

Reclaiming the Discarded:
The Politics of Labor and Everyday Life on Rio's Garbage Dump

By Kathleen M. Millar
B.A., University of Notre Dame, 2002
A. M., Brown University, 2006

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dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Date _____
Matthew C. Gutmann, Advisor

Date _____
Catherine Lutz, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date _____
João Biehl, Reader

Date _____
Nicholas W. Townsend, Reader

Date _____
Kay B. Warren, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date _____
Peter M. Weber, Dean of the Graduate School

CURRICULUM VITAE

Kathleen M. Millar

Department of Anthropology
Box 1921, Brown University
Providence, RI 02912

Home address:
43 Mayfield Avenue
Fort Thomas, KY 41075

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born February 3, 1980, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

EDUCATION

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
Ph.D., Anthropology 2011
Dissertation: Reclaiming the Discarded: The Politics of Labor and Everyday Life on
Rio's Garbage Dump
Preliminary Examination Fields: Economic Anthropology, Anthropology of Latin
America, Theories of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Class Societies
Committee: Dr. Matthew Gutmann (co-chair); Dr. Catherine Lutz (co-chair);
Dr. Nicholas Townsend; Dr. Kay Warren; and Dr. João Biehl (external reader)
A.M., Anthropology 2006
Thesis: Recycling Class: Politics of the Informal Economy

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana
B.A., summa cum laude, Valedictorian candidate, Theology and Spanish 2002

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Political ecology; environmental politics; anthropology of waste
Economy and culture; informal economies and non-waged labor; global political economy
Urban studies; spatial inequality; poverty; violence
Class and social inequality; social reproduction and social change; social movements
Public anthropology and sociology; community-based research and learning
Qualitative research methods, GIS, ethnography, ethnographic writing
Brazil; Latin America

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

Joukowsky Presidential Fellowship, Brown University 2004-2005 and 2010-2011
Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship 2008-2009
National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship 2005-2008
Fellow, Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences Initiative, Brown University 2008
Tinker Grant, Brown University 2005
Brown University Summer Research Grant 2005

PUBLICATIONS

2010 Cooperation in the Informal Economy: The Case of Recyclers at a Brazilian Garbage Dump, in *Cooperation in Economy and Society*. Robert C. Marshall, ed. Society for Economic Anthropology Vol. 28. Pp. 175-194. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

2010 Reconsidering Routes to Membership in the Anthropological Community” (with Rebecca Prahl, Christine Reiser, and Christy DeLair), *Michigan Discussions in Anthropology* 18(1): 148-173.

2008 Making Trash into Treasure: Struggles for Autonomy on a Brazilian Garbage Dump,” *Anthropology of Work Review* 29(2): 25-34.

2008 The Informal Economy: Condition and Critique of Advanced Capitalism, in *Underground Economy: Issues and Approaches*. Asha B. Joshi, ed. Pp. 55-74. Hyderabad, India: Icfai University Press.

2007 Dying to be Men: Youth, Masculinity and Social Exclusion, Book Review, *Men and Masculinities* 9(3): 399-401.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS & INVITED TALKS

“I Come and Go, Come and Go: The Circulation of Workers in Rio de Janeiro’s Urban Periphery,” American Anthropological Association meeting, New Orleans, November 2010.

“Catadores, Deposistas, Bandidos e Assistentes Sociais: Uma Análise da Organização do Trabalho de Catadores no Rio de Janeiro,” Latin American Studies Association meeting, Toronto, October 2010.

“Conceptualizing class and social exclusion with respect to the informal economy: An ethnographic study of *catadores* in Rio de Janeiro,” Latin American Studies Association meeting, Rio de Janeiro, June 2009.

“O dinheiro que vem da rampa é maldiçoado,” invited lecture at the Department of Anthropology, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, May 2009.

“Competition and Cooperation in the Informal Economy: Reflections on the Social Practices of Waste Reclaimers in Brazil and South Africa,” Society for Economic Anthropology, Cincinnati, April 2008.

“Reciclando a Vida: Struggles for Social and Environmental Justice on a Garbage Dump in Rio de Janeiro” presented in the session on Violence, Spatial Justice and the Urban Environment, at the Brazilian Studies Association annual meeting, New Orleans, March 2008.

“Illicit and Informal Entrepreneurs: Fighting for a Place in the Neoliberal Economic Order,” double-session, chair and co-organizer, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 2007.

“New Terrains of Class Politics: Reflections on the Organizing of Informal Recyclers in Brazil and South Africa,” invited lecture at the Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, August 2007.

“From Jardim das Flores to the World: Theorizing Community in the Informal Sector,” American Ethnological Society Annual Meeting, Toronto, May 2007.

“Are Universities Gated Communities?,” Intellectuals and the Academy in Public Life Conference, Brown University, May 2007.

“Rethinking Labor Today,” Center for Latin American Studies Graduate Student Conference, Brown University, April 2007.

“Informal Economies as Economies of Risk,” Society for Economic Anthropology Annual Meeting, Greensboro, NC, April 2007.

“New Movements New Spaces: Political Mobilization in the Age of Empire,” Movements of Empire Session (co-organizer), American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., December 2005.

“Talking Trash: Discourse and Crime at a Brazilian Garbage Dump,” New England Center for Latin American Studies Annual Meeting, Bowdoin College, October 2005.

TEACHING

Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University, completion of Teaching Certificate I (2008), II (2010), III (2010)
2007-2010

I have completed three year-long certificate programs offered through the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University. These programs provide training in reflexive teaching practice, pedagogical tools such as use of technology in the classroom, and course design oriented towards the inclusion of different learning styles.

Teaching Assistant, U.S. Culture, Brown University (Dr. Nicholas Townsend)
Spring 2006

My responsibilities included creating and maintaining the course website that included an online discussion page that students used to reflect on readings prior to class meetings and post materials relevant to the course, periodically leading class meetings, and providing an alternative design for the course in future semesters.

Teaching Assistant, Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Brown U (Dr. Matthew Gutmann)
Fall 2005

My responsibilities included teaching a discussion section of 25 students, evaluating papers and exams, meeting with students on paper topics and final projects, and giving a guest lecture.

Teaching Assistant, Violence and the Media, Brown University, (Dr. Kay Warren)
Spring 2005

My responsibilities included evaluating and providing in-depth comments on the papers of 50 students throughout the semester. I also held office hours, meeting with students who had questions about their papers or wished to improve their writing in the future.

Invited lecture, "The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil," for the course Culture and Health, Brown University, (Dr. Sherine Hamdy), Fall 2010

Invited lectures, "Informal Recycling in Latin America," for the course Latin American Politics, Brown University, (Dr. Richard Snyder), Spring 2010

Invited lecture, "The Catholic Worker Movement," for the course Anthropology and Utopia, Brown University, (Dr. Nicholas Townsend), Fall 2009

Invited lecture, "Behind the Scenes: Anthropological Fieldwork as Process," for the course Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Brown University, (Dr. Daniel Smith), Spring 2008

Invited lecture, "Working in the Shadows: A Different Kind of Story," for the course War and Society, Brown University, (Catherine Lutz), Spring 2007

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & SERVICE

Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Graduate Student Liaison, Brown University
2010-2011

My responsibilities in this role include communicating departmental teaching needs to the Center, contributing to the Teaching Assistant Orientation that the Center hosts each fall, and participating in meetings to discuss particular issues related to teaching development for graduate students.

Academic Coordinator, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies
2009-2010

Unusual for a graduate student to have this position, I was asked by Dr. Matthew Gutmann, the director of the Center, to assist him with the undergraduate program and grant writing. My responsibilities included designing a senior capstone course in Latin American Studies, leading a student thesis-writing group, and writing the Center's \$1.6 million grant application for Title VI funding from the Department of Education.

Visiting Scholar, Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, June-August
2007

As an invited visiting scholar, I conducted fieldwork on landfills in Durban and Johannesburg relevant to on-going research at UKZN, collaborated on research projects on environmental movements in South Africa, participated in seminars at the Centre for Civil Society and the School of Development Studies and gave a lecture on my comparative study of informal recycling in Brazil and South Africa.

Graduate Student Council, Anthropology Representative, Brown University
2007-2008

This duty consisted of attending monthly Graduate Student Council meetings and providing graduate students in the Anthropology Department with information and guidance on relevant issues pertaining to graduate education at Brown University, such as changes in funding or graduate assistantships.

Member of the editorial board for the journal *After Culture*
2006- 2008

Research Assistant for Dr. Catherine Lutz and Dr. Matthew Gutmann,
2006-2007

“Conduct and Discipline in UN Peacekeeping Operations,” Watson Institute for International
Studies, Brown University

My contribution to this project involved conducting a comparative analysis of the discourse
surrounding UN conduct and discipline problems in UN documents, press articles (in both the
U.S. and internationally), NGO reports, and academic studies with a focus on UN missions in
Haiti and Lebanon.

Co-organizer, “Anthropology, Art, Activism” speaker-series, Brown University
2005-2006

In collaboration with four other graduate students in the Anthropology Department, I raised
funds from the Herbert H. Goldberger Lectureship Fund and other departments at Brown
University and organized a year-long lecture series that invited eleven anthropologists and
activists to discuss their work in challenging boundaries between academia, advocacy and
activism.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Anthropological Association
Brazilian Studies Association
Latin American Studies Association
Society for Economic Anthropology
Society for the Anthropology of Work

LANGUAGES

English (native)
Portuguese (near native)
Spanish (fluent)

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I first want to thank the *catadores* of Jardim Gramacho who shared their lives and stories with me and who generously took me under their care as a “novice” on the dump. Ana Carla, Ana Claudia, Jó, Ninho, João, Carlos, Jaqueline, Funabem, and Zumbi, in particular, patiently taught me how to select material, how to carry a heavy sack on my shoulder, how to find a spot in the staging area, and most importantly, how to avoid being hit by the trucks and tractors. They kept me alive and sane as I struggled to learn the work of a catadora. I also thank the numerous catadores on the dump whom I never came to know, but who tossed me cardboard boxes or plastic bottles when I was feeling most exhausted and dispirited. The gift of each box that fell at my feet became a reminder that so many catadores, not only those who appear in the following pages, supported and contributed to this ethnography.

Tião was the first person I met in Jardim Gramacho and my fieldwork would not have been possible without his belief in this project, his help, and the generosity of his extended family. Tião arranged a place for me to stay on my first research visit in 2005 and has provided continual support and encouragement. I lived with his sister, Glória, for a month when I visited in January 2007 and for three months in 2008 until I was able to find a place of my own. It is impossible to state all the ways that Glória has contributed to this project, including hundreds of long conversations in the evenings when she listened to my ideas and challenged my thinking. I am eternally grateful for her friendship.

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management company that owns the dump in Jardim Gramacho. Comlurb granted me access to the dump and allowed me to collect with catadores despite not always agreeing with my emphasis on participant-observation in ethnographic research. I thank Comlurb for trusting me and for respecting my research and its strange methodology. I also want to thank Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva in the Sociology Department at the Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ) for providing me with an institutional affiliation and with guidance in my research, and Federico Neiburg for inviting me to participate in seminars organized by the Núcleo de Pesquisas em Cultura e Economia in the Anthropology Department at the Museu Nacional.

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university life run smoothly but more importantly, they provided much encouragement and emotional support along the way. I owe many successes to Kathy Grimaldi's "magic wand," and am thankful for the ways their compassion and kindness have created an ethos of community and collaboration in the department.

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INTRODUCTION

I came to Jardim Gramacho the way almost everyone does – by word of mouth. Paulo¹ told me about the place on the day I met him while wandering the streets of Rio de Janeiro. I saw him from across a wide avenue, hunched over, methodically pulling a cart laden with flattened cardboard boxes. A flag pinned to the back of his cart caught my eye. Bright green with a simple black drawing of a cart at its center, I recognized it as the flag of Brazil's national movement of *catadores*. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands across urban Brazil, catadores make their living collecting and selling recyclable materials that they retrieve from garbage bags or garbage dumps. I was in my first year of graduate studies in anthropology at the time and was intrigued by the political mobilization that had recently sprung up around this type of work. I crossed the street.

“If you are interested in the movement here,” Paulo told me, “you should also meet the catadores from Gramacho, Jardim Gramacho. I think they might be going to that meeting in the south, in Porto Alegre.”

I assumed Paulo was referring to the World Social Forum that was to take place in Porto Alegre in a few weeks. I asked him how to get to Jardim Gramacho and received only “Duque de Caxias” as an answer. This meant nothing to me. I spent the two years prior to graduate school in the relatively small, inland city of Passo Fundo in the far south of Brazil, and had previously only been to Rio once for three or four days. I was still

unfamiliar with the center of the city, let alone its environs. Only later would I learn that few *cariocas*, natives of Rio, know of Jardim Gramacho or its location.

I decided that a taxi was my best option and eventually found a driver who knew where I wanted to go. “I live there, well, in Gramacho, on the other side of the highway Washington Luis,” he told me.

We wove through traffic in downtown Rio, passed the main intercity bus station, and then merged onto Avenida Brasil. The urban landscape changed. A multitude of buses clogged the side lanes, as they paused momentarily to let passengers on and off. Food stands and pedestrians clustered at these points and at the base of foot bridges that spanned the busy highway every kilometer or so. Dense red brick houses, some of them piled three stories high, lined the road on both sides. At times, it was possible to catch a glimpse down one of the narrow streets that led off the main highway and into the thick of these neighborhoods. Car factories, furniture factories, textile factories, cigarette factories, and factories I failed to identify as we raced by, became increasingly numerous. As we merged onto Washington Luis from Avenida Brasil – thus crossing from the city of Rio de Janeiro to the city of Duque de Caxias, as I would later learn – cheap motels interspersed the industrial warehouses and a few roadside *churrascarias*, restaurants serving all-you-can-eat grilled meats.

We pulled off the highway onto a dusty road, following a lumbering eighteen-wheeler truck with an orange trailer and the words *Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro*, “The City of Rio de Janeiro,” written on the cab. The truck rocked clumsily on spots of uneven pavement, making brutal sounds of stressed metal and engine as it pounded through the street, sounds that would keep me up at night during the first few weeks that I was

eventually to live in Jardim Gramacho. We drove by warehouses, homes, corner bars, a grocer, chicken shop, bakery, and several evangelical churches. Children wearing public school uniforms chased each other. In front of a bar, several young guys gathered around a juke box that played a music video accompanying the blaring *funk*. A couple pigs roamed at the edge of the sidewalk. Coming from the opposite direction, a flat-bed truck passed us, stacked with bundles of crushed plastic bottles. Another truck followed, but this one carried a dozen or more burlap sacks filled with what looked like white paper. On top of and in between these stuffed sacks, sat several men and women, all wearing tattered orange or yellow vests. Some of these riders seemed half asleep, but others shouted boisterously to acquaintances below. I began to notice many people on the sides of the streets, wearing these same vests and carrying bundles of burlap sacks or large plastic containers on top of their heads. The dust had now thickened into a haze, making the scenes to my left and right seem like photographs developed with a brush effect.

I was so transfixed by all this activity that I did not even notice the reddish-brown mountain rising up in front of me, nor the sign at the end of the road that read, “The Metropolitan Landfill of Gramacho.”

We stopped at the entrance. A guard approached the taxi and then directed us over to a small, single-story white building that housed administration offices. I spent the next several hours chatting with Jorge, the manager of the dump, and then Tião, the 25-year-old leader of a newly formed Association of Catadores – the association, in fact, was just an idea at the time. I learned in those first conversations that trucks bring 8,000 tons of garbage to Jardim Gramacho every day; that this constitutes most of the waste of 8 million people across the metropolitan area of Rio; that the dump rests on former

mangrove swampland, where locals once caught crabs; that dozens of scrap yards fill the neighborhood of Jardim Gramacho where materials are sorted, bundled, and then sent out again into the world; and that for the last thirty years, hundreds and eventually thousands of catadores² have made their lives reclaiming plastics, paper, cardboard, metals, rubber, and a multitude of other objects that still hold some use-value.

But these details were not what occupied my thoughts on my bus ride back to downtown Rio. Instead, I kept returning to a comment Tião made as he walked with me to the bus stop in the late afternoon. “Catadores often say: ‘Ah, I came here and thought it was a horrible place and I would never stay and that was eight years ago or ten years ago, and here I am to this day.’”

“Why do they stay, then?” I asked.

“Oh, you’ll see. You might leave Jardim Gramacho, but you almost always come back.

An Ethnography of Work

This study is not about garbage, at least not directly or primarily. It is about work. The catadores I came to know in Jardim Gramacho are among millions of laboring poor in cities throughout the world who earn a living as self-employed workers in what anthropologist Keith Hart (1973) first termed the informal economy. Since the 1980s, the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, processes of deindustrialization, increased urbanization, and rising rates of unemployment in many parts of the world have resulted in an expansion of urban labor performed outside conditions of formal employment. Street vending, homeworking, car-watching, beer brewing, hair-braiding,

scavenging, odd construction jobs, domestic work, hustling, sex work, drug dealing and many other kinds of income-generating strategies have become increasingly common forms of work in urban areas. This trend from formal to informal employment has not gone unnoticed. Particularly in the late 1980s and 1990s, a range of studies on the informal economy proliferated. These included studies on the informal economy's definition, scale or growth (Allen 1998; Depres 1990; Noronha 2003; Sethuraman 1976); on formal-informal linkages (Chen 2006; Fyle 1987; Malagutti 2000; Webster 2005); on informal employment as a survival strategy (Hart 1973; Gaughan and Ferman 1987; Lomnitz 1977; Pahl 1984); on informal labor's role within the capitalist system (Castells and Portes 1989; Gerry 1987; Gerry and Birkbeck 1981); on the informal economy's relationship to the state (Cross 1998; de Soto 1989; Tokman 1992); and more recently, on the political organizing potential of informal workers (Datta 2003; Fernández-Kelly and Shefner 2006; Gallin 2001; Itzigsohn 2006).

Yet, this abundant discussion of the informal economy has paid little attention to the experience and meaning of work in these contexts. How are these activities understood by those who perform them? What identities, values, affects, and signs become attached to or emerge from these forms of work? How does work relate to other dimensions of daily life? What social relations and power inequalities are created or recreated through these systems of production? And how might the ways that self-employed or informal laborers experience what they do challenge the very definitions of what constitutes work?

“Work is so overarching in our daily lives,” writes Frederick Gamst in his introduction to cross-cultural studies of work (1995:xi), “that we tend not to see or

contemplate it.” This observation holds true for anthropology as well. On the one hand, studies and conceptualizations of work have been foundational in the history of sociological thought. Durkheim’s understanding of social order and disorder in relation to the division of labor (1984 [1933]), Marx’s emphasis on modes of production as fundamental to social structure and relations (1972 [1932]), and Weber’s interpretation of the emergence of capitalism as a consequence of the spread of a new work ethic, all clearly point – though, of course, in divergent ways – to the role that theories of work have played in theories of social life (1958 [1905]). Certain lines of inquiry within anthropology have followed these traditions, most notably those anthropologists who began, roughly in the 1970s, to turn to questions of political economy (see Lamphere 1986; Meillassoux 1975; Mintz 1985; Nash 1979; Trouillot 1988; Vincent 1982; Wolf 1982). However, despite these foundations in social theory and a Marxist tradition in anthropology (one that has arguably come and gone), the study of work has not played as prominent a role in anthropological thought as, for example, kinship, ethnicity, religion, language, identity, affect, and the body. An understanding of work as fundamental to the human condition has always been present in anthropology, but the direct contemplation of the nature and meaning of work has, more often than not, occurred in the background.

I put questions of work front and center in this study. I am interested in the organization, practices, experiences, relations, and meanings of work in the lives of catadores and what implications this has for our understanding of labor and global capitalism today. Of course, as with all ethnographic research, this inquiry carried me to many other interrelated questions and concerns. I found myself struggling to make sense of macabre stories of injury and death. I was struck by the significance of friendship. I

realized that local understandings of time, play, money, home, and movement were essential in this social world. I began exploring tensions between desire and obligation, and rethinking the meaning of “experience.” This ethnography is about work, but it is also about human suffering, resilience, and political projects forged in brutal conditions of urban poverty.

The Work of Ethnography: Inquiries and Methods

When I first began conducting research in Jardim Gramacho in June 2005, my inquiries focused on the political mobilization that was taking shape on the dump. At the time, Tião and a group of eight other catadores were in the process of forming an association that was named the Associação de Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano de Jardim Gramacho and became known by its acronym, ACAMJG (pronounced *ah-cán-jee*).³ The impetus for creating ACAMJG partly arose out of a concern among catadores that the City of Rio de Janeiro was planning on closing the dump in Jardim Gramacho, which had already reached its projected capacity, and opening a sanitary landfill in Paciência, a neighborhood in the West Zone of Rio. Catadores understood that the closure of the dump in Jardim Gramacho would bring an end to their livelihood. ACAMJG’s first efforts, therefore, consisted of a monthly newsletter to keep catadores on the dump informed of the process, representation of the catadores’ interests at meetings concerning the dump’s closure, and projects to create work alternatives.

As I write, the dump in Jardim Gramacho remains open and ACAMJG has since extended its efforts in other directions, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 7. I mention ACAMJG here at the outset, because the association and many of its members shaped my

initial research in Jardim Gramacho and continued to play key roles throughout my ethnographic fieldwork. When I returned to Jardim Gramacho after my first visit, as Tião predicted I would, I came to explore why some catadores had become active members of the association, while others expressed disinterest in or even disapproval of the movement. I sought an understanding of the process of political mobilization in its early stages and how collective action interrelated with the conditions and social relations of production.

This inquiry spoke to important concerns regarding the possibilities for collective action within informal economies at a time when neoliberal policies worldwide had weakened labor unions and other formal work organizations (Moody 1997). However, as I began to write my MA thesis based on this research, I felt that my focus on organized political action had missed a great deal of the practices, experiences, and meanings of work in the everyday lives of most catadores I came to know in Jardim Gramacho. Furthermore, much of the literature that I had read on catadores in Brazil similarly centered on those catadores who participated in the National Movement of Catadores (MNCR) or were members of recycling cooperatives (Freitas 2005; Gonçalves 2003; Domingues Junior 2003; Kemp and Crivellari 2008; Magera 2003), despite the fact that these catadores represent a small fraction of the roughly half million laboring poor in Brazil who collect recyclables on city streets or atop dumps.

This limited focus is understandable given the public visibility of politically active catadores, the relative ease of accessing and conducting research among catadores who are organized in some kind of cooperative or association, and the significant role that social movements have played in Brazilian politics since the 1980s. It may also be a

consequence of what Philippe Bourgois has called the “imperative to sanitize the vulnerable” in anthropology and other social sciences (1995:15).⁴ In a similar vein, Orin Starn has questioned anthropologists’ choices of studying social movements that meet their “own vision of the right kind of activism” (1999:25). By concentrating in my initial research on the leaders of the association and specifically, on their formally organized political activities, I skirted some of the more painful dimensions of life in Jardim Gramacho, including drug and alcohol addiction and interpersonal violence. My perspective also circumscribed, however inadvertently, what actions and meaning-making among catadores counted as politics.

When I returned to Jardim Gramacho for the third time to conduct a year of ethnographic fieldwork for this project, I shifted my attention to the relationships between work and everyday life. I spent the majority of my time during the first four months collecting alongside catadores on the dump. I started by collecting cardboard, because I found cardboard to be one of the easiest materials to identify. Large boxes tend to fall loosely from unloading trucks; it is not necessary to open up and dig through garbage bags to retrieve cardboard, as is the case when collecting plastics, metals, and paper. When the scrap dealers stopped buying cardboard a couple months after I began my fieldwork, I switched to PET (the plastic found in water and 2-liter soda bottles) and other hard plastics. At the same time, I began collecting *de truta*, slang in Jardim Gramacho for working in a partnership. Collecting *de truta* means that two or more catadores fill the same burlap sacks, sell them jointly, and divide their earnings. I was grateful for my partner, Simone, for teaching me how to distinguish quickly between recyclable and non-recyclable plastics and how to sort the various kinds of plastics that

we collected over the course of a week – a task that I found much more difficult than it may at first seem. She also introduced me to many catadores I may never have come to know well, including several *moradores*, “residents,” catadores who effectively live on top of the dump, only descending as one of them told me, “to buy our drugs, drink, and water.” My partnership with Simone extended far beyond our work together on the dump. Towards the end of my fieldwork, she began assisting me with other aspects of my research, particularly with mapping the neighborhood, helping me collect thousands of GIS waypoints in Jardim Gramacho. On some days, we went up to the dump together and other days, mapped a few streets. We became, as Simone told me, *trutas* in collecting and *trutas* in research.

There were days at the beginning of my fieldwork when all of my energy focused on the physical act of collecting. In order to pay attention to what felt like haphazard pathways of trucks and tractors and simultaneously, to retrieve and carry back to the staging area enough cardboard to fill just one or two burlap sacks, I often hardly spoke to another person. I wondered whether what I was doing had any research value at all. But over time, I realized the significance that the *experience* of work has in the lives of catadores and that my own experiences, however limited, helped my understanding of this process. I also became more comfortable with the work and gradually began chatting with other catadores in the midst of collecting and participating in the numerous social activities that occur on the dump. To truly be present on the dump, meant being active. When catadores asked me why I was collecting and I stumbled through the reasoning behind ethnographic methods in anthropological research, I was often surprised by their responses. In contrast to other more formally educated middle-class Brazilians who often

resisted my explanations about the value of participant-observation as a research method, catadores usually replied without hesitation, “Right. Of course. You can’t really know what it’s like unless you do it.”⁵

I continued to collect and spend time on the dump throughout my fieldwork,⁶ but after several months I began to intersperse these days with other components of my research. I recorded the life histories of twenty-four catadores, conducted interviews with catadores on other topics including oral histories of Jardim Gramacho and ACAMJG, and recorded many of our spontaneous conversations both on and off the dump. I also interviewed scrap dealers, recycling plant owners, truck drivers, waste management personnel, local politicians, and long-time residents of Jardim Gramacho who lived there before trucks began arriving with Rio’s refuse. I visited the homes of catadores, both in Jardim Gramacho and in other neighborhoods of Rio’s metropolitan area; created digital maps of the neighborhood; and attended various kinds of political meetings and congresses involving catadores.

Despite shifting my focus away from formal political organizing, ACAMJG remained a significant dimension of my research. In May 2007, ACAMJG inaugurated the *Pólo*, a recycling center at the edge of Jardim Gramacho consisting of an open-air shed (*galpão*) and a small building with an office, a kitchen, and bathrooms. Roughly 50 catadores who are members of ACAMJG collect their own material on top of the dump, bring it to the *Pólo* to sort, and then sell their material jointly either to recycling plants or large scrap dealers – bypassing the intermediary scrap dealers (*deposistas*) in the neighborhood. Each person receives payment in accordance with the amount of material that they contribute to the total sale. I used the *Pólo* as my own base for collecting: I rode

up to the dump on ACAMJG's truck, brought my material to the Pólo at the end of the day, sorted material there if needed, and contributed what little I managed to collect to ACAMJG's sales each week.⁷ From time to time, I would also help out with day-to-day operations at the Pólo, assisting with the week's accounting, sweeping and cleaning the patio, helping weigh material, and running errands.

As is often the case in ethnographic fieldwork, my research developed much more organically, or even haphazardly, than original grant proposals or final analyses express. Rarely did my days ever proceed as planned. The truck would blow a tire on the way down from the dump and I would miss a scheduled meeting. Simone would show up late in the morning, upset because her son had fought with his wife and been kicked out of the neighborhood, and we would spend the rest of the day trying to resolve this issue. I might come to the Pólo to meet a catador for a life history interview on a Friday and instead, find that a dispute with a buyer had delayed Glória all morning and she needed an extra hand with the weekly accounting in order to make everyone's payments on time. These disruptions, however, often led me to new questions and understandings and into relationships with people I may never have encountered. A few of my most important friendships during fieldwork were with people who did not work as catadores: Dona Hilda who happened to live along a shortcut that I took between my house and the Pólo and who often stopped me on my way to share the latest gossip; my neighbor Boi who shared the same yard (*quintal*) with me and my neighbor Deca who owned a bar in front of my house; and Tía Fátima, the cook at the Pólo whom I affectionately called "aunt" and who would sometimes spend the night at my house to avoid making her long commute home to the neighboring city of Belford Roxo.

Studies of catadores and other reclaimers

The literature on informal recycling as a livelihood is relatively sparse compared to other kinds of “informal” employment of the urban poor, such as street vending and domestic work. However, it is worth mentioning a few classic studies that have become foundational texts in this small sub-field, as well as recent cutting-edge research that is pushing the study of reclaimers in new and important directions.

Larissa Lomnitz was one of the first social scientists to consider the collection and reuse of discarded materials a primary economic activity and survival strategy of the urban poor.⁸ In her study of a Mexican shantytown in the 1970s, she argues that the poor gather what the urban industrial system discards—used clothing, leftover materials from construction sites, and even odd jobs—calling them urban “hunters and gatherers” (1983:96). Lomnitz’s work can be seen as part of a larger literature in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s concerned with questions of marginality in the shantytowns of major cities, built and settled by recently arrived rural migrants. It is within this historical context that other, non-academic accounts of collecting discarded material emerge in Latin America as well, such as Carolina Maria de Jesus’s diary *Quarto de Despejo* (1995[1960]), literally “The Garbage Room,” but translated into English as *Child of the Dark* (1962). In this diary, Carolina Maria de Jesus writes about her everyday struggles to support her children as a single mother living in a favela of São Paulo by collecting paper to resell or by gathering other items for reuse in the household.

As interest in the informal economy expanded in the late 1970s and 1980s, a few scholars began looking in more depth at recycling as a form of self-employment. Rather

than one component of a study on everyday life and survival strategies of urban poor, these studies examined this work directly, considering—often from a Marxist perspective—questions that were being asked of the informal economy more generally, such as how to classify this work, how and to what degree these workers are exploited, and how this sector articulates with the formal economy. Chris Birkbeck’s work on “garbage pickers” on a dump in Cali, Colombia is perhaps the most influential of this literature. Examining conditions and relations of production on the dump, Birkbeck maintains that the collectors are “self-employed proletarians” working for the “factories” of the scrap dealers (1978; see also Birkbeck 1979 and Gerry and Birkbeck 1981).⁹ Other studies in this tradition, many of which draw from or critique Birkbeck’s theories, include Malcolm Blincow’s analysis of informal recycling in multiple cities (1986); Daniel Sicular’s study of “scavengers” in Indonesia (1991; 1992); Martin Medina’s extensive work on “scavengers” on the Laredo US-Mexican border (1997) and his review of literature on this topic worldwide (2007); and more recently, Tamar Diana Wilson’s study of “garbage pickers” in Mexico (2005).¹⁰

In the late 1990s and 2000s, catadores and other reclaimers began to attract more attention from scholars, partly a consequence of the greater political visibility of catadores who began forming cooperatives or joining other organizing efforts at this time. This is especially the case in Brazil. As I previously noted in my discussion of the evolution of my research, by far most studies of catadores in Brazil have focused on the National Movement of Catadores, cooperatives and associations of catadores, and the larger political context of these struggles at both the local and national levels (See again, Domingues Junior 2003; Gonçalves 2003; Kemp and Crivellari 2008; Magera 2003).

These studies have contributed significantly to an understanding of transformations in social movements, environmental politics, and public policy in Brazil in recent years and moreover, have assisted in raising awareness about the work and struggles of catadores in the urban public sphere. A secondary theme has also emerged in this literature concerning urban space and homelessness, as most of these studies examine the work of catadores who, unlike those in Jardim Gramacho, collect on city streets. These studies have explored the social relations of catadores and the residents who live along catadores' routes and with whom the successful catador constructs social ties as a way to consistently receive "donations" of recyclables (Natalino and Eckert 2003). They have also explored the construction of urban space through catadores' routes in the city as well as the experience of many of these catadores as homeless (de Andrade et al. 2008; Escorel 2000; Freitas 2005; Freitas and Neves 2008).

This literature on catadores and other reclaimers is dotted with little in-depth ethnographic work, though this is changing. As part of a vibrant cluster of scholars studying *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires (see Paiva 2008, Schamber and Suárez 2007) two doctoral dissertations, by Débora Gorbán (2009) and Mariano Perelman (2010), present historically contextualized, rich ethnographic accounts that explore questions of morality, subjectivity, experience, and socially-constructed meanings of work in the lives of cartoneros and *cirujas*¹¹. Many of the issues that Gorbán and Perelman address in their studies are particular to the Argentine context. Following the Argentine economic crisis in 2001, many workers lost their jobs and began collecting recyclables for income, swelling the numbers of cartoneros on the streets of Buenos Aires and, as Gorbán and Perelman explore, reconfiguring how this economic activity is seen as work. Though

Gorbán and Perelman study street cartoneros and though they orient their studies to questions of work, worker identity, and worker citizenship in the post-2001 Argentine context, I have found much inspiration in their research and writing. I see my own work here as contributing to an emerging ethnography of reclaimers that they have begun.

Notes on Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to those who collect recyclables in Jardim Gramacho as “catadores.” Literally, this word means “collectors.” It is a shortened form of “*catadores de materiais recicláveis*” (“collectors of recyclable materials”), which is the term adopted and promoted by the MNCR and by many catadores in Jardim Gramacho, though many journalists, politicians, and members of the general public in Brazil continue to refer to catadores as “*catadores de lixo*” (“collectors of garbage”). This term has evolved historically and can vary in different parts of Brazil. Some of the older catadores in Jardim Gramacho spoke about a time when they were called *xepeiros*, a degrading term for a beggar or someone who does odd jobs. The catadores I met in Passo Fundo referred to themselves instead as *papeleiros*, from the root word “paper.” The terms used for this type of work also vary outside of Brazil, in Latin America and other regions of the world. In Buenos Aires alone, for example, those who perform this kind of work have used a range of terms depending on historical moment and context, including *ciruja*, *cartonero*, *recolector*, and *recuperador* (Gorbán 2009:39-40; see also Perelman 2007; 2010:37).

I have chosen to use the Portuguese word “catadores” both because those I met in Jardim Gramacho self-identify with this term, and because it avoids derogatory or

incorrect terms commonly used in English including “scavenger,” “garbage picker,” and “rag picker.” Catadores in Jardim Gramacho call the objects that they collect “material” and distinguish this from the category of “garbage.” These categories sometimes shift depending on the market in recyclables. For example, in October 2008 at the beginning of the global economic crisis, the price of cardboard dropped rapidly over the course of three weeks from 20 cents a kilo to 7 cents. By November, the price became so low that no scrap dealer in Jardim Gramacho was willing to buy cardboard. And so, as catadores commented, “Cardboard became garbage” - “*Virou lixo.*” I therefore find it erroneous to use a term that implies that catadores collect garbage when catadores understand their work as an act of recovering what is valuable from the midst of waste. During an exploratory research trip to a dump in Johannesburg, South Africa, I found that those who perform this work there call themselves “reclaimers.” The concept of reclaiming reflects this same spirit that I found in Jardim Gramacho and inspired the title of my dissertation. However, I felt that if I were to use a term in English that is not widely understood as designating this type of work, then I ought to maintain the term used in the particular context of this study.

A perhaps more controversial linguistic choice is my use of the word “dump” to refer to the waste disposal site in Jardim Gramacho. The official name of the site is the “Metropolitan Landfill (*Aterro*) of Gramacho.” The City of Rio de Janeiro first began unloading waste into Jardim Gramacho’s mangrove swamp in 1978 without first building impermeable lined cells that help prevent leachate from contaminating the ground water and which is now considered by Brazilian law to be a necessary requirement for the designation of a sanitary landfill. In the 1980s, COMLURB (Companhia Municipal de

Limpeza Urbana), the City of Rio's semi-public waste management company, citing a lack of sufficient funds, stopped systematically covering deposited waste daily with a layer of soil (Nascimento et al 2008). Furthermore, without a piping system to trap and burn off methane gas from beneath the surface of the dump, fires erupted frequently. In 1996, Comlurb sub-contracted the company Queiroz-Galvão to recuperate the site and today, there is a clear perimeter to the site, waste is covered daily, and pipes burn off methane gas. However, because this site was not initially lined (and also because people collect materials on the site), Brazilian law designates that the waste disposal site in Jardim Gramacho is not a "sanitary landfill," but a "controlled landfill."¹²

More importantly, I almost never heard catadores refer to the site as a "landfill." They either called it the *lixão*, garbage dump, or *rampa*. The word *rampa* literally means slope and usually refers to the specific area within the dump's one million square meters where waste is currently being unloaded. For example, the management of the dump shifts this area every few days to a different spot in order to evenly distribute the waste, and when this happens, catadores will say that "the *rampa* moved." The diminutive form of the word, *rampinha*, refers to the area where small, compactor trucks unload, and the superlative form, *rampão*, designates the area where the massive semi-trailers, which come from transfer stations, deposit their waste. For catadores, then, the whole waste disposal site is a *lixão* and the unloading grounds comprise the *rampa*.

I find it meaningful that catadores refer to their place of work as a garbage dump, but the objects that they collect "material," in contradistinction to garbage. The word landfill euphemizes a place that, as I discuss in the following chapter, catadores often call "pure suffering." Despite passing below a sign reading "Metropolitan Landfill" every day

that they work, catadores continue to call the place a dump. In doing so, they refrain from participating in the sanitizing work that the word *landfill* does to hide the refuse, decay, and environmental degradation that are consequences of capitalist consumption and social inequalities, and which catadores palpably experience in their everyday lives. I have chosen to maintain the terms – *catadores* (or more fully, *catadores de materiais recicláveis*) and *dump* – to be faithful to the language that catadores use and to affirm its implicit critiques.

Overview of the Chapters

I have organized this dissertation into seven chapters. The first two introduce the theoretical and ethnographic context of the study. In Chapter One, I take catadores' contradictory interpretations of their work as simultaneously “pure suffering” and “liberation” as a point of departure in my analysis. I see this tension as a way to understand how neoliberal capitalism has deepened social inequalities and eroded the livelihoods of many workers worldwide, while enabling new subjectivities, values, and political practices to emerge. I then present three overarching theoretical insights that guide my analysis throughout the dissertation, situating my arguments in conversation with the political economy of Brazil, conceptual approaches to the informal economy, studies of urban poverty, and the anthropology of work. Chapter Two provides historical and geographic background of the fieldsite. More importantly, however, this history illustrates how Jardim Gramacho has played an integral role in the urban development of Rio, in the politics of the city, and in the expansion of national and global economies. I take issue in this chapter with the renewed use of the terms *marginality* and *social*

exclusion in studies of urban poverty, arguing that they mask processes of place-making and fail to conceptualize how seemingly peripheral places play central roles in local and global power relations.

Five ethnographic chapters then follow. Chapter Three considers questions of power. I explore how the liminality of the dump – situated between different economic processes, moralities, and realms of value – leads to contestations over the actions of catadores as work. I argue that the waste management company attempts to discipline catadores into adopting behaviors and structures deemed appropriate for a “profession.” Scrap dealers also seek to discipline catadores. However, their efforts focus not on professionalism but rather on employment, striving to exert power over catadores as disguised employees whose collected materials rightfully belong to the scrap yard. Evading these tactics and forms of control, catadores assert an alternative interpretation of what constitutes work and what it means to be a worker. This chapter also provides an overview of the various actors – catadores, scrap dealers, waste management personnel, social workers, guards, drug traffickers, and residents – who constitute the social field of Jardim Gramacho.

The next three chapters examine the relationships between work, play, home, and social life. Chapter Four explores the life trajectories of catadores. I focus on moments of transition and rupture in catadores’ lives that accompany shifts in their employment, such as leaving the dump to sell purses with a neighbor or returning to the dump after quitting a job as a domestic worker. I argue that these shifts cannot be understood primarily in economic terms: the pursuit of a higher paying job or stable employment. Rather, an emphasis on the desire for autonomy and the inability to “adapt” to the structures of

waged employment arise frequently in the narratives of catadores. This suggests that the circulation between jobs is both a consequence of and a way of negotiating the precarity of life in Rio's urban periphery. In Chapter Five, I shift my attention to money: to what catadores do with the income acquired from their work and how they understand their spending practices. This inquiry leads me to explore the wider social relations of obligation and debt in Jardim Gramacho, as well as moralities critiquing the accumulation of wealth and the valorization of work as an end in and of itself. Chapter Six moves my analysis beyond the dump, examining the carnival experience of a group of catadores from Jardim Gramacho, whom I accompanied as they collected discarded cans and bottles on the streets of Rio's wealthy South Zone during the 2009 carnival street parades. I examine how the practices and commentary of catadores collecting during the parades reveal another side of Brazil's carnival that calls into question the assumed divide of carnival-play on the one hand and everyday life-work on the other. This leads me to consider in the second half of the chapter not only how work is constituent of carnival, but also how play is an integral part of the everyday labor of catadores on the dump. I show how catadores have reconfigured relationships between workplace and home, and between labor and leisure.

Chapter Seven addresses the politics of labor directly. I examine why three different cooperatives in Jardim Gramacho – each with its own history, method of mobilization, and organizational form – have all failed to gain widespread participation among catadores. I argue that the lived experience of autonomy on the dump has led many catadores to avoid institutionalization of their work. However, more anarchic forms of cooperation and collective action have flourished on the dump, including work

partnerships, the teaching of novice catadores, the sharing of work vests, and coordinated efforts to load and unload materials onto scrap yard trucks. I argue that such practices constitute an everyday class politics often missed by studies focusing on unions, cooperatives, and organized social movements.

Drawing from findings in each of my chapters, I conclude the dissertation by suggesting that an anarchic spirit imbues the practices of catadores. This is not an overt, ideological *anarchism*. Rather, I understand the practices of catadores as an orientation to the world that evades disciplinary structures, values autonomy, often privileges play over work, integrates work and non-work activities into the flow of everyday life, and pursues a politics resistant to processes of institutionalization. Global economic transformations in recent years have brought about new configurations of labor, especially in conditions of urban poverty. The stories of catadores manifest how these transformations have also brought about new subjectivities, new values, and new meanings of work.

Notes

¹ With the exception of individuals who voluntarily requested that I use their names or nicknames, the names of individuals have been changed to protect their anonymity.

² Roughly 40 percent of catadores who work in Jardim Gramacho are women and 60 percent men. In this way, work on the dump is rather unique compared to other types of informal employment usually held to be the domain *either* of women or men (for example, beer brewing, hair-braiding, sex work, and domestic work are often perceived as women's labor and construction jobs, car-watching, hustling, and drug trafficking deemed men's labor). At different points throughout the dissertation, I examine how women and men experience and give meaning to the same work on the dump in divergent ways. These differences reveal how class and gender inequalities and ideologies are co-constituted in the lives of catadores.

³ ACAMJG was the second organization of catadores to form in Jardim Gramacho. In November 1996, a cooperative of catadores named Coopergramacho was founded, initiated and assisted by social workers hired by the company managing the dump. I discuss the history of Coopergramacho in more detail in Chapters 3 and 7.

⁴ Here, Philippe Bourgois (1995) is referring specifically to a US context in which popular interpretations of the "culture of poverty" thesis, a strong belief in individualism and upward mobility, and a tendency to blame the poor for their own poverty, have led ethnographers to shy away from studies of urban poverty in

the United States. The fear is that an ethnography that seeks to understand the lives of urban poor, which include social suffering and violence, might contribute to negative representations of the poor and therefore further social marginalization. Though these issues are especially heightened for US anthropologists conducting ethnography in the US, they also apply to studies of other societies. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, for example, notes that her thesis on (m)other love (that the actions of poor women in the Northeast of Brazil sometimes aid in the deaths of their infants) sparked a heated controversy among US and Brazilian academic audiences (1992:340, note 1).

⁵ In Chapter 4, I discuss how *experience* emerges as an important theme in the ways catadores understand and narrate their entries into and adaptations to the work on the dump. I see their recognition of participant-observation as a valid, if not necessary, method of coming to know the dump as resonating with the emphasis catadores place upon experience in their own accounts of becoming a catador.

⁶ In February 2009, roughly six months into my fieldwork, the manager of the Metropolitan Landfill of Gramacho temporarily revoked my access to the dump. I describe part of this story at the beginning of Chapter 3. This incident occurred on the first day that the manager visited the top of the dump at the same time that I was working. Though I had explained the ethnographic research methods that I intended to conduct and he had agreed to allow me to collect alongside catadores, he expressed concern for my safety. Following this incident, I worked out an agreement with him in which I was allowed to return to the dump at liberty and participate in all activities with the exception of collecting material.

⁷ Glória, who handles all the finances at the Pólo, insisted on paying me my first week, arguing that payment was an important part of the experience of working as a catador. I received R\$57 for the 335 kilos of cardboard that I collected during two days on the dump. After this week, I contributed what little cardboard I collected to the ACAMJG's total sale of cardboard. When I began working with Simone, she received payment for what we collected together.

⁸ This is not to say that the collection of discarded material has not been a long part of human history, but only that this work became a salient topic of research for scholars of urban poverty in the 1960s and 1970s. For a brief history of reclaiming, see Medina 2007:16-48.

⁹ For a fuller discussion of Birkbeck's analysis, see Chapter 3.

¹⁰ There are a couple accounts of reclaimers in Mexico (*pepenadores*) that do not fit easily into this tradition of literature, because they are concerned more with the local politics of waste management in Mexico City involving city bosses or *caciques* (see Castillo 1990; Guillermprieto 1995).

¹¹ The terminology of *cartonero* versus *ciruja* has been a matter of debate in the Argentine literature (see Gorbán 2009:68; Perelman 2007, 2010:37).

¹² These designations are relevant for federal and state environmental legislation and regulation. If *municípios* do not comply with standards outlined in federal and state environmental laws, the city governments can be fined. For more information on the evolution of environmental legislation in Brazil and city compliance, see Grippi 2006.

CHAPTER 1

RECLAIMING THE DISCARDED: WORK IN THE TIME OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

*We are poor, and we live on the banks of the river.
The river banks are places for garbage and the marginal people.
People of the favelas are considered marginals. No more do you see
buzzards flying the river banks near the garbage.
The unemployed have taken the buzzards' place.*

- Carolina Maria de Jesus, 1960

The dump may not be beautiful, but there we have found refuge.

- MC Riquinho, *Rap do Lixão*, Rap of the Dump

A First Day

One Monday in October, I cracked. *Quebrei*. I had been collecting material on the dump for nearly two months, which was plenty of time to have experienced most of the challenges that the garbage brings. I had worked under the pouring rain, carrying sacks on my head, heavy with the weight of soaked cardboard, trudging through eight inches of mud. I had endured the heat from above as the relentless sun baked the surface of the dump and the heat from below, produced by the gases of rotting refuse. If it is 96°F at the base of dump, it is 104° at the top of the mountain of trash. There is, of course, no shade—not a single tree or building casts a shadow. Nor is there any source of water, which must be carried every day along with food, sacks for collection, and all other supplies. The dump is a desert.

In those first two months, I had also learned to deal with vulnerability. Even after becoming familiar with the rhythm of the trucks and bulldozers on the dump, there were

times when I had to scramble to avoid the path of a moving vehicle. Injuries occur daily on the dump. An elderly man beside me was hit in the head by a thrown stick of wood from construction debris. Blood streamed down his face until another catador shook “clean” a piece of cloth to bandage his wound. Simone and I worked to extract something from the sole of her worn boot, and pulled out a piece of used needle. Above all else, I experienced pure, flattening exhaustion. At first I thought the fatigue I felt, which seemed to settle deep into the bone, was due to my being a novice on the dump, unused to the weight and the bending over for so many hours each day, to having to be quick on my feet, and to expending every last bit of mental energy in remaining alert to the movement around me. But then one afternoon, João, who has worked on the dump for decades, sat down beside me and said, “It hurts, right? Your whole body is stiff and aches in the morning and you wonder if you will even be able to move to lift yourself out of bed, no?” The work, it appeared, would never get any easier.

I still do not know why, after two months of managing the rain and the heat and the weight and the exhaustion, I found one Monday to be difficult beyond bearing. I woke that day at 4:30 a.m., which felt like 3:30 because daylight savings time had started the night before. I walked in the dark to the association’s center in order to pick up burlap sacks that Simone, my work partner (*minha truta*), and I stored there. I waited for Simone for a half hour, swatting the mosquitoes that were still out in droves in the early dawn. “The bus was late and the traffic already horrible,” Simone grumbled when she arrived. She quickly changed into her work clothes, while I rolled up our burlap sacks and stuffed them into two plastic barrels, as Simone had taught me to do. Carefully placing the barrels atop our heads, we made our way to the dump, pausing only once and briefly to

stare at the site of dozens of vultures pecking the carcass of a dead horse on the side of the dirt path. Just as we came to the dump's entrance, Simone's sixteen-year-old son ran up to us. He told us that he was leaving the dump because he had gotten into a fight with another catador whom he accused of having stolen one of his full burlap sacks. The drug dealers were called to the dump to resolve the dispute and he left for fear that he would be beaten up or worse. Simone urged him to go home and we continued on our way. I could feel the tension in Simone's arm, as she helped me jump onto a slowly moving truck heading to the top of the dump. A few moments passed in silence and then Simone turned to me. "Do you have another cigarette?" she asked. I handed over the pack.

We collected the whole day with few breaks. Simone needed to pay an overdue credit card bill by the end of the week, which added pressure to keep working no matter how tired we were becoming. Around nine o'clock, it started to rain, and the mud made walking more difficult and our sacks heavier. I had brought a leftover container of rice, beans, and a few pieces of fried chicken, but we ate little, as the pouring rain quickly turned our lunch to mush. Towards the end of the afternoon, exhausted after ten hours on the dump, I bent down to lift a bag full of plastics and metal cans onto my head to carry back to the large burlap sacks that we had been gradually filling all day. As I started to walk, striving to balance in the uneven mud, I failed to see a chunk of stone with a piece of iron sticking out from it. I tripped on the iron and fell to the ground. The weight of my bag collapsed on top of me.

Simone and I stopped collecting around 6 p.m. and waited for the truck to take our material to the association and sort it there. The wait stretched to an hour in the rain, and we debated what to do. Deciding that we were too tired for the mile walk to the

association, we continued to wait. When the truck finally arrived, we loaded up our material, climbed onto the back of the truck and started down the dump. On the way, the truck blew a tire on a piece of protruding metal in the mud. We knew that it would take hours before Seu Antônio, the truck driver, would be able to get another tire, so we reluctantly jumped off the truck and walked the mile to the association in the rain and by now, the darkness. On one deserted stretch of the road to the association, which cut through the remaining swampland (*mangue*) beyond the “little *favela*” at the edge of Jardim Gramacho, we noticed a man who was stumbling a few feet in front of us. Simone suggested that we keep our distance, since we could not make out who this person was in the darkness. And so we slowed down our pace and the walk seemed to extend indefinitely. It was difficult to see the deep puddles in the dim light of the moon and many times, my boot sank into a pool of water and filled with pebbles and debris. At one point, I thought that I no longer had the energy to keep walking. I stopped, sat down in the mud, and cried for the first time in two months.

The following day, over a shared bottle of beer, Glória—whose house I was presently staying at—said to me: “Yesterday you had your first day in Jardim Gramacho.”

“What?” I responded, assuming I had not heard her correctly, since I had spent several months in Jardim Gramacho by that point.

“Your first day,” she repeated, “You had your first day in Jardim Gramacho.”

Noting the confused look on my face, she continued, “When I saw you arrive last night, I took one look at you and I knew that you had had one of those days when nothing goes right, when everything seems too much to bear, when you work all day in the rain

and the truck breaks down and you have to walk home exhausted, and all you can think about is everything you have to do when you get home—wash your clothes, make dinner, prepare your backpack for the following day, take care of your kids, you know, in my case—and you think about how you will have to get up at dawn just a few hours later to face another day on the dump and you begin to cry, thinking that you just can't do it anymore. And then you ask: God, what did I do to deserve this? You sit down in the mud, exhausted, and you ask: What did I ever do to deserve this?"

In the months that followed and especially as I began the process of writing this dissertation, I returned many times to the fieldnotes I had written on that day. Glória's comment that I had had my "first day" in Jardim Gramacho perplexed me when she said it, and it continues to make me pause. One of the first people I met in Jardim Gramacho, Glória became my closest friend there. I stayed with her and her daughter for a month during a visit in 2007, and I lived with her again for two months at the beginning of my dissertation fieldwork until I found a place of my own. Glória is one of the smartest, strongest, most spirited people I have ever met. She began working on the dump when she was eleven years old and today, with no formal training, almost singlehandedly administers the finances and daily operations of the Association's cooperative. Though Glória's sometimes loud and abrasive behavior (much, I thought, a consequence of being the only woman in the otherwise completely male-dominated leadership of the Association) drew criticisms both within the Association and in Jardim Gramacho more broadly, I knew her to be deeply perceptive, intuitive, and reflexive. She liked to contemplate and discuss the social context of her life and the relationships around her,

which always made me think of her as a born anthropologist. “You know what I would study if I were you,” she told me the night I arrived at her house. “I would study how there is a culture of tolerance in Jardim Gramacho, how there aren’t the same social rules as in other places, how everything and anything is accepted.” In many ways, this question is very much what this dissertation is about.

Given this intellectual bent, I knew that Glória had chosen her words carefully, and I came to think of her statement about my “first day” as having three levels of meaning. That Monday in October was a first day in that how I experienced and reacted to the dump resonated with many catadores’ narratives of their own initiation into work on the dump. Most catadores came to Jardim Gramacho from other parts of the city and did not necessarily know anything about the dump before they arrived. In some cases, they did not even know that they were going to a dump. A friend had simply said, “There’s this place where you can make some money. Here, I’ll take you.” When I asked catadores, “So, what did you think of the dump when you first arrived?” nearly everyone responded that they did not know what to think, were shocked (“*me estranhei*”), cried, could not eat for the rest of the day, thought they would never stay there, and found the work so difficult that they hardly filled a single burlap sack. “But then I got used to it (*me acostumei*),” many catadores added. My day in October was a day of a *novata*, a novice. Over time, though the sun remained intense, the burlap sacks did not lighten, and I did occasionally see accidents, I learned how to best carry material, how to distinguish through touch and smell which bags to open and which to leave alone, how to time the movement of the tractors and trucks, and when to ask for help and when to rest. Once,

after Simone recounted a particularly gruesome story about her day on the dump, I stared at her in silence.

“What? What is it?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s just... a lot,” I replied.

“But it’s normal, Kathleen, completely normal.”

I gradually began to see it like that.

Glória’s statement about my “first day” could also be read as my first *real* day. In describing “one of those days when nothing goes right,” Glória connected her observations of my demeanor and exhaustion when I arrived at her home that night to her own hard experiences on the dump. It was not that the experiences I had in my small attempts to live up to the ethnographic method of participant-observation were in any way commensurate to Glória’s experiences of years of helping her parents and seven siblings and then caring for her own child as a single mother by working as a catadora. Rather, I took it to be a moment of connection with her, as something important to pay attention to, much like the time I put aside a knapsack I found in the garbage and drew the attention and approving comments of catadores around me, or the first time I ate food found and cooked on the dump (called *podrão*¹ by catadores) and was subsequently introduced as the “one who ate *podrão* with us.” If the day that I broke down and cried in the mud was my first *real* day in Jardim Gramacho, then what it means to truly be *in* Jardim Gramacho is, at least in part, to suffer.

Following from this, I understand “first” in the sense of primacy, in that recognizing the suffering of the dump must come first in any meaningful research, writing, or reading about the work and lives of catadores. Yet, I hesitated to begin, as I do

in the pages that follow, with a discussion of aspects of the dump that catadores call “pure suffering.” Usually, the first reaction to the idea of people walking through garbage, collecting—including, as we saw above, the first reaction of most catadores working in Jardim Gramacho— is one of shock, disgust, and horror. This reaction immediately casts those who do this work in the mold of the victim, and prohibits us from seeing the place as anything but a place of garbage and the work there as anything other than mere survival. The last thing I want to do in my writing on Jardim Gramacho is magnify this response.

I have worried a great deal about issues of representation in this project. For a long time I was (and in certain cases remain) deeply critical of those who take photographs of catadores collecting on the dump. In large part, this photographing has been conducted by journalists, though two renowned artists, Marcos Prado and Vic Muniz, have also created photographic projects of Jardim Gramacho. Several times I witnessed journalists arrive in Jardim Gramacho and immediately pull out their cameras, as catadores threw up their arms to hide their faces. However, this failure to treat catadores with respect, to speak to them and ask their permission before photographing, did not occur in all incidents and certainly not in Prado’s and Muniz’s projects. Rather, what has bothered me is, as Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg write in their reflections on their photoethnography of heroine addicts, the risk of trusting “raw images of marginalization, suffering, and addiction to an often judgmental public” (2009:14). I would add to this the risk of reifying and reproducing the suffering of those presented in the photographs in what a fellow graduate student once called “poverty porn.”² Ethnography, however, is not that different from photography. Both are representations

and both in Jardim Gramacho are usually created by outside observers – the anthropologist, the journalist, the artist. My concerns over photography in Jardim Gramacho emerged from concerns over my own work. What images of suffering and images of humanity am I etching with the words I write? What potential violence do these images do to the full persons with full lives whom I came to know in a place catadores often call by its shortened name, *O Jardim* – the Gardens? What parts of Jardim Gramacho get pushed to the edges or altogether left outside the picture’s frame?

