project.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, multiple theoretical frameworks of class identity advanced by social theorists have been incorporated and

refashioned in anthropology. Many of these frameworks evolved in tandem with larger intellectual shifts in the social sciences, including those of positivism, structuralism, and postmodernism. For the purposes of this section, I want to highlight two approaches to theorizing class identity that are especially compelling in investigating the desire for public sector work. Since most readers are familiar with Marxist and Weberian frameworks, the following paragraphs sketch a general summary of the intellectual traditions, emphasizing in particular the formulation of class as a concrete structure of stratification, an abstract structure of social positions, and an historical accumulation of lived experience.

Marxist frameworks tend to tie class identity to production and portray the ownership of property as fundamental to class divisions and, therefore, social stratification. Marx (1948) conceptualizes two classes based on these relationships: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—those who own productive property and those who do not. In *Capital*, Marx (1965) expands this classification by further segmenting the bourgeoisie into two ruling classes: the aristocracy and the capitalists. At the most basic level, Marxism posits that class exists as a concrete structure due to its connection to subsistence systems (the "base") and determines peripheral components of culture including ideological, political, religious, and social practices (the "superstructure" of lived experience). Thus, concrete structures of stratification take class as a distinct category: more material, more objective, and more fundamental in the formation of group identity than other social categories (cultural, natural, or otherwise). Class identity is a group identity and it is constructed via class-consciousness—an awareness of solidarity or belonging to the class group. Moreover, it is reproduced through conflict

and struggle with other class groups in ways that can be revolutionary to economic and social organization. For this reason, many anthropologists working in Brazil have drawn from Marx or refashioned his theoretical frameworks to investigate inequality, resistance, and agency within structures of domination.

Ribeiro (1995), in his seminal work *O Povo Brasileiro*, defines class identity in a fairly traditional Marxist sense. He identifies two classes—those with economic power, and those without—and distinguishes the elite based on their political clout (business executives, political leaders, and agents of foreign enterprise). Chilcote (1990) also considers economic and political power the defining factor of class identity, though he considers "ruling classes" to be economic classes that rule politically. He identifies members of the ruling class by their reputation as elites, their position in the upper class hierarchy, or their preeminence in the political institutions of decision-making in northeast Brazil. Conniff and McCann (1989) demonstrate the extent to which class identity remains conflated with political power and economic resources, rooted in definitions of class from the colonial era. Since Brazil has not experienced the kind of social revolution that has occurred in other parts of Latin America, many Marxist conceptions of class identity remain focused on land holding, large scale agriculturalists, and the aristocratic owners of production.

With respect to the "new middle class" in Brazil, social scientists emphasizing a concrete structure of stratification do not consider the inclusion of 50 million Brazilians to *Classe C* a new structural reality. To the contrary, they frame it as a quantitative expansion of the proletariat. Singer (2013), for example, calls newcomers to *Classe C* an incorporation of the "sub-proletariat"—laborers drawn from the upper ranks of the

destitute into the working class. According to the most recent data on the composition of the "new middle class," upwardly mobile, traditionally marginalized socioeconomic groups represent the fastest growing segment of *Classe C*. In some sense, locating the "new middle class" in a preexisting proletariat structure is an obvious move: historically in Latin America, growth in class membership on such a large scale is more likely to come from below via upward mobility than from above via downward mobility (Pastore 1982). In the Brazilian case especially, private industry was directly responsible for over five million jobs in the formal economy during the first decade of the millennium. In the northeast, the rate of growth in the private sector was almost two and a half times that in the south. So, the explanation that the number of formal laborers has simply grown with the intensification of capitalism in Brazil is fairly reasonable and self-evident.

But while Marxist frameworks may serve neatly to explain a segment of *Classe C* benefiting from the expansion of private sector jobs, they lack the explanatory power to investigate the desire for public sector work—a desire which often cuts across class lines, traversing fundamentally opposed group identities (bourgeoisie and proletariat), and aligning interests rather than initiating conflict in class formation. Privileging concrete structures of stratification obscures the effects of "technologies of power" on subjectivation: the role of institutional forms of power, the domination of conduct, and the centrality of anxiety in constructing subjectivity. Broadly speaking, Marxism frames class consciousness as learned (and reproduced) upon entry to the labor market. But in the case of the public sector, and indeed for many of the participants in this project, the labor market itself is an object of intense desire (and, one might even say, consumption)

at both the individual and the collective (e.g. class) levels. Rather than mobilize its class members to political awareness, wage labor in the public sector makes an ally of the state and reunites laborers with modes of production otherwise alienated. So one of the most poignant critiques of Marxism is the general failure of history to vindicate its theoretical predictions: that class consciousness eventually leads to massive reorganization of the class structure. By and large, inequalities in class structures appear to have been reproduced throughout the course of history and remained stable over long periods of time.

One way around the constraints of Marxist conceptions of class is to frame class as an abstract (rather than concrete) structure of social positions. The following overview groups frameworks loosely under the term "Weberian" because they take class as a real structure of domination but accept multiple systems (beyond subsistence) for organizing the horizontal strata. Like Marxist notions, Weberian frameworks associate class identity with ownership. However, Weber (1946) characterizes ownership as the result of consumption rather than production. In direct contradiction to Marx, Weber does not view class identity as a group identity. Instead, he frames class as one of many bases of stratification representing "typical chances" of economic opportunities, access to scarce goods, and life experiences afforded to social actors (Weber 1946:181). Social classes are the manifestation of structural positions of class "within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical" (Weber 1968:305). Class markers can be objectively measured (income, occupation, education) or subjectively constructed (status, ranking, hereditary prestige), but they are ultimately reflective of structural locations. In frameworks incorporating status attainment models,

status is the driving force of stratification and status groups form across traditional class divisions by monopolizing privilege and preventing other social actors from mobilizing their own resources or access. Structures of stratification influence ideological, political, religious, and social practices, but do not determine them. Moreover, class conflict is not privileged as the site of reproduction of class identity; the market is. Thus, "the potential for class membership is not real until the determining factor is used in a market to secure access to privilege" (Pakulski and Waters 1996:15). The market provides the location at which class structures and the individual intersect to reproduce class identity.

Weberian approaches offer a critical insight into the desire for public sector work in Brazil: multiple bases of stratification make possible the formation of new classes, and thus, the "new middle class." The horizontal strata in Brazil have undergone massive changes within the last two decades. In a compelling project documenting the rise of the new economic elite during the Lula and Rouseff administrations, Zibechi (2014) charts the evolution of the *Partido de Trabalhadores*—the traditional party of the working class—and contends that union involvement in pension funds and state-owned development banks is constituting a new structural reality. He argues that unionists have not only fused with corporations to monopolize economic power, but they also have secured state power by obtaining employment in the public sector via political and electoral processes. Thus, union leaders have gained legitimate access to and maintained control of public resources (pension funds and bank loans, for example), as well as promoted the capitalist growth of these resources by locating them in the market. Rather than viewing this process as the development of a

labor aristocracy (as would be the case in a Marxist framework), Zibechi characterizes the emergence of the "union/government/corporation" power bloc as a "qualitative leap" in the aggregate of social classes. Brazilian sociologist De Oliveira agrees, arguing that the new class formation "has unity of purpose, was formed with ideological consensus around the new role of the state, works within management of state or semi-state pension funds, and creates the link to the financial system" (2003:148).

The *Partido de Trabalhadores* operates at all levels of the state apparatus, controlling approximately 16 percent of Brazil's GDP through management of pension funds and accounts at the *Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social* (Zibechi 2014). Pension funds finance national debt, public infrastructure, private industry, and multinational operations. While Brazil is not unique in its domination of pension funds by unionists, what is unusual is that financial accumulation takes place in the realm of the state rather than the private sector. Some have dubbed this organization of the market state-capitalism or bureaucratic capitalism, but what is most relevant to this project is that the change took place in a relatively short period of time—within the span of two decades—and resulted in a dramatic shift in the lived experience of many "ordinary" Brazilians on the other end of the class spectrum: essentially the "new middle class." For many Brazilian families in this project, within the span of one generation, the union/government/corporation bloc has altered their own anxieties, class consciousness, work, and the ability to organize politically. On this topic, Zibechi contends, "It is neither chance, nor error, nor a case of co-optation that those same union leaders are working with the state and the corporation to prevent or destroy strikes" (2014:256). Indeed, demonstrations, conflict, and struggle are in decline, with

fewer strikes in the entire decade since the millennium than in a single year in the 1980s (Zibechi 2014). While Marxist frameworks may interpret these figures as representative of stagnation or weakening mobilization among the proletariat, Weberian approaches at least offer the possibility of a new emerging class consciousness. In other words, declining struggle and conflict numbers may signal the exodus of 50 million Brazilians from one structural position into another—a "new middle class" in which an emancipatory or revolutionary class consciousness is not 1) politically, economically, or socially compatible with newly-desired forms of labor and consumptive practices, and 2) profitable in subjectivation alleviating anxiety introduced by new class identities.

So what does the "union/government/corporation" bloc have to do with the "new middle class" and the desire for public sector work? First, through the rise of a new economic elite, the consolidation of power (political, economic, and social) is occurring simultaneously at the site of public employment and the market. I suggest the effect is twofold: first, it intensifies the desire for public sector work among those in *Classe C* undergoing class formation; and secondly, it fuels consumptive practices in the market to solidify class belonging. Governing desire for public sector work is intensified by the state, as the *Partido de Trabalhadores* transformed "one of its core constituencies—current and retired public-sector workers" into a "pillar of the corporate state" (Reid 2014:141). Recall Muehlebach's argument about solidarity in the neoliberal project. Leftist or oppositional groups are incorporated in the state through moral "work"—that is, through "practices that are both oppositional and complicit at the same time" (2012:9). The simultaneous advancement of union interests and corporate interests in the realm of the state makes public sector work a site for solidarity, desirable

precisely because of the intersection of morality and class. Consumptive practices are fueled through direct initiatives increasing the numbers of public sector jobs and raising wages, but also through indirect initiatives targeting secondary education. Since entry level positions in the public sector require the equivalent of a high-school diploma, the more educated the Brazilian population becomes, the larger the pool of candidates for *concursos* grows (and the greater the revenues for the state). Education, in Weberian frameworks, is one of many commodities for consumptive actions in the market signaling class identity. So, class belonging is manifest in the market through consumptive practices like education and *concursos*, while the state, private industry, and political elite shape the formation of the "new middle class."

Additionally, fusing labor interests with the state and the market is in line with Brazilian ideology about class mobility more broadly. While American ideology might frame class mobility as more "open" than it actually is—emphasizing meritocracy and economic opportunity—and British ideology might frame class mobility as more "rigid" than it actually is—emphasizing status and traditional ranks—Brazilian ideology frames class mobility as more "paternalistic" (or "neo-patrimonial," Schwartzman 2007) than it actually is—emphasizing clientelism and public grafts. This is a gross oversimplification, of course, but it illustrates the point about the persistence of public grafts in the Brazilian system. While it may not actually be the case that the public sector ensures upward mobility—by some estimates, for example, the expansion of the formal private sector labor force accounts for almost half of the economic growth in Brazil during the decade since the turn of the century (Reid 2014)—it is nonetheless the prevailing ideology that positions in the state apparatus afford upward mobility and

legitimate access to public funds for personal use. I employ the term "legitimate" here because, despite the illegality of some forms of public grafts within existing legal frameworks and the criticism surrounding political corruption scandals often featured in the media, Brazilians themselves display a great deal of tolerance (one might even say endorsement) for the practice of public grafts in everyday life.

My evidence for this is largely anecdotal, though there are several authors who have tackled explicitly the topic of corruption as a cultural phenomenon. DaMatta (1979) is perhaps the most famous to do so with his description of the Brazilian *jeitinho* used in everyday life to secure access to privilege. Almeida (2008) also discusses the *jeitinho*. Multiple authors have compared corruption in Brazil cross-culturally (Fisman and Miguel 2006, Vieira 2008) and bestowed the unenviable distinction that Brazil displays a "high level of abuse of the perks of public office, even by Latin American standards" (Power and Taylor 2011:10). Recall the discussion with Lucinete about corruption in the Brazilian system. Without straying too far from the topic at hand, consider her observation that ordinary practices are "just as corrupt, just as dishonest as the, the politicians" (*o faz tão corrupto, o faz tão ladrão quanto os, os políticos*). Despite her disapproving tone, she maintained these practices in her own daily life. Maria demonstrated a similar practice, criticizing her fellow public school teachers for expropriating computers and office furniture for their own "personal" (*próprio*) use. But while having dinner in her home one evening, I commented on a stack of industrial rolls of toilet paper in the corner of her living room. She laughed and said simply, "I got them from work." To offer one more example, in 2013, Sandra participated in mass demonstrations in Recife protesting inequalities in the implementation and adjudication

of the law. Her primary complaint was expressed as follows, “Everyone should have to obey the rules.” In 2013, she vacationed to the United States and I accompanied her to New York City. While going through security, she was pulled aside by a Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) agent for packing a snow-globe souvenir that exceeded liquid restrictions. I acted as her translator as she argued with the agent, until she turned to me and demanded, “Is there not a way (*jeitinho*) to get my souvenir through? Why is he being so rigid with the rules? Can’t you slip him a little cash?”

In discussions about class mobility (whether explicitly framed as such, or alluded to in narratives), Brazilians generally agree that upward mobility is hampered by corruption. But many of the same Brazilians willingly identify their own “corrupt” practices when asked about them. In this chapter, I am less interested in the moral economy of these practices than I am in the larger structural elements shaping conduct. In the case of corruption, I suggest that it is a very particular form of corruption that is objectionable to the middle class. By the time many of the Brazilians I surveyed gained access to the public sector, they felt entitled to its resources and viewed, to an extent, public grafts as legitimate. The exception was for those at higher levels (as viewed from “below”) of the public sector hierarchy—essentially those politicians in public office. That it was objectionable for career politicians to engage in public grafts, but acceptable for “ordinary” employees of the public sector, is in part, I suggest, a matter of class identity and relevant to discussions about the desire for public sector work.

Alesina et. al (2000) sees public employment as redistributive when policies such as tax-transfers are not politically viable. For the “new middle class” then, and indeed for Brazilians in general, seizing the public sector for private gain is simply an

expression of the ideology surrounding class mobility. In some sense, it is no different than street attendants seizing public parking spaces for personal use ("looking after" your car for a small fee while you dine or shop), or carnival managers seizing public plazas to set up their amusement rides (during my fieldwork, one rotated through our residential neighborhood every three months, see Figure 6), or union leaders in public office seizing state funds to finance their lifestyles (as occurred in the "*mensalão*" scandal). Thus, Weberian frameworks emphasize the formation of the "new middle class" as a manifestation of emerging structural positions in multiple bases of stratification.

Figure 6. Carnival in residential neighborhood park (author 2012)

Chapter 5: Technologies of Self

In this chapter, I want to examine some of the ways in which participants in this project construct themselves as ethical subjects. As outlined in the introduction, I take the desire for public sector work as part of a larger, learned subject position through which "technologies of power" and "technologies of self" (Foucault 1988) govern the aspirations and practice of individual subjects. In this chapter, I offer examples of the latter—how, rather than shaping conduct via domination, technologies of self "permit individuals to effect, by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988:18). Building on discussions in the previous chapter about structural pathways of anxiety, this chapter investigates how anxiety is mitigated through the desire for (not the actual attainment of) public sector work. For many Brazilians, the desire for public sector work exists in tension with the practice of living a "good" life. This is especially true for *evangélicos* (evangelical Christians) and their families. Of the participants I surveyed, 7 of 19 identified as *evangélico*, and it is in their narratives that the ambivalence surrounding the morality of public sector work is most apparent.

