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# To Love To Survive: Culture and Maternal Sentiment in Brazil

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# **To Love and To Survive: Culture and Maternal Sentiment in Brazil**

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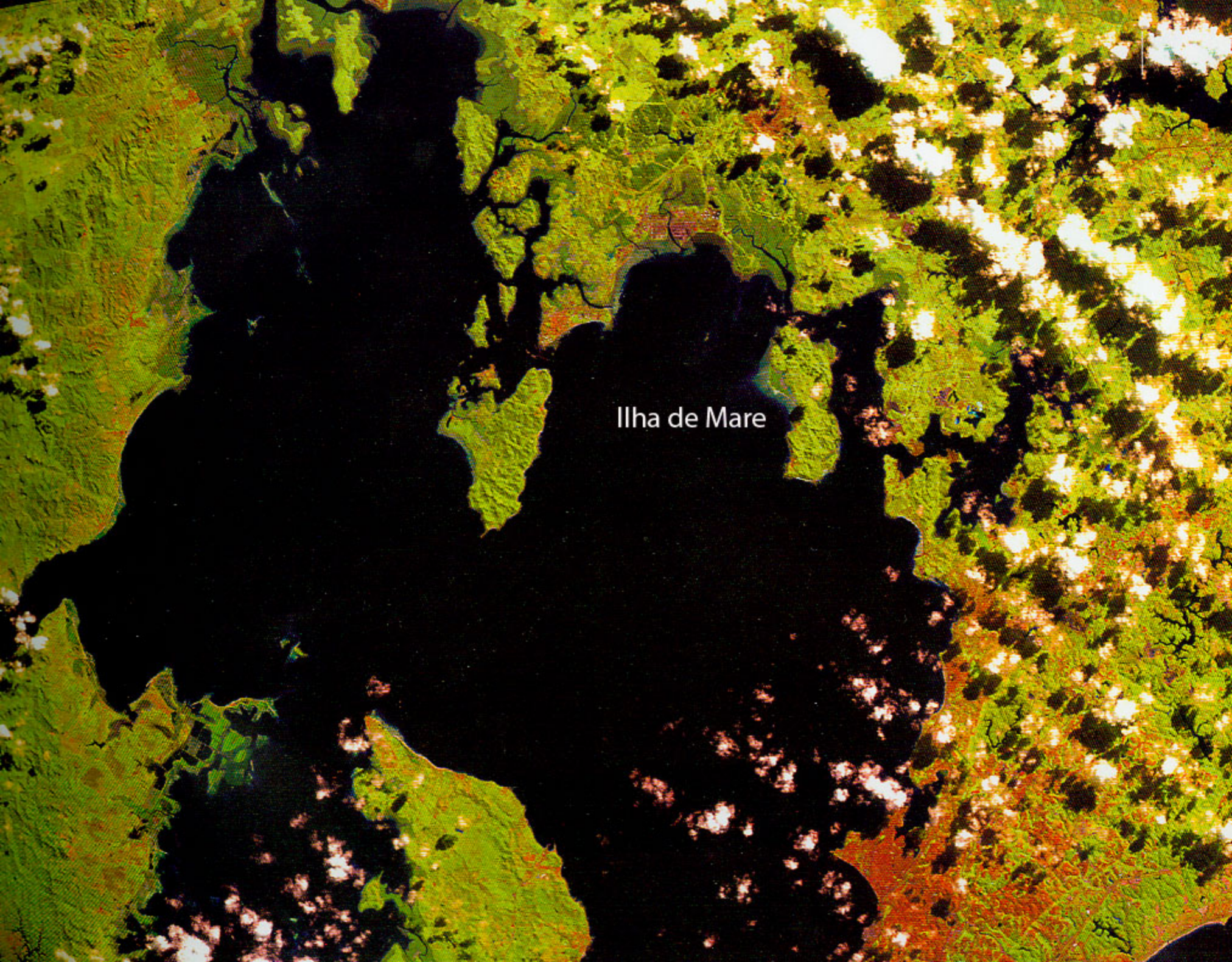
This paper examines the cultural construction of maternal sentiment on Ilha de Maré, and attempts to describe the social reality of mothers on the island; the social conditions in which they live, their work, her kinship networks, and the ways in which they define motherhood. I will attempt to portray a mother's love as defined by a *marezeira* (woman of Ilha de Maré); to illustrate how maternal sentiment manifests itself for a woman facing scarcity and multiple jobs under difficult working conditions, and for whom, no matter how poor, young, or overworked, the responsibility of loving, educating, feeding, and maintaining healthy children is assigned to her by the community in which she lives. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, in her ethnography *Death Without Weeping*, also studies maternal sentiment in Alto do Cruzeiro, a favela community in the state of Pernambuco. She determines that as a consequence of extreme conditions of scarcity, hunger, and infant mortality, *maternal indifference* and *mortal neglect* became patterns of nurturing in this small community. Drawing from her interest in maternal sentiment, this study moves beyond the labels constructed by Scheper-Hughes and conceptualizes “motherhood” as a public rather than private element—something that encompasses groups of women and other members of the community rather than one single woman. The paper begins by introducing the reader to Ilha de Maré and then leads the reader into a theoretical discussion of the cultural construction of sentiment and motherhood, while also summarizing Nancy Scheper-Hughes methodologies and conclusions. After explaining my own field methods and research questions, the body of the essay describes women's work in Praia Grande—from work in the “domestic sphere” to collecting shellfish along the bay. The paper ends by discussing the notion of maternal sentiment in the words of the women of Praia Grande. What follows is a discussion, which neither romanticizes motherhood nor isolates women as solely responsible for constructing maternal sentiment, but rather describes a purposeful kinship system of family, friends, and female role models and community leaders involved in the lives and work of *marezeiras*. Thus, the responsibilities of love, child-care, and even healthcare are distributed throughout the social structure in which women live.