Of course, these issues of representation are not at all new in the discipline of anthropology. “Not to look, not to touch, not to record, can be the hostile act, the act of indifference and of turning away,” Nancy Scheper-Hughes boldly wrote nearly two decades ago, arguing for a “good-enough ethnography” in her account of infant death and mother love in the Northeast of Brazil (1992). But, as the numerous ethnographies that have continued to reflect upon the politics of representation so clearly illustrate (see, for example, Behar 1996:1-33; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:12-15; Goldstein 2003:42-45), what it means to do a good-enough ethnography always depends upon the context at hand. How to look, touch, and record must be weighed in each distinct ethnographic encounter. And so we keep returning to the same questions even if they will never lead us to an easy or final exit from this ethnographic double bind. As Bourgois and Schonberg remind us, ethnography by its very nature will always be “torn between objectifying and humanizing; exploiting and giving voice; propagandizing and documenting injustice; stigmatizing and revealing; fomenting voyeurism and promoting empathy; stereotyping and analyzing” (2009:15).

In this chapter, I introduce the dump and the work of reclaiming recyclables by presenting ways that catadores themselves perceive the *rampa*, literally meaning “slope,” the name they most often use to refer to the dump. I argue that contradictions found in catadores’ interpretations of the *rampa* reveal contradictions in the meaning of work for many laboring poor in today’s current form of capitalism. To introduce the dump in this way means that I begin with some of the more grotesque and painful aspects of Jardim Gramacho. Moreover, I have tried to follow what I believe Glória was trying to teach me about my “first day.” I trust her wisdom that to understand Jardim Gramacho, you first have to understand its suffering.

The Side of Pain

“The dump has a good side and the dump also has a bad side,” Simone told me. I struggled for a long time to make sense of this contradiction—not resolve it, but understand it. On the one hand, I frequently heard catadores refer to the dump as “pure suffering” and “hell.” Seu Carlão, a rather eccentric catador who had worked on the dump for over twenty years, would spontaneously shout over the tractors and garbage trucks, “Pay to enter and pray to leave!” (*Pague para entrar. Reze para sair*), an expression taken from the Portuguese-translated title of the 1981 horror film *The Funhouse*. Yet, the very same catadores who in one moment referred to the dump as hell, in another described it as a blessing, as a kind of refuge, and as a place of freedom and fun (*distrainção*).

Much like Glória’s above description of a hard day, the declarations that the dump is pure suffering and hell begin to express the everyday struggle, or *luta*, of working as a

catador. Most catadores arrive on the dump by 6 a.m. in order to collect for several hours before the sun becomes unbearably intense, or they work at night with a flashlight under their chin, a light attached to a headpiece, or with no light at all. In order not to interfere with the traffic and operations of waste disposal, catadores must keep their burlap sacks behind a line marked by the management of the dump that is roughly 50 meters from the area where trucks are unloading their garbage. Catadores use a plastic bag or barrel to collect material in the unloading area and then carry it back to their burlap sacks. These trips back and forth between the garbage and the burlap sacks are treks through thick mud and uneven ground. Catadores work quickly and closely to the unloading garbage trucks in order to collect as much material as possible before the tractor comes moments later to bulldoze the pile. At the end of the day or in the early morning, trucks from the scrap yards arrive on the dump and catadores lift their sacks, which can weigh up to 800 pounds, onto the flatbeds. This usually requires three or four catadores on the ground lifting the sack and two catadores on top of the truck pulling the sack upward. Catadores work in the sun and rain with no shelter aside from beach umbrellas that they sometimes find in the garbage and stick into the tops of filled sacks. They breathe the fumes from pipes that collect and burn off methane gas produced from the decomposing garbage beneath them. And they spend hours bending over, racing to avoid the vehicular traffic, and carrying heavy loads.

Despite these working conditions, few catadores I knew complained in spontaneous conversations of their own specific aches, fatigue, injuries, and fears endured while working on the dump. If I asked directly about personal injury, nearly everyone immediately recounted an incident, sometimes pulling down a sock or lifting a

sleeve to show me a scar. And, as João and Glória had done on my “first day” on the dump, many catadores told me of their own fatigue, frustrations, and tears as, or so I understood them to be, gifts of encouragement. More frequently, though, catadores told stories. Absurd, gruesome, preposterous, and macabre, these stories were told and retold, at times with variations, with some added detail or an editorial comment. “Did you hear about the time a group of catadores made soup at night?” Dona Fátima asked me. “They gathered *podrão* (food from the garbage) and made a huge stew. Everyone ate. The next morning, when it was light again, they looked into the container in which they had made the stew and found human hands. They had eaten stew made from human hands.” A few weeks later, another catador told me the same story, this time adding that the catadores who ate the soup did not realize that there were human hands in it, because they had drunk too much *cachaça*, a sugar cane liquor.

Many of the stories deal with injury and death. Catadores frequently recounted an accident that happened the previous year in which a truck tipped over and killed five catadores or twenty catadores, depending on the storyteller. The large open containers of the trucks that dump on the *rampão* (the “big slope,” the disposal area where the semi-trucks from transfer stations unload) sometimes tip over when being raised up to dump their contents if the truck is on uneven ground, which can happen if there is a lot of mud after a rain. In the story told by catadores, last year a container tipped and there was no time for the catadores alongside the container to get out of the way. The container crashed on top of them, killing them in an instant. One catador telling the story, André, concluded that there was no way to know how many catadores were killed, that many were underneath garbage and were buried when the bulldozer passed over them. Another

claimed that one of the catadores who was killed was a woman, a novice, whose first day it was on the dump. “Can you believe her luck?” the storyteller asked, “it was her very first day on the dump and she was killed. Her family probably did not know yet that she had gone to the dump to work and never found out what happened to her.”

Some of the stories concerning death were not about catadores, but about bodies found in the garbage. “In the past,” Simone told me, “they didn’t take out the corpses that would fall in the midst of the garbage; they would just bury them. Now there’s this law that you have to take out any corpse, but it didn’t used to be like that. Once, a long time ago, when I first started collecting, I found a [dead] baby that must have been about seven months old. And I did not want to throw her out, you know. I was just a child myself. I didn’t want to throw that baby away. A woman next to me came over and took the baby from my hands and placed her back in the garbage. The baby already had a full head of hair. She was a beautiful girl, very beautiful, you know. For me, it was like she was a doll. Then, the tractor came and passed over her, passed over the baby. I cried and cried and cried, for that baby.”

Most of the stories of “dead bodies that fall in the midst of the garbage,” as catadores call them, are tales of urban violence in Rio. One afternoon, while sitting outside Roseane’s shack to avoid the stifling summer heat, her neighbor began telling how the previous night her mother had seen the ghost woman who is said to stand at the entrance of the dump and call out to catadores as they begin to go up to work.

“Oh, come on,” Roseane replied. “Are you going to start telling fairy tales too? People also say that you can hear the cries of children at night where they put the hospital waste, but I’ve never heard any cries... Once I did see a dead guy fall from an unloading

truck. It was so horrible, so swollen and his stomach full of bullet holes, everyone trying to pull him out from the garbage by his legs. Damn horrible. Damn, I've seen a lot on that dump."

"There was this woman all tied up," Luciana, another neighbor, joined in the conversation. "They'd left a stick in her thingy. She was brought all the way from Caju³. She was still dripping [with blood], all tied up with wire. A beautiful girl with long, thick hair. I wanted to cut her hair so that I could make hair extensions for myself. I said, 'Hey everyone, give me scissors, a knife, a broken bottle so that I can cut off the hair of this corpse. What big hair!' My sister was like, 'You are nuts. I am going to smack you.'" So I went over to Claudia real fast. I said, 'Claudia, come on, I found damn good locks of hair on the dump.'"

I found it difficult for a long time to see elements of these stories other than their graphic details or what felt at times to be a quality of magic realism. This, despite the fact that an example of nearly all of the types of events recounted in the stories occurred at some point during my time in Jardim Gramacho. Three times I saw one of the large, orange containers of a semi-truck tipped over on its side, the metal beam that had raised it mangled and crushed. In all three cases, everyone was able to get out of the way before the container collapsed and no one was injured or killed. Twice, catadores discovered a corpse in the garbage. Both were bodies of adolescent boys who had been killed by gunfire. And just two weeks before I was to leave the field, a catador was killed by a tractor on the dump. It was the morning that I was to present my research findings to Comlurb staff. I waited in the office for the manager to return from handling the situation. I watched the ambulance go up to the dump slowly. "They must know that he

has already died,” the secretary commented. Twenty minutes later, the ambulance drove past the office, its sirens silent.

If we shift focus, though, from the events recounted in the stories to the practice of storytelling as a social process, it allows us to further understand how catadores themselves make sense of the side of the dump that they describe as *puro sofrimento*. “In telling a story with others,” writes anthropologist Michael Jackson, “one reclaims some sense of agency, recovers some sense of purpose, and comes to feel that the events that overwhelmed one from without may be brought within one’s grasp” (2002:36). While the stories that catadores tell are horrific and graphic tales of their experiences on the dump, they place the narrative emphasis on the suffering of others rather than on their own. That is to say, the storyteller emerges not as the one injured but as the injury’s witness. In the accounts of the accident with the collapsed container, the storytellers leave themselves almost entirely out of the story, remaining third-person narrators. Their stories focus primarily on their concern for the catadores who were possibly buried without anyone knowing or the novice woman whose family would never know of her death. While Simone’s story of the baby that she found recalls a deeply painful memory, she says that she cried *for the baby*, not that she cried for her own vulnerability as a child herself working on the dump. And Luciana’s story of the dead woman with the beautiful hair, a story that invokes a dark humor reminiscent of the joking described by Donna Goldstein in her ethnography of domestic workers in Rio (2003), does not call attention to any personal trauma of seeing the remains of a woman raped and killed but rather emphasizes her actions in attempting to acquire the beautiful hair, something still of value, and to turn tragedy into comedy.

The storytelling of catadores can therefore be understood, following Veena Das, as an “act of witnessing” (2007:59). The narratives that circulate among catadores become collective testimony to the dump as “pure suffering” and “hell,” as a place of danger, vulnerability, and labor – not only the labor of reclaiming recyclables but also the emotional labor entailed by intimate encounters with injured bodies and death. This storytelling is empowering because the process of telling and retelling each other the most extreme examples of horrific events that have occurred on the dump transforms the experience of personal suffering into an experience of shared suffering and one that is recognized, validated, and normalized by others. This storytelling also empowers in that it allows catadores to construct themselves as actors who see, speak, empathize, cry for, and joke in a world where at any moment two-ton containers can come crashing down upon them or a body riddled with bullet holes can suddenly fall into their midst. If, as Veena Das argues, the act of witnessing in the context of violence and trauma constitutes “the work of self creation” (2007:78; see also Das and Kleinman 2001), then by their storytelling catadores construct subjectivities more in the image of the hero than the victim. After all, as Roseane makes clear in her story of the killed adolescent and as other catadores frequently emphasized in similar accounts, catadores – and not waste management staff, truck drivers, or emergency personnel – are the ones who grab onto corpses to pull them from beneath the garbage, making visible what was meant to remain hidden and ultimately enabling identification and proper burial.

By telling gruesome tales, catadores give meaning to their experience of the dump as pure suffering. The suffering of their stories, however, is not a pain or hardship that simply befalls them but suffering that they knowingly take on and bear witness to as part

of their everyday labor. When they hop aboard a truck with a bundle of sacks ready for a day of work on the dump, they do so knowing full well what is at stake. This recognition makes the “good side” of the dump, as we will see, all that more significant.

The Side of Liberation

“The dump has a good side and the dump also has a bad side.” When Simone told me this, we were sitting in the living room of her house in Imbariê, a semi-rural neighborhood of Duque de Caxias, a good half hour north of Jardim Gramacho. Simone had moved there with her husband after one of her in-laws was killed by gangsters in Jardim Gramacho and they felt that they should leave the neighborhood for a while. Simone shared a dirt road with only two neighbors. I had spent the previous night at her house, and after having become used to the noise of constant traffic in Jardim Gramacho, I found it difficult to sleep in a silence that now felt strange. We were a few hours into a life history interview. I had long since stopped asking questions, letting Simone just talk.

“I feel good on the dump,” Simone continued. She passed me a thermos of sweetened morning coffee for a second refill. “You know why? Because there I enjoy myself. Even when I am having problems, I enjoy myself. I play around, I laugh. Just as my son was saying the other day, ‘Mom, up here you are a different person, much more fun.’ I prefer to be on the dump than to be here. There’s amusement on the dump. There’s Buchecha -- with all the problems that he has, he is always goofing around. There’s Fininho, who’s a lot of fun. They are always doing something in jest, singing or dancing. Other jobs are more rigorous. You have a boss. On the dump you don’t, *you* make your own money and while you are in the garbage collecting, there is always someone who is

doing something funny, some kind of joke, laughter. So, you know, there is this good side to the dump.”

Just prior to this description of the “good side” of the dump, Simone had been critiquing what she saw as authoritarian attitudes at the Association. She complained that Glória acted as if “she was higher up than the sun” and was bossy to other catadores at the Association. In what felt to me at the time as a stream of consciousness, Simon’s description of the dump’s good side then flowed seamlessly into an expression of her feelings of powerlessness inside her own home, her husband’s negligence to their children, experiences of violence in her relationship with her husband, and the pain she feels when she watches her sons go hungry, both her sons who live on their own (though only 16 and 19 years old) and her eleven-year-old son who still lives with her. She had recently bought a month’s worth of groceries for Leandro, her sixteen-year-old son on, on a credit card, which she had failed to pay off on time. Her card was now blocked, she had spent her last earnings from the dump, and her husband—who received a small pension as result of a motorcycle injury that permanently damaged his back—refused to buy groceries for the household “just out of spite,” Simone told me.

Each of these elements of Simone’s narrative is a story in and of itself, and I will return to many of them in later chapters. Here I want to focus on what they have in common and how they relate to the description of the dump’s good side, which is essentially embedded in Simone’s narrative between criticisms of Glória and laments concerning her husband. In both cases, Simone experiences feelings of inferiority and lack of control. She refers to Glória as authoritarian, and alludes to times when she asked Glória for advanced payment and was refused or came to the Association intending to

weigh her material only to find that Glória was too busy and could only weigh Simone's material the following day. Similarly, Simone refers to her husband as someone who "imprisons" her and says that she asked her husband to buy groceries when there was nothing left to eat in the house and was spurned.

Simone describes the dump's good side in terms of the amusement and play that occurs there. However, what comes before and after in her narrative suggests that the good side is related not so much to the diversion that Simone enjoys in the company of other catadores but to the very ability to have this fun. That is to say, in the context of the Association and within her own home, Simone feels that she does not have control over her life – when to get paid, when to show up to work (to weigh material), how to provide for her children. On the dump, in contrast, she can do as she likes. While making her own money—without a boss, as she says, or anyone else dominating her—she feels at ease to sing, dance, and joke around with friends while working.

In a similar spirit, many catadores referred to the dump as a place where "no one orders me around" (*ninguem me manda*) and "anything goes" (*vale tudo*). It is not exactly true that *anything* goes on the dump, however. Any novice catador gradually learns that there is a set of unwritten rules that help mitigate potential conflicts among catadores. For example, once a catador touches a plastic bag (or at night, once a catador shines a flashlight on a bag) that bag is considered theirs and other catadores are expected to leave it alone. Often, in the haste to gather material before the tractor arrives to bulldoze the pile, catadores grab cardboard boxes or plastic bags and toss them over their shoulders out of the way of traffic. Once the truck has finished unloading and the tractor arrives, catadores then collect what is valuable from their tossed piles and carry it back to their

burlap sacks. These tossed piles are recognized as belonging to someone and even though they might lie scattered on the ground for quite some time, no one disturbs them.

Catadores have also created a certain order to the staging area where they place their burlap sacks. Pathways through the area begin to form organically as catadores trek back and forth between the area and the garbage. Catadores arriving to a new staging area are not supposed to place their sacks in the way of the path. I learned this the hard way when I arrived on one of my first days collecting and spread out my sacks in what I thought was an open space only to receive the admonishing shouts from catadores nearby. These “rules” are enforced largely by the power of consensus; catadores who see a rule being broken will upbraid the offending catador until the action is righted. In rare occasions, as in the case with Simone’s son mentioned in my “first day” at the beginning of the chapter, if no one witnessed the offense or if a conflict escalates, drug traffickers can be called upon to resolve the issue.

When catadores talk about this sense that “anything goes” on the dump, they usually are referring to the wide range of practices and lifestyles observed in Jardim Gramacho and a common attitude of tolerance for this diversity. “Up on the dump, you see everything,” Alessandra told me. During the course of one day on the dump, for example, I hung out with a group of young guys as they played dominoes and passed around a joint; got into a lively theological discussion with a catador, Edilson, who was a leader in an evangelical church; watched a drag performance by a *travesti* catador on top of one of the flatbed trucks; and received help loading my material at the end of the day from Valter, who consistently worked seven days a week on the dump and almost never paused for a break, and from Jonatan, who offered me a swig of cheap wine that he was

drinking as I climbed onto the back of the truck. Of course, all of these practices could be found in neighborhoods or favelas across Rio. What is particular to the dump is the occurrence of these practices in the midst of work and the degree to which all of these practices co-exist and are accepted as normal. Catadores, most of whom came to the dump from another neighborhood, frequently stated that this attitude of “*tudo aceita*” (everything accepted) is more prevalent on the dump and in Jardim Gramacho than in other parts of Rio where they have lived or worked. “No one complains about anything,” Rose told me. “No one is bothered. It’s just the culture here. Everyone is used to everything just being normal. You can do anything (*tudo pode*).”

Unlike in other work settings – or even other life situations as we see in Simone’s case – catadores on the dump work without supervisors or authority figures, without an institutional framework, and without top-down disciplinary structures. Rules exist, but they are less like orders and more like norms that have developed over time and are reinforced by collective response to a particular action. The two guards (subcontracted by Comlurb) who are stationed on top of the dump, make sure that burlap sacks are behind the designated line and that all catadores are wearing work vests (an issue I further explore in Chapter 3), and they sometimes intervene if a physical fight breaks out between two or more catadores. Beyond this, the guards keep to the side of the unloading zone and rarely interact with catadores. Each catador, therefore, can work (or not work) as she sees fit as long as her actions do not impede the work of other catadores.

When I heard catadores speak about the dump as a place they liked, they almost always referred to experiences of amusement and fun (*distracão, diversão*), as in Simone’s narrative, or they specifically stated that the dump was a place where “no one

orders me around.” I began to see these two responses as intertwined aspects of the dump’s good side. As a place where catadores work for themselves and largely control how they pursue this work, the dump provides an experience of autonomy that allows for joking, play, and many other practices that may be considered *diversão*. Sometimes this takes on the sense of escape. Simone speaks about feeling imprisoned in her own house and her desires to go to the dump as a way to gain temporary respite from her difficult family situation. This is even more profound for catadores who have literally escaped to the dump. Some have fled drug traffickers in other parts of Rio; others have fled the police and found the dump to be a place where they can make their “little money” (*dinheirinho*) and be left in peace. One catador whom I came to know well spoke with gratitude for the dump as a place of refuge: “Everyone here is family. I am owing jail time. If I go out there, I’ll be imprisoned again. I was a gangster, I was a thief, I was all these things and here I am. I’ll say this one thing: God took me out of a crazy life and now I am here, thanks be to God, in the garbage.”

I take catadores’ contradictory interpretations of their work as simultaneously “pure suffering” and “liberation” as a point of departure for an analysis of non-wage labor in today’s current form of capitalism. I see this tension as a way to understand how neoliberal capitalism has deepened social inequalities and eroded the livelihoods of many workers worldwide, while enabling new subjectivities, values, and political practices to emerge. In many ways, the contradictions emergent in catadores’ experiences of their work crystallize fundamental contradictions in the inner logic of capitalism (see Marx 1972:433-465). I trace these connections in what follows as a way to relate the work of catadores to economic developments in Brazil and globally.

Capitalist Crises and the Neoliberal Fix

During the time of my fieldwork in Jardim Gramacho, the 2008 global financial crisis hit and became a frequent topic of conversation among catadores as they watched the prices of cardboard, paper, scrap metal, and aluminum plummet. However, this crisis was but one manifestation of a longer, chronic global economic crisis that had developed decades before the US housing market and financial institutions collapsed.⁴ This crisis, its origins often associated with the end of the Bretton Woods Accord, the US going off the Gold Standard, and the 1973 oil price hike, derived from an overaccumulation of capital and a lack of new investment opportunities that could meet the need within capitalist competition for continually increasing rates of profit.

David Harvey argues that the adoption of neoliberal economic policies beginning in the 1980s—initiated by Reagan and Thatcher and later imposed by IMF structural adjustment programs in Latin America and elsewhere during the 1990s—was a way to address the crisis of overaccumulation (2003:145-161). Neoliberalism advocated privatization of state enterprises and resources, thereby opening up new and cheap areas of investment for capital. Furthermore, neoliberal policies included not only the lifting of tariffs and other trade barriers (though quite unevenly⁵), but also the deregulation of capital flows, allowing the free movement of capital across borders and foreign direct investment by multinational corporations. In order to compete for mobile capital, states pursued a “race to the bottom” in an attempt to out-compete each other with respect to low taxes, low wages, and poor labor protections (Babb 2005:206). This resulted in a devaluation of labor, both directly through lower wages and benefit costs and indirectly

through lean production practices and subsequent wide scale unemployment (see Moody 1997). Buttressed by neoliberal doctrine, these policies and practices enabled what Harvey terms “accumulation by dispossession” (2003:139-143). “What accumulation by dispossession does,” Harvey writes, “is to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use” (149).

Of course, this overarching story of the crisis of overaccumulation and the adoption of neoliberalism has played out in Brazil, as in all particular places, with its own nuances. After five decades of one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world, Brazil’s economy stagnated in the 1980s – nicknamed the “lost decade”-- as a result of a severe external debt crisis and hyperinflation reaching as high as 2,269% in 1994 (Ferreira et al. 2010:22). The debt crisis resulted from heavy borrowing by Brazil’s military dictatorship during the last half of the 1970s when private financial institutions, rather than foreign governments alone, began offering loans. First as Finance Minister (1993-1994) and then as President (1995-2002), Fernando Henrique Cardoso sought to stabilize Brazil’s economy by introducing a new currency, the *real*, and pegging its value to the dollar. He furthermore opened up Brazil’s economy to the entry of multinationals and foreign direct investment and privatized state enterprises—all policies supported by neoliberal doctrine. Annual net foreign direct investment grew from \$1.8 billion in 1994 to \$22.6 billion in 2001 (Rocha 2002:21). Political scientist Geisa Maria Roch argues that such FDI inflows displaced many of Brazil’s industries, resulting in increased unemployment and deindustrialization: “Most overseas investors, responding to the incentives offered them, have not geared their strategies to building new plants, or

expanding production and boosting employment, but rather in acquiring existing ones, either by taking over private firms or buying up state enterprises put on the auction block” (22). During this period, Brazil’s economic growth remained stagnant; the growth rate of GDP per capita between 1992 and 2005 reached only 1.25% (Ferreira et al. 2010:22).

In 2002, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a former metalworker and union organizer, won the presidential election, promising a new model of economic development, income redistribution, and poverty reduction. With an approval rating of over 70% in the final months of his two-term presidency, Lula has received praise in Brazil and internationally for achievements in economic growth, declining inequality, and poverty reduction. After the GDP per capita growth rate decreased from 4.8% in 2008 to 2.29% in 2009, partly a result of the financial crisis (Salama 2009:32), Brazil’s economy grew 9% in the first quarter of 2010. Brazil’s Gini coefficient (a measurement of inequality with 100 signifying that one person owns all the wealth and 0 indicating complete equality of wealth) has steadily declined in recent years. With a Gini coefficient of 62.5 in 1989, Brazil was the second most unequal country in the world. By 2004, Brazil’s Gini coefficient decreased to 56.4, dropping Brazil to tenth place (Ferreira et al. 2006:2). Alongside inequality, the percentage of Brazil’s population living in poverty has declined during Lula’s presidency, decreasing from 37.5% in 2002 to 25.8% in 2008 (ECLAC 2009). These statistics on poverty reduction prompted two journalists from the television network Rede TV to arrive at the Association one morning in September 2008 to film their report that millions of Brazilians had “climbed out of poverty” in a place that they saw as the epitome of the poor. The conversation that ensued between Glória, who tried

to explain to them that catadores earned incomes well above the poverty line (R\$120 a month), and the journalists, who continued to see catadores as representing the poor while reporting that Brazil had made great strides in reducing poverty, points to the complexities masked by the above statistics on economic growth, inequality, and poverty.

Despite certain positive economic and social indicators, Lula's leftist orientation, and the emergence of a "postneoliberal consensus" in Latin America in recent years (see Diniz 2007; Bresser-Pereira 2007), much of Brazil's economic policy has changed little and has continued to exacerbate urban unemployment. The declines in poverty and inequality in Brazil has resulted in large part from Lula's social assistance programs *Bolsa Escola* and *Bolsa Família*, which involve direct cash transfers of an average of R\$62 a month to families with incomes below the poverty line (Rocha 2007:143). These programs have mitigated situations of extreme poverty and hunger, particularly in the poor region of the Northeast (the region with presently the highest approval ratings of Lula), but they do not create new employment opportunities for unskilled workers, build infrastructure and national industries, expand the domestic market, or address land reform. Rocha argues that these programs are little more than a Band-Aid for the detrimental effects of neoliberal reforms in Brazil, citing a study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development:

The disappointing results of policy reforms led to the recognition that the initial reform package would have to be supplemented by measures to mitigate the adverse social effects... But such policy is unlikely to have a lasting impact as long as structural change remains slow and capital accumulation is insufficient to boost growth, increase productive capacity and create employment for the poor; shifting public finances away from investment that can have long-lasting effects on the causes of poverty to social spending that might temporarily cure the symptoms of poverty can be counterproductive in the long run (UNCTAD 2006:51,52, cited by Rocha 2007:143).

Most of Brazil's economic growth in recent years, meager in Lula's first term but rising in his second term, can be attributed to the expansion of exports of minerals and other natural resources during a boom in commodity prices resulting from increased demand from China (Rocha 2007:145). Agricultural exports have also expanded, though this has had little impact on poverty reduction, partly a consequence of the lack of land reform. Only 1% of Brazil's population owns 50% of its land. Moreover, export-led growth has weakened the domestic market and failed to create new formal jobs in industry and service, the two sectors that have the greatest impact on poverty reduction (Ferreira et al. 2010). Finally, Lula made paying off Brazil's external public debt a priority; with the exception of the cash transfer programs, the trade surplus was used to pay off IMF loans rather than invest in state services and infrastructure that could have long-term effects on poverty and unemployment in Brazil.

I want to situate the work of catadores in Jardim Gramacho within this context of a chronic capitalist crisis. This first allows us to recognize that, while retrieving material from a garbage dump may seem to be an anomalous kind of labor, the work of catadores is nonetheless connected to economic transformations that have impacted laboring poor in Brazil and across the globe in recent years. Some of the elderly catadores whom I met on the dump had collected recyclables long before the City of Rio began dumping waste in Jardim Gramacho; they "followed the garbage," in the words of Dona Janira, when one dump in the city closed and another opened. Those familiar with Carolina Maria de Jesus' widely read diary, *Child of the Dark* (1995[1960]), might recall the descriptions of her work collecting scrap paper and other materials on the streets of São Paulo in the 1950s, as she struggled to raise two children as a single mother living in the favela

Canindé. However, most catadores, both those in Jardim Gramacho and the roughly 300,000 others who collect on the streets of Rio or in other parts of Brazil, came to this work in the last 10-20 years (Magera 2003:371) and have been part of a general trend towards the informalization of work, particularly in cities, in Brazil and globally.

Secondly, the labor configuration, experiences, and practices of catadores – as well as other casualized, informal, unemployed, or underemployed workers – are important for how we understand the dynamics of capitalism today. Unfortunately, scholarly attention to issues of work, production, and the working class has subsided alongside the decline in formal wage-labor employment and labor unionization. Despite reminders that “there is no such thing as capitalism sans production” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:7) or observations that “contemporary scholars have mistaken the transformation and decline of the Fordist working class, a specific historical formation, as the end of class itself (Carbonella and Kasmir 2006:8),” anthropology and the social sciences more broadly have shifted focus to consumption as the primary force shaping social relations and political struggles. Thus, in her study of consumption practices of Chinese women migrant workers, Pun Ngai contends that “the highest value of the citizen-subject, in the eyes of the state, no longer lies in his or her capacity for production but as consumers” (2003:474). Daniel Miller similarly argues that “It is not the proletariat today whose transformation of consciousness would liberate the world, but the consumer” (1995:19).

Certainly, many of these studies have provided valuable insights into the ways that neoliberalism has reshaped political subjectivities, and they have introduced long neglected questions of semiotics, value, and desire into economic anthropology. The

problem that I see is not the attention to consumption but the ways that this focus has excluded questions of work and production at a time when new forms and meanings of work are emerging that are not yet understood and at a time when capital has the upper hand over labor.⁶ The idea that questions of labor and social class are less relevant in today's global economy conforms to and reinforces the hegemony of finance capitalism, neoliberalism's promotion of self-help and a focus on the individual-consumer, and the ways that transnational capital have dismantled labor protections and fragmented the working class in different parts of the world. This makes anthropological studies of work all the more critical.

The UN Habitat's 2003 study of urban slums reported that, "In much of the developing world, and particularly in slums, *most of the employment is not formal wage labour at all*, but takes place in a myriad of small, informal enterprises" (UN Habitat 2003:98, emphasis mine). The informal sector's share of nonagricultural employment has been estimated to reach 57% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 78% in Africa, and 45-85% in Asia (Gallin 2001:533). In Brazil, 50% of workers are employed in informal enterprises (IMF 2005:115, cited by Rocha 2007:145), and 88% of these are self-employed (IBGE 2005). The decline in formal wage labor is also not limited to the global South. Many studies of urban poverty in the U.S. and Europe in recent years have noted that the loss of stable, full-time employment, the turn to more casualized and temporary forms of work, permanent unemployment, and participation in informal economic activities, including drug trafficking and hustling, have deeply impacted the life chances and strategies of the urban poor in industrialized (or now post-industrial) societies (see Bourdieu 1999; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Mollona 2005; Wacquant 2008).

Contrary to early theories of the informal economy that predicted that informal workers would gradually be absorbed into formal wage labor, the trend appears to be the reverse. The UN Habitat's report suggests that 90% of new jobs created in urban areas of Africa in the next ten years will be in the informal sector (103). Wacquant argues that the qualifier "advanced" should be added to the concept of today's "marginality," defined in part by the loss of wage labor employment among the urban poor—because new configurations of marginality "are not *behind* us and being progressively resorbed"; instead, "they stand *ahead of us*" (1996:213, emphasis in original).

Of course, such measurements and predictions of the informal economy are rough estimates given the difficulty of counting economic activities that, by definition, operate off the books. And furthermore, the informal economy is conceptually problematic, as I discuss in more detail below. However, I cite estimates of the size of the "informal sector" in order to bring into relief the problem of continuing to conceptualize the human experience of work in today's capitalist system in terms of formal wage labor. Despite numerous feminist studies on women's work and household labor that have long questioned the hegemonic place of wage labor in social scientific theories of capitalism, value production, and what counts as "work" (see Collins 1990; Nash 1989), wage labor continues to be seen as the standard, dominant form of work in capitalism. Work that is not wage labor is marked, categorized as part of an informal – or illicit, illegal, unregulated, unrecorded, underground, clandestine, shadow – economy as opposed to the non-qualified, unmarked category of *the* economy. The "informal economy" is thus a category defined entirely by what it is *not* and in contrast to economic rationalities and practices upheld as the norm. Arguing for an expansion of definitions of work to include

not only material production but production of social relations, David Graeber argues that “It reminds us how much our habits of thought have, at least since the time of Marx, made the work of the craftsman or factory worker emblematic of labor in general; and how that focus itself tends to relegate most forms of real work to the shadows” (Graeber 287). If this is true and if an increasing number of urban poor worldwide do not work in conditions of wage labor, then much of our theories and knowledge of labor are inadequate to understand the conditions, organization, experiences, relations, and meanings of work in the urban world today.

Urban Poverty and the Ethnographic Refusal

Those studies that have addressed questions of urban non-wage labor, usually as part of a more general analysis of urban poverty, have tended to adopt the concept of “social exclusion” as a theoretical language and framework for their analyses. While the concept of social exclusion has antecedents in sociological and anthropological theories of boundary creation and maintenance, its current usage in studies of urban poverty originated in public policy debates in France (see Donzelot 1991; Fassin 1996; Nasse 1992; Paugman 1993; Touraine 1992). Attributed to René Lenoir, who was Secretary of State for Social Action in France in the 1970s, this term was first deployed in public policy discourses to refer to “the mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, drug addicts, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other ‘social misfits’” (Silver 1994:532). Beginning in the 1980s, the meaning of social exclusion in France shifted to an emerging category of youth unable to find long-term employment. With rising unemployment in a

post-Fordist context increasingly seen as a lasting feature of advanced capitalism, exclusion began to signify those who could no longer be integrated into society through paid work. It also took on new meanings with the rise of racist and xenophobic movements targeting immigrants. Residents of the *banlieues* (poor suburbs in the urban periphery), who included “delinquent” youths, the long-term unemployed, and immigrants, became known as the “excluded” (Silver 1994:534).

The concept of social exclusion has become widely adopted in other regional and national contexts in the past fifteen years, including the European Union more broadly as well as parts of Latin America (Perlman 2004:124; Zaluar 1997:29) and the United States (Byrne 1999:1). It has furthermore become the dominant term used not only in public policy debates but in social scientific studies of urban poverty, supplanting other concepts including class, marginality, the subaltern, and in Brazil, *grupos populares* (Fonseca 2006). The most cited justification for thinking about ghettos and shantytowns, unemployment and informal street economies, policies of containment and the retrenchment of the welfare state in terms of social exclusion rests on the premise that there is something qualitatively different about conditions of urban poverty today. Wacquant argues that “advanced marginality,” defined as the “novel regime of sociospatial relegation and exclusionary closure” in post-Fordist United States and Europe, differs from the marginality of the 1960s and 1970s in that the excluded – or as he calls them, “urban outcasts” – are now for the first time completely severed from the life of the city: from wage labor employment, public services and associational life, and state protection (1996; 2007; 2008). Similarly, Javier Auyero writes that the shantytown in Buenos Aires “runs the risk of becoming functionally disconnected from the rest of

society” (1999:100); Mike Davis refers to slum-dwellers today as a “truly global residuum” who “truly live in exile” (2005:27,34); Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg, while rejecting the pejorative connotations of the term, resurrect Marx’s category of the “lumpen” defined as the “residual class” in their ethnography of homeless heroine addicts (2009:17); and Janice Perlman maintains that marginality has become a “reality” in the *favelas* of Rio (2004; 2010).

Those invoking the concept of social exclusion have done so for important reasons. The first concerns an analytical shift in the social science of inequality beginning in the 1980s that has emphasized the need for a multidimensional approach to understanding discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. Examples include Second Wave feminists who critiqued conventional class analysis for its outright dismissal of gender relations and women’s household work (see Collins 1990; Lamphere 1987; Nash 1989) and New Social Movement scholars who turned to identity politics combining race, gender, class, ethnic, and environmental struggles (Alvarez et al 1998). Similarly, the concept of social exclusion allows for a holistic study of intersecting processes of inequality including class reproduction, racial and ethnic discrimination, gender relations, physical or mental disabilities, citizenship status, and spatial segregation, among others (Geddes and Benington 2001; Escorel 1999; Whelan and Whelan 1995). Loïc Wacquant’s comparative sociology of the ghetto and *banlieues* (1996; 2008), which is arguably the most influential work in urban poverty studies today, is especially rich in this regard⁷. By examining intertwined processes of deproletarianization, race and ethnic relations, public policies of abandonment, and urban spatialization, Wacquant elucidates

the historical construction of specific, distinct constellations of urban poverty in the U.S. and France.

It is also worth noting that the adoption of the social exclusion concept derives in part from a deep concern for the pernicious effects of neoliberal policies implemented across the globe in the past three decades. The idea of exclusion is meant to capture the struggles and suffering of the urban poor made more severe, more violent, and potentially more permanent by neoliberal capitalism than ever before. Scholars of social exclusion are asking timely questions, many of which I am also concerned with here: What political and economic structures have created present conditions of urban poverty? How can we understand the relation between the rise in non-wage labor and neoliberal capitalism? What are the experiences and meanings of work for the urban poor laboring outside formal employment? What new forms of sociality emerge in and around so-called informal and illicit economies? How can we make sense of the social suffering and violence, as well as politics and possibilities, of those making their lives in conditions of urban poverty today? There is a sense of urgency in these studies, stemming both from a recognized need for new theories applicable to the workings of neoliberal capitalism and from a political commitment to those who are suffering its consequences.

However, this said, the social exclusion literature is problematic in a few respects. Firstly, it is useful to think about what is implied in the term exclusion. In contrast to social class, usually thought of in a vertical hierarchical social structure – the upper, middle, lower classes – social exclusion suggests a horizontal relationship. The excluded are outside of, rather than below, other segments of society. Furthermore, unlike the concept of marginality, which is similarly a horizontal metaphor but which maintains the

urban poor as part of the larger city or society in that the edge of a structure is still part of that structure, exclusion suggests a non-relation. Discussions of the excluded as a surplus humanity no longer *needed* for capitalist production and consumption strengthen this sense of the term exclusion. This is all to say that the concept of exclusion downplays consideration of the system as a whole or how processes leading to long-term unemployment or urban segregation may functionally serve certain economic and political structures.⁸ Sociologists and anthropologists beginning with Durkheim (2000 [1912]) and Mary Douglas (1996 [1966]) have long demonstrated how group formation necessitates what is deemed “outside”; the sacred needs the profane, order creates dirt. One, of course, could argue that the urban poor are included via their exclusion, but at this point, it is worth asking whether exclusion is a more useful analytic concept than those (such as class) that already express such contradictory relations of domination and exploitation.

Secondly, a few scholars (see Bowring 2000; Sibley 1998) have challenged studies of social exclusion for failing to ask critically the question, *excluded from what?* Bowring, for example, argues that theories of exclusion leave the social system as is. That is to say, this approach tends to neglect structures and practices of domination within the political and economic system (i.e. the alienation of wage labor, consumerism, ecological destruction, state violence) and instead, focuses on the need to integrate into these systems those who are left out or left behind. “Constrained to defend the conventions of existing society,” he writes, “[the debate over social exclusion] is in danger of leaving the cultural hegemony of capitalism intact” (2000:327). It is, of course, understandable why those concerned with urban poverty might decry the poor’s

“exclusion” from wage labor employment and “exclusion” from fuller citizenship into a democratic state. But as Wendy Brown argues in her call for contemporary critical theory, the severity of oppression, violence, and suffering makes the voice of critique all that more necessary:

Critical theory is essential in dark times not for the sake of sustaining utopian hopes, making flamboyant interventions, or staging irreverent protests, but rather to contest the very senses of time invoked to declare critique untimely... [Intellectual and political strategies of successful untimeliness] involve efforts to grasp the times by thinking against the times. They attempt, as Nietzsche put it, to ‘overcome the present’ by puncturing the present’s ‘overvaluation of itself,’ an overcoming whose aim is to breathe new possibility into the age. If our times are dark, what could be more important (2005:4-5)?

My point is simply that studies of exclusion, in part through a concern for the suffering that can come from permanent unemployment and from state policies of neglect towards the urban poor, seem to forget, or perhaps just sideline, the understanding of wage labor as based on exploitation and alienation of the worker and the understanding of the state as founded on violence.

Finally, and most critically for my concerns in this project, the social exclusion literature has shied away from ethnography.⁹ Claudia Fonseca, in her review of the anthropology of class in recent years, refers to this trend as an “ethnographic refusal,” a concept first broached by Sherry Ortner in the context of the anthropology of resistance in the 1990s and defined as “a refusal of thickness, a failure of holism or density” (1995:174). For Fonseca, this ethnographic thinness derives from the impetus to denounce structures of inequality and from a failure to recognize meanings, logics, and practices in the lives of urban poor beyond those related to economic means and survival. “It homogenizes the variety of people in the ghetto, depicts their strategies as merely compensatory if not maladaptive, and privileges the economic (as if the only

preoccupation of the poor ought logically to be survival and financial improvement)” (2006:28).

I find Fonseca’s last observation – the privileging of the economic and the focus on “survival” – of particular importance for this project, which seeks to provide an ethnography of work on a garbage dump in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, one of the cities most frequently cited as an example of social exclusion in the urban world today. The first response to the idea of people risking injury and even death to sort through garbage for objects that could be used or sold might be horror or indignation, followed by the assumption that permanent unemployment and strategies for survival explain this occurrence. However, as Fonseca suggests, unemployment and economic conditions are part of but not all of this story, which includes too the particular logics, practices, relationships, values, ambiguities, contradictions, meanings, and affects that make up the lives of catadores and are connected to the work that they do. Writing against the adoption of Agamben’s concept of “bare life” (1998) that has become commonplace in studies of AIDS sufferers (and I would add, in studies of many other kinds of social suffering under neoliberal capitalism, including urban poverty), Jean Comaroff reminds us that, “While the will to power or the effects of structural violence might significantly sever life from civic protection and social value, no act of sovereignty – save perhaps in the fantasies of philosophical absolutists or biological determinists – can actually alienate humans from entailment in webs of signs, relations, and affect” (2007:209). Attention to “signs, relations, and affect” are precisely what I find missing in many of the recent urban poverty studies, framed as they are around “exclusion”, a term, like the *informal* economy, defined entirely in the negative (Fonseca 2006:21).

The informal economy and social exclusion are presently the two most utilized concepts in studies of urban poverty. Both of these concepts focus on what those living in conditions of urban poverty lack. Moving beyond these concepts and the approaches they entail is an effort at the heart of the anthropological tradition of seeking to understand others on their own terms –what they do and create and what is meaningful to them in their own lives.

Theoretical Guideposts for an Ethnography of Work

In the chapters that follow, I explore the practices, social relations, and meanings of work created by catadores, who labor and live in conditions of urban poverty shaped by neoliberal capitalism. Three overarching theoretical insights guide my analysis. The first is an understanding of work as a process that always involves more than the material production of things. Forms of work also entail the production of social relations and the production of ideas—logics, symbolic structures, consciousness, values, and senses (Burawoy 1985). Seeds of this understanding can be found in Marx’s early writings on modes of production defined as both the means of production (the physical conditions, materials, technology) and the relations of production (the way production is organized socially). He writes in the *German Ideology*, “This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their lives, so they are (1972:150).”

Of course, many scholars have since critiqued Marx for drawing a deterministic relationship between a material base and an ideological (social, cultural) superstructure. It

is quite possible though, to retain Marx's perception of production as simultaneously and inseparably the creation of things and the creation of social relationships and consciousness, while examining too how social relationships and consciousness shape production. For example, in his ethnography of transnational labor and the tourist economy in the Dominican Republic, Steven Gregory (2007) describes how racial and xenophobic attitudes towards Haitians limit how and where Haitians can work in what he terms the "social division of labor" in the tourist economy. Carla Freeman addresses this issue directly in her study of interlaced class and gender identities among women informatics workers, arguing "that because production is not generic in either its organization of labor or its recruitment and discipline of laborers, we must incorporate into our reading of the labor process the simultaneous processes of the culture of production and the production of culture" (2000:51). This is all to say that I am interested here in the work of catadores for the ways that this work has shaped social relations in Jardim Gramacho, the temporal and spatial organization of everyday life activities, worker subjectivities, and ideas about value and desire. I also seek an understanding of how catadores' life histories and webs of relationships that extend beyond the dump carved out the pathways that led them to Jardim Gramacho and molded their experiences of working as a catador.

My second guide is the conception of wage labor as a defining characteristic of capitalism and as a configuration of labor with unique characteristics. Capitalism as a distinct economic system has usually been defined by the profit motive – the continual accumulation and reinvestment of wealth to create more wealth—or by wage labor as capitalism's dominant mode of production. But, as David Graeber has pointed out (2007),

many other economic systems prior to capitalism had some form of money that was reinvested to make more money; what was unique about the industrial capitalism that emerged in 17th century Europe was wage labor. Graeber further argues that capitalism as a mode of production defined in terms of wage labor is unique in that “it is the only mode of production to systemically divide homes and workplaces” (2007:86). This division reveals how strikingly similar wage labor is to slavery: just as slaves were usually captured and thus the slave owner bought the slave’s capacity to work without having invested in having raised that person from a child to an adult capable of labor, an employer effectively rents a wage laborer for a certain amount of time who then returns home where all the labor of caring for the worker and the labor that goes into the social reproduction of new workers occurs. According to Graeber, “what one buys when one buys a slave is the sheer capacity to work, which is also what an employer acquires when he hires a laborer. It’s of course this relation of command which causes free people in most societies to see wage-labor as analogous to slavery, and hence, to try as much as possible to avoid it” (Graeber 2007:104).

I therefore find it meaningful that catadores work outside of a wage labor relationship, though their work is absolutely tied into the global capitalist economy. As Jane Collins has written with respect to women’s unpaid domestic work: “If such work lies outside the inner dynamic of capital accumulation, then we need to ask why it does, and how it articulates with that dynamic in specific times and places” (1990:11). The experiences of catadores and the meanings that they attach to their work have implications for today’s current form of capitalism not so much as an example of informality, a category usually determined by state regulation and not by the conditions

of production (Fernández-Kelly 2006), but as an example of non-wage labor. Many of the characteristics of work on the dump that catadores invoke as part of the “good side” are precisely those that run counter to defining elements of wage labor: workplace/home divisions, discipline, and subordination. This suggests that an experience of work that is part of the capitalist economy but not part of capitalism’s inner dynamic can lead to a critical consciousness and active avoidance of the disciplining and alienating aspects of wage labor.

Finally, echoing Claudia Fonseca’s and Jean Comaroff’s observations cited above, I take as a guiding insight the simple recognition that mere survival can never define human life no matter the destitution, suffering, or violence. This recognition emerges from catadores’ contradictory interpretations of their work as both suffering and liberation. Catadores are fully aware of the risks that they take each day to work on the dump, telling each other stories again and again of the pains, injuries, and deaths that are an integral part of their everyday. But catadores explicitly state that this is not the full story of their work or their lives, that there is another side to the dump that they value and enjoy, a side to their experience that does not supplant or mask the pains they endure but that co-exists in tension with the suffering of the dump. As I describe in the chapters that follow, catadores have created their own interpretations of work and what counts as labor, have developed organizational forms on the dump outside of an institutional structure, have cultivated the integration of labor and leisure and other dimensions of human life, and have produced new social forms and political practices. Their stories cannot be reduced to “bare life,” just as they also cannot be understood apart from the hardships of everyday life on the dump.

I also draw this last insight from the fundamental act of catadores' labor: reclaiming objects that others have discarded. Often journalists, politicians, scholars, and NGO workers, when speaking or writing about the dump, refer to catadores as *catadores de lixo*, "garbage pickers," rather than *catadores de materiais recicláveis*, "pickers of recyclable materials." Catadores will quickly respond to this that the materials that they collect are not garbage. "To be garbage is to be worthless, *o lixo é o que não presta*," they say. And clearly, in their eyes, the smashed blue water bottle, the outdated high heels, the dented Coke can, the school notebook with half its pages still blank inside, the cardboard box soaked with the juice of rotting tomatoes, and even the ubiquitous black plastic bag – all of these objects and many others that they pile into burlap sacks to sell or reuse – still have value. The work of catadores is an act of remaking a world produced by inequality and unceasing consumption, both their work of collecting materials and their work of creating social relations, meanings, and values in their everyday lives.

Notes

¹ From the root word, "rotten."

² I thank Susan Ellison for our insightful conversation on these issues.

³ Caju is a neighborhood in the North Zone of Rio where there used to be a dump and where there is now a waste transfer station. Small compactor trucks that collect on the streets in that area unload waste at this transfer station. The waste is then loaded into the containers of semi-trucks, which then make the trip to Jardim Gramacho for final disposal.

⁴ Of course, these two crises are related. It could be argued that the financial crisis was a consequence of the crisis of the overaccumulation of capital, given that the predatory loaning practices that led to the housing market crash and the risky, unregulated speculation of financial institutions were ways to invest accumulated capital that would produce high rates of return.

⁵ For example, the US continued to subsidize domestic corn production, while dumping this corn in the Mexican market following the implementation of NAFTA in 1994.

⁶ A few exceptions to this overall trend include Jane Collins's *Threads* (2003), a study of workers at four different sites in the global apparel industry; Carla Freeman's *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy* (2000), a study of the class identities of women who work in an off-shore data processing center

in Barbados (2000); and Stephen Gregory's *The Devil Behind the Mirror* (2007), a study of the division of labor in a tourist zone in the Dominican Republic. Note that all three books examine transnational labor shaped by U.S. business or consumers.

⁷ Throughout this discussion and at certain points in other chapters (see Chapter 2), I engage with the work of Loïc Wacquant because he has, by far, produced the most extensive research and writing on urban poverty, marginality, and exclusion in recent years, and because his conceptual and methodological approaches to these issues have been adopted widely by other scholars working on urban poverty in other contexts. Javier Auyero (1999), for example, translates Wacquant's concept of the "hyperghetto" to the slums of Buenos Aires, calling them the "hypershantytown" and noting similar transformations of territorial stigmatization, unemployment and disconnection from the national economy, and social disintegration. Others, such as Janice Perlman (2010:158-161), have done the work of applying Wacquant's formulation of "advanced marginality" to places outside the U.S. and Europe, while observing that some of its elements do not hold in these other contexts (in this case, in Brazil). Claudia Fonseca similarly notes Wacquant's impact: "... in many professional spheres, the work of Wacquant (and not the works of other researchers that have a more anthropological regard) serves as the ideal standard for ethnography of the poor in complex society" (2006:28, my translation).

⁸ Wacquant (2008:11) does state that it is important to consider "the *function* [a zone of relegation] performs for the broader metropolitan system. Some such districts serve as active and resilient reservoirs of low-skill labour force; others are mere warehouses for supernumerary populations that no longer have any identifiable political or economic utility in the new polarized capitalism; and others yet are spatial containers for the ostracization of undesirable social categories and activities." However, this depiction of the function of these places in the larger system as merely "reservoirs," "warehouses," and "social containers" suggests a fairly passive and one-dimensional relation between the periphery and the metropole. As I seek to illustrate in Chapter 2, Jardim Gramacho plays important, active roles in city politics and in the national and global economy.

⁹ There are a number of recent anthropological studies of urban poverty that stand as an exception to this "ethnographic refusal." João Biehl's account of the different life trajectories of homeless AIDS patients negotiating treatment and care in Brazil (2007; see also 2005) and Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg's fifteen-year study of homeless heroine addicts in San Francisco (2009) are two such examples. In addition to both studies being photo-ethnographies, they share in common their orientation to public health and medical anthropology. In fact, many of the most influential and densely ethnographic works in anthropology addressing issues of extreme poverty, whether rural or urban, since the 1990s could be labeled medical anthropology (see Farmer 2000; Fassin 2007; Scheper-Hughes 1992). I have found many of these studies to offer the most guidance in my own work. Nonetheless, this observation has led me to wonder about possible reasons for the predominance of medical anthropology in recent years as the orienting lens for studies grappling with extreme poverty and social suffering. These could include the influence of funding agencies' priorities, as well as claims that the body and biocitizenship (rather than labor and class) constitute the new site of mobilization and political struggles (Comaroff 2007; cites Petryna 2002). Of course, the discipline of anthropology, with its roots in "pre-capitalist" and peasants societies, has historically focused more often on ethnicity, race, gender, generation, and kinship than social class (Smith 1984). This changed in the late 1970s and 1980s during which time many anthropological studies turned to focus on issues of political economy, production, work, and class (Lamphere 1987; Mintz 1985; Nash 1979; Ong 1987; Taussig 1980; Wolf 1982; Vincent 1982), only to fall out of style once again with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of neoliberalism. I put forth these observations because it is important to keep in mind not only the studies and approaches that are being produced. It is also essential to take notice of the studies *not* conducted and the issues met with relative silence, if only because there is a tendency "to not see the very dimensions of reality that run up against hegemonic ideology" (Fonseca 2006:20, my translation).

CHAPTER 2

JARDIM GRAMACHO: PARADISE LOST OR THE PERILS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

*Memories tie us to that place... It's personal,
not interesting to anyone else, but after all
that's what gives a neighborhood its character.*
(Michel de Certeau 1984:108)

In September 1978, garbage trucks began arriving in Jardim Gramacho to unload roughly 3,000 tons of Rio's waste a day into the mangrove swamp at the edge of the neighborhood. Despite federal guidelines that prohibited solid waste dumping in waterways,¹ as well as a federal law that established mangrove swamps as protected environmental areas,² the City of Rio chose the one million square meters (roughly 250 US football fields) of mangrove swamp located in the neighboring city of Duque de Caxias as the new destination for the metropolis's refuse. The establishment of a garbage dump in Jardim Gramacho was considered a development project, sponsored and coordinated by FUNDREM, the Foundation for the Development of the Metropolitan Region that was created by the Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro in 1975 in an effort to recognize the urbanization of the periphery of Rio and institutionally incorporate neighboring cities into urban planning projects oriented towards the metropolitan region as a whole. The land that became the "Metropolitan Landfill of Jardim Gramacho" had been a large farm (*fazenda*) in the 19th century that was appropriated by Brazil's National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA). INCRA donated this land to the

State of Rio de Janeiro, and FUNDREM coordinated a contract between Comlurb and the cities of the Baixada Fluminense to use the land as a garbage dump servicing the entire metropolitan area. Since 1978, well over 50 million tons of garbage have been dumped in Jardim Gramacho. Ninety percent of this waste has come from the City of Rio de Janeiro.

The story of the garbage dump in Jardim Gramacho is also a story of the neighborhood that became home to Rio's refuse, to dozens of scrap yards and pigpens, and to the hundreds of catadores whose work now drives the economy of this place. The neighborhood's main street, Avenida Monte Castelo, connects Jardim Gramacho to the highway Washington Luís, which leads to the center of Rio. Avenida Monte Castelo is the path taken by the eighteen-wheelers rumbling, day and night, to and from the dump. These trucks and the garbage they carry cut through the heart of Jardim Gramacho.

I am interested in exploring in this chapter the intertwined history of the dump and the neighborhood of Jardim Gramacho. This is certainly necessary for contextualizing the work of catadores. More importantly, however, this history illustrates how Jardim Gramacho has played an integral role in the urban development of Rio, in the politics of the city, and in the expansion of national and global economies. I divide my discussion into three parts. In the first, I trace the story of how Jardim Gramacho transformed from a small fishing community and migrant settlement of a few dozen homes into the location of a garbage dump and a neighborhood with over 40,000 residents, most of whom are involved in a global economy of waste recycling. The second part focuses on the geography of Jardim Gramacho, specifically the uneven and unequal spatial construction of the neighborhood's internal zones and borders. In the third part, I turn to the political economy of this place, following the forms of capital that

circulate through the neighborhood and integrate Jardim Gramacho into textile, packaging, and automotive industries, stretching from southern Brazil, to the US, to parts of Europe and Asia.

Brazilian historian Marlucia Santos de Souza (2002) has called Duque de Caxias the “periphery of the periphery of the city of Rio de Janeiro.” The few studies of urban poverty in Rio that have included Duque de Caxias and other cities in the metropolitan region have noted that these areas are far worse than many *favelas* in the South and North Zones of Rio in terms of employment opportunities, housing and living conditions, sanitation, health indices, and homicide rates (Alves 1998; Goldstein 2003; Perlman 2004; 2010). Jardim Gramacho is located both geographically and symbolically on the edge of Duque de Caxias: the periphery of the periphery of the periphery. From the top of the dump and from some of the hillsides in the neighborhood it is possible to watch planes landing at Rio’s international airport just across the bay and to view the sunrise on clear mornings over Rio’s tourist attraction, Sugar Loaf. Yet, few middle-class *cariocas* whom I met had ever heard of, let alone visited, Jardim Gramacho. Those who did know something about the place told me that “Jardim Gramacho is a hell.”

Thus, Jardim Gramacho could certainly be considered to fit the ideal-type of the “hypershantytown” (Auyero 1999; Wacquant 2007; 2008;) or “outcast ghetto” (Marcuse 1997), concepts proposed by a new wave of urban poverty studies arguing that political and economic processes of late capitalism have created “no-go zones” of the city, severed from the metropolis and excluded socially, politically, and economically. These studies point to important political and economic transformations in the post-Fordist era,



Figure 2.1 View of Sugar Loaf at sunrise from the dump. The building across the Bay of Guanabara is Rio's international airport terminal. All photographs taken by the author.

particularly mass and seemingly permanent unemployment among urban poor, which have deepened inequalities and social suffering in cities of both the global North and South. However, the approaches taken in the advanced marginality and social exclusion literatures have a tendency to homogenize and exoticize places like Jardim Gramacho, while leaving them ethnographically empty and with no relations to the rest of the city (or world) other than through their own exclusion.