Ethical subjectivity is not simply an imposition of authoritative religious structures upon passive subjects, but it is "the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (Mahmood 2005:14). Embodied practice is essential to the process of ethical subjectivation. That is, for many of the participants in this project, "right-living" supersedes attachments to categories of identity such as gender, race, nationalism or

class. The preeminence of righteousness (*justificação* or *piedade*) in the lives of *evangélicos* represent a "category of practice" (Fassin 2012:11) in which self-making is located in the moral domain. Indeed, I propose that technologies of self, operationalized in the construction of the *evangélico* subject, account for significant cultural changes underway in many areas of Brazil, including the labor market. Recall Muehlebach's (2012) examination of ethical subjectivity amidst neoliberal state-craft. She argues that technologies of self can be framed as political actions when they take place in the market, altering meanings of work and even wage labor itself. Drawing from her insights, I propose that the *evangélico* subject can function as a form of insubordination to the neoliberal project, even though the desire for public sector work makes *evangélicos* themselves complicit in political articulations of the state. Muehlebach suggests, "it is precisely because of the moral neoliberal's capacity to appear…as a form of critical emancipation that ethical citizenship has become so persuasive" (2012:4). Similarly, the rise of evangelicalism in Brazil is closely linked to sentiments of resistance and cultural critique, making technologies of self especially effective in navigating politics of exclusion in an environment of Catholicism, corruption, and neoliberal state-craft.

Evangélico is a term used by social scientists and evangelicals alike to identify members of Protestant movements in Brazil. *Evangélicos* are characterized by an active recruitment to salvation, individualized faith experiences, and two major tenants of faith: the supremacy of Christ and the gifting of the Holy Spirit. As of 2010, the Pew Research Center (PRC) reported that more than 22 percent of Brazil's population identified as *evangélico*, a figure that had quadrupled over the past 40 years (PRC

2013). By 2020, some speculate the number will have increased to over half of the population (Burdick 2013). There is disagreement, however, about what exactly constitutes *evangélicos.* In a recent ethnography on religion in Brazil, Burdick (2013) characterizes the term as encompassing denominations of "historical" churches (Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians), "classic Pentecostal" churches (Assemblies of God, Congregação Cristã do Brasil, Igreja Quadrangular, Brasil Para Cristo, Casa da Benção, and Deus é Amor), "neo-Pentecostal" churches (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, Igreja Internacional de Graça de Deus, Renascer em Cristo, and Igreja Nova Vida), and "millennial Protestant" churches (Seventh-Day Adventist and Jehovah's Witnesses). The PRC has a similar classification of *evangélicos*, with the exception that it excludes Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons from its tabulation of evangelical denominations. Based on my own experiences, Brazilians of mainline and Pentecostal branches of Protestantism would likely question association with Seventh-Day Adventist for the simple reason that they do not congregate on Sundays, and with Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses for reasons relating to their preferential estimation of the Book of Mormon and Watch Tower materials respectively. It is precisely this difference in embodied practice that fuels the self-policing—or governing—of membership in each group and prevents the latter-mentioned denominations from being included in the category *evangélico*.

There are additional distinctions that should be made about the term *evangélico*. There is a growing divide in practice and in theology between charismatic and non-charismatic mainline groups in Brazil (and elsewhere). In practice, differences are expressed at congregational gatherings through the public display of gifts of the Holy

Spirit. Speaking in tongues, faith healing, casting out demons, and possession by the Holy Spirit are a few of the most common supernatural giftings performed in charismatic circles, and confirmation of salvation is closely tied to the public demonstration of one's supernatural gifting (Mariz and Machado 1994). Non-charismatic groups, on the other hand, generally do not practice speaking in tongues, faith healing, or possession by the Holy Spirit, opting instead for technologies of self shaping the "inner state" as an intellectual rather than existential exercise (a point to which I will soon return). In terms of political economy, charismatic congregants tend to tithe more than do congregants from non-charismatic churches, relative to their income, and protestant groups more than Catholic ones (Duin 2001). And while most religious branches in Brazil are wary of involvement in politics (Burdick 2013, von Sinner 2012), in my experience, non-charismatic mainline Protestants tend to be the most reluctant of *evangélicos* to engage in politics, rejecting assertions that their own activity is in any way political.

From a theological perspective, differences between charismatic and non-charismatic groups coalesce around concepts of sanctification and salvation. These are gross oversimplifications, of course. Charismatic churches tend to emphasize the spiritual battle between God and Satan, encouraging congregants to rid themselves of demons by enacting gifts of the Holy Spirit (Smith and Prokopy 1999). Material blessings flow from God's approval of these efforts and the amount of faith. This theology has come to be known in popular vernacular as the "gospel of prosperity." Non-charismatic churches tend to emphasize work ethic, estimation of the biblical text, and the sovereignty of God's will. Weber's (1952) insights about the protestant ethic are

relevant here: in non-charismatic churches, reformed theology is central to understanding salvation. Predestination means that congregants do not know with certainty their eternal fate, or if they do, they are driven by anxiety to work hard to ensure it. Moreover, material blessings are a result of hard work: the accumulation of wealth is evidence of "right-living," or more specifically, "right-working," as subjects attempt to discern the will of God, seek sanctification, and attain salvation.

Finally, it is worth noting that "charismatic" (*progressivo*) branches of Catholicism emerging as of late share distinguishing features with charismatic Protestantism including the emphasis on individual relationships with God, direct accessibility to Christ, and charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit (Peterson and Vásquez 1998). In time, it is possible that these groups may become associated with evangelical movements as their visibility grows, since their agendas are salient in charismatic evangelical circles. As with any category of identity, the boundaries of group belonging are not fixed. There is a growing (yet small) number of charismatic Pentecostals turning to reformed theology and altering congregational rituals accordingly (Lopes 2012). Additionally, though neo-Pentecostal groups vary quite a bit from Pentecostal branches of Protestantism, there remains a significant amount of movement from one group to another, especially in the realm of politics when congregants unite to endorse evangelical politicians or stand behind legislative measures (Dreher 1997).

For the purposes of this chapter, when I use the term *evangélico*, I mean to focus on the mainline non-charismatic variants of Protestantism. My reason for doing this is simple: even though all of the participants I identify as evangelical self-identified as *evangélico,* in practice and theology, they most closely resemble non-charismatic

branches of Protestantism in Brazil. While the process of ethical subjectivation is certainly not new in the field of anthropology, its significance in the lives of participants in this project initially surprised me. At the outset of my fieldwork, I did not intend to confront the moral domain so overtly in discussions about labor and aspirations of success. However, the presence of "ethical dispositions" (Mahmood 2005) in participant narratives about public sector work was so prevalent, it demanded my attention and challenged earlier conclusions about the intersection of desire and moral practice. This chapter examines technologies of self and the construction of the ethical subject through three examples: receiving peace, seeking fulfillment in life, and objecting to corruption.

A Peaceful Self

For many of the self-identified *evangélicos* in this project, being a moral subject necessitates discerning the will of God and obeying it. The uncertainty of God's will is foundational to Weber's (1952) framework concerning the Calvinism and relevant to many of the participants in this project. Even though one's eternal fate may be predestined or assured within the Protestant framework, the expressed will of God for individual believers is often unclear and must be determined experientially. That is, God's will must be discerned in a "moment of production" (Holland et al. 1998:45)—a process shaped discursively by participants mitigating the anxiety of an uncertain eternal future. For example, for many of the *evangélicos* I surveyed, the will of God was not known prior to registering for a *concurso* or pursuing a public sector job. Rather, the successful passing of *concursos* functioned as one of many indicators considered by *evangélicos* in confirming their interpretation of God's desire for their lives. One of the

ways this affirmation was embodied was by bending one's will to achieve a state of peace.

Peace is at once a passive state—signified as the absence of anxiety (mental or emotional)—and an active one—operationalized through conscious decisions to submit "rational" thoughts and conduct to the perceived will of God. In investigating peace, I do not use the term "rational" to suggest that technologies of self produce irrational or illogical subjects, incapable of thinking critically or acting sensibly. To the contrary, the process of constituting a peaceful self requires a great deal of thought, logic, and purposeful behavior. Rather, I use the term "rational" after the apostle Paul's characterization of peace in the epistle to the Philippians: "The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension (*entendimento*), will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus . . . for I have learned to be content (*contente)* in whatever circumstances I am" (NASB Philippians 4:7, 11). This biblical text was regularly invoked during the course of my fieldwork to explain the process of discerning the will of God. Accepting a peaceful state does not necessitate human understanding; in fact, for the apostle Paul, and according to many evangelical Brazilians, the peace of God is characterized by the lack of a rational explanation. In this sense, the constitution of a peaceful self functions as a "dimension of everyday life in which [actors] are not aspiring to escape the ordinary but rather to descend into it as a way of becoming moral subjects" (Das 2012:134).

Moreover, peace is a learned state of satisfaction with present circumstances—a mental exercise in simplicity rather than complexity. Receiving peace is a conscious process of contraction, reducing what constitutes "well-being" to the most basic level of

existence: merely being alive. Contentment-regardless-of-circumstance implies sheer satisfaction with life itself, no matter the quality or substance. Thus, as an embodied practice, a peaceful state requires *evangélicos* to elevate the value of life above any other material or immaterial concern. Consider the following discussion with Lucia:

Lucia: I always ask for guidance from God to decide. Should I do it or not. I frequently ask people to pray for me. It helps me decide and such. I talk to this one and that one. And when I feel peace. When I declined, for example, the *concurso* and still felt peace. I was not distressed. I was…

L: What is peace? Explain it to me.

Lucia: Peace, peace, peace. I am not distressed, not doubtful, I do not think, "Wow, I should have gone." I stop questioning myself. It is like, it was not meant to be. God has something better for me. Understand? I believe it is like that. That is how I perceive things. I pray, I ask. Then I read the Bible. I was trying to decide yes or no, then I read, "I am the Lord your God, and I will guide you with My eyes." Then I thought, "My God, how are you going to guide me with Your eyes? What now? Where do I go? What do I do?" And the more I thought about going, the more distressed I became because I was going to take on too many things. And I heard this, too. The people of the church said to me, "You have to focus on what you want." A colleague from church, she was *concursado* in physical therapy, I do not know if it was mid-level or advanced. She gave it over to God,

> and God confirmed in her heart that she needed to leave her job to study medicine, because her dream was to be a doctor. So she left two *concursos* to *study*! <emphasis original> To do six more years of medicine. So why could I not let go of one *concurso* to study for another that would give me more satisfaction in the future? So, I have to risk it. I have to pursue what satisfies me, and what really brings me peace.

Lucia is a self-identified *evangélica*. At the time of our interview, she had recently passed a *concurso* for a position as a public school teacher, but despite her desire for public sector work, she had elected to "let it go" (*abrir mão*) because she did not receive peace about accepting the position. In her opening narrative, she explains that, through prayers and consultations with other Christians, she discerns the will of God by feeling peace (*quando eu sinto paz).* When pressed to explain peace, she depicts a mental state free from anxiety, doubting, and second-guessing. But this state is discursively constructed—that is, it is formed in the realm of discourse to counterbalance the anxiety surrounding eternal destination.

In his analysis of culture change among the Urapmin, Robbins (2004) outlines "technologies of self" employed to construct ethical subjectivity, specifically that of a "sinner" in a Christian moral system. He identifies a "peaceful, calm inner state" (231) as one such transformation enacted on a daily basis through self-reflection and renunciation of the will. In Robbins' framework, cultural change is facilitated by a model he terms "adoption" (2004:11), and while I do not believe it completely accounts for the changes hereafter presented in the Brazilian case, I do believe there are

similarities in his analysis of Christianity as a cultural phenomenon. Lucia's initial description of peace is reminiscent of Robbins' description of Urapmin Christians who "experience the Spirit's guidance as a heart filled with clear thoughts about which they feel no 'ambivalence'" (2004:231). She qualifies the peace she receives by giving it permanency—she literally "remained" in peace (*fiquei em paz*) after foregoing the opportunity to work in the public sector—further evidence of its divine origin.

In addition to the absence of mental and emotional anxiety, a peaceful state also entails the active discipline of thought and conduct. Note the mental efforts Lucia devotes to receiving peace: "It was not meant to be," and "God has something better for me," are both examples of conscious reasoning. The physicality of flipping through the bible's pages in search of guidance represents transformative conduct that initiates a conversation with God. He speaks through Psalm 32:8. Reading the bible, praying, and self-reflection illustrate the deliberate actions required in the realms of thought and conduct to constitute a peaceful self. Moreover, since God resides in the mind of the *evangélico* through the presence of the Holy Spirit, thought is a means by which divine power can be accessed. On this point, the distinction between charismatic and non-charismatic *evangélicos* cannot be overstated. Thought is regularly recognized through discourse as a realm of divine presence. Thus, possession of the Holy Spirit occurs in non-charismatic variants of Protestantism, but with the effect of altering the internal state and producing stillness in the body (rather than movement, such as dancing or falling). Embodiment of the peaceful self is itself a signaler of identity—proof of salvation—much like the demonstration of spiritual giftings.

Moreover, Lucia's assertion that public sector work would complicate her life (*acumular muita coisa*) speaks to the importance of simplicity in embodying peace. In this example, it is precisely because the desire for public sector work would have complicated her conceptualization of moral subjectivity that it was rejected. Finally, Lucia points to the very nature of her decision—its seemingly irrational character—as proof of it being from God. She references a friend from church who resigned from two positions in the public sector to begin a new profession. The lack of rationality is implied in Lucia's emphasis that the woman left her job "to *study*!" a minimum of six years, without guarantee of future employment. In the evangelical moral framework, it is acceptable to understand peace as incomprehensible from the human perspective, even more so in the face of great personal risk. As Lucia explains on behalf of her friend, to do anything other than bend her will to the desire of her heart would have been immoral—rejecting that which God had purposefully placed there. Lucia's comments reflect the theological underpinnings of evangelical individual aspirations: namely, God's sovereign purpose and predestined decisions about individuals shape and direct their own aspirations.

Discerning desire as part of the will of God regularly requires *evangélicos* to balance pursuing their own wills—represented as divinely-appropriated desire—and exercising peace—a byproduct of successfully following the will of God. Aligning oneself with God's will at once supersedes the desires of one's heart and satisfies those desires (if they are pursued within the will of God). This is important because it stresses the experiential nature of discerning God's will. Recall that many non-charismatic *evangélicos* draw heavily from reformation theology, emphasizing work ethic as a

location in which to discern the will of God (Weber 1952). However, I regularly observed *evangélicos* extending technologies of a peaceful self beyond public sector work to discerning the will of God in areas such as vacation planning, degree selection, and romantic relationships. Additionally, since ethical subjectivity is not constructed in a vacuum and involves the embodied practice of other Christians, *evangélicos* have the additional task of engaging with the technologies of others to constitute a peaceful self. For example, João passed the *vestibular* in the top position of test takers from the state of Pernambuco. His test results granted him first place (and first pick) among tens of thousands of students. He chose to pursue a degree in medicine, but in the years leading up to passing the *vestibular*, it was not entirely clear that he had God's blessing to pursue his desired profession. Note the multiplicity of interpretations of the will of God in the following discussion:

João: I tried three times, ok? When I did not pass the second time, some of the brethren of the church said to me, "João, I do not think it is God's will that you become a doctor, because if it was,"—because the common thought was—"if it was the will of God for you to be a doctor, then you would have passed the vestibular. So since you did not pass, it must not have been the will of God. Listen to the voice of God, João. Go get a different degree. Medicine is not what God wants for you." Understand?

L: Yes.

João: So I think it is, I think it is dangerous to be guided by concluding, "It is the will of God" simply by what you see happening. Simply by

> trying once and not achieving. Trying again, and not achieving. To conclude that "It is not the will of God" that you do such and such. I think this is a little dangerous, you know, to follow this line of thought. But I do think that God has a plan for me in medicine. In my opinion, wherever I go, whatever profession I pursue, God has a plan for me. God wants me to accomplish something. And I have no doubt that I will discover it at the right time. Understand?