EPRESA  
EDRA DO  
CAVALO







Ilha de Mare



## **Introduction**

May 9, 2004

*It was my first day “in the field.” I woke up early to start forming my interview schedule and to go visit the homes of different women I wanted to interview. My “room” in the house was an area between Simone and Claudio’s bedroom that originally belonged to their youngest child, Bruna. It was a small area with two twin beds and no door, only a thin bed sheet that was put up to give me some privacy; so, it was easy to hear the crying. When I was done getting ready, I walked out to see Simone with a red face and swollen eyes. “Bom dia,” I said smiling. Simone gave me a broken smile and immediately lamented, “I can’t help you start your study today. Claudio’s aunt has passed away last night. She is being transported to Praia Grande from Salvador and as soon as the boat arrives we will begin the wake and prepare for the caminhada.” I can not recall my initial reaction, however, if I had known at that moment that people would be traveling from all over the island and Salvador and would soon fill the house and the streets surrounding the house to mourn the passing of Claudio’s aunt, I would have asked Simone to tell me what to do, what to say to people who didn’t know me (which was everyone), and whether I should participate in the caminhada. As I wandered around the house and outside listening to family and friends tell stories and recall the kindness of their mother, sister, aunt, and friend, I learned that Claudio’s aunt was a woman well-known and deeply loved by a wide range of people from all over the island. The day it was known that she had passed away the house was slowly filled with people and the street in front of the house was crowded with family, friends, family of friends, friends of friends, etc.—People from numerous townships of the island had walked to Praia Grande for the wake. I knew there were no roads on the island, which meant that people had probably traveled more than half an hour over algae, sharp seashells, and rocks trying to beat the rising waters of the bay just to be in Praia Grande before the caminhada. Mercadinhos were closed in the afternoon and afternoon and evening classes were cancelled so that everyone could attend her wake and burial. When the boat brought her body from Salvador, her coffin was placed in Jardim’s house (Jardim is one of her sisters, and her house is practically attached to our house). People were crying, some women were screaming, and some men needed to be helped out of Jardim’s house secured by other men. For her burial, Claudio’s aunt was carried half an hour to Santana followed by a tremendous crowd of people. The crowd walked over algae, sidestepped large holes, puddles, and rocks making its way along the small part of the bay that was not yet covered in water. An impressionable vision, this procession is called a caminhada (walk), and it is common to have a caminhada for any death in the community—some are larger than others and they do not always involve the majority of the community, depending on how well known the person was. We walked for about an hour to Santana where Claudio, Simone, Pedro, Jardim and others would bury their beloved in the only cemetery on the island.*

My research began in the personal and sentimental lives of *marezeiros* (residents of Ilha de Maré); I entered their lives at the same moment that a very important woman and mother was departing, and I was expected to show empathy and mourn—something that I would only learn after several weeks of living and trying to figure out how to study sentiment and culture on Ilha de Maré. I arrived on Ilha de Maré the same way all visitors and *marezeiros* do, on a small, crowded boat that left the port of São Tomé de Paripe a suburb of Salvador, Bahia, early the morning of Mother's Day. A twenty-one year old, undergraduate student studying development and social justice with the School for International Training (SIT), I was one of the first students in the program to ever conduct research on Maré, together with Claire Willey who was studying *Marezeiro* households at the same time I was there. An island off the coast of Bahia, Ilha de Maré has a growing population of about four thousand permanent residents divided into eight different townships, of which Praia Grande and Santana are the most populated. The island is a municipal district of the city of Salvador and is composed primarily of afro-descendents; more than 32 percent of *marezeiros* are black and still more than 57 percent are *parda*.<sup>1</sup> Like in many neighborhoods of Salvador, the families of Ilha de Maré live on low incomes; there is very little and precarious infrastructure, and certain basic services, such as running water, adequate transportation, health care, and education are scarce.

### **The Historical Context: Salvador and its Forgotten Ilha de Maré**

Stuart Schwartz writes of the tropical magnificence encountered in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Portuguese as they sailed into the Bay of All Saints. The city and port of Salvador controlled the bay but depended on the surrounding tropical lands for foodstuffs and other

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<sup>1</sup> *Parda* is directly translated as a mixture of two cultures, which can be black with white as is most common on Ilha de Maré, white with *indio* (Indigenous) called a *caboclo*, and more in the Amazon region of Brazil, black with *indio* known as *cafuso*.



agricultural products (Schwartz 1985:76). While the island of Itaparica, the largest island of Salvador, had a town and some *engenhos* (mills), most of the other, smaller surrounding islands, such as Ilha de Maré, were used as sources of firewood, cane, and foodstuffs (1985:76). The commercial and later industrial, as well as the religious history of Salvador, thus, progressed as sugar and tobacco, and various religious sects of Jesuits, Franciscans, Benedictines, and Carmelites transformed the social, economic, and religious life of the city and state. Today, Salvador is a major commercial and historical center that attracts hundreds of European and American tourists, and like many major cities, is largely increasing in its service sector. Ilha de Maré, however, has remained a neglected municipal district of Salvador, having lost much of its attractiveness as a source foodstuffs and other subsistence resources during colonial times. The majority of the residents of Ilha de Maré are descendents of Africans primarily from the Yoruba Nation of present day Nigeria and Benin, as well as from Angola. In fact, most of the eight *Terreiros de Candomblé*<sup>2</sup> are of the Nation of Angola. As there were no *engenhos* or even slave plantations on Maré, many of these African ancestors were runaway slaves who escaped from the Salvador mainland to Maré, others jumped from slave ships in route to Salvador ports. Today, Maré is catalogued as one of the 743 officially recognized quilombos<sup>3</sup> registered by the *Fundação Cultural Palmares*, a faction of the Ministry of Culture in Brazil.<sup>4</sup> The residents of Maré receive very few, if any, government services from Salvador, such as basic health services, primary schools, and monies for infrastructure, conditions which tend to be characteristic of most

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<sup>2</sup> African shrines

<sup>3</sup> Actually called "*Quilombola*" communities.

<sup>4</sup> Fundação Cultural Palmares. <http://www.palmares.gov.br/>.

A modern quilombo is a community composed of the descendents of African slaves who either fled from slavery, acquired their freedom, or were emancipated. In most of these communities residents do not possess official ownership or titles to the land. In fact, according to the Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA), currently in only 73 of the 743 registered quilombos in Brazil do residents own titles to the land.

quilombo communities throughout Brazil<sup>5</sup>, and which contributed to Ilha de Maré's classification as a quilombo. Despite these serious social concerns, Ilha de Maré has maintained much of its pre-colonial beauty; it is considered one of Brazil's Ecological Reserves and a tropical paradise. Protected within the Bay of All Saints, Ilha de Maré is rich in biodiversity seen largely in its abundant mangroves and Atlantic flora<sup>6</sup>. Most of the arable land is useful for cultivating coconut, Palm trees, mango, banana, sugar cane, various roots including manioc and *macaxeira* or *aimpim*, and other fruits such as *pinha*, *acerola*, and *genipapo*.<sup>7</sup> The surrounding coast is Ilha de Maré's most valuable resource. The lands along the coast are often, after the tide recedes, rich *mangues* (saltwater swamps) (1985: 77), and the bay provides various types of fish, shellfish, and crab—each prime sources of income for *marezeiros*. It is important, then, to recognize the value of the bay for the every day lives and autonomous existence of *marezeiros*. “Water dominate[s] [Ilha de Maré]. Everywhere it penetrate[s] and control[s] the rhythm and organization of human activity” (1985: 77). We will see throughout this paper that everything from work to childcare depends on the maré. It is where women go to work and collect shellfish for income. The maré also separates townships and can restrict movement during certain hours of the day or even entire weeks. Altogether, the extraction of natural resources from Ilha de Maré for colonial commerce and the history of its population have largely set the stage for the present socio-economic status and social concerns of Maré.