A stone hitching post still stands in Jardim Gramacho, where Emperor Dom Pedro II in the 19th century would stop on his way from Rio to Petrópolis to let his horses drink from one of the many natural springs in the area. Today, the catadores who work in Jardim Gramacho come from various neighborhoods across the metropolitan area of Rio,

most of them maintaining homes and relationships in these places, continually circulating between Jardim Gramacho and other parts of the metropolis. The waste deposited in Jardim Gramacho arrives too from across the city and the material that the catadores collect travels beyond Rio de Janeiro, some of it ending up as far away as textile factories in China. The neighborhood has established bars and *barracas*, two-story brick homes and cardboard shacks, factories and scrap yards, paved and unpaved streets, a *boca de fumo* where drugs are sold, and dozens of evangelical churches. Different areas of the neighborhood have their own names – Chatuba, Favelinha, Remanso, Maruim, Cohab – and each has its own characteristics. The image of the hypershantytown and the concept of social exclusion do little to capture the historical and social complexities, contradictions, texture, and topography of Jardim Gramacho.

This chapter is therefore also about place-making. The study of place has a long history in the field of anthropology, but often the discussion of place in ethnography remains limited to place as setting, background, context, or location alone (Rodman 1992:640). Place is where – not what— an ethnographer studies, as expressed in Geertz’s quip that “anthropologists do not study villages (tribes, towns, neighborhoods...); they study *in* villages” (1973:22). To treat place purely as location is to run the risk of reifying and naturalizing social geography. Additionally, as I argue below, the conceptualization of today’s ghettos, *banlieues*, and *favelas* in stark terms of social exclusion and advanced marginality stems in part from a one-dimensional or limited approach to the study of place. Following a shared definition among numerous cultural geographers, anthropologists, and sociologists, I take “place” to be a blend of location, material form, and meaningfulness (Gieryn 2000:466; see also Appadurai 1996; Low and Lawrence-

Zúñiga 2003; Sack 1997; Soja 1996), and understand place-making as the combined processes of what Setha Low (1996) calls the social production and the social construction of space. Low defines the social production of space as “the processes responsible for the material creation of space as they combine social, economic, ideological, and technological factors” whereas the social construction of space refers to “the actual transformation of space – through people’s exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting – into scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning” (1996:861-862). In other words, studies of place-making attend to both the physical creation of the built environment and the values, representations, and meanings born from lived experiences with the built environment. I am therefore interested in both the political projects, historical events, and economic processes that transformed Jardim Gramacho into a dump site *and* the experiences, practices, and meaning-making of those who live in, work in, interact with, and continuously shape this place.

I also wish to add a less common, third dimension to the idea of place-making. Though “place” is usually understood as an object, a product, something that is made rather than something that makes, a few theorists of space and place suggest that place can be agentic with its own effects on the world (Werlen 1993). A classic example of this approach is Bourdieu’s study of the Kabyle house (1970), which he reinterprets in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977:87-95), as a spatial arrangement that both reflects and reproduces the gender relations and symbolic universe of Berber society. For Bourdieu, the Kabyle house is an example of a “structuring structure” (Bourdieu 1977:72), a spatial arrangement structured by social relations and values of Berber society, but which also structures the movements and activities, and subsequently the

habitus, of the men, women, and children occupying this space. I am concerned with the processes and practices that have contributed to the making of Jardim Gramacho as a particular place as well as the ways that Jardim Gramacho has helped make other social worlds, such as Rio's inter-city politics or the global recycling industry. This line of inquiry illustrates how the making and unmaking of place in the urban periphery contributes to the making of state power and capital accumulation.

Wacquant (1996) identifies the "dissolution of place" as one of the ideal-typical elements of "advanced marginality." By dissolution of place, he refers to the "change of both ghetto and banlieue from communal 'places' suffused with shared emotions, joint meanings and practices and institutions of mutuality, to indifferent 'spaces' of mere survival and contest (1996:126)." It should be noted that Wacquant's ideal-type is intended to apply to metropolises of so-called First World societies in Western Europe and the United States, and that Wacquant furthermore notes differences in the social, political, and historical processes that have created conditions of advanced marginality in the Chicago ghetto and the Parisian *banlieue* (1996; see also 2008). Nonetheless, similar ideas about space and place have appeared in studies concerning the urban periphery in other parts of the world (Auyero 1999; Agier 1999; González de la Rocha et al 2004; Perlman 2004; 2010). Janice Perlman (2010), for example, in her re-study of *favelas* in Rio, argues that drug trafficking, ubiquitous fear, and social disintegration have destroyed the conviviality and community life that she observed in the 1960's in *favelas*, including in neighborhoods of Duque de Caxias close to the location of Jardim Gramacho.

My point here is not to contest the impact of these contemporary historical processes – the decline of wage labor and increasing permanent unemployment, urban

segregation and policies of containment, and the rise of drug trafficking and gang and police violence. Rather, I argue that these processes have not dissolved or destroyed places but remade them, and that these processes are best understood with attention to the particularities of place. Ideal-types and blanket statements on the ghettos, *banlieues*, *favelas*, *poblaciones*, *villas miserias*, and townships of the urban world do little to help us conceptualize how the different places that fall into these categories are distinctly made and transformed by, as well as participate in and shape, wider social, political, and economic forces. By being left empty, these concepts furthermore run the risk of reproducing stigmatizing notions of the periphery – as if it was all poor, all chaotic, all violent, all the same. In other words, as if it were no place. In what follows, I explore the intertwining of historical processes, built environment, and lived experiences of those who have made their homes and livelihoods in Jardim Gramacho in an effort to understand Jardim Gramacho as a place in the urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro.

Part 1: Origins

“Jardim Gramacho was a paradise.”

Deca, a bar owner on the main road through the neighborhood, Avenida Monte Castelo, told me this as he uncapped a bottle of beer. “This road was just a dirt path when I came to Jardim Gramacho. I think my house might have been the seventy-eighth in the whole neighborhood. We were surrounded by natural springs and fruit trees and when the tide came in, pools formed where we would go swimming (*tomar banho*). The pools were full of fish, and it was easy to catch crabs among the mangroves.”

My neighbor Cláudio had mentioned the previous day that he no longer ate crabs caught in Jardim Gramacho, because the crabs feed on dead bodies thrown into the

mangrove swamp by *bandidos*. When I recalled this, Deca laughed, nodding his head in agreement.

I asked Deca what it was like when the garbage began arriving in Jardim Gramacho, whether Comlurb had informed the residents, and what they had thought about this change to their neighborhood.

“They told us that Monte Castelo would be paved. We were told about the dump, but none of us knew to what extent the garbage would affect our lives.” Deca spoke deliberately. His words weighed heavily, as if laden with silent meaning, with sadness or perhaps *saudades*, the bittersweet remembering of something loved and lost.

“Did you know my wife?” Deca asked me. “Did you arrive here before she died?”

I recalled the day that I had found a house to rent in Jardim Gramacho, not an easy feat in a place where most families had built their own homes. Gláusia, who sold clothing door-to-door in Jardim Gramacho and knew more about neighborhood news than the most committed gossip, had offered to take me to a couple residents whom she thought had a vacant house in their family’s yard (*quintal*) that they might be willing to rent. We arrived at Deca’s bar. Deca was not there, but Boi, another long-time resident of Jardim Gramacho, was working the bar and showed me a house behind the bar owned by Deca’s brother who had moved in with his grown children. As I finished making arrangements with Boi to rent the house, Gláucia inquired about Deca’s wife, and Boi replied that she had recently passed away. “She was such a good person, kind to everyone. Such a big heart. I didn’t know about her death. I don’t know how I didn’t know. I just saw her last week. She was a wonderful person, a wonderful person” Gláucia repeated several times, her voice trembling, as we walked back to her house.

I told Deca what Gláucia had said.

“She had breast cancer,” Deca continued. “We fought it. We did the mastectomy and the reconstructive surgery. After five years, the cancer came back. When it comes back, there is nothing to be done. There are so many diseases in Jardim Gramacho. Cancers. Tuberculosis. Skin diseases. Other horrible diseases. I think that it is the garbage, it is the dust that we breathe in Jardim Gramacho that is dust like no other dust, a dust that comes off of the garbage trucks on their way to the dump. The leachate drips from the trucks onto our streets. All this toxicity, it causes these diseases.”

Like Deca, other residents who lived in Jardim Gramacho prior to the inauguration of the dump described the neighborhood as a place with dozens of natural springs that flowed continuously, bordered by a mangrove swamp teeming with fish that entered from the Bay of Guanabara to lay their eggs. “There were many people who used to fish inside here,” Seu Edmo, another long-time resident of Jardim Gramacho, told me. “Many people used to fish here. The mangrove swamp was rich with *siri*, *parati*, with crabs, all kinds of shellfish. And then there was *Maria-da-Toca*, a huge fish, and lots of *sururu*. It was possible to fill a sack with *sururu*. This was not a place of misery. Only if a person was lazy and did not have the disposition to fish. I had to lay out my fish on my tin roof to dry, because I did not have a refrigerator and there were too many fish for my family to eat, too many even for my neighbors.” Also like Deca, other original settlers of the neighborhood spoke of the degradation that the garbage brought to Jardim Gramacho and the ways the waste intimately touched their lives. “I used to wake up to the smell of green foliage (*cheirinho do mato verde*),” recalled Dona Ani, “but then the garbage



Figure 2.2 Boats stranded in mud near piles of plastic bags and containers, where fishermen used to launch their boats at high tide.

trucks began arriving, a truck with a dead horse or dripping with that rotten water and the stench remained on the street.”

Conversations with Dona Ani, who remembered with nostalgia the forest and fields where she played soccer with her children, and Deca, who even more painfully saw in the waste around him the cause of his wife’s suffering and death, prompted me to question how the dump came to be in this place. How did Jardim Gramacho become the destination for Rio’s refuse? What were the residents told about this process and decision? How did they interpret, respond to, and participate in the transformations that the garbage brought to their homes and community? In short, what were the historical contours of the politics of waste in Jardim Gramacho?



Figure 2.3 Map of the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro. The cities of the Baixada Fluminense are located just north of Rio de Janeiro in the center of the map. Source: Centro de Informações e Dados do Rio de Janeiro (CIDE, now CEPERJ), Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

These questions cannot be addressed without first placing them in the context of the history of the Baixada Fluminense and of the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro as a whole. Though there have been numerous variations in the geographic and symbolic definitions of the borders of the Baixada Fluminense, this region generally refers to a low-land area with rivers, swamps, and flood plains to the northwest of Rio de Janeiro. As historian Alexandre dos Santos Marques (2006) notes, the word “baixada” refers to a valley between mountains and Latin word “flumen” denotes “river,” therefore making the word “fluminense” quite similar to “Iguassu” or “big waters,” from the indigenous Tupi-Guaraní who first settled the area. In the 1970s, FUNDREM identified seven cities (*municípios*)³ as forming the Baixada Fluminense: Duque de Caxias (where Jardim Gramacho is located), São João de Meriti, Nilópolis, Nova Iguaçu, Belford Roxo, Queimados, and Japeri.

These are all cities in the periphery of the metropolitan region between the Bay of Guanabara to the east and the mountains (*serra*) to the west. However, as José Cláudio Souza Alves (1998) illustrates in his study of the political history of violence in the Baixada Fluminense, the Baixada has long been conceived by *cariocas* not in geographic terms but in social ones: as “barbarous” (in opposition to “civilized” Rio de Janeiro), violent, underdeveloped, and poor. Several scholars have noted that journalists reporting shootings or other violent crimes in a neighborhood or *favela* within the city of Rio have often mistakenly reported the location as within the Baixada Fluminense (Alves 1998:14; Marques 2006:9).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, large landowners divided the Baixada Fluminense into plantations (*fazendas*) that cultivated sugar cane, rice, corn, and beans (Ferreira 1957:255). This agricultural production, which used slave labor,⁴ generated a great deal of wealth for plantation owners. The Baixada’s rivers also served as transportation routes at the time between the gold mining region farther inland in what is today the state of Minas Gerais and the ports of Rio de Janeiro (Pires Junior and Santos Souza 1996). However, beginning in the mid-19th century, intensive logging destroyed much of the original forest of the Baixada, leading to increased flooding, pools of stagnant water, the proliferation of miasmas and malarial mosquitoes, and a general impoverishment of the region. Health and living conditions became so bad that many of its residents abandoned the area. The population of Duque de Caxias, for example, fell from 10,542 inhabitants in 1872 to 800 inhabitants by 1910 (Beloch 1986:22, cited by Cantalejo 2008:22). Similar environmental and health problems are still common today in Jardim Gramacho. Parts of the neighborhoods lie below sea level, up to negative twenty feet, and therefore any rain

turns dirt paths into rivers of mud and floods shacks built at the lowest points.

Mosquitoes are so prevalent in Jardim Gramacho that one of the sub-sections of the neighborhood, Maruim, is named after a type of small mosquito that thickens the air at dusk.

The industrial urbanization of the Baixada began with the founding of the National Factory of Motors (FNM) in 1943, the same year that Duque de Caxias officially became an independent município. Financed in part by funds from the United States to help industrial development of its allies during World War II, this factory became the first of many to line the newly constructed Rio-Petrópolis highway (today the highway Washington Luís) connecting the Baixada to downtown Rio de Janeiro. The Baixada as a location for new factories became an attractive option both because land with abundant fresh water was available there at a short distance from the city of Rio and because government officials of the Baixada welcomed industrial projects in the hope that they would bring urban development and much-needed infrastructure to the region (Cantalejo 2008:25). As historian Cantalejo describes, the establishment of the Petrobras (Brazil's national petrochemical company) Refinery of Duque de Caxias (REDUC) in 1961 provides a prominent example of this drive towards “development” both in the Baixada and in Brazil as a whole during this time:

The opening of the refinery in 1961 helped to propagate even further in the region the vision that the city [of Duque de Caxias] was progressing. The country lived the developmentalism of the government of Juscelino Kubitschek, who pursued modernization by speeding up industrialization. This new image was also reinforced in material ways, as the refinery generated new funds for the city's coffers via taxes (2008:51).

REDUC, which today produces 242,000 barrels of oil daily, lies only a few kilometers from Jardim Gramacho, making the blue flames of its smoke stacks the only thing visible in the darkness of the dump at night.

The FNM, REDUC, and other factories that sprung up in the Baixada Fluminense, particularly in the city of Duque de Caxias as part of Brazil's planned modernization and industrialization, had the unintended consequence of building a strong labor movement in the region. Workers in the FNM factory began to unionize in the 1950s, supported by the Metalworkers Union of Guanabara. They organized the first general strike in 1961 for the end of overtime, an increase in salary, the right to thirty days of vacation time, and payment for 240 instead of 234 hours a month (Santos de Souza 2002:210-211). Workers at REDUC created the Union of Petroleum Workers and also joined forces with other unions in the region. In addition to the unionization and strikes in Duque de Caxias, food riots (*quebra-quebra*) broke out in the Baixada in 1962 in response to a price war between the Brazilian federal commission responsible for stipulating prices of foodstuffs and producers who refused to sell at the set prices. This resulted in a severe shortage of rice and beans. Over 20,000 people in Duque de Caxias, and others throughout the Baixada, took to the streets, looting stores, and shouting "we prefer to die fighting than to die of hunger!" (Cantalejo 2008:59). By the end of the riots, the city of Duque de Caxias alone counted 6 dead, 675 injured, 800 imprisoned, 180 looted stores, and 2.5 billion *cruzeiros* in damages (61). Cantalejo argues that such events led the military dictatorship that took power following a coup in 1964 to see Duque de Caxias as a union stronghold with communist tendencies that was unruly and explosive (92). In 1968, the military dictatorship, citing the presence of the Petrobras oil refinery, declared the city of Duque

de Caxias an “Area of National Security,” thereby justifying a takeover of the city government (96-100). The dictatorship governed Duque de Caxias from 1968 to 1985. Note that the contract establishing the dump in Jardim Gramacho was signed in 1973 during the time when Duque de Caxias was not an autonomous município.

In addition to establishing industries, the urbanization of the Baixada also attracted migrants from the northeast and other parts of rural Brazil to the region in the 1950s –1970s. Most of the large *fazendas* of the Baixada had been divided into small plots for sale and this land was much cheaper than land within the city of Rio de Janeiro. Many migrant families also constructed informal settlements on unoccupied land of the Baixada. A rail line connecting the Baixada to downtown Rio made it possible for migrants to live in the Baixada and work in Rio, though this commute was time-consuming, the trains overcrowded, and the stations lacking security and known for high rates of armed robbery and violence. The combination of heavy industrialization and the population boom from rural-urban migration in the mid-20th century, transformed the Baixada Fluminense from an agrarian hinterland to an urban periphery of Rio de Janeiro.

The earliest residents of Jardim Gramacho, whom I came to know, were part of this wave of migration, settling the area in the late 1960s. They were all migrants from other states of Brazil, particularly from the poor, drought-ridden Northeast, who came to Rio in search of employment. Their stories are similar to those described in ethnographic and historical studies of rural-urban migration in Brazil during this period (Holston 2008; Perlman 1976). Dona Ani, for example, came to Jardim Gramacho from the countryside of the neighboring state of Espírito Santo, because her husband found a better paying job in Rio de Janeiro. “My husband had a job in Espírito Santo that paid very little,” Dona

Ani recounted. “He worked in a carpentry workshop, which sold wood to an owner of a furniture factory here whose name was Seu Leo. One day Seu Leo came to pick up a load of wood. He asked my husband if he wanted to work in his factory in Rio, because there he would make more money. And so my husband left. He put a change of clothes in a bag and climbed up on the truck and rode all the way to Rio on top of the logs. I stayed in Espírito Santo with our four children. After six months, he got a ride on the truck back to Espírito Santo and came to get us. We arrived here in Caxias. I already had an acquaintance from Espírito Santo, who had come here ahead of me with her husband. And so we went to live with her for a while in Caxias until we found this house here in Jardim Gramacho, which had been abandoned by an old man who had passed away.”

Thus, at the time that garbage trucks began arriving in Jardim Gramacho, the neighborhood consisted of a small community of migrants who had come to the area in search of employment and who had built their homes on available land by a mangrove swamp in the more affordable periphery of Rio. Many subsidized their wages by fishing in the surrounding wetlands at high tide. Though there was no electricity, water, sewage, or paved streets, Jardim Gramacho belonged to a município that had the second highest tax revenue in the entire state, funneled from the heavy industries that had recently been established there, particularly the oil refinery, REDUC. Efforts to industrialize the Baixada Fluminense, were part of the same state-planned developmentalist efforts to modernize Brazil’s hinterland that inspired the construction of the new capital city of Brasília in the interior of the country in 1960. These industries – both their political-economic importance and the unionization that they initiated – led the military dictatorship to take over the governing of the city of Duque de Caxias for over a decade.

It was during this time of the dictatorship's control over Duque de Caxias that the City of Duque de Caxias signed a contract with Comlurb making Jardim Gramacho the new site of Rio's largest garbage dump. In short, the transformation of Jardim Gramacho from mangrove swamp to garbage dump occurred at the intersection of large scale rural-urban migration, strategic industrialization, and the security interests of Brazil's military dictatorship.

I asked long-time residents of Jardim Gramacho many times how it could have happened that their neighborhood became a garbage dump. "Didn't people complain?" I continually asked. "You couldn't say anything," Dona Ani sighed. "Look, politics was different then," explained Deca, referring to the military dictatorship. Everyone I asked mentioned that the residents of Jardim Gramacho were "small people" (*gente pequena*). Seu Edmo turned the question back to me: "Remember when the vultures from the dump got into the turbine of a plane full of artists? They tried to put an end to the dump and weren't successful. If the big people can't do it, how could we, small people, have managed?" Dona Ani added that there were only a few trucks that came in the beginning. "It wasn't all the mess it is now," she told me. I was reminded again of Deca's lament that they did not know at the time "the extent to which the garbage would affect our lives."

At one point when I asked Dona Ani about Comlurb's role in the process, whether Comlurb had asked residents for their input or informed them about the dump before they started unloading garbage there, Dona Ani embarked on what I thought at first was a tangent about shopping. "To go to the store, we would have to walk to the highway. There we would wait for the cars to pass in order to cross to the other side and get the bus

to go to Caxias. There was no pedestrian bridge. There was no overpass. So that was how we had to go. On our way home with all our grocery bags – they weren't the bags you have nowadays but paper bags that always ripped— we would have to do the same thing. We had to get off the bus on the other side of the highway and wait. The cars would pass by, speeding by. And so we spent a good many years in this struggle.”

I had heard many stories of this *luta*, this daily struggle to negotiate eight lanes of traffic moving at speeds of 60-70 miles per hour in order just to come and go from Jardim Gramacho. Simone's brother, when 19 years old, was hit and killed crossing the highway Washington Luís that borders Jardim Gramacho.

Dona Ani continued, “After Comlurb built the overpass, the bus to Caxias could cross to this side and would stop at the corner. After that, they built the pedestrian bridge. Comlurb paved the main road here, put in electric lines, built health clinics, and a soccer field. I have never been against Comlurb.”

For many residents of Jardim Gramacho, the Comlurb trucks that began arriving in their neighborhood in 1978 brought not only waste and the accompanying dust, noise, putrid smells, toxic leachate, rats, fires, and the destruction of their “paradise” of mangrove trees and natural springs. The Comlurb trucks also brought paved roads and other infrastructure that would have been nearly impossible to acquire through the political system at the time, especially as a poor settlement of a couple hundred migrant families. Dona Ani's description of the hardships endured prior to Comlurb's entry into Jardim Gramacho testifies to the contradictory relationships that continued to form between residents and the garbage dump that now towers above their neighborhood hillsides.

In the same conversation in which Deca spoke of his wife's cancer and death, he told stories of "good times" in Jardim Gramacho when he was able to build his business by selling *quentinhas* (hot lunches) to the employees of the company responsible for maintaining the dump in the late 1990s. Still today, most of his clientele are tied in some way to the dump. Truck drivers stop at his bar for roasted chicken and a beer on their way to or from recycling plants in the south of Brazil. A team of engineers working on the construction of a new system to capture the methane gas produced on the dump had drinks each night at Deca's bar before heading to the local motel where they were staying. And of course, many catadores unwind at his bar, sharing rounds of drinks and listening to music blaring from the bar's juke box. Deca lamented the crash in the prices of recyclables and the subsequent decline in catadores frequenting his bar, pointing to how his financial success fluctuates with the recycling industry in Jardim Gramacho. It is not easy to part the threads of Deca's history in Jardim Gramacho that have been interwoven with the history of the dump. In what follows, I continue to trace these woven stories by exploring the spatializing practices through which residents of Jardim Gramacho have sculpted their neighborhood in and around the pathways of Rio's waste.

Part 2: The Geography of a Neighborhood

During my fieldwork, I spent at least as much time meandering along Jardim Gramacho's streets, muddied pathways, improvised bridges, and heavily trodden short cuts, as I did working on the dump. I walked to and from the dump and the association, between the dump and the association, to catadores' homes or temporarily rented shacks, to the highway bordering Jardim Gramacho where buses pass on their way to downtown

Caxias or Rio, and to various scrap yards, bars, meeting places, and markets. These treks carried me through different sections of the neighborhood and they tended to take longer than would be expected, as I often encountered and chatted with catadores and neighbors whom I knew who were also walking from one place to another in Jardim Gramacho or who were lounging outside their doorways when it was far too hot to remain indoors beneath a radiating tin roof. Catadores, too, spend a great deal of time off the dump in the neighborhood: sorting materials, washing their *rampa* clothes, preparing their supplies for another day of collecting, resting, eating, drinking, socializing at one of the many *barracas* (bodegas), caring for their families, and maintaining their homes. As one of my original research objectives, I sought an understanding of the lives of catadores that extended beyond the dump and of the relation between work and non-work activities. This inquiry inevitably led me to various parts of Jardim Gramacho (as well as other neighborhoods in Rio) and prompted me to consider how the neighborhood has been spatially constructed by catadores, scrap dealers, and other residents through their interactions with Jardim Gramacho's economy of waste and recycling.

The house where I lived in Jardim Gramacho was located behind the main street, Avenida Monte Castelo. To reach the front door, it was necessary to walk through a narrow corridor between Deca's bar and a neighbor's house, duck beneath the neighbor's concrete staircase, and step carefully to avoid slipping on the mud and grime that gathered from a leaky pipe next to a sewage drain five feet from the door. I shared the *quintal* (yard) with one neighbor, Cláudio, who lived in a house built above a bar adjacent to Deca's (the house with the staircase) and another neighbor, Boi, who lived in a one-room shack behind my house. Two roosters and a couple dozen chickens also

roamed the *quintal*, which belonged to Deca but were left under the care of Boi, who fed them, gathered their eggs, and a times chose one for the *panela*, the cooking pot. Cláudio and his family, Boi, and I shared the use of a well in the *quintal* for our water source. It was only possible to get city water three days out of the week in Jardim Gramacho and so I considered myself fortunate to have access to the well.⁵ The house itself consisted of a living room, bedroom, bathroom, and a kitchen that was a partially enclosed porch at the back. Though Boi received electric bills for the *quintal* every month, he never paid them. By the time I moved in, the balance on the bill had reached the equivalent of \$1,000. “Don’t worry,” Boi told me, “if they bother to come to cut off the electricity, we will just hook up the house to another line.”

Living on the main street had its benefits. I could walk in less than five minutes to the one local grocery store, a pharmacy, a bus stop, and a small plaza where a *pagode* band played on Friday nights. However, living on Monte Castelo also brought the constant noise of eighteen-wheeler trucks clunking along the pothole-filled road and a thick, black dust that gathered on the floors of the house in layers each day. It was necessary to sweep and mop the floors each day to keep the gathering dust to a minimum. At times I felt that most of my efforts were expended in an unceasing battle against the rats, ants, poisonous centipedes (*lacrãia*), cockroaches, and dirt that threatened to overcome the house with any momentary lapse of cleaning – the residue of a juice glass overlooked on the table, a couple days without mopping the floors, or a week without pouring bleach in the cracks of the wall where centipedes gathered and multiplied.

To go to the dump, I had only to walk a quarter mile to the end of Monte Castelo. This walk varied depending on the time of day and the weather. I often made this trek just

before dawn in order to meet up with Seu Antônio at the gate on his first morning trip up to the *rampa*. Though the street could feel strangely quiet at these times, I encountered many people beginning a day or ending a night of work. I would often pass a small cluster of people waiting on the corner by Deca's bar for the first bus to downtown Caxias. By the time I reached half-way to the dump, others would be boarding the 5:30 bus to Central Station in Rio, many finding a seat and then resting their heads against the window to catch an extra hour of sleep on the painfully slow journey into Rio in rush-hour traffic. I often passed owners of small bars and food stands along the way, setting out fried pastries or sweeping away the dust that had settled in front of their doors over night. As I approached the *portaria*, the entrance to the dump, I would gradually find myself in a stream of catadores carrying bundles of burlap sacks or plastic barrels atop their heads. Some would be heading in my same direction towards the dump. Others, the catadores who had just come off the dump from a night of work, would be heading to the *barracas* that had just opened to buy something to eat, a cup of black coffee, a fresh pack of cigarettes, or a beer.

In the afternoon, the commotion of Monte Castelo magnifies. It can become difficult to find an opportunity to cross the street through the traffic of garbage trucks, scrap yard trucks, trucks transporting bundled recyclables, and trucks watering the street to help mitigate the dust that all this traffic produces. Most of the twenty bars and bodegas that line the street have juke boxes, which, by this time, are blaring an assortment of rap, *funk*, evangelical songs, Michael Jackson and other U.S. pop music. The forty scrap yards that open to the street are bustling too – their workers chatting and shouting across the yard to each other over the screeching of balers, as they quickly toss

bottles, cans, and containers into the appropriate sacks behind them. Delivery boys carting gas containers, shoppers lugging home the days' groceries, and groups of children returning from school, weave between vehicles and the occasional pigs, horses, and stray dogs that wander the street close to the *portaria*.

On days when it rains, Monte Castelo becomes covered with a mud that thickens as one approaches the dump. It can become difficult to discern where the pavement of Monte Castelo ends and unpaved side streets and pathways begin. Glória loved to tell a story about the time when two fairly high-ranking gangsters in the Comando Vermelho⁶ from another *favela* came to Jardim Gramacho (also controlled by the Comando Vermelho) to hide out during a police invasion of their headquarters. "It happened to rain," Glória laughed, "and they spent four days cursing the fucking mud that destroyed their brand-name shoes and cursing Jardim Gramacho as a place that could only be for beggars (*mendigos*).” To avoid the mud and the deep puddles dotted with floating debris, I sometimes hitched rides on the garbage trucks passing in front of my house. I learned this trick from other catadores, mostly women, who hitchhiked in the cabs of garbage trucks not only to go to and from the dump but also to go to the Caxias Mall and the beach (*Piscinão de Ramos*), which are both located along the Washington Luís-Avenida Brasil route that the garbage trucks travel several times a day between a waste transfer station in Rio and Jardim Gramacho.

The path between my house and the association was far more circuitous and passed through more sub-sections of the neighborhood than my straight-shot down Monte Castelo to the dump. The association is located on the very edge of Jardim Gramacho, still surrounded on three sides by forest, though this remaining forest is quickly being

cleared for new warehouse construction and by new arrivals building shacks in the growing sub-section known as Favelinha, or “little *favela*.” Originally, the mayor of Duque de Caxias donated land to the association located adjacent to the highway Washington Luís, but a few months later the city revoked this decision, granting a box-store rights to build on the plot, and moving the association farther back from the highway with only dirt roads as access. Several times, when encountering catadores on the street and telling them I was headed to the association, they asked in reply: “Where’s that?”

On a Friday afternoon, after a long day and a long week of collecting cardboard on the dump, I decided to walk home from the association. I had gotten a ride on Seu Antônio’s truck from the dump to the association in order to unload my four burlap sacks of cardboard into the trailer (*caçamba*). I was planning on riding with Seu Antônio to Monte Castelo on his next trip to the dump, but he left to take João to the bank to take care of end-of-the-week payments. Rather than wait for Seu Antônio and João to return from interminable bank teller lines, I headed out from the association on foot. Failing to have brought a change of clothes with me that day, I was still dressed in my permanently foul-smelling work vest, a pair of pants splattered with the remains of rancid vegetables that had fallen from broken cardboard boxes, and mud-caked boots.

Along the way, I encountered Erica, who was hanging up clothes on a line outside her house. She lived on the dirt path behind the association, having arrived in Jardim Gramacho in the last year to build a shack of her own on unoccupied land at the edge of the *Favelinha* because, as she explained, “It’s difficult to make ends meet when paying rent.” She called out to me as I passed: “Hey, you on your way to the dump?”

“No, I was already up there earlier today.”

“Yeah, I know, I thought I saw you this morning. Just figured that you might be pulling a double shift (*vai dobrar*)”

“No way. I’m exhausted.” I started on my way again, but Erica shouted after me:

“Wait, you are going *home* like *that*?! I turned to find her giving me a look of surprise that bordered on disgust.

I explained that I had gone directly from my house to the dump and so did not have a change of clothes with me and that furthermore, I was hungry and tired and did not want to spend the next three hours waiting for Seu Antônio to emerge from a bank errand.

“Well, I guess you know best, (*você que sabe*)” she replied in a tone that suggested otherwise.

I continued walking home, but became more sensitive to the dress and appearance of those around me and to the reactions that others I passed on the street gave to mine. Throughout the Favelinha and along Rua Tocantins in the Chatuba, no one bothered to glance twice at me. I passed many catadores – all still dressed in *rampa* clothes – walking back from the dump to their shacks, unloading burlap sacks at the numerous scrap yards scattered throughout this area, or sipping a beer at a bodega. However, once I crossed Rua Tocantins, this changed. Few scrap yards are located between Rua Tocantins and my house on Monte Castelo, and few catadores live in this area, which is an older section of the neighborhood lined with brick houses interspersed with an occasional storefront. The movement on the street was less hectic than in the Favelinha and Rua Tocantins and those I passed were all wearing street clothes. I suddenly felt out of place. Once I arrived

on Monte Castelo, a block from my house, I was back among catadores riding atop sacks on scrap yard trucks, hitching a ride on the back of small compactor trucks, or walking to and from one of the dozens of scrap yards located on the main road.

My walk home that day made me acutely aware of spatial differences within Jardim Gramacho. I realized that an invisible perimeter exists in the neighborhood dividing where it is acceptable to be dressed in *rampa* clothes from where it is not. This line is unstated, less a rule, and more a sensibility in the tenor of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Furthermore, this line is created not so much by the practices of residents unassociated with the dump (who, though I rarely observed this, may give scornful looks or express disregard), as it is by the practices of catadores who routinely wash and change clothes before venturing far from the dump or scrap yards. These practices, for catadores, are an affirmation of pride and respect and an opposition to the stigma of working with garbage. Catadores who commute daily from other near-by neighborhoods rent small shacks for the sole purpose of having a place to wash up, change their clothes, and store their burlap sacks and other supplies so that they make the trip each way well-dressed and clean. Zé, who spends days or even weeks in Jardim Gramacho in a rented shack before returning to his home in Araruama, roughly three hours away by bus, spoke about how he never likes "to be out on the street and be dirty" (*andar sujo assim da rua*). He explained that he will walk back to his shack still dirty from working on the dump, because "around here everyone goes from here to there on the street with a burlap sack on their head, running into other people on the way, and no one notices a thing." In contrast, those in Araruama only see him "all put together, all dressed up."

Zé added a story about how once, after working on his car and getting oil all over his clothes, some of his friends in Araruama passed by and expressed surprise at seeing him so filthy. “They never see me that way, all dirty, never, under any circumstances,” Zé told me. “My style is to always be finely dressed as if I am going out, whether I am going to work or going home. I explained that I had just finished a job (*obra*) and that now I was going to try giving my car a jump.”⁷ By including this account, Zé connects the work on the dump to other (more respected) forms of manual labor in which one gets dirty, such as the job of a mechanic. This connection affirms the activities of a catador as real work while implying that the concern with *rampa* clothes is not simply their contact with garbage. He suggests that while it is fitting to be smeared with the residue of plastic bags while working on the dump or smeared with oil while working on a car, it is not appropriate to continue to wear soiled work clothes outside of a work context. *Rampa* clothes on a bus, in the plaza, or in other neighborhoods are, following Mary Douglas (1996 [1966]), “matter out of place.” It is precisely this quality that makes them dirty. That is to say, the residue or oil on clothes is not the problem, but rather the continued use of these garbage-spattered, oil-caked clothes beyond the workplace. Hence, the perimeter of where catadores comfortably walk around wearing *rampa* clothes and where they do not, is effectively a division between the part of Jardim Gramacho that combines the workplace with both social settings (bodegas and bars) and the home and the part of Jardim Gramacho that functions almost exclusively as a place of residence.

My experience walking home from the association in my *rampa* clothes also heightened my awareness of the neighborhood’s diversity. I first passed along a narrow path between tall grasses, a quiet and isolated area that spawned rumors about sightings

of alligators and three-meter-long snakes. This path led to a dirt road dotted with random debris dumped clandestinely by those avoiding waste removal fees or, in fewer cases, the attention of the police: a large pile consisting entirely of rusted nails, the burned frame of a stolen car, the carcass of a dead horse, white and shining in the summer sunlight, its bones having been picked clean by vultures. Erica's shack and other relatively recent constructions were located at the far end of this road, as it entered the Favelinha, a largely residential section of Jardim Gramacho that did not exist when I first arrived there in 2005. Its streets, all bearing names like Happiness, Love, and Justice, remain unpaved and are lined with makeshift shacks and half-constructed brick homes.

After passing from one end to the other of the Favelinha, I crossed Rua Tocantins, the main street through the section known as Chatuba where many scrap yards are located, as well as long rows of one-room shacks that catadores rent, particularly those who commute from another neighborhood or city. This street is busy and loud with the traffic of scrap yard trucks, of catadores walking to and from the dump, and of stray dogs, horses, and roaming pigs that sometimes block the road. Though Rua Tocantins is the first paved street I came to after leaving the association, the potholes brimming with pools of stagnant water and the accumulated mud and debris from passing trucks could make it hardly distinguishable from the dirt pathways of the Favelinha. Finally, I cut through an area with older, finished brick homes, some of them two stories, where hardly a vehicle passed, before arriving again on Monte Castelo.

I spent a month towards the end of my fieldwork making my meanderings through Jardim Gramacho more systematic by mapping particular sections of the neighborhood. Using a hand-held GPS receiver, I recorded waypoints (the latitude and



Figures 2.4 and 2.5 The left is an image of shacks in Chatuba, contrasted with the image on the right of a corner on Avenida Monte Castelo, just a few streets away

longitude) for each location along the street, noting what was there: a house, shack, scrap yard, pig sty, factory, store, restaurant, bar, bodega, street vendor, internet café, home business, school, athletic field, or an empty plot of land, among others. If relevant, I added descriptions such as what type of material the scrap yard bought and sold, the type of factory or store, whether a house was still under construction, and if a building was no longer in use. I focused on five areas of the neighborhood: Chatuba, Favelinha, Maruim, Remanso, and the area along Monte Castelo including the plaza that intersects with Monte Castelo at about its mid-point. Though categorized by the City of Duque de Caxias as a “sub-neighborhood” (*sub-bairro*), the City estimated in 2005 that Jardim Gramacho has a population of 40,000 (Comunidade COEP 2005:10),⁸ and its geographic area extends roughly 12.5 square kilometers. Because of the size of the neighborhood, I selected certain areas for detailed mapping where catadores spend most of their time living, working, and traveling and where there is a high degree of commercial activity or variance in the types of establishments on the streets. The areas I did not detail consisted almost entirely of well-established brick houses with few businesses. However, I did note if a school, health clinic, or other central neighborhood institution was located in these

other areas. Simone, my *truta* or work partner on the dump, accompanied me on many of my mapping excursions, and she contributed an abundance of her knowledge and interpretations based on nearly three decades of experience in Jardim Gramacho. We engaged in many discussions along the way, such as what made an establishment a *bar* versus a *barraca* or why certain areas had more infrastructure than others.

I created two maps of Jardim Gramacho derived from this spatial data and overlaid them on a GoogleEarth satellite image of the neighborhood to provide a more detailed illustration of the terrain.

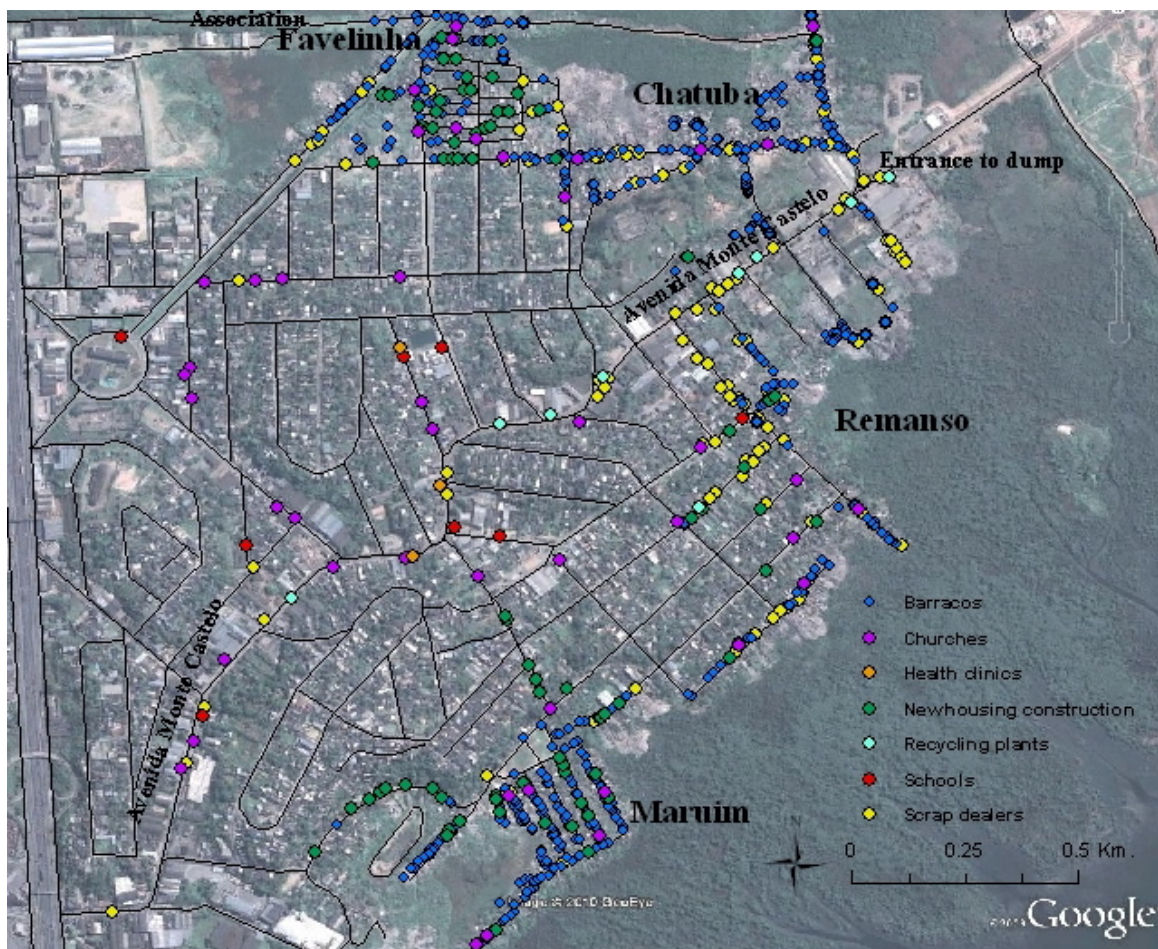


Figure 2.6 Map of Jardim Gramacho showing principle areas where catadores live and work.

The first map (Figure 2.6) shows the location of *barracos* (blue points), which are shacks that are usually built out of wood or scrap materials on “invaded” land or in areas without running water, sewage lines, paved roads, or infrastructure. Some of these shacks have been built by newcomers to Jardim Gramacho who do not necessarily (or at first) work on the dump or in scrap yards, but who move to the neighborhood because there is space in landfilled areas of the swamp where one can build a home and live more cheaply than when paying rent. This was the case with Erica, who came to Jardim Gramacho because she heard there was unoccupied land; only later did she begin collecting on the dump. However, most *barracos* are built or rented by catadores and therefore are a good indication of the areas where catadores live and spend most of their time while in Jardim Gramacho.

The scrap dealers are primarily located along Monte Castelo or in areas with high concentrations of *barracos*. This distribution makes clear the spatial divisions in Jardim Gramacho that I experienced the day I walked home in my *rampa* clothes – between areas of overlapping work and residence and areas that are solely residential. While churches are distributed fairly evenly across the neighborhood, schools and health clinics lie far from the areas where catadores live. This is true for most public infrastructure in the neighborhood. None of the streets of the Favelinha or Maruim are paved nor do these areas have running water or sewage. A city councilman illegally cleared the area of Maruim for settlement in 2005 (the land belonged to the Brazilian Navy) when running for office, promising to provide the necessary infrastructure. He never completed those promises. The main street through Chatuba was not paved when I first arrived in Jardim Gramacho in 2005 and many of its side streets remain alleys of mud. As is clear from the

locations of new housing construction, including both *barracos* and small half-finished brick homes, the Favelinha and Maruim are the areas of new growth in the neighborhood. This is in large part because of their lack of infrastructure, which makes them more affordable places to build.

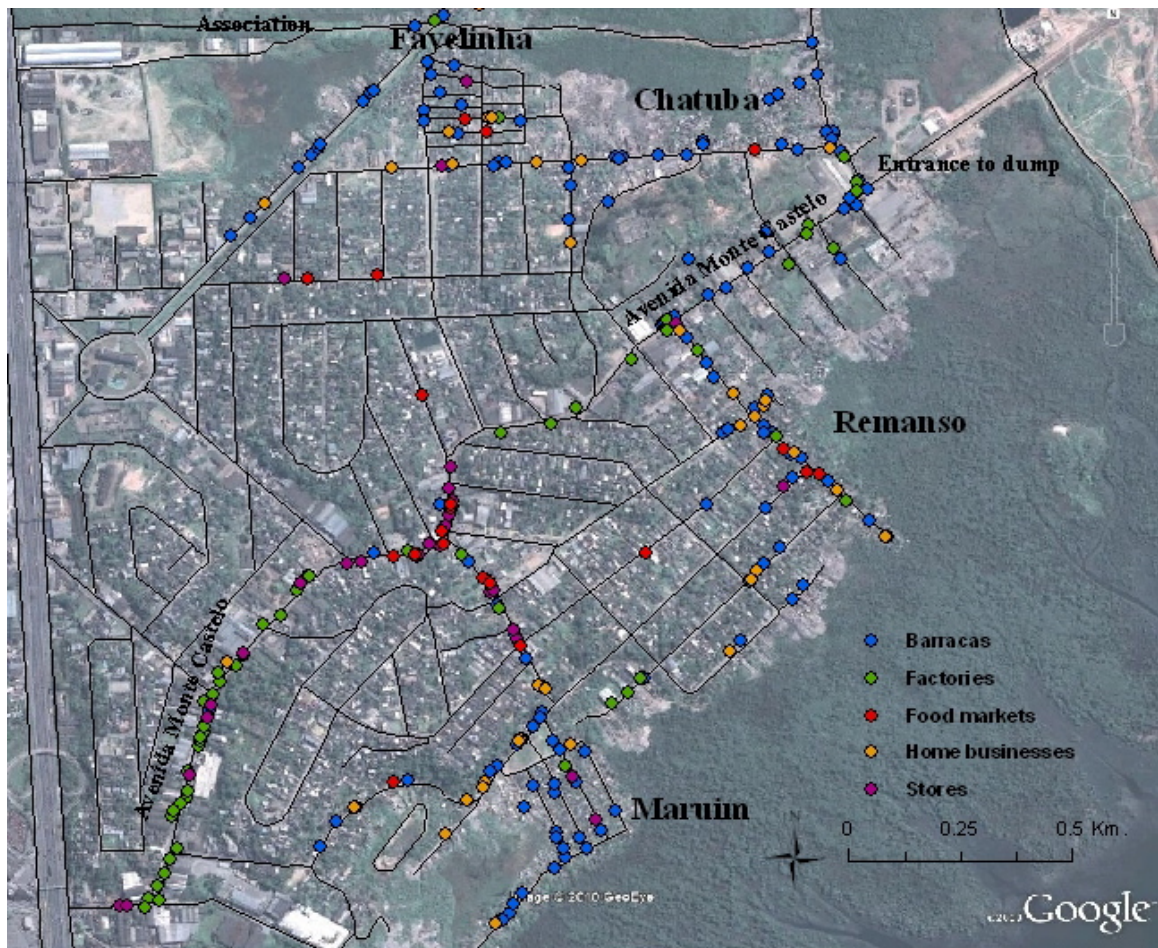


Figure 2.7 Map of Jardim Gramacho showing businesses not directly related to recycling.

The second map of Jardim Gramacho (Figure 2.7) shows the locations of businesses in the neighborhood other than the scrap yards. Most home businesses, such as home repair shops or the sale of homemade clothing or food, and *barracas* are located in the Favelinha, Chatuba, Remanso and Maruim. Barracas are similar to bodegas, selling both alcohol and an assortment of general household goods (such as cleaning supplies,

some basic groceries and snacks, personal hygiene items, candy, and cigarettes), and operating out of a stall next to someone's home or a shack. Many function as bars with outside tables and chairs and a jukebox. As seen on the map, barracas are concentrated in the same areas where there are many scrap yards and where catadores primarily reside. Since most stores and food markets in the neighborhood are far from these areas, *barracas* provide a means to acquire necessary goods as well as social spaces for catadores and neighbors to gather, share drinks, and unwind after working on the dump. Work, residence, and social life merge in these areas. Note too that Jardim Gramacho is home to many factories beyond those tied to the recycling industry. These include furniture and metallurgic factories and garages for bus and truck companies. However, these businesses are almost exclusively located along Monte Castelo, especially towards the entrance of the dump. Their location on the edge of the neighborhood ties them more to the bustling commercial and industrial activity along the highway Washington Luís than to the social and economic life of the neighborhood.

The geography of Jardim Gramacho illustrates how the circuits along which waste and recyclables travel have shaped the terrain of the neighborhood, carving out spaces that blur workplace and home while symbolically dividing these spaces from other parts of the neighborhood. This geography reminds us that, just as it would be wrong to homogenize all *favelas* or poor neighborhoods of the urban periphery, it would also be a mistake to homogenize a single neighborhood. The terrain of Jardim Gramacho is uneven and unequal. In part, this is what makes this place a *place*, materially and symbolically constructed, part of the life of a community, with all the social differences and power relations that this entails. It reminds us too that processes of inclusion and exclusion

operate not only at the level of the neighborhood but also within a neighborhood's borders.

Part 3: Local and Global Connections

Politics of waste in Greater Rio

On July 21, 2005, Rio de Janeiro's main newspaper *O Globo*, published the following letter to the editor:

“The mayor of Duque de Caxias does not want Rio de Janeiro's garbage deposited within his city. Now, imagine if the mayor of Rio prevented Rio's municipal hospitals from receiving residents of Duque de Caxias?”

These two terse lines encapsulate the complex unequal relationship between the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Duque de Caxias and point to the role that Jardim Gramacho has played in the inter-municipal battles of the metropolitan area. The letter appeared during a standoff between then Caxias mayor Washington Reis and Rio mayor César Maia over maintenance of Monte Castelo Avenue, the access road to the dump in Jardim Gramacho. When Washington Reis took office in January 2005, he gave the city of Rio a period of six months to fix potholes on Monte Castelo created by the passage of heavy eighteen-wheelers to the dump, clean areas surrounding Monte Castelo of debris and dust, and pave an alternative access road that would enable garbage trucks to pass around the neighborhood rather than cut directly through it. Washington Reis argued that these public works were the responsibility of the City of Rio and Comlurb, because 90% of the waste deposited in Jardim Gramacho comes from the City of Rio. One Caxias city councilman complained to me in an interview, “It's bad enough that they have to dump their garbage in our backyard; they also insist that they pass right on through our living room.”

Needless to say, the City of Rio did not heed Mayor Reis's demands. In response, on the morning of July 18, 2005, Reis ordered a sign placed at the entrance of Monte Castelo that stated that trucks with three axles were prohibited from using the road, and also sent several municipal police (*guardas municipais*) to enforce this interdiction. The garbage trucks that deliver waste to the dump from Duque de Caxias and from other cities of the Baixada are smaller, compactor trucks, whereas most trucks carrying Rio's waste are large semi-trailers that have picked up garbage from transfer stations. The prohibition against trucks with three axles, therefore, kept out Rio's trucks exclusively. Within a few hours, the City of Rio obtained a judicial order requiring the City of Duque de Caxias to reopen Monte Castelo to all trucks. Washington Reis responded by taking down the sign, but also having a bulldozer break up the road, creating a large trench that no vehicles could cross. Military police were sent to Jardim Gramacho and a councilman and two employees of the City of Duque de Caxias were arrested. Washington Reis insisted that he was not preventing Rio's access to the dump, that trucks could use the *via alternativa*, a road that circumvented most of the neighborhood and which, he argued, was the responsibility of the City of Rio and Comlurb to pave. It happened to rain that day and the couple eighteen-wheelers that attempted passage on the *via alternativa*, sank deep into the mud. In reprisal, the City of Rio, which owns the property of the dump, closed the gates. By early afternoon, no trucks from any of the cities of the metropolitan area were able to deposit garbage on the dump in Jardim Gramacho.



Figure 2.8 A bulldozer breaks up the road on Avenida Monte Castelo as police arrive and a crowd gathers.

This incident is not the only case of disputes between the City of Duque de Caxias and the City of Rio de Janeiro, represented by Comlurb, over the dump in Jardim Gramacho. Five months previously, Comlurb closed the dump for two days in response to a fee of up to R\$50 to be collected by the City of Caxias for each truck entering Jardim Gramacho. That time, the City of Caxias was successful at obtaining a judicial order establishing that any truck had a right to enter the dump, forcing Comlurb to reopen its gates. The former mayor of Caxias, José Camilo Zito dos Santos, who served two terms between 1997 and 2004 (and is presently serving a third term 2009-2012) also engaged in multiple battles with Comlurb. In response to my expressed astonishment at the bulldozed road, closed dump, the commotion of dozens of journalists and military police, a long-time resident of Jardim Gramacho standing next to me shrugged, “Oh, this happens all the time, every few months.”

Unsurprisingly, most of these battles end in favor of the City of Rio, which, as the state capital and the second largest city in Brazil, has a great deal more political weight than Duque de Caxias. The incident described above came to a close after three days when Mayor Washington Reis stated that he was lifting his immediate demands on Comlurb for the sake of the catadores in Jardim Gramacho who were not able to work without the normal functioning of the dump. The association of catadores had indeed protested the actions of Washington Reis, demanding a meeting with Caxias's Secretary of the Environment and arguing that they supported improvements in the neighborhood, but should have been informed and included in the process so that they could have prepared for lost days of work. However, most catadores and residents of Jardim Gramacho told me that they were convinced that the mayor was not sincerely concerned with the situation of the catadores, but rather fixed the trench and reopened Monte Castelo because the dispute had gone on for too long and Caxias did not have any other destination options for its municipal waste. Still today, all garbage trucks pass down Avenida Monte Castelo, straight through the center of Jardim Gramacho.

This dispute over the access road to the dump speaks to the ways that Jardim Gramacho has become a site where power struggles between center and periphery in Rio's metropolitan area get played out. The City of Rio has for decades taken advantage of the cities of the Baixada Fluminense as spaces for less favorable elements of the urban environment. For example, historian Maurício de Abreu (2006:99) points to a law passed in 1930 that established an "industrial zone" for the City of Rio as one of the principal causes of the urbanization of the Baixada. According to Abreu, neighborhoods in the South Zone of Rio fell outside the established industrial zone, forcing the removal of the

strong working class communities and factories of Gávea, Jardim Botânico, and Laranjeiras, which today count among the wealthiest neighborhoods of all of Rio. Industries relocated to northern, poorer neighborhoods along the Avenida Brasil, an area bordering the Baixada Fluminense, and into Duque de Caxias and other cities of the Baixada. In addition to Rio's industry, the Baixada also became home to migrants coming to work in Rio in the 1940s-1960s. Perhaps surprisingly, given the degree of scholarly attention given to Rio's hillside favelas,⁹ only 12.3% of migrants in the 1940s settled in favelas within Rio, the rest finding residence primarily in the Baixada Fluminense (Abreu 2006:107). This continued into the 1950s, with roughly half of new migrants settling in the Baixada or in the outskirts of Rio bordering the Baixada (121). As geographer Segradas Soares argued in the 1960s, "The metropolis *needed* this area [the Baixada] to put its rapidly growing population and to locate its industries" (1962:179, cited in Abreu 2006:111, emphasis mine).

The disputes between the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Duque de Caxias concerning Jardim Gramacho are therefore part of a larger, historical, on-going relationship of inequality within the political economy of the metropolitan area. The letter to the editor mentioned at the beginning of this discussion summarizes these politics well through its analogy between the dump located in Duque de Caxias and used by the City of Rio and hospitals located in Rio used by residents of Duque de Caxias. Of course, the problem with this analogy is that a garbage dump is not at all equivalent to a hospital. It is not a coincidence that the primary garbage dump for the metropolitan area is located in Duque de Caxias, far from the center of Rio, while the best hospitals for the metropolitan area are located in the center and South Zone of Rio. While some industries located in

Duque de Caxias and the Baixada more broadly provide revenue for the city, such as the oil refinery REDUC, in large part the cities of the Baixada bear the brunt of the cost (both financial and environmental) of industries and services that most benefit the City of Rio.

Mayor Washington Reis's efforts to block Rio's access to the dump were a way to expose and contest the City of Rio's exploitation of Caxias. He most certainly knew that the trucks would not be able to travel on the unpaved *via alternativa* and that his demands would not immediately be met. His actions and his subsequent three-day standoff with Rio's mayor can be read as a performance. Not the result, but the very act of contestation drew major media attention, increased Washington Reis's political visibility, and potentially augmented support among his electorate by demonstrating his willingness to take concrete action to improve conditions in the most disadvantaged areas of Caxias.

It could be argued that the incident served the mayor's own political interests (the same could be said for other mayors of Caxias taking similar actions) more than the residents of Caxias or Jardim Gramacho specifically, but such an interpretation would fail to account for the ways multiple interests and political differences can intersect in what Anna Tsing (2005) has termed the "friction" of political encounters. Residents in Jardim Gramacho have long mobilized for improvements in their neighborhood and for an alternative route to the dump by supporting city council candidates in elections and pressuring city officials to take action vis-à-vis Comlurb on their behalf. When the Legal Director of Comlurb was interviewed during the dispute over the road access, he stated that the "City of Rio has made various investments in that region," citing the paving of roads around Avenida Monte Castelo and the building of a school, sports center, and day-care center in the neighborhood. Though meager in comparison to the environmental

consequences of the garbage dump in Jardim Gramacho, these examples are nonetheless benefits that residents have acquired through such incidents and through the exposure, debates, and political struggles that they spark. Catadores, in turn, took advantage of the situation as grounds to meet with Caxias's Secretary of the Environment and to present not only their complaints about the current situation's impact on their inability to work but also long-term proposals, such as the construction of recycling centers in Duque de Caxias where catadores could work after the dump eventually closes.