While recent work in anthropology has provided an excellent framework for understanding how evangelicals discern the will of God, hear his voice, and interpret his plan for their lives (Luhrmann 2012), I want to focus on the constitution of a peaceful self and the ways in which peace is embodied in practice. João describes peace as a process of enduring criticism—via doubting and second guessing—from fellow church members. His personal knowledge that, "God has a plan for me," (*Deus tem plano pra mim*) facilitates a peaceful state through discursive negotiation. In João's case, even though his professional ambitions are unclear, apart from being located in the field of medicine, he argues it is dangerous (*perigoso*) to interpret the will of God without regard for the desires he has placed in the heart. I will return to the topic of desire in a moment, but for now, I want to point out the importance of constituting a peaceful self despite repeated failures. Being at peace with disappointment is a confirmation of "right living"—a state of being which must be maintained in the pursuit of righteousness. Failure to do so can constitute sin. And in the face of adversity, peace must be seized to preserve right living (or so goes the popular discourse). It is possible that for many *evangélicos*, peace is framed in terms of agency ("seized") rather than passivity

("accept") to reinforce constructions of power and resistance. Recall Muehlebach's (2012) characterization of ethical subjectivity as having the capacity to appear emancipatory. Peace—though it may actually be a byproduct of alignment with God's will—is often framed in discourse as an active pursuit that acts in opposition to the dominant order. In her ethnography of evangelical Americans, Luhrmann observes a peculiar rationale among participants—"sin is something you do…that drives the peace of the Lord from your grasp" (2012:104)—a rationale with which many of the *evangélicos* in this project would agree. "Grasping" or "seizing" peace conveys the empowerment through which *evangélico* subjectivity is understood to be emancipatory in the spiritual realm.

Fulfillment in Life

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (NASB Psalm 37:4). During my fieldwork, I not only encountered references to this frequently quoted scripture in interviews explaining professional pursuits, but I also observed it regularly on graduation cards, office knick-knacks, and congratulatory notices in church bulletins announcing a member's passing of a *concurso* or *vestibular*. It was invoked, for the most part, in association with major life events, but specifically, it was linked to employment and higher education. Since my aim is to investigate the desire for public sector work, I want to turn to the centrality of job satisfaction in narratives of *evangélicos* and the mechanisms governing the sense of fulfillment (*realização*). In the excerpt quoted earlier, Lucia concludes her discussion by linking peace and job satisfaction. She posits that employment which truly grants peace (*realmente me dá paz*) is characterized by a sense of fulfillment: doing what you want

to do (*o que você quer*). Thus, in this section, I examine the topic of job satisfaction and investigate how the concept of fulfillment both constrains and introduces aspirations for employment.

That *evangélicos* seek, and indeed expect, job satisfaction comes from the notion that desires are placed in the heart by God. Among the participants I surveyed, this belief was especially strong with respect to the desire for particular kinds of work. Professional ambitions are perceived as highly individualized affinities that occur "naturally"—natural in the sense that they originate in the heart and are placed there prior to one's earthly existence—and reflect a personal relationship with God. Participants were quick to distinguish the desire for public employment from the desire for the kind of employment one was designed to do. The first reflects a temporal, earthly aspiration, while the latter, an eternal, heavenly one. To pursue employment in the public sector on the basis of monetary gain alone is at odds with the directive to "Delight in the Lord." In fact, seeking satisfaction in anything other than that which God provides is a major source of anxiety for *evangélicos*. It indicates a carnal, banal focus. To achieve compatibility between one's employment and one's inner design, on the other hand, is to participate in the supernatural. Consider the following discussion with Paulo, a 29-year-old student in environmental management:

> In theology, there is a framework called creation theology. It concerns the physical creation. You probably are familiar with this. So the creation belongs to God. And man ruins creation. So in some sense, we should be caretakers of creation. This was my approach to the environment. Why did I go into environmental management? Because I understand that through environmental management, I can care for God's creation. Understand? So I can develop professionally, earn money, and still have a connection between theology and environmental concern. That which defines the thought process is the Bible.

For Paulo, employment not only represents a sphere of value, but it actually functions as a site of redemption in which the original intent for creation is embodied, practiced, and fulfilled. From the point of view of *evangélicos*, the created world belongs (*pertence*) to God and was intended to be stewarded by humankind. But through sin, humankind spoiled (*estragou*) what was formerly perfect, transforming it into a fallen state. Paulo chose to enter the field of environmental management because it allowed him to, "take care of God's creation," rectifying the consequences of original sin. Thus, it is the very nature of the fallen world itself that ascribes pollution, conservation, and preservation entirely new meanings for *evangélicos*—meanings of supernatural significance in the moral domain. Ethical subjectivation at once constrains aspirations for employment by limiting those in which the connection to the supernatural is unclear or not established and by introducing those in which employment can function as a location for embodied practice with eternal significance. One final point should be made about the tie (*ponto de ligação*) between the sacred and the profane: it is fashioned in the realm of discourse, not conduct, and socially constructed through the interpretation of biblical texts in evangelical circles.

In Brazil, as in other areas in Latin America, a strong tradition of Liberation Theology has long framed stewardship in terms of environmental management (von Sinner 2012). However, stewardship extends beyond environmental concerns to include engaging in the material world. In *evangélico* circles, stewardship is directly linked to fulfillment through the parable of the talents. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus recounts a parable in which three servants receive talents—or drachma—from their master, "each according to his own ability" (NASB Matthew 25:15). A long time passes before the

master settles accounts with his servants. He finds the first two have doubled their talents and commends them with the following statement, "You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things" (NASB Matthew 25:21). When he finds the third servant, however, he discovers the talent was hidden—buried—to avoid losing it. The master responds by taking the talent from the "wicked and lazy" servant and ordering he be thrown out where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (NASB Matthew 25:26, 30). In this parable, stewardship is the overriding principle at work, shaping the embodied practice of earning a living. Good stewardship results from making the best of one's abilities to "double" one's impact in the world. Poor stewardship, on the other hand, is only concerned with the spiritual self. Unlike the first two servants who make choices in the earthly realm evidencing faith, the third servant refuses to engage in the material world. It is consciously not using one's abilities to make a living and it results in banishment. Fulfillment comes from acknowledging one's talents and using them in the interest of increase. Ultimately, it represents the proper and acceptable alignment of the *evangélico* work ethic with God's sovereign will. The lack of fulfillment, on the other hand, is expressed in anxious discourses about God's will: am I doing what God wants me to do? References to the parable of the talents were littered throughout conversations with participants and their families. They ranged from short comments such as, "God wants me to administer my talents well" (*Deus quer que eu administre meus talentos bem*), to more lengthy comments such as those from Lucia:

> Lucia: Now I feel fulfilled by my students in the course, the language course, when I walk into the vocational-technical class, the students are older, adults. They have completed high school or are just finishing. And I can help them in some way. They already have an idea of what they want. So I can help them

> grow. I like working with languages themselves. I think that I, that it is my, my "talent," I don't know, don't know, working with languages. I help people understand the structure of language and the interpretation of text. I like it a lot. I like it a lot.

During my fieldwork, *evangélicos* regularly framed their comments about public sector work in terms of satisfaction or fulfillment. Reasons for not holding public employment consistently returned to these issues. And even though most of the participants in this project critiqued the public sector for a lack of job satisfaction, all of the students I surveyed were studying for, or had passed *concursos* at the time of our interviews. In other words, all of them still desired public sector work despite it being morally questionable to them. Why? One could argue that criticism of the public sector softens the pain of failure—rationalizing the private sector as preferable after being denied entrance into the public sector. One could also argue that criticism of the public sector is a byproduct of familial reproduction—choosing employment based on parental job choices or family welfare. But, returning to Robbins, I would suggest that, for *evangélicos* themselves, the desire for public employment is one of many "concatenated actions" (2004:121) organized in the moral domain and subverted to more important values in the construction of the ethical subject. That is, the will of God is not known beforehand, but is by nature discerned in practice—upon passing a *concurso* or entering the public sector—and experienced as a series of adjustments or shifts aligning oneself with the will of God. In this sense, *evangélicos* view as supreme their quest for fulfillment of God-given talents because it demonstrates their own obedience to God's will—in the same way that speaking in tongues and possession by the Holy Spirit act as evidence of salvation for charismatic *evangélicos*. Consider the following comments by Ricardo:

Ricardo: For me, as a human being, I believe that each of us has a mission in life. And I think that we should do what we like. I do not see myself, do I see myself in the public sector? Passing some type of good *concurso* in the future? Yes. Yes. Clearly. Obviously. But I do not see myself staying in something that will not give me happiness. That will not give me pleasure.

L: Right. It is satisfaction, isn't it?

Ricardo: Satisfaction. And many have pursued this route and have continued there, and some of them are dissatisfied, like in my experience, in conversations with some friends, some are already public servants, but they are studying for another type of *concurso* in order to assume other roles. Not that they never liked the work. But that the monetary value is higher.

Ricardo's notion that every human has a mission in life (*missão de vida*) to do that which is personally enjoyable means that happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction are nonnegotiable expectations in shaping aspirations for employment. Recall the woman referenced in Lucia's earlier narrative: money was relatively inconsequential when compared to achieving her goal of divinely-sanctioned fulfillment. In the excerpt quoted above, Ricardo portrays motivations of monetary gain negatively—as unsettling, unrelenting, and ultimately, unfulfilling. This was the single most common reason I encountered among *evangélicos* for not working in the public sector. The implications are clear: if one does not seek employment for a sense of fulfillment, then one seeks employment for earthly gain. Personal fulfillment indicates the proper discernment of

God's will. The desire for public sector work, then, is actually rooted in the desire for money. The following three excerpts illustrate the juxtaposition of fulfillment and money.

Christiane, a 25-year-old student majoring in tourism:

> So, I like the field. I want to stay in the field, however, I am anxious because finding a job is very difficult. More difficult than necessary. If I must have a graduate degree, then I am going to do it in a field that I like. In my opinion, it is not worth it to earn a lot of money without job satisfaction in your field. So I prefer to earn less and do what I like, rather than get a degree in a field that might have better job possibilities.

João, a 21-year-old student majoring in medicine:

> Do what you like. Do not do something just because of the money. Because imagine what it would be like to work the rest of your life in something you do not like. That is very bad.

Sandra, a 20-year-old student majoring in secondary education:

> You are not going to be working in something you like. And your work is going to be very bad every day even if you are earning well. The money is not that important. To me, the money does not matter if I like what I am doing. I think that job satisfaction is minimal in Brazil, and that is bad. Because most of the workers are not satisfied, they are not joyful or happy to be doing what they want. Job satisfaction is good, it is good because people who are working in an area that they like do a really good job. So when an employer has an excellent employee, it is because he has found satisfaction in that sector or job.

Much has been theorized about the precarious relationship between money and faith in the Christian moral system. It is worth noting that concerns about job satisfaction are not limited to Brazilian *evangélicos*; this discourse occurs all over the globe in Christian and secular circles alike. While I recognize the insights this body of literature may bring to bear on evangelical subjectivity, for the purposes of this chapter, I want to remain focused on the value ascribed to the notion of fulfillment and the technologies enacted to receive it. First, earnings are not transmissible to the moral

domain. Cristiane prefers to work harder and longer, earning less but gaining more—"pleasure" (*prazer*)—in the moral domain. Secondly, God grants material success as long as one remains faithful to the desires of one's own heart. João took the *vestibular* three times before passing and concludes, "imagine working the rest of your life doing something you do not want to do." By remaining faithful to what he wanted to do, João passed the *vestibular* in medicine. Third, employment without fulfillment is very bad, literally "ruined" (*muito ruím*). Employment for the sake of employment interferes with "a job well done" (*bem feito*) and leads to ruined labor force. Sandra goes on to link the demonstrations and protests that had just begun in late 2012 with a lack of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is taken as an indicator of God's will, and it remains crucial to discerning his will for many of the *evangélicos* I surveyed who stressed the expectation of job fulfillment and the precariousness of the lack of it. This form of self-governing is unique to non-charismatic *evangélicos.*

Ease of Life

"Ease of life (*facilidade*). Having a job, that you don't have to go to, with a guaranteed paycheck, [long pause], ease of life. That's what Brazilians want. Brazilians, you know, are a lazy (*preguiçoso*) people." Or so I was told by a taxi driver one afternoon on my way to a test prep facility. *Facilidade* is one of the most often cited motivations for public sector work. In this section, I focus on the morality of public jobs themselves. In particular, I investigate what I found to be a growing criticism among *evangélicos* I surveyed of the public sector in Brazil and the internal tension many participants express between their desire for public work and their ambivalence about the moral implications of public work. For even among *evangélicos*, the promise of an

easy life fuels desires for public sector work. So how do Brazilian *evangélicos* come to see public work as "wrong" and view the public sector as a morally questionable space? How does the public sector work ethic, once justifiable in the Latin American cultural context, become "sinful"? Or rather, what is the mechanism by which evangelicals become vulnerable to the trappings of public employment?

In popular Brazilian discourse, *facilidade* is synonymous with public work. Consequently, public employment is associated with a weak work ethic. For some, work ethic in the public sector is laughable. Consider the following depiction of public work by Rosemary, a 19-year-old *evangélica* student.

> The *concursados* at church work. They work. It is just that they have this thing about taking off, lots of days off, every single holiday they are off, I have never seen so many days off. They are on holiday or taking off work the entire time. [laughter]

Contrast the statement above with the following sentiments about public work from Juliane, a 20-year-old Catholic student:

> Juliane: In the public sector, whether you want to admit it or not, the workload is lighter. Here in Brazil, we have this saying that the workload is light ("*lite*") It is only 4 hours of work. The work day is four hours. It is easier, "lite."
>
> L: And why is that good?
>
> Juliane: Because we work less.
>
> L: Do you actually work less?
>
> Juliane: Yes, it is actually less. You work less. So it is good, much better.

Juliane makes a clear declaration of value with respect to public sector work: "It is good, much better" (*é bom, bem melhor*). Presumably, public sector work is much

better than private because it requires less work. Rosemary, while not making an overt pronouncement about the value of public sector work, frames her comments in the form of a joke, disguising an underlying hesitancy toward making a judgment, for good or ill, about public work. Goldstein (2003) interprets this cultural practice as an effort by Brazilians to use laughter to mitigate the violence and corruption perpetuated by the state. O'Dougherty observes a similar reluctance among Brazilians "to name very negative things directly" (2002:181). However, the implication is clear: public employees never work (*só tem feriado e tá folgando*). When pressed to explain what was comical about this weak work ethic, Rosemary simply laughed, shrugged, and exclaimed, "It is absurd!" (*É um absurdo!*).

While the differences between the two excerpts above are subtle, I chose to include them because I believe they represent broader distinctions among the constructions of evangelical and Catholic subjects. Conversions from Catholicism comprise a large percentage of evangelical growth in Brazil and thus offer a comparative perspective of new subjectivities being fashioned from an environment still dominated by the Catholic moral system. Hesitancy to assign the public sector a value (ie "good") was present in many of my conversations with *evangélicos*. Moreover, while I heard most of them express their desire for public sector work, I recorded very few instances in which value judgments were made about the work itself. That is to say, among the *evangélicos* I surveyed, most expressed discomfort with the characterization of public work as "good" or "better" precisely because of its association with weak work ethic, invoking near textbook examples from Weberian frameworks about the protestant work ethic. Rather than critique it openly, I found *evangélicos* were much

more likely to express hesitancy behind a veil of laughter. I suggest that this hesitancy is a direct result of the constitution of the evangelical subject and reflects their ambivalence about a social sphere in which it used to be morally acceptable to participate. Appropriating public resources for the benefit of the individual (or family unit) is still commonplace, but for *evangélicos* in Brazil, ease of life is becoming increasingly linked to corruption. Consider the following comparison Ricardo makes between the public and private sector:

> The private sector does not allow you to sit down and get comfortable. You are always active. You are always studying, thinking, wanting more. And if you get situated within a big corporation, you know that you are empowered to grow. Deep down, you are always searching for ways to get ahead. The public sector is different. You had to fight and scrape by for a long time in order to assume that public role. When you get it, you become stationary, you sit down. And there you atrophy. And you get sedentary and fat. [laughter] You get no physical exercise. [laughter]

The public sector, in Ricardo's view, has real and imagined physical consequences: the caricature of a public employee is one of a stationary, lethargic, atrophied, overweight, out of shape individual. The private sector, on the other hand, is depicted as facilitating employees who are always on the move: active, ambitious, studying, thinking, growing.