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<sup>5</sup> A description of *quilombola* communities given by the World Bank Group's Latin America project division states, “These people of African descent have maintained socio-cultural distinctiveness in the practice of their unique life-styles and sharing of a common territory. Living primarily from subsistence agriculture and fishing, they have largely remained marginalized from the larger society, are extremely poor, and have had little to no access to health, education, land regularization or other services” (World Bank Group 2004).

<http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/external/lac/lac.nsf/0/3cf6c2f763f6f19c85256a6400651192?OpenDocument>

<sup>6</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.

<sup>7</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.

## **A Modern *Quilombo*: Social and Economic Concerns on Maré**

Ilha de Maré has little and precarious infrastructure. When my colleague and I first arrived on Maré we were fortunate that the bay was high enough so that when we neared the island we were met by a smaller boat, which carried us from our boat to the island. At least that time we did not have to descend in the water and carry our luggage on our heads to land. One of the main problems in traveling to and from the island is transportation. There is only one port in one township of the island, Botelho;<sup>8</sup> thus, when people travel to any other township they usually have to descend from the boat directly into the water, and depending on where the tide is at that time of day, either walk or wade through the water to shore. In certain areas of the island, such as in Praia Grande and Santana, if the tide is high enough a boat can disembark close to shore so that people can jump off directly onto land; often, there also are smaller boats or canoes that can carry passengers from the boat to shore. Small rafts or canoes keep people dry but are not safe or convenient for all passengers. Because the boat cannot be kept completely still and because it is often filled to its capacity with passengers, people must secure themselves well so as not to fall into the water while jumping onto shore. The situation is further complicated for children, pregnant women, and sick passengers. Other problems regarding transportation have to do with movement within the island. There are no roads or spaces for cars, bicycles, or even horses on the island; therefore, most people walk everywhere including between townships—distances that are half an hour or more depending on the township and depending on the maré. If the tide is low, people walk over rocks, mud, and algae, and around holes. If the tide is high, people walk through these same obstacles only through water, and again the situation is more complicated for certain people. Further still, some electricity has only been available to certain parts of the island for little less than twenty years, thus much of the maré remains unlit making it nearly impossible

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<sup>8</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.



to see anything when walking between towns at night. Some, although very few, residents own some forms of transportation, such as horses, mules or bicycles. Over all, the lack of transportation and precarious infrastructure within the island makes any exchange in information, trade and commerce, and other resources, among the peoples of different townships very difficult, especially when the only clinic and cemetery for the entire island are located in one township.

Briefly, certain basic services were only installed in some townships on the island within the last couple of decades. Electricity was the first to arrive on the island in August of 1985. Running water was installed 14 years later in March of 1999 in every township except for Caquende, and telephone services arrived two years later in August of 2001.<sup>9</sup> Running water, however, continues to be a problem and often an added labor for most residents. Several days during the week tap water will be shut off leaving many households with no water, and in which case people must go out early in the morning to bring back buckets of water from community wells. Some homes are located near wells, but for others young men and women travel much further carrying buckets of water back on their heads. Many households have large reserve tanks in their homes—tubs of water they maintain full at all times—saving them a lot of time and labor when the water is not running; however, these tend to be expensive and so only certain people can afford them. Regardless of how often water does or does not run during a given month, residents with water service still must pay their water bill for a full month of water. Although water is available, in some form, for all residents on the island, it continues to be an issue of concern, frustration, and labor for most residents, especially because in one week the water may

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<sup>9</sup> This information was provided by Altamira Moraes de Paula, resident of Ilha de Maré and minister of the Catholic Church in Praia Grande.

be working only two days or none at all. *Marezeiros* do not know when they will have running water, nor for how long the municipality will maintain the water turned on.

Other basic services that have received less attention are sewage maintenance and garbage collection. Except in some areas where constructed, cement canals direct waste water out into the bay, waste water from showering, cleaning, etc. flows freely and relatively uncontained throughout the streets. Most importantly, this waste is out in the open exposing many children, who play out in the streets bare foot, to numerous infections and illnesses. Residents of the island often throw out garbage directly into the bay or on the ground. Garbage is collected weekly from each township, however it has to be carried through the water into a boat to take to Salvador<sup>10</sup>—a process that is often unorganized and environmentally harmful.

Some of the primary social issues facing *marezeiros* involve education, medical services, and stable employment with living wages. Today, the majority of the population has up to an eighth grade education, and only some townships have at least grade schools for students up to fourth grade.<sup>11</sup> Some grade schools in Praia Grande offer night classes for adults who want to complete or re-do their elementary education through eighth grade. One school in Praia Grande even has English and Spanish classes in the evenings. Because there are only primary schools on the island, most other students have to travel every morning at 6A.M. to schools in São Tomé de Paripe and other areas of Salvador, as well as to Candeias, and Madre de Deus. Walking out of their houses every morning, students have to be sure to carry their sandals and roll up their pants in order to walk through the water to get on the boat. There they have to pay to take the boat to São Tomé, and if their school is located further into Salvador, they have to pay another fee for

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<sup>10</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.

<sup>11</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.

the bus then pay the same fees to return home. Thus, even trips to school each day are complicated and become costly.

In terms of employment, people's incomes tend to be low and are often unstable, and most families live from at least two incomes. *Marezeiros* live primarily from fishing and shellfish collection from agriculture (banana, sugar cane, *cana brava* (a type of wild cane), etc.), and from *artesanato* or crafts (*cesta*, *muzuá*, large baskets to hold fish, *balaio*, large market baskets, and other forms of basket weaving and crafts, also *esteiras* (straw-woven mats) and *renda de bilros* or crochet); all economic activities that continue to be an important source of income since colonial times.<sup>12</sup> Although these jobs are available to most men and women on the island, they are largely undervalued and consequently underpaid—an issue that will become apparent as the essay progresses and describes the jobs and working conditions of women in Praia Grande.