Thus, many of those living and working in Jardim Gramacho have actively sought to further their interests by inserting Jardim Gramacho into the political debates and struggles in the metropolitan area that stem from Rio's unequal relationship with its municipal neighbors. Furthermore, the dispute over road access to the dump, which effectively obstructed waste collection in a city of 7 million people, reminds us that a place deemed remote – spatially, economically, and politically – can nonetheless impact the most basic functioning of a city's center.

From Bottles to Fiber Fill

While battles between mayors over road access to the dump link Jardim Gramacho to the politics of the city, the trucks that leave the neighborhood laden with bales of neatly pressed cardboard or plastic bottles link Jardim Gramacho to a global recycling industry that generates annually an estimated US \$200 billion (BIR 2010). With few exceptions, all the materials that catadores sell eventually travel beyond Jardim Gramacho along their own separate trajectories, involving different commodity prices and chains, and production processes that ultimately transform them into yet other

commodities. Scrap paper from Jardim Gramacho is transformed primarily into new packaging for products and though its production is oriented towards national markets, the price of scrap paper in Brazil is tied to virgin pulp exports and varies according to fluctuations in the value of the US dollar (see more on this below). The steel, construction, and automotive industries are the principle destinations for scrap metals, including scrap iron, stainless steel, aluminum, and copper. Ferrous scrap from Brazil is increasingly exported to China, which surpassed the US in steel production in 2009 (BIR 2009). Recovered plastics in Brazil are recycled at a number of corporations (many of which are multinationals) that export their products to Mercosul countries, the United States, Europe, and parts of Asia. Most recycled plastics enter the textile industry, followed by the construction industry, and are transformed into a wide range of products including fiber fill for stuffed toys and furniture, automotive carpets and roof linings, and cords used in yachting and water sports.

Nothing made Jardim Gramacho's ties to a global industry more palpable during my fieldwork than the US housing market collapse and financial institution failures in September 2008 and the global economic crisis that ensued. On the morning of September 17, 2008, the day following one of the most severe drops in US stock prices historically, Glória and I stopped at a corner store on our way to the Association so that she could buy a pack of cigarettes. The front page of the newspaper *O Dia*, which displayed a large diagram of stock markets around the world that had plummeted the previous day, caught her attention and she added a copy to her purchase. As we walked, Glória began to read the report, adding her own commentary: "Bovespa fell over four points. Stocks in Petrobras and Vale went down"¹⁰. Vale buys a lot of scrap iron; this

means that the price of our scrap iron is going to drop. Plus, a lot of our steel is exported to the United States. If they aren't building anything, they won't need any steel, and that is bad for scrap iron. But the dollar went up against the *real*, so this should mean that there will be more exports of cellulose and the price of cardboard will go up."

When we arrived at the Association, Glória continued discussing the economic news and the potential effect on the prices of recyclables with João. Throughout the day and throughout the coming months, I overheard numerous conversations among catadores and other residents of Jardim Gramacho about the "*crise*," the economic crisis. I learned a great deal about the recycling industry from these discussions. Indeed, as Glória explained to me as we walked to the Association that fateful day in September, the scrap paper industry had been struggling since 2007 when the dollar declined against the *real*, reaching below R\$2 to the dollar. This is roughly the point at which it is not economical for the Brazilian pulp industry to export cellulose, resulting in a flood of virgin cellulose in the national market, lowering the demand for scrap paper (Vieira 2008a:38; 2008b:46-48). Unfortunately, though the dollar began to rise in September 2008, the demand for packaging dropped off precipitously, sending the scrap paper industry worldwide into near total collapse (Baxi 2008). By November, the price of cardboard in Jardim Gramacho had declined from 20 cents a kilo (beginning in August), to 14 cents, 10 cents, 7 cents, and eventually zero. That is to say, by the end of 2008, there was no longer a market for recovered cardboard.

When the news hit of GM's and Chrysler's insolvency, Carlinhos lamented that the price of scrap aluminum would most certainly fall, given its use in the automotive industry. Eighty-five percent of scrap aluminum is consumed by the automotive industry

(Vieira 2008:41). By carnaval, the time of year when catadores collect the most aluminum cans, a kilo of aluminum was worth only R\$1, compared to the R\$4 it had earned during the previous year's carnaval. After interrupting a debate between João and another catador concerning the "normal" end-of-year fall in prices and whether price decreases could be attributed solely to this cycle, João explained that in January and February many of the larger scrap dealers and recycling plants close down for the holidays and routine maintenance and that this causes a small price slump. He had been arguing with his friend that the recent price drops were too great to be accounted for by this annual slump and that a part of the decline had to be caused by the "crisis." Of course, not all catadores who joined the many conversations about the fall in prices of materials offered as prescient and detailed diagnoses as did Glória, Carlinhos, and João. Most conversations made general references to the global economic crisis as a causal factor and some proposed more far-reaching theories such as one discussion in which a catador argued that price declines were a direct result of "Bush's war in Iraq." What all of these conversations shared, though, was a sense of global connection, of Jardim Gramacho – not as the "periphery of the periphery of the periphery"—but as a place integral to the workings of a global economy.

Because the range of papers, plastics, and metals collected and sold in Jardim Gramacho enter very different industries—from textiles to steel production – tracing all of the economic relations and processes that impacted the pricing of each recyclable during the economic crisis would be a project unto itself, far beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, even the most basic sketch of these economic relations reveals how it would be wrong to interpret the economic activities in Jardim Gramacho in terms of a

small-scale, local, informal, subsistence economy. Many of the objects collected on the dump in Jardim Gramacho eventually travel across Brazil and worldwide, and the fluctuations of the recyclables market in the neighborhood are linked to fluctuations in various global industries. It is important to remember too that it is not only the case that the global economy influences Jardim Gramacho. Very few cities in Brazil have formal recycling programs (and those that do, often involve the work of cooperativized catadores). Yet, Brazil recycles more of its consumed aluminum than any other country and more of its plastic (PET) than any other with the exception of Japan.¹¹ Nearly all of this recycled material results from the work of catadores. The recycling industry in Brazil, which supplies raw materials to manufacturers nationally and internationally, depends upon catadores.

As I discuss in more depth in the following chapter, catadores as well as scrap dealers and business owners in Jardim Gramacho, struggled financially as a result of the economic crisis. Some catadores worked longer hours to compensate for the lower prices of their material. Others stopped working altogether, having calculated that the cost of working (new burlap sacks, gloves, ice water, laundry, batteries for night shifts, and in some cases child care) exceeded their earnings. Conversations about prices and the economic crisis often carried tones of discouragement and frustration. Zeca, who fixed and sold used refrigerators in the neighborhood, replied to a comment I made about how he seemed to have more variety of refrigerators than when I had bought mine from him a few months previously:

“Well, the crisis almost brought an end to this dump. The catadores are earning so little and they aren’t working as much either. Do you think they are buying my

refrigerators? You know, what started this crisis... People just lost numbers. There is the same food and things in the world. What was lost was numbers. It is a crisis of numbers. And here I am with all these refrigerators.”

The economic crisis, much like Deca’s story of a “paradise lost”, reminds us of the detrimental effects that *inclusion* into state politics and the global capitalist economy can have on the lives of the laboring poor. After all, it was inclusion into the modernist ideology and development projects of the 1950s and 1960s that first brought Rio’s waste to this neighborhood with all the harm, benefits, and contradictions that became part of this story thereafter. What is certain is that far from contributing to the “dissolution of place,” the history, geography, and political economy of Jardim Gramacho have made this neighborhood into a place fully engaged with the world beyond its borders.

Notes

¹ This refers to Portaria No. 53/59 of Brazil’s National Council on the Environment, the Conselho Nacional do Meio Ambiente, CONAMA (Nascimento 2008).

² See the Federal law: Lei No. 4.771, passed on September 15, 1965.

³ Political divisions in Brazil do not map exactly onto those in the United States and this can become a source of confusion in translating *município* to a term in English. A município in Brazil can be thought of as equivalent to a combined city and county. It consists of a territory that can often include rural areas (much like counties in the US) and the seat of the município is the largest urban settlement or city in that territory. The term “municipality” usually does not include surrounding areas of a city and therefore is not an exact translation of município. I use “city” in the remainder of the text to refer to the municípios of Rio de Janeiro and Duque de Caxias, because it is more common in English to use the word “city” to refer to the kinds of urban conglomerations that Rio and Caxias are. When I use “City” with capital “C”, I refer not to the territory or population but to the government of Rio (*prefeitura*), as in “The City of Rio signed a contract with the City of Duque de Caxias.”

⁴ For a history of slavery in the Baixada Fluminense, see Peres 2007.

⁵ Because of the unreliability of city water and the abundance of ground water in Jardim Gramacho, many residents use wells as their water source. However, studies have shown the contamination of ground water in close proximity to the dump (Nascimento 2008).

⁶ The Comando Vermelho is a criminal organization that originally formed among convicts and leftist political prisoners in the prison Cândido Mendes during Brazil’s military dictatorship. It has since come to control a large portion of the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro, operating from multiple favelas in the

metropolitan area. One of its largest rivals is the Terceiro Comando. The Comando Vermelho controls the drug trade in Jardim Gramacho.

⁷ It might seem surprising that a catador owns a car, suggesting that Zé's comments here were a way of asserting a high class status or economic means. This is not my interpretation, however. Used cars are relatively cheap and old, and broken-down cars can be common sights in poor neighborhoods, where their owners spend Sunday afternoons working on them. Zé clearly puts the emphasis on the work he was doing on the car (which he never says actually started to run), rather than on buying, owning, or driving the car. Furthermore, many catadores own "luxury" items, such as computers, DVD players, and stereos. See Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of the practices of catadores related to earning and spending money.

⁸ Given that new areas of the neighborhood have been occupied since 2005 and that many of these do not appear on official city maps, the population of Jardim Gramacho is probably even higher.

⁹ Janice Perlman (2010:40) critiques what she sees as an overproduction of studies on the hillside, more "picturesque" favelas near the South Zone (wealthiest area) of Rio, whereas favelas in the North and West zones and in the Baixada Fluminense remain relatively unstudied. She writes, "The living standards [in the South Zone] are good, the views are great, and the close proximity to beaches, restaurants, and cultural amenities including high-speed Internet access make this handful of favelas the destination of choice for students, scholars, and tourists alike."

¹⁰ Bovespa is the São Paulo Stock Exchange. Petrobras is Brazil's largest semi-public oil company. Vale, founded in the Brazilian mining region of Minas Gerais, is one of the largest mining companies in the world and a leader in iron ore production.

¹¹ In 2008, Brazil recycled 91.5% of its consumed aluminum, compared to 90.8% for Argentina, 87.3% for Japan, and 54.2% for the United States (ABAL 2010). Brazil recycled 54.8% of its consumed PET compared with 69.2% for Japan and 27.0% for the United States (ABIPET 2008).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF WORK VESTS: POWER, PROTEST, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

In this chapter I explore contestations over the meaning of work in the context of informal recycling on a garbage dump—what counts as work, what is deemed appropriate behavior for workers, how work should be organized, and who controls workers and their products. The work of catadores unsettles the social order of things not only because it brings back into circulation objects that were meant to remain defunct and unseen, carried away, and hidden at the edge of the city beneath layers of dirt. The work of catadores also transforms the garbage dump from an end zone into a liminal space. Catadores labor at the intersection of production and consumption. In addition to producing raw materials from the waste of capitalist consumption by retrieving recyclables from intermingled refuse, they also set aside reusable clothes, wares, and other objects for their own household consumption. Catadores also situate the dump in a morally ambiguous universe, referring to their place of work as both “blessed” (*abençoado*) and as “cursed” (*maldiçoado*). The dump is “cursed” because it is a place of dirt and danger; injuries and death caused by tractors and trucks and sharp or contaminated objects are common occurrences. But the dump is also “blessed” because it is a place of resources and livelihood, called at times *Mãe Rampa*, Mother Dump. Finally, the work of catadores has developed betwixt and between our categories of informal and formal economies, the licit and illicit, self-employment and wage labor.

Their work has generated a local economy of waste recycling in which over 1.5 million *reais*¹ circulate a month and which involves 140 scrap dealers scattered throughout the neighborhood. Furthermore, the local economy of recycling includes dozens of local businesses selling gloves, socks, burlap sacks, water, and other equipment to catadores; gangsters exacting tolls from scrap dealers in addition to selling marijuana, powder cocaine and crack cocaine as part of Rio's powerful Comando Vermelho drug syndicate; a cooperative and an association of catadores mobilizing as part of Brazil's National Movement of Catadores; and Rio's semi-public waste management company Comlurb managing the dump. These various institutions and actors span the horizon of economic practice and organization. The formal, informal, licit, illicit, public, private, local, and global divide and reify a world that spills out beyond these categories.



Figure 3.1 One of the many scrap yards in Jardim Gramacho

While the limitations of many of our economic concepts may become especially salient in a context involving two thousand people collecting recyclables from a waste dump, this analytic challenge is not specific to Jardim Gramacho. As Carolyn Nordstrom illustrates in her ethnography of criminal networks and global trade, much of what constitutes economies today is unaccounted for by our existing concepts, including what “the economy” is (2007:19). “Social science has critiqued the concepts of class, nation, culture, society, state, gender, race, personhood, and many others,” writes Timothy Mitchell, “but not the idea of the economy” (2002:3). I am interested in this critique of the idea of the economy not as a project of conceptual deconstruction alone, but rather as an exploration of the ways that economies are constructed and imagined and of the effects that such practices and imaginings have on human lives.

I explore in this chapter how the liminality of the dump – situated between different economic processes, moralities, and realms of value—leads to contestations over whether the actions of catadores count as work. I argue that the waste management company, in an effort to euphemize waste and make the garbage dump resemble a sanitary landfill where refuse is hidden beneath a sculpted landscape, attempts to discipline catadores into adopting behaviors and structures deemed appropriate for a “profession.” The scrap dealers who buy material from catadores also discipline catadores. However, their efforts focus not on professionalism but rather on employment, seeking to exert power over catadores as disguised wage laborers whose products rightfully belong to the scrap yard. Catadores contest both of these interpretations of their labor, asserting through acts of cooperation both control over their work and their ownership of the materials they collect.

In what follows, I map these power struggles by tracing conflicting ideas and practices surrounding work vests that catadores are required to wear to enter the dump and to collect during the day. Glowing neon green or pumpkin orange, these bright vests dot the dull landscape of the dump, as catadores hurry after unloading trucks and shuffle between accumulating mounds of waste and the staging area where they leave their half-filled burlap sacks. Work vests function as a means of access to the dump: between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. guards bar catadores without vests from entering the dump. These vests also function as a kind of uniform. Catadores are required to continue to wear the work vest while collecting and guards will order a catador to leave the dump if the catador is “*no lixo*” – “in the garbage” – and not wearing a vest. The work vest has become an object of contention between waste management and catadores, catadores and scrap dealers, and scrap dealers and waste management. What the work vest means for



Figure 3.2 Catadora wearing an orange work vest obtained from ACAMJG. In the background, other catadores wearing neon green vests.

different groups in this context varies widely, generating a range of contradictory practices and meanings. Tracing the social life of work vests, therefore, helps illuminate the power relations that constitute the liminal economy of the dump.

I begin with a brief discussion of the origins of work vests in Jardim Gramacho. As will become clear, the history of the work vest is also a history of the organization of the dump: how the practices and relations of collecting, buying, and selling recyclables changed over three decades. This history is important first because it reminds us that the work of catadores—which can appear static and homogenous in popular representations of “scavengers”—varies both geographically and temporally, has local configurations and evolutions, and thus like all social worlds, has a story. This history also helps situate the work vest in a broader context, introducing the various actors, institutions, and events that have shaped the social organization of Jardim Gramacho.

I then turn to three perspectives on the work vest from different actors in the economy of the dump. The first perspective comes from a conversation with Valéria, a social worker who has worked for over a decade with the waste management company Comlurb. The second is an excerpt from Latinha, a scrap yard owner who buys primarily hard plastics (PET) from catadores who work on the dump at night. The third is taken from a catadora named Jó. Two of her friends, Rose and Carlos, who are also catadores, were present during a portion of the interview and joined in the conversation when the topic of the work vest arose. I am interested in the intersection of these three perspectives, specifically how they diverge from each other and what their points of contradiction reveal about power relations in this context—between managers of the

dump, the catadores who collect there, and the scrap dealers who buy their material.

This inquiry leads me to make two arguments. In the first, I suggest that questions of power and exploitation in Jardim Gramacho cannot be addressed through a structural analysis alone or fit easily into categories of exploiters/exploited, oppression and resistance. The uncertainties and ambiguities surrounding this world of work – an economy that blends and overflows the categories of the legal, illicit, regulated, informal, waged, self-employed, wasted, and valued – enable multiple, ongoing power struggles. Power in Jardim Gramacho gets played out, in a Bourdieuan sense, as a sport and while there are instances of exploitation, governance, resistance, subversion, complicity and violence, none of these finish the game (see Bourdieu 1977).

My second point concerns the concept of the informal economy, which has come to signify a range of economic activities that in some way diverge from legal, regulated employment and trade in capitalist economies. According to most definitions of the informal economy, the work of catadores would fit this category as would the majority of the scrap yards in Jardim Gramacho, which operate as clandestine, unregistered businesses and which violate many environmental regulations and employment laws in Brazil. I argue that the formal and the informal (as well as the licit and illicit) are not only linked together vertically through trade and commodity chains, as many scholars have noted (Carr and Chen 2001), but that they are co-constituted through daily interactions in the economy of Jardim Gramacho. If we are truly to move beyond these conceptual divisions, our attention must turn to these spaces of connection in economic life. I therefore return in the conclusion of this chapter to the idea of liminality as a way to conceptualize economies as they are made in everyday practice.

Work Vests: A Brief History

The story of how bright fluorescent vests became the attire of catadores begins over a decade ago. In February of 1996, Comlurb contracted the civil engineering company Queiroz Galvão, to address many of the environmental and social issues tied to what was at that time an uncontrolled, open-air dump. In addition to creating a road at the perimeter of the dump, constructing a piping system to release methane gas more safely, beginning the practice of covering deposited waste with dirt, and replanting some of the mangrove swamp that had been destroyed, Queiroz Galvão supplemented its engineering and management work by hiring three social workers to help register and organize the catadores working on the dump. Queiroz Galvão intended for these social workers to remain in Jardim Gramacho for eight months during which time they would help remove catadores from the top of the dump by constructing a cooperative, Coopergramacho, located near the dump's entrance. Queiroz Galvão provided the land and infrastructure for the cooperative, which opened in November of 1997.

The registration of catadores and the creation of the cooperative constituted the first major efforts on the part of Comlurb (via Queiroz Galvão) to formally manage and organize catadores. In addition to prohibiting certain portions of the population of catadores from collecting by excluding them from the registration (children, adolescents, disabled, and elderly catadores), Comlurb introduced work hours, payment schedules, obligatory social security payments and taxes, uniforms, and a formal organizational structure at the cooperative that was hoped to eventually absorb all of the 960² catadores who were registered at the time, thereby ending altogether collection on top of the dump.

However, these first efforts to manage the situation of catadores were thwarted by a number of factors. First, the cooperative could neither accommodate all 960 registered catadores nor did all catadores wish to join the cooperative which would require accepting its rules, dividing payment equally among members, and recognizing the authority of the elected leaders of the cooperative. Second, the social workers failed to remove or control catadores who worked at night on the dump. The social workers made a proposal to catadores working at night to close the dump to collection after dusk but allow them to work a nocturnal shift at the cooperative. However, the first night that the dump was closed to catadores, there was an open revolt in Jardim Gramacho that ended in police action. After this incident, Comlurb allowed catadores to work at night. In recounting this history, one of the social workers explained that because there is insufficient light and few guards at night, it is dangerous to do any kind of social work at this time. Therefore, from sunset to sunrise catadores are left to themselves. Finally, many of those who had joined Coopergramacho left the cooperative out of frustration with the rules, leadership, or loss of income³ and returned to the dump. Newcomers continued to arrive in Jardim Gramacho in search of employment, swelling even further the numbers of catadores collecting on the dump.

Comlurb responded to some of these obstacles to the management of the dump through the continual creation of new policies. Registered catadores were allowed to enter the dump during the day, but they were required to have an identification badge. This policy was then modified because of pressure by scrap dealers to allow additional catadores to enter the dump during the day so as to increase the amount of recyclable material collected and their own economic gain. Scrap dealers applied this pressure with

the added force of the gangsters in Jardim Gramacho whom scrap dealers regularly bribed and continue to bribe for protection and support. As a result, Comlurb registered in March 2000 forty-two scrap yards and implemented a policy in which each scrap yard was allowed a certain number of catadores to enter the dump depending on the size of the scrap yard, measured by their number of trucks. For each truck, up to four trucks, that a scrap yard owned, the scrap yard could have ten catadores. Catadores who were registered back in 1996 also sold their material to these same scrap yards, but were not counted as part of the scrap yard's allotted number of catadores.

In order to manage the 960 registered catadores and the further 1,800 catadores counted by the scrap yards, Comlurb invented the work vest. The original 960 catadores received the first work vests, which were fluorescent orange and numbered. Work vests for catadores associated with scrap yards soon followed. These were fluorescent yellow so as to be easily distinguished from those worn by the registered catadores and bore two numbers: one number designating the registration number of the scrap yard and a second number identifying the individual catador. For instance, if a scrap yard had the registration number 4 and was allotted 20 catadores, then a work vest for the fourteenth catador at that scrap yard would read 4-14. In order to enter the dump between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., a catador had to be wearing one of these either orange or yellow work vests. Those wearing the yellow work vests had to enter with the truck of the scrap yard associated with the number on their work vests. This policy continues today. Valéria, one of the original three social workers who still works with catadores in Jardim Gramacho, described the work vests as a “strategy of control.” I begin my exploration into the social life of work vests with her account.

Valéria

On a Friday morning in early August 2009, I went to Valéria's office located in Comlurb's administrative buildings at the entrance to the dump to interview her on the history of social work in Jardim Gramacho. Even though Valéria was one of the first people I met in Jardim Gramacho in January of 2005, this was only the second time that I had been in her office – a small concrete-block room plastered with posters from events, campaigns, and organizations related to catadores. Our paths usually crossed beyond Jardim Gramacho at meetings and events concerning the national movement of catadores or the formation of cooperatives. I saw Valéria at a meeting of catadores to work on the legalization of a new cooperative in Jardim Gramacho,⁴ at a regional congress of catadores in Rio in November of 2008, and at the *Lixo e Cidadania* ("Garbage and Citizenship") annual forum in Minas Gerais. I often saw her too in and around the gatehouse of the dump (*portaria*) – resolving disputes between catadores and guards or walking between Coopergramacho and her office. I never encountered Valéria while on top of the dump.

Valéria invited me to sit down on a folding chair opposite her desk. She was wearing a long purple dress, purple *Melissa* brand shoes (purple was the color of fashion that year), and chunky jewelry. Her hair was straightened with fresh highlights, common among Afro-Brazilian women in the middle and upper classes of Brazil (Caldwell 2007; Goldstein 2003). Before we finished initial small talk, she received a call on her cell phone and apologized to me as she answered it. Her phone rang several times throughout our conversation; she explained later that she had arranged for a meeting that morning

between a couple journalists and a few of the catadores, but they had not shown up for the meeting. Valéria kept trying to reach Alessandra, one of the no-show catadores, who was not answering her phone and the journalists continued to call back. Slightly miffed, Valéria commented as much to herself as to me, “This just makes me look bad.”

At the time of our meeting, Valéria had been practicing social work in Jardim Gramacho for over twelve years, the only remaining social worker of the three who began in 1996. She divided her time between working with catadores and teaching part-time at Rio’s prestigious private university PUC-Rio, where she earned a doctorate in social work in 2008. Though I did not regularly cross paths with Valéria in Jardim Gramacho, I frequently heard Valéria’s name mentioned by catadores. These comments and their opinions of her varied. Tião, who has worked the closest with Valéria in the process of organizing catadores in Coopergramacho and a recently formed association, affectionately calls Valéria his “second mother.” Others express doubts that Valéria supports the interests of catadores rather than the interests of Comlurb that ensures her job or even the interests of the scrap yards. One catadora argued, “Look, the scrap dealers are always bribing the guards and with all that money flowing around (*rolando*), how could it be possible that Valéria is not also taking a cut (*comendo*)?” Those who have a memory of the dump prior to Valéria’s arrival, speak with admiration for the ways that Valéria bettered the work conditions on the dump, such as allowing trucks to enter to pick up the material of catadores so that they would not have to push their material on carts, the *burrinho sem rabo*. Though catadores do not always approve of Valéria’s actions or decisions, in large part they respect her and her work.

I began the interview with Valéria by asking her to describe the initial actions

taken by the social workers in 1996. In the telling of this history, Valéria described her work in Jardim Gramacho as an effort to create a “professional work environment” – to develop structures and encourage behaviors deemed appropriate for a workplace. In this context, the topic of policies, including the policy of work vests, arose in our discussion.

Kathleen: How did the work vests originate?

Valéria: It was yet another strategy of control.

Kathleen: Of the number of people?

Valéria: Yeah, the number of people. Well, not just the number of people, but their identification, too. Our first priority is that the vest be fluorescent, so that we can identify the person from far away. At night.

I had often thought while collecting on the dump that the fluorescent colors of the vests made the catadores seem like they should be in a construction zone, directing traffic on a highway, or cleaning city streets. Similar to these other work settings, the dump is a site of heavy vehicular traffic. Hundreds of catadores at any one time are moving around several semi-trucks coming and going from the dump as well as large Caterpillar tractors flattening out the mounds of garbage that the trucks leave behind. The vests are fluorescent, a manager of Comlurb reiterated to me upon the death of a catador who was hit by a tractor in June 2009, so that the truck and tractor drivers can see the catadores more easily.

However, to see (*enxergar*) a person is not the same as to identify (*identificar*) a person. For Valéria here, the priority is to be able to *identify* catadores and identification is as much about safety with respect to vehicular traffic as it is about order on the dump. The large white numbers against the bright color of the vest enable guards to easily

identify a catador who may be breaking a rule or engaging in some kind of disruption while collecting. Sometimes such rule-breaking can involve fights between catadores or between catadores and guards but more often it involves minors infractions such as catadores placing their burlap sacks beyond the bounds of the designated area for the catadores' material. Guards on top of the dump can radio to guards at the entrance to stop a catador with a certain numbered vest upon leaving the dump or prohibit the catador's entry the following day. The vests thus make the catadores surveillable by the management of the dump.

Valéria: Right, so the first work vests started in 2001. We had thousands of meetings with the scrap yard owners to discipline this issue. We disciplined many things: the work vest, the condition of the scrap yard trucks. We made a series of rules here. We ended up disciplining many issues; even to the point of putting in that little machine at the front of the entrance, that today, doesn't serve a purpose anymore since the machine did not correlate with the work vests and the amount of catadores on the dump. Each scrap yard has, *had*, a card with a bar code, so that we could control things.

The words “discipline,” “rules,” and “control” continued to crop up in Valéria's account of her work in Jardim Gramacho. The work vest was but one disciplinary technique among many that were instituted (and then often supplanted by a new technique hoped to be more functional) in an effort to manage both catadores and scrap dealers. Valéria's words recall Foucault's analysis of power as productive (1995[1977]), not only because of the surveillance enabled by the identifiable work vests or the emphasis on literally “disciplining” catadores and scrap dealers but because these techniques are constitutive of a larger effort to transform a place of refuse into a workplace, catadores into worker subjects, and their activities into a profession. Valéria elaborated at another point in our conversation that she sees her work not as “social assistance” but as the creation of a proper “work environment” in Jardim Gramacho – the

dump as a place with scheduled times for entry and exit, that has a border and controls access, and in which certain activities occur (collecting recycles), but not others (soccer games, sleeping, cooking and sharing meals, drug and alcohol use, lounging, play, and sex).

Her efforts are not unlike those of the industrialists described in the works of Foucault (1995[1975]), Sidney Pollard (1963), E.P. Thompson (1963; 1967), and Weber (1958[1905]), among others. As shown in these social histories of capitalism, industrialists at the beginning of capitalist wage labor struggled to persuade workers to show up regularly at the factory on time; not play, eat, or drink while working; and be incentivized to work quickly, efficiently, and for longer hours in return for higher wages. However, Valéria's efforts in the context of informal recycling in urban Brazil at the turn of the millennium take on new and distinct meanings. For example, one of the primary goals of the National Movement of Catadores, which has been heavily influenced and organized by several NGOs, is the social and legal recognition of the work of catadores as a profession. In addition to gaining political and legal rights through the establishment of the activities of catadores, *catação* as an official category of work, the professionalization of the work of catadores is seen as a way to overcome stigmas attached to this activity and enable catadores to construct a dignified, shared identity. Discipline is as much about making catadores manageable in ways that enable smooth operations on the dump, as it is about transforming catadores into the kinds of subjects whose attitudes and behaviors fit the idea of a "professional" and who would thus be recognizable to the state and wider society as "real" workers.

Valéria: But all of these things go up against other interests. The greater the number of catadores that the scrap yards have access to, the more money that they are going

to earn. And others [implying local drug traffickers] are involved too, right? Our enemy is money itself... The correlation between money and control is very strong and so each time that we get control here, there are created various controls to undermine the control that we have implemented. There are innumerable actions that we have tried. Scheduled times to enter, ID cards, work vests. For everything that we create, someone creates a sub-control, a counter-control to avoid or undermine the order.

Here Valéria points to the power struggles that revolve around the policies, including that of the work vest, that have been implemented by waste management on the dump. Her interpretation of these struggles focuses on money earned and circulated through the economy of recycling in Jardim Gramacho. Scrap dealers profit from the material that they buy from catadores. The more catadores working on the dump, the more material they can buy at lower prices, thereby increasing their profits. Local gangsters also make money from the work of catadores, though indirectly. As we will see later in Latinha's discussion of the work vest, gangsters visit scrap dealers once a week, collecting "funds" for the neighborhood. This money is both a tax on the scrap dealers that allows them to function without trouble from the gangsters in Jardim Gramacho and it is a kind of insurance used whenever the scrap dealers need the gangsters to back their interests with the threat of force – usually vis-à-vis the waste management company but also more recently vis-à-vis the association of catadores. The controls and restrictions placed upon access to the dump, as Valéria points out, goes against the interests of buyers and "other people" – the gangsters.

Note that Valéria mentions the scrap yards and gangsters (obliquely) in her discussion of the difficulty faced in implementing policies and enforcing rules on the dump. Though we will see in the final perspective on work vests that catadores contribute to the subversion of Comlurb controls, Valéria does not explicitly refer to catadores here.

Valéria sees money as the greatest threat to her practice of social work – particularly the profit incentives of scrap dealers and gangsters. This draws our attention to the *multiple* interests at play in the social field of Jardim Gramacho. An exploiter-exploited, powerful-powerless division of the world does not account for how the management of the dump can institute policies that control catadores and make them more vulnerable to scrap dealers while simultaneously opposing many of the interests of the scrap yards.

Kathleen: Was there a way to... instead of having a different work vest for the catadores of scrap yards, have a general work vest?

Valéria: Only if Comlurb agreed to register them.

Kathleen: All of them?

Valéria: All of them. They didn't agree to this. Beyond the 960 catadores, the scrap yards presented 1,800 people! In addition to the 960! There was no way. So, in order not to hurt other interests, and also in order not to block this access, things were worked out through other means: they agreed to register catadores through the scrap yards. That was the big problem. Maybe at the time, if they'd said: "Okay, how many catadores do you have there?" 2,500 people? Let's register 2,500 and that's the end of it." That would have been better. But, no one wanted to assume responsibility for them.

It becomes clear in Valéria's explanation that the primary rationale for two different kinds of work vests related to Comlurb's concerns to protect itself from legal claims that could be made against the company by catadores. Once Comlurb registered catadores in 1996, they became legally responsible for their presence and activities on the dump and would have to pay compensation to them if they were injured or killed during work. Comlurb personnel realized this retrospectively, and therefore avoided further registering new catadores.

Valéria's statements reveal how catadores on the dump work in a liminal space.

Catadores are not expelled from the dump – in large part, as Valéria explains, due to the financial interests of those who profit from the work of catadores. Nor are catadores fully acknowledged and accepted on the dump given that neither Comlurb nor the buyers assume responsibility for them. The solution is a combination of ignoring catadores and making them invisible (Comlurb stops registering catadores and passes the work vests off to the scrap yards) and controlling catadores and making them recognizable “workers” (the work vest becomes one of several rules and disciplining techniques directed at catadores). As we will see in Latinha’s and Jó’s perspectives on work vests, this liminality becomes a source of tension and contradiction in Jardim Gramacho.

Latinha

I first met Latinha while slowly walking the streets of Jardim Gramacho in an effort to create a map of spatial inequalities in the neighborhood. He was leaning against a makeshift gate through which it was possible to glimpse scattered plastic containers on an empty lot next to a small brick house. Simone, who was accompanying me, called over to Latinha from across the street to ask him what kind of material was at the scrap yard. In our recordings, we had been noting whether a scrap yard works primarily with scrap metal, hard plastics, soft plastics, or paper. Latinha ignored Simone’s question and instead asked what we were doing. Though the majority of catadores and residents of Jardim Gramacho knew me or knew of me by this point and generally expressed interest in the map of the neighborhood, an unknown scrap dealer had complained the previous day, prompting Simone and me to have a conversation with the gangsters to ensure that we had not caused some problem in the neighborhood. I assumed that Latinha was

another scrap dealer who was similarly suspicious of our work. Within minutes, I realized that my assumptions were wrong. An earnest and inquisitive person, Latinha chatted with Simone and me for close to an hour on a range of topics including anthropological research methods, the drop in the prices of materials, and his own story of becoming a scrap dealer. He invited me to return the following Saturday to do an interview with him on the effects of the economic crisis on scrap yards.

Through this first chat, the interview and subsequent conversations, I learned that Latinha became a scrap dealer by way of first collecting as a catador. Though I have found this kind of trajectory of collector-to-buyer common on other dumps that I have visited, this is unusual in Jardim Gramacho due to the amount of capital needed there to begin a scrap yard.⁵ Latinha came to Jardim Gramacho to live with his mother who had just separated from his father and had bought a plot of land on the edge of the neighborhood. Latinha was twenty-two years old at the time and was working as a fare collector on a bus. He wanted to convince his father, who was getting old and living alone in the neighborhood of Penha in the North Zone of Rio where Latinha grew up, to join him in Jardim Gramacho. Knowing that his father liked raising animals, Latinha decided to begin raising pigs and ducks on his mother's plot of land. He began going to the dump to collect food leftovers to give to the pigs. Latinha lost his job a couple years later and transitioned from solely collecting food for his pigs to collecting recyclables on the dump. While working on the dump, he noticed that catadores who collect plastics often find a few aluminum cans in the process and exchange these cans at the base of the dump for a shower, a snack, or cigarettes. Latinha decided to buy a small scale, the kind used for weighing fish in the market, and began to buy aluminum on top of the dump. No

other buyer purchased aluminum exclusively because the quantity of collected aluminum was so little in comparison to other materials (most high-priced aluminum being retrieved by catadores on the street well before the waste reaches the dump in Jardim Gramacho). Latinha managed to grow his business gradually and eventually was able to buy a plot of land and a truck and switch to buying plastics with the help of a larger scrap yard who loaned him the necessary funds. Latinha received his nickname (*latinha* meaning small can) because of his beginnings as an aluminum buyer.

I intended my interview with Latinha to focus on the economic crisis. Though we eventually discussed the crisis, Latinha initiated many other topics during our long conversation as we sat precariously on plastic crates between his house and rows of clothes lines where his wife was hanging laundry though it looked at any moment as if it would rain. As he talked about his trajectory in Jardim Gramacho, the ways he operates his scrap yard, his visions for improvements in the work conditions of catadores, and the challenges that he has faced in the recycling industry, the subject of work vests arose several times. I have excerpted two of these moments below. In the first, Latinha talks about the ways that the work vest has shaped scrap yard owners' attitudes and practices regarding the purchase of material from catadores. In the second, Latinha describes a meeting of Comlurb personnel and scrap yard owners in which Comlurb staff seek to clarify organizational policies with the scrap yard owners and the scrap yard owners raise issues that they are having with catadores. One of these issues involves a work vest.

Latinha: I only work with the night catadores. I don't go during the day.

This surprised me. I had not yet spoken with a scrap yard owner without a registration number and without work vests from Comlurb. Latinha was limited to buying

from catadores who worked at night when work vests were not required for entry.

Latinha's restriction to buying at night was a reminder that the category of the "intermediary buyer" is not monolithic. Scrap yard owners differ in terms of their history in the neighborhood, amount of capital, infrastructure, size, type of material purchased, connections to companies in the recycling industry and, as we see here, registration status. Forty-two scrap yards are registered with Comlurb. I counted 144 scrap yards while mapping Jardim Gramacho. Realizing that Latinha probably lacked the work vests that would enable him to buy from catadores during the day, I nonetheless asked him why he worked at night.

Latinha: Why? Because a certain kind of control exists here through the registered scrap yards that give out work vests. These vests are for those who work during the day. Those who collect with these vests, in a way, are obligated to sell to these scrap yards... And so the catador who collects during the day becomes imprisoned to these vests. So what happens? If a catador collects with this vest, the owner of this vest arrives on the dump. If a sack is worth fifteen, he will pay twelve. If the sack is worth ten, he wants to pay eight. Simply because he provided the means for the catador to work during the day. So, he sees himself as the owner of the material, the owner of the work of that person and in a way this becomes exploitation because he wants to earn more than what is normal to earn. Why? Because he provided the vest. So he feels like he has the right.

Latinha draws our attention to a different sort of meaning that the work vest holds for scrap yard owners. For Valéria, the work vest is one technique among many to bring order to the dump and professionalize the work of catadores. For scrap dealers, the work vest is the basis of their perceived right to and ownership of the material collected by catadores. From this perspective, the relation between catadores and scrap yard owners thus shifts from being one of seller-buyer to one of piecemeal worker-employer. The scrap yard owners are right in a structural, Marxist sense. They own the work vests, controlling access to the dump and thereby the means of production for catadores. In this

scenario, the scrap yard owners are akin to a plantation owner who “allows” workers to pick tomatoes in their fields in exchange for piecemeal payment for each pound of tomatoes picked. This comparison is not perfect, however, because scrap yards own the means of access to the dump in the form of the work vest but do not own the source of the recyclable material that the catadores collect – that is, the garbage on the dump.⁶ Furthermore, as we will see in the comments made by Jó, Rose and Carlos, catadores challenge the view held by scrap yard owners that by furnishing the work vests, they have a right to the material of catadores.

Latinha added a final comment on scrap yards and registration that alluded to the market in work vests that has developed in Jardim Gramacho.

Latinha: I already had the opportunity to become registered, to get work vests.

Kathleen: How did this opportunity arise?

Latinha: Due to the crisis and all the difficulty, some scrap yards closed and they wanted to pass on their registration and number to other people. They even came to me and I know of people who bought registrations so that they could have the right to work during the day.

One scrap dealer told me that she bought her “number” and the associated vests for 4,000 *reais*. Describing her experience of opening up a scrap yard, she explained that scrap yards that are closing or wish to simply make a quick profit sell their registration number to new owners. They also sell the vests that bear the registration number. She added that a friend of hers had recently bought a number for 8,000 *reais* and that if she were to sell her scrap yard, she would receive 9,000 *reais* for the number and the vests alone. Not only scrap dealers, but catadores as well purchase vests – from those who have inherited vests from deceased catadores or from catadores who have left Jardim

Gramacho to pursue work elsewhere. The work vest has thus become a commodity.

The second excerpt comes from a later part of the interview with Latinha in which he discusses interactions between scrap yards and Comlurb, particularly in meetings.

Latinha explained that only registered scrap yards were invited to meetings with Comlurb, but that he always attended them despite this restriction.

Latinha: In a meeting with Comlurb, I heard that the catador does his job, Comlurb does its job, the scrap yard owner does his job; that Comlurb does not have any tie to either catadores or scrap yard owners. There was a person in the meeting who said something like: “Well, there was a catador who had one of my vests and he didn’t sell me anything. He had borrowed my vest from another catador and was collecting with it. He arrived up on the dump and died, and so his relatives came to me wanting me to pay compensation. So there should be some way to do something about this, to have some control over this kind of thing.”

There are several things to note in this account. First, Comlurb makes it clear that the company does not assume responsibility for anything that occurs on the dump involving scrap dealers or the catadores registered through scrap yards. The scrap dealer who complains of having to pay compensation to the family of a catador who was killed accepts the premise that by furnishing the work vest, the scrap yard takes responsibility for the catador. However, the scrap yard owner sees this as a contract – in exchange for the work vest, the catador has to sell exclusively to him. Because, as the story goes, the catador who was killed had borrowed the work vest from another person and had never sold to the scrap dealer, the dealer does not see himself as having any obligation to the catador’s family. Finally, this account foreshadows some of the catadores’ comments that I include below, namely that the catadores do not recognize this “contract” between catadores and scrap yards and regularly circumvent the “obligation” to sell exclusively to the scrap yard providing their work vest. Latinha continued his account of the meeting

with the response he gave to the scrap yard owner:

Latinha: So, I suggested the following proposal. I spoke a lot in the meeting, but it just went in one ear and out the other -- precisely because I don't have a registration, because I am newer among the scrap yard owners, this kind of thing. Well, I suggested, "Since money is already taken from scrap yard owners, why don't you take this money and create an aid fund for catadores, for people who work on the dump, so that when they get injured they have somewhere to go and can ask for money to buy medicine or can ask for something for their families, like a food basket, whatever, something along these lines. And when they die, this fund could even be used for funeral expenses so that the person can be buried."

Latinha's suggestion hinges on money "already taken from scrap dealers." Here he is referring obliquely to bribes that scrap dealers regularly pay guards who are subcontracted by Comlurb to check all vehicles and persons entering the dump and to provide security on top of the dump where catadores are collecting. Latinha explained later in our conversation that he gives the minimum of R\$50 a week so that the guards let him pass without a problem. Latinha emphasized to me that he was not obligated to give this money but that he gave it willingly, seeing this kind of payment as just and proportional to what he receives in return – access to the dump to pick up the material of catadores who collect at night. This money helps ensure, Latinha told me, that a single buyer will not acquire a monopoly on the dump nor that many people will come from the outside to try to buy in Jardim Gramacho, because they will not be "in the know" of how this system of payments works. Latinha added that scrap yards give money to three different "institutions", as he called them, all of which carry guns: the security on the dump, the gangsters in the neighborhood, and the police.

Latinha sets himself apart from the other scrap yard owners – the more established buyers who refuse to listen to him – by seeking to address the needs of catadores. The catadores are like a hot-potato being passed between Comlurb and the

dealers. No one is willing to take responsibility for the risks, injuries and death that is part of the work of catadores from which all other parties benefit. Though Latinha demonstrates concern for the situation, he too passes the potato – suggesting that compensation to catadores and their families for the injuries they suffer come from the bribes that the scrap dealers already pay.

The meaning of the work vest shifts in Latinha's account from being a management technique to being a contract. The scrap yard owner provides a catador with a work vest; the catador therefore must sell material to this scrap yard owner. This idea of the work vest as a contract leads easily to notions that the material that the catador collects, and thus the labor of the catador, belongs to the scrap dealer. The market in work vests (the vests now becoming not only a contract but a commodity) reinforces this slippage. "The work vest," one catadora grumbled, "was something that literally reduced people to a number, to an object. 'I have fifteen and will sell them to you!'," a scrap dealer will say and this commerce is done in Jardim Gramacho to this day." However, as we will see in the conversation between Jó, Rose and Carlos, the work vest-as-contract does not go uncontested by catadores.

Jó, Rose, and Carlos

The following excerpt comes from a life history interview with Jó. I originally met Jó when she crashed a barbecue at my house that I had thrown in celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday in the U.S. Jó's friends often joked that you never had to remember to invite Jó to an event because she could innately sense the location of a party a hundred kilometers away. A tall, robust woman with an animated spirit and a bellowing laugh, Jó

was well known and well liked on the dump. After getting to know her at my barbecue, Jó frequently offered to help me lift my burlap sacks onto the truck after a day of collecting on the dump. She needed only to call out to others once for assistance for half a dozen catadores to drop immediately what they were doing and come over to the truck to help us.

Jó grew up in a favela in another area of Rio, raised partly by her mother who worked as a prostitute and as a cook and partly by her grandmother. Her father was a pimp who died of AIDS three years earlier. He was not a presence in her life during her childhood but Jó eventually reunited with him and took care of him while he was dying. Jó worked in various employment before coming to Jardim Gramacho: as a seamstress sewing costumes for the samba school Beija Flor, as a hotel maid, and as a cook in an elite resort. Her brother introduced her to the dump six years ago when she was unemployed and unsure how she was going to feed her three children whom she supported by herself. Her brother had moved to Duque de Caxias (the municipality in the metropolitan area of Rio where the dump is located), found out about the dump, and was working there collecting paper. He took Jó to the dump for the first time, giving her a couple burlap sacks and telling her to collect all plastic household items that she found in the garbage.

I had scheduled the interview with Jó for a Sunday, suggesting that she come to my house for lunch. At 9 a.m. that Sunday, Jó was at my door shouting my name. Surprised by her early arrival, I told her that I still had to go to the market to purchase the groceries for our meal. She replied that she just wanted me to know that she had brought Rose and Carlos and that they would all be at the bar in front of my house drinking beer

to stay cool on what was a sweltering, stuffy day in early March. I knew Rose and Carlos from the association, prior to meeting Jó. They had worked on the dump for over ten years and were two of the original members of the association. They met on the dump and began living together five years ago, merging their two families. Jó frequently spent the night at Rose and Carlos's house in order to save bus fare since she lived about a half hour from Jardim Gramacho.

Rose and Carlos joined us for lunch and stayed during the interview with Jó. They mostly listened (and for half of the interview, left to go to the kitchen to wash dishes), but interjected at points that usually related to a general issue or experience of catadores. This was the case with the topic on work vests. Jó raised the subject when speaking about her first days on the dump: how various people helped her learn the work and how she did not have to worry about certain matters at that time, such as having a work vest. Both Rose and Carlos quickly interrupted to give their opinions and include their experiences related to work vests. This part of the interview became a conversation between the four of us on the practices of catadores with respect to vests. I give the excerpt in full here, so as not to disrupt the flow and tempo of the dialogue.

Jó: At that time, we didn't have to wear a vest to enter the dump. When I first came here, you didn't need a vest.

Kathleen: What happened? Where did the idea to have vests come from?

Jó: From the scrap yards.

Rose: [Interrupting] It was Comlurb, in order to reduce people's access to the dump.

Carlos: But it didn't reduce at all. It increased.

Rose: Fine. But this was the *idea* at the beginning.

Jó: Except that it increased.

Rose: Okay, let's say I am a scrap yard owner. I get 20 vests. They give 20 vests to So-and-So. Those who don't have a vest lose the right to enter. In order to reduce access. But then everyone was like "No, no..."

Kathleen: Okay. Let's say that Carlos has a scrap yard. He gives you a work vest.

Jó: Uh huh.

Kathleen: Do you have to sell to him?

Jó: You are obligated to sell to Carlos.

Rose: But the catador doesn't sell *only* to Carlos but sells to another, sells to another [Jó and Carlos break out in laughter].

Kathleen: But...

Rose: Really! Really! And when Carlos arrives hunting for you, you hide inside a burlap sack.

Jó: Inside a plastic barrel. In the middle of the garbage.

Rose: Then Carlos will ask around: "Did you see Kathleen?" And people will say: "No, I didn't see Kathleen." He'll ask around – "What happened to So-and-So?" – even more if you are well known. But if you are not well known, [slapping hands together] whatever...

Jó: And when you are known, then everyone hides you.

Rose: Yeah.

Jó: There will be some who will hide you. It all depends on the friendship that you have [laughing].

Rose: You get it?

Kathleen: Yeah, all right.

Rose: But the original idea of the work vest was to reduce how many catadores are on the dump.

Jó: But this didn't work.

Rose: It didn't work.

Kathleen: Because you are able to enter the dump without a vest?

Carlos: No. It's that one catador comes down from the dump and gives his work vest to another.

Jó: When the work vest was yellow, we matched the color.

Rose: We bought cloth –

Jó: [talking over Rose] We'd go buy cloth.

Rose: And then go to a seamstress and the seamstress would make an identical vest.

Jó: With the number and all.

Rose: So, there was, like... For example, 38-01. There were

Rose and Jó [simultaneously]: Five 38-01!

Carlos: Sometimes there were ten!

Rose: So, I make three vests, give one to you, one to my cousin, another one to my neighbor.

Jó: Because one meter of cloth made two vests. You'd buy one meter of cloth to make two vests.

Rose: And then, you'd all work it out: "Okay, So-and-So, I am going to go up in this truck. You wait until three trucks pass by, then you go up."

Kathleen: Oh, so that they wouldn't notice...

Rose: Yeah. Yeah. And in this way, they lost the control.

Throughout this dialogue, Jó, Rose and Carlos interrupt each other. Certainly, the majority of conversations that I transcribed involved instances of participants talking over each other, rapid back-and-forth comments, and the completion of others' sentences. However, a pattern emerges among the interruptions in the above dialogue that I see as meaningful to an understanding of power relations and work vests in Jardim Gramacho. At several points, one person cuts off another in order to correct or clarify the statement being made. At the beginning of the excerpt, for example, Jó states that the idea for the work vests came from the scrap yards. This prompts Rose to interject that the idea was actually Comlurb's. The difference in these two responses is not so much a disagreement; Jó does not question or even reply to Rose's assertion that Comlurb initiated the work vest. Rather, this "disagreement" is a reflection of the ambiguity surrounding the work vests, the disconnect between policy and practice. Jó answers my question from the perspective of lived experience: the scrap yards give the catadores the work vests and clearly benefit from this control over catadores; hence the work vests originate with the scrap yards. Rose responds instead with the official account, the one given by Valéria, that Comlurb initiated the work vest as a strategy for reducing the number of catadores on the dump.

This kind of discrepancy occurs again in the dialogue when Carlos immediately interrupts Rose to point out that the numbers of catadores continued to increase following

the introduction of work vests on the dump. Here, Rose explicitly distinguishes between policy and practice. She responds in agreement to Carlos but qualifies this with the statement that the purpose, if not the reality, of the work vest was to reduce numbers of catadores. This disconnect begins to reveal how Comlurb's strategies of control are perceived by catadores. Comlurb's policy involving the vests does not "work" as Jó, Rose and Carlos maintain, not because catadores overtly protest, resist, or force their way onto the dump without vests but because they find other ways of circumventing this policy. They make their own vests, duplicate them, and share them with others.

Similarly, when I asked whether catadores are required to sell to the scrap yard that provides the work vest, I received two seemingly contradictory answers. Jó this time gives the official policy response. Yes, you are obligated to sell to that scrap yard owner. But Rose interrupts again to point out that despite this obligation, the catador sells to multiple buyers. Jó, Rose and Carlos do not share the view of the scrap yard owners, expressed by Latinha, that the provision of a work vest gives the scrap yard owner the right to a catador's material. Jó and Rose describe the various ways of evading and tricking a scrap dealer in order to sell to another buyer offering a higher price. Ambiguity in this context abounds. Comlurb insists on catadores wearing work vests though the number of catadores continues to increase. Catadores are required to sell to the particular scrap yard that provides their work vests, but in practice they sell to multiple scrap yards. This means that buyers also undermine each other. Catadores circumvent the restriction of the work vest by making copies of vests; in so doing, though, they participate in and affirm this policy of control.

It is striking that all of the tactics to evade control that Jó, Rose and Carlos

mention rely upon cooperation to work. Catadores do not just hide from buyers “hunting” them on the dump; they hide each other. Here Jó points to the importance of friendship among catadores for success in this on-going battle with buyers. In response to Comlurb’s attempt to reduce the number of catadores by introducing a finite number of vests as the means of access to the dump, catadores make copies of the vests, share them with family members and neighbors and coordinate so that two people with the same numbered vest do not enter the dump at the same time. This requires at least some degree of organization and collective action in opposition to Comlurb and scrap yard owners. My point is not to romanticize these tactics as “resistance” but rather to call our attention to the moments and contexts in which catadores work collectively to evade forms of oppression that they most certainly recognize. Much of the informal economy literature argues that workers in this context are necessarily individualistic and competitive and therefore rarely mobilize collectively (Cross 1998; Itzigsohn 2006). This interpretation is only possible if people are perceived *only* as workers, divorced from the full range of social relationships in which they make their lives. “It all depends on the friendship you have,” Jó tells me. “So I make three vests, give one to you, one to my cousin, another one to my neighbor,” Rose says later. Catadores blend their lives as workers on the dump with their lives as friends, kin, and neighbors. This is central for any understanding of class formation and collective action in alternative forms of employment.

Jó, Rose and Carlos’s conversation about work vests highlight the discrepancies and contradictions surrounding the work vest. This dynamic adds a chapter to the story of work vests and waste management policies in Jardim Gramacho. More importantly, their back-and-forth banter speak to the power relations in this work context: it reveals not

only that these very contradictions provide the space for catadores to develop their own strategies of evading control but also that they perpetuate unending games that render the outcome of such efforts indeterminate. In what follows, I put contradiction at the center of my analysis and attempt to tease out the implications of such everyday ambiguity for our conceptualizations of the economy.

Power Struggles and Liminal Economies

The disconnects, tensions, and struggles found at the intersection of the three accounts of work vests illuminate several features of economic relations in Jardim Gramacho. The first concerns the question of exploitation. In one of the earliest studies of reclaimers, Chris Birkbeck (1978) describes garbage pickers on a dump in Cali, Colombia as exploited, piecemeal laborers working for the “factories” of scrap dealers. Birkbeck argues that despite being part of the “informal sector” and working independently on the dump, these garbage pickers rely entirely upon the dealers who buy and set the prices of their material. It is worth quoting him in full:

Because of the nature of their relationship with the industrial market for recuperated materials, the garbage pickers in effect work for the factories but are not employed by them. They are little more than casual industrial outworkers, yet with the illusion of being self-employed. They may be in a position to decide when to work and when not to, but the critical factor is control over the prices of recuperated materials, and that control very definitely lies with the industrial consumers. It is for this reason that I call garbage pickers ‘self-employed proletarians’ thereby underlining the essentially contradictory nature of their class location. They are self-employed yet in reality sell their labour power (1174).

In these few lines, Birkbeck addresses what would become a long debate in the informal economy literature and one of the issues that continues to crop up in studies of reclaimers: namely, the tension between seeing this type of work as self-employed,

autonomous, independent and even liberating, and seeing it as disguised wage labor and thus a form of super-exploitation (Castells and Portes 1989). Birkbeck clearly falls on the side of the latter. For Birkbeck, the aspects of this work that give the impression of independence and self-employment, such as the ability of reclaimers to determine when and how much to work, are misrecognized by the reclaimers who fail to see that the real issue is their dependence upon the scrap dealers who buy their material.

When Birkbeck wrote his article in 1978, few scholars were considering income-generating activities of the urban poor, such as the work of the reclaimers in Cali as organized, productive and part of larger industries. Birkbeck's Marxist analysis of this work illuminates how the "petty" activities of those not formally employed are integrated into capitalist production and how the situation of these workers is not that different from the situation of industrialized factory workers. However, what I find missing in this perspective is a consideration of the ambiguity of this kind of labor configuration that enables participants to engage in power struggles without projected ends, to play on-going games.

Scrap dealers strive to set low prices of material and force catadores to whom they furnish work vests to sell exclusively to them. This would be a clear-cut example of exploitation, defined as the act of profiting from another's labor. The catadores in this scenario would be structurally similar to piecemeal workers, as Birkbeck argues. However, as we see in Jó, Rose and Carlos's comments, catadores do not see themselves as employees of the depositories. They believe that they have a right to their material, that they own the material that they collect, and that they can decide when and to whom they sell their material. And since scrap dealers are not homogeneous and do not operate

as a unified block, as we see in Latinha's account of his experience as a buyer, catadores can take advantage of inequalities and competition among buyers, play buyers off each other, and push for higher prices. They can also decide not to sell their material or even not to work if the price drops too low. Jó, Rose, and Carlos provide multiple examples of the strategies they have pursued to evade the controls of the work vest: hiding from buyers, making their own vests, and sharing their vests with family and friends.

However, it is important to note as well that catadores are not always successful. A catador cannot hide every time from the scrap dealer providing the work vest; at a certain point, the dealer will tell a guard to confiscate the work vest the next time the catador arrives on the dump. In addition, the controls and counter-controls, as Valéria point out, are constantly changing. Catadores learned to duplicate the color of the yellow work vest, but Comlurb has since changed the color of the work vest to green. The point here is that catadores, buyers, and even Comlurb administrators are engaged in continually on-going struggles enabled by the indeterminacy of the social situation. The status of catadores as workers; what contract, if any, exists between scrap dealers, catadores and Comlurb; who has a right to and ownership over material collected on the dump; what types of exchanges are legal, licit or legitimate on the dump – all of these ambiguities create confusion from which an experienced participant can potentially benefit.