Now, it is worth noting that this is not a particularly new argument in anthropology. Weberian frameworks, for example, have long linked work ethic and religious identity. This chapter has drawn extensively from these well-known concepts to explore how evangelical participants in this project discerned God's will and understood the "calling" on their life. In this final section, I want to extend Weberian frameworks to focus on the ways in which ethical subjectivity among *evangélicos* is actively constructed via critiques of corruption within the neoliberal state. These

technologies of self assume the form of moral discourse required to abstain from painting in a favorable light public sector work ethic, the verbal acknowledgement (or confession) of corruption in the public sector, and the embodied practice of refraining from participation in the public sector.

For some, participating in the public sector takes the form of "guilty by association." Consider the following conversation with Ana Paula, a 37-year-old student in cosmetology:

> Ana Paula: I try to find things that do not interfere with my faith. Truly, I can be a Christian and I can be a beautician. But I do not feel good being a Christian and being a person involved in the public sector [laughter]. Understand? Because in general, politicians become corrupt, even if they do not mean to. So it is not something that I see in my future.
>
> L: And what about being *concursado*? How do you see this type of work in relation to religion?
>
> Ana Paula: Well, I do not think there is a problem. There is not a problem. As long as you pass them in an honest way. Because there are cases where *concursos* are offered, you know, where there is a certain number of people that should get in, but they already have the spots filled with family, friends, this and that. So if you pass a *concurso* in an honest way, that is, you studied, you passed, you were called for an interview. I do not see a problem. Now, if it was through John Doe's help that you were chosen, for example, I took this *concurso* recently and I could have spoken with someone to facilitate my

passing, and I would have been accepted. But I don't want to do that. I could do that. But I did not and was not called for the interview.

In Ana Paula's estimation, the public sector corrupts. Even if one resists, corruption will eventually undermine the righteous person. Technologies of self among the non-charismatic *evangélicos* I surveyed were all about relieving anxiety, and the public sector was a constant source of anxiety. Thus, the public sector would be an unlikely "calling" for any serious *evangélico,* unless, of course, he or she could maintain a serious work ethic in the public sphere. Ana Paula goes on to suggest that the corruptible nature of public sector work calls into question the legitimacy of passing *concursos* in an honest fashion. Later on in our conversation, she quotes from the epistle of James, emphasizing her responsibility to remain "unstained" (*incontaminada*): "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself *unstained* by the world" (emphasis added, NASB James 1:27). Thus, the rejection of public sector work is at once an act of opposition to the state and an act of solidarity with non-charismatic *evangélicos*. It requires a non-hegemonic framework drawing from Calvinism and discursively constructed in the realm of discourse to critique corruption, Catholicism, and neoliberal state-craft.

At the time of my fieldwork, bribes and grafts were commonplace in many localities in Brazil. Public officials operated with little accountability, and public property was often available for the taking by enterprising employees. It can be said that these difficulties are characteristic of many countries in Latin America more broadly. Aron-Schaar (2002) observes that public office holders are often expected to be

independently wealthy, as public positions do not, in the formal economy, pay enough to maintain lifestyles of affluence. However, public office regularly grants officials additional income in the informal economy through bribes, fees for services, inside information about contracts, and alliances with foreign capital and other affluent families. In northeast Brazil, Lewin (1987) notes that elite oligarchic families use positions in the public sector to transmit economic capital and material wealth through informal channels to their heirs to avoid taxation and intervention by the state. Thus, in addition to critiquing the public sector work ethic, many *evangélicos* also critique the "climate" of corruption associated with the public sector.

During the time of my fieldwork in 2012, nearly every federal agency went on strike—military police, federal police, public school teachers, university professors, prison guards, municipal and regional level administrators, to name a few. While Brazilians are generally proud of their right to organize, I encountered striker's fatigue by late 2012 and repeated criticism of the demonstrations, especially with respect to lax working conditions of public employees. The undercurrents of dissatisfaction were beginning to show in public protests in southern parts of Brazil, but very little of the movement had made its way to the northeast. In 2013, nearing the height of the mass demonstrations and protests in Recife, I spoke with one of the parents who had participated in this project about the protests; note the disapproving tone of Lucinete's discussion:

> There will always be more and more unprofessional public workers. That is because many public servants fall into corruption in our country. This is a question worth asking: "Why are most of our public servants corrupt?" They corrupt the whole system. It does not matter what makes you poor; corruption breeds poverty. And it does not matter if you live in a slum or if you live in a mansion. If you cheat on taxes, you rob the state. If you buy a cd—cd?—if you

> buy a pirated cd, you also are cheating on taxes. You are just as much, excuse the expression, you are just as much a thief as the corrupt politician robbing the people. This is a vicious cycle in our country. That is why it is not going to end. I am a Brazilian dissatisfied with politics, but in my own house, I do small maneuvers to get by. I buy pirated cds, I cheat on taxes, I declare, I declare false information, declare false information on my income tax. And I try to barter so I can get a better deal. I go to the market to buy ten bananas, and I ask the seller to give me 11, and I give him some change under the table. These small practices of daily life are just as corrupt, just as dishonest as the, the politicians. So, please, my fellow Brazilians, don't gripe about politicians when you yourselves do the same thing [laughter]. I'm sorry. Damn!

Multiple themes arise in the excerpt above, some of which I addressed in the previous chapter. In this section, of most interest to me is the confessional, self-reflective tone of her discussion about corruption: that it is inherent in Brazilian culture and that she herself is implicated in it. Lucinete claims that while the majority of public employees fall into corruption and, in turn, corrupt the larger governing system, the majority of Brazilians practice the same behaviors on a smaller scale. Her concluding statement essentially frames Brazilians as hypocrites (*você é tão ladrão quanto politico*), and undermines the legitimacy of their protests (*não reclame da politica, você faz a mesma coisa*). All of the examples she provides of theft—buying pirated cds, evading taxes, not declaring imported goods in customs, providing false information about household income, and convincing the street vendor to include an additional banana in the sale—are examples of corruption in embodied practice. Abstaining from these practices provide a concrete way in which technologies of self transform the everyday (*cotidiano*) into a space for constructing moral subjectivity.

Chapter 6: Travel

Public sector work affords an infinite number of possibilities for consumptive practices. Central to the desire for public employment in Brazil is the desire to travel. Participation in the public sector not only affords the opportunity to travel, it "ensures" the opportunity to travel. This is an important distinction since it speaks to why *concursos* have become so pervasive in recent years. Stable employment—that is, job security through the public sector—provides a guarantee of sorts for the consumption of travel; and travel—be it abroad or domestic—holds a number of meanings for Brazilian families. This chapter aims to unpack some of the meanings of travel for the participants in this project and consider the social and economic fields in which their aspirations are historically grounded.

During my fieldwork, I often encountered discussions about travel in success narratives. I use the phrase success narratives after Ortner 's (2003) work examining class identity through narratives reflecting "imaginings" of success. Ortner argues that while structural mechanisms such as occupation may act as a general indicator of class identity, aspirations to social classes form the actual experience of identity. In the Brazilian case, the aspiration to travel is not limited to a single class; however, it often functions to build cohesion among particular groups of people, especially those seeking public employment. Indeed, for many of the participants in this project, transnational experiences define the kind of person they envision themselves becoming with public sector work. Success narratives offer perspectives of the "temporary attachments" (Hall and Du Gay 1996) to subject positions formed by participants seeking public employment. These subject positions are not defined by any single kind of capital—

cultural, economic, or symbolic—as much as they are by aspirations for similar experiences, a point I hope to stress in the following sections. Like Ortner (2003), I find that social actors participate in "imaginings and practice" of action—invoking subject positions that require external actors for comparison. These comparisons necessitate internal and external affirmations of that position by other social actors. To borrow from Abu-Lughod (1993), "positionality" shapes the manner in which success is discursively constructed and, in the Brazilian case, engenders travel as a critical component of the desire for public sector work.

Public employment is made desirable by the practice of collective aspirations to travel. One of the ways I tracked this in success narratives was through contrast categories. Drawing from Ong's (1999) work, I use contrast categories to identify the conceptual groupings that prejudice people against certain practices and govern what is considered acceptable in Brazilian society: namely, biases against working in the private sector and estimation of travel experiences. Ong investigates the accumulation of capital with respect to contrast categories and exposes racial prejudices in the disdain for affluence among ethnic Chinese *huagiao* in the United States (for example, white/ethnic, rich/poor). In the Brazilian context, I suggest contrast categories prejudice people against social practices, like particular forms of work, and link the aversion of working in the private sector to deeply rooted notions of stability (for example, public/private, stability/instability). These categories are especially visible when talking about travel. Consider the following comment from Ricardo linking travel to public employment:

Ricardo: I cannot, I cannot, cannot plan a trip five years from now with the private sector job I have today.

I heard an iteration of this rationale over and over. Very simply stated: public employment allows individuals to 1) plan for travel in the future and 2) pay for it. Conversely, employment in the private sector is viewed by many as an impediment to aspirations of travel. Now whether or not it is the case that earnings from the public sector actually fund more travel than those from the private sector is unclear. But it is certainly the case that the prevailing perception among the Brazilians I surveyed is that public employment facilitates the "planning" of travel. Many Brazilians who had traveled abroad recounted their experiences applying for visas, noting that the consulate required them to demonstrate future income. This is a helpful insight since it links the importance of "imaginings" of travel to the desirability of public work. During my fieldwork, I was surprised to find that no amount of effort or reasoning on my part was successful in challenging participants' use of these categories. The public/private work dichotomy extended to travel in that public work facilitated it while private work did not. Moreover, this rationale is present in *Classe B* and *Classe C* families alike, regardless of household income. In other words, for these families, the perceived ability to travel has less to do with an actual, quantifiable amount of money and more to do with an occupation facilitating the "practice" of travel.

Recent projects focused on job selection suggest that people select the jobs they do because of the perceived utility the occupations afford to maintaining or leaving their social context (Akerlof and Kranton 2010). Public employment, then, not only represents a steady occupation and source of income to consume travel, but it also

represents the free time to travel. Consider the following comments from two student participants about holiday schedules in the public sector:

> Rosemary: It is just that they have this thing about taking off, more days off, every single holiday, they are off, I have never seen so many days off. They are on holiday or taking off work the entire time.
>
> Tiago: Many people desire to have a public job. Any holiday, you get off. Any little problem, you can get off. Isn't that true? The demands of the job, I don't exactly know, but the job does not demand that the person has to be there. Because I think the expectation is less.

Paid time off is a defining feature of public employment even though it is not limited to the public sector. In fact, employees in the private sector also receive paid vacation and holidays, sometimes on days not afforded to public employees. For example, while working at a Catholic elementary school, Sandra received multiple religious holidays that were not observed on the public employment calendar. However, the prevailing perception, and indeed the view she held, is that public employment provides more time off, more time to travel, and more time for leisure (*lazer*). It is precisely this association with free time that privileges public sector work in discussions about travel.

On one occasion, I was invited by Rebeca's family on a day trip to a resort town in the interior, about an hour and a half drive from the city. They advised me we would eat and then walk around (*passear*). I dressed in tennis shoes and sunscreen, fully expecting to be out in the sunshine. We drove 90 minutes to town, pulled into a restaurant famous for its fried chicken dumplings (*coxinhas*), ate dinner, and then drove

back to the city. I was puzzled that such effort was taken to get out of the city and such little time was spent walking around. Each time I went with them, the itinerary was the same. After several visits, I asked Rebeca if their outings usually consisted of a drive and dinner.

L: Do you always go to *O Rei Das Coxinhas*?

Rebeca: Always.

L: Why?

Rebeca: Because it is the best. It is nice to get out of the city. Take the scenic route. Relax. It is very hurried and crowded here. It is more tranquil there.

L: How long have you been taking these trips?

Rebeca: Let me see, it has been a few years. I think it was when I started work at the Federal University.

These day trips caused me to rethink the significance of travel to Rebeca's family. While neither transnational nor lengthy, these day trips represented a lifestyle of leisure, newly-acquired due to public sector work (*meu trabalho na federal*). The ability to take a short trip inland for the sole purpose of dining at a trendy restaurant would have been all but impossible ten years earlier. Now, billboards for the restaurant lined the highway out of the city, directing a new class of consumers to leisurely dining (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Billboard for *O Rei Das Coxinhas* (author 2012)

In fact, the family did not even own a car until Rebeca entered university. By the time of my fieldwork, however, they had two vehicles, funds for dining out, and leisure time to travel. The fact that these day trips did not happen until both children acquired employment in the public sector is no coincidence. Familial aspirations for public employment resulted in a household in which three of four adults held public sector jobs and traveled accordingly in their leisure time.

History

Being a well-traveled citizen was once the domain of the elite Brazilian subject, as for much of Brazil's history, maneuvering in international settings represented an arena in which "formal education and social refinement" were acted out (O'Dougherty 2002). The association between travel and privilege has its roots in colonial history. In colonial Brazil, travel abroad served the purpose of maintaining social hierarchy. The official position of the Portuguese crown, as recorded in royal documents, was to force

colonial dependency on Portuguese subjects by limiting the availability of services in Brazil and requiring colonialists to travel abroad (Russell-Wood 2001). From the beginning, then, travel regulated the autonomy of colonial elite by redirecting them to the crown and preserving the integral role of the motherland. Many institutions, including those of higher education, were virtually non-existent in Brazil during colonial rule (Skidmore 2004). Colonial subjects who wished to participate formally in arenas of education, governance, and high society were required to do so through institutions outside the colony: in Spanish Latin America or, more commonly, in Europe.

In more recent history—in the centuries following independence—travel remained linked to affluence. While it is not my intention to cover all of the social and economic events that altered meanings of travel, I want to mention a few of the elements most commonly cited by participants in this project when asked to explain, in historical terms, why travel holds such value for Brazilians. First, travel provided access to stability in unreliable economic times. Maintaining homes abroad and foreign bank accounts were common among the politically elite and functioned to preserve social differentiation, provide access to resources when domestic assets were threatened, and invest in the household economy. Transnationalism offered a safe haven for those seeking to escape political turmoil. While this link is clear in the case of Brazilians going abroad during the military dictatorship, for instance, it is also apparent in the influx of transnationals *to* Brazil, in the case of German and Japanese citizens during the Second World War. Thus, historically, travel has represented access to stability for affluent families.

Secondly, travel reflected one's prowess as a consumer. In the twentieth century, economies based on consumerism and cultural exports developed, attracting both those Brazilians wanting to purchase goods unavailable domestically and those wishing to purchase "cultural" experiences. The United States, for example, became an increasingly desirable destination for elite families. Trips to Disney World were essential to the entrance of young debutantes to Brazilian high society, making travel even more desirable for families looking to display status and wealth (O'Dougherty 2002). Transnationalism provided additional arenas for consumption, and the number of Brazilians traveling by air nearly tripled between 2001 and 2011 (Reid 2014:170).

Thirdly, transnationalism signaled historical ties (intellectual, familial, or otherwise) to foreign ancestry. For many Brazilians, Europe remained the cultural capital of the world and vacations abroad substantiated claims to cultural sophistication. Recalling a vacation to Europe as a child, Fatima summarized, "We visited eight countries in ten days. We saw only the most important sites: the Eiffel Tower, the Coliseum, Buckingham Palace, the Louvre. There was not time to see everything, you know? I learned about the birthplace of our culture. It was beautiful. Everything was so refined." While it could be argued that many tourists, regardless of their nationality, sought similar experiences abroad, I want to highlight in particular the association made between Europe and refinement and cultural heritage. The colonial legacy that initially limited access to education and high society later facilitated the participation of elite families in these institutions through transnationalism. Consider the following excerpt from Ricardo. Note the links he makes between class, transnationalism, and intellectual sophistication.