Finally, medical services present a serious problem for *marezeiros* because they are practically nonexistent on the island. There is only one clinic for the entire island located in Santana. The clinic is run daily from 9A.M. until noon by a medical assistant, and only has resources to do very basic check ups, such as checking blood pressure or blood sugar. There is only a doctor present on the island on Fridays for about two hours between 9:30 or 10:00A.M. and noon. For serious illnesses or emergencies people must secure a boat and travel to Salvador. The Brazilian constitution guarantees basic health care and medical services for all Brazilians; for Ilha de Maré to be up to par with the basic rights provided under the constitution, the Brazilian government would need to construct a health post in each of the major townships of Maré, and install the *Programma de Saúde da Família* (Brazil's nation-wide family health program) with at least three teams of medical staff, including resident doctors, nurses and health

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<sup>12</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, "Relatorio de Ilha de Maré," Salvador, Bahia.



agents on Maré to provide services for the entire island.<sup>13</sup> Health agents or *agentes de saude* are a very important part of the health care hierarchy in Brazil, and because Maré lacks significant social resources, the need for more health agents and doctors is one of the most important priorities of Maré communities. While many forms of natural remedies are still used by *marezeiros*, including various teas and spiritual cleanings performed by local *rezadeiras*, doctors, nurses, and especially health agents, are still held in authority by most residents. Unfortunately, reaching these health-care workers requires obtaining and often paying for a boat to Salvador, or waiting until the end of the week to see the doctor in Santana, where, according to the nurse, every week a long line of mostly women and children wait to see the doctor during her two hour visit. The lack of adequate healthcare on the island, especially in regard to prenatal and pediatric care, is a problem that was discussed in every interview conducted, and which will become more apparent as the paper progresses.

While the different townships of Ilha de Maré as a whole share some geographical, structural, and social similarities, every-day social and cultural practices, especially in regard to work and family, as well as the level of resources vary from township to township. Although this paper relates specifically to the community of Praia Grande, the final product of this research will focus primarily, though not exclusively, on mothers and other females from each of the different townships, not just one. Part of the purpose is to describe the various forms of work that women perform and the conditions under which they work. In doing so, I hope to understand how a mother's love is constructed and played out on an island with serious social concerns and where women no matter how poor, young, or overworked, maintain the responsibilities of loving, educating, feeding, and raising clean and healthy children. This discussion does not romanticize motherhood nor does it isolate women as solely responsible for constructing

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<sup>13</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, "Relatorio de Ilha de Maré," Salvador, Bahia.

maternal sentiment, a term which I use to describe a social attitude rather than individual sentiment. In this paper, the responsibilities of maternal sentiment and child-care are distributed throughout the social structure in which women live.

### **Problemizing Motherhood: Maternal Sentiment and Western Science**

Among the definitions with implicit ethnocentric assumptions universally applied by Western feminists and social scientists are those of motherhood, marriage, and the family (Amadiume 1987: 6). The woman as a unit of analysis, as a social category, is often studied in terms of her work, her possession, or lack thereof, power, and/or her capability of controlling the factors of production. Furthermore, she is often the victim of a universal patriarchal system where her social role, because it is confined to the so-called “domestic sphere,” is undervalued and incompatible with social and individual progress or development. In response to this universal paradigm of women’s roles in the social order, Karen Sacks appropriately states, “...women’s social relations are neither universally dependent nor universally subordinate; women have been making culture, political decisions, and babies simultaneously and without structural conflicts in all parts of the world” (1979: 6). Just as there is no single model of feminism, there is also no single model of patriarchy, poverty, or oppression. There are major problems with the ways in which poor women from developing countries are studied, conceptualized, and problematized by Western social science and feminists. The central thesis of this essay is the conceptualization of the social role of the “mother” and the cultural construction of maternal sentiment as it relates to the survival of poor mothers and their children on the island of Maré. Nancy Scheper-Hughes provides one of the best-known studies of how socio-economic condition shapes maternal sentiment. She demonstrates how the emotions of a mother are

constructed, internalized, and played out in Alto do Cruzeiro, a favela<sup>14</sup> community in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil. Scheper-Hughes uses a political and economic model for interpreting the emotions of mothers in this particular favela community that focuses on the economic situation in which women live. She concludes that “overwhelming economic and cultural constraints” as well as high expectancy of child death produce patterns of nurturing that she calls “maternal indifference and mortal neglect.” The importance of Scheper-Hughes’ ethnography is that it introduces the impact of socio-economic conditions in constructing and/or de-constructing emotions within a community. Thus, the emotions of poor and socially marginalized mothers are included in the model of “universal” motherhood and maternity. The problem is that Scheper-Hughes focuses so strongly on socio-economic conditions that she ends up reducing the emotions and destiny of Alto women—and consequently all poor women and their children—to their economic situation. Scheper-Hughes depicts desperately poor, urban women as trapped by their situation—a representation that borders on structural determinism, and which primarily affects poor women of color, as they are a majority in favelas. Scheper-Hughes’ argument is feminist and Foucauldian in the sense that emotions are places where even the most minute and local social practices mirror the large-scale organization of power.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the apparent indifference of Alto mothers toward the lives and deaths of some of their infants is continuous with, and a byproduct of, “the official bureaucratic indifference of local agents of church and the state to the problem of child mortality in northeastern Brazil” (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 276). In contrast, this paper uses a socio-cultural model, which examines the human relationships and

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<sup>14</sup> Favela communities share important socio-economic characteristics with *quilombola* communities in that they are generally very poor, have little, if any access to health care, an adequate food supply, clean water, or formal education, and are often marginal communities largely ignored by the greater political and economic structures within Brazil. Favela’s, however, are also defined as urban areas where as *quilombola* communities exist in urban as well as rural regions. Ilha de Maré is an interesting and unique case in that the island combines important rural and urban characteristics.

<sup>15</sup> Lutz, Catherine, 1988, Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory, University of Chicago Press: Chicago.



cultural knowledge of poor women. Rather than reducing a mother's sentiment toward her children to her economic condition, this paper will attempt to bring forth the ways in which poor women retain their sense of agency and community, as well as their sense of freedom to have an impact on their situation, despite deprivation. Altogether, the underlying objective of this paper is to adhere to a socio-cultural model in representing the lived experiences of the women of Maré. In doing so, I must first set out certain cultural assumptions which will provide an important foundation on which to discuss the everyday activities of *marezeiras*, as well as to interpret the meaning of these activities in relation to motherhood, maternal sentiment, and the effects of poverty. Psychologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists often assume that "all humans are endowed with a self-consciousness of mind and body, with an internal body image, and with... a sense of body self-awareness, of mind/body integration and of being in the world as separate and apart from other human beings" (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987: 14). It is, however, important to expand this assumption and highlight the fact that selves can be experienced differently in non-Western cultures. In the case of Ilha de Maré, it is the black African female self-image that is relevant for most women. Although, like with any other, there are different aspects of this self-image, there are certain recurring themes that come up in many published life histories of African women, and which are also evident on Maré. One of these is the idea of the self in relation to the group. A critical component of the black female self is her tie to her community, or what Nellie McKay calls a "community identity" (Etter-Lewis 1991: 53). In her study of gender and sex in indigenous Nnobi society, Ife Amadiume noted that:

"Women organized themselves in their capacity as wives and mothers and sought structural power on that basis. As wives and mothers, they had access to essential economic resources—land and market. Although, the material situation of women has changed, women still cling to their social and cultural statue as mothers, and seek power in that capacity..."(1987: 162).