A second dimension of economic life in Jardim Gramacho that becomes salient in the work vest accounts relates to how we talk about, and thus conceptualize, this world of work and exchange. Ever since Keith Hart first proposed the term “informal sector” in the 1970s in an effort to account for the labor of growing numbers of unemployed city-

dwellers in Ghana, a large body of literature utilizing and debating this term has developed across the social sciences. Related concepts, such as illicit economy, parallel economy, underground economy and shadow economy also emerged as part of the discussions on informality. One of the strongest critiques of this literature has argued that the notion of an informal economy, as well as its related concepts, erroneously divides the economy into separate spheres and fails to acknowledge how informal economic activities are integral to regional, national and global markets (Malagutti 2000; Noronha 2003). Studies that have heeded this critique and taken up the task of illustrating connections between formal, regulated, licit economies and informal and/or illicit economies have tended to focus on global commodity chains or trade routes (see Carr and Chen 2001; Collins 2003; Hansen 2002; Nordstrom 2007). For example, Marilyn Carr and Martha Chen (2001) trace the pathway of Shea butter from self-employed women gathering the Shea butter in Burkina Faso to confectionary companies in Europe and North America. This type of analysis illustrates well that the so-called informal and formal are not two separate economies.

However, the day-to-day interactions and exchanges described in the work vest accounts, suggest a more horizontal integration of those adjectivized economies. Comlurb, a multimillion dollar company owned by the City of Rio de Janeiro, is heavily engaged in efforts to structure and control the activities of both catadores and scrap yards in Jardim Gramacho, the majority of which are unregistered businesses that pay weekly bribes to both police and local gangsters to allow them to operate in peace. These scrap yards also make payments to Comlurb personnel in order to ensure their continued access to the dump and at times to circumvent the rules set down by Comlurb. Comlurb's policy

of the work vest has furthermore created a market in these vests, transforming them into commodities that a buyer who is closing business will sell to a new or expanding scrap yard. Here we see firms, drug dealers, self-employed workers, small-scale vendors, and police engaged with each other in a range of economic exchanges. These economic exchanges are at once formal, informal, licit, and illicit. Our different categories of economies come together not only at the point that objects gathered from garbage are recycled into raw material in a manufacturing plant but at multiple points throughout Jardim Gramacho in everyday practice.

This suggests the need for a different way to think about economic activities classified as the informal economy. The concept of the informal economy falsely fragments webs of relations and exchange. It fails to do justice to the ways that economies are constructed in everyday practice. And it reinforces the idea that a pure, orthodox economy – *the* economy – exists from which all other (informal, illicit, shadow, parallel...) economies deviate. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge and perhaps emphasize the diversity of employment conditions and trade relations in the world today. By traditional definitions, the informal sector's share of nonagricultural employment has been estimated to reach 57 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 78 percent in Africa, and 45-85 percent in Asia (Gallin 2001:533). In Brazil, 50 percent of workers are employed in informal enterprises (IMF 2005:115, cited by Rocha 2007:145), and 88 percent of these are self-employed (IBGE 2005). Attention to this reality was the original inspiration for the concept of the informal economy and a primary reason for its continued use despite trenchant critiques. The task, then, is to develop a holistic approach to the study of economies that still accounts for such labor

configurations as those found in Jardim Gramacho.

Recent anthropological theories of the state, particularly the work of Veena Das, might offer guidance for this task. In her analysis of the riots in Delhi that followed the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, Das proposes the concept of “illegibility” as a way to understand the state as “neither a rational-bureaucratic organization nor simply a fetish but as a form of regulation that oscillates between a rational mode and a magical mode of being” (2007:162). Das argues that this oscillation derives from the difficulty in “reading” the law: policemen led crowds committing crimes and violence during the riots in 1984 while perpetrators invoked the law arguing that it was illegal to hide Sikhs. Das further illustrates how state documents are forged, mimicked and reproduced as a strategy of survival – both by low-level bureaucrats and by communities of urban poor. She gives the example of the Emergency in 1975 when those seeking housing claims were illegally required to produce certificates of sterilization by bureaucrats seeking to fulfill the goals of their supervisors related to population control. Many urban poor paid homeless or others who were more needy to undergo sterilization in order to acquire the certificate and make a housing claim. Here we again see this oscillation between the rational and magical mode –the use of these official state certificates which were fictitiously produced and illegally required by bureaucrats. Das argues that this illegibility of the state is a potential source of power for both officials of the state and those being governed.

What would it mean to adapt this conceptualization of the Indian state to an understanding of the economy as constructed in Jardim Gramacho?⁷ Just as the state in Das’s account is neither rational nor magical, the economy in Jardim Gramacho is neither

formal nor informal. Das's description of forgeries, imitations and the potential power that comes from this uncertainty is also reminiscent of the contradictions, obscurity, and trickery that fuels power struggles among Comlurb personnel, scrap dealers, and catadores. Liminality is at the heart of the economy in Jardim Gramacho. To conceptualize the everyday economic practices and relations there in terms of liminality allows us to overcome the dualistic concepts of informal-formal and illicit-licit while still highlighting the types of activities that the informal economy category was meant to acknowledge. This attention to liminal spaces may also enable us to question reified ideas of *the* economy and pursue inquiries that take a practice-oriented approach to how economies are made in and through the social interactions of everyday life.

Notes

¹ At the time of research (2008-2009), this was roughly equal to \$750,000.

² The number of catadores since 1996 has swelled to over 2,000. The Association of Catadores had registered roughly 1500 catadores by 2008, and not all catadores filled out the Association's registration forms.

³ Many catadores who had work at Coopergramacho complained that they made less income than they did working on the dump. They blamed this on the equal division of income among all members in accordance with the amount of time worked rather than amount of material each person retrieved.

⁴ One of the catadores who had helped found ACAMJG became disillusioned with the ways ACAMJG operated its cooperative at the Pólo and left (see Chapter 7 for this story). Still believing in "the spirit of cooperativism," as he called it, he started organizing a new cooperative in Jardim Gramacho, which he named Cooperjardim. Valéria met with these catadores to explain the process and documentation needed to legalize a cooperative.

⁵ New scrap dealers in Jardim Gramacho often purchase the registration number and work vests from scrap yards that have closed down in addition to trucks and equipment necessary to begin business.

⁶ Technically, Comlurb owns the source of the recyclable material because Comlurb owns the dump.

⁷ While being faithful to the ethnographic context from which Das's concept of illegibility emerged, I do not intend to set up a dichotomy between the state and the economy. The economy is also a site of governance, as I attempt to show throughout this thesis through an analysis of work as a disciplining technique.

CHAPTER 4

“I COME AND GO, COME AND GO”: CIRCULATING WORKERS AND PRECARIOUS LIVES

On a long, lazy Sunday afternoon – as Rose, Carlos, and I lounged on overturned wooden crates outside their house and passed around several cans of cheap beer and a plate of grilled sausage – Rose announced that she had good news to share.

“What? What is it?” I asked.

“Well...”

Rose paused for effect.

“I found a job.”

I knew that, prior to collecting on the dump, Rose had worked in various kinds of employment – selling garlic on the streets of downtown Rio, cooking for a lunch counter, cleaning in an elementary school, and providing in-home care for an elderly woman. This new job, however, was different because it was a job that came with a *carteira assinada*, a worker’s passbook signed by the employer that would guarantee Rose at least a minimum wage, compensation in the case of injury, pension payments, and other rights of a formally employed and recognized worker in Brazil.

“It’ll be my first job ever with a *carteira assinada*,” Rose emphasized. She told me that she would receive two minimum wages – at least as much if not more than she was presently making on the dump. She would be cleaning the house of a couple who lived a relatively short 20-minute bus-ride away. And she was due to start the following

Monday. Details about the job and Rose's excitement filled much of our conversation for the rest of the afternoon.

I was therefore surprised when, a few weeks later, I asked Rose how she was liking her new job and she replied nonchalantly:

“Oh, I quit.”

Her employer required her to stay at work until 7 p.m., even though she easily finished all of her cleaning tasks by two in the afternoon.

“I had nothing to do, but just sit there. For five hours! It drove me crazy,” Rose told me. “I figured I might as well be home. Railende and Anani would already be out of school, and why not be there with them?”

Sure enough, a few days later I saw Rose back on the dump. She waved to me from across a pile of recently unloaded waste – balancing a barrel of plastics on her right shoulder as she carefully stepped through mud that oozed puddles from the drizzling rain.

The Circulations of Catadores

When I first began my research, I was concerned with understanding the life trajectories that led catadores to arrive in Jardim Gramacho and work on the dump. That catadores were unemployed elsewhere and that it was difficult if not impossible for most of them to find a stable job seemed obvious. Yet, to comprehend the work of catadores as a strategy of economic survival alone struck me as a reductive explanation -- if an explanation at all. To borrow from Elliot Liebow's classic study of unemployed men, *Tally's Corner*, “Such an answer begs the question. It is descriptive of the facts; it does not explain them” (1967:34). I therefore set out to understand how political, social,

cultural, and environmental processes and institutions carved out the pathways that led catadores to Jardim Gramacho. How did experiences of employment and unemployment figure into the fuller life histories of catadores? In what ways do catadores make sense of these processes? How do they relate and come to understand their own entry narratives?

Over time, I realized that these inquiries were important but not entirely adequate, that the trajectories leading catadores to Jardim Gramacho continue. A perhaps more compelling question is why catadores leave and then return to working on the dump. Rose's story is not at all unusual in Jardim Gramacho. I often felt there that everyone was constantly on the move. Sometimes I would not see someone for weeks or even months on the dump and almost without fail, the person would reappear – often with a story of a family visit to another part of Rio or a story of employment very similar to Rose's. My own comings and goings, as I tried to fit research into academic breaks before spending a continuous year in Jardim Gramacho, seemed easily understood in this world.

Rose's story and the stories of other catadores who have left seemingly "better" jobs to return to working on the garbage dump bring to mind studies of informal and illicit economies, such as Philippe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect* (1995), or Steven Gregory's *The Devil Behind the Mirror* (2007), which consider why some laboring poor may decide to work informally rather than in more "legitimate" types of employment. Bourgois sees the refusal of the drug dealers he comes to know in East Harlem to work in menial service jobs, such as in a McDonalds – the only kind of "legit" employment available to them following the deindustrialization of New York City – as a form of oppositional politics to demeaning, minimum-wage work. Dealing in El Barrio brings status, respect, and an affirmed masculinity utterly lost in "the humiliating interpersonal

subordination of service work” (Bourgois 1995:141). For catadores, however, working in and with garbage – far from bringing respect – is a type of work that is stigmatizing even within their own social worlds. Catadores who live in another favela of Rio will make sure that they are showered and nicely dressed before going home so that their neighbors, and in some cases their family members, do not know what they do. Even those catadores who will say openly and with pride that they work as a catador are aware that others often perceive their work of reclaiming objects from garbage as not real work, as not any different from being a beggar or *vagabundo*, a bum.

Furthermore, collecting on the dump is arduous work done under harsh conditions. In *The Devil Behind the Mirror* (2007), Steven Gregory explains that, in part, the participation of undocumented Haitians in the underground tourist economy in the Dominican Republic is a preferred alternative to the only other employment option: hard labor in the sugar industry. Rose presents us with the opposite. She leaves a job that she describes as not that demanding to return to working on the dump. Even if she did not describe her job in this way, domestic work is arguably less physically straining and dangerous than work on the garbage dump. “I was so afraid when I arrived in Jardim Gramacho,” Rose recounted, dropping her voice to a whisper, “I looked all around me and thought to myself, what the hell am I doing here, picking up garbage, picking up bags of shit?! And the fear! The huge tractors that could run you over, you know...” As Rose’s voice trailed off, seemingly lost in a memory, I thought of the many times I had heard her say, “the dump isn’t a walk in the park, *não é mole*.”

Given the harsh work conditions on the dump, how do we understand Rose’s story and the stories of many catadores who told me, in reference to the dump in Jardim

Gramacho, that they “come and go, come and go?” This inquiry at first seemed only to generate further contradictions. On the one hand, catadores repeatedly told me that they would leave Jardim Gramacho in an instance if they could find another kind of employment. “If tomorrow, there appeared an opportunity to leave the dump, for sure I would go,” Jó asserted. “I am not on the dump because I like to be there,” Cordeiro remarked, “but because I didn’t really have an option.” Many catadores, especially young men in their late teens and yearly twenties, described frustrating experiences of camping out in a line over night in the hope of being one of the first people to respond to a job announcement, “only to be told that you have to have prior experience,” André grumbled. Elias, who began working in Jardim Gramacho when he was sixteen years old, said that even though eight years had passed and he continued on the dump “to this day,” he was trying to find another job that would be considered “honest work.”

Yet, on the other hand, most catadores who did find work outside Jardim Gramacho at one time or another, returned to the dump within a few weeks or months. Most were not actively searching for another job, as echoed in Jó’s comment that she would leave Jardim Gramacho if an employment opportunity just happened to appear. There seems to be a classic anthropological disconnect here between what people say and what people do: catadores maintain that they will leave the dump at the first opportunity, but few leave and when they do, they often return within a short time. The practices of catadores contain contradictions as well. As we saw above, Rose enthusiastically accepted a job offer, and then a few weeks later, quit this job and began working again in Jardim Gramacho. I argue in this chapter that these contradictions stem from competing desires and aspirations in the lives of catadores. Formal, stable employment, while upheld

by catadores as a dominant cultural value¹, often comes into conflict with their other life goals and demands.

I begin my discussion of these contradictions by situating the work of catadores within the fuller constellation of labor among urban poor in the metropolitan area of Rio. In both scholarly and popular accounts of catadores, there is a tendency to depict reclaiming on a garbage dump as such an extreme form of labor as to be incommensurable in the world of work. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, what counts as work and how the activities of catadores meet this definition have been issues of debate and struggle. However, nearly all catadores I met in Jardim Gramacho had worked outside the dump at some point in their lives and these different work experiences were interrelated both practically and symbolically. Let me explain what I mean by this by first contextualizing the work of catadores within the historical evolution of meanings attached to the image of labor and of the worker in Brazil.

The Symbolic Ordering of Labor in Brazil

In the 1930s, the populist dictator Getúlio Vargas radically transformed the position and meaning of labor in Brazil by making working-class employment the basis and emblem of Brazilian citizenship (Holston 2008). Prior to Vargas's *Estado Novo* (New State), Brazil's long history of slavery and the continued power of the oligarchy following abolition in 1888 had the effect of devalorizing manual labor. Many scholars have pointed to the middle and upper classes' avoidance of household work and to the historic separation between service elevators, entrances, and areas in buildings from those used by residents (see Goldstein 2003; Holston 2008:278), as manifestations of this

perceived indignity of labor. The figure of the *malandro* – the trickster, petty thief, hustler – that became popularized and exalted in samba lyrics in the 1920s, expressed in a different register the disdain for work. In his analysis of this music, Ruben Oliven argues that *malandragem*, “by proclaiming a ‘horror of work’ and by refusing salaried work, developed as an alternative strategy of survival in a society that marginalized the laborer and did not assure him the conditions of a decent livelihood from the fruit of his labor” (Oliven 1984a:107, see also Oliven 1984b).

Vargas passed a series of labor laws that positioned the state as the sole arbitrator between capital and labor as a mechanism to control the labor organizing that developed in conjunction with Brazil’s industrialization at the beginning of the 20th century and with high levels of European immigration that brought to Brazil anarchist and communist influences. As a result of this legislation, the state began regulating work organizations, defined what legally counted as a profession, granted rights based on one’s status as a worker, and instituted the *carteira assinada*, the worker’s passbook mentioned in Rose’s story. In his historical ethnography of urban laboring poor in São Paulo, James Holston (2008) argues that, through these labor reforms, Vargas produced another form of differentiated citizenship in Brazil. On the one hand, labor became valorized for the first time in Brazilian history and workers could access rights on the basis of their labor; but on the other, those who were not employed in legally defined and regulated professions, were excluded from this new citizenship status.

Article 136 [of the 1937 Constitution] divided Brazil’s population into those who worked and those who did not, making work both a social right and a social obligation that entitled workers to state protection. By the same coin, it practically criminalized those who did not work for reasons other than infirmity. The regime placed the unemployed at the moral margins of society, labeling them ‘bums’ (*vagabundo*) and excluding them categorically from the only kind of citizenship

rights most Brazilians at the time might realistically exercise. Thus, it created a new construct of social marginality and exclusion” (2008:194).

In short, by exalting “the worker” as the model Brazilian citizen, Vargas created a worker-criminal dichotomy that continues to function in Brazilian society’s moral order.

In recent years, the symbolism of “the worker” has taken on added meaning in the context of drug trafficking, violence, and the fear of crime among middle and upper classes in Rio de Janeiro and other major cities of Brazil. Rather than associate favelas with the working-class poor, in the past two decades Brazilian elites have increasingly come to perceive favela residents as *marginais* (marginals), a word now denoting criminals and drug traffickers rather than the poorest of the poor (Perlman 2010:157; Roth-Gordon 2009:58). This semiotic shift has justified extreme forms of police violence targeting favela residents and street children (Caldeira 2000:138; Scheper-Hughes 2006:154), as well as the elite’s disregard of structural inequalities and the everyday struggles of Brazil’s lower classes, no longer deemed the hard-working, “deserving” poor (Skidmore 2010:191).

In this context, favela residents themselves have taken up the *trabalhador-marginal* (worker-marginal) or *trabalhador-bandido* (worker-bandit) dichotomy, as a way to distinguish themselves from criminality. This is especially the case for poor, black, male youth who are frequently the targets of police abuse (Penglase 2007). For example, when Simone’s 17-year-old son was stopped and shoved by police one day in Jardim Gramacho, he pleaded his innocence by taking out his boots, gloves, and water bottle to try to prove that he was an honest worker. In such instances, *trabalhador* invokes the Vargas-era valorization of the “worker of Brazil” and becomes synonymous with law-abiding citizen. Brazilian anthropologist Leticia Veloso (2010) has argued that

this slippage has led to the fetishization of the worker passbook. During her fieldwork among poor youth in Rio, she observed several adolescents, who had acquired formal jobs through an NGO program, flaunt their worker passbooks at every opportunity. Even though their employment consisted of minimum-wage jobs with no possibilities of advancement (such as a pizza delivery boy), it provided them with the status of worker and the ability to demonstrate this status through their signed passbooks. The passbook, according to Veloso, became more important than the actual job, because the passbook “proved” that these young men worked and therefore were not bandits.

Rose’s initial excitement about obtaining a job with a worker passbook must be understood within this larger moral order situating the worker in contradistinction to the criminal or the low-life *marginal*. The significance of the worker passbook for Rose entailed not only the guarantee of employment rights and benefits. It also, and perhaps more importantly, held the promise of shedding the stigma of an activity associated in the wider social imaginary with crime, drug addiction, alcoholism, and begging, and of joining the ranks of the solidly working class. However, this aspiration, as we will see, clashed with other values and pressures in Rose’s life.

I now want to reverse my discussion from Rose’s departures to her arrival in Jardim Gramacho. This requires me to write parts of Rose’s life story as she related it to me on another lazy Sunday afternoon at her house, just a couple of weeks before I finished my fieldwork. Both Rose and I had put off this interview for months, mostly because we regularly spent so much time together at Deca’s bar chatting and gossiping over roasted chicken and bottles of *Skol* that it seemed bizarre to schedule a special time for an interview. I therefore knew many elements of Rose’s story from our conversations

prior to recording her life history, but I asked Rose to tell her life story as if I did not know any part. I focus on Rose's story not because it is representative of the life histories of catadores, as if that were possible, and not even because it is a particularly salient example of the comings and goings of catadores. Unlike the vast majority of catadores, Rose moved permanently to Jardim Gramacho when she began working there and over the years, left the dump and neighborhood very rarely. Rather, I present Rose's story as an organizing thread tying together the various pieces that comprise my analysis. Along the way, I introduce parts of the life histories of other catadores to further elucidate points or to address issues that are not raised in Rose's story.

An Entry Narrative

"So, when are we going to start this interview?" Rose asked me. We had spent the previous two hours exchanging the latest gossip with one of Rose's neighbors, Cristina, who had stopped by to use Rose's water pipe. The area known as Maruim, which began on the other side of the road, still lacked water lines and sanitation.² Cristina excused herself, complaining of a large pile of laundry awaiting her at home and lifting an overflowing jug in each hand. Water sloshed onto the dusty yard. A trail of mud stains followed Cristina as she made her way across the street.

"We can begin whenever you like," I replied. Rose took a sip of beer.

"I was born in Campo Grande, in the state of Paraíba in the Northeast. I was mostly raised by my grandparents who had twenty children. Of their twenty children, ten died. My mother was their fourth, no, their third daughter. As someone who was very feisty, willful, and a little vain, my mother never liked living there, helping my

grandfather with the crops and cattle. And so my mother came to Rio de Janeiro very young and began working here.

“And so, I was six months old when I first came to Rio. My brothers had already come. I have one brother who is 39 years old now and another who is 35. In the past, forty years ago, Rio was a place where you could make a decent living. My mother was nuts about making money and that is why she wanted to come to Rio. When I was four years old, my father left my mother. He left all of us, my brothers and me, in a square in downtown Rio. That day we were playing in the square and my father bought us *chorros*. I used to love *chorros*, you know, those pastries that have caramel in the middle of them that they sell on the street? He bought us *chorros* and said, ‘Now stay here until your mother comes to get you.’ He just abandoned us – me and my two brothers – in that square. He then set off to sell the gas tank, fan, television, everything in the house, while my mother was working. He arrived at the bus station and just before the bus was scheduled to leave, he called my mother and told her, ‘You should leave work now because all of your children are in the square. They have been there since nine this morning.’ By the time my mother arrived, it was three in the afternoon. I remember this as if it happened today. I remember. I was four years old when my father did this.

“My grandparents found out what had happened and came to take me back to Paraíba. They felt sorry for me, because my mother worked long hours in Rio and had to leave me with others to look after me. She worked in a *pensão*, a boarding house, for fourteen years and then she became a street vendor in the center of the city. On Rio Branco Avenue, in Cinelândia, in Candelária, in Praça 15, on Uruguayana. Nearly my entire family worked as street vendors downtown: my mother, my aunts and uncles, by

brothers. I worked as a street vendor as well. When I was 14 years old, I returned to Rio to live with my mother. But I wasn't able to adapt to living with her. I started working downtown to support myself, as a vendor, selling garlic. I was 15 years old at the time.

“Soon after, I met the father of my children. I was having a drink in a corner bar with a group of friends. Like always, still today, right? You never do lose your habits. He was there with some friends of his and we began hanging out and not too long after, we moved in together. At the time, he worked in construction. He paved roads where we lived in Piabetá. I continued selling garlic.

“I sold garlic on the streets for a long time. But then a new mayor took office and the municipal police began to take our merchandise on the street. We had to run from them. You must have seen this on the television. When the police come, the *rapa* – we call them the *rapa* – chase all the vendors. And well, I got to know some of the businesses on Uruguyana where I sold garlic and when the police cracked down, I found a job at a lunch counter there. I worked as kitchen help until the woman who owned the place died of a heart attack. She died and the lunch counter closed. I then worked for another lunch counter, but I didn't like that owner. So, I stopped working. I then found a job cleaning a school in Magé. I swept the classrooms and straightened up the desks and chairs. Soon after, I became pregnant with Railende and I stopped working again. I had to depend entirely on my husband, a husband who never liked to work because he is a good-for-nothing – to this day. So, we separated.

“I began to pass through hard times. Railende was only 10 months old. Anani was three and Raele was four. They were born so close to each other, one after the other. They were little, and I was alone and unemployed. My mother was indignant when I left home

and moved in with my husband. She told me, ‘If you go, you’re on your own. If you think you’re so capable...’ And, Kathleen, I left and until this day, I have never returned to my mother’s house. To visit, of course. I was just there during Easter. And I talk with her on the phone. But I never went back to live with her.

“And so, I passed through hard times. I slept on top of the pedestrian bridge by the train station until I was able to get enough money to pay rent for a one-room shack – for myself and my oldest, who was eight months old at that time. I paid someone to take care of her so that I could work and at night, I didn’t have anywhere to go. I would pick her up and we would sleep at the train station. In the morning, I would leave her with a baby-sitter and would go work. That happened because my husband and I – we lived together but we broke up a lot. We would be together, then separate, then get back together, then separate. And I was always crazy. I would just pick up and leave everything and get the hell out. I always thought of myself as a very strong person. I always worked, and so when I didn’t want to put up with that shit anymore, I would leave. I didn’t think twice about it. But then, we would meet up again, make up, and get back together. Everything all over again. We stayed that way for nine years. Until I said once and for all, ‘I don’t want this anymore.’

“After Railende was born, I passed through very hard times. One day, Railende said to me – he was only 10 months old and he hardly even spoke yet. He said to me, “Mom, bottle, mom, bottle.” And I didn’t have the money to buy milk. I didn’t know what to do.

“My friend Nazaré came to me. You know Nazaré. She had another husband at that time and he would come here to collect food from the dump, *podrão*. She said to me,

‘Damn, Rose, there’s this place. I know you aren’t going to like it, but at least there you will be able to make some money and have food for your children.’

“And that was when I came to Jardim Gramacho.”

The Shock of Order

As in Rose’s story, the work histories of many catadores began on the streets or in some other context of informality. Funabem sold snacks on the commuter trains that bring workers into downtown from Rio’s periphery. Ana Carla combined collecting recyclables with selling sweets and refreshments on buses; she collected material at a waste transfer station and then used her earnings to buy refreshments to sell to passengers stuck in traffic. André worked odd jobs in construction as a bricklayer. João shined shoes and sold popsicles on the trains. Dona Rosa carried bags for customers at an open-air market, made passion fruit juice to sell on the beach in Ramos, and sold mints at the entrance of a movie theater.

Many of these catadores shared stories similar to Rose’s account of the increased difficulties faced by informal workers beginning in the 1990s. Rose’s mention of a new mayor of Rio and a subsequent crack-down on unlicensed street vendors referred to Mayor César Maia’s urban revitalization program. In 1993, César Maia took office and launched a series of projects, including *Rio Cidade* and *Favela-Bairro*, that implemented a new politics of bringing order to what he called the “urban chaos” of Rio de Janeiro. “My entrance into office coincided with a profound urban crisis in the city,” César Maia asserted. “The previous governments had a populist base as a trademark. They abandoned the consolidated city in name of ‘social priorities’ of a metropolis occupied in a

disorderly fashion, principally in the favelas. We have passed through a long period in which the central neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro practically did not receive a single considerable intervention.”³

In contrast to earlier urban planning in Rio in the 1970s and 1980s that proposed general, large-scale solutions, César Maia’s intervention focused on targeted, relatively short-term projects with immediate results that he called “urban acupuncture” (Oliveira 2008). These projects focused on beautifying the city and aimed to improve Rio de Janeiro’s *image* as a global city that would be attractive to international capital and tourism. Inspired by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s “Broken Windows” approach to crime in New York City, César Maia saw these projects as a way to address issues of security and violence in the city. He also looked to the urban reforms in Barcelona for the 1992 Olympics as a guiding example and hired the Spanish company Tecnologías Urbanas Barcelona S.A. to develop the *Plano Estratégico da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro* - The Strategic Plan for the City of Rio de Janeiro (Ribeiro 2009:158-160).

The project *Rio Cidade* concentrated on the streets as the primary element of urban space in need of reform. The urban planner responsible for initiatives in the Central Business District of Rio, Augusto Ivan, referred to this project as one of “straightening up the house” or “cleaning the landscape” (Magalhães 2002). Such “clean-up” involved burying telephone and electric wires underground, relocating bus stops, telephone booths, and mailboxes, and widening the streets in some areas, as well as removing street vendors, street children, and the homeless from major arteries and highly visible public spaces of the city (Oliveira 2008:9). Within this project, therefore, hung electric lines and street vendors both fell within the same category as obstructions of public space,

inhibiting an image of tidiness and order. The plan also argued that removing obstacles from the streets would enable more fluid pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

At the same time that Mayor César Maia launched his urban renewal projects, he also founded the *guarda municipal*, a municipal police force instated to protect the city's patrimony: its public parks, squares, gardens, beaches, and monuments. The duties of the *guarda municipal* quickly extended to the active policing of street vendors operating within these public spaces. Though officers of the *guarda municipal* do not carry arms, they make use of clubs, handcuffs, and in some cases attack dogs when detaining unlicensed vendors and confiscating their goods. Most catadores who had previously worked as street vendors described the loss of merchandise as the harshest consequence of these police actions and the one that ultimately inhibited them from continuing to sell on the streets. "When the police caught us selling on the train platforms," João related, "they would take us to the station downtown, take our merchandise, and then release us. I lost my whole box, all of my popsicles, everything. It became too big of a loss to keep selling."

Brazilian geographer Marci3n Piñ3n de Oliveira (2008) has argued that while César Maia's urban renewal project removed vendors from major streets and avenues of Rio on the basis that vendors impeded the flow of traffic, these vacated spaces subsequently became occupied by commercial businesses. Bars, fast-food joints, caf3s, and lunch counters extended their dining areas onto the sidewalks. The city government also allowed kiosks to be built – all with the same style and size – in plazas and pedestrian-only streets that had previously been selling spots for ambulant vendors. Thus, Oliveira concludes, the project had far less to do with opening up streets and sidewalks

than with controlling who could occupy these spaces and what activities were permissible within them. The end result was the privatization of public space.

César Maia served three terms as mayor of Rio de Janeiro (1993-1996; 2001-2004; 2005-2008). Luiz Paulo Conde, Maia's Secretary of Urbanism during his first term, took mayoral office between 1997-2000 and continued the policies that he had helped Maia initiate and implement. Rio's current mayor Eduardo Paes, who was elected in 2008, has further intensified police actions against unlicensed vendors as part of an effort called the *choque do ordem*, literally the "shock of order." Other municipal governments in the metropolitan area of Rio, including in Duque de Caxias, have also adopted these urban policies and practices in recent years. On the first day that José Camilo Zito took office as mayor of Duque de Caxias in January 2009, he arrived at a major plaza downtown at 7:30 in the morning to personally remove homeless people from this square (*O Dia* 2 Jan 2009). In short, Maia's politics of bringing "order" to the city have extended unabated since the early 1990s, encompassing more and more public space throughout the metropolitan area of Rio.

Thus, many catadores came to Jardim Gramacho not as a result of losing a stable, formal job but partly as a consequence of the enclosure of Rio's informal economies. The policing of street vendors as well the policing of other forms of informality such as illegal construction (many catadores, like André, worked previously as bricklayers on small, temporary construction jobs) limited the possibilities of work. In particular, it limited the possibilities of work that is more transient, flexible, or a form of self-employment. Following the crack-down, few catadores who had worked as street vendors turned to formal employment. As Fininho put it succinctly, "I worked for four years at a

photocopier, I worked for six years at a grocer, and after *one day* of working as a street vendor, I never again wanted that life of having a boss ordering me around.” Some former street vendors, like Rose, did find jobs working for someone else, but these rarely lasted. Rose did not like her boss and quit one job; she became pregnant and could not manage the work hours and so quit another.

Certainly, not all catadores worked previously as street vendors or in some kind of self-employment. This is especially the case for older men on the dump who had work histories that included long-term, stable employment in working-class professions such as a welder, metalworker, shipyard worker, or machines operator at a plant. Such employment, however, became increasingly scarce following the deindustrialization of Rio in the 1990s, and women and younger generations of catadores tended to find employment in domestic work, work in the service industry, and in some cases, low-skilled factory work. In what follows, I want to focus on the ways that catadores, who have had extensive employment backgrounds, understand their work experience in Jardim Gramacho and how their understandings relate to those of catadores who once worked as street vendors.

To do so, I turn to Alessandra’s description of her arrival in Jardim Gramacho. I begin my discussion with her entry narrative, because Alessandra had a relatively unusual employment history among catadores before coming to the dump. Alessandra grew up in a household in which both her parents had jobs with a *carteira assinada*, and when she began working at the age of 20, she found employment with a *carteira assinada* in a sewing factory and later as an aid in a daycare center. Her work experiences therefore

span both regulated, officially recognized formal employment and various kinds of self-employment in conditions of informality.

“I Can No Longer Adapt”

“I began to pass through a difficult time in my life,” Alessandra told me. We were sitting at my kitchen table, drinking small glasses of black coffee in the late afternoon. Scooby, one of my neighbor’s roosters that regularly attacked all those who came to my door, punctuated our conversation with his screeches, as if in protest to each statement Alessandra made.

“Scooby, stop it! *Para com isso!*”

Alessandra continued, clearly unperturbed by the shrill interruptions.

“My groceries were running out, and I was quickly becoming broke. I had a friend – she is still my friend – Dona Solange. She said to me, ‘My dear, I am going to take you to a place, a place that is very good, where there falls into your midst all kinds of things from the supermarket that you could help yourself to. *Vamos lá.*’

“‘All right, then, let’s go,’ I replied.

“It was a Saturday when I came here. I stared at the sign: The Metropolitan Landfill of Jardim Gramacho. It all begins there. I was frightened that first day to go up to the top. I was frightened, because I never imagined that I would ever be in the midst of garbage. I thought to myself that I was not brought up for this sort of thing, to be in a place like this. I wondered, ‘What the hell am I doing here? My God, what am I doing here?’

“My friend told me, ‘Look, when you go up, you have to wear long pants and socks to protect yourself, okay? When we arrived at the top, a truck began unloading and a bag of cookies fell from that mass of garbage. When I saw a mob of people ripping the bag of cookies, I became terrified. I thought that I had come to the ends of the earth. That’s how I arrived. It was a Saturday. And now, it’ll be 14 years that I have worked here. I entered that Saturday and until this very day, I have not left.

“I met a *senhor* who was sincere, very human, and kind. I have met many good people here. I worked on his *rampinha*,⁴ where I learned how to distinguish between all the different kinds of recyclables. One day he turned to me and said, ‘Now you know what everything is. Why don’t you go to the *rampão do urubu*, so that you can work more and earn more money?’

“I replied, ‘But, Seu Pernambuco, how could I possibly work there? I don’t have my own burlap sacks. I don’t have a plastic barrel for collecting. I don’t have any of the supplies that I would need.’

“He said, ‘Come here tomorrow, and I’ll work something out for you.’

“The next day when I arrived, he gave me five burlap sacks, a new plastic barrel, and gloves. I still remember all that he gave me.

“‘Go up to the Urubu,’ he said to me. When you arrive there, ask around for Zumbi. Tell him that I sent you and that he should help you. He’ll already be expecting you.’

“So I went. When I arrived, I began asking around, ‘Which one is Zumbi?’ Zumbi came up to me and said, ‘All right, look, you have to collect like this. Pay attention to the

door of the trailer. Don't stay too close to it. Collect more along its sides. When the trailer begins to back up, keep to its side, and then quickly fill your sack.'

"At that time, no one bought PET, only hard plastics, and I thought to myself, 'God, how am I going to make anything here? What am I doing here?' But damn, if on that first day I didn't fill three sacks. If it was worth the same today, those sacks would have been worth R\$70. I arrived home with those R\$70 and a bag full of things that came from the supermarket: rice, beans, jerky, sugar. I took home everything. I hardly needed to go to the market. The next day, I came back. And I got used to it. I was no longer able to work in a formal job, in no way, shape, or form. And I am here to this day.

"I have tried to work formal jobs after that, but I've never been able to adapt. I worked as a maid in a hotel. I tried. I stayed there one month. It was so tiring. My boss was always saying, 'Straighten up this room! Do this! Do that!' On the dump, this doesn't happen. You don't have a boss. You don't have a schedule. You don't even have days that you have to work. You make your own salary and your own schedule. The catador gets used to doing what he wants, when he wants. He gets used to not being ordered around. I got used to this too. So, I said, 'Do what? I am going back to my dump, because there no one is trying my patience and giving me a hard time.'

"I also worked as a maid, a *faxineira*, in a family's home. They said to me, 'Look, we are going to pay you R\$70 a day.' If it is just a matter of working one day, I'll go, do the work, and then leave. I don't want anything tying me down. I also opened up a little refreshment stand at my house. This works well for me, because I am working for myself. I can no longer adapt to working as employee for someone else. I'll work doing anything.

I arrange flowers. I make tablecloths to sell. But I do this for myself. I am not an employee of anyone else.”

I want to take seriously Alessandra’s use of the word “adapt” in the way that she narrates her entry into Jardim Gramacho. This word, or the similar expressions *acostumar-se* (to become accustomed to) and *habituar-se* (to get used to), appear both in Alessandra’s description of her arrival on the dump and in her account of subsequent employment. Furthermore, adaptation is one of the most common themes that run across the entry narratives of many catadores, whose histories and trajectories to Jardim Gramacho may be strikingly different.

Like Alessandra, nearly all catadores describe their first impression of the dump as a severe shock or horror. Alessandra relates this through her story of the bag of cookies that falls from a wave of waste and is then grabbed and ripped open by several catadores. What Alessandra first perceived as naked desperation startled and upset her. Rose, as we saw above, focuses in her narrative on the giant bulldozing tractors that terrified her when she first began collecting. Other catadores described the physical conditions of the dump – the smells, the heat, the methane gas – as unsettling and sickening initially. “All that gas consumed me in the beginning,” André told me. “I might eat something and then two hours later, it was as if I had not eaten everything. The gas weakened me and made me ill.” In catadores’ entry narratives, this “horror” of the first day is usually followed by a depiction of a process in which they gradually “adapt to” or “become used to” the dump. In some narratives, catadores say that they only came back the second day, because the family member or friend who brought them to Jardim Gramacho showed up at their house the following morning and pushed them to go back

to the dump again. Or, as in Alessandra's story, catadores point to their experience of earning money immediately – of seeing that their work produces fruits – as the primary reason for returning the second day.

A motivating friend or the motivation of earnings provides the initial hook; these are reasons why catadores say that they returned to a place they experienced as terrifying or sickening. They are not the reasons given, however, for continuation in Jardim Gramacho. Catadores understand their continued returns to the dump over the course of many years – both their returns on a day-to-day basis and their returns after the pursuit of some other kind of employment – as a consequence of a process of adaptation. Alessandra “got used to” the dump through friendships that she developed; Dona Solange, Seu Pernambuco, and Zumbi helped her learn how to dress and prepare for work on the dump, how to identify different materials, and how to manage the rhythm of the trucks and tractors. Her adaptation involved not only adjustment to physically and emotionally strenuous conditions, but also an acclimation to the rhythm and structure of self-employment. Alessandra's assertion, “And I got used to it,” slips seamlessly between her description of her initial experiences of the dump and her account of her subsequent indisposition to formal employment.

For catadores, like Alessandra, who primarily worked formal jobs before coming to Jardim Gramacho, the dump often becomes a fundamentally transformative experience of work. Both Rose and Alessandra narrate their first days on the dump as a process of getting used to collecting, but for Alessandra this process involves a further habituation to self-employment. By adapting to the dump, she sees herself as no longer able to adapt to the discipline, regular schedules, and orders of a boss. Those catadores who previously

worked as street vendors or in other areas of informality already found it difficult to maintain formal jobs before arriving in Jardim Gramacho, as in Rose's case. It makes sense, then, that many catadores used to work as street vendors prior to the crack-down in the 1990s: both are examples of work without a boss and without a fixed schedule. Jó stated this explicitly. "I came to the dump," she told me, "*because in all the different kinds of work I've ever done*, I never had someone on my back, always saying 'Jó, you have to do this; Jó, you have to do that'" (emphasis mine).

For many catadores, it is not so much the subservient position as it is the lack of control over their work and over their lives that is the fundamental problem with working for someone else. When I asked Cordeiro why he had left a formal job for the third time, he told me that there comes a time when you can no longer adjust to a job with a signed passbook because of its different orientation to time. "In a job like that, you have your shift and you have to clock in and out. And as catadores, we are used to a different rhythm of life – to not having a work schedule – and we just don't adapt." João gave a concrete example of this incompatibility when describing why he was fired from a job he acquired with Queiroz Galvão, the company that COMLURB subcontracted to manage the daily operations of the dump.

"I was very unsettled (*alterado*). I would do all my duties, but when the dinner hour came around, I wouldn't stay in the area where we were supposed to rest and eat. I would go down to a bar that was right at the gate, Lima's bar, who has since passed away. His bar opened up to the street and it would often have a *pagode*. I went down just to have a beer and dance a little and then, I'd go back up to work. They considered this disturbance at work, and so they fired me." As you may recall, Rose's primary

explanation for quitting her job similarly centered on time. She did not complain about the workload, an overbearing employer, or the salary but instead, deplored the five hours she had to stay at work with nothing to do. For someone used to working hard and then taking a break, hanging out with friends, or going home whenever she decided to do so, the requirement that she remain at work without working struck Rose as irrational and frustrating. When catadores speak about their adaptation to the dump, they are referring in many ways to subjectivity, to the ways that different forms of labor remake the self. Formal wage labor requires certain ways of being and acting in the world. In other words, it creates a particular worker subjectivity and one that runs counter to habits formed on the dump or in other contexts of self-employment. As I discuss below, the requirements of formal employment also run counter to many of the obligations and demands in catadores' lives.

Precarious Lives

The desire for autonomy and the circulation between different jobs and between periods of employment and unemployment take on added meaning in the precarious conditions of urban poverty in Rio. In addition to raising their own children and looking after elderly parents, catadores take on the responsibility of caring for other relatives or friends. These extra responsibilities often result from ruptures in their social world. Ana Carla began helping her mother support the family by collecting recyclables on the streets and selling refreshments on buses after a leaking gas canister caught fire, burning their house down, and killing several of Ana Carla's family members. Jó stopped working altogether for some time, relying on the support of friends in Jardim Gramacho, after her

husband was killed and her three-year-old daughter died of pneumonia within six weeks of each other. Less tragic but still of great concern, Rose's teenage daughter had gotten into trouble with some young men in Jardim Gramacho. Rose's concern was not just pregnancy but the possibility of her daughter getting pulled into involvement with *bandidos*, or gangsters, in Jardim Gramacho. Prior to taking the job with the *carteira assinada*, Rose had structured her work hours on the dump around her husband's so that one of them could always be home for their daughter.

Stable employment does not always fit easily into the everyday lives of catadores. Catadores often say that they would leave the dump if something better came along, but these same catadores who say this have left and returned to the dump many times. Their returns – and their own interpretations of these returns – point to the incongruence between demands in their lives and demands of wage labor. Fixed work hours and work days. Adherence to orders. The lack of self-determination. Their inability to “adapt” to these requirements are reasons that they continually state for their inability to work outside Jardim Gramacho.

Different values and desires are in conflict here as well. On the one hand, catadores recognize the dangers of working on the dump. The pain and injuries that they endure prompt their searches for another kind of employment. And sometimes catadores leave the dump for some time – take a break, *da uma parada* – because, as Cordeiro told me with a sigh, “the dump can become so tiring.” On the other hand, the very ability to come and go from the dump and the control that catadores have over when and how much they work, allows them not only to deal with precarity in their lives but also to actively pursue other life goals and desires. Catadores can work intensely for a week, day

and night, to be able to make extra money to host a son or daughter's birthday party, pay off a debt incurred from a large purchase they otherwise could not have made, or even in order to spend a week carousing with friends. Catadores who have been active in the National Movement of Catadores, have been able to travel, attend meetings with politicians in the middle of the day, or take a week off in order to attend a march in another city because they can work longer hours on the dump before or after their travels to make up for their lost income.

It might at first seem that this demand and desire for flexibility among catadores echoes neoliberal logics that value flexible labor and flexible bodies (Martin 1994). However, the worker who is able to respond and adapt quickly to the changing needs of capital is quite different from the catador who moves between jobs or decides to work in a context with little controls on time and schedule in order, for example, to be able to wait for ten hours in a public hospital with a feverish child or dance all night at a *pagode* with friends. In the first case, the flexible worker becomes radically individualized; flexibility emerges from the worker's detachment from her social world. In the case of the catador, flexibility is a way of fulfilling social obligations and of creating and maintaining relationships.

It may also be tempting to read the circulations of catadores as either a survival strategy or a case of "resistance." Yet, neither of these paradigms fully capture the tensions and contradictions that inspire their mobilities. To explain the decisions of catadores to come and go from Jardim Gramacho in terms of survival draws attention to their struggles within the precarious conditions of urban poverty in Rio. But this account misses altogether catadores' critiques of the discipline of wage labor and their conscious

affirmation of the autonomy that they experience while working on the dump. Nor is this a story of resistance. The circulations of catadores are comings and *goings*. The symbolic power of a “real” job with a *carteira assinada*, as well as safer work conditions, the possibilities for social protection, and sometimes the greater income that this employment brings, prompts many catadores to continually seek a value that conflicts with other values, desires, and demands that often hold greater sway in their lives. Hence, they return to Jardim Gramacho. Or, they never leave, all the while saying that they would go straightaway if a better work opportunity came along.

In what follows, I suggest instead that we understand the circulations of catadores by unpacking the concept of experience. For, as we learn from Rose, Jó, and Alessandra, it is the *experience* of self-determination in the labor process, whether first as an unlicensed vendor on the streets of downtown Rio or later as a reclamer on the city’s garbage heaps, that makes one no longer willing or able to adapt to the discipline and domination of wage labor.

The Phenomenology of Work

In his study of training in the art of *capoeira*, an Afro-Brazilian form of dance and martial arts, Greg Downey (2005) argues for the value of a phenomenological approach in ethnography. Anthropology, he contends, is usually not concerned with “things themselves” – a practice, ritual, artifact, or social interaction – but rather the signs and meanings that the stuff of everyday life reveals (19). Of course, to look deeper at what the retelling of macabre stories, the spatial layout of a neighborhood, the exchange of work vests, or the movements of catadores to and from Jardim Gramacho might *mean* is, in

many ways, what anthropological analysis does. While not denying this approach to cultural analysis and its importance, Downey posits that the focus on meaning and meaning-making in anthropology has precluded our understanding of immediate experience. He suggests that anthropological analysis, at times, be inverted:

Meaning comes into play, and symbols certainly influence experience, such as the way that singing affects how the game of capoeira feels. But if some forms of anthropological analysis look from the *outside in* at a practice like capoeira, seeing it as reflecting a broader context, this book looks from the *inside out*, asking how the world looks after one has spent enough time in the roda (20).

Catadores' emphasis on "adaptation" in their entry narratives has led me to think similarly about the transformative power of immediate experience, about what work and employment look like after one has spent enough time collecting on the dump. Catadores offer their own explanations: the process through which they became "accustomed to the dump" changed them in ways that made them "unable to adapt" (or readapt) to conditions of regular, formal employment. Cordeiro points to a different "rhythm" of life that conflicts with the regularity and stark time divisions between working and not working in wage labor. Alessandra sees the ability of the catador "to do what he wants" as a reason for her stress when working for someone else, for feeling a loss of control in situations of employment. Both Cordeiro and Alessandra draw attention here to the discipline and domination of wage labor, but their reflections on the inability to adapt to these conditions are not exactly critiques in the sense of a conscious condemnation of exploitative and oppressive relations. Their reflections are born of experience, not intention. Their practices are more like evasion than resistance.⁵

Bourdieu's concept of the habitus also offers guidance in thinking through the significance of experience. Although many anthropologists have turned to practice theory

as way to theorize agency⁶, his concept of the habitus actually prohibits an understanding of human action as entirely conscious or intentional. Bourdieu defines habitus as the set of beliefs and dispositions that generate practices in a particular type of social environment and that are, in turn, generated by the practices of subjects who have internalized these dispositions through the process of socialization and through past experience (1977:72). Furthermore, habitus operates not only at the level of a culturally-specific context for action, but at a deeper level of embodiment in “postures and stances, ways of standing, sitting, looking, speaking, or walking” (15). In Bourdieu’s conceptualization of habitus, the fundamental principles of a culture “are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness [through their embodiment], and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation” (94).

Experience is clearly central to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Habitus could perhaps even be defined as accumulated experience that generates ways of being and acting in the world. But what exactly constitutes experience or how experience transforms a subject are questions that remain largely unexamined in Bourdieu’s work. Greg Downey makes a similar observation that “theorists of ‘practice’ do not ask how habits are acquired, how techniques feel for the person who does them, or how skills function practically, psychologically, and neurologically (2005:207).” This prompts him to consider transformative processes in the physical education and training of capoeira. In a very different context, the comings and goings of catadores to Jardim Gramacho suggest that a similar approach to cultural analysis – one that centers on experience and transformative processes or what catadores call “adaptation” – might allow use to consider domination and dissent in more complex ways.

Notes

¹ See Townsend 2002:1-29 for a fuller discussion on anthropological approaches to competing cultural values.

² See Chapter 2.

³ From an interview with César Maia, <http://www.cesarmaia.com.br/biografia/>, accessed 12/10/2010.

⁴ Alessandra arrived in Jardim Gramacho just prior to the reforms that were made to the dump in 1996 (refer to Chapter 3). At that time, various “leaders” on the dump organized and controlled their own dumping areas. When Alessandra first arrived, she worked on one of these small areas, *rampinhas*. She then moved to the primary dumping site, that was called the *rampa do urubu*, and today is called the *rampão*. The largest semi-trailers from waste transfer stations unload at this site. This site therefore has the most material, but also the most danger due to the high levels of traffic and the size of the trucks.

⁵ Rather than directly confronting power, I understand evasion as seeking out spaces in the interstices of power. That is, catadores do not resist structures or orders in situations of employment, but avoid them by leaving these jobs to return to the dump.

⁶ For a discussion on the implications of practice theory for theorizations of agency, see Ortner 2006. Also note that in this essay Ortner acknowledges that Bourdieu never explicitly develops a theory of agency in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

CHAPTER 5

CURSED MONEY AND THE VALUE OF NOT WORKING

“I can’t just sit around. Shit. I haven’t even filled half a sack today, and I’m completely broke,” Leticia complained to some friends who were lounging around their sacks, eating lunch or otherwise just resting. It was late in the morning on a Monday in mid-December. The summer sun was scorching the dump and many catadores were taking breaks in any shade they could find – beneath beach umbrellas pulled from the garbage or against tall sacks that partially blocked the sun’s rays.

“Chill out. What do you mean you can’t stop?” asked Simone. “Here, try these leftovers that Kathleen brought,” passing Leticia my lunch container. “Weren’t you up here on Friday?”

“Yeah. I worked the whole week. Made R\$550.¹ But I don’t have a single cent.”

This caught my attention. I had known Leticia since my first arrival in Jardim Gramacho over three years ago, and I knew that she was not much of a weekend partier. She did not drink, use drugs, or even smoke cigarettes – practices I had often heard blamed for the fast consumption of catadores’ earnings. How could Leticia have spent R\$550 in two days?

“Hold on.” I interjected. “Let’s go through each expenditure until we reach R\$550, *tá bom*?” Leticia proceeded to tell me that she spent R\$80 on rent for her shack, gave R\$40 to her mother-in-law whom she owed, and bought groceries. She was not sure

exactly how much she spent on groceries, but she was certain that she did not spend any more than R\$100. When I replied that we still had to account for over R\$300, Leticia sighed and said, “Money that comes from the dump is cursed (*maldiçoado*).”

“Cursed?” I asked.

“Here, money comes into your hand quickly, but then leaves just as quickly. There are many dead bodies buried beneath this garbage. Money earned from the dump is cursed.”

Issues related to money, spending, and debt quickly became central concerns during my fieldwork. As in this moment with Leticia, I often overheard catadores complain about being broke (*duro*), and I observed constant requests for loans that catadores made to other catadores or to family members and friends. Eventually, as I became more involved in the lives of a few catadores, I also received requests for loans. I had to learn how to negotiate these exchanges, however imperfectly, not only as a researcher but as a friend, neighbor, work partner, and fictive kin to different catadores within this social world.² The need for this kind of practical knowledge led me to pay close attention to what catadores did with and thought about money, and to reflect extensively on the moral economy of spending in Jardim Gramacho.

That catadores frequently complained of being broke did not strike me as unusual. Money shortages, payments, and debt are ubiquitous, daily struggles for urban poor in neoliberal capitalism (see Han 2004; 2011). I was puzzled, rather, by the ability of catadores to earn *more* than the salaries of minimum wage or low-paying jobs, yet experience their earnings as somehow being much *less*. As we saw in the previous chapter, many catadores have worked in other forms of employment. And nearly all

catadores know of someone—a family member, neighbor, or friend—who is working a regular, minimum-wage job. Based on their first-hand experiences or observations, catadores compare money earned from the dump with money earned from these other jobs. They argue that unlike earnings from other jobs, money that comes from the dump vanishes (*some*). It slips through one's hands. It is difficult to control. It disappears without bearing fruit (*sem render*). It is cursed.

This chapter unpacks the relationship between the work of catadores and their experiences of “being broke” by tracing the movement of money as it comes into and then passes out of the hands of catadores. Following this trajectory, I consider the payment structures that influence the acquisition of money on the dump; the demands placed upon money once it is received; the social pathways through which money circulates; the exchanges, uses, and transformations of money; and finally, the meanings that become attached to money as it moves. The question that begins my analysis is simple: how and why does money in Jardim Gramacho “vanish”? However, along the way, this inquiry raises a number of distinct but interlocking issues related to addiction, time, social relations of care and debt, and morality. The pages that follow therefore take me back to and extend the discussion I began in the previous chapter on competing demands and aspirations in the life projects of catadores. How catadores experience and conceptualize the money that they earn through their labor on the dump leads me deeper into questions of value and desire.

Anthropology of Money

I borrow two insights from the vast literature on the anthropology of money to guide my analysis. The first is the notion that money is not in fact a universal medium of exchange. Many early investigations in economic anthropology, such as Paul Bohannan's classic account of separate spheres of exchange in the Tiv economy of West Africa (1955), examined the effects that the introduction of general-purpose money had upon the social and economic systems of "pre-capitalist" societies. Bohannan argued that an economic system comprised of separate spheres of exchange is incommensurable with money economies in which currency provides a universal equivalence for *all* exchanges. Furthermore, Bohannan posited, the introduction of European money into the Tiv economy disrupted not only the Tiv's system of exchange but also gender relations, marriage institutions, and social structure. Other anthropological studies focusing on the impact of capitalist expansion into non-market economies have similarly argued that the introduction of money fundamentally transforms or even destroys the social order (Burridge 1969; Macfarlane 1985). These studies illuminated important anthropological understandings of different regimes of value, but they also had the unfortunate consequence of setting up a dichotomy between capitalist and noncapitalist economies and reifying economic notions of money as a neutral, universal medium of exchange.

In response to this approach, many anthropologists have instead examined how the use and significance of money becomes shaped by the social relations and moral economy of the society in which it is introduced or circulates. That is, they argue that money does not transform the social order but rather the social order accommodates and alters the meaning of money (Hutchinson 1996; Mauer 2006; Parry and Bloch 1989; Piot

1991). These studies show that far from being universal, money can take on attributes and qualities within particular contexts. Adopting emic descriptors of money as analytical concepts, this literature has investigated “tainted” money (Parry and Bloch 1989), “bitter” money (Shipton 1989), “barren” and “baptized” money (Taussig 1980), “savage” money (Gregory 1997), “hot” money (Walsh 2003), and money “that burns like oil” (Gamburd 2004).

My discussion of money and catadores is not an account of how catadores use and think about money in general, but how they use and think about the particular money that they earn working as catadores – “money that comes from the dump,” as they call it. Some catadores describe this money as “vanishing” and therefore “cursed.” Like Leticia, they often attribute these qualities to the decay and death buried beneath them and from which they retrieve the materials and the value that generate their earnings. By invoking stories of the macabre (see Chapter 1), catadores also link certain qualities of the money that they earn to the “bad side” of the dump. Though all catadores are aware of a circulating discourse of “cursed” money from the dump, not everyone shares this perspective. Alessandra, for example, agreed that most catadores did not have savings and were often broke, but she rejected the belief that money from the garbage is cursed. “For me, that’s just a popular superstition. What did the person do with that money? They did something. If they didn’t use drugs, if they didn’t drink, they had some kind of fun. It’s a mystery to me.” As we will see, many catadores also spoke about money from the dump in a positive light, as more easily adaptable to their alternating financial needs. In all of these reflections on money, however, catadores asserted that money from the dump

possessed a special quality. They shared a recognition that whether or not the money was “cursed,” earnings from the dump disappear quickly in ways that other money does not.

Anthropological literature on money has also elucidated connections between the source of money and the ways money is perceived and used. “How people earn money affects how they think to spend it,” Michele Ruth Gamburd (2004) observes in her study of the remittances of women migrants from the village of Naeaegama in southern Sri Lanka who work in the Middle East as domestic servants. Gamburd explains how within the moral logics of Naeaegaman society, money earned through hard work “thrives,” while money obtained through windfall, cheating, stealing, or exploitation (particularly of the poor) “burns or disappears without leaving a trace” (172; see also Papataxiarchis 1999). She furthermore shows how migrants have reconfigured the relationship between the source and spending of money by maintaining that remittances, even though earned through hard domestic labor, burn because the maltreatment and exploitation of their employers permeates their wages, making them burn more quickly. This enables women migrants to justify spending lump sums of their remittances on a large purchase for their nuclear family – displacing the blame onto money that has an agency of its own and burns beyond their control – rather than distributing their earnings incrementally across their more distant kin relations.

I similarly observe an association between the source and use of money in the lives of catadores. However, I understand this relationship to be not only symbolic, but also structural. It is not only the case that some catadores perceive the money that they earn as coming from garbage and decay, therefore cursed, and therefore as having the tendency to disappear quickly. It is also that, literally, the ways that catadores earn money

– the form, method, and cycles of payment – impact their spending practices. I argue that in order to understand why and how the earnings of catadores vanish, it is necessary to take account of this interplay between the structural and the symbolic, between practices and the moral logics that give them meaning.