Ricardo: Brazilians. That reminds me of the history of our country. It is funny, but in the history of our country, we are Portuguese colonies. And every prefix, suffix—prefix or suffix?—every suffix *–eiro* signifies worker. In Portugal, in Portuguese. Iron worker (*ferreiro*). Works with iron. Baker (*padeiro*). Works with bread. And we are Brazilians (*brasileiros*). Why "Brazilians"? Because we worked, the slaves that came from Africa to Brazil, they came to work with Brazil. They worked extracting lumber from Brazil. So they were called Brazilians. So Brazilians, workers in nature, strong advocates for nature, but sometimes mentally weak. Because sometimes they want to get to know the world, but they do not even know their own country. They do not know their own identity. They do not even know their own history. And they want to have a history. Every day I see, with much pain and heartbreak, the Brazilian people crawling toward a cultural explosion. Not culture. But cultural identity. It would be so much more beautiful if we could start introducing people to our origins. Grafting our culture. It would be so beautiful if you Americans or other foreigners, if you arrived here and were welcomed with our Brazilian identity. If you go to Peru, you are met with a lot of Peruvian identity.

L: That's true.

Ricardo: If you go to Chile, you are met with a lot of Chilean identity. You go to Brazil, and you are met with a lot of cultural identities from other

places. We give so much more value to things from abroad than things that are from here.

L: To Europe, to the United States?

Ricardo: Unfortunately this is our reality. Brazil: the country of everyone else. [laughter]

In Ricardo's telling, the frenzy for transnationalism is unique to the Brazilian context. It is historically grounded in colonialism and it is inherently tied to class. Those of more humble professions—miners, bakers, loggers—desire transnational experiences precisely because they have no intellectual sophistication (*fraco de mente*). Their failure to recognize the merit of their own national identity is reflected in their preference for all things foreign (*coisas de lá*) over that which is "native" to Brazil. Whether or not this is really the case is of less interest to me than the overall argument about transnationalism and Brazilian identity. Ricardo's characterization of Brazil as "the country of everyone else" (*O país de todos*) is meant to be a critical commentary about society's expropriation of cultural heritage. The notion that Brazilians crave "the Other" above their own identity reflects larger perceptions about national identity in Brazilian society: that Brazil is unable to export any single cultural identity of its own and that it remains a sterile ground for the transplanting of foreign cultures rather than a fertile environment for cultural "grafting" (*enxertar*). Thus, the desire for travel is seen by many Brazilians as a long standing feature of Brazilian society.

Finally, travel was seen as a form of education and pathway of upward mobility. When federal institutions of higher education were finally established in the twentieth century, students of affluent families who did not place high enough in standardized test

to secure entrance into public universities often were sent abroad for higher education. In fact, the link between travel and education is so deeply rooted in Brazil that it remains an underlying principal of many projects of the modern Brazilian state addressing inequality. During my fieldwork, for example, the Lula administration initiated a program to broaden the educational experiences of socio-economically disadvantaged high school students by sending them abroad for a year of study in a foreign country. The aim, essentially, was to improve their socio-economic condition via travel. One such student actually ended up placed with an acquaintance of a relative of mine in a small, rural Oklahoman town. The irony, I quickly discovered after speaking with her host family, was their own marginalized identity as underemployed residents of a housing project in an economically depressed region of the state. It was unclear how exactly these circumstances were intended to improve the exchange student's socio-economic status. Regardless, historically based associations between status, travel, and education remained a premise on which the Brazilian state governed aspirations of upward mobility and transnationalism among its subjects.

In recent decades, large-scale social and economic movements extended the qualification of being "well-traveled" beyond elite groups and increased the number of transnational experiences among Brazil's citizenry. For the first time in Brazil's history, travel is no longer the exclusive domain of the elite. The broad availability of domestic credit and the emergence of Brazil on the global scene have made travel both more affordable—through monthly payment schedules advertised for any "*renda de casa*" (budget)—and more attractive—as a form of meaningful participation in the international dealings of the nation state. Shifts from inwardly-focused development

policies to externally-focused initiatives in an era of "globalization" shaped the modern Brazilian subject as one externally present and interacting on the global scale. Moreover, the decades following the initiation of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), as well as the global financial crisis of 2008, created a climate of new possibilities for emerging powerhouses—those countries previously dubbed "developing" by the "developed" world. Brazil's resulting diplomatic efforts broke from traditional alliances with countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom and focused on nontraditional partnerships with governments of China, Russia, and Venezuela, achieving "the global status Brazil craved" (Reid 2014:261). For many Brazilians, the country's rising tide of influence in international politics signaled a coming of age: "a nation on the cusp of super-powerdom" (Naidoo 2010).

Inasmuch as the nation state now demands recognition as a global power, Brazilians themselves demand recognition in the global arena as players in their own right. The Brazilians I surveyed were quick to point out this change. Ricardo once told me, "You Americans need us. We go to your country to spend money." Of course, the Brazilian *real* was trading at R$1.50 to the dollar at the time of this statement and Brazilians were traveling in droves to the United States. Most mornings during my fieldwork, I passed by the American Consulate on my way downtown and observed lines stretching around the block for travel visas. So, the assertion that the modern Brazilian subject has something to offer the international community, or rather, that the international community "needs" (*precisa*) the transnational Brazilian highlights sentiments of empowerment and agency enacted through travel. On more than one

occasion, I was reminded by Brazilians that ex-pats were returning (notably from the United States) for employment in an economy with greater job prospects than its North American neighbors and vying for a greater slice of the international labor market. Of course, my fieldwork was conducted during a period of economic optimism in which the *real* was trading strong, averaging R$1.30 to the USD, and preparations for the 2014 World Cup favorably seasoned public opinion about the ascendancy of the host nation in international politics.

While transnationalism has been used by many scholars to examine concepts of diaspora, migration, and post colonialism, for the purposes of this chapter, I want to focus on the ways in which it fuels the desire for public employment via aspirations of being a modern Brazilian subject for many participants in this project. As noted in earlier chapters, the crusade for citizenship is a hallmark of the *Partido de Trabalhadores* and defines the political sympathies of those in the public sector. Brazilians themselves explain the appeal of transnationalism using conventional discourses ascribing status, education, and cosmopolitanism to the experience of travel. The following sections explore two discourses in particular—flexible citizenship and conspicuous consumption—and offer insights into the experiential (rather than material) value of travel. While these discourses are often invoked at the national level—prevalent in contemporary media sources—they are also historically grounded in the social and economic change Brazil has undergone in the past two decades.

Flexible Citizenship

The concept of transnationalism surfaced often during my fieldwork, reflected in the imaginings of participants and expressed in their desire for "flexible citizenship." I

use the term "citizenship" because citizenship is a critical component of social, political and ethical subjectivity. Ong (1999) defines "flexible citizenship" as the process of using geographic and social positionality in changing economic and political environments with the goal of taking advantage of capitalist accumulation. For most of the participants in my project, flexible citizenship was not a reality to the extent Ong applies it to the Chinese business elite. However, there were many similarities between the strategies employed by the *huagiao* in Ong's ethnography and the Brazilian families I surveyed. Many expressed the goal of securing flexibility in what has historically been a volatile economic and political environment. For example, several participants had access to banking in alternate currencies, most often the USD, and many made regular deposits in foreign institutions. While this practice is certainly not new to elite Brazilians, I was surprised at how much more accessible it had become to "regular" Brazilians in this project. Brazilians with connections abroad ranged from a student whose father was a high-ranking officer in the Brazilian military, to one whose parent was an American, to one who studied in Europe during college and maintained his foreign bank account, to one who simply "bought" USD bills on the informal market (from art vendors in upscale tourist hotspots around the city) and stored them in her closet for upcoming travel. In all of these cases, socially adept Brazilians used their positions within their social network to take advantage of capitalist accumulation through transnationalism. Moreover, I would suggest that a long history of economic and political volatility actually increased the value of travel for many of the participants in this project. Juliane's father, for example, allocated a significant portion of his disposable income to buying dollars held in a foreign bank account overseas. His

regular trips to the US allowed him to save for a recession he anticipated would soon strike Brazil (which did soon happen).

Key to travel is capital mobility—the ability of capital to cross geographical borders. Often, modern technology—the internet, online banking, ATMs—facilitates transnational practices. But more traditional practices of exchange networks were also present. For example, I once needed a large sum of cash to purchase a tablecloth from a street vendor. Rather than make several ATM withdrawals incurring foreign transaction fees, one of the parents of a student participant offered to "cash" a check of mine. I made out the check to his name and he took it to a mechanic shop where a friend of his worked. He returned with local currency in a more favorable exchange rate than I could have gotten through formal channels. When the check cleared my bank account in the United States approximately two months later, it had been physically routed (presumably mailed) to a business in Texas and deposited in their account. I later asked him about this process. He admitted not knowing exactly how the check made it to Texas, but he assumed it went through the owner of the mechanic shop—a "businessman" who lived in a luxury residence atop a neighboring *favela* and had "connections" stateside. Thus, while he did not maintain his own flexible citizenship in the same sense as Ong's *huagiao*, he participated in an extension of that status through the "citizenship" of the mechanic shop owner. His familiarity working with existing social networks and through informal channels illustrates a more "traditional" way of accessing capital in a transnational context.

In addition to capital accumulation, more and more Brazilians I surveyed exercised their flexible citizenship to maintain and construct transnational networks. In

July of 2015, I hosted Fernando and his family for a week during their trip to the United States. Fernando was employed as a minister at a local Christian church congregation and his wife was *concursada* as medical assistant in a public hospital. By OECD standards, their household income classified them as solidly middle class: a *Classe C* family. It was their first time abroad, and I was curious to know why they had chosen to travel rather than allocate their resources to other projects. During my earlier fieldwork visits, for example, they had discussed plans to construct several residential units on the land behind their house to generate additional income.

L: What happened to the deal with the rental properties behind your house?

Fernando: We are still working toward that goal. We have already purchased some construction materials. But it remains a long way off. Now is the time to travel. Normally, we stay close to home during winter break, but several years ago we received an invitation from an American friend to stay at his house if we traveled to the United States. So we knew we would not have to pay for accommodation. So it was affordable. We tried to get visas in years past, but they were denied. This time, when we got word that they had been approved, we bought the tickets.

L: Why do you think your visa applications were approved this time?

Fernando: Look, we have a friend who travels to the United States once every three years. He helped us fill out the application. He advised us on what to say during the interviews. On the day of the interview, he

called to say he was praying for us. And he called afterward to see how the interview went. He was very helpful.

His wife added:

Michele: My family does not understand how we were able to do this. They think we won the lottery. They *seriously* think we won the lottery! [laughter] My sisters think we have become rich and that is how we paid for this vacation. They do not understand how we could have saved little by little from our jobs and paid for the flights. Even my co-workers are so impressed that we are going.

L: Have you paid cash for everything on this trip?

Fernando: No. We have a credit card.

Fernando and his wife had been considering international travel for several years, and indeed, saving for it. But transnational networks with both Americans and Brazilian acquaintances who had been abroad facilitated the realization of their travel goals. Fifteen years ago, neither the visa applications nor the financing for the flights would have been successful. Public sector work was a critical component of their visa and credit card applications. As an employee in charge of processing visa applications at the American Consulate in Recife once explained to me:

> The Americans want to make sure you have money to spend before you go. And steady money coming into your bank accounts. And the credit card companies want to make sure you have money to spend on the monthly payments. So public sector work satisfies both.

Conspicuous Consumption

Travel is linked to capital accumulation, upward mobility, and success for the modern Brazilian subject. This is due, in part, to opportunities for "conspicuous

consumption" (Veblen 2006). Multiple authors have approached aspirations to travel through this lens or similar frameworks grounded in Bourdieusian notions of "distinction" (Goldstein 2003, Owensby 1999, Peshkin 2000, Rutz and Balkan 2009). O'Dougherty (2002) provides an excellent examination of consumption in Brazil in the 1990s, framing travel as an arena of competition in "tournaments of value" (after Appadurai 1986) for middle-class actors seeking social distinction. She aptly concludes that the "quest for foreign goods and travel unifies the Brazilian middle class" (126). Many of her observations about the function of these "symbolic pursuits abroad" (94) are applicable to the participants in this project. Like O'Dougherty, I also encountered during my fieldwork tales of "great deals" on items purchased abroad and noticed that many who had traveled to the United States were quick to point out their favorite pastime: shopping.

Public sector work provides the means to make purchases with clear associations to traveling abroad. For example, upon learning they were expecting a baby, an acquaintance of mine declared, "I'm going to the Unites States for my baby shower." She planned a shopping trip to the United States to buy baby items. When I asked why she could not purchase the items in Brazil, she explained that the selection was much greater and that she could save (*economizar*) on goods purchased abroad. While it was unclear to me if costs were indeed less once flight, room, and board expenses were considered, it was clear that the shopping trip provided cultural capital that was not necessarily quantifiable. She insisted that travel to the United States came with the added benefit that people would notice the items had been purchased abroad (*conheça as marcas americanas*).

During my fieldwork, there was always word of someone selling Victoria's Secret body sprays, designer purses, or name brand cosmetics upon returning from travel to the United States. More than providing an additional income in the informal economy, practices like this bestowed upon the seller an international quality—as a well-traveled, well-connected, global Brazilian subject. But travel for reasons relating to conspicuous consumption went beyond purchasing particular brands of items. The accumulation of capital, both economic and cultural, drove agendas for overseas travel. In 2013, for example, Sandra visited for a few days while on vacation to the United States and asked that I take her "*shopping.*" She had very specific knowledge about the items she wished to buy—those with the most "bang for the buck" representing a vacation abroad and easily read by those in her social circle as markers of status. She was uninterested in my recommendations about "better" brands. In particular, she asked to shop at the local Ross Dress-for-Less. We arranged the trip and on our way to the store, she told me about all of the great deals she had heard about from friends and acquaintances that had been abroad. Once we arrived, I was amused when, much to her disappointment, she was not able to find a single item with the Ross logo. "Is there not a single thing that says 'Ross'?!" she demanded. She wanted to return to Brazil with a tangible item (preferably a purse) substantiating her trip to Ross.

The following year, I noticed photos posted on social media by another participant in front of the local Marshall's department store during a recent trip to Miami. Her caption read, "Finally! Shopping!" (*Finalmente! Shopping!*). I was struck by the draw to discount shopping at retailers such as Ross and Marshall's. Frugality as a text can be read in multiple ways. O'Dougherty (2002) interprets "international bargain

shopping" as a class project: it is practiced by the middle class in an effort to extend the possibilities of conspicuous consumption. In this view, frugality is practiced because it affords middle class families the ability to compete with more affluent families by purchasing discounted goods and thus stretching economic capital. The tangible goods obtained through discount shopping are highly prized and Brazilian families take care to preserve their signaling power. Like O'Dougherty, for example, I found that the practice persists of storing items purchased abroad in their original boxes, complete with packing materials and owner's manuals. In fact, many of the participants I visited maintained multiple shelving units in their laundry rooms or bedrooms dedicated to housing electronics, small appliances, shoes, and other accessories purchased abroad in the original packaging. However, while upward mobility via conspicuous consumption may provide the motivation for some Brazilian families shopping at discount retailers abroad, I find this explanation lacking for the participants in this project for two reasons. First, what is striking about the above mentioned examples is that frugality is esteemed because of its experiential value rather than its material result. In other words, both participants sought to display proof of an experience emblematic of their shopping skills rather than display the signalers themselves (particular brands). Secondly, framing frugality in terms of competitive relations ignores other motivations for discount shopping that may be rooted in valuing experiences above material goods. O'Dougherty notes "the Brazilian state remained well in view as a player—or better, as an adversary in conflicts over the acquisition of these goods" (2002:114). This suggests that, for some families at least, discount shopping is a form of insubordination against the state.

Experiential Value

At the time of this dissertation, much of the existing scholarship on the meaning of travel to Brazilians was concerned with discount retail shopping as a field of competitive relations (Rutz and Balkan 2009). O'Dougherty (2002), for example, tracked a group of "upper middle sector" consumers in the southern part of Brazil seeking to be upwardly mobile in the 1990s. She focused on the tangible goods acquired through travel and the status ascribed to them. While she conceded that "the verbal display of international experience and knowledge is perhaps as operative as goods for claims to social distinction" (124), she did not investigate the meanings of these experiences nor their exchange in the knowledge economy. She also failed to consider the value of travel for purposes other than status. Thus, it is not clear why the *experience* of travel (for motives other than consumption) may be so desirable nor why it might be linked to public sector work and imaginings of success.