Although, the women of Nnobi, Nigeria have a different social and political history from the women of Maré, Amadiume's analysis is relevant in that it describes a different way by which West-African women and mothers might identify themselves in relation to their kin and to the social role of the mother. Mothers, as well as other women, and men on Ilha de Maré are all prominent and critical in the survival and day-to-day existence of children. In fact, the parental model on Maré encompasses much more than just the roles of mother and father. It is a division of labor between maternal and paternal kin, and which necessarily includes the conscious assistance of friends and other community members (Oyewùmí 1997: 74). Therefore, in this paper the concept of motherhood is defined as a social role, and as one of the most important institutions on Maré. Motherhood and mother love are thus, public and defined as the everyday activities that women perform to survive.

### **An Anthropological Lens: Field Methods**

I conducted this research throughout a period of three weeks in which I lived with Simone, Claudio, and their young daughter Bruna in Praia Grande. Because I arrived into the community on a very important day of mourning for much of the community, my visit was quickly known by many people, especially community leaders who had sentimental ties with the deceased and who had seen me walking in the *caminhada*. The actual afternoon I arrived, and after getting to know my new family, I sat down with Simone and Claudio and constructed my interview questions. I told them what I wanted to know and they helped me phrase my questions in a form that most *marezeiros* would understand. I intended to conduct formal interviews and participate in many informal conversations, so Simone helped me construct a list of potential "interviewees" whose homes we planned to visit together. In the beginning Simone accompanied me to each interview and helped clarify statements or re-word my questions if they were not

clear. Although I did not need her to translate, her clarification ensured that I understood certain cultural definitions and practices, or the significance of certain things. As is natural when most people are asked to talk about their day to day lives, *marezeiras* would give me a very basic account of their average activities in a day without explaining or giving too many details, assuming these activities were so “average” and “basic” that I must have already known all about them and what they meant. During home visits and interviews I observed the general physical conditions of newborn and young children and of mothers. I also noted the different ways in which women interacted with other women, men, and children as they came by or joined in on the interview. I interviewed thirteen mothers and spoke with several women and men. The ages of the mothers interviewed ranged widely from 17 to 83; this was so that I could see how patterns of nurturing had changed and are changing with new generations of women, as well as to see what types lessons, values, and responsibilities related to motherhood were passed down through generations. Most mothers identified themselves as *marisqueiras* (shellfish collectors) and *lavradoras* (female laborers), and all identified as *domésticas*<sup>16</sup> in addition to their other jobs. I also interviewed a *rezadeira* (faith healer) who was also one of the local *Mães de Santo*<sup>17</sup> of the *Terreiro de Oxossi* and who had raised nine children. I interviewed one of the two community health agents in Praia Grande who was also a mother of three, and finally, I interviewed the medical assistant of the clinic in Santana. Interviews lasted between one hour and three hours each, and consisted of open-ended questions designed to allow for individual definitions of motherhood and maternal sentiment. In addition to home visits and interviews, I also, with the help of Simone and her contacts, organized a discussion group. The group was

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<sup>16</sup> Most women from Praia Grande declared themselves, first-and-foremost, as *domésticas* or domestics even when they were actively engaged in fishing, shellfish collection, basket weaving or other forms economic or income-generating activities. (Miranda 2002: 11).

<sup>17</sup> Translated as a mother of saints, there is also a *Pai de Santo* or father of saints; these are powerful, highly influential, and highly respected spiritual leaders of *terreiros* or churches of Candomblé.

composed of thirteen different mothers from the ones already interviewed, except for the health agent who also participated, and of ages ranging from 20 to 61. I began the group discussion by asking a series of basic questions regarding the work and the composition of the families of these mothers. As the discussion progressed, I saw that most women were interested and more so demanding to talk about the responsibilities of mothers and the characteristics of a neglectful mother, so I allowed the discussion to stay focused on this topic for the rest of the time. The group discussed and debated for more than three hours and then cooled down by eating cake and drinking coffee that Simone prepared for the reunion. The group was ideal in developing a sense of the controversy and disagreement surrounding ideas about maternal neglect, indifference, and maternal sentiment. In addition to all of these dialogues, I also participated in *mariscagem* and other daily activities of *marezeiras*. Altogether, a great deal of my rapport and friendship ties were made through informal conversations; walking down the streets daily, stopping in houses of people I had either interviewed or met through interviews, or who were family members of people with which I had spoken. Because of the goals of this research, one of the biggest limitations of this project was time. The time in the field was three weeks and three days. In order to develop a more profound understanding of emotion and how it is manifested culturally, I would need more time in the field to establish more intimate relationships and allow people to become used to me as part of the community rather than an outsider. Apart from this limitation, this research was able to collect a great deal of data that begins to construct a new paradigm for the conceptualization of maternal sentiment. Finally, I attempted to write and organize this narrative in a form that would give most significance to the voices and experiences of *marezeiros*. One of the greater difficulties of conducting this research and completing this monograph is that there is little if any written history of the people of Ilha de Maré; Maré has, in

many ways, been almost entirely abandoned and forgotten by its mainland, Salvador and the whole of Bahia. In this paper, I use a method of multi-vocality, which I have borrowed from Richard Price, used in his book *Alabi's World*. I have included significant amounts of raw material from my field notes and from transcribed recordings of interviews and conversations. In using this method, I intend to present, rather than represent, the life histories of *marezeiros*. Although, I do include some of my own interpretations and analysis, I clearly and consciously distinguish my voice from the words and definitions of *marezeiros*. Therefore, the reader is able to see for her/ his self the ways in which *marezeiros* form and express ideas about their community and ways of life. I only hope that this paper, in addition to expanding the global definition of motherhood, can also serve as a window through which others will see agency, activism, and more than survival, but rather life in a community that is only economically poor, Ilha de Maré.