Daily Bread

It is difficult to determine an average income of catadores, because the frequency that catadores work, the type and amount of material they collect, and the prices of material at different times of the year (and historically) can vary widely. In September and October 2008, prior to the impact of the economic crisis on the recycling industry worldwide, catadores were earning an average of R\$75 (roughly USD \$37 at that time) per day of work. At the lowest point from January-March 2009, this average fell to R\$35.³ Some catadores reported earning as much as R\$4.000 a month (earning R\$100-R\$150 daily and working nearly every day). However, when I asked about this high end of the earnings range, catadores – both those using and those not using drugs – responded that only catadores high on cocaine or crack are able to maintain the energy and intensity necessary to collect enough material to generate this much money. “A guy might make R\$4.000 or so in a month,” André told me. “But he’ll spend R\$3.000 on drugs in order to be able to keep working. The effects of the drug enable him to work without stopping and to make a lot of money, but in compensation, nearly all of his earnings go towards the purchase of drugs.”⁴

Age and health and, to a lesser extent, gender⁵ can impact how much material a catador collects and therefore how much the catador earns. How frequently a catador

works also varies. Some catadores work a full week and then take a week off in order to rest or, in the case of catadores who live in another neighborhood or city in the metropolitan area of Rio, to return home. Other catadores work double shifts – an entire day followed by an entire night – and take two or three days off in between these stretches. Most catadores alter their work routines day to day, depending on such factors as weather, health, and mood. Measuring the income of catadores by month, as generally done with salaries in Brazil (minimum wage, for example, was set at R\$480 *a month* in Rio), masks these fluctuations and differences. It would not distinguish, say, between the earnings of an elderly catador who collects R\$20 worth of material in a day and works five days a week and a 20-year-old catador who collects R\$50 in a single day but only works two days a week.

Despite variations in how much catadores earn in a day of work and how often they work, I found the experience described in Leticia's above comments to be common on the dump. That is to say, no matter the amount, earnings tend to be spent in one way or another within a few days and savings are rare. I also want to make clear from the beginning of my analysis that this experience is shared by catadores who identify as *viciado*, addicts, and by catadores who do not use drugs or drink alcohol. Many people in the world of Jardim Gramacho – social workers, NGO workers, waste management personnel, residents, scrap dealers, and even some catadores – attributed the quick disappearance of earnings to alcohol and drug addiction. Alessandra implies this association when she states that if catadores who are broke “didn't use drugs, if they didn't drink, they had some kind of fun.” Otherwise, how their money disappeared is a

“mystery” to her. I will return to this issue of money and drug use in my discussion of “addiction to the dump” in the following section.

My point here is simply that while earnings vary among catadores, the quick disappearance of their earnings largely does not. Another shared characteristic of their earnings concerns daily payment. Catadores are paid for their material on the spot in cash each day that they go up to the dump to work. Scrap dealers usually arrive with their trucks on the dump at two different times of the day – in the morning around 6 a.m. to purchase material gathered by catadores who work at night and again in the late afternoon around 5 p.m. to buy material collected during the day. Catadores either sell to the scrap dealer at that moment, accepting a flat price that the scrap dealer offers based on eyeballing the weight of the sacks. Or catadores ride down to the scrap yard with their material on the back of the truck and weigh it at the yard. Either way, catadores finish a day or night of work with cash in hand.

Daily payment is not unique to the world of catadores; it is also a common feature of day labor or other forms of temp work. Though sometimes a day laborer might transact a job for several days or even several weeks, in most cases day laborers acquire work on a daily basis and are paid at the end of the day’s job (Valenzuela 2003). However, unlike catadores in Jardim Gramacho who can decide to work at any time, day laborers are dependent upon their employers to secure a job. They might show up at the parking lot, street corner, or other hiring spot in the morning and not receive any job offers that day. Weather or certain seasons of the year can make work especially irregular or difficult to obtain. Tom Gill, in his ethnography of Japanese day laborers, quotes their proverb that “You don’t need a knife to kill a day laborer. Three rainy days in a row is all it takes”

(Gill 1999:126). Catadores, in contrast, know that they can work when necessary. If catadores spend, loan, or give away all the cash that they earn one day, they can return to the dump the following day to make more money. They know that they can always work the next day and they know that at the end of that day, they will have money in their pocket. This knowledge reinforces for catadores an orientation to the present time that Gill finds common among Japanese day laborers. “We don’t think about the future,” Gordinho told me. “We only think about the immediate. If a catador earns R\$300, he spends R\$300. If he earns R\$1.000, he spends R\$1.000.”

The practice of spending money quickly should not be understood as an intrinsic trait, habit, or attribute of the people who work as catadores. When catadores leave the dump to work in other forms of employment, they often shift how they manage their money. Angela, one of the first catadores I met in 2005, was working at a job cleaning in a local public school when I returned three years later. One evening when we met at Deca’s bar to catch up, I complimented her on her haircut and outfit in the style of Rio’s latest summer fashion. Smiling, she replied that she had money now and could buy clothes for herself.

“Wow, the school pays that well?” I asked with a hint of doubt in my voice.

“R\$400. But you know, even though it is half what I made on the dump, it seems to go farther.” Angela told me that she had acquired store credit, found it easier to keep up on the payments, and was able to budget her money to cover her bills.

“I even have money leftover from time to time to be able to help out the children at school. So many of them arrive hungry, and I’ll go across the street to buy them juice and stuffed pastries (*salgadinhos*).”

A few days after my conversation with Angela, I spent a Sunday afternoon visiting João and his wife, Cristina. João had worked on the dump, on and off, for nearly two decades. One of the founding members and an increasingly important leader of ACAMJG, João had recently begun working full-time at the Pólo. He opened up the office each morning, ran errands to the bank and to buyers when necessary, helped load and unload ACAMJG's truck, took care of small maintenance projects, and assisted with day-to-day administration. His salary at ACAMJG was R\$600 a month, which he received through direct deposit into his bank account in bi-weekly payments.

Cristina told me that she was happy that João was at the Pólo and no longer working on top of the dump. We had been discussing Seu Valter's recent diagnosis of tuberculosis. João interpreted Seu Valter's illness as a consequence of working non-stop, Sunday to Sunday on the dump. Cristina agreed, saying that the dump could lead catadores "to work themselves to death," and that this was one reason she welcomed João's new work at the Pólo. She added that she also felt as though João earned more money from his salary at the Pólo even though João easily made R\$300 a week on the dump, collecting only Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

"I don't know why, but the money João is earning at the Pólo somehow goes farther. This money is blessed. The money that comes from the dump, from the midst of all that garbage – I know it sounds like nonsense, but it seems cursed. You work hard. You sacrifice so much. You earn your money. And then you go to the market and it seems like all of your money stays there. That's how it used to be for us. But wow, after João left the dump, I've noted such a difference. The little, the *less*, he is earning at the Pólo somehow ends up being more.

“We used to live broke. João would work a week, not even a full week, and he’d already have R\$200. Suddenly, out of nowhere, poof! The money would be gone. You might have money in your hand, but you do not have control.

“Now that João is working at the Pólo, we are able to control money. He gets paid on the 15th and the 30th of the month. We know what to do with the money earned on the 15th and we know what to do with the money earned on the 30th. We are always keeping an eye on how much we have left. Would you believe that until yesterday (December 5th), we still had money from the payment of the 15th?”

Both Angela’s and Cristina’s experiences of change in their control over money when receiving payment in monthly or bi-weekly installments versus payment in cash daily draw attention to some of the structural conditions influencing spending practices. An emphasis on the immediate and a tendency to spend money sooner rather than later have often been understood as common practices of people living in conditions of marginalization. Andrew Walsh makes this point in his study of the “daring consumption” of young men working in sapphire mines of northern Madagascar (2003), and he positions his analysis in conversation with the edited volume, *Lilies of the Field* (Day et al. 1999:2), which presents ethnographic accounts of social groups who “live in the present,” ranging from Hungarian gypsies (Stewart 1999) to Amazonian peasants (Nugent 1999).

I borrow many insights from these studies, including how a reluctance to accumulate and save wealth, an orientation towards the present, and an emphasis on personal autonomy constitute interconnected features of a style of life and a form of politics often missed by political anthropology “focused on instrumental action oriented

to the long term” (Day et al. 1999:18). However, it seems to me that what these diverse groups oriented towards the present share in common is not so much their marginalization, but their forms of livelihood. Certainly, the young sapphire miners of Walsh’s study and the gypsies, prostitutes, day laborers, peasants, and forest foragers of the *Lilies of the Field* could all be described as living in oppressive or marginalized conditions and their present orientation understood as a form of oppositional politics. But there are many populations living in similar conditions who do not share this same present orientation. For example, David Syring (2009:136-138) describes how some Ecuadorian peasants have opted to work in agricultural wage labor in the United States as a way to accumulate capital to invest in land or the construction of a house for their future.⁶

I would like to place more weight on the observation that sapphire miners and the groups studied in *Lilies of the Field* are all self-employed (or at least have a high degree of control and autonomy in their livelihoods compared to those working in regular wage employment), and they receive income from their labor relatively directly and immediately. The sapphire miners sell the stones that they find to local buyers (Walsh 2003:293). The London prostitutes see themselves as their own bosses who “glean an income” from their clients (Day 1999:140). The Japanese day laborers, though they work for someone else, determine day-to-day when they work and in what job and are usually paid by the day (Gill 1999:123). Such forms of livelihood are more conducive to spending practices that seem to privilege immediate needs, concerns, requests, and desires. When Angela and João shifted to regular wage employment, the relationship between time and money in their spending practices also shifted. In short, the form of

making money impacts how that money is spent. As we will see, this is only one part of the story. However, it is an important one because it manifests why “culture of poverty”⁷ explanations of the spending of the poor are invalid. Spending quickly is not an ingrained attribute of those who work as catadores, but rather (partially) a consequence of the form of work itself.

Addiction to the Dump

I want to return for a moment to notions that drug and alcohol addiction are responsible for the disappearance of catadores’ earnings. “I’ve used crack,” Fininho told me. “One hit makes you want another (*craquar outro*), makes you want another, makes you want another. As long as you have money in your pocket, you continue smoking crack. If you have R\$500, you spend R\$500.” I frequently encountered Fininho on the dump with a group of *moradores*, literally “residents.” These catadores effectively live on the dump. While they share in the same kinds of circulations in and out of Jardim Gramacho, often “disappearing” for a while to visit family or pursue an amorous relationship, when they are working on the dump, they stay on the dump. They build makeshift camps that they relocate each time that the rampa, the unloading area, moves. They make meals together from *podrão*, expired food that they find in the garbage (see Chapter 6). They only go down to the *portaria*, the area near the entrance of the dump, to run errands: buy crack, powder cocaine, marijuana, cachaça (a sugar cane liquor), and water, most of which they take back to consume on top of the dump.

I came to know well a group of moradores through Simone. A few years previously, her adolescent son had a fight with his father, left home, and began working

and living on the dump. Her son became involved with the moradores and Simone became worried about his drug use. She began spending nights on the dump with the moradores and her son in an effort to “pull him out of that life,” as she told me. Her son still works on the dump, but has since married and lives with his wife near the base of the dump. Simone continues friendships that she made with the moradores through this process, a relationship that might seem strange but I found to be quite common and natural within the ethos of tolerance in Jardim Gramacho. Simone enjoyed the company of the moradores, and the moradores seemed to understand and respect a mother’s project to extricate her adolescent son – whom they affectionately called *Craquinho*, “little crack” – from the life of a morador.

I never heard moradores describe the money that they earned as “cursed.” As Fininho made explicit, they recognize that their addictions consume their earnings, but they understand this as part of a kind of high life that they pursue similar to the daring consumption of “*la vie*” pursued by the young sapphire miners of Walsh’s study (2003:292). Vinte-dois (literally, “Twenty-two”⁸) described how the immediate and daily payment on the dump enables the moradores to do a stint of work, spend their earnings continuously on the consumption of drugs and alcohol, return to work only when that money ran out, and then repeat the cycle. “When the prices were still good, I could make R\$100 in one day. Shit, those were good days. We collected and we spent. We had money for two days, three days on the dump, getting high on powder and just living.”

Vinte-dois often called the dump a “refuge,” and I gradually began to understand some of the reasons why he experienced the dump in this way. The ability to earn money every day enables catadores like Vinte-dois to protect themselves from withdrawal, to

escape the anxiety of not knowing how to obtain the next hit. Though writing in the context of heroine use and the physiological symptoms of dope sickness that differ from symptoms of cocaine withdrawal, Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg make clear the urgency and suffering experienced by those unable to sustain a supply and ward off withdrawal:

Every five to eight hours, organs run amok: the nose drips, bowels burst, eyes burn, skin itches, and bones ache. Cell membranes scream out for the opiate proteins they require to function normally, and the psyche overflows with anguish.

All of the Edgewater homeless know exactly which foot to put in front of the other as soon as they wake up every day. Their needs and priorities are unambiguous: they must solve their most urgent physiological problem before worrying about anything else. Finding employment, acquiring food, obtaining shelter, appearing in court, applying for public assistance, or treating an abscess become inconsequential (2009:80-81).

The dump is a place where life with addiction can be lived. This is not to say that the dump leads people into addiction. The catadores living with addictions whom I met began to use long before they came to Jardim Gramacho. Fininho began snorting cocaine when he was fourteen-years-old, soon after his mother died and he began working to help support his younger siblings. Vinte-dois became involved with drug dealers, lived the “good life,” and spent several years in prison before coming to the dump. And though binges, overdoses, and death are enabled by the dump’s enduring bounty that sustains addictions, these are not the only possibilities. For some, living with addiction on the dump is a form of “active waiting” in which other potentials take shape (Han 2011:25). Nivaldo came to Jardim Gramacho as an alcoholic, after having lost his job as a professional welder. He spent many years on the dump in a cycle of collecting and binge

drinking until he befriended a scrap dealer involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, an encounter that sent his life on another trajectory.

In the context of money and spending, addiction has taken on multiple meanings in Jardim Gramacho. It can speak to the drug use of catadores like Fininho and Vinte-dois, but it can also refer to a broader experience of being “addicted to the dump,” *viciado na rampa*. When catadores work without taking days off or when they continue to work on the dump even when they do not need the income, they are considered to be addicts of the dump.

“I am addicted to the dump,” Dona Angela told me when I asked her why she continued working when her eight grown children are capable and more than willing to support her.

João blamed Seu Valter’s illness on an addiction to the dump that drove him to work every day of the week.

“Sometimes Seu Valter would feel not quite right, working. He’d stop, drink some water, take a pill. He’d recover and then go right back to the garbage, letting the sickness inside him worsen. And now he has tuberculosis. It’s because Seu Valter is on that dump, Sunday to Sunday. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Non-stop, non-stop, non-stop. All in the obsession for material, obsession for money.”

Daily payment is the hit in this addiction. The ability to make money every day fuels the cycle of earning money, spending it on immediate expenses, and returning the next day to earn more. This can create a relationship of dependence to the dump that some catadores experience, express, and critique as a form of addiction. I understand the

layered meanings of addiction in Jardim Gramacho as a way that catadores draw together within their own analysis of their world both those who use and do not use drugs. So rarely do we find sociological and anthropological accounts that jointly conceptualize users and non-users as not only co-existing within the same neighborhoods or social networks, but as sharing experiences, practices, logics, and moralities. When catadores speak about addiction to the dump, they point to the possibility of dependency that daily payment can bring, but they also point to the ways that the experience of money is the same whether drugs and alcohol consume one's earnings or some other obligation or desire does. The cycle – earn, spend, go back to the dump to earn more – is the same for addicts and non-addicts alike.

Attitudes towards daily payment are often more ambivalent than the discourse on addiction might suggest. Many catadores cite daily payment as one of the most important benefits of working on the dump because, like an open work schedule, the ability to make money at any time can become a source of autonomy and adaptability within the precarious conditions of urban poverty. Jó made this clear when venting one day about ACAMJG's prohibition of selling to other buyers on the dump. Many catadores who are members of ACAMJG argue that they have a right to sell their material to scrap dealers when they have an immediate expense, because ACAMJG makes payments only once a week through direct deposit.

“ACAMJG doesn't allow us our freedom, Kathleen. For instance, say I go to work Monday and on Tuesday my gas runs out. I might have material up on the dump, but I'm not allowed to sell it. I have to wait for money to be deposited in my account on Saturday. I can't buy my gas. I don't have freedom. I have material just sitting there, up

on the dump, and I still can't buy my gas. Or take another example. Last month, my husband spent the rent money. I needed R\$150 to pay my rent. I went to the Pólo and asked for an advance of R\$150 so that I could pay my rent. I was told, 'No.' I was only able to pay my rent a couple days ago. I asked for an advance during the week of the 15th and I just now paid my rent at the end of this month. Look, if I'm needing money, I'm going to collect and sell to whomever."

As Jó's views on ACAMJG's policy suggest, the ability to earn money every day enables catadores to mitigate some of the precarity in their lives – suddenly running out of cooking gas or a husband squandering the rent money. Daily payment can provide a degree of financial independence and control. Whether on-the-spot payment is experienced as a benefit or curse, a source of freedom or a form of addiction, often depends upon the larger web of social relations in which a catador works and lives. Family members, spouses, neighbors, and friends influence the kinds of financial demands placed upon the daily earnings of a catador as well as the strategies that a catador might develop to counter these demands. In order to address the question of how money "vanishes," it is necessary to trace not only the movement of money into the hands of catadores – daily payment – but also the circulation of money as it passes out of their hands and into relations of obligation and debt.

To Spend is to Save

As with millions of others struggling in conditions of urban poverty, catadores in Jardim Gramacho work and live in a social world in which there are constant needs. When I lived with Glória, nearly every day a family member or long-time friend stopped

by her house to make a request. A sister-in-law needed bus fare to take her son, who had recently recovered from meningitis, for a medical check-up. A few of the grandchildren who lived with Glória's mother accidentally ate the (expensive) whole grain rice that her mother needed as part of a special diet to control her diabetes; she needed to buy more groceries. Glória's aunt, who cooked meals at the Pólo, was still waiting to be paid by some of the catadores and needed an advance to be able to purchase meat for the next day's lunch. Her daughter, Glória's niece, came to collect what Glória owed her for a cosmetics item that she had sold Glória through a monthly catalog to make extra income. Glória's friend, Gláucia, stopped by to show her items of lingerie that she was selling door to door. A niece and a nephew, whose mother had difficulties caring for them and who consequently circulated among relatives' households, came to spend time with Glória. The niece arrived with a bad cough, and Glória went to buy cough syrup at a local drug store. At times Glória answered the request, pulling a few bills from her back pocket, and at times she shook her head. Regardless, the stream of requests remained steady, a constant in a world in which little is ever certain or secure.

This barrage of needs and requests is a common experience for those living in favelas across Rio, across Brazil, in poor neighborhoods in other parts of the world. However, catadores in Jardim Gramacho experience and respond to such requests differently from others in a similar position as a result of daily payment on the dump. Those who know catadores – their family members, friends, and neighbors – know that when catadores arrive home from working on the dump, they have money in their pockets. This makes it difficult for catadores to deny requests for loans: catadores know that others know that they were just paid. Similarly, when catadores owe money, it is

difficult for them to evade paying their debts. Simone loaned her son R\$70 for groceries one week when he was unable to work. Her credit card payment became due and she needed her son to repay her the R\$70. One afternoon, as we were walking through the neighborhood, she suggested that we stop by her son's shack, because she knew that he would be returning from the dump around that time. Sure enough, we arrived at his door just moments before he came winding down the muddy path that weaved through rows of tilting wooden structures. Before Simone had a chance to greet him, he complained, "Ah, mom, I'll pay you Sunday when I come over." Simone replied that she knew he had the money to pay her and there was no reason for him to wait. He reluctantly handed over the R\$70.

In addition to requests for help, catadores also receive (often tacit) pressures to provide for parties or other forms of recreation and entertainment. I discovered this personally the first week that I collected cardboard on the dump and received R\$50. Glória insisted on paying me like anyone else who brought material to the Pólo, and I decided to accept payment at the moment and find a way to give the money back to ACAMJG at a later point. When word spread that I had earned my first payment as a "catadora," many of the catadores at ACAMJG started shouting that I was taking everyone out for drinks that night: "Kathleen got paid! She's buying tonight!" Glória turned to me and said, "Well, now you really have become a catadora. You collected, got your money, will spend it all on beer, and will be broke by Monday." All of this was said partly in a joking spirit, I believe, in an effort to make me feel welcome. Nonetheless, these comments touched on a common experience among catadores of earning money and quickly facing expectations to treat others to rounds of drinks, barbecues, or other

social events. Those who earn monthly salaries are able to escape these kinds of requests three out of four weekends a month by saying that they have not yet been paid. Vanessa, whose husband, Gordinho, used to work on the dump but now earns a salary from ACAMJG, did not throw a party for Vanessa's birthday this year as he usually does. When I asked Vanessa about her birthday plans, she told me: "I don't think that we will have any money to do anything for my birthday, not even something small. Gordinho doesn't get paid until the week after." If Gordinho still worked on the dump, it is likely that he would have worked extra time one or two days before her birthday and spent the money he earned on a birthday celebration.

Continual requests for money, expectations to spend, and the daily payment of catadores have the effect of creating webs of credit and debt in Jardim Gramacho. We partially saw this in the encounter between Simone and her son, Leandro: Simone owed money on a store credit card, while waiting for Leandro to pay her back from a previous loan. But often, all of the debtors and creditors in a given scenario are part of the same social network. At one point, Leandro bought a bag of clunky jewelry from a catador who had found it on the dump. He did not have the money at the time, but he promised to pay when he sold his material at the end of the day. A friend of his, whose child had come down with a fever, asked to borrow money for medication before he paid the catador with the jewelry. He was then only able to pay part of what he owed and still needed R\$10. He then borrowed money from Simone in order to pay what he owed on the jewelry. Simone went home that night to Imburiê, a trip requiring two bus fares. She spent what money she had left on groceries. She needed bus fare in order to be able to return to work and so went to borrow money from her in-laws who lived nearby. When Simone arrived on the

dump, part of what she earned was already owed someone else (her in-laws). It was possible that Leandro would pay her back before she crossed paths again with her in-laws, but this all depended on timing. Such relations of credit and debt help contribute to the feeling among catadores that they are always broke: they simultaneously lend and owe money to others.

Given this context in which the daily earnings of catadores are easily claimed by others, catadores have developed strategies to protect their money. Most commonly, catadores spend as quickly as possible in order to put their earnings towards certain desired ends before relatives and friends place demands upon their money. While at first it appears that catadores are often quick and perhaps careless spenders, this practice actually enables catadores to save part of their income. Dona Rosa, a bar owner in Jardim Gramacho who used to work alongside her husband on the dump, drew my attention to the practice of saving-through-spending one afternoon when I commented on how incredible it was that she and husband were able to save enough of their earnings over the years to build their bar.

“Hah! We never saved a single cent,” she replied.

“But then how were you able to construct this bar?”

“You are never able to save, never able to save. It’s impossible. So, this is what I would do. I’d collect and get the money. The next day, I would go to the market to buy what we needed in the way of groceries. But I’d split up the money. If I would have bought ten kilos of rice, I would buy five. The money that I would have spent on the other 5 kilos, I would use to buy bricks. If you don’t do it like that, you’ll never manage to keep any money. Let’s say I earned R\$100. That’s enough to buy all the groceries that

I would need and then some. So, what would I do? I'd buy R\$50 worth of rice and beans and I would use the other R\$50 to buy inventory for the bar. Otherwise, you spend everything anyway. Maybe your child suddenly gets sick and you have to buy medicine. How would you save up any money?"

As Dona Rose described from her own experience, the best way to save money for long-term projects in a context in which there are constant financial demands is to spend one's earnings immediately on a small portion of the project. Over the course of several years, Dona Rosa and her husband bought bricks and then the necessary equipment and inventory for the bar a piece at a time each moment that they had money in their hands. They spent all their earnings immediately but by doing so, they ensured that their money would not be diverted to cover an unexpected family expense or distributed throughout their social network. Their savings quite literally were held in the form of bricks for their future bar.

A Moral Logic of Spending

"When I arrive home from the dump, the first thing that I do is look at the stove and see if there is still cooking gas. Then I look in the cupboard to see if there is something to eat. Then I go buy whatever is needed. I put aside enough money for water, batteries, gloves, anything that I'll need when I go back to work. Whatever is left over, I go out and have a good time."

This was André's routine as he described it to me in a long interview on a Sunday afternoon at my house. A twenty-three-year-old catador from Santa Cruz in the West Zone of Rio, André had come to Jardim Gramacho five years previously by way of a friend from his home neighborhood who worked on the dump. André had a reputation for

being quiet and diligent, but also very social, generous, and affectionate. He played soccer once a week with a group of friends from the dump in a loosely organized league in Jardim Gramacho. He did not use drugs and drank relatively little and only beer—extra cautious about drinking, he told me, after both his parents died from alcoholism. But André loved going out dancing and spending time with friends. His post-work routine caught my attention because of the ways it explained and justified his use of the money he made from the dump. I asked André what he meant by having a good time.

“I go to a *pagode* [live music with dancing]. I go out with friends until one or two o’clock in the morning. If I’m very tired or not feeling well, I’ll go home earlier. And other times, I party too much, arriving home at 6 o’clock in the morning.

“My brother is a little different. First, he goes out to party and then he goes home. I think about home straightaway, because when I go out partying I could arrive home at any time. I could spend all the money that I have. If I think about home first, then I know that when I wake up from a night of partying, I will have bread. When lunchtime arrives, I will have something to eat.”

By comparing himself to his brother, André indicates different attitudes towards money and spending among catadores. He argues that his choice to spend money on having a good time with friends to the point of being broke is not a careless or irresponsible decision, because he *first* takes care of all necessary household expenses. In contrast, he criticizes his brother who, according to André’s depiction here, would be considered a catador “whose money does not make it past the portaria, the entrance to the dump.” Numerous small bars (*barracas*) line the street Rua Tocantins at the base of the dump where catadores, often still dressed in their work clothes (*roupa da rampa*),

congregate in the late afternoon following a day of collecting. If a catador's earnings are all spent at one of these bars, then their money "did not make it past the portaria." For André, this is a form of squandering one's money, whereas engaging in the same types of activities *after* stopping at home, is an acceptable practice.

"When you have money left over," André continued, "maybe you save it. But I have never had any money left over. I earn what is necessary and then I leave. I don't earn a lot, but I also don't exert myself too much. When I have made R\$200 or R\$300 in a week, I go home. Some people might save money working, working, working, working. Not me."

André still considered his home to be in Santa Cruz and he regularly went there to visit his grandmother and his childhood friends. When he wanted to make a visit, André would work several days in a row, travel to Santa Cruz, and stay there until his money ran out and he needed to come back to Jardim Gramacho to work again. In other words, André only worked as much as he deemed necessary to make a trip home and he only returned to work when necessary – when he had spent all of his earnings. Work does not have value, for André, in and of itself but only in so far and to the extent that it enables him to fulfill certain desires: to be at home, to maintain relationships important to him, to go out partying with friends and have a good time. André's routine is a different manifestation of the same work cycle we saw in the lives of Vinte-dois and Fininho: work → exhaust earnings → return to work. Though André has structured the cycle around visits home and though he pursues a different life project than the long-time moradores, the work rhythm is fundamentally the same.

André makes clear that being broke is as much a function of not working as it is a function of spending. He becomes broke, because he waits to go back to work until he has consumed his earnings. Being broke is simply one stage of the work cycle.

Furthermore, this cycle is a practice conducted in accordance with a value system that diverges from the capitalist logic, which seeks accumulation and reinvestment of wealth.

André continues to invert capitalist moral logics concerning work and money through a discussion of a type of person he called a *pessoa ignorante*, a “know-nothing.”

“To have extra money, to save up money has a tendency of turning someone into a *pessoa ignorante*. This person sees everything as having a profit or a loss.”

“What does it mean to be a *pessoa ignorante*?” I asked.

“Someone who sees everything as having a price. This person desires a lot of material things: money, technology, expensive things. That person ends up *ignorante*, because he never has a good time. He never takes advantage of the good things in life. When I arrive home, I always call all my friends: “Let’s go eat, let’s drink, let’s go out!”

“Oh, and another thing. Sometimes the *pessoa ignorante* doesn’t realize that he is *ignorante*, but he is. He is the kind of person who will go do things, will go out with friends, will treat others to parties. But the next day, he regrets it all and complains to his friends. He thinks about all that he spent. This will destroy a person. Do you understand now what I mean?

“Yeah, I think I get it.

“Look, to be able to have a little fun is a pleasure that – I don’t even know how to explain it exactly. But it’s a pleasure that’s really good. There are certain kinds of people who distance themselves from others. When I go home, I invite everyone to go play

soccer, to go to a party, to go wherever. My friends are the same way. The *pessoa ignorante* is not. To be *ignorante* is to be closed off.”

For André, the know-nothing fool is not the one who spends all the money in his pockets on a night out with friends, but the one who refuses to have a good time and removes himself from social activities in an effort to save money. The *pessoa ignorante* is the one who counts their bills, the one who in the morning after a night of carousing calculates how much was spent and regrets it, the one who views money in terms of loss and gain. Spending money on “having a good time” – playing games, drinking, dancing, partying, having barbecues – is valued, André implies, because it creates and strengthens friendships. Indeed, most of the activities that tend to consume catadores’ earnings quickly – including drug use – are performed in a group. It follows, then, that André criticizes the *pessoa ignorante* not only for saving money, but also for insulating himself from others. Indeed, within André’s social world, these are one and the same. Friendship is performed through shared consumption.

Andrew Walsh (2003) similarly finds that despite their precarious living and working conditions of the sapphire miners, they often spend large portions of their earnings on “living the good life” – consuming alcohol, food, and marijuana. He argues that this lavish consumption results in part⁹ from the social pressure to share earnings with other miners coupled with the need to sustain relationships given that sapphire mining requires digging with a partner or a group and relies upon the exchange of information concerning new finds. Collecting on the dump in Jardim Gramacho could also be considered an activity that relies on cooperation: help with lifting and loading heavy burlap sacks onto trucks, passing along knowledge concerning types of material

that can be collected, sharing resources ranging from water to work vests, and watching out for one another's safety. Buying rounds of drinks for one's fellow catadores would certainly help one maintain important social networks in Jardim Gramacho.¹⁰ However, to view the practice of spending money on others and on "having a good time" solely in terms of a calculus for personal survival or advantage is to miss the logics, values, and moral systems that inform and shape such practices. The practice of spending rather than saving or investing must be understood in light of the sense expressed in André's comments that to be too careful with money, to pay too much attention to how much one earns and spends (beyond basic necessities) is to allow money to become more valued than one's social relationships.

One evening over a few beers, I asked Glória, the financial director of ACAMJG, who has worked in Jardim Gramacho since she was 11 years old, for her insight into money and spending practices in Jardim Gramacho.

"I just don't get it," I told her, "how can it be possible to earn money and spend it so damn quickly? Glória suggested drug and alcohol addictions as a cause.

"Yeah," I replied, "but there are many, many catadores who do not use any drugs, who don't drink or smoke and still manage to spend every cent they make from one day to the next."

"You're right," she said to me. Still... I don't know what to say. When you figure out the answer to this question, you let me know."

Part of the difficulty in addressing the question of vanishing money is that there is no one answer. As seen above, money passes out of the hands of catadores for all sorts of

reasons. For some, money disappears in support of a substance addiction. For others, the needs of family members and friends quickly claim the earnings of catadores. Both acquired debt and the strategy of saving-through-spending also play a role in making money seemingly vanish in Jardim Gramacho. Daily payment on the dump can be considered an underlying structural cause for the difficulty of holding onto money, leading to the attitude that more money can always be earned tomorrow (so spend today) and enabling frequent claims by family and friends on the cash in the pockets of catadores. Finally, certain values related to hospitality and friendship, as well as the importance of leisure over work, have contributed to practices of relatively high spending during social events and of exhausting one's earnings before returning to work. These reasons, of course, are not exclusive. The same catador who spends his day's earnings on a night out with friends may the next day lend the majority of his earnings to a relative presently short on rent money. Structural conditions, relations of obligation and care, and a moral logic that values not working over wealth accumulation combine to produce a situation in which money, as Vanessa explained, "comes into your hand quickly on the dump but then leaves just as quickly."

Notes

¹ Leticia was working with her husband. The amount of R\$550 was the total that she and her husband earned together. At the time R\$1 was approximately USD\$0.50.

² Requests for money were almost always framed as loans. Catadores would usually ask, "Is there any way you can lend me R\$50 (or other amount)?" However, not all loans get repaid and there are times when both the person asking and the person loaning the money know that the money will not be repaid – at least directly. This is especially the case with smaller sums. For example, Glória's brother Tião stopped by on a Sunday to ask if she could lend him R\$10 so that he could buy meat for a barbecue. Glória did not ask for the R\$10 to be repaid, but a few days later asked Tião to lend her a few bucks so that she could buy cigarettes. Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg (2009) describe a similar "moral economy of sharing" among heroine addicts in San Francisco (6).

³ The price of recyclable materials tends to drop each year in Brazil at this time due to the summer holiday. Some recycling plants close temporarily, leaving intermediary buyers with an overstock of materials. Additionally, consumption of beer, refreshments, and other goods packaged in recyclable material increases at this time, increasing the overall supply of recyclable material. In 2009, this yearly drop in prices was further exacerbated by the global economic crisis: commodity prices plummeted (no longer creating a demand for scrap metals) and the demand for packaging materials also dropped. Many cities in the United States reported difficulties sustaining their recycling programs, which were bringing net losses. Prices began rising again in April 2009, but by August, they still did not reach mid-2008 levels.

⁴ Jason Pine (2007:360) has noted this similar connection between hard labor and the use of methamphetamines in the rural Midwest: Truck drivers, migrant meat packers, concrete layers, roofers, carpenters, cooks, waiters, bartenders, and exotic dancers found that meth can give you more energy, more working hours, more 'life.' It enables you to work fourteen-hour days and stay awake for as long as three weeks." The use of narcotics *in order to work* challenges assumed associations between drug use and the homeless, unemployed, unproductive, non-working poor.

⁵ Though, the catadores earning at the very high end of the income range tended to be exclusively men, the average earnings of women on a daily basis were roughly equivalent to those of men. That said, women often experienced more household demands that could prohibit them from working a certain day or for a period of time. For example, women often told me that they did not make it up to the dump the previous day because they spent the day washing clothes (by hand) or had to stay home to take care of a sick child.

⁶ Maximo, a migrant worker from Saraguro comes to know through his fieldwork, intends to eventually return permanently to his Saraguro community in southern Ecuador. He sends money periodically to his brother-in-law to work gradually on building this house for him. He also hopes that this house could become a future source of income as a hostel for ecotourists.

⁷ Though Oscar Lewis first proposed the theory of a "culture of poverty," its elaboration and applications have often strayed from Lewis's ethnographic work. In his analysis of agency in the context of political action/inaction in a working class-neighborhood of Mexico City, Matthew Gutmann (2002) cautions against simplistic critiques or dismissals of Oscar Lewis's work, arguing that Lewis contributes to discussions of structure and agency through his willingness to question how the behaviors and rationales of the poor are mechanisms that at once enable their survival in oppressive conditions and play a part in the reproduction of these conditions.

⁸ Vinte-dois later explained that his nickname comes from the illegal but widely popular lottery game *Jogo do Bicho*. This lottery is based on 26 animals. The tiger is number 22 and is associated with craziness. When I asked about the source of his nickname, he replied, "Sou *maluco* (crazy), the tiger, twenty-two!"

⁹ Walsh continues his analysis to include other factors leading to lavish consumption among miners such as miner's responses to the risks that they encounter in their work and the encouragement to engage in "daring" acts among young Malagasy men.

¹⁰ It should also be noted that many catadores keep a shack in Jardim Gramacho but live elsewhere in Rio de Janeiro. When they spend their money on having a good time, they often do this with friends and family in another neighborhood. If viewing spending practices with respect to the maintenance of social ties, the spending of these catadores would have to be understood as contributing to the maintenance of social networks that are important for reasons other than those concerning work on the dump.

CHAPTER 6

WORKING CARNAVAL, PLAYING THE EVERYDAY

Carnival is thus an inversion of daily reality, banishing work and creating a utopia of pleasures and abundance.

– Roberto DaMatta 1984

What distinguishes peasant life so profoundly from the life of industrial workers, even today, is precisely this inherence of productive activity in their life in its entirety. The workplace is all around the house; work is not separate from the everyday life of the family.

– Henri Lefebvre 2008 [1947]

I reeked of beer and piss. We all did. Gordinho was methodically tossing the last bags of the aluminum cans we had collected over the side of the truck. However, the rest of us – Vanessa, Cristódio, Maria, Jó, and I – were sitting on the curb next to the truck, either slumped over in exhaustion with elbows on knees or leaning back with splayed arms and face to the sky, as if to catch a fresh breeze rolling off the waves of Ipanema’s beach. Rio de Janeiro’s *carnaval* group “Friendliness is Almost Love” had just finished parading along the beaches of Ipanema and Leblon in Rio’s wealthy South Zone. The final notes of the carnival group’s electric band blared in the distance, leaving behind an eerie silence intermittently punctuated by the shouts of straggling drunks. We watched as Atlantic Avenue emptied of the remaining carnival revelers.

“See how they like to kick things,” Maria grumbled, pointing to a group of four young guys, who indeed were kicking a couple empty water bottles in front of them as they stumbled down the street. “They would kick cans out of my way just as I was

reaching down to pick them up.” This prompted a venting session in which we all complained of the kicks, shoves, and insults endured while collecting cans and bottles in the middle of 100,000 people drinking, dancing and “playing” (*brincando*) carnival.

“Yeah,” added Cristódio, “Fucking *filhos de papai*” – a derogatory slang phrase for spoiled, rich kids.

Perhaps thinking that food might cure the group’s *mal humor*, Vanessa retrieved the sandwiches of white bread and bologna that she had made for the group earlier that day. As we ate and passed around a 2-liter bottle of Coke, we discussed the plan for the following day. Cristódio suggested a carnival group that he knew was going to parade, beginning at the Praça Mauá in downtown. Gordinho pulled from his pocket a schedule of the *blocos* and pointed out that the carnival group *Suveca* was going to parade the next day in Jardim Botânico, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in all of Rio. The group agreed that it would be better to collect in the affluent South Zone and decided on a meeting time of one-thirty the following afternoon.

It was time to go. We still had to make the forty-five-minute trip from Ipanema in the South Zone of Rio to Jardim Gramacho, located beyond the northern limits of the city. And then, once in Jardim Gramacho, we would have to unload the truck in preparation for the next day of carnival collecting. As we climbed into the back of the truck, awkwardly finding positions to sit among the overflowing bags and piles of grimy cans, Cristódio sighed:

“After carnival, you know what I am going to do? After carnival, I am going to take a whole week off. A whole week. I’m not going to do a damn thing (*porra nenhuma*).”

“After carnaval” (*depois do carnaval*) is an ubiquitous phrase in Brazil, heard particularly during the weeks leading up to the pre-Lenten festivities. Meetings, projects, proceedings, classes, favors, and plenty of other operations are put on hold until “after carnaval.” Many fellow researchers in Brazil from other social science disciplines complained in frustration that beginning in January, their interview requests constantly received the response, “*depois do carnaval*.” Of course, not everything stops until after carnaval. Travel, vacationing, parties, beach-going, drinking, dancing, and performing are all activities that continue, and indeed are heightened during this annual celebration. What is put on hold until after carnaval is specifically work. Tired and irritated after the first night of carnaval and facing another five days of collecting discarded beer cans in throngs of revelers, Cristódio reverses the meaning of the phrase. Vacation and relaxation will wait until after carnaval. During carnaval, he works.

In this chapter, I take a view of carnaval contrary to its usual interpretations, arguing that many Brazilians experience carnaval not as a period of fervent play, but as a time of intensified work. “There is no single, unified *carnaval*,” Nancy Scheper-Hughes notes in her account of the pre-Lenten festivities in a shantytown of the Brazilian northeast (1992:482). This observation forms the premise of her critique of anthropological studies that have depicted carnaval as a ritual of subversion and reversal, a liminal moment in a hierarchical society when status distinctions between rich and poor fall away and the suffering of everyday life is forgotten. For the women of the shantytown Alto do Cruzeiro, Scheper-Hughes argues, carnaval is not a time of forgetting but of remembering. The stark contrast between the extravagance of the festivities and

the continued meagerness of their resources only magnify the poor's experiences of inequality and their everyday struggles with hunger and death. In her account, Scheper-Hughes thus follows the poor of the Alto do Cruzeiro as they "play carnival," showing how this play is less like the liberatory revelry upheld in the ideology of carnival and more like a dark humor imbued with ironic meanings and social critiques, as men dress up as street children and street children throw "buckets of motor oil, tar, honey, and mud on passersby in the traditional *carnaval* play called the *mela-mela* [messy-messy]" (486).

I consider here how yet another carnival exists in Brazil – a carnival of production, labor, and the workaday world, so often cited as the antithesis to Brazil's pre-Lenten festivity. I aim to draw attention to a lacuna in the anthropological literature on carnival which, I argue below, has important implications for a political economy of the event and for conceptualizations of work, play, and the everyday. Recent anthropological studies of Brazil's carnival have questioned several notions: that carnival is evidence of a racial democracy (Pravaz 2008a; Sheriff 1999); that it is an instance of unrestrained license (Lewis 2000; Pravaz 2008b), and that it is a moment of egalitarianism and role reversal (Scheper-Hughes 1992). The association of carnival with play, however, remains largely unchallenged.

And yet, as anyone who has followed the *trio elétricos* (parading floats) of Salvador, watched the samba schools from the *Sambódromo* (samba stadium) of Rio de Janeiro, or danced on the streets to the pounding drums of neighborhood blocos (carnaval groups) in cities throughout Brazil could have observed, the festivities of carnival require tremendous amounts of work. Vendors line the streets selling stuffed pastries, cans of cold beer, and *caipirinhas* made with sugar cane liquor and crushed limes. Others who

happen to live along the parade line or near the center of festivities supplement the scarce and filthy portable toilets by charging carnival-goers (mostly women) one *real* for the use of their home bathroom. In Rio, outside the Sambódromo, vendors shout out the prices of scalped tickets to tourists, gradually lowering their cost as the night unfolds.

Of course, much of the work of carnival occurs beforehand and in the background – the musical compositions and choreography, the maintenance of the samba schools' facilities, and the production of the floats and costumes that are often still being altered seconds before the parade. Some occurs afterwards. At dawn, the remains of carnival line the streets: empty bottles and cans, discarded costumes, sheets of paper with carnival lyrics, paper plates and wrappers, hollowed green coconuts, and the rinds of limes. The smell of this refuse intermingles with the stench of dank beer and urine. Rio's waste management company reported that its workers used 160,000 liters of water and detergent to clean the downtown area of Rio alone and collected 446 tons of waste from the streets following four nights of carnival revelry (Jornal do Globo 25/02/2009). This tonnage does not include the material collected by informal recyclers, known as *catadores*, working the nights of carnival – the *catadores* who weave in and out of the parades, snatching up empty beer cans, water bottles, and plastic cups as this debris is tossed about in the movement of the crowds.

How is carnival experienced by those who work it? How does an attention to the labor entailed by the festivities remake sociological and anthropological understandings of this event? What does a shift in the interpretative angle on carnival from play to work, imply about conceptualizations of everyday life as toil? In other words, what are the relationships between labor and leisure in both the liminality of carnival and the

normalcy of everyday life? And how might this inquiry challenge work/play and carnival/the everyday dichotomies in new ways?

I explore these questions based on the experience of eighteen catadores with whom I collected cans and bottles in Rio's street parades (blocos) during six nights of carnival. These blocos consist of floats carrying bands and loud speakers through the city streets followed by members of the bloco's carnival group, usually dressed in themed costumes, and spectators who dance spontaneously to the music. The blocos represent a celebration of carnival that contrasts with the large televised samba school parades that take place in Rio's Sambódromo. To attend the Sambódromo festivities, spectators must purchase tickets, the most expensive of which provide admittance to the *camarotes*, private viewing areas where spectators, many of whom are foreigners, are served fine foods and drinks as they watch from a distance the tightly choreographed processions of multi-story floats and thousands of elaborately costumed dancers. The Sambódromo carnival is seen by many residents of Rio, particularly those from its hillside *favelas* and sprawling periphery who cannot afford tickets, as a commercialized spectacle for Brazil's middle class and for foreigners that has lost any real sense of connection to the poor Afro-Brazilian neighborhoods where the samba schools originated in the 1930s (see Sheriff 1999). Rio's blocos remain small, neighborhood-based, and free, offering the most potential for spontaneity and play among Rio's various kinds of celebrations. The experiences of catadores working the blocos, including their encounters with race and class divisions and with commercial interests and corporate sponsorship, take on added meaning in the context of Rio's supposedly more egalitarian street carnival.

Anthropological studies of carnival are rarely just about carnival. As with other

rituals and cultural events, carnival has often been analyzed as a window onto larger or deeper social relations, forces, and meaning. Victor Turner's analysis of various carnivals, including Rio's celebration, helped elaborate his theories of ritual process, liminality, and anti-structure (1983; 1987). Roberto DaMatta (1979), interpreting the pre-Lenten festivities as subversive practice, argued that carnival inversely mirrors the rigid unequal social structure of Brazil. This led him to questions of Brazilian national identity or, as he subsequently wrote (1989), "what makes Brazil, Brazil." More recently, Daniel Linger (1992) has studied carnival to understand the cultural and psychological forces that lead to street violence in Brazil. Robin Sheriff (1999) has explored contested visions of carnival among people of color in a Rio *favela* as a way to speak about the complexity of unspoken racial politics in Brazil. And Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), as noted above, tells a story of carnival that reinforces her larger account of infant mortality, maternal love, and the omnipresent struggles with hunger and death among the poor in the Brazilian Northeast. As J. Lowell Lewis (2000) argues in his article on *capoeira* and *carnaval*, special events can reveal more about the everyday than everyday life itself.

In a similar vein, this chapter is about carnival. But it is also about how an alternative experience of carnival illuminates the relationship between work and play in the lives of catadores. In the first half of the chapter, I recount a different story of Brazilian carnival, one that begins with the work of collecting cans in Rio's street parades, moves to the class and race relations instantiated in the interactions between those working carnival (catadores) and those playing carnival (the parade participants), and culminates with suggestions for a political economy of this mega-event.

The second half turns to the experience of catadores "after carnival," in the

ordinary time of everyday life. If carnival is played, as standard interpretations go, then it follows that the everyday is worked. And yet the day-to-day practices of catadores on the dump, which interweave diversion with drudgery, belie this association. It is not that carnival is play and the everyday is work or that carnival is work and the everyday is play. Rather, the experiences of catadores in carnival and in daily life on the dump remind us that demarcations between work and play are constructed in and by the conditions of production. This exploration into the practices of catadores that challenge the dichotomies of work/play and carnival/the everyday ultimately leads me to interrogate the anthropological concept of “everyday life.”

Catadores and Carnival

Catadores from Jardim Gramacho collected in the parades of Rio’s blocos for the first time in 2009, the year that I joined them and that I describe in this chapter. This was not, however, the first time these catadores worked carnival. For decades, catadores in Jardim Gramacho have intensified collection on the dump during the week of carnival because, as they say, so much “rich” material falls from the trucks during this time. Aside from copper, aluminum carries the highest price of recyclable materials, rarely escaping the eye of street catadores who sift out recyclables from garbage bags and containers well before Comlurb trucks transport the waste to Jardim Gramacho. On an average day, an experienced catador on the dump might gather fifty aluminum cans while collecting plastics or other materials, exchanging the small pile of cans for a mid-day snack or a few cigarettes. During carnival, Luciana told me that she managed to stuff an entire burlap sack with crushed cans in a single day, a small sign of the copious consumption of Rio’s

festivities. I found that many people collected material during carnival who did not usually work as catadores. These included Seu Antônio, Tia Fátima, and Glória as well as friends and relatives of catadores. Stopping to chat with a young woman picking up cans outside the Sambódromo, I asked her how long she had worked as a catadora. “Oh, I’m not really a catadora,” she replied, “I am a student right now but I always collect cans on New Year’s Eve and during carnival.”

In 2006, several catadores from Jardim Gramacho began collecting material in carnival festivities outside of the dump. The first to do this collected material in the Sambódromo during Rio’s nationally televised samba school parades. With sponsorship from Coca-Cola Brasil, Comlurb, and Liesa (the league of samba schools), sixty catadores from eleven cooperatives from the metropolitan area of Rio received access to the Sambódromo, uniforms made from recycled PET, and 150 sacks for collection. In addition to the value derived from advertising this campaign, which Coca-Cola Brasil calls “Recycling is A+”, the work of catadores in the Sambódromo significantly cuts the clean-up costs for Comlurb and Liesa. Each year, catadores pick up approximately eight tons of aluminum cans from the Sambódromo during carnival. For this work, they are paid only for the aluminum that they sell at the end of the night to a commission representing the group of cooperatives, which then sells all of the aluminum cans together to a recycling center. Most of these catadores never attended the samba school parades until they were given this “free” ticket to the Sambódromo to collect empty beer cans.

The idea of formally sponsoring catadores to collect the debris left in the wake of carnival festivities extended from the Sambódromo to the blocos in 2009. The idea originated with Sebastiana, the Association of Blocos of Rio de Janeiro. “I got a call from

Marli [an NGO-worker who acted as an intermediary between Sebastiana and ACAMJG],” Gordinho explained. “Marli told me that there was going to be a meeting that afternoon concerning the possibility of collecting in the carnaval blocos. I had just arrived from the World Social Forum in Belém. Tião couldn’t go to the meeting because he had missed his flight from Belém, which he always does. He never checks the damn schedule. So I went straight from the airport to downtown to the meeting. I didn’t have time to take a shower, change my clothes, eat something. And that’s how I ended up in charge of organizing a group of catadores to collect in the blocos. The meeting was on the Monday before the first bloco was scheduled to parade. I called Cristódio and Bete [presidents of two other cooperatives of catadores in Rio] and by Saturday, we had a group together.”

Because the blocos parade through open streets, Sebastiana’s sponsorship is not needed to collect during carnaval, as is the case for catadores working in the Sambódromo. While collecting with Gordinho and the rest of the group, I encountered dozens of other catadores gathering cans in the midst of the blocos. However, Sebastiana’s sponsorship enabled Gordinho to bring ACAMJG’s truck to the blocos and drive behind the floats on streets that were otherwise closed down for carnaval. This facilitated the collection of cans and bottles as well as the transportation of the material to Jardim Gramacho in the outskirts of Rio where the group gathered on Ash Wednesday to sort the recyclables. Catadores from Jardim Gramacho had never collected in the blocos in previous carnaval years, because they had no way to get the material back home to sort and sell to known buyers.

A Time to Work

When I first learned about catadores collecting in the Sambódromo and later heard from Gordinho that a group would be collecting in the blocos, I assumed that catadores would take these opportunities to enjoy carnival right in the midst of all the action. After all, few of Rio's poor ever have the chance to see the samba schools from the elite boxes of the Sambódromo and those who live in Rio's periphery rarely make the trip to the South Zone of Rio to partake in the famous blocos that parade down the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema. My first night of collecting in the blocos confounded this expectation. Before the bloco's float even arrived in the square where the parade was scheduled to depart, Vanessa handed me a plastic garbage bag. "Come on, let's go over to those garbage cans," pointing to the large orange Comlurb receptacles on the other side of the square. As we made our way through the thickening crowd, Vanessa scooped up a couple cans lying against the curb and tossed them into my bag. We quickly developed a system: one of us would tip a container at a forty-five degree angle while the other person would reach to the bottom and pull out any aluminum cans or plastic bottles. By the time we heard the first notes of the blocos's theme song, we had emptied a full bag into the back of the truck. We joined the crowd following the float now, weaving in and out of the thousands of people walking, dancing, pushing, singing, drinking, laughing, having a good time – *curtindo o carnaval*. I lost sight of Vanessa and of the truck for a while. My bag became heavier and bulkier, frequently catching between people as I moved to quickly grab cans off the ground before someone's foot landed on my target or worse – my hand.

"I hate all the people," Vanessa shouted breathlessly as she ran up to me. "Where

have you been? The truck is a little ways behind us if you want to dump your bag.” I almost suggested that we take a break, that I could buy us a cold soda from one of the dozens of vendors lining the street. But before I got these words out, Vanessa darted off to the edge of the parade, collecting the cans that gather in piles along the sidewalk. As I sluggishly made my way to the truck, I saw Bete and Norma, both carrying bulging bags. I suddenly realized that I could no longer hear the music of the receding float. The parade – now totaling 100,000 people – stretched from Ipanema to the end of Leblon and despite the float’s loudspeakers, the notes were lost among them, dissipating somewhere along the open beach. I unloaded my bag and continued to collect. We did not take a break until the bloco had ended and the streets had emptied.

The rest of carnival continued in the same work rhythm as that first night with a few exceptions. One of these involved Jó, well-known in Jardim Gramacho for her playfulness and sense of humor. We had arrived at the top of the old cobbled, windy streets of Santa Teresa, one of the few middle-class neighborhoods in Rio located on a hillside, famous for its communities of artists and hippies. Dozens of people were wearing identical black and white veils in honor of Santa Teresa’s bloco, the “Carmelites”, the order of Catholic nuns who founded the neighborhood by building a convent on a hill in Santa Teresa in 1744. One man was dressed as a priest, wearing a long black robe and a white collar, with the addition of red devil horns atop his head. Another man wore a veil and a robe stuffed at his belly— a pregnant nun. Costumes unrelated to the “Carmelites” dotted the crowd as well, including two women dressed as cats and a group of six carnival-goers wearing red tutus and wigs. Watching this crowd as we waited for Gordinho to find a way to get the truck up the narrow streets of Santa

Teresa, Jó interjected, “Why don’t we dress up (*ir de fantasia*) on Sunday?”

“Why Sunday?,” I asked.

“Because we are going to be in Copacabana.” Jó seemed to pause for effect. “I am going to be a prostitute!” This prompted Jó to burst into laughter.

Moments later, Jó asked Rose for one of the handful of plastic bags she was holding. Jó began to tear the bag at the seams and both Rose and I asked simultaneously what costume Jó was improvising. But then, to our surprise, she wrapped the bag around her waist, pulled down her pants beneath the bag, squatted in the middle of the sidewalk bracing the hood of a parked car for support, and started to pee. At this point, we all burst into laughter, while Jó, laughing herself, kept repeating, “it would be worse if I peed my pants, worse if I peed my pants.” “And then,” Jó added, looking at me as if for some approval, “I would have to stay here collecting cans all day with wet pants!” We all kept laughing until Gordinho finally arrived with the truck and we began the work of collecting the Carmelites’ cans. The idea to wear costumes in the next bloco or any bloco was a joke, I realized, never meant to be taken seriously.

It was not until the last day of carnaval that I began to understand the incident in Santa Teresa and the group’s general malaise and disinterest in participating in the dancing, costuming and revelry of the blocos. I left Jardim Gramacho on the Tuesday of carnaval in the late morning, catching the *Central* bus – the only bus that goes from Jardim Gramacho to downtown Rio. The bus was unusually full and I was perplexed that so many people from Jardim Gramacho would be heading to the festivities in Rio on this last day, since the buses had remained nearly empty during the other days of carnaval. All became clear, however, when the bus stopped across from the *Piscinão de Ramos* – a

beach in the Northern Zone known to be the beach of poor, black *cariocas* that was inaugurated as a salt water pool in 2001, when the Bay of Guanabara bordering this beach became so polluted that the government began treating the water. Every person got off the bus at the Piscinão de Ramos. I remained the lone passenger to Central Station where I caught another bus to Copacabana to meet the rest of the group for one final bloco.

When I arrived, I found the group lounging around on the street, waiting for the bloco to start, which was running behind schedule. Few people had yet to gather by the float; it seemed as if the City of Rio was still recovering from a collective hangover after the last big night of samba school parades at the Sambódromo. I sat down on the sidewalk next to Bete, who was eating some leftovers of cold spaghetti and gazing off in the direction of the statue of Princess Isabel planted in the middle of the avenue before us. Princess Isabel was the famed empress who had signed the “Golden Law” in 1888 abolishing slavery in Brazil. “So what did you do last year for Carnaval?” I asked.

“Last year? I worked in the Sambódromo. In the elite boxes. It’s a whole other world.

“What about before working at the Sambódromo? What did you do?

“I’ve always done something. I used to charge one *real* for people to use my bathroom.” Bete lived in the Northern Zone, one block from the busy thoroughfare leading to the Sambódromo.

“Did you get a lot of people?”

“Did I! There was a line outside my house that went all the way around the corner, people just waiting to use the bathroom. But the mayor cracked down on this.”

“So, you’ve always worked during carnaval?”

“I work *even more* during carnaval.” Bete took another bite of spaghetti.

“Carnaval is for the rich, for those who have money to drink, to eat, to party, to really enjoy (*curtir*) carnaval. Look at the blocos. Most of the people have money. How am I going to take my husband, my children, everyone to carnaval? I’d have to spend a lot of money. It’s expensive. You’ll see that the poor, they are all at the beach”.