It is at once helpful to utilize ethnographic data from previous projects for comparative purposes whilst also critically evaluating claims about the consumption of travel and class identity. Data collected during O'Dougherty's fieldwork reflect a period of immense economic instability and political turmoil in Brazil—a wildly different historical context than that of my own fieldwork. Moreover, much of the ethnography presently available is concentrated on the southern region of Brazil—an area with a rich history of modernity and cosmopolitanism—in direct opposition to the perceived "backwardness" of the northeast. So, in the following section, I would like to offer an explanation of travel that focuses on the value of experiences rather than the competitive nature of purchases or the material goods obtained abroad.

Experiential purchases are transactions primarily concerned with obtaining an experience (music concerts, vacation cruises, fine dining) rather than a material good (cars, clothes, appliances). I use the term experiential purchases after Van Boven and Gilovich's (2003) work in social psychology examining the "enduring satisfaction" of experiences over material possessions. Their research suggests that experiences actually hold greater value for many participants, even though they are intangible, because, "they are more open to positive reinterpretations, are a more meaningful part of one's identity, and contribute more to successful social relationships" (2003:1193).

In one particular study, satisfaction was tied to income: for those earning less than US$30,000 per year, experiential and material purchases afforded similar levels of satisfaction. Similarly, subsequent research suggests that participants who have an abundance of experiential purchases may gain less satisfaction (Quoidbach et. al 2015). Cultural context and meanings of "satisfaction" aside, it is relevant to this project to consider the relationship between value and self and note that with fewer possessions the relative value gap between goods and experience may be lessened.

While a number of researchers have confirmed these findings in various cultural contexts (Carter and Gilovich 2010; Nicolao et. al 2009, Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012), I want to extend the framework to investigate meanings of travel in the Brazilian case. Of particular interest to me is the desire of participants in this project to display evidence of discount retail shopping and recall in narrative form their similar experiences abroad. Rather than framing travel as an attempt to accumulate goods, I suggest it can function as a form of participation in frugality—an experience valued by

many participants in this project—and consequently as a gatekeeper to particular kinds of subjectivity, legitimizing claims to modernity and religious identity.

These assertions are based on several points related to experiential purchases. First, individuals perceive shared experiences as more enjoyable than individual ones (Caprariello and Reis 2013). Secondly, posting on social media is a form of making travel experiences shared experiences. Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) suggest that social norms accessed by sharing "extraordinary experiences"—events not experienced in ordinary, day-to-day life—on sites such as Facebook, regulate the sense of self. Third, experiential purchases offer a viable expenditure of disposable income that avoids the stigmatization of materialism (Van Boven et. al 2010:551). Travel allows northeasterners to participate, joining broader discourses about experiences stereotypically available to those in the southern regions of Brazil. Finally, experiences are integral to the construction of self. In contrast to material possessions, experiences "tend to be more closely associated with self" (Carter and Gilovich 2012:1304). Experiences, rather than possessions, are more commonly invoked in narrative and more favorably remembered as time goes on.

The Brazilians I surveyed were more likely to talk about experiences than material goods when asked to discuss their family history or aspirations for future employment and education. Among those I surveyed over the course of several years, many were also more likely to recall a specific travel experience more favorably in each subsequent retelling. In 2013, for example, Sandra vacationed to the United States and I accompanied her to New York City. We visited all the standard "tourist" stops: the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, Ground Zero, Central Park, and so on. But

it was not until walking through Times Square and posing for a picture with the "Naked Cowboy," that she let out a long sigh and exclaimed, "We can go home now. I have seen everything there is to see in New York." I laughed because the highlight of her trip was not a tangible item brought back from New York City, but the experience of posing with an icon emblematic of travel abroad (Figure 8). While she had initially complained about the tip required for posing with the cowboy (USD$20), in subsequent tellings of the story, there was no mention of the monetary cost. In fact, on the last observed occasion of her retelling in 2014, her narrative was quite exaggerated and exuberant: recalling more flirting and more audacious behavior than had actually been the case. Her audience giggled and teased, with some interjecting their own stories of experiences with the Naked Cowboy.

Figure 8. Posing with the Naked Cowboy at Times Square (author 2013)

The value of experiences in narrative and subjectivity has been thoroughly discussed in anthropology. In *The Social Life of Stories*, Cruikshank (1998) examines meaning in narrative, arguing that oral and written texts do not inherently have meaning. Instead, she points to the everyday contexts in which stories are invoked, created, told, or referenced for social and cultural purposes. She notes, "Meaning does not inhere in events but involves weaving those events into stories that are meaningful at the time. Events, after all, are stories known directly only to those who experience them and interpret them to others, who in turn make their own interpretations of what they hear" (1998:2). Like cultural objects, Cruikshank determines that narrative forms require shared knowledge between the storyteller and the audience—a kind of "cultural scaffolding"—to imbue meaning among members of the community. In the same way, retelling stories of discount shopping trips (or displaying evidence of the experience) creates success narratives. Frugality is esteemed because it is both built into the "cultural scaffolding" of many participants in this project and it is useful via narrative for reinterpretation and new constructions of self (Cruikshank 1998). Whether this be the result of religious identity—displaying good stewardship (as Daniel said, "*Deus quer que eu administre bem."*)—or class identity—maximizing the use of disposable income—it is important to point out that frugality can be at once structural and embodied.

Finally, recalling the discussions on governing technologies in previous chapters, it is easy to see how narratives about travel experiences provide coherence in changing, often chaotic, political, economic, and class status environments. The telling and retelling of travel experiences functions as an attempt to organize anxieties created

through state-crafting projects, such as neoliberalism. Narrative forms serve to locate one's place in the world, and consequently, public work has become emblematic of an orderly subjectivity.

Chapter 7: Home Ownership

The previous chapter examined the experience of travel as a consumptive practice enabled by public sector work. This chapter offers another case study—home ownership—as a lens through which to view the desire for public sector work and the technologies of power and self discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. For many of the families in this project, participation in the public sector not only makes home ownership a possibility, it guarantees access to the credit apparatus reifying that possibility. This is an important distinction since home ownership accounts for perhaps the single greatest change in the household economy in the last decade. By the time of my fieldwork, for example, mortgage payments as percentage of monthly disposable income had grown to 15 percent of the household budget, more than unsecured credit, education, or leisure expenditures (Biller and Schmidt 2013). This figure is even more remarkable considering that in 2010, mortgage payments accounted for less than eight percent of disposable income spending. In other words, indebtedness from home ownership doubled for the average Brazilian family in just three short years.

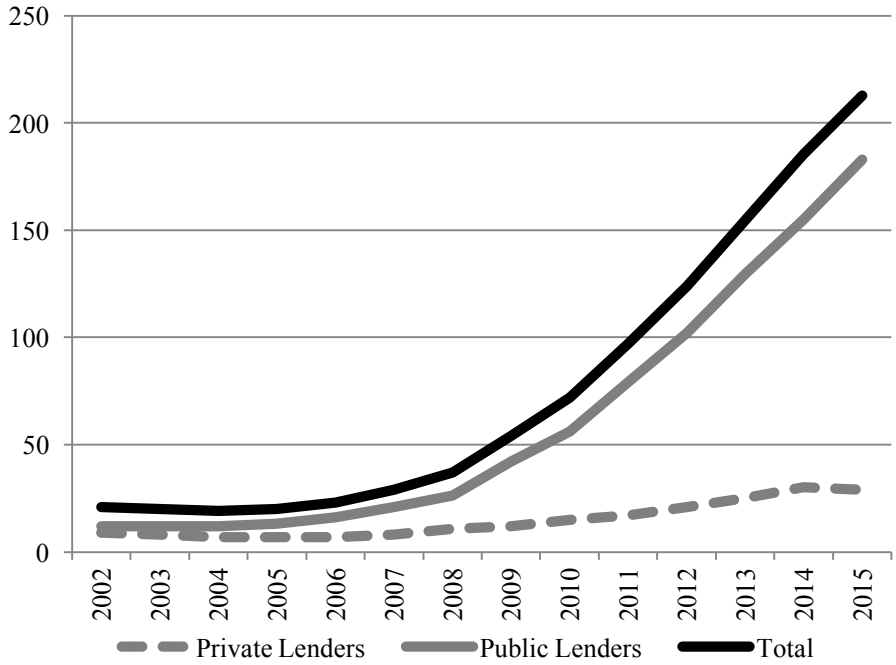
Consumer lending has put within grasp of the aspiring middle class particular kinds of homes, desirable neighborhoods, and "lifestyle" features like fitness, parking, and security that were previously inaccessible to owner occupants. *Concursos* act as gatekeepers of sorts to an exclusive, upwardly mobile community of homeowners; and home ownership holds a number of meanings for Brazilian families. This chapter examines why home ownership is integral to notions of stability for Brazilian families and how it acts as a powerful signifier for class belonging.

Mortgage Lending

Home ownership is not new to Brazil. The rate of home ownership in Brazil actually has hovered around 70 percent for the past two decades (Euromonitor International 2015). In some ways, this statistic is misleading: first, the owner occupancy rate includes ownership of "informal" housing. That is, it includes ownership of housing units that do not meet legal codes or public health and safety standards (such as housing in impoverished rural communities or urban *favelas*). Second, the steady rate of home ownership does not reflect the feverish amount of turnover experienced within the housing market in the past two decades. That is to say, while rates of home ownership may have increased gradually only four to five percent, the actual numbers of transactions in the housing market have increased exponentially. In the ten years preceding my fieldwork (between 2002 and 2012), for example, the Financial System of Low Cost Housing (SFH) reported that the number of units purchased through mortgages increased 1,075 percent—a more than tenfold increase (SFH 2015)! Moreover, during the course of my fieldwork (between 2011 and 2015), the monetary value of outstanding mortgage balances tripled (SFH 2015).

The trend continues, despite indications that the housing market may be cooling. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) reports that consumer lending as a percentage of GDP remains low in Brazil (especially when compared to fellow BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), indicating an underdeveloped mortgage market and significant potential for future growth in the banking industry (Martins et. al 2011). Even though private banking institutions are

taking interest in Brazil's housing market, state-owned banks continue to finance the greatest number of securities and assume the most risk (Figure 9).



Source: data taken from EMIS 2014 and Martins et. al 2011.

Figure 9. Total housing credit, R$ billions June 2001 (author 2016)

The steep growth trajectory of outstanding mortgage balances appears unlikely to change. As housing shortages persist, the state continues to subsidize the construction of new units made available to the public through state-owned mortgage lenders. Moreover, increasing indebtedness among Brazilians means that many are facing virtual debt "prisons," increasing demand for products like home equity loans and second mortgages. So, while rates of home ownership over the past two decades may not appear particularly impressive at first glance, what is remarkable is the ballooning of mortgage securities to achieve home ownership, especially among particular kinds of consumers. In other words, home ownership via consumer lending has become a critical component of consumptive behavior among many Brazilian families in this project.

Only recently have mortgages become a real possibility for many Brazilians. Along with the availability of domestic credit for unsecured debt, the accessibility of financing for home loans expanded under President Lula and experienced significant growth with the continuation of his policies under President Rouseff (Reid 2014). Prior to this time, mortgages were only accessible to affluent families due to high interest rates and large principle down payment requirements. But the expansion of housing and an increased access to mortgage credit have been hallmarks of the *Partido de Trabalhadores* government over the past 15 years. In 2003, the state created the Ministry of Cities to address urbanization, housing, and sanitation (Magalhães 2014). In 2009, the program My House, My Life (*Minha Casa, Minha Vida*, nicknamed My House, My Debt)—launched by the national bank *Caixa Ecônomica*—provided funding for home ownership for low to middle income families and embarked on construction projects for over 3.3 million new units (Caixa 2014). Even though the program was intended to target low income families, middle class families appear to have benefited from it as well, especially in the northeast. Families with household incomes ranging between R$1,700 and R$5,000 qualified for low interest rates, low monthly payments, and mortgages requiring little to no money down. Recall that this range of income essentially represents *Classe C* families—many of the families in this project. The possibility of home ownership, or rather, the possibility of owning homes previously inaccessible to middle class families, resulted in a significant shift in the horizontal strata as home ownership became an increasingly powerful component of stability and signaler of middle class identity.

"Homelessness" and Stability

During my fieldwork, apartments in the newest high rises offered through *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* were advertised for 360 payments of R$980—at that time, approximately one and a half times the minimum wage. Advertisement brochures touted the proximity of residential communities to shopping centers and main thoroughfares, stressing "paved roads" and "elevated" locations, safe from the flooding that annually engulfed the metropolis. Amenities like pools, soccer fields, clubhouses, and professional landscaping offered the "best place for you to live" with "all of the comforts for your family" (Figure 10). Financing through *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* served as a credentialing technology for new construction, and residential communities marketed this stamp of approval to potential homeowners: "financing made super easy through *Minha Casa, Minha Vida.*"

Figure 10. Advertisement brochure for high rise community (author 2014)

Maria, a 45-year-old public school teacher, participated in one such program to purchase a unit in a high rise in an up-and-coming suburb south of the city. Instead of occupying the unit, she rented it to an acquaintance and continued living in the home she shared with her mother and unmarried sister. Her monthly mortgage payment was R$800 and she charged R$1,200 a month for rent in 2010. But in just a few years, by the time of our interview, the going price of rent for units in her building was closer to R$2,000. She explained that it made more sense to rent the unit rather than occupy it herself, since she doubled her income by continuing to live at home. Both she and her sister held positions in the public sector, and with their government paychecks, both qualified for mortgages from public lenders through the *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* program.

For Maria, home ownership was both emblematic of stability and contributive to it. Her investment in real estate not only served as a tangible manifestation of her consumptive power, but it also, like public sector work, provided a guarantee of income. "As long as I maintain employment as a public servant," she explained, "the condo is mine. They cannot take it from me. I am *concursada*." Maria linked stability conferred by public sector work to home ownership with good reason. Civil servants had preferential access to loans and real estate during my fieldwork. Many lenders offered a "fast track" to approved financing for public employees based on their pay stubs alone. The ease with which home ownership was achieved by public servants contributed to a concentration of wealth among those employed in the public sector. Civil servants in state-owned properties enjoy below-market-value rent payments and had first choice purchasing those properties when they come up for sale when the

government sells assets. Rather than selling at current market value, these were properties whereby "the prices, defined by an evaluation done by the *Caixa Econômica Federal* (a bank controlled by the Federal Government), and payment conditions were quite favorable to the civil servants" (Mendes 2014:198). Recall from Chapter 4 that state-crafting projects in Brazil aim to locate financial accumulation in the realm of the state rather than the private sector. As expenditures in the field of home ownership have become more easily accessible (through equity and increased liquidity), the desire for public sector work facilitating those expenditures has also intensified. Home ownership reinforces the desire for public sector work and is itself an extension of the stability afforded by public sector work. Nearly every person I surveyed about desire for public sector work included home ownership in his or her list of guaranteed outcomes of passing *concursos*.

If home ownership is indicative of stability for many Brazilian families, the lack of home ownership is similarly reflective of instability. One evening, over a cup of coffee, Daniel was discussing the upcoming wedding of a young couple from his church. Even though the groom occupied a position of high status within the church community, he did not have a "well-paying" job nor did his parents own their own home. Daniel commented that the bride was in for a surprise, as the groom was not as well off (*estável*) as she expected. I asked how this could be, since the groom's parents appeared to be solidly middle class—having lived in a gated high-rise community in one of the nicer neighborhoods in the city and sent two children abroad for college. His response highlighted the centrality of home ownership to his own notions of stability and class belonging:

Daniel: Their situation is very sad. Truly very sad.

L: What do you mean?

Daniel: They do not have a house, Lauren. They are homeless!

L: How are they homeless? They have a house. They have lived in that same apartment for years!

Daniel: Yes, but it is rented. It is not their apartment.

Daniel's assertion that the family was homeless (*sem casa*) caught me off guard. Longevity in their place of residence did not necessarily equate stability. In fact, the very act of renting made them unstable and created reservations about marrying into the family. Since rent had to be renegotiated every few years, Daniel reasoned, how could the family be certain their income would be enough to meet expenses two years down the road?