### **Typeface**

The two voices in this paper appear in different typefaces in order to maintain their original forms:

- My own words, description, and analysis, as well as quotes from relevant literature are printed in Times New Roman.
- Words originally spoken by *marezeiros* in interviews and conversations are printed in Lucida Sans Unicode.
- *And text taken from reflections and notes in my own field journal and weekly logs is printed in Times New Roman Italics.*

### **1.) Vivendo da Maré: The Community of Praia Grande**

Looking out on Praia Grande from the Church of Nossa Senhora das Candeias, houses and a few *mercadinhos* (little markets) run all along and face the bay creating an initial mural of infrastructure that appears to end there. Other homes wind further back and into higher areas of the region on land that is mostly flora with dirt plots and winding paths cleared off for homes and small streets. Houses vary in shape and size, although most homes are made from different mixtures of sand, rock, limestone, cement, brick, and even tiny shells—most materials are transported to the island from Salvador. The roofs are made of *telha*, or ceramic-type shingles that are stacked over each other and allow air and light to flow into the house. Descending the stairs of the church of Nossa Senhora at 8A.M. and walking along side the bay, if the tide is low, women can be observed all along the beach bent over scrapping the ground and collecting hundreds of small shellfish into buckets, bags and baskets. There are also men out in canoes fishing and other women in the water catching different types of crab. Turning away from the bay, there are people sitting in front of their homes and on their porches conversing with neighbors and family, and others are carrying back bread for breakfast.

Early in the morning it is common to see men selling fresh bread out of carts going up and down the small paths that wind around and between homes. There are also men in orange jumpsuits from *LIMPURB* (Salvador city maintenance) sweeping the trash and sewage from the ground—sewage that is so penetrated into the dirt that even shoveling and digging cannot remove it completely. Most noticeably, early in the morning there are already men and women sitting out on stools in front of their homes, out on the street, on their porches, and in the entranceway of their houses. Some people are just chatting but most are cutting and cleaning *cana brava*, a type of wild cane used to make *muzuá*, *balaio* and other forms of baskets and



crafts, and are surrounded by mounds of cane shavings that stick to their bare arms and legs. Many people are already weaving baskets to sell in the big market of Salvador.

In Praia Grande the street is an extension of the home as most people begin their day by opening their front doors and walking outside, even before having breakfast. Praia Grande is the most populated region of Ilha de Maré with a population size of about 1600 permanent residents.<sup>18</sup> As can be seen on any day of the week, depending on the level of the tide, the people of Praia Grande live primarily from fishing, *mariscagem* or shellfish collection, and artisan crafts in *cestas* and *esteiras* (baskets and mats woven from wild cane). Some women supplement incomes from *mariscagem* and *balaio* by making *doce de banana*, a type of candy made from banana that is cooked and boiled with sugar and then wrapped in banana leaves, a unique candy and a true delicacy of Praia Grande. Although there are *Terreiros de Candomblé*<sup>19</sup> in Praia Grande, primarily of the Nation of Angola, most *marezeiros* call themselves Catholic, 69.3 percent of the entire island. In fact, *Nossa Senhora das Candeias*, which was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> century, is one of the most historically valuable landmarks in Praia Grande. During the month of May, the month of Mary, every Wednesday and Saturday *marezeiros*, mostly women, go to the church for the *ofício de Nossa Senhora* to pray and recite several Hail Marys. February 2<sup>nd</sup>, there is a big celebration for the day of *Nossa Senhora das Candeias*. Catholic images of Mary, St. Peter, St. George, St. Anthony, and others are present in the majority of homes and worn on bracelets and necklaces, as is often customary within Catholic communities. Recently there are increasing numbers of evangelical and protestant churches and converts in Praia Grande and throughout the island. It is important to note that many, though the exact amount is impossible to

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<sup>18</sup> According to a community-conducted census carried out in 2000. This information was provided by Altamira Moraes de Paula, resident of Ilha de Mare and minister of the Catholic Church in Praia Grande.

<sup>19</sup> Afro-Brazilian shrines

<sup>20</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.

quantify, *marezeiros* who call themselves Catholic also actively practice Candomblé. Praia Grande has one of the largest populations of black, Afro-Brazilians, of all of Maré; something that manifests itself in many of their celebrations, such as *samba de roda*<sup>21</sup> and festivals of Candomblé.

Eu so durmo de tarde se estiver doente

~Women of Praia Grande

## **2.) Within and Beyond the Domestic Sphere: Women's Work in Praia Grande**

### **Eu sou Domestica: Women's Work and the "Domestic Sphere"**

*Today is Sunday. Walking down the street of Beco on my way to bater um papo or chat with Dona Joana, I walk past several groups of men playing dominoes out in the street or sitting together at tables drinking beer and lounging. Women are nowhere to be found in these groups. Several women, including Dona Joana, are looking out to the street from their windows; some are sitting in doorways or directly in front of their homes with family and neighbors. Some women stand around together and dance to arrocha (a type of Bahian music and dance that is very popular on Ilha de Maré).*

There are so many men, I tell Jeffery, a 15 year-old marezeiro.  
It's like that. Wives and other women usually stay in their houses.

Women in Praia Grande are responsible for their homes. One of their most important jobs each day is making sure that there are three meals on the stove for their family and themselves. A *marezeira's* workday can be described as a un-interrupted cycle of work that begins as soon as

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<sup>21</sup> *Samba de roda* is a traditional form of samba danced in a group circle with people calling each other in and out of the circle to samba. Although the music can include percussion and other instruments, in Praia Grande people danced to the rhythm of clapping.

she wakes, pauses at night while she sleeps, then begins again the next morning. During each interview, I asked mothers to describe a normal day of work; most answered:

Olha, eu faço de tudo (I do everything), she laughed.

Acordo cedo as cinco horas, faço café da manhã e brigo com meus filhos para eles sair para o barco. Quando eles vão embora, arrumo a casa, lavo pratos, lavo roupa, e começo a preparar a comida para o almoço.

Most mothers wake up at 5A.M. to wake and feed their children before sending them off to the boat that will take them to school in São Tomé de Paripe; the boat leaves anywhere between 6:00 and 6:30A.M. depending on how many people are on board.

I have to make sure they eat, they have their sandals, their money for the boat, their pants rolled up, and that they don't arrive late to the boat!<sup>22</sup>

Mothers with younger children have to walk them to the local pre-school. This, however, largely depends on the maré, or the level of the tide that morning. If the tide is low earlier, between 6A.M. and 7A.M., then mothers that are *marisqueiras* have to take advantage of the low tide and go out to collect *marisco* before it rises again. Because young children do not start school until 8:30 or 9:00A.M., often *marisqueiras* have to leave their children sleeping and ask a neighbor, or more often other women in their family, such as mothers, mother-in-laws, or sisters, to come wake, give breakfast, and take their children to school. In this case, the levels of the tide on any given week would determine whether mothers were able to send their own children to school, or whether they would have to depend on other women to do this. While, much of a woman's interaction with her children may be limited by *mariscagem*, if she does not go out to the maré then she cannot help contribute to the family income and food supply. All marezeiros understand

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Maria, the health agent of Praia Grande, pg. 51.

this dynamic of the maré and, those who are able, do what they can to help make sure that children are not left alone and unattended.