I was reminded of the bus that morning that stopped at the Piscinão de Ramos.

“When you go to the beach, you can take your own beer and your own food from home, find a spot in the sand, and just hang out. Everyone who is poor is at the beach.”

Bete’s words help make sense of the intensity and focus of catadores on their work during carnaval, Jó’s joking about dressing in costumes that was never to be taken seriously, and the group’s disinterest in participating in some of the fun of the blocos. Bete’s second comment explains her first. If carnaval is for the rich, if the ways of having fun, engaging in play, and consuming that dominate Rio’s carnaval do not resonate with catadores’ own experiences of leisure, if the Sambódromo parades and the blocos (nearly all of which took place in the wealthy South Zone) do not belong to the social worlds of catadores and other poor *cariocas* – why play? Why not work?

Robin Sheriff’s study of the racial politics of Rio’s carnaval (1999) argues that many poor, black *cariocas* view carnaval as stolen from them. Their experience of carnaval is an experience of betrayal: that the festival based on the Afro-Brazilian music of samba and founded in the samba schools of Rio’s favelas has become the domain of white, middle-class Brazilians and tourists. The small blocos of the *morro* (literally “hillside” where many of Rio’s poor live), Sheriff recounts, lost their energy and appeal too – overshadowed by the spectacle of the big-stakes samba school parades that are

cordoned off in the Sambódromo, no longer sharing a public space with the blocos. These small old neighborhood blocos that Sheriff describes were not the same as those in which the catadores collected. Rather, the blocos sponsoring the catadores were blocos founded in the 1980s and 1990s mostly by groups of friends or professionals from the middle and upper-class neighborhoods of the South Zone. These blocos too belong to the rich.

Let us consider again the incident in Santa Teresa when joking punctuated the intensity of work for a few brief moments. We were gathered in a small square in Santa Teresa, lined with art shops, quaint bistros, and tiny bars. None of the catadores had previously been to Santa Teresa. The small size of the square and the growing crowd increased our proximity to the carnival-goers, and since we were waiting for Gordinho and the truck, we were not collecting but just standing around watching the scene. Most of the people surrounding us were white. Though much of the crowd wore costumes, they were in large part standardized, thematically appropriate for the name of the bloco, “The Carmelites.” In such a setting, the catadores were out of place. Jó joked that the group should wear costumes too, but not until we collected in a more gritty area of Copacabana where she would be a prostitute—stating it in an ambiguous way that could mean either dress as a prostitute or actually work as a prostitute. Jó’s humor here can be interpreted both as emerging from the discomfort and unease of hanging out in the midst of the Santa Teresa crowd and as providing a critique of the non-subversiveness of this middle-class carnival dressed “subversively” as pregnant nuns and horned priests. Furthermore, Jó’s playfulness in turning a garbage bag into a skirt ends up not being about carnival play – fantasy and *fantasia* – but about practically dealing with a common problem faced frequently by women catadoras: they do not have access to bathrooms while working.

Jó's "play" is a way to enable her to continue to work.

As we will see in the second part of this chapter, catadores play frequently on the dump, in the midst of their work collecting. They goof around (*zoar*), play soccer, drink together, flirt, sing songs, gossip, and tell stories. The everyday on the dump belongs to them in a way that the carnaval blocos do not. This does not mean that carnaval loses all meaning for catadores, or for others who work during the holiday, as a time outside of ordinary time. Carnaval is special. At no other time do catadores from Jardim Gramacho collect on the streets of Rio's South Zone or work five continuous days without breaks. Cristódio referenced this uniqueness when he grumbled that he could not wait until "after carnaval" when he would not do a "damn thing." However, the meaning of the *special* event of carnaval shifts for catadores. The intensification of play for some translates into an intensification of work for others.

Producing Inequality

Viewing carnaval from the perspective of work draws attention to the class and race relations made and remade in Brazil's largest celebration. Questions of social division and inequality have figured prominently in debates in the anthropology of carnaval. Classic interpretations of carnaval as a time when the *morro* ("hillside": where many of Rio's poor live) meets the *asfalto* ("pavement": the world of middle-class residences and businesses) and Brazil's rich and poor and white and black intermingle in a celebration that momentarily forgets social hierarchies have been challenged by studies that point to Brazil's distinct and exclusive celebrations. The wealthy flee the city (Scheper-Hughes 1992:482), attend elite carnaval balls (Pereira de Queiroz 1999:150-

151), or watch the parades from secured luxury boxes (Pereira de Carvalho and Madeiro 2005). While these latter studies demonstrate that the carnaval utopia is indeed just a utopia and one not even played in jest during the festivities, their focus on the segregation of celebrations tends to overlook the class and race interactions that do occur during carnaval. Rich and poor, white and black may not *play* carnaval jointly, but the work of carnaval brings them together through the services that the poor provide for the festivity. Ironically, collecting in the blocos of the South Zone brought catadores from Jardim Gramacho into elite spaces of the city where they rarely venture. Simone, who has lived in the metropolitan area of Rio since she was three years old, asked if she could pass by my house on the first day of carnaval and take the bus along with me. “But you will have to pay an extra bus fare if you get off at my house first.” I replied. “I don’t know where I am going,” she told me. She had never been to the Praça General Osório in Ipanema nor as I learned when we arrived at the famous horseshoe beach on another day of carnaval collecting, had Simone been to Copacabana. Rich and poor do meet in carnaval, just not in the egalitarian or subversive ways that Victor Turner (1983) and Roberto DaMatta (1979) describe.

Of course, the *morro* meets the *asfalto* in the everyday as well, through various forms of employment, most notably domestic work in the wealthy residences of the South Zone (see Goldstein 2003). Simone’s aunt, for example, was employed as a domestic worker in a wealthy architect’s home in Ipanema for nine years. Such moments and spaces of class interaction, however, are circumscribed and contained in the context of service employment (the separate service elevator that domestic workers until recently were required to use is an iconic example). This contrasts with the large gatherings of the

blocos where catadores, as well as the numerous street vendors, literally bump into carnival-goers from higher classes, most of whom are much whiter than they are. The anonymity of these carnival encounters further distinguishes them from the class relations of service work, particularly those involving domestic workers who have worked for the same household for many years.

On the last day of carnival, while half-heartedly picking up stray cans along the beach of Copacabana after the bloco had passed, I asked Simone how people had reacted to her while she was collecting.

“Well, some people looked down on me, treated me with indifference. But not everyone. Some even told me that they were impressed with our work. They said: ‘Congratulations. You are working. Many people steal but you are working. There should be more people like you.’

“They really said this?” I dropped the can I was picking up. I thought to myself: “Right. More people picking up their damn waste instead of embodying their fear of the poor as *marginais* – criminals.”

“Yeah. They said congratulations! Congratulations! – to me.” I could hear pride in Simone’s voice. I paused. In my rush to critique, I had missed the significance of this moment of recognition.

We started walking back towards the truck. Simone made a detour to a beach stand that was closing to ask for their garbage bags that surely would be full of cans and bottles. I waited for her uncomfortably.

“What do you mean by indifference?” I asked when Simone returned with two heaping bags. We began pulling out the valuables.

“Huh?”

“You said people treated you with indifference.”

“You feel humiliated, you feel this,” Simone replied.

“But what causes you to feel this way?”

“The indifference. They treat you with indifference.”

I paused, striving to reword my question. “But what exactly did people do or say when you felt this way?”

“Oh, there was one person who jumped to the side so as not to be touched by my sack. They pull away, they give you distance when you pass. Haven’t you noticed this? You feel humiliated.”

I had noticed this. One woman swore at me the first night I was collecting when I was still learning to negotiate a large sack in a thick crowd and accidentally hit her legs with the leaky, sticky bag when I tried to pass. Others, mostly groups of drunk guys, kicked cans away as a joke. This “carnaval play” drew the most complaints from the group at the end of each night. Some people, particularly in the Carmelitas bloco of Santa Teresa, directly handed me their empty cans, saving me the step of reaching down to pick the grimy cans off the street. One of these expressed surprise as he tossed the can into my bag: “Blue-eyed and collecting?!” (*de olho azul e está catando?!).* The correct order of things – who was playing carnaval in that bloco and who was working carnaval – was not only a question of class but of race. Most people, however, ignored me. It seemed that my presence was invisible, that I was not there at all, or there in a way that did not matter. Seeming to instinctually avoid my body and my bag, those who passed moved slightly away, often inadvertently stepping on or knocking the cans I had intended to retrieve. I

wondered if Cristódio's and others' complaints at the end of the night about *filhos de papai* kicking away cans referred as much to the groups of guys joking around and kicking cans between them as if in a soccer drill as to those who kicked away cans in the process of parading because they did not see that a catador was there. It was the "indifference," Simone told me, that brought humiliation.

Such direct encounters with the social divisions of race and class rarely occur in the daily life of catadores in Jardim Gramacho in contrast to their experiences during carnival. Numerous studies of street catadores – those who collect material from the garbage bags placed on curbs for municipal waste collection and who often form a kind of patron-client relationship with business owners and condominium residents who "donate" their recyclables to them—have examined extensively cross-class interactions involving catadores (see Gorbán 2009:201-215; Natalino and Eckert 2003; Wilkis and Gorbán 2006). These relationships and interactions with other social groups, so central to the work of street catadores, are nearly absent for catadores collecting on dumps. With the exception of Comlurb personnel, garbage truck drivers, guards, and scrap dealers, catadores do not regularly encounter non-catadores on the dump. From time to time, Comlurb leads tours of the dump to university engineering students, and journalists sometimes arrive to cover a news item: the inauguration of a new piping system for the methane gas that builds beneath the surface of the dump, a waste management dispute between neighboring municipalities, or the discovery of a dead body in the garbage. These visitors usually remain in their vehicles while on top of the dump, taking in the scene and shooting their photographs from a distance.

Carnaval, then, is a special moment for catadores of Jardim Gramacho in terms of

contact with other social classes while collecting. The same could be said for others who work carnival, such as the police protecting the tourists and middle-class Brazilians enjoying the street blocos or the hundreds of vendors who do not normally (outside of carnival) sell goods on the streets where the parades are passing. While carnival does create these encounters across social divisions of class and race, such encounters, in the experience of catadores, reify the class structure. Whether through outright hostility (“*filhos de papai*” kicking cans away from catadores), the indifference that Simone felt from those around her who avoided touching her, or the gestures of help from those who looked for catadores to “give” them their empty cans, social inequalities were made manifest, enacted, and lived through the play and the work of carnival. For catadores, carnival is not just a “space for *remembering*” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:482) poverty and inequality through the contrasting images of the abundant consumption in carnival festivities of the rich and the meager resources, celebrations, and even work in the carnival experience of the poor. Rather, carnival is an event that *produces* inequalities and through which participants perform class, race, and social position in Brazilian society.

On the last night of carnival, a lively conversation broke out on the topic of race. We were seated in the back of the truck, leaning against the cardboard we had carefully plastered against the cage of the truck so as not be seen by police passing by who could give us a ticket for riding in the truck’s trailer. The last of Rio’s blocos had ended and as we bumped along on the pothole-filled road leading to Jardim Gramacho, we chatted about what time we would meet the following morning – Ash Wednesday – to do the work of sorting and bundling the material. Regina, who had been quiet throughout the

discussion on logistics, suddenly interrupted:

“Do you all think I am *morena* [brown]?”

“No, you are *parda* [brown/mixed-race, a term used commonly on birth certificates and other documents]. Sandra replied matter-of-factly and without hesitation.

“Well, what color are you?” Regina asked.

“I’m *parda*.” Sandra was one of the darkest persons in our group.

“How do you know?” asked another woman, Angela.

“Because I was registered *parda*. I was born *parda* and was registered *parda*. This is just from being out in the sun.

“What about me? What color am I?” Simone joined in the conversation.

“You’re *parda* too.”

“And me?,” asked Angela.

“You’re white,” Sandra maintained. “The color you have is from the sun.”

“Do you know what race is the worst, the absolute ugliest?” Regina asked without pausing before her answer. “It’s the white person – yellow really – who is born with kinky hair.”

This exchange was the only conversation during the length of my fieldwork that arose spontaneously among catadores about their own racial identities. This is not to say that catadores never used race terms, such as the common term of affection *negrinho*, or were not conscious of race, racism, and racial politics. As many scholars on race in Brazil have argued (Caldwell 2007:126-129; Goldstein 2003; Sheriff 2001:59-83; Vargas 2004), the persistent ideology of a racial democracy in Brazil – that racial mixture in Brazil, from colonialism onward, led to racial hybridity and harmonious race relations – has

resulted in silence on the topics of race and racism. It is significant, then, that carnival made the unspoken spoken. Regina, Sandra, Simone and Angela chatted about racial categories not in terms of their personal identifications with a particular racial or color group but in terms of how others might see them. The question “what color am I?” is an inquiry into how *others* would categorize them racially. Sandra quickly becomes an authority on this question because she seems to know well the categorization system and terms used on official government documents. In her responses, Sandra also “whitens” the group, maintaining that darker complexions are due to the sun, not because of a racial ancestry that, they all know well, is considered inferior in Brazilian society. This is reiterated in Angela’s final comment that the worse case is the white person born with kinky hair, as the hair betrays the racial background of this person who could otherwise pass for white.¹ This conversation occurred after seven days of collecting in the predominantly white South Zone of Rio, an area where these catadores rarely go outside of carnival. It suggests that the encounters between the morro and asfalto in Rio’s street carnival – encounters between carnival players and carnival workers – produce and reproduce class distinction and racial difference.

Producing carnival

“A carnival parade,” writes Maria Laura Cavalcanti (2001:83) in her essay on the historical development of Rio’s carnival, “is not only a spectacular party but also a very long process of production.²” The ideology of carnival as a ritual of reversal and subversion has long suggested that carnival play is spontaneous and impulsive. However, attention to the work entailed by the carnival festivities reminds us that carnival does not

just happen but must be *made*. Several scholars (Cavalcanti 2001; Farias 2006; Pravaz 2008b) have recently touched on the production side of carnival, scrutinizing the efforts of the Brazilian state and culture industry to sell carnival to tourists, to the middle-class, and to a mass television audience. These studies have focused on Rio's carnival in the Sambódromo, exploring how the development of this event into a spectacle, and one that is televised, has resulted in a standardization and disciplining of the highly choreographed samba school parades.

However, the experience of catadores working the blocos suggests that the commercialization of carnival in Rio is not confined to the Sambódromo spectacle. Nor can this commercialization be understood only through the lens of the culture industry. Attention to the ways Brazilian national identity is sold through scripted samba performances broadcast to a mass television audience captures an important process of the commodification of this event (see Pravaz 2008b). Nevertheless, this is but one dimension of a larger political economy of carnival, the edges of which often remain hidden in the shadows cast by the Sambódromo spotlight. "We need to shift our gaze," Veena Das (2007:164) suggests, "from the obvious places in which power is expected to reside to the margins and recesses of everyday life in which such infelicities become observable." In the context of carnival, shifting this gaze from the "obvious places" of power brings into view those who work carnival, reminding us that the leisure of this event is not the absence, but the product, of labor.

On the third day of carnival, Gordinho was late with the truck. We were back in Ipanema for a long night during which three different blocos would parade. The truck had broken down in route and we waited impatiently in the Praça General Osório for

Gordinho to arrive so that we could start collecting. When the truck finally pulled up to the curb, Gordinho was flustered and scowling.

“I didn’t have time to pick up more bags.” Gordinho was practically yelling. “Traffic is horrible. It took us an *hour* to get through Copacabana. I don’t know what to do. We are just going to have to use the Coca-Cola bags. Put an old black bag over it.”

Vanessa started putting clean, unused clear bags marked with a red Coca-Cola label into old, torn black bags and handing them to each of us. Though I wanted to ask why we were putting perfectly good bags inside bags riddled with holes, we were in a rush and I followed the others, relining the black bag each time that I unloaded my material.

I forgot to ask Gordinho about the bags until we were sorting material at the association in Jardim Gramacho on Ash Wednesday, half working and half watching the results from the samba school competition on an old black and white 10-inch television set that Rose had brought from her house. I came across one of the Coca-Cola bags and went over to Gordinho who was, at that moment, focused on the scoring of the percussion section of each samba school.

“Coca-Cola supports the association and other cooperatives,” Gordinho explained.

This I knew. In 1996, Coca-Cola Brasil began a program called *Reciclou, Ganhou* (“You Recycled, You Won”) that provides support to cooperatives of catadores in the form of donated trucks, presses, other materials and technical training. This program is part of Coca-Cola’s effort to be a “citizen company.”

“So Coca-Cola is the one sponsoring the cooperatives collecting in the Sambódromo,” Gordinho continued without taking his eyes off the television. “Coca-

Cola gave us t-shirts and bags for collection during carnaval. We were going to use these until Marli told us that Antártica is the official sponsor of Sebastiana, of the blocos.

Antártica is a competitor of Coca-Cola. We were there collecting at the blocos through a partnership with Sebastiana and so we could not very well disadvantage Sebastiana's sponsorship with Antártica by using the shirts or bags with the name of Coca-Cola on them. Right? That's why we put black bags over the Coca-Cola bags, so that no one, particularly not any Antártica people, with all those vendors out there, you know, would see the Coca-Cola label."

In order to collect in the street parades, Gordinho and the other catadores had to negotiate an awkward position between two competitors in the beverage industry. Additionally, the blocos boisterously paraded through the streets with the advertisements of a multi-million dollar company on the side of their floats. Gordinho asked me to take a picture of him with a giant Antártica beer can that was passed between the various dancing members of the bloco on the last day of carnaval, leading me to contemplate the contradiction of a festival mythically upheld as subversive yet supported through corporate sponsorship. My point here is not to further the disillusionment of carnaval, a project which at times implies that the illusion was, at some historical moment, real. Rather, I want to suggest the need for a political economy of carnaval—analyses of who finances and profits from this event; understandings of how the leisure and play of carnaval gets produced and through this production, becomes structured in particular ways; accounts of the labor and laborers entailed in this production of carnaval; and ultimately, explanations of how these processes not only reflect inequalities in Brazilian society but create them. When carnaval (and perhaps other kinds of festivals, holidays

and leisure) is seen exclusively as play, questions concerning the production, inequalities and political economy of the event are left unpursued.

After Carnaval

On Ash Wednesday, I arrived at the association late in the morning to find everyone from the group seated along the wall outside the kitchen waiting for Tia Fátima to serve lunch. Several sacks overflowing with aluminum cans were already stationed next to the scale ready to be weighed. Dodging teasing comments about my tardiness (I had only managed to pull myself out of bed at ten, still fighting the cumulative exhaustion of a week of carnaval), I entered the kitchen to help Tia Fátima dish out rice, beans, and fried fish. As people gradually finished eating, they returned to the *banquinhos* and continued the work of sorting the material, weighing each sack, and loading the sacks into the association's truck to take them to a depository for sale later that night.

I joined Rose and Bete at one of the *banquinhos*. As I tossed a couple of blue PET bottles into a sack behind me, I noticed Carlinhos walking toward the association carrying a small television on his shoulder. He placed the television on the patio facing the *banquinhos* and ran an extension cord through the window of the kitchen. "They are announcing the samba school results," Rose informed me when I asked why Carlinhos had gone to such efforts to lug a television to the association. Throughout the rest of the afternoon, members of the group alternated between sorting material and watching the scores announced for each of the ten criteria on which the samba schools are judged, from each of the four judges, for each of the twelve samba schools in competition. I was

surprised, given the group's general disinterest in the Sambódromo and other carnival festivities while collecting in the blocos, to find that each person expressed a strong allegiance to a samba school. Jó yelled at me when I started to root for Salgueiro to win.

"But Tia Fátima told me that Salgueiro has not won in seventeen years!" I protested. "I'd rather see them win than Beija-Flor, since Beija-Flor won the last three years in a row."

"Jó grew up in Belford Roxo," Rose cautioned me, "Beija-Flor is the samba school from Belford Roxo and Jó worked for several years sewing costumes for them."

"Oh, well who do you want to win?"

"Clearly, Grande Rio. I just want Grande Rio to make it into the top five, because then they will parade again next Saturday in the Parade of Champions."

Grande Rio, the samba school from Duque de Caxias, did make it into the top five, and Salgueiro beat Beija-Flor by one point to become the 2009 champion. These results drew both cheers and curses from different members of the group, as we continued the work of sorting, weighing, and loading hundreds of kilos of recyclables.

Cristódio, who sorted with the rest of the group on Ash Wednesday, was not quite right that "after carnival" he would "not do a damn thing." For at least the first day after carnival, those who collected during the blocos continued to work. Nonetheless, Ash Wednesday brought moments of leisure, relaxation, and play, which I had become accustomed to while collecting among catadores on the dump and strangely missed during carnival. Ironically, just when carnival came to an end and ordinary life returned, catadores expressed enthusiasm for the samba schools, intermittently stopping work to sit around, drink sweetened coffee, and watch the results on television. Based on the cheers,

taunts, and stories that broke out in front of the television that day, this enthusiasm derived less from a fondness for carnival and more from long-held allegiances to particular neighborhoods of Rio where different catadores were born or lived for significant portions of their childhood. It is quite possible to recognize the status that a community acquires by its associated samba school winning the championship and therefore to root fervently for the samba school's success, while simultaneously believing that carnival is for the rich and its festivities not that enjoyable. Robin Sheriff (1999) describes a similar, apparent contradiction in her account of poor *cariocas* who feel that carnival no longer belongs to them, but who nonetheless take pride in the historical roots of carnival in their communities.

More importantly, however, the combination of sorting and television-viewing on Ash Wednesday points to the relation between work and play for catadores in their "everyday life" – the ostensibly "ordinary" time outside the season of carnival. The concepts of the "everyday," "daily life," "the day-to-day," and the "quotidian" invoke images of work and in the Brazilian context, the *luta*, the struggle. Scheper-Hughes argues that the *luta* in the Brazilian Northeast is "a single, unifying metaphor that gives shape and meaning to people's day-to-day realities" (1992:188). Though the *luta* is not synonymous with *trabalho*, with work, it nonetheless conjures up similar associations of toil, pain, exertion, hardship, difficulty, strain, and sacrifice. What are the consequences of defining "everyday life" in these terms? How do these associations limit our understanding of how workers diversely experience and organize their labor in relation to other dimensions of their lives? I am interested here in interrogating the boundaries between labor and leisure remade through the juxtaposition between everyday life and

carnaval. How do catadores construct their own sense of this relation between work and play? How do they organize work spatially and temporally in their everyday lives on the dump?

A “Break”

Simone and I had one last burlap sack to fill. Rather than carry cardboard from the site where garbage had been dumped to the staging area where we had left our other sacks, we decided to plop the last sack in the midst of the garbage. The *rampa* had moved earlier that morning, meaning that trucks were now unloading on another spot of the dump. Furthermore, the tractor had broken down, leaving the pile of remaining garbage undisturbed. The absence of vehicular traffic allowed us to work calmly and quickly in the hope of filling our last sack before the sweltry summer sun became unbearable.

“Come over!” shouted one of Simone’s friends, nicknamed Vinte-dois (literally, “Twenty-two”).³ “Come and take a *break* [pronounced bráy-kee] with us. Buchecha is making a big soup.”

There was still space in our burlap sack to squeeze in a few more kilos of cardboard, but Simone and I tied it up and headed over to the spot where Vinte-dois was lounging with four other catadores.

“Welcome to our house. But you have to take off your shoes (*chinelo*)! Here, take a seat on the living room sofa,” Vinte-dois exclaimed as he jumped up to greet us.

I sat down on a wooden crate and Simone pulled over an upside-down bucket. Mineiro was lying underneath a makeshift tent constructed out of a torn blue tarp extended between three sticks. Fabinho and Sem Futuro (“Without a Future”) were each

resting on large metal containers. Behind them, two faded beach umbrellas were strategically placed to shield the gathering spot from the late morning sun.

“Hey, Buchecha!” Simone shouted, “Hey, how many chickens did you put in there?” Buchecha was busy stirring the contents of a large rectangular can that rested on a rack placed delicately between two stacks of bricks. Beneath the rack a small fire burned. Simone and Buchecha entered into a joking exchange about chickens that invoked the double meaning of *galinha* as both “chicken” and “slut.”

Mineiro began to fidget with a radio, making small adjustments to the tuning dial and bent antenna. Eventually, a rap song broke out from the static.

“Hey, Mineiro! Hey, sing us that rap, the “Rap from the Favela,” Vinte-fois prodded him. Instead, Mineiro broke into an impressive imitation of MC Créu singing the “Dance of Creu,” which had recently become one of the most popular *funk*⁴ songs in Rio.

“You missed our *pagode* (dance) last night!,” laughing as he swung to Mineiro’s rhythm.

Buchecha handed me an old butter container full of still boiling soup. “See if the soup is good,” he said as he passed a second butter container to Simone. As I stirred the soup and waited for it to cool, I noticed that it contained cuts of beef and sausage as well as a variety of vegetables – tomatoes, potatoes, collard greens, onions, peppers, and carrots.

“Damn it’s good!, replied Simone. “Boy do you know how to cook. You cook even better than I do. My soup I make at home tends to be clumpy.”

“Well, the remains of one thing or another. Everything can go into the pot.”

Mineiro changed the radio station. The voice of a *futebol* announcer came through

clearly.

“Hey Buchecha!” Simone yelled over the radio, “Are you going to pull our burlap sack for us? It’s right over there.”

“Which one is yours? That big one?”

“Yeah. The truck isn’t going to come today. It’s broken down.”

“Fucking A (*porra*)!” Vinte-dois nudged Fabinho. “Buchechea is dragging that sack all by himself. Fabinho, Fabinho, go on and pull with him!”

Vinte-dois and Fabinho began to push each other and swear in between laughter.

“We goof around (*zoar*) in the garbage,” Vinte-dois said as if he felt the need to explain their mock fight. “When no one [referring to guards] is close to us, we really have a good time. We goof around, we curse each other.

“All just in good fun,” added Fabinho.

“We curse. We fight. We really play.”

“Hey, Vinte-dois,” Simone interrupted, “Are you going to stay around here today? Can you keep an eye on our sacks over there?”

“Where? Up that hillside?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you going to come tomorrow? Because we are going to have to move spots.”

“Yeah, tomorrow we’ll come with the truck to take down our material.

“Have one more sip of coffee before you go,” Vinte-dois offered. “After a strong *break*, you have to have coffee. Hey, Buchecha! Buchecha! What happened to our glasses, our *crystal* glasses [*copos de cristal*]?”

Buchechea poured coffee into the cut-off bottom of a clear plastic water bottle, a

type of plastic called *cristal* in the jargon of the recycling world. We passed around the crystal glass and Simone's remaining cigarette.

"We are still going to get a move on today [*rolar*]," Vinte-dois told us. "At one o'clock we're going to work. Bap, bap, bap. Yeah, we're going to do our rush collecting [*fazer nossa correria*]."

Though most catadores do not make such elaborate meals on the dump as Vinte-dois and Buchecha, I found the *break* to be a common part of the daily activities of catadores. The usage of *break* here, as far as I can find, is a unique linguistic invention of catadores in Jardim Gramacho. In general Brazilian Portuguese, this word, derived from the English word "break" is used in the sense of a *coffee break* at a conference (written this way in a conference program) or in reference to "break dancing." Among catadores, the word *break* refers not to coffee specifically or to the dance style, but rather to a wide range of things including a cigarette, crack (or another drug), alcohol, a meal, a rented shack, and even a person. "Give me a *break* of a cigarette [*me da um break dum cigarro ai*]" is a way to ask to bum a cigarette. "Did you rent a *break* down below?" [*vocês foram alugar um break la embaixo?*] is a way to ask others if they rented a shack at the base of the dump to have a place to wash up, change clothes, and rest after working. "He was a strong *break*" [*ele foi um break forte*] was used to describe a catador from years ago who joked around a lot, sometimes sitting in front of the tractor with his legs crossed, holding a newspaper in front of him, and shouting at the tractor driver that he was a "pussy" (*babaca*). Though these usages can seem disparate, they all refer to some kind of diversion, fun, play, joking, and relaxation. The meal we shared together, as well as the whole experience of stopping collection and hanging out, was a *break*. The fact that

catadores in Jardim Gramacho, through their usage of the word *break*, have created a category of their own for the various forms of play and relaxation on the dump suggests that their everyday is not just the “workaday world”, but rather a world that blends labor with leisure and social life.

An analysis of the *break* illuminates the spatial and temporal dimensions of the blending of work and play by catadores on the dump. Despite the overwhelming noise of trucks and tractors and the seemingly constant commotion of people scrambling to reach a falling PET bottle or jumping aside to barely miss the edge of the tractor plow, the dump is not only a work zone. Catadores shape the space of the dump in ways that enable them to pursue multiple kinds of activities beyond the task of collecting recyclables. The area where they station their burlap sacks is a landscape dotted by yellow and red beach umbrellas. Retrieved from the garbage, catadores secure them in the top of their already full sacks. All kinds of sofas, chairs, stools, and tables are pulled from the garbage and set up by their sacks, beneath the umbrellas. In the absence of a good find, catadores will make do with crates, buckets, metal cans, and even partially filled sacks for sitting. Vinte-dois’s comment welcoming Simone and me to his “living room” was not entirely a joke. Catadores are continuously arranging spaces, built in part from reclaimed objects, to sleep (as in Mineiro’s makeshift tent), cook (as in Buchecha’s improvised stove), and relax with friends (as in the circle of overturned buckets and cans that formed Vinte-dois’s “living room”). For the *moradores da rampa*, the couple dozen catadores who effectively live on the dump, workplace and home become entirely integrated. I should also note that this construction of space on the dump enables catadores to gain a sense of this workplace as their own in a way that was impossible for them to realize in the blocos

of the wealthy South Zone.

If the concept of the workplace loses sense in Jardim Gramacho, so too does the workday. Catadores cycle between periods of rest and periods of intense collecting. Often this rhythm matches the flow of trucks on the dump. On the small dumping site (*rampinha*), for example, trucks tend to arrive at dawn, subside mid-morning, and then pick up again in the afternoon. Catadores take advantage of downtimes to lounge on their half-filled sacks, eat their packed lunches or pastries purchased from Dona Rosa's stand, play a pick-up game of soccer, sleep, gossip, flirt, and for some, pass around a bottle of *cachaça* (sugar cane liquor) or a joint.



Figure 6.1 Playing soccer on the dump



Figure 6.2 A *break* beneath beach umbrellas

These calm, unhurried moments of leisure are often followed by periods of rigorous collecting. At the end of our *break*, Vinte-dois informed us that that he was going to move (*rolar*) and work quickly (*fazer nossa correria*) later in the afternoon. Some catadores refer to brief stints of frenzied collecting as the “fast attack” (*ataque rápido*).

Moments of work and moments of leisure in this cycle, however, are never entirely split from each other. As Simone and I shared a *break* with Vinte-dois, Buchecha, Mineiro, and Fabinho, we talked about how the *rampa* had moved, arranged for Vinte-dois to watch over our sacks for us, and received a favor from Buchecha who carried our last heavy sack over to the spot where the rest of our material was tied up, ready to load on the truck the following day. I found too—much to my consternation as a novice on the dump fretfully trying to pay attention to the dangerous vehicular traffic while quickly discerning different materials in the bags before me—that catadores frequently start up conversations in the midst of collecting. Aside from catadores whom I met as friends of friends, I came to know well catadores on the dump through the conversations and joking that happened as we were collecting.

Work in the Flow of Life

The spatiality and rhythm of the dump call into question several loosely related dichotomies of labor/leisure, workplace/home, and work/play. I want to consider briefly each of these in turn as a way to tease out some of the implications of how catadores have defined and organized their work in relation to other dimensions of human life.

In his historical account of capitalist development in 17th century England, E.P.

Thompson (1963; 1967, see also Thomas 1964) argues that the very concept of leisure had to be purposefully cultivated by industrialists as a means of disciplining workers to wage labor. Employers purchase, in conditions of wage labor, not the products of a worker's labor but the worker's capacity to labor during a certain period of time. Industrialists thus needed to instill in workers a time sense oriented around the clock—time that could be measured, commodified, and divided between the employer's time (work) and the worker's personal time (leisure). Thompson maintains that this reshaping of everyday rhythms and perceptions of time entailed a “severe restructuring of working habits – new disciplines, new incentives and a new human nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively (1967:57).

Thompson's insights remind us not only that leisure as a separate category of human life emerged from conditions of wage labor, but that the making of a labor-leisure dichotomy was only one of several dimensions of everyday life reconstituted by capitalist relations of production. Ideological and spatial boundaries between workplace and home similarly emerged in this context. “What distinguishes peasant life so profoundly from the life of industrial workers, even today,” Henri Lefebvre observes in his reflections on work and leisure “is precisely this inherence of productive activity in their entirety. The workplace is all around the house; work is not separate from the everyday life of the family” (2008[1947]:30). Feminist scholars of capitalist labor have made significant theoretical contributions to this issue by interrogating how the boundary between workplace and home devalued women's domestic labor as not “real” work and reified gender inequalities in the household (see, for example, Bose 1987; Collins 1990; Fox 1980; Gardiner 1975). In doing so, they have illustrated how conditions of production can

profoundly shape the organization of everyday life including family life, power relations, values, and subjectivities.

I therefore find it meaningful that catadores integrate work and non-work activities both temporally and spatially in the flow of everyday life on the dump. Unlike in conditions of wage labor, catadores do not have an employer who buys their labor and so the time that they work on the dump is their own. In an article titled *La Vida Matizada* (“The Blended Life”), David Syring (2009) finds a similar fluidity between work and non-work activities in the daily life of an agriculturalist who works his own land in Ecuador. He compares the agriculturalist’s daily routine to that of a migrant worker from Ecuador who works in multiple agricultural jobs in the United States and to his own, as an academic at the University of Minnesota. Syring observes that each of these work situations create different work rhythms: the agriculturalist is able to integrate fluidly work and non-work activities in daily life, the academic is also able to do so but to a lesser extent, and the migrant laborer finds such integration impossible in his daily routine of punching the time clock at the farm in the morning, performing his required tasks, and punching the time clock at day’s end. He argues that these different experiences of time in the relationship between labor and the rest of everyday life produce “frictions” that allow for critiques of capitalist labor discipline and in some cases, for struggles to affirm and hold onto the “blended life” as the good life. Syring argues that the migrant worker, who has had experiences of both fragmented time and the blended life, prefers the latter. His experience of industrial time, Syring writes, “is one that is *sufrido*, suffered, rather than lived” (2009:136).

Through the ways that catadores have organized their work on the dump, they

have also created a kind of blended life. The experience of catadores collecting during carnival brought this into relief. Carnival, a time usually associated with play, became a time of work for catadores and one that was more rigid and tiring than their ordinary work experience on the dump. Unlike on the dump where catadores have the flexibility to work at whatever time and for the duration that they wish, their work schedules during carnival had to match the scheduled times of the parades. And unlike the dump where catadores feel at ease to relax, joke around, and pursue a range of activities in a space that is largely theirs, the streets of Rio's middle-class neighborhoods were not spaces where catadores felt welcomed and at home. After five days of tirelessly picking up cans between the feet of passing carnival revelers without so much as a break for a soda let alone the kind of *break* I enjoyed with Vinte-fois, Buchecha and other catadores on the dump, I realized just how much I had come to rely on catadores' seamless interweaving of labor and leisure.

The work/play dichotomy has not only figured prominently in aforementioned discussions on capitalist labor but also in the anthropology of play, games, and sport. Indeed, anthropological studies of play have tended to define their object of inquiry precisely as non-work. Following Johan Huizinga's defining characteristics of play in *Homo Ludens* (1944), many anthropologists have argued that play is unserious, unproductive, with no material interest or aim other than the activity in and of itself (Sack 1977). In a brief paper for the 1978 proceedings of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play, Phillips Stevens (1980) challenged this play-work dichotomy by arguing that what matters for an action to be play is the *experience* of an act and not the act itself. Thomas Malaby (2009:205-206) has recently elaborated

Stevens' insight to suggest that play be conceptualized as a disposition rather than a type of activity. He argues that "when the work/play distinction is left behind, we see instead in ludic practice a more useful contrast between a cultural *form* (a game-like activity, no matter how playfully engaged in) and a *mode* of cultural experience (a playful disposition towards activities no matter how game-like)" (209).

Applying Malaby's understanding of play to the practices of catadores, it is possible to argue that play not only interweaves but also permeates work on the dump. Catadores often pursue their work of collecting with a certain degree of joking and playfulness. And they point to this dimension of their experience explicitly by stating that their ability to play, *brincar*, while working is one advantage of the dump over other forms of employment. The word *brincar* is one of two possible translations of the English word "play." *Brincar* carries the sense of child's play, playfulness, and folly, while *jogar*, means "to play" as in to play a game or sport.⁵ Catadores say that they play, *brincar*, on the dump in the same way that carnival revelers say that they play, *brincar carnaval*. The meaning of play in both of these uses echoes Malaby's conceptualization of play as a mode of experience. Catadores' work situation outside the conditions of wage labor enable them to cultivate this disposition on the dump, to blend playfulness into their work.

The "Everyday" of the Laboring Poor

I have argued in this chapter that many Brazilians, particularly the laboring poor, experience carnival not as play but as intensified work. Viewing carnival from the perspective of work draws attention to the ways that the production of this event does

more than reflect power relations in Brazilian society. The making of carnival entails too the making of social inequalities. Furthermore, catadores' alternative experience of carnival as work draws attention to the relationship between work and play in their lives beyond carnival. It suggests that forms of employment outside conditions of capitalist wage labor, increasingly common in the urban world today, are reintegrating labor and leisure into the flow of daily life and thereby resignifying what it means to work and to play.

By way of conclusion, I want to reflect on the implications of this analysis for the anthropological concept of the "everyday." Much like the culture concept throughout most of anthropology's history, the concept of the everyday escapes clear definition while often being taken as a hallmark of anthropology. Yet, as J. Lowell Lewis (2000:539) has pointed out, the everyday is a residual category, "*something* that cannot be known *in itself*." When anthropologists assert that their ethnography is a study of everyday life, Lewis argues, a theory of the everyday as a category of social analysis is often absent. Nancy Ries has similarly described this paradox of the ubiquitous use but largely absent theorization of the concept of the everyday in anthropology:

... ethnographers usually feel they have a particular purchase – if clumsy and partial – on the everyday... And yet, though the trials of everyday learning may be narrated at cocktail parties or in conference corridors, and though publications may be anchored in descriptions of everyday practice, reflection on the singularity of the everyday as a spatial, temporal, and philosophical category is relatively rare (2002:725).

An uncritical use of any concept tends to carry tacit meanings and associations. In the case of the everyday, one of these is the association of everyday life with work and drudgery, particularly when speaking about the everyday in the context of urban poverty. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, if standard interpretations see carnival as

play, then it follows that the everyday is work. The “blended life” that Syring encounters in the work rhythms of an Ecuadorian farmer and that catadores create in their own particular ways of interweaving labor, leisure, the workplace, and the home complicate this association. What do we gain by thinking about leisure and play as not outside the everyday – weekends, holidays, festivals, or the great spectacle of carnaval – but as an integral part of the everyday? And how might this reconceptualization also lead us to rethink the “everyday” of laboring poor – an everyday depicted as a *luta*, a struggle, but often lived in a spirit of play?

Notes

¹ The aesthetics of racial ideology in Brazil sexualizes the *morena* as the most sensual and attractive (see Goldstein 2003:102-135). Angela’s statement that the white person born with kinky hair is the ugliest can be understood within this ideological framework. The white woman with kinky hair cannot pass for white, but then also fails to conform to the image of the sexually attractive *morena*.

² My translation from the Portuguese.

³ Twenty-two later explained that his nickname comes from the illegal but widely popular lottery game *Jogo do Bicho*. This lottery is based on 26 animals. The tiger is number 22 and is associated with craziness. When I asked about the source of his nickname, he replied, “Sou *maluco* (crazy), the tiger, twenty-two!”

⁴ *Funk* is a dance music widely popular in Rio’s favelas as well as elsewhere in Brazil. It has been criticized for containing violent and sexualized language and is associated with large outdoor dances in favelas financed by drug traffickers called *Baile Funk*.

⁵ The different connotations of *brincar* and *jogar* are similar to Roger Caillois’s distinction between *paidia*, a kind of unstructured child’s play and *ludus*, play that is more ordered in the form of games (2001).

CHAPTER 7

POLITICS OF AUTONOMY

On a chilly day in August 2008, I arrived back in Jardim Gramacho to begin another span of fieldwork. I left downtown Rio in the late morning and along the way, called Glória to see where she was.

“You arrived?! Come to the Pólo! Everyone’s here.”

“The Pólo?”

“Don’t you remember last time you were here? We went to see the Pólo when the shed was still under construction.”

Right. Just a few days prior to my last departure, we had trekked through the brush at the edge of Jardim Gramacho to observe the construction of ACAMJG’s future offices and work shed. There was little to see other than a clearing, a dirt road, and a few red beams. I had a difficult time imagining what this skeleton of a structure would become, but Glória spoke eagerly about plans for the center—the *Pólo de Reciclagem*,¹ as she called it. I had forgotten the name.

Following Glória’s detailed directions, I arrived at the Pólo without any difficulty, though I did not realize this at first. The scene before me was slow to come into focus. On the left side of the road was a long, one-story building made of concrete blocks. A group of four people, none of whom I recognized, were lounging on a low wall that bordered a patio in front of the building. A dog with matted brown fur trotted towards me, but then

stopped abruptly, distracted by the remnants of a chicken bone on the ground. Across a yard with trampled grass, stood an open-air shed. I realized that the screeching sound that I had been hearing came from a press at the far side of the shed. Bales of bundled plastics lined the shed's patio. Their stillness and order contrasted with the commotion at the far end of the patio. At two raised tables, several men and women were swiftly sorting a medley of plastic containers into surrounding burlap sacks. A tossed green bottle missed the targeted sack entirely. It bounced a few times before rolling along the patio into one of the bales. I felt as though I had stumbled into a scrap yard in Jardim Gramacho – not just any scrap yard, but one of the few large recycling businesses in the neighborhood. Those businesses had well-constructed sheds and office buildings that, from the outside, looked like any kind of warehouse or factory.

“You made it! Let me help you with your bags.”

I turned back towards the building to find Gordinho calling out to me.

“Damn! Gordinho! Is this really the association? I can't believe it!

I followed Gordinho into the office: a room with three tables, a computer, and a few shelves stacked with an assortment of pamphlets, loose papers, and books. Both Glória and Tião were there and we spent the afternoon catching up. Tião had just returned from London where his photograph, taken by the internationally renowned plastics artist, Vik Muniz, had been auctioned for \$50,000. He showed me photos from his trip on the computer, while Glória filled me in on ACAMJG's developments:

They had inaugurated the Pólo in May. The building consisted of an office, a kitchen, and men's and women's bathrooms complete with showers. They had purchased a press and two trucks. One of the trucks picked up donations of recyclables and the other

transported material that ACAMJG members collected on the dump. After a protracted battle, Glória had managed to convince Valéria to supply ACAMJG with work vests. Members collected their own material on the dump, but instead of selling it to a scrap yard, they brought it to the Pólo and sold it jointly for nearly double the price. Everyone received payment once a week in proportion to what they contributed to ACAMJG's sale. Glória had developed an accounting system and after an armed robbery one Friday afternoon at the Pólo, Glória began requiring members to have bank accounts so that she could make payments online through direct deposit. ACAMJG was also self-sufficient; fifteen percent of each person's payment was subtracted to pay a full-time truck driver, a security guard who stayed at the Pólo over night, the utility bills, the diesel for the truck, any needed maintenance, and salaries for Glória, João, Gordinho, and Tião. Glória and João worked full-time running the daily operations at the Pólo. Gordinho organized the *coleta seletiva*, establishing relationships with businesses willing to donate their recyclable materials and picking up the material at scheduled times. Tião remained "on the street," furthering ACAMJG's political organizing efforts.

"Damn. I'm impressed," I told Glória, as we left the Pólo in the early evening. "I don't know how you did all this in one year. Remember when ACAMJG didn't even have an office? And the time you wore through your last pair of flip flops, because you never had money for bus fare and walked everywhere?"

"Yeah, well, unless we were able to hitch a ride on one of the garbage trucks."

"Right, of course. You and María Angélica were expert hitch-hikers. The trucks always stopped."

As we exchanged memories of ACAMJG's early organizing days, I realized that I had not seen Zumbi or Funabem at the Pólo. Alongside Tião and Gordinho, they counted among the original founders of ACAMJG and the most respected leadership on the dump.

"Hey, where were Zumbi and Funabem?," I interrupted.

"Zumbi and Funabem? They both left."

"They left the association? When? Why?"

"A little while after the Pólo opened. There were some problems. Some people couldn't adapt to the rules. They wanted to do things their own way. Funabem wanted his own container (*caçamba*). He didn't want to put his cardboard in the same container with others' cardboard, in case they put in garbage or wet cardboard and it got discounted. But I couldn't have each person with their own container. Right?"

None of this made sense to me. I did not understand what Glória meant by a cardboard container and discounts. I did not understand the process through which ACAMJG had quickly evolved from an association that mostly organized political meetings and demonstrations to a full-scale cooperative at the level of an intermediary scrap dealer. Most of all, I did not understand how the association had lost two of the most central figures in ACAMJG's history. I attributed my confusion to exhaustion at the end of my first day back in Jardim Gramacho. Only later did I realize that these questions were different dimensions of a larger inquiry, one that ultimately led me to reconsider political practice in Jardim Gramacho.

Politics Otherwise

In his ethnography of popular politics in a *colonia* of Mexico City, Matthew Gutmann draws attention to a lacuna in social theories of agency and the poor. “Those of us who write books and articles for a living often champion the poor when they stand up to unfair government authorities and win. We are often at a loss when they stand up and lose. Or when they do not even stand up” (2002:51). This chapter tells the story of ACAMJG, a combined political association and worker’s cooperative that emerged from almost nothing to become one of the most important organizations in the National Movement of Catadores and the most economically successful cooperative of catadores in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro. This is the story of the poor who stand up and win. But it is also the story of Zumbi and Funabem and many more catadores in Jardim Gramacho who were once leaders or active participants in ACAMJG and have since left. In some ways, then, this is also an account of the poor who stand up and lose. Over two thousand people work as catadores on the dump, and yet only a few dozen have ever joined ACAMJG’s cooperative. This, despite the fact that catadores at ACAMJG earn almost twice as much as other catadores who continue to sell their material to intermediary scrap dealers. The far larger story here – at least in terms of numbers and, as I will argue, for its implications – is the non-story. It is the story of those who never joined ACAMJG’s struggle. It is the story of the poor who do not even stand up.

In what follows, I argue that these three different stories constitute distinct political projects in Jardim Gramacho. I begin with the history of ACAMJG: how the association originated and developed from 2003-2009. The history of ACAMJG can be understood as an example of organized political struggle that has mobilized primarily

around issues of work, livelihood, and employment. ACAMJG has organized numerous rallies and demonstrations in support of local issues involving catadores in Jardim Gramacho and has participated in congresses, meetings, and marches of national and transnational social movements, including the National Movement of Catadores (MNCR) in Brazil, the Forum Garbage and Citizenship (Lixo e Cidadania), and the World Social Forum. ACAMJG also began functioning as a worker's cooperative in May 2007 with the inauguration of the Pólo. As will become clear in the telling of ACAMJG's history, what kind of organization ACAMJG is and how its members envision its composition and aims have shifted over time.

I then consider conflicts that arose in the early days of the Pólo's operations and discuss the implications of Funabem's, Zumbi's, and other catadores' departures from ACAMJG.² I argue that as ACAMJG became more institutionalized, especially following the inauguration of the Pólo, it became less appealing to many catadores. The rules and structures that enabled ACAMJG to operate successfully as a cooperative came into conflict with many of the values and practices of catadores that I have explored in previous chapters.

I conclude with an exploration of non-institutionalized forms of cooperative practice on the dump. These include work partnerships, loose communities of *moradores*, who live on the dump, and ephemeral moments of collective action. I see such practices as constituting a particular way of being and acting in the world that avoids disciplinary power, while creating social formations rooted in relations of friendship and solidarity. In short, I argue that the catadores who seem to be the least politicized are engaging in particular life projects that entail a different kind of politics.

From Bar to Bureaucracy

“The revolution starts in the bar.”

Glória laughed when she said this, raising her glass for a toast on the first night we ever went out for drinks together. I hardly knew her at the time, and only later realized that she was chiding me for having spent most of the evening asking questions about politics in Jardim Gramacho – not necessarily the most entertaining topic of conversation for a Friday night. In the case of ACAMJG, however, Glória’s statement proved literally true. The first meetings of the association, when ACAMJG existed only as an idea, took place in a small outdoor bar, the Botequim do Gringo, in Jardim Gramacho in 2004. Tião, Nilson, and Zumbi started meeting at the bar to talk about “dreams,” as Glória later recounted, over five years after our first night out together and three years after the founding of ACAMJG.

“I wanted nothing to do with it. Tião kept begging me to go to their meetings and I finally caved in and went. A group of people gathered, everyone said what they wanted, what they hoped for, what was important. There wasn’t any kind of focus at all. No objective. It was like group therapy. One person would say something, another person would swear. Every week, we would go to the bar, drink beer, talk about our dreams. Our meetings were basically weekly group therapy sessions.

“I eventually said to Tião: ‘Look, these meetings are cool, our aims are cool. But if you don’t focus on something, you won’t go anywhere with this. It won’t turn into anything. You need rules. Even to have a meeting, you need rules. All of the ideas and objectives of ACAMJG – the idea to divide money by percentage, even the idea of the Pólo itself – came out of these meetings. But no one was taking notes. No one was

writing anything down. So, I bought a notebook and said to Tião: ‘Hey, I am going to write the meeting minutes, because if we have minutes, we will be able to refer back to them the next day. He said, ‘Ah, Glória, you are being very bureaucratic,’ and I said, ‘I am not bureaucratic. I just think things have to be a certain way to work.’”

When I arrived in Jardim Gramacho in 2005, a group of twelve catadores, the founders of ACAMJG, were still meeting at the bar Botequim do Gringo. ACAMJG had not yet been officially legalized and they still did not have a place that they could use as an office (*sede*). However, Glória was diligently taking meeting minutes and the group had organized several efforts to publicize ACAMJG to other catadores. Tião, Zumbi, Nilson, and Gordinho had begun collectively writing a monthly newsletter called *O Mensajeiro da Verdade*, “The Messenger of Truth,” named after the socially conscious Brazilian rap singer MV Bill.³ Each issue of the newsletter announced the time and location of ACAMJG’s weekly meetings and included a collage of excerpts from other media sources intermixed with the group’s own comments and ideas. Many of the early issues focused on the City of Rio Public Ministry’s estimation that the dump had reached its capacity and would have to close by the end of the year. The front page of the first issue announced in large print:

If you carefully analyze what you are about to read, you will see that, I am here to speak about a matter that interests everyone (Regardless of whether they are Men or Women, old hands or novices). Registered or not, we are catadores, this is a reality, the landfill is about to close, but, if we work together, we can organize, together we will create a center to struggle for our rights as catadores...Therefore I count on the collaboration of everyone in order to unite together in this struggle, more organized. Thank You and Look for the Next Communication.⁴

O Mensajeiro de Verdade also included accounts of the experiences and activities of catadores in other cities, information on health and safety issues, general news items, and short quotes (*mensagens*) for reflection.

In addition to the newsletter, the group also registered over a thousand catadores as members of ACAMJG. Glória had suggested that they needed to do some kind of public action so that other catadores would learn about ACAMJG and see that the group actually existed. Nilson proposed the idea of creating membership forms that catadores could fill out and sign. Glória developed the form, which included information on place of birth, residence, educational background, racial identity, age, family (both parents and children), marital status, monthly income, number of dependents supported by this income, and length of time on the dump. They made photocopies of the forms, found a tent, borrowed a table and chairs from a friend who owned a bar by the entrance to the dump, and hung a sign by the table reading: “Join the association that is being founded to fight for your rights. Sign-up here.”

“That was our first action as ACAMJG,” Glória recounted. “It caught everyone’s attention. No one knew why they were filling out a form, but everyone did it anyway. They thought it was cool, to stop at the tent and fill out a form. The guards noticed. Comlurb saw the entire action, because a huge line formed that went far beyond the entrance to the landfill. That’s really when the history of ACAMJG began, when ACAMJG finally caught everyone’s attention.”

There are a few points I want to emphasize in relation to these early actions in ACAMJG’s history. First, ACAMJG did not develop as an NGO project or as some kind of social action initiated by social workers or academics. Its origins are therefore quite

different from those of Coopergramacho, which, as I described in Chapter Three, began as an effort on the part of Comlurb to remove catadores from the dump and was implemented by a sociologist from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Still today, Coopergramacho is located on Comlurb's property and administered by a manager and social worker paid by Comlurb. Almost all of the original founders and members of Coopergramacho have long since left, disillusioned with the cooperative's operations for various reasons.⁵ As I have written elsewhere (Millar 2010), most of the catadores presently working at Coopergramacho do not share a sense of ownership over the cooperative. They were not involved in early efforts to create the cooperative, an experience that many leaders of ACAMJG have pointed to as a source of pride, as a reason that they feel that the association is their own creation, constructed through personal sacrifice and struggle. This lack of a shared history of struggle, coupled with the continuing role that outside managers play in overseeing the daily operations, make Coopergramacho seem more like a social assistance project than a worker-owned and operated cooperative.⁶

Of course, Tião's previous experience as vice-president of Coopergramacho,⁷ his involvement over the years with several NGOs,⁸ and his exposure to other cooperatives and associations of catadores through the national movement (MNCR) certainly influenced the formation of ACAMJG. Because of his position at Coopergramacho, Tião received various invitations to engage in NGO projects and events. In 2001, he participated in a Young Black Leaders group organized by a Dutch-funded NGO called IBISS (Brazilian Institute for Innovations in Public Health) that seeks to reduce violence in Rio's favelas by educating youth to become effective, positive leaders in their

communities. As a Young Black Leader, Tião took courses on Brazilian history, political organizing, social movements and civil rights and met over forty other youths from favelas throughout the metropolitan area of Rio. Furthermore, in 2003, the MNCR organized the first meeting of catadores from across Latin America. The MNCR's organization in the state of Rio de Janeiro sent out invitations to the leaders of all cooperatives of catadores in the state. Tião responded and received funding from them to travel to Caxias do Sul in the far south of Brazil to attend the meeting, where he met hundreds of catadores from across Brazil as well as from Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. Many of Tião's ideas involving *coleta seletiva*, the formation of a network of cooperatives, and the creation of the Pólo emerged from conversations he had with other catadores at these meetings.

These influences notwithstanding, ACAMJG was born in Jardim Gramacho, developed by a few catadores who had all worked on the dump together since adolescence. When Tião eventually found a house in Jardim Gramacho that could serve as an office for ACAMJG, he was unable to find an NGO that would provide funding for the rent. At the time, IBASE (Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis), a progressive institution that has served as one of the primary organizers of the World Social Forum, was conducting a *diagnóstico social* in Jardim Gramacho. "We asked IBASE for funding for the office," Glória recalled, "but they wouldn't give money to ACAMJG. No one ever gave us money." The twelve active members ended up dividing the rent among themselves, each paying a part from their own earnings each month.

ACAMJG furthermore managed to get the Pólo constructed nearly singlehandedly. Members presented the project proposal for the Pólo to Comlurb several

times, but with no success. They then started showing up at meetings and talks involving Comlurb executives where they would make a ruckus. One instance involved a lecture at the state university given by the director of Comlurb at the time, Jose Henrique Penido. When he rose to speak, ACAMJG members began shouting: “Shut your mouth! Because in Jardim Gramacho the landfill is going to close and we are going to die of hunger!” After this occasion, Penido informed ACAMJG that Comlurb had received nearly a million *reais* that came from a fine that Petrobras paid as a result of an oil spill into the Bay of Guanabara. The money had to be used for an environmental project impacting the Bay of Guanabara and a project involving recycling fit into this category as defined by the federal government. Members of ACAMJG then began pressuring the Mayor of Duque de Caxias to cede a parcel of land in Jardim Gramacho for the Pólo. The last hurdle involved the legalization of ACAMJG, which was necessary in order to be able to receive the land from the city government. A lawyer helped ACAMJG with the process of legalization, but the members wrote their own statutes and divided the registration fee among themselves, which totaled several hundred *reais*.

Glória often commented that NGOs⁹ do not like ACAMJG, that the association has a reputation for being “unmanageable.” ACAMJG charted its own course in its early organizing days and has since remained relatively independent. This orientation has surfaced many underlying tensions between NGOs and the “needy” populations they seek to serve: unequal access to resources, claims to knowledge and expertise, and the power of defining what counts as appropriate social and political goals. I often heard Glória complain about some NGO project that was seeking the involvement of ACAMJG – but on the NGO’s terms, not the association’s. On a particularly busy and tiring afternoon,

after an NGO worker stopped by the Pólo to solicit the participation of ACAMJG in a Coca-Cola funded project to develop a course on environmentalism for catadores, Glória began fuming.

“They like to use people. They sustain misery. If they really wanted to solve the problem of the catador, they would buy trucks, build sheds, donate a mill to grind plastics. The other day I was talking with the woman from Coca-Cola, because they are working again with the NGO Donate Your Trash, and they want ACAMJG’s participation. And they aren’t going to get it, because I’m going to put my foot down.