I later confirmed these details with the mother of the groom. She added that the trend of rising housing prices had created a great deal of anxiety for her family; at the current rate, she did not know how much longer they would be able to stay in their apartment. From Daniel's point of view, lack of home ownership meant that the family might as well be "homeless." Sandra agreed with her father when I asked her about the groom's financial condition:

Sandra: He does not make much, Lauren. And she does not even have a job.

L: So?

Sandra: So they are going to live in his parents' apartment!

L: And she cannot work?

Sandra: She can. Maybe as a teacher's aide, if someone, I do not know, secures a job for her, or something like that. Even so, how will they ever improve their financial condition without stable jobs?

The tone of her discussion was disapproving. Marriage into the family was unattractive in two respects: first, the couple would have to live with their parents (who were already "homeless"), and second, neither the bride nor the groom had "stable" employment to improve their financial prospects at any point in the near future. While it is not unusual for Brazilian children to reside with their parents long into their adulthood (for example, into their 30s), it is increasingly less common for married couples to live with their families. Structural changes such as access to consumer credit, prolific mortgage lending, and increased wages are altering social norms for middle class families and making home ownership an integral component of stability. That is not to say families do not organize resources informally or arrange the household economy to provide for young couples. Three of the families in this project owned second story units constructed above a parent's home, four others were owner occupants, and one lived with her mother, renting the apartment she owned for additional income. Sandra went on to explain that the bride had little to no training or schooling for "stable" work. With the groom, it was less about how much he earned and more about the sector of the labor market in which he participated. Again, public sector work was perceived as facilitating stability—in this case, home ownership—both for the present time and for the future of the young couple.

It has not always been the case in Brazil that home ownership was integral to notions of stability. In a country where there was a gross deficit of housing units for

families and almost three-quarters of all arable landholdings were held by just three percent of the population at the turn of the millennium (Wolford 2003), property ownership has been structurally impossible for many Brazilian citizens since independence. In fact, recall that for most of O'Dougherty's (2002) participants, home ownership was not a defining feature of middle class identity. In the decade preceding my fieldwork, however, profound changes occurred facilitating the growth of home ownership among ordinary Brazilians. Some of these changes stemmed from policies discussed in Chapter 4. The commodification of personal information, for example, facilitated the expansion of the credit apparatus and mortgage securities. Social insecurity brought about by the reformation of the state facilitated the privatization and marketization of public entitlements such as security and safety. Foreign investment contributed to speculation and real estate booms. And finally, consumer lending fueled dramatic growth in consumptive patterns, especially among upwardly mobile families looking to secure long term stability.

Conspicuous Consumption

Recall from Chapter 6 that travel and material goods purchased abroad functioned as a form of conspicuous consumption. For families in this project, home ownership also functioned as a site for conspicuous consumption. Goldstein (2003) in an observation about domestic workers in Brazilian households, called middle class identity in the home a "game of symbols." For much of the period since the military dictatorship, the "rules" to this game have remained somewhat constant despite economic instability. In her examination of consumption among the middle class in the 1990s, for example, O'Dougherty (2002) argued that consumption was increasingly

inflexible during periods of economic instability. That is, the "symbols" of middle class identity remained constant. Travel, material goods purchased abroad, and social events comprised the primary fields of conspicuous consumption. O'Dougherty did not find home ownership to be as compelling of a marker of middle class identity. She takes as her point of departure "middle class" families from São Paulo, but her designation of middle class is complicated by the up-scale neighborhoods from which her informants come, as well as their participation in affluent class practices such as debutante balls and Disney vacations. Reid follows similar suit, defining middle class families in Recife as those living in the "smart beachfront residential suburb of high-rise towers" in Boa Viagem, with a car, apartment, and monthly income of R$3,000 (2014:172).

Not one of the families in my study hailed from such a neighborhood or participated in debutante balls, though all but one identified as middle class. Without denying the findings of O'Dougherty and Reid, I suggest a broader definition of middle class in this project, one that instead focuses on consumptive patterns, occupation, and education. In this chapter, I explore how emerging consumptive patterns of home ownership via consumer lending have become a central pursuit of the middle class and why home ownership is emblematic of class belonging. That is to say, more than any other consumptive practice, home ownership has become representative of middle class identity.

Much of the growth in the housing market can be traced to the growth of the middle class and to lending practices established by the state. Since the 1990s, the number of Brazilians belonging to the middle class doubled and household incomes increased significantly (Birdsall 2012). In the northeast, especially, household income

rose by 72.8 percent in the first decade of the 2000s (Reid 2014). Moreover, purchasing power for Brazilian families increased five percent per year for three decades. Thus, robust disposable incomes allowed for a variety of consumptive patterns by the time of my fieldwork. Consumer lending also underwent dramatic changes. For example, the number of consumer loans doubled in the first decade of the millennium, rising from six percent to 13 percent (Reid 2014). During this time, the number of bank accounts in Brazil nearly doubled (Reid 2014). This is significant because the Brazilian state has tied public banks to the housing market through savings accounts owned by the general public. Banks must allocate R$0.65 of every *real* deposited in a savings account to financing housing (Martins et. al 2011). So, notwithstanding large volumes of savings withdrawals in the near future, the capacity for mortgage lending will remain robust and home ownership will remain a site for conspicuous consumption.

By the time of my fieldwork, recent changes in legal frameworks and policies in the past decade—such as those affecting domestic workers and higher education—were increasingly constraining consumption among many upwardly mobile families (even though consumer lending was at an all time high). Measures implemented by the state to shape subjectivity and conform to the market made it difficult for middle class families to sustain the same traditional markers of class identity afforded by their parents' generation. In her study of downward mobility among the middle class in the US, Newman contends, "Class is clearly a critical factor…but it is not the only one. Generation is at least as powerful a source of conflict" (1999:110). I have already discussed some of the ways in which the expansion of higher education and the quota system made entrance into public universities more competitive and tenuous for middle

class families and I will return to the topic of domestic work at a later point in this chapter, but with respect to conspicuous consumption, it is important to note that the broad availability of mortgages enabled many ordinary Brazilians to rework markers of class by turning to home ownership as yet another field of accumulation and consumption. Families with more material capital increased their stake in the market through home ownership.

Recall from Chapter 4 that neoliberalism in particular had the effect of expanding consumer credit and commodifying mortgage securities in Brazil, both of which increased accessibility to home ownership and altered symbolic provisioning for the future associated with middle class identity. In some ways, home ownership functioned as a means of production in the neoliberal project. That is, it allowed for the accumulation of economic capital via equity, increased liquidity, and credit worthiness. In the same way that public sector work in Brazil can be seen as redistributive (Alesina et. al 2000), home ownership can be seen as redistributive in that the "means of production" are financed by the state, seized by the middle class, and expropriated for private use. It remains an object of consumption, but also a site of production increasingly utilized as other markers in the domestic sphere are challenged and constrained.

Domestic Work

Like many parts of Latin America, high rates of participation in the informal economy in Brazil make the labor market dynamic different from that in the US. During my own childhood in Brazil, most middle class families I knew maintained at least one female domestic worker in their home. This had the effect of creating a dominating

technology between women who employed domestic help and women who were domestic help. Goldstein (2003) suggests that employing domestic help in the home was the defining characteristic of middle class identity in Brazil, embodying culturally specific markers constructed through particular histories of colonialism, enslavement, hyperinflation, and economic depression. For example, she points out that affluent children in Brazil are not allowed in the kitchen and learn nothing of cooking or cleaning, making "helplessness" a marker of prestige.

In the decade leading up to my fieldwork, however, gendered work in the domestic sphere changed dramatically. In 2007, the IBGE reported some 1,723,000 domestic workers employed in Brazilian households; by the conclusion of my fieldwork, the number had dropped to 1,325,000—a loss of almost 400,000 jobs in just seven years (IBGE 2014b). The reasons for this shift are varied. First, and perhaps most obvious, the number of formal jobs in Brazil increased significantly in the first decade of the millennium with economic growth. This had the effect of driving fewer Brazilians to seek primary employment in the informal economy. Secondly, the emergence of the new middle class put pressure on traditional middle class, in public and private spaces. Reid notes, "they had to pay more for maids, while social spaces, from shopping centers to roads, became more crowded" (2014:157). Third, a series of legislative measures aimed at formalizing domestic work brought domestic workers under the protections of the state. Of particular importance to participants in this project was a law that required employers to provide formal benefits to domestic workers employed in the home more than two days a week (a signed labor contract, paid maternity leave, the end-of-year disbursement, and a handful of other standard

employment benefits). The labor courts were strengthened and expanded to handle the caseload of charges brought against employers who did not comply, and whether or not it was actually the case that employers were taken to court, the consensus among Brazilians I surveyed was a fear of engaging with the penal system.

Eventually, the legislative houses passed measures granting social security, holiday pay, and overtime to domestic workers, requiring even more capital for the maintenance of domestic work. Shifts in legal frameworks governing the domestic sphere had the direct effect of constraining the use of domestic work as a marker of middle class identity. In fact, by the time of my fieldwork in 2012, all but one family had released their live-in maid due to the strain it placed on the household economy. Or at least, that was the common explanation. "It's simply too expensive," Daniel told me. He employed a woman two days a week for housecleaning and meal preparation, and his wife had taken up cooking on the days their domestic help was not present. She was proud of her culinary skills, especially when they featured international cuisines. One evening, for example, she asked for my help making doughnuts. We downloaded a recipe (in English, she insisted), heated a pot of oil, and fried the dough. After cooling and decorating the sweets, we gathered around the table and recounted our favorite doughnut shop memories from travels abroad. It seemed to me that changes in the domestic sphere had reworked the "game of symbols" referenced by Goldstein and replaced the symbolic value of "helplessness" with sentiments like pride, self-reliance, and cosmopolitan citizenship. Rather than display in their home a boxed specialty blender acquired abroad, Daniel's family exhibited a privileged knowledge (about

doughnuts) acquired from international travel. This knowledge was reproduced in the domestic sphere, a practice that shapes notions of domesticity.

To say that legal frameworks completely eliminated the symbolic capital of maintaining domestic work in middle class families would be inaccurate. On the contrary, many families adjusted their patterns of consumptive behavior, employing domestic service just 2 days a week to avoid the costs associated with full time work or simply allocating more of the budget to eating out. I remember being struck by the strategies Juliane's family employed to maintain their middle class identity in the face of these changes: every morning, her father visited the upscale *paderia* in their neighborhood and purchased breakfast for the family. If anyone was home for lunch, the family went out to eat at a local restaurant. And since dinner in Brazil is very light, the family usually snacked on cold foods from the refrigerator or leftovers from breakfast. I remarked one morning after spending a few days in their home that it must get expensive paying for every meal out. "Not as expensive as a maid," Juliane's mom quipped. Juliane's mother was able to maintain her practice of not cooking and the housekeeping was concentrated to two days a week. So, while legal frameworks altered symbols of middle class identity, families were creative in reinterpreting, reworking, and reproducing traditional markers in the domestic sphere.

Leisure and the Home

During my fieldwork, Daniel's family lived in a second-story residence they had constructed over the first floor of a property they purchased 15 years ago. Through a series of small personal loans from relatives and friends and a diligent savings habit, they had stockpiled construction materials and saved over the years to expand the

original two-room property to include four small retail spaces on the first floor and a modest three bedroom, two bath home on the second floor (Figure 11).

Figure 11. A second-story home with retail shops below (author 2012)

Daniel rented the storefronts to small businesses—a movie rental store, a hair salon, a second-hand thrift shop, and a realty office. But the availability of mortgages through public lending made moving a regular topic of conversation in the family. Daniel's wife, for example, complained about the noise from the street in front of the house—the property was located on the main thoroughfare (*avenida principal*) of the neighborhood. On Friday nights, food and alcohol vendors parked in the plaza in front of the home and served snacks and drinks into the early hours of the morning. Daniel was especially bothered by these gatherings, as they "drew the youth out of the neighboring *favelas*" to party and engage in illegal activities. Almost daily, Sandra visited a friend who lived in a gated condominium community to use the fitness facility.

During the time of my fieldwork, the family regularly entertained the topic of moving to a better, more "tranquil" home.

When I returned to Recife for a follow-up visit in 2014, the family had "upgraded": they had rented out their home and had moved into a three bedroom, two bath gated high-rise condominium with pools, fitness centers, and secure parking. They had a new stainless-steel refrigerator and new kitchen cabinets, hot water heaters on the showerheads, and air-conditioned rooms. In the same way automobiles and computers act as class indicators in discussions about higher education, hot water heaters can provide a baseline for measuring standards of living in northeastern Brazil. Hot showers have been relatively rare in households in this region. The tropical climate affords year-round warm temperatures, and water is often collected in roof tanks and warmed by the afternoon sun. "Cold" showers are a regular, and welcome, part of the daily routine to escape the heat and humidity for many northeasterners. On particularly chilly nights, families may heat water on the stove and take a "bucket bath." Lack of hot water often comes as a surprise to foreigners, and even to native Brazilians from the southern part of the country, but it should not be taken as an indication of poverty in these households. Rather, it represents a material culture specific to the northeast coastal region. During my fieldwork in 2012, only 4 of 19 participants had hot water heaters installed on the showerheads in their bathrooms. By the time of my follow-up visit in 2014, this number had increased to seven, with several more participants reporting electrical outlets in their shower stalls wired for water heater installation, even if they had not purchased the actual heater. Consider the contrast between the material culture

of the 1990s: only one of the families in this project had hot water in their showers prior to the 2000s.

In addition to markers of leisure in the primary residence, vacation homes have been made increasingly available to middle class families through mortgages. During my fieldwork in 2012, vacation homes and private gated communities dotted the landscape along highways to resort towns on the beach or in the mountains. Billboards announced the newest subdivision and its luxury amenities: golf courses, pools, fitness courses, and manicured lawns. I spent several weekends with Juliane's family at one such vacation home in a gated community complete with horses and stables, hiking trails, and other amenities of country living. What struck me as particularly interesting was that her family maintained the vacation cottage as well as a modest vacation home in a nearby beach community, even though they did not employ full time domestic work in their primary residence. Her dad confirmed that both vacation properties had been purchased with mortgages within the past six years. Thus, the desire for home ownership extended beyond primary residences to include provisioning of vacation homes as sites of leisure. To many of the families in this project, home ownership via consumer lending had become more integral to class identity than maintaining domestic help. This represents a significant shift in the household economy. Recall that both of Juliane's parents had passed *concursos*—in fact, her dad had occupied two positions in the public sector and was drawing retirement from one while maintaining work in the other. *Concursos* facilitated entrance into an exclusive, upwardly mobile community of homeowners with time for leisure (also afforded by public sector work). For Juliane's family, and indeed for Daniel's family, mortgages opened the market for particular

kinds of homes—leisure homes and primary residences in more desirable neighborhoods, with “lifestyle” features like fitness, parking, and security that were previously inaccessible.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have attempted to investigate the desire for public sector work in Brazil. My conclusions were based on fieldwork, ethnographic data collection, and literature review during a four year period, between 2011 and 2014. I spent the greater part of 2012 living in Recife, conducting participant observation and building relationships with the families in this project, and I am forever indebted to their kindness and willingness to share their lives, aspirations, and struggles for the purposes of this dissertation project. Though I have circulated excerpts of my writings to participants and received feedback from many in this project, my conclusions are my own.

Chapter 1 began with an introduction to the field site. I emphasized the competitive and highly selective nature of *concursos* and examined two explanations traditionally offered for the preference of employment in the public sector. I argued that wage premiums were unsatisfactory in explaining desire since many of the public positions desired by participants in this project actually paid less than their private sector counterparts. I also argued that class identity did not, in itself, adequately explain the desire for particular occupations since participants were determined to obtain a public sector position at any cost, regardless of earnings level or identity utility. I offered an outline of my own theoretical framework, locating the desire for public sector work in subjectivation: as part of a larger learned subject position cultivated in citizens by technologies of power and technologies of self in an effort to relieve anxieties of interpretation and orientation. I closed the chapter with an overview of my

methodology and the broader context to which I hoped to contribute through this project.