Taking children to school, however, is only one part of what women do before lunch. Simone, my host mother, was a *marisqueira* but could only go out when Bruna, her four-year-old daughter, did not have school. While I was living with her family, Simone would wake up every morning to boil water and fill the shower bucket from the water reserve for Bruna's shower. Then, Simone boiled more water that she mixed with powdered milk for Bruna to drink with bread or *aimpim* (a type of root like manioc root). Simone braided Bruna's hair and dressed her in her prettiest little outfits every morning. Bruna always went to school showered, well dressed, and most importantly, wearing sandals or shoes. After visiting several mothers and observing the children of Praia Grande, I learned the importance of a child's physical appearance for how mothers are judged by other members of the community. Every mother and father with whom I spoke considered it shameful and neglectful for a mother to not properly clean and dress her children; this was considered a fundamental responsibility of being a mother. There were, however, different levels of dress that could be considered "proper." For example, many children, like many adults, walked around barefoot, and still others, little boys and girls, walked around wearing only shorts. This dress was at least partially acceptable because of the hot weather on the island. It became reproachable when, during times of heavy rains and cooler winds, children's chests were not covered and children still ran around barefoot; or if, in addition to being barefoot and partially-dressed, these children were consistently and very obviously dirty and unkempt. It is important, also, to distinguish Simone from other mothers in Praia Grande. Since Bruna began school, Simone was not going out to the maré; thus, she had more time to devote to keeping Bruna clean. In fact, Bruna took more showers than anyone else in the house,

often having up to five showers in one day. There is also a small level of stratification on Maré, so that some households receive slightly higher and more stable amounts of income than others. This stratification, though minimal compared to the dynamics of Salvador, added to the importance of appearance as a factor of good mothering. Married women, older women, women with some formal education, and women with access to televisions or who were able to regularly travel across the bay into Salvador, seemed to set the standard for all women on Maré.<sup>23</sup> Maria, the local health agent in Praia Grande, would pull children off of the streets during her home visits and send them to tell their mothers to give them a shirt and a pair of sandals. After fighting with Bruna to drink her milk and stop watching cartoons, Simone walked Bruna to school. Claudio, Simone's husband, helped some days but most days he woke up much earlier, made his coffee, and went outside to cut *cana brava* and weave baskets.

Deborah, a 20 year old mother and *marisqueira* with a six year old son, had very different and much more laborious mornings than Simone. Like many women, Deborah usually woke up at 5A.M. to go straight to the bay to collect *marisco*.<sup>24</sup> As her son was never awake at 5A.M., Deborah would often leave him at home where her mother-in-law, who lived directly across the street, would go over to wake him, make him breakfast, and take him to school. When she did not go out to collect *marisco*, Deborah received income from weaving baskets. This was only in the month of June when Northeast Brazil is celebrating São João in a month of Festas Juninas (June festivals). During this time, people who dance in these festivals buy a lot of baskets and so

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<sup>23</sup> Often, I thought of the *marezeira* as a “global” woman because she often imitated the clothing styles and fashions of television or those displayed in the shops of Salvador. Globalization also affects family dynamics on Maré and the social rules that define the “perfect” family. Claudio, Simone's husband, always complained that television in Bahia was dominated by Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo media, which always portrayed *Bahianos* (and all *nordestinos*) as lazy, poor, and uneducated. Television households often reflected the white, middle class Brazilian family with two children, a mother, and father. A model which not only impacts ideas about proper parenting on Maré, but is very far from the local family reality.

<sup>24</sup> Most often women go out very early to mariscar to avoid the strong sun, however, the time they go out always depends on the week and where the tide is during that time and on that day.

Deborah is hired to begin baskets for many sellers who supply baskets and hats to the *quadrilhas* or dance groups of *São João*. Even though she could stay home to do this work, she had to sit in one place all day and work in order to finish all the baskets she was commissioned to begin. Deborah is paid to weave the skeleton or bottom area of medium-sized baskets for other people who then finish them off. She begins seven-dozen baskets early in the morning and does not finish until midnight.

Isabel, a *marisqueira* with two adolescent sons, wakes up at 4A.M. to make breakfast for herself, her sons, and her husband, and to clean up the house. She wakes her sons and sends them to the boat before 6:30. She then goes out to the bay at 8A.M. everyday and returns home in time to make lunch for her family. Isabel described how her work used to be when her sons were younger and electricity had just arrived and there was still no running water.

**Eu tinha que fazer tudo com eles nos braços** (I had to do everything with them in my arms).<sup>25</sup>

Isabel would carry her sons with her up to the nearest well to sit and wait for the water to rise and the well to fill; then, she carried a bucket of water back on her head to make *mingau*<sup>26</sup> and milk for her sons. Because her husband worked in the city during her pregnancy and while her sons were still young, Isabel was able to stop collecting *marisco* and dedicate her time instead to making baskets until her sons were 10 years old when she went back to *mariscagem*. In the morning most mothers are out at the bay collecting *marisco*, other women are cutting *cana brava* or beginning to weave their baskets for the day. Depending on the level of the *maré*, many women would choose to go out to the *rosa*<sup>27</sup> to collect firewood for cooking the *marisco* of the

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Isabel, pg 67.

<sup>26</sup> A strong *mingau* is a highly nutritive soup/ drink made with corn or corn flour, *farinha* (manioc flour), wheat flour, milk, and cinnamon

<sup>27</sup> A type of small *fazenda* or plot of very rich land for planting all types of vegetables, fruits, roots, etc.



day before or what they expected to collect later that day. Women took advantage of their trips into the *rosa* to collect fruits, vegetables, roots (*aimpim* and *mandioca*), and leaves for daily meals. The women of Praia Grande worked in various types of jobs to help provide an income for their families; some women on the island, although fewer, were teachers, two were health agents, and many others made *doce de banana*, *geladinhos*,<sup>28</sup> and sewed *renda*.