“Wait. Which project is this one?,” I asked.

“*Capacitação*. Empowerment. We are going to make you environmental agents. That’s what they said. But who the hell wants to be an environmental agent? What’s an environmental agent, seriously? I don’t know how they define what it means to be an environmental agent, so I said: ‘Man, let me explain something to you. People work with recycling for financial reasons. If you ask the members of ACAMJG if they want to protect the Pantanal – none of them are ever going to travel there. Tell the tourists who have money to spend going to the Pantanal to go fuck themselves. And sure, man, nature is great on the Discovery Channel. You want to protect the environment? Great! But here everyone is working for an income.’

“‘Ah, but Glória, you are saying this without even having seen the course we would offer.’ That’s what the woman said, to which I replied: ‘I’ve already seen plenty of courses just like yours. It’s not going to work. And there’s no use signing up the members, because no one here likes to waste time. They spend most of the week working up on the dump and the one day that they are here at the Pólo, they have to sort all their

material. They aren't going to want to spend eight hours, sitting around, listening to you speak. No way. Now, if you really want to help ACAMJG, buy a mill. I sell plastic at 40 cents. If I had a washer and dryer to clean the plastic, I could sell at 50 cents. And if you gave me a mill to grind the plastic, I would sell at 3.50 a kilo. If you really want us to rise in the chain of production, since you talk so much about the chain of production in your courses, then start supplying us with equipment. ACAMJG's problem, my dear, isn't empowerment. It's equipment."

Glória was certainly ACAMJG's most vocal critic of NGOs. Tião and Gordinho tended to take a more compromising approach. Though they shared many of Glória's critiques, they were more open to taking advantage of certain NGO opportunities and resources. Their different strategies sometimes resulted in arguments over whether and in what ways ACAMJG should participate in a project. I often thought that Glória maintained her firm stance, because so many of her responsibilities in ACAMJG involved administrative and planning activities that would usually be performed by NGO workers assisting catadores.¹⁰ I witnessed numerous occasions when a visitor to the Pólo expressed surprise that Glória had developed the weekly accounting and payment sheets herself or had authored a particular project proposal. I was disturbed to learn that Glória had sometimes attributed her own work to me. "You know that data on the age, gender, and education of catadores that I put together based on ACAMJG's membership forms? Well, no one would believe it if I said that I was the one who did that research, so I tell them that the anthropologist here did it."

Glória's critiques point to ways that "empowerment" programs first disempower the poor by constructing them as subjects who lack not only (or even primarily)

resources, but also knowledge, expertise, and political consciousness. As Glória observes, NGOs refrain from investing in equipment and infrastructure for ACAMJG *not* because they lack the funds to do so, but because such projects would imply that catadores are already capable – that they have the knowledge and experience to operate on their own.

The relationship between ACAMJG and NGOs, in some ways, manifests a deeper issue in the association's history related to processes of institutionalization. This leads me to a second point regarding ACAMJG's beginning. When the founders of ACAMJG first began convening, their meetings resembled little more than a gathering of friends for evening drinks. Glória jokes that these meetings were “group therapy sessions” and that when she suggested recording meeting minutes, Tião teased her for being overly bureaucratic.¹¹ From a very early point, then, a tension arises in the association over the type of collectivity or organization it will become—specifically, the degree to which the group will operate according to established norms and structures and with principles of efficiency and calculation. Tião expresses an initial aversion to “rules,” which Glória argues are indispensable if they are to realize any concrete project.

It might seem ironic that Glória becomes the one most critical of NGOs given that many of her efforts imitate the form and practices of these NGOs: recording meeting minutes, producing membership forms, composing statutes, and writing proposals. Yet, it is not so much the content of these NGO practices but rather the middle-class NGO workers' claims to an exclusive authority and expertise to perform such actions that constitutes Glória's critique. Glória also points to the unequal access to resources that enables NGOs to maintain those they serve in relationships of dependency. In an effort to attain respect, status, and independence, Glória therefore strives to make ACAMJG

appear and act like an NGO or formal institution. The contrast between ACAMJG's first meetings over drinks at the bar and Glória's more "bureaucratic" approach foreshadows numerous conflicts that arise following the establishment of the Pólo—conflicts that ultimately led to Funabem's and Zumbi's departures.

From Cooperative to Capitalist

When I returned to Jardim Gramacho in 2008, the construction of the Pólo and the absence of Zumbi and Funabem were not the only changes in ACAMJG that I encountered. I soon learned that ACAMJG had ceased writing its newsletter, *Mensagem da Verdade* and that weekly meetings had become monthly meetings and then irregular meetings, called only when a particular issue needed to be addressed. Tião, and at times Gordinho, continued to focus their efforts on political organizing. As we saw in the previous chapter, Gordinho was responsible for organizing the carnival-collecting during Rio's *blocos*. And Tião spent almost every day outside Jardim Gramacho, building relationships with numerous public officials and NGO workers to negotiate legislation or to bring projects to Jardim Gramacho¹² and to catadores more broadly. However, I found that beyond the efforts of Tião and Gordinho, ACAMJG had largely shifted its attention away from the mobilization of catadores and towards the daily operations of the Pólo. Funabem argued that Glória and Tião were no longer recognized as the "real leadership" on the dump. The only time that Glória shows up on the dump, Funabem pointed out, was to take back the work vests of catadores who were no longer bringing their material to the Pólo.

Though the exact details surrounding Funabem's and Zumbi's departures from ACAMJG differed according to who was telling the story, all accounts referenced conflicts that arose in the first few months of the *polo*'s operations. Glória described difficulties with establishing weekly pay cycles. Because ACAMJG was able to sell a container full of material only once a week and because it did not have funds in reserve, catadores at the Pólo received payments every Friday instead of every day that they worked. "There were all kinds of fights over this. Some people left. Those who stayed got used to it," Glória said. Glória spoke too about other fights that ensued over her efforts to enforce a policy of "clean" material. Material that is wet or heavily soiled weighs more and catadores in general will pick up a piece of soaked cardboard before a piece that is dry. Glória negotiated higher prices with buyers by guaranteeing that ACAMJG's material was "clean." Catadores who were accustomed to having to cheat scrap dealers (by soaking material or adding mud to increase the weight) in order to counter the ways that buyers cheated them (by altering the scale or adding discounts), had to shift their mode of collecting. Many catadores became upset, not necessarily with the policy but with the ways it was enforced. Glória would ask Rose, Paula, or João to keep an eye on catadores who were sorting or baling material and she insisted on weighing the bales and sacks herself, sometimes discounting sacks that seemed unusually heavy. I often heard catadores at the Pólo protest this surveillance.

"Yesterday, Glória said that my material 'was weighing a lot,' Marta complained to me at a Friday night at Deca's bar. "I told her that she could dump out that whole sack onto the patio and look through it and she wouldn't find a single piece of garbage. She said nothing in response and discounted my sack anyway. Look. I collect on the *arada*

(literally, “tilled grounds”), after the tractor has passed by and because of this, my PET is already crushed and flattened, and so I can fit much more into one sack. That’s why my sacks weigh more. She shouldn’t assume that I am cheating.”

In addition to the above policies concerning payment, Glória instituted policies related to behaviors disallowed at the Pólo. “Some of the members wanted to be able to smoke their pot or *cheirar* when the Pólo first opened. We had a big fight about this. I told them that they could smoke pot or do whatever else they wanted at their homes. I didn’t want the Pólo turning into a cooperative, like the ones downtown, that basically operate simultaneously as a *boca* (where drugs are sold). I wanted ACAMJG to be a respectable business.” Glória also impressed upon members that they should wear their ACAMJG uniforms while sorting or baling material at the Pólo, that they should sweep up the area around the table or press after finishing their work, that they should not leave any of their items (change of clothes, towels, boots, and especially any *podrão* that they may have collected on the dump) in the bathrooms or elsewhere in the Pólo, that they should schedule with her ahead of time the day that they want to bring down their material, and that they should not, under any circumstances, sell material to other scrap dealers. With the exception of the prohibition on drug use at the Pólo, which was strictly enforced, most of these were ongoing struggles and sources of conflict.

By far, though, I heard catadores at the Pólo complain the most about their treatment by Glória. They felt that she looked down upon them, disrespected them, failed to treat them as equals, and was too “authoritarian.” I frequently observed the basis for their complaints. Sometimes Glória would reply to a request without looking the person in the eye or would respond brusquely. She shouted orders. She often kept people waiting

– seemingly without reason. One afternoon at the Pólo, I saw Leandro, André’s brother lounging outside the office. I commented to him that I had not seen André in several weeks and Leandro told me that André had just gotten back to Jardim Gramacho from visiting “home” in Santa Cruz, that he was renting a different shack now, and that he could take me there when he left the Pólo – once Glória responded to his request for a payment advance. We waited the rest of the morning and the whole afternoon. Leandro asked again as Glória was preparing to leave and she told him that she did not have any money to give him an advance. Leandro stormed out of the Pólo so quickly that I had a difficult time keeping pace with him. “I don’t know why she would keep me waiting so long,” he ranted. “She could have told me right away and then I would have gone home. I began to bring my material to the Pólo because the prices are higher, but you know what? It’s not worth it. Not with this treatment.”

Though complaints by catadores at the Pólo often took the form of personal attacks on Glória’s character, these criticisms focused on Glória because of her role and responsibilities in ACAMJG. Glória occupied a complicated position at the Pólo. She did not serve as the president of ACAMJG – Tião’s title. Nor did she become president of CooperACAMJG, when they officially registered the operations at the Pólo as a cooperative in 2009 (according to Brazilian law, an association cannot have financial earnings). João became the president of the cooperative side of ACAMJG when this occurred. But though technically Glória’s role was limited to that of “financial administrator,” she effectively ran the everyday operations of the Pólo. She arranged all of ACAMJG’s sales, weighed all material, kept the payment sheet and monthly accounting records, made sure the truck had diesel every day, resolved any problems that

arose (loss of electricity, the police stopping ACAMJG's truck, a broken water pump), and bought any needed equipment or supplies.¹³ Tião preferred to stay out "on the streets," focusing on political organizing and potential projects, and was happy to leave day-to-day operations to Glória. Towards the end of my fieldwork, João began to take on more responsibilities, and became more confident as a leader, sometimes disagreeing with Glória. But largely, Tião, João, and other members of ACAMJG – including those who most frequently complained – saw Glória as competent, even if her treatment of others seemed to them authoritarian. Most catadores at the Pólo wanted to continue collecting on the dump, selling their material, and going about their lives with the same degree of fluidity as they always had in Jardim Gramacho – a point to which I will return. I never heard any catador say that they desired Glória's position or thought that anyone else at ACAMJG should do her work.

This, of course, left Glória with a great deal of responsibility and many no-win situations. She desired deeply that the Pólo would be a success, defining this success in terms of being a respected institution¹⁴ that was financially independent. She told me many times that she worked to do whatever she could to get the best prices for the catadores at ACAMJG. But these efforts often led her to focus on rules and act in authoritarian ways in the eyes of other ACAMJG members. I did not realize quite the extent to which this contradiction upset her until one Sunday afternoon, late in my fieldwork, when I came over to her house to drink beer and wash laundry together – a ritual we did every Sunday when I first lived with her. She was tired. She had had a hard week, and she began venting about all the difficulties at ACAMJG. She eventually came to the issue of *vales*, advance payments.

“You know, it’s not easy always saying no, no, no. I end up always have to say no. Someone comes and says, ‘Can’t you give me a *vale* of R\$50? Because my gas just ran out.’ The person just received payment and will be paid again on Friday. I know I can’t keep giving out *vales*. This would start a whole practice of doing so and ACAMJG can’t operate like that. And so, I say no. And people even say to me, ‘Well done, Glória, you can’t always be a pushover. You have to stand up and say no.’

“But then at night, I am trying to sleep and I can’t. At night, I start thinking: ‘Shit. So-and-so’s gas ran out.’ I feel bad and can’t sleep. This is why I don’t sleep. Others, like Tião – if someone asks him for something, he always tells them to go ask me. I am the one who has to say no. I don’t blame him. I know how hard it is. It is hard, because the other person’s story is your story, too. It is the same story. The story of the poor. Father drank. Mother was beaten. This person was raped. That person was robbed. You know that the person’s life hasn’t been easy, because your life wasn’t easy either. You know that everyone is suffering in Jardim Gramacho. We all grew up together. But Tião sends them to me, and I have to say no, no, no. I have to, because otherwise things wouldn’t work. It is a business that I have to run. I am tired of being the one who always has to say no. I am the one who does not sleep at night.”

When I asked Funabem and Zumbi why they left ACAMJG, they both referred to Glória’s treatment. Zumbi said he felt that he was not welcomed in his own home. Funabem thought that Glória had become too condescending – *subiu demais*. But the more I spoke with them about their experiences during those early months at the Pólo and the more time I spent in the day-to-day operations of ACAMJG, the more I realized that their departures had much more to do with competing visions of what ACAMJG should

be. For Glória, ACAMJG became “a business that I have to run.” For Funabem and Zumbi, ACAMJG was a collective of catadores – largely a group of friends – who came together to promote the interests of catadores, to improve the conditions of the neighborhood in which they lived, and to work together on other projects, including a recycling center through which they could sell their material jointly. The most important part of ACAMJG was not the success of the Pólo but the collectivity that they had created. After Funabem left ACAMJG, he began working on forming another cooperative that would retain the spirit of “cooperativism,” as he called it, and Zumbi continued to be an active member of the National Movement of Catadores. Their disillusionment with the Pólo did not lead them to dismiss the idea of organizing altogether.

Funabem often critiqued ACAMJG for having become a “business” (*empresa*). “I lost three years of my life with ACAMJG,” he lamented. “Do you know how much I sacrificed working for ACAMJG? And now it’s not a cooperative. It’s a business. When new people join ACAMJG, they aren’t given any kind of training or course on cooperativism. They are just given a work vest. In the beginning, when the Pólo first opened, there were regular meetings and assemblies. The finances were presented each week to everyone. We would also organize a *mutirão* and everyone would come together and do the major cleaning that was needed at the Pólo. We would divide the tasks – sweeping the patio, cleaning the bathrooms, helping load the truck were done as a service to ACAMJG. Basically, everyone had to give one day to the Pólo.” Funabem was right concerning how ACAMJG’s operations had evolved. By the time I arrived, there were no longer any regular meetings. When newcomers came to the Pólo, inquiring about the higher prices, Glória filled out a membership form for them and gave them a work vest.

She outlined a few of the rules and policies: payment in check only until you can open a bank account and no selling material to other buyers. This constituted the extent of their initiation. I often heard catadores say, “I sell to ACAMJG” not that they were a member of ACAMG. The Pólo could have been any scrap yard.

A group of roughly twenty catadores consistently bring their material to the Pólo each week and often participate in political events involving ACAMJG, such as an annual regional meeting of the National Movement of Catadores and the national forum “Lixo e Cidadania” (“Garbage and Citizenship”), held each year in Belo Horizonte. Beyond this core group, however, many catadores in addition to Funabem and Zumbi have come and gone from the Pólo. Their reasons for leaving are often reminiscent of reasons given for leaving formal jobs. Glória was too much like a *patrão*, a boss. They did not like being ordered around at the Pólo. They also did not like the schedule – waiting for ACAMJG’s truck, the requirement of weighing material on Thursdays, and receiving payment only on Fridays.

Institutional Power and Life Projects

In his ethnography of the politics of AIDS treatment in Brazil, João Biehl (2007) tells a story of a clinic called Caasah that began housing and caring for homeless AIDS patients in Salvador, Bahia in the early 1990s. Caasah was founded as a grassroots organization whose leader took over an abandoned Red Cross maternity ward and turned it into a clinic for the poorest AIDS patients in the city. When the current director at the time of Biehl’s research, Celeste, first arrived at Caasah, she found it to be, in her words, “a place of no government (2007:289).” Fights broke out continuously. There were not

rules about who could be in the building. Sex and drug use within the clinic were commonplace. Celeste worked hard to bring order to Caasah. Rules were set, group therapy encouraged adherence to norms, patients received incentives to contribute to house maintenance, guards were hired to help enforce rules, medical routines were established, and residents signed a “contract of responsibility” (310). Many patients began adhering to the institutional norms, reshaping their behaviors and even encouraging other residents to do so, but some patients also left Caasah as a result:

Celeste said that she was proud of having transformed Caasah’s marginality and criminality into a life to be cared for: ‘The patients who wanted to attend to the norms stayed; the ones who did not want to submit had to leave. They went back to the streets; they belong there’ (313).

Though embedded in quite different contexts, Biehl’s story of Caasah resonates with the story of ACAMJG. Both Caasah and ACAMJG began as grassroots organizations, working with populations that would be seen as among the most marginalized in Brazil. Both organizations underwent processes of institutionalization through which the directors (Celeste and Glória) aimed to reform the behaviors of those participating in these organizations. And this process of institutionalization prompted some residents or members to leave – to return to the streets or return to the dump.

I find the comparison of ACAMJG with Caasah useful for how it illuminates the workings of power in institutions. Biehl’s analysis of Caasah uncovers the ways that institutional care and treatment are life-giving but also constitute disciplinary techniques that construct a particular type of subject and exclude persons who do not “break with old habits and communities and behave in certain ways.” The departure of Funabem, Zumbi, and other catadores from ACAMJG can likewise be understood as a refusal to be made into a particular kind of worker. As ACAMJG developed into an institution – and here I

am taking up Foucault's definition of institution as "as a site where power becomes embodied in techniques" (1980:96, cited by Caputo and Young 1993:9) – it increasingly sought control over behaviors and habits. These went deeper than rules of conduct at the Pólo. Catadores had to reconfigure their orientation to money and time in order to be able to receive payment only once a week and meet the schedule of ACAMJG's weighing and sales. They had to alter their "culture of cheating," as Glória described it, developing trust in relations built on transparency instead of fraud. And they had to segregate domains of their lives; Glória insisted, for example, that drug use be confined to the home and not brought into the workplace of the Pólo.

Given all the ways that we have seen catadores place value on their autonomy, it is perhaps unsurprising that many would evade techniques of discipline and control in ACAMJG as well as in other domains. The closer ACAMJG became to a "business," the more it resembled some of the aspects of formal employment that many catadores critiqued and avoided. The departures from ACAMJG echo the comings and goings of catadores discussed in Chapter 4. A few catadores adapted to ACAMJG's rules (and also learned to bend them) and stayed. Others did not adapt and left. Still others, the vast majority of catadores on the dump, never sought out ACAMJG. "*Fico no meu*, I keep to myself," catadores often replied when I asked why.

These departures, I argue, constitute other life projects and even other political projects. Biehl observes that leaving Caasah to return to the streets was a refusal of those patients to be made into a particular kind of subject, to become defined as an AIDS patient. "Moreover, residents like Nerivaldo and Maria Madalena strongly reacted against the moral imperatives of being a certain kind of 'good person' in order to be attended to

as an ‘AIDS patient’” (396), Biehl writes. He also quotes Jorge, who was one of Caasah’s first patients and who had since left and joined a group of homeless patients living on the streets of Salvador:

That was something we did. But I couldn’t stand being locked in. So I left. I like to play around. Here I drink my *cachaça* [a popular sugarcane liquor] and smoke my pot in peace, that’s my medication, that’s my woman. If I had taken all those pills, I would already be dead. If I kept thinking about AIDS, I would any special medication. When the time comes and if necessary I will take it though. Meanwhile, I roll my life as God wants it [...] (148).

I see in Jorge’s words here, and similarly in the words and practices of catadores who refuse the disciplining of ACAMJG or the disciplining of wage labor, an alternative vision of a way of life. Catadores who “like to play on the dump,” who value their mobility and blended rhythm of everyday activities, and in some cases, who have created social worlds around shared living, working, drinking, and drug use are constructing a life project. This way of being in the world is shaped by conditions of extreme social inequality and suffering and is not always life-giving: the danger of working on the dump, the precarity of their everyday lives and again for some, the dependency and violence of addiction are also part of their stories. These conditions, however, do not make their lives non-projects—reduced to mere survival, to responding in overdetermined ways to the structural violence of urban poverty, to social death. In what follows, I explore some of the projects that catadores have constructed on the dump – moments of collective action beyond institutional forms of power.

The Syndicate, Partners in Crime, and Cooperative Practice

I examine in this section several different kinds of collective action and cooperative practice that I observed among catadores on the dump. I begin with

descriptions of groups of *moradores* – those catadores who effectively live on the dump, like Vinte-Dois, Buchecha, and Fininho whose *break* I discussed in the previous chapter. These groups are sometimes called the “syndicate,” a reference to trade unions and resistance movements during Brazil’s dictatorship. Here, I want to focus on how these groups self-organize and operate. I then look at work partnerships, called *trutas*. In Brazilian slang this word can refer to a shady business and therefore *truta* may best be translated here as “partner in crime.” Finally, I turn to more subtle forms of cooperation on the dump and to moments in the history of Jardim Gramacho when catadores have engaged in ephemeral collective actions. When catadores leave ACAMJG or when they neglect to ever join in the association, other cooperatives, or the national movement, they are nonetheless creating and participating in numerous forms of cooperative practice.

André told me that he lived on the dump as one of the *moradores* when he first arrived in Jardim Gramacho. It was not until the methane gas began to make him sick that he eventually sought out a shack for rent at the base of the dump. In those first few months on the dump, he encountered several friends from his home neighborhood of Santa Cruz, located on the opposite side of the metropolitan area of Rio. With these friends and eventually with other catadores he came to know on the dump, they created a kind of camp where the group would sleep together under tents that they constructed of black tarps and rugs retrieved from the garbage.

“We [*a gente*] would all get together,” he explained. For meals, we would grab one of those big cans of oil – 20 liter cans. We would cut it open, wash it out. And then we would cut up vegetables and meats that we had collected. Another of us would prepare the pasta. We always made soup [more like a strong stew], because you have to

eat something substantial to be able to work. We would eat around 9:30 or 10:00 at night. At 1:30 or 2:00 in the morning, we would wake up and continue working. In the morning, each of us would do a task. One person, for example, had the task of going to fetch water down below. That person would carry up twenty 2-liter bottles of water. To participate, you had to do some task. We would say, 'Go fetch water. When you finish, wash the dishes.' There wasn't any leader. Everyone could make orders. If I didn't like something, I could say so."

I asked André if this led to many conflicts within the group. He replied, "Yeah, sometimes there were conflicts. Someone would complain, 'Hey, that guy didn't fetch such-and-such a thing.' Another would say, 'Well then, he won't participate in the meal.' Someone else would go fetch whatever was missing, but that person who didn't do his task would not be allowed to participate. That was just. Sometimes a catador doesn't want to stop working to do other things, because the more you collect the more you earn. But that catador can't just show up at the last minute when everything is already prepared. The others had stopped working to be able to contribute."

André's description highlights the fluidity of these groups. To be part of the group is to participate; if a catador decided to work instead of help out with the meal preparations, then he would simply sit out that meal. Nor was there any leadership structure. Each catador could suggest how to divide up the tasks and each could voice disagreement. In many ways, this group did not operate as a "group" in any fixed sense of the word. In fact, André uses only the word *gente*, which is a term that in Brazilian Portuguese can mean both "people" and "we." I came to know several "groups" of *moradores* on the dump. Their members, or rather their participants, came and went at

different times of their lives. Vinte-dois spent over a month in Petrópolis visiting his mother and siblings who still lived there. I ran into Buchecha on a day standing outside a shack near the base of the dump. He had begun living with a woman he met on the dump and was no longer spending nights with the *moradores*. I saw both Vinte-dois and Buchecha back on the dump, hanging out under a tarp together, a few weeks later. A kind of elasticity to these groups allowed people to come and go and when present, to work collectively to create camps and share meals.

I learned about *trutas*, or work partnerships, from Simone. I was filling my sacks of cardboard next to her sacks of plastics on an especially hot day on the dump. The heat made both of us lethargic and we failed to collect much of anything. Simone suggested that we work *de truta*, that such an arrangement would help motivate us. I did not know what she meant by *truta*, and she replied that a *truta* was a kind of *parceiro*, or partner. To collect *de truta* meant that two (or sometimes more) catadores collected and sold their material together, dividing their earnings equally. In most cases, *trutas* perform the same tasks: they each collect the same type of material simultaneously, take this material back to the staging area, and go about filling the same burlap sacks. In a few cases, *trutas* have created a division of labor. One catador will pull bags from unloading waste and toss them to his partner, who then sorts through the bag to retrieve any recyclables, or one catador will focus on collecting while the other will do all the carrying, making the treks back and forth from the staging area. I spent the rest of my collecting days on the dump working *de truta* with Simone.

As I came to know other *trutas* on the dump, I was surprised by a few characteristics of most *truta* relationships. The first was that partners are rarely spouses or

family members. Many couples do work together on the dump, but women usually insisted on maintaining their own material, and thus their own income, separate (for how this ties to women's life trajectories and struggles for independence, see Chapter 4). Catadores who had siblings or other relatives working on the dump also more frequently chose a friend over a family member to be a *truta*. For example, Simone asked if I would work with her *de truta*, while her sister Claudia worked with a long-time friend, Rose. I realized over time that these choices had much to do with the kind of open or fluid relationship that the *truta* often is. Catadores work together as *trutas* until this arrangement is no longer convenient. Their life schedules might be at odds or they might want to work different amounts for one reason or another. Much like the camps of *moradores* in which catadores can easily come and go depending on their participation, *trutas* are relationships that work so long as they are working. However, this is not to say that when a *truta* relationship stops momentarily or indefinitely, the relationship between those two catadores also ends. That friendship usually continues in other ways: shared meals on the dump, assistance with loading material on the truck, drinking together at a bar at the end of the day.

It is easier to create such a relationship of flexibility with a friend than with a spouse or family member with whom one shares many types and levels of social obligation and with whom one is embedded in power relations of the household. For example, by having their own work routines and income, women are able to maintain greater control over household spending and they have a basis on which to threaten to leave a husband if she does not approve of his actions or treatment. Other power relations of the family emerged from networks of credit and debt described in Chapter 5. By

working with a friend rather than with kin, catadores are better able to shield their earnings from some of the thickest webs of obligation that lay claims to their income. They also avoid strong pressures to work more frequently or intensely than they otherwise would wish to do. In short, the desires and obligations to support family members have the potential to complicate the kind of openness and fluidity deemed necessary for a *truta* to work well.

Secondly, *trutas* rarely make more income working together than they do individually. In fact, many catadores who worked *de truta* told me that they actually made less money. The most common reason given for working *de truta* was not financial, but social and emotional. A *truta* was there to *animar* – a word with combined meanings of encouragement, cheering up, enlivenment, and spirit. One catador told me, “When you are tired, just sitting there on your burlap sacks, not wanting to back into the garbage, your *truta* will say: ‘Come on! Let’s collect a little more!’” Luciana told me that she detested working on the dump alone, because the work could feel overwhelming. A *truta* helped make the work seem lighter. There were more possibilities, she said, to have fun. A *truta* is a “partner in crime,” someone to go out with you to make a livelihood in one of the most dangerous and forgotten zones of the city. I came to think of the work of the *truta* as an act of solidarity.

In addition to the types of social formations as the camps of *moradores* and the relationship of the *truta*, several moments in the dump’s history inspired the organization of larger-scale collective actions. Three moments stand out. The first involved a group of women led by Dona Gerusa, Glória’s mother, who challenged the system of the “leaders” on the dump. In the early years of the dump (the late 1970s and 1980s), the roughly 300

catadores collecting at that time were organized according to “leaders.” These leaders had worked on the dump in Cajú located in another area of Rio and when this dump closed, they followed the garbage to the site of the new municipal dump in Jardim Gramacho. Given that these catadores from Caju already had over fifteen years experience collecting and were well acquainted with many of the Comlurb personnel, they easily took command of those who lived in the vicinity of Jardim Gramacho, heard about the dump, and arrived on the dump at first in search of food. Newcomers who wished to collect material during the day on the dump had to be accepted by one of these leaders and agree to work three days of the week for the leader.

During a slump in prices of recyclable materials, Dona Geresa found it increasingly difficult to earn enough income to cover the household expenses of raising eight children. She joined together with ten other women and the group refused to hand over their material to their “leaders.” This struggle involved guards, waste management staff of Comlurb, and the *bandidos* in Jardim Gramacho, but eventually these women were allowed back on the dump and no longer had to sell to the leaders. Other catadores similarly refused to divide part of their material for the leaders and this system came to an end.

The second moment occurred during Brazil’s currency crisis and efforts to stabilize inflation in the 1990s. The scrap dealers sought to take advantage of the confusion in prices caused by the introduction of the non-monetary currency (URV) and drastically lowered the prices of recyclables in Jardim Gramacho. Catadores on the dump jointly decided to refuse to sell their material until the prices improved. This “strike” lasted three months. The third moment was a reaction to changes in the organization of

waste disposal on the dump. Comlurb's recuperation efforts in the late 1990s involved hiring engineers to oversee the operations of the dump. These engineers moved the *rampa*, the unloading area far from staging area of catadores. Consequently, catadores had to walk a kilometer between their burlap sacks and the area where they collected. After three days, a group of catadores gathered together and went to Comlurb's offices. They said that if this arrangement was not changed, they would put fire to any truck that unloaded on the dump.

Asef Bayat has noted that the goal of self-employed workers who mobilize is that of "attaining autonomy, both cultural and political, from the regulations, institutions, and discipline imposed by the state and by modern institutions" (2004:93). These moments of mobilization are often ephemeral, much like the three instances of collective action described above. Once autonomy and the ability to continue working in conditions of self-employment have been reestablished, such visible and overt collective actions fade back into the social relations and cooperative practices of everyday life. While it might seem that the "failure" on the part of most catadores in Jardim Gramacho to join or remain active members of ACAMJG is an example of apathy, a lack of political consciousness, or an assertion of individualism, the *moradores*, *trutas*, and various forms of cooperation on the dump manifest another kind of political project. This is a politics that refuses disciplinary power, a politics in pursuit of autonomy.

Notes

¹ The word "Pólo" in this context refers to a center or nucleus. The *Pólo de Reciclagem* in Jardim Gramacho was part of a larger plan, proposed by the leadership of ACAMJG, to create various centers throughout Duque de Caxias and the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro where catadores could receive, sort, and bundle recyclable materials. The idea for the Pólo also included the possibility of involving multiple cooperatives of catadores at each locale. Though ACAMJG was responsible for constructing the

Pólo in Jardim Gramacho and was the only cooperative operating at the Pólo in 2008-2009, when I was there, the leadership of ACAMJG maintained the idea that the Pólo could become a space where additional cooperatives of catadores could operate.

² The trajectories of catadores are ongoing, and like the circulations described in Chapter 4, the departures of catadores from ACAMJG can sometimes be “comings and goings, comings and goings.” Zumbi, for example, told me towards the end of my fieldwork in 2009 that he was thinking of returning to ACAMJG. Funabem has begun working more closely again with ACAMJG in his political organizing efforts. These intended or partial returns to ACAMJG are, I believe, partly a result of the intensified mobilization of catadores in response to the closing of the dump, projected for the end of 2011. As I discuss later in this chapter, catadores in Jardim Gramacho, historically, have mobilized at key moments to defend their work—their access to the dump or the prices of material—and then demobilized once the situation passed.

³ The initials MV stand for Mensajeiro da Verdade, “Messenger of Truth.”

⁴ I retained the punctuation and capitalization as written in the original text.

⁵ Some of the original founders became disappointed by the payment structure in which members received equally regardless of production. Others left because they disagreed with the leadership or rules that were instituted. Some also accused leaders of stealing from the cooperative’s funds.

⁶ This feeling on the part of catadores is further strengthened by the fact that the majority of catadores at Coopergramacho are elderly or less physically capable of working on top of the dump. At Coopergramacho, catadores stand alongside a conveyor belt carrying garbage and pull out the recyclable materials from the passing stream of waste. This work involves less movement, weight-bearing, speed, and agility, and it is also much less dangerous than collecting on top of the dump.

⁷ Glória also worked for several years at Coopergramacho. She was one of the founding members of Coopergramacho and Glória’s and Tião’s mother, Dona Gerusa, served as the administrative director during the first term. Comlurb hired a production engineer to assist Coopergramacho in its early years and he ended up teaching Glória various elements of administration: how to keep records of work hours, calculate payments, make the appropriate social security tax deductions, and produce receipts. Both Glória’s and Tião’s time at Coopergramacho certainly provided formative experiences that later shaped their development of ACAMJG.

⁸ Some of the most important NGOs that have worked with Tião and with ACAMJG more broadly include IBISS (Brazilian Institute for Innovations in Public Health), IBASE (Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis), and COOPERAC (Cooperative of Cultural Agents). These NGOs have different histories, funding sources, projects, and aims in working with catadores. IBASE, for example, is a progressive NGO founded in 1981 by Brazilian sociologist Herbert de Souza (o Betinho) to support a culture of democracy in Brazil and abroad. IBASE has played a major role in organizing the World Social Forum and the movement Solidary Economy (Economia Solidária). One of IBASE’s projects with catadores involved a participatory diagnostic of Jardim Gramacho in 2005 to determine social, economic, environmental, and health-related needs of the neighborhood. IBISS has tended to work more closely with leadership training and COOPERAC, most recently, has been involved in organizing and developing cultural events as part of the regional Congress of the National Movement of Catadores in Rio de Janeiro.

⁹ As much literature on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has noted, the NGO is not a homogeneous category. NGOs can be quite diverse with respect to scale, types of funding sources, organizational structure, relationship to social movements, relationship to the state or to international organizations like the World Bank, and types of services, projects, and aims of the organization (Mercer 2002; Srinivas 2009; Vakil 1997). Glória’s statement here refers to characteristics of NGOs that proliferated in the 1980s in Brazil. These NGOs were largely created by middle-class activists who began working in poor neighborhoods or favelas and who professionalized many of Brazil’s social movements (Baiocchi 2005:29). I borrow Sonia Alvarez’s definition of NGOs in this context as “‘intermediary organizations’ that

‘are typically composed of middle-class, educated and professional people who have opted for political or humanitarian reasons to work with (or on behalf of) the poor and the marginalized’” (Alvarez 1999:186). Many scholars have critiqued NGOs for depoliticizing movements, furthering the interests of governments and lending institutions, promoting neoliberal governmentality, and enabling the retraction of the welfare state by providing what were once public goods and services (Alvarez 1998, 1999; Eade 2007; Jad 2007; Paley 2001:143-147; Petras 1997). However, Glória’s critiques focus specifically on class inequalities. While recognizing the need for ACAMJG to have good relationships with NGOs, she sees many NGO professionals as legitimating their work by maintaining those they serve in a position of inferiority and dependence—needing training, guidance, organizational assistance, and programs. Often, Glória’s interactions with NGO activists led her to feel her class position acutely. For example, Glória was invited to attend the World Social Forum in 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya. She received an information booklet from the NGO that was sponsoring her trip, explaining the type of clothing (long-sleeve shirts and pants) that she should bring, which she did not own and had no means to buy. She spent the last day before her trip hurriedly going to family member’s and neighbor’s houses to try to find and borrow the “appropriate” clothing, expressing frustration and embarrassment at not having what her NGO travel companions easily took for granted. Her travel companions, furthermore, stayed longer in Kenya to go on a safari that they self-financed, while Glória traveled back to Brazil alone. Seemingly small moments like these, as well as moments when Glória felt her knowledge and experience were not taken as seriously as the knowledge of her middle-class NGO partners, brought these class inequalities into sharp relief.

¹⁰ That is to say, Glória’s position at ACAMJG led her into more tension or conflict with NGO personnel, either because she felt that she had to prove her ability to perform a function that formally educated NGO personnel usually did or because NGO personnel disagreed with the way that she was doing a particular job. In short, she competed for legitimacy in the same spaces that NGO personnel usually operated.

¹¹ The characteristics of Glória’s approach to ACAMJG that lead Tião to call her “bureaucratic” are similar to many of those noted in Weber’s definition of bureaucracy in *Economy and Society* (1978:956-1005). These include strict discipline and control, mechanization, efficiency, and an emphasis on rules, regulations, and standard operating procedures. For Weber, underlying all of these elements of bureaucracy, is a dehumanizing, rational, calculative logic and action:

The second element mentioned, calculable rules, is the most important one for modern bureaucracy. The peculiarity of modern culture, and specifically of its technical and economic basis, demands this very ‘calculability’ of results. When fully developed, bureaucracy also stands, in a specific sense, under the principle of *sine ira ac studio*. Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is ‘dehumanized,’ the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is appraised as its special virtue by capitalism (975).

Tião reads Glória’s emphasis on rules for conducting meetings, recording minutes, and setting clearly-defined and achievable goals (rather than “dreams”) as bureaucratic in spirit. The bureaucratization of ACAMJG increases, I argue in the following section, as some members of ACAMJG try to create a cooperative that operates efficiently and is economically successful in a capitalist market.

¹² In the past, projects have included paving and sanitation in parts of Jardim Gramacho, the creation of a neighborhood association, the construction of the Pólo, and the creation of a community library with computers located at the Pólo. These projects have been assisted and/or funded by a combination of NGOs and federal, state, and city agencies. For example, the diagnostic study led by the organization IBASE in 2005 helped put pressure on the City of Duque de Caxias to pave several dirt roads and provide sanitation in areas where many catadores live in Jardim Gramacho. During my fieldwork in 2008-2009, Tião focused on funds and projects to address the imminent closure of the dump in Jardim Gramacho and the consequences that this closure will have in the lives of catadores (projected for the end of 2011). In January 2011, the World Bank announced that, in partnership with Brazil’s Federal Bank (Caixa Econômica Federal), it would provide R\$2.8 million for a range of projects to benefit catadores following the closure of the dump, including support and new infrastructure for cooperatives of catadores and job training. The company Nova Gramacho Energia Ambiental, responsible for the capture of methane gas for energy

production, will also apply R\$1.2 million a year for 14 years for projects benefiting catadores in Jardim Gramacho.

¹³ Glória is the only leader of ACAMJG who is a woman. Furthermore, she has become responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Pólo, whereas Tião, Gordinho, and to an increasing extent, João represent ACAMJG in the public sphere.

¹⁴ Many leaders of ACAMJG, especially Tião and Glória, described the difficulties in convincing others—Comlurb personnel, the social worker, NGO professionals, others catadores, and even some of their own family members—that the association would be a success, “*que ia dar certo*.” At landmark moments in ACAMJG’s history, such as the May 1st celebration in 2009 of the Pólo’s two-year anniversary, Tião became overwhelmed with emotion to the point of tears, saying that “no one believed in us, no one believed in us.” It is important to Tião and Glória (as well as others who have played key roles in ACAMJG’s history) that the Pólo function smoothly and be self-sufficient not only for the economic gains this success brings to member catadores, but also as a way of gaining respect from those who never believed that a small group of catadores could successfully organize and operate a cooperative. In short, this desire for respect has to be understood in reference to the stigma of having grown up poor, black, and the children of a catadora.

CONCLUSION: ANARCHIC SPIRIT AND THE LABOR OF SELF AND WORLD

Throughout my dissertation, I have argued that the work of catadores has generated subjectivities and political projects at odds with dominant modes of production and cultural values in today's current form of capitalism. Catadores see the dump as a place of suffering, but also a place of autonomy. This experience of control over their labor and therefore, to a greater extent, over their everyday lives, is one of the most important reasons for their decisions to come or to return to the dump. This autonomy has enabled them to reconfigure the relation between labor and leisure. Not only does the work of collecting become interwoven with play, social life, meals, rest, other forms of work and caretaking, but this "blended life" also allows catadores to fulfill social obligations and life concerns far beyond those of mere economic survival. Catadores evade disciplinary techniques intended to shape them into a particular kind of worker, and many have been reluctant to participate in cooperatives or other efforts in recent years to formalize their work. Yet, though cooperatives and the association have failed to gain wide participation among catadores, more anarchic forms of self-organizing and cooperative practice have flourished. This, I argue, constitutes a new politics of labor.

By way of conclusion, I unpack what I mean by a new politics of labor and reflect on its implications for the ethnography of work, for studies of urban poverty, and for anthropological understandings of subjectivity. My discussion takes up many of the

themes of this dissertation, but I approach these themes less like threads to be tied up and more like pathways that open up to further inquiries and concerns.

For the past two decades, scholars of political economy have been writing about the current moment in the history of capitalism as fundamentally different from past economic orders (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Hardt and Negri 2000; Harvey 1989; Lash and Urry 1987; LiPuma and Lee 2004). While recognizing that contradictions, crises, and their “fixes” have always constituted the dynamics of capitalism and while diverging in their diagnoses of exactly how and why this new configuration of capitalism has taken shape, these scholars share a sense that post-Fordist, neoliberal, financial, speculative, globalized capitalism has shifted the political-economic order in unprecedented ways. The disarticulation of production from consumption and the decline of labor as a primary organizing social force have resided at the heart of this historical shift. “The globalizing process now in motion,” Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee (2004:9) argue, “is engendering a decoupling [of finance capital from the organization of production] on a scale more encompassing, more powerful, and also perhaps more permanent than anything that has gone before.”

Labor, it seems, has lost its place as a hegemonic political subject. Recent political-economic transformations have resulted in what Beverly Silver (2003:1) identifies as a “double crisis of labor studies and labor movements.” Changes in the international division of labor and the increase in part-time and casualized employment have fragmented the working class locally and globally (Collins 2002), making it more difficult for unions and labor movements to organize and solidify collective bargaining

power (Moody 1997). Identity-based movements mobilizing around issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, youth, religion, the environment, and the community or neighborhood have replaced those of class (Castells 1997). Neoliberalism has cast consumption as a primary site of political struggle (Miller 1995; Ngai 2003). It is now more likely that citizens appeal to the state, not as a social class, but as individuals who self-identify with a particular interest group (see Biehl 2007:56-57; 283-336).

But the lives of catadores and other self-employed or unemployed workers suggest that the politics of labor has not ended, but been transformed. New ways of organizing production transnationally and new forms of work beyond wage labor have multiply rereconfigured workers' political struggles, movements, projects, visions, and belonging. Some of these ways draw upon historical forms of labor politics, while reshaping them to contemporary contexts. Unions have opened up to new members and created linkages across continents and a diversity of organizations (Gallin 2001; Moody 1997; Nash 1998). Andrea Muehlebach (2011) tells a story of unemployed workers who have refashioned, through a new regime of volunteer labor, the worker-citizen as a form of social and political belonging. And as Vargas-Cetina observes (2005:229-230), "Cooperatives, in different forms, shapes and arrangements, have taken hold of planners' imagination, and also of the hopes and wishes of rural producers and the urban poor."

Other manifestations of a new politics of labor remain unrecognizable as such. Most people who have come to Jardim Gramacho to make a living from Rio's refuse are not actively involved in a cooperative, the association, or the National Movement of Catadores. Few have participated in rallies, protests, or other kinds of mass collective actions and when they have done so, these moments have tended to be ephemeral. Some

practices of catadores – hiding from scrap dealers or exchanging work vests, as I discussed in Chapter 3 – could be called small acts of “resistance” (though I prefer to think of them more in the sense of evasion). But it does not seem to me that these moments capture the full political significance of the lived experiences of catadores. Rather, I understand the very work of catadores, and the kind of life projects that they have constructed through their work, to constitute a new politics. A life project, Mario Blaser (2004) writes in relation to the Yshiro of the Paraguayan Chaco, is “about the possibility of their defining their direction they want to take in life, on the basis of their awareness and knowledge of their own place in the world” (30). “Life projects have no political horizon; they *are* the political horizon” (40).

Throughout the long process of writing this dissertation, I have grappled for a language with which to speak about the social world created through the work of catadores in Jardim Gramacho. I have sought this language as a way to crystallize my sense that the desire for autonomy, the integration of work and play, the evasion of disciplinary techniques, the cooperative practices, and the anti-authoritarian and anti-institutional spirit of catadores, all emerge from a certain orientation to life and the world. In the absence of a clearly suitable theoretical language in anthropology, I have come to think of the practices of catadores as “anarchic.” This word, of course, is laden with connotations of disorder, chaos, and even violence—none of which I would wish to retain in my own use of the word (and furthermore, none of which constitute the meaning of anarchy as understood by most anarchists). But perhaps even more importantly, anarchic is usually associated with the political philosophy of anarchism. Unlike most self-

identifying anarchists, catadores do not uphold a particular vision of the state nor are attempting to create alternative organizations of self-rule in line with this philosophy. I would not argue that catadores are *anarchists*. Rather, I am suggesting that an anarchic spirit imbues their values and practices.

David Graeber has noted that an anarchist theory does not exist in anthropology nor in the academy more broadly. The absence of an anarchist tradition in anthropology is odd, he suggests, given that the ethnographic record is filled with examples of “actually-existing self-governing communities” and “actually-existing non-market economies” (Graeber 2004:11). In his own ethnographic work, Graeber has explored the overtly anarchist groups of the global justice movement (2009), as well as subtle practices by members of a rural community in Madagascar to evade the state, to go about daily life as if the state did not exist (2007). He argues that such examples of anarchic practice are undertheorized in anthropology; their implications for our understandings of capitalism, power, and the human condition are left unexamined.

By calling the practices of catadores “anarchic,” I seek to bring attention to critiques of power occurring in the cracks of capitalism. These fissures constitute social forms and spaces created, but not wholly determined by capitalist development. The dump, as I aimed to show in Chapter 2, came into existence through a combination of processes including industrialization and developmentalist efforts by Brazil’s military dictatorship. The scrap yards scattered throughout the neighborhood, the vendors selling burlap sacks and gloves, the catadores collecting on top of the dump, the whole economy of waste recycling in Jardim Gramacho would not have emerged without the development of a global recycling industry. The work of catadores also would not have

come to be in Jardim Gramacho without Brazil's severe social inequalities and without the impact of neoliberal capitalism on the livelihoods of the urban poor. Jardim Gramacho has been and continues to be intimately tied up with the workings of global capital.

But many of the practices, relations, and logics that the work of catadores has generated in Jardim Gramacho are at odds with dominant capitalist values. Catadores work outside conditions of wage labor. Their work rhythms blur capitalism's fragmented spheres of life. A morality of spending and working only when necessary—that is, when broke—diverges from the logic of accumulation. Cracks are produced by overwhelming force, but cracks also open up new spaces. The broken lines that they create emerge in unexpected patterns, undetermined directions. Neoliberal capitalism and its impact on urban poverty may have created Jardim Gramacho's dump into a workplace for thousands, but it has also become a place that allows for other possibilities, other ways of fashioning work and life.

I do not mean that catadores resist or confront structures of power nor that they are engaged in a project for social change. Their efforts to evade the discipline and alienation of wage labor are more similar to the tactics of the Malagasy in Graeber's study, who did not rebel against the Madagascan state but simply went about their days as if the state did not exist (2007:157-180). Catadores leave formal jobs to work on the dump, because there "no one orders them around" and "anything goes." They make an appearance of following Comlurb's policies by wearing work vests, but then sell to different scrap dealers. They create a multitude of social forms – *trutas*, communities of *moradores*, ephemeral collective actions – but are reluctant to join cooperatives or other

institutions with hierarchies and rules. And when they do join cooperatives, when ACAMJG became too much like a business for some, they returned again to the dump. “The dump is a refuge,” Vinte-dois told me.

Informal economies are, more often than not, seen as a survival strategy of the urban poor. From this perspective, collecting recyclables is one income-generating activity among a multitude pursued by the unemployed who cannot find or perform “real” work. Some neoliberal paradigms in the literature on the informal economy, spearheaded by Hernando de Soto (1989), have celebrated the expansion of these types of economic activities as an expression of entrepreneurship and self-help of the poor. The idea here is to support these small enterprises so that the poor can develop their own proper businesses and participate fully in the market. Marxist perspectives, unsurprisingly, have voiced strong critiques: Work in informal economies is a form of super-exploitation. It lacks physical and social protections. And it contributes to capital accumulation by keeping down labor costs (Portes 1994). Though clearly divergent, both of these perspectives affirm the hegemonic place of capitalist labor. The former celebrates entrepreneurship. The latter decries the loss of formal wage labor employment.

These perspectives prevent us from seeing these alternative types of work as spaces of production—productive not only of material things, but like all work, productive of social relations, subjectivities, meaning, affect, pleasure, and pain. A vast literature on the history of capitalism documents all that wage labor has produced: a particular time sense, the nuclear family, the category of leisure, gendered divisions of labor, domestic and public spheres, certain forms of citizenship, formal education, a class

structure, class identities, social inequalities. The list goes on. Such inquiries might be asked of work outside formal wage labor relations. This would entail seeing informal economies, as well as the “no-go zones” of cities in which they often occur, as spaces of creativity in which self and social world are co-fashioned. I do not aim to romanticize work in informal economies by taking this approach. The creation of a social world includes the creation of power inequalities and structures of domination. Rather, I suggest that this approach opens up new avenues of research. It begs for ethnographic attention to the cultural practices and social relations that constitute spaces of production outside wage labor employment.

I have come to see the work of catadores as the creation of a way of life, a way of being and acting in the world. In many ways, this is what subjectivity has come to mean in anthropology: “a strategy of existence” or “arts of living” (Biehl and Moran-Thomas 2009:270; 282) within and despite the workings of power. Though the study of subjectivity has generated much writing and discussion in recent years in medical anthropology, political anthropology, and the anthropology of social suffering, this concern has rarely been taken up in studies of work, urban poverty, or economic anthropology more broadly. Concern for the economic survival of urban poor and the urgency to denounce structures of inequality have perhaps led to an overemphasis on the economic at the expense of other dimensions of human experience, including self-conception, affect, and desire. I understand the anarchic spirit of catadores as a particular kind of subjectivity, created through their experience of work outside wage labor relations and ultimately shaping their larger life projects. This is an orientation to life, a style of life, an understanding of “what life is for” (274). It responds to the question

posed by João Biehl, Bryon Good, and Arthur Kleinman in their introductory essay to subjectivity and anthropology: “How, under quite new conditions, do people value life and relationships and ‘enact the possibilities they envision?’ (Rosen 2003:x) for themselves and for others?” (2007:8).

On a Thursday morning, a few weeks before I was due to leave the field, a catador died collecting. The accident happened on the day that I was scheduled to present my research to Jorge and the waste management staff at the entrance to the dump. I knew something was wrong when I arrived. The receptionist seemed nervous when I entered. She told me that Jorge had just left the offices to go to the dump, that there had been an accident. I could wait if I liked, she said, and so I sat down in one of the four chairs in the tiny entrance and pulled a battered magazine off the counter: recaps of soap operas from several months ago. I flipped through the pages absent-mindedly anyway, wondering what had happened, worrying about who could be involved. A half hour later, the phone rang.

The receptionist said nothing, only listened, and then hung up the receiver.

A catador had died. Hit and killed by a tractor. I dropped the magazine. Startled. I knew that this happened. How many times I had heard the same stories, told and retold? How many times catadores had pointed to scars.? I knew. But still...

I asked, but the receptionist did not know the name of the catador. I could tell that she was also upset by the news.

“I know that many of them need to be there,” she said, “but many are just complacent, they are used to being there, used to the easy money...”

I said nothing. What could I say? I picked up another magazine, this one with a cover story about medical tourism and plastic surgery. Photos of patients recovering from their surgeries on Rio's beaches. I put down the magazine and stared at the clock.

About ten minutes later an ambulance drove by the office. We waited. Another half hour passed and the ambulance drove by again. Its sirens were silent.

When Jorge eventually arrived to the office, he told me straightaway:

"Look. A catador died today."

I know.

"This is why I did not want you collecting there. This is why we can't have catadores collecting on the landfill. Do you understand now?"

When I tell others about my research, the most common response I receive is that people should not be picking through garbage. What about the smell? Isn't it dangerous? Is there a lot of disease? Embedded in these responses is the idea that the dump—or more precisely, the presence of human beings collecting atop the dump—is a problem. Many people have asked me what can be done about it. One person asked what I would tell a social worker. Jorge wanted to know what could be done about catadores when the dump closed. Clearly, one cannot allow catadores to collect on the new sanitary landfill, he told me. Clearly not.

But there is a way in which defining certain social worlds only in terms of a problem, no matter how destitute or violent, precludes all other questions and possibilities. It ends the story before it begins. It fails to listen to the human experiences and meanings that are made in these worlds or allow for different life projects—lives

forged in oppressive conditions of urban poverty. Anthropology has always been about understanding others on their own terms. This includes allowing others to be as they are, allowing for the existence of the dump in Jardim Gramacho and of the hard work of catadores who reclaim what the world has rejected.

I began this dissertation with the tension, felt and lived by catadores, between the dump as “pure suffering” and the dump as “liberation.” These two dimensions of experience, in the work of catadores, cannot be understood one apart from the other. To look only at the side of liberation is to ignore the gross inequalities and structural violence that first located the dump in the peripheral neighborhood of Jardim Gramacho and then transformed this waste disposal site into a workplace for thousands of Rio’s poor from across the metropolitan area. It also misses the acts of witnessing by catadores, the ways catadores recognize and testify to the dangers of the dump and to the pain endured in their labor and in their fuller lives. But this side of pure suffering makes the side of liberation all that more meaningful. Catadores’ decisions to pick up a burlap sack and hop a truck to the top of the dump, knowing full well what is at stake, challenge us to consider other ontologies, moralities, desires, and politics that unsettle dominant capitalist conceptions of work and of what, within particular conditions, constitutes ‘the good life.’ To take seriously this tension between suffering and liberation means taking seriously the words of Dona Janira, a frail but bold seventy-year-old catadora who had worked in Jardim Gramacho for over thirty years when I first met her and who has since passed away:

“The rampa is my life and I like it there. I don’t like to be ordered around and I don’t like to order others around. I like to collect.”

GLOSSARY

Abençoado blessed

ACAMJG (*Associação dos Catadores do Aterro Metropolitano do Jardim Gramacho*)
The Association of Catadores in Jardim Gramacho

Asfalto pavement, slang for part of city where middle and upper classes live

Aterro landfill

Bandido bandit, gang member, criminal

Banlieue poor neighborhood in the outlying areas of a city in France

Bairro neighborhood

Banquinho raised table where recyclables are sorted

Barraca small bar, store, or stand selling an assortment of goods

Barraco shack

Bloco an organized *carnaval* group that parades through the streets

Boca de fumo literally, “mouth of smoke,” area where drugs are sold

Brincar to play, esp. in sense of folly, child’s play

Burrinho sem rabo a large cart pushed by catadores to transport collected recyclables

Caçamba trailer or large container that can be detached from a truck

Cachaça sugarcane liquor

Caipirinha a mixed drink made with sugarcane liquor (*cacheça*), limes, and sugar

Camarote a luxury viewing area for *carnaval* parades

Carioca a person from Rio de Janeiro

Carteira assinada a worker passbook that keeps record of all current and past employment

Catador someone who retrieves recyclables from garbage and sells them for a living

Choque de ordem literally, “shock of order,” a municipal crack-down on unlicensed vendors and other illegal uses of urban space

Churrascaria restaurant serving barbecue

Comando Vermelho Red Command, a drug trafficking gang in Rio de Janeiro

COMLURB (Companhia Municipal de Limpeza Urbana) Rio de Janeiro’s cleaning and waste management company, owner of the “Metropolitan Landfill of Gramacho”

Curtir to enjoy, like very much

Deposista scrap dealer

Depósito scrap yard

Favela urban shantytown

Faxineira maid who works by the day

Funk a genre of music popular in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas

Galpão large shed

Guarda municipal municipal police

LIESA (Liga Independente das Escolas de Samba do Rio de Janeiro) league of samba schools in Rio de Janeiro

Lixão garbage dump

Lixo garbage

Luta struggle, fight

Malandro scoundrel, rascal, vagrant

Maldiçoado cursed

Mangue mangrove swamp

Marginal (marginais) marginal, term often referring to urban poor with negative connotations of criminality, drug use, or homelessness

Materiais recicláveis recyclable materials

Moradores residents; slang in Jardim Gramacho for catadores who effectively live on the dump

Morro hillside, slang for favela in Rio de Janeiro

MNCR (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis) Brazil's National Movement of Catadores of Recyclable Materials

Novato novice

Pagode informal singing and dancing, popular party, usually involving *samba*

Panela cooking pot

Papeleiro other term for catador, common in the south of Brazil

Pensão boarding house

PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) type of plastic found in 2-liter bottles

Petrobras Partly state-owned oil and energy company in Brazil

Piscinão de Ramos large beach and pool in the North Zone of Rio, considered to be “the beach of the poor”

Podrão food retrieved from the garbage

Pólo the area where the Association of Catadores operates its cooperative

Portaria the entrance to the dump

Prefeitura city government, city hall

Puro sofrimento pure suffering

Quentinha a purchased lunch that comes in a container made of aluminum to keep the meal hot

Rampa slang in Jardim Gramacho for dump, area where waste is being unloaded

Rampão area where eighteen-wheeler trucks unload on the dump

Rampinha smaller area where compactor trucks unload on the dump

Rapa municipal police who confiscate the goods of unlicensed street vendors

Sambódromo samba stadium in Rio de Janeiro

Saudades memory invoking feelings of longing, sadness, and nostalgia

Travesti drag-queen

Trio elétrico electric band on motorized float parading during *carnaval*

Truta partner on the dump with whom one collects and divides earnings

Viciado addict

Xepeiro beggar, term used in the past to refer to a catador

Zoar to goof off, make fun of, joke around

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