Chapters 2 and 3 provided histories of the labor market and higher education in Brazil. Chapter 2 considered the historical context shaping the labor market conditions at the time of my fieldwork. Longstanding economic instability, unemployment, and shifting models of corporate management plagued the labor market in the years leading up to my dissertation project and heightened the desire for employment in both the formal economy and in the public sector. I briefly outlined the legal frameworks affording benefits to public sector employees, with special attention paid to the near absolute protection from termination. I attempted to unpackage the meanings of "stability" for many of the participants in this project. Focusing on job security in particular, I linked the desire for public sector work to the capacity to consume and accumulate, especially in the fields of education, travel, and home ownership. I employed the classification scheme used by the OECD to sort participant families by income levels and then identified work as a function of collective aspirations of the so-called emerging or new middle class. Finally, I framed occupational status as a familial project and suggested that the operationalization of job selection ties the individual to the family in the same ways that public sector ties the individual to the state. Thus, I argued the desire for public sector work represented an alignment of interests—among Brazilians aspiring to be *responsável* and the state aspiring to produce (govern) *responsável* citizens.

Chapter 3 provided an overview of higher education in Brazil. I opened with a history of postsecondary education in the Portuguese colonies and traced the

development of the institutional apparatus unto the time of my fieldwork. I argued that the colonial legacy in higher education was important for two reasons: first, it explained why higher education in its current form is a relatively new structural phenomenon, since universities were not present in Brazil until the 1930s; and secondly, it explained why meanings of higher education associated with class identity and mobility, intergenerational transmissions of wealth, and travel are easily transferred to public sector work. Namely, I argued that the desire for public sector work overlaid on previously established foundations of governmentality and politics of exclusion in higher education. I argued that institutions of higher education both shape students through exclusion, conferring prestige, and reproducing racial or socioeconomic disadvantage and are shaped by students through consumerism, commodification of higher education, and political organizing. Finally, I attempted to illustrate the complicated relationship between postsecondary education and public sector work through two ethnographic examples. I concluded that higher education is at once complementary and in competition with public sector work.

Chapters 4 and 5 bridged the "historical" chapters on the labor market and higher education with the "case study" chapters on travel and home ownership. Chapter 4 considered technologies of power dominating conduct and objectivizing the subject during the time of my fieldwork. I argued that structural changes in the political economy and horizontal strata created an environment of economic and social insecurity, leading to anxieties of interpretation and orientation for many of the participants in this project. In particular, I focused on the implications of neoliberalism for subjectivity via commodification, individuality, and the reformation of the state

through the expansion of the penal wing and the reduction of the welfare wing. I attempted to demonstrate through census and employment data how the expansion of the public sector in the last decade was concentrated in systems of penality and reflected the internally contradicting aims of neoliberal state-craft. I also offered an overview of Marxist and Weberian frameworks of class identity to investigate how structural changes in income classes have affected consumption patterns, success narratives, and symbols of class identity, ultimately accounting for the emergence of the union/government/corporation bloc that has altered anxieties, class consciousness, work, and the ability to organize politically. I concluded that the desire for public sector work is at once a proactive alignment with the neoliberal project of the state and a reaction to shrinking public entitlements and instability in the labor market, arising from an environment in which social insecurity threatened to pull down anyone perched precariously on the boundaries of middle class.

Chapter 5 investigated technologies of self, implemented by participants in this project to construct themselves as ethical subjects. I focused on *evangélicos* as a category of practice and examined subjectivation through moral discourses drawing from Weberian frameworks of the protestant ethic, divine callings advanced by Calvinism, and efforts to align oneself with God's will. I offered three examples of how technologies of self are constructed socially through discourse in the face of anxiety: a peaceful self, fulfillment in life, and ease of life. I noted that since conversions from Catholicism comprised a large percentage of evangelical growth in Brazil, comparative perspectives of new subjectivities being fashioned from traditional moral systems helped explain the contradictions surrounding the morality of public sector work. I

concluded that technologies of self, operationalized in the construction of the *evangélico* subject, accounted for significant cultural changes underway in many areas of Brazil, including the public sector. Thus, ethical subjectivation at once constrained aspirations for employment by limiting employment opportunities in which the connection to the supernatural was unclear or not established and by introducing opportunities in which employment functioned as a location for embodied practice with eternal significance.

Chapters 6 and 7 offered case studies in which the major themes of the preceding chapters could be examined as interrelated, complementary, and contradictory forces shaping the desire for public sector work. I selected the case studies because they exemplified the goals most often referenced among the Brazilians I surveyed when discussing the practical outcomes of public sector work. Chapter 6 examined travel and the historically rooted meanings of transnationalism to participants in this project. In particular, I focused on discourses of contrast categories linking public sector work to aspirations of travel, paid time off, and a lifestyle of leisure. I offered flexible citizenship as an explanation for the geographic and social positionality Brazilians display in changing economic and political environments to take advantage of capitalist accumulation and conspicuous consumption abroad. Finally, I argued that for many Brazilians, satisfaction from experiential purchases far outweighed that gained from material purchases. That is, experiential value increased as time passed and narrative forms imbued experiences with new meanings and reworked new forms of symbolic and social capital. I concluded that for many Brazilians, travel had less to do with an actual quantifiable amount of money and more to do with public employment

facilitating travel. Thus, transnational experiences defined the kind of person participants envisioned themselves becoming with public sector work.

Chapter 7 offered home ownership as a case study. I offered a brief history of the housing market and the mortgage securities facilitating its expansion, with particular attention on government subsidized programs. I considered the meanings of stability extended from public sector work to home ownership through access to preferential consumer lending, and I argued that owner occupancy (rather than renting) mitigated the precarious position faced by many middle class families in maintaining class belonging. I suggested that traditional markers of middle class identity, such as employing domestic help and displaying gender roles, have been supplanted by home ownership in the new millennium due to legal initiatives affording greater protection to domestic workers and requiring families to choose between domestic help or consumer debt. Ultimately, I argued that the markers signaled by consumer lending solidified class belonging. Finally, I considered home ownership as a site of production for leisure, extending to vacation homes and weekend villas now accessible through second mortgages and home equity loans.

Race and Religion

The ethnographic project is, by nature, an incomplete snapshot of a particular people at a particular time and place, interpreted for the reader through the eyes of the ethnographer. The so-called "crisis in representation" challenged anthropologists to incorporate reflexivity into the ethnographic project, and it is with that in mind that the following paragraphs acknowledge a few of the shortcomings of this dissertation.

First, a critique I received from reviewers was that my fieldwork did not adequately address the topic of race among participants in this project. I agree. Part of this was due to limitations in my initial research design: I did not include in my original proposal a protocol to investigate racial identity, so I had not thought through the "how" of studying race prior to moving to Brazil. At the outset of my fieldwork, my formal interview scripts did not contain questions about race and I was not intentional about asking about it when I surveyed Brazilians about public sector work. That is not to say the topic of race did not come up during fieldwork. Unlike in the US, where class is the "only American identity term that is organized primarily around an economic axis" (Ortner 2006:72), class identity in Brazil is very closely tied to racial identity. So the topic of race frequently surfaced in discussions about class or economic security, albeit in veiled and often obscure ways.

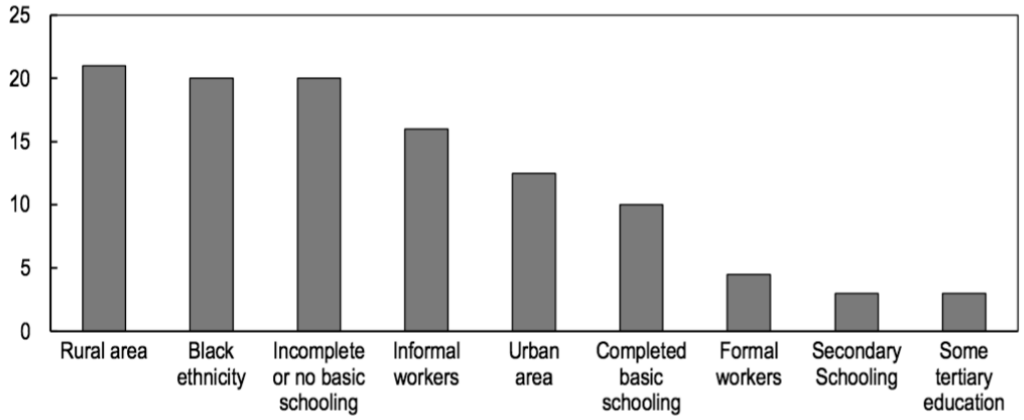
For example, while watching an NBA game in the home of Lucinete one evening, she turned to me and asked, "Is basketball the national game over there?" I replied without giving it much thought, "No. Most would say baseball is the national past time. Or football." Frowning, she asked again, "Is basketball not the common man's game? It seems like only the poor play basketball over there." After a long pause, I realized what she was saying. I asked, "What is the national game here?" She immediately replied, "Soccer. Soccer is the national game. It's the poor man's game in Brazil." Then she explained matter-of-factly, "Only the rich can afford to send their kids to play basketball. Look at all the Brazilian basketball players. They are all white. Yours are all black."

I share this excerpt to illustrate the complexity of race and class in Brazil and the ease with which categories of race and class were used interchangeably in conversation. There is a vast and excellent literature on the subject of race in Brazil, much of which offers far better examples than the one outlined above. But in this dissertation project, I was not prepared to engage this body of literature in my fieldwork. It was not until I began the phase of conducting formal interviews that I started asking participants about their racial identity and the effect they thought it had on higher education, income, and public sector work. Responses were often dismissive and usually led to a critique of the quota system. In fact, only one student—Ana Paula, who had herself been granted entrance to a university through a quota program—identified racial discrimination as a problem in higher education and a barrier to equal income earnings.

At the opening of each formal interview, I asked participants to state their race, along with other demographic markers of identity (including age, sex, class, religion, residential neighborhood, and household income). Usually, students and family members self-identified using terms I would have used to describe their racial identity. However, on a few occasions, participants self-identified using a term reflecting a darker position on the "skin-tone continuum" (Wacquant 2008) than I would have used. Rebeca was one such student whose racial status I would have identified as mixed (*parda)* but who self-identified as black (*negra)*. She also self-identified as lower-middle class (*classe media baixa),* even though her monthly household income was among the highest of families in this project (R$11,800, or *Classe A*, in 2012). It is possible her self-identification was comparative, that is, shaped by the interview setting and my own racial identity (I am white, *branca*). On the other hand, it is also quite

possible that she was aware of her own Afro-Brazilian ancestry and intentionally emphasized her *negra* identity in discussions about race. While she did not support racial quotas in higher education or public sector work, she was active as a member of the Afro-Brazilian women's group on campus. Her self-identification, then, might have reflected a political or social agenda. In any case, her example illustrates how my fieldwork failed to adequately investigate issues of race among participants in this project.

The new middle class is itself a demographic marked by racial tensions. Arnold and Jalles (2014) note that Brazilians of color made up one of the largest segments of newcomers to the middle class between the years of 2002 to 2012, second only to those from rural areas (Figure 12). It is unclear how exactly members from "traditional" middle class families viewed these newcomers, but I suspect there were anxieties surrounding the changing face of the middle class.



Source: Arnold and Jalles 2014.

Figure 12. Characteristics of the new middle class

The mass protests of 2013 amplified some of these concerns to an international audience and displayed the consequences of downward mobility in public discourse. Brazilian scholars and public officials alike tried to classify demonstrators into well-

defined groups of occupational, racial, or religious belonging. One commentator emphasized race, arguing, "black and brown newcomers to the middle class do not want to risk falling back into the working class, so they protest the loss of consumptive power" (Singer 2013). To me, the lines were not so clearly drawn. Even though Brazilians on the whole reject the concept of race (Hasenbalg 1991), inequalities in income distribution remain tied to racial categories. Racism continues to be veiled as socioeconomic disadvantage, and rather than support efforts to reduce inequality by targeting racial and socioeconomic barriers, many Brazilians I surveyed do not consider legitimate the distinction of the two. However, the inequity was obvious and persisted in higher education as well as the labor market, where quotas existed to diversify the student body and the public sector work force.

The second shortcoming of this dissertation project concerns religious identity. During my fieldwork, I taught English classes at a local center situated on one of the busiest avenues in the city. The avenue was a main thoroughfare for the bus lines servicing the metropolitan area, and, on any given week night, bus stops were packed with students returning from classes or test prep courses. The center maintained a religious affiliation, and in addition to offering instructional courses in English and Spanish, it also offered courses on various biblical topics. This was not particularly unusual in Recife, nor was it unique to the local center at which I worked. The demand for English instruction and the desirability of the English language was such that courses were commonly offered by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religiously affiliated institutions, and private test prep centers alike. In fact, at the time of my fieldwork, there were a dozen or so centers within a three block radius of the one

at which I worked, for-profit and non-profit, secular and religiously affiliated (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Advertisement brochure for English classes (author 2012)

In any case, my observations about religious identity and public sector work first came about as a result of observing casual conversations among students in these classes. That is to say, like race, I did not anticipate confronting religious identity so overtly in discussions about public sector work. But the weight of the evangelical aspiration and moral discourses surrounding public sector were so pervasive, I could not ignore them. Unfortunately, like race, I had not prepared prior to starting my fieldwork to engage the body of literature concerning evangelicalism in Brazil. I also did not

know if the anecdotal evidence I was observing in my classes could be extended to *evangélicos* in particular or Brazilians in general. It was unclear to me if the religious affiliation of the center "self-selected" a sample of students with religious identities, or if I would have encountered these identities and discourses regardless of where I taught. Moreover, at the time of my fieldwork, religious identity appeared to closely follow other markers, especially class identity and residential neighborhood, so it was also unclear if the moral discourses I observed in these classes were indeed due to religious identity or something else, like class. Regardless, the end result was that I began investigating the morality of public sector work in conversations with participants in this project, the transcripts of which made up a large part of Chapter 5. Thus, my analysis would have benefited from a research design addressing religious identity.

Looking Forward

As of the writing of this final section, Brazil was heading into the deepest recession in more than three decades. The Rouseff administration was facing threats of impeachment and the giant, state-owned oil company, Petrobras, was collapsing from low oil prices and widespread internal corruption. It remained to be seen if public sector work would indeed buffer the ill effects of an economic slow-down, insecurity, and declining wages for many of the participants in this project. By 2016, the possibility of public sector work was increasingly untenable for many *Classe C* families, as the annual number of open *concursos* was in decline and reserve lists were growing longer and longer. The odds of securing employment for Brazilians who actually managed to pass the tests were increasingly exponential and improbable.

It should be of no surprise that the *concurso* apparatus remained intact even with an eroding façade of credibility. Tests for public sector work continued to provide significant profit to the state and thus continued to be promoted by the state. Moreover, the markets created by the demand for test preparation and administration of *concursos* formed a lucrative industry, unlikely to go anywhere in the coming decades. The desire for public sector work also remained, as decades of economic and social insecurity continued to weigh on the public psyche and frame a bloated public sector as both the problem and the solution.

Though it would require a longer time commitment than allotted for the dissertation project, it would be worthwhile investigating the test prep industry that has arisen in response to the demand for *concursos*. In an interview with the director of a prestigious private test prep center, I was surprised to learn that the center did not keep records on the percentage of students who successfully passed *concursos* after completing their courses. Of course, the director claimed the rate of success was "very high" but the extremely competitive selection rates of public sector work is contradictory. In 2012, courses ranged from R$100 to R$700 and students often enrolled in a dozen courses to prepare for one *concurso. Concursos* themselves were relatively inexpensive to take (R$50), but, as with all things in Brazil, the government received a cut of the profit taken in by test administrators and prep centers. Exactly how much and in what form was less clear. Thus, an extended study would offer great insight into the structural mechanisms at work in the markets supporting the industries of test prep and *concurso* administration.

This dissertation project offers a "snapshot" of the *concurso* fever that had swept Brazil during the first decade of the millennium. I believe my fieldwork took place at the height of the desire for public sector work and captured some of the final successful attempts of upwardly mobile families to gain entrance into the middle class and grasp stability for their households.

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