One particular job that occupies women's "free" time is *escamando peixe* or de-scaling fish. *Marezeiros* consume primarily seafood; nearly ten percent of all women on the island formally declared themselves *marisqueiras* and about eight percent of all men formally declared themselves fishermen (although the actual number of men and women who collect *marisco* and who fish may be much higher). On days when the *maré* was appropriate for *jangada*<sup>29</sup> men would take their rafts and small boats out for hours and then return with large baskets and buckets filled with all kinds of fish. As there are no markets on *Maré* for selling fish, people would wait until they saw the fishermen returning from a *jangada* then buy the fish directly from their hands. Men, however, also kept apart fish for their own families. As soon as the men returned from a *jangada*, women had to take the fish and wash it, then immediately toss the fish into big vats filled with water, vinegar, and lime, and sit in the living room, stand in the kitchen, or sit outside on the porch with the vat of fish and a knife and scrape the scales off of each fish until they finished the entire catch of the day. I usually saw women de-scaling fish between noon and 2P.M. while they were also preparing a *tempero* for the beans and placing the rice on the stove. On days when a new pot of beans needed to be cooked, Simone would sit and sort through each bean tossing out all the dry or spoiled beans. Since families eat beans and rice everyday, women usually cooked large quantities on Sundays or Mondays to last for the entire week. Fish

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<sup>28</sup> Natural juice that has been frozen in small, cylinder bags—homemade frozen pops.

<sup>29</sup> Raft fishing. For more on raft Fishermen in Northeast Brazil see: Shepard Forman, *The Raft Fishermen: Tradition & Change in the Brazilian Economy*, Indiana University Press: London, 1970.

of all sorts, including ray and blowfish, take longer and are more work to prepare. Women are *escamando peixe* at different times of the day, depending on the time men return from a *jangada*, as well as on the amount of fish they bring in. Women de-scale anywhere from 50 or more fish every day. De-scaling fish takes so long, much like hand washing the entire family's clothes, that women often take "breaks" from de-scaling to do other things such as wash dishes, wash clothes, clean rooms in house, or make *lanches* (snacks) and coffee. Mothers with daughters that are seven and older have a great deal of help and can work faster. Girls are taught to de-scale fish very early, as early as nine years old. For women who have access to a refrigerator, de-scaling fish can be compared to making beans in the sense that it is something that is done regardless of whether the fish will be eaten that day or not.

On Maré, as in most of Brazil, lunch is the most important meal of the day; however, lunch is hardly a break for most mothers on Maré. Children that attend schools in São Tomé de Paripe do not receive food at school, and both mothers and fathers work all morning. The amount of cooking involved for lunch can depend on the day of the week. On a Monday there may be more cooking that needs to be done than on a Wednesday when there are already beans and rice prepared from earlier in the week. After lunch, women clean up the house again and wash all of the dishes from lunch. Women are always cleaning or organizing the house in addition to the other jobs they do during the day; house cleaning is a perpetual task. After lunch, a woman may throw a large mound of clothes into a tub of soapy water and let it soak while she does other things.

<sup>30</sup>*When I arrived to interview Isabel she had just finished lunch. I sat on a stool drinking coffee and eating some bread she served for me while she continued to do her work. I had gone out to work with her collecting marisco that morning, and Isabel had just begun to*

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<sup>30</sup> Journal entry, pg. 66

*cook the marisco from that morning on the fogão (an open fire, fed fire wood, and used to place a big iron pot for cooking marisco and other foods; these were used for all meals before gas stoves arrived on the island). While the marisco was cooking, Isabel was soaking her husband's uniforms and scrubbing some other clothes. After each piece of clothing, or so, she would walk over to the sink and wash dishes or she would get the broom and either sweep the ground outside or the floor in the house.*

For most women, “housework” is a mixture of various jobs and something they do until they go to sleep. After lunch, women already begin to prepare for dinner and at the same time continue to clean the house, wash clothes, and *escamar peixe*. In Praia Grande the domestic sphere is not “private” in the Western sense, in which women’s work is “restricted” or “confined” to a rigidly defined space within or relating to the household. In describing the distribution of labor in rural Brazilian communities, Scheper-Hughes writes that women’s work is “confined to the home and household” (1992: 50). In fact, on Maré a woman’s domain is virtually limitless; though few, some women on Maré are even *pescadoras* or fisherwomen, about one percent of the population. For most *marezeiras* housework is not separate from the rest of their work. While at home, women work with the door open and are always working on two or three things at once with people coming in and out of the house to sit and converse while they work; often mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, and young children will stop in to help with food or housecleaning, then, of course stay for lunch or a *lanche*. Housework is not limited to a certain hour of the day, and its characteristics involve every type of job women do to earn an income, to maintain their children clean, fed and healthy, and to keep their house neat and *arrumada* (organized). For these reasons, a woman’s domain in Praia Grande is never private and goes well beyond the Western paradigm of the private versus the public sphere. What’s more, because “domestic” work, or

work related to the household, is so loosely defined and all encompassing on Maré, over 36 percent of all *marezeiras* for the entire island call themselves only “*domesticas*” or “*donas de casa*” even when they are very actively involved in other income-generating jobs, such as *mariscagem*; i.e. women will declare one area of work but not the others. Part of the reason for this is that shellfish collection, like small-scale fishing using *jangada*, as well as basket weaving and other artisan trades, is hugely under-valued throughout Brazil. In Brazil, only workers who hold official employment cards are considered formally employed and receive retirement and medical benefits. In other fishing communities in Brazil with more resources, such as Fortim in Ceará, *marisqueiras*, *pescadores*, and *pescadoras* are organized into unions and have obtained for their members employment cards so as to be more competitive in the market, receive fair prices for their products, and government recognition for their work; these types of unions are only beginning on Maré and very few *pescadores*, and still fewer *marisqueiras*, have an employment card to recognize their work as formal labor; therefore, few *marisqueiras* distinguish and declare *mariscagem* as a form of employment in itself. At the same time, women’s work on Maré is distributed throughout the various areas of labor required to sustain the entire household. Thus, “domestic” work is a flexible category and is defined by all of the jobs women do throughout each day, and it is not limited to the home or a confined private sphere. In their own words:

My work begins the moment I wake up and doesn’t stop until I go to sleep...I only nap in the afternoon if I’m sick.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> A comment made by several women during the group discussion with mothers, pg. 71.

Her children eat and dress from marisco...  
~Praia Grande health agent

### Depende da Maré...: Collecting Shellfish for Survival

<sup>32</sup>May 17, 2004: 8:30A.M.: Claire, Dada, Jefferson,<sup>33</sup> and I went out to see and feel what it's like for *marisqueiras* during a day of work, what they do and the conditions in which they work. As we walked out to the bayside the sun beat down on our backs. We were actually very late.

Most *marisqueiras* go out work between 5 and 6A.M., depending on the maré that week. During the week of May 17<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup>, the tide was rising later in the afternoon and evening, therefore *marisqueiras* were going out very early before the sun was strong and staying out through noon when the tide was already rising and high. The length of time *marisqueiras* stay at the maré depends on the time they went out, and whether they were able to fill a bucket and a plastic bag to complete at least one kilo of *marisco*.<sup>34</sup>

*As we walked down the beach, we saw women in all directions bent over scrapping the ground; there were places with groups of women scrapping in one large area and other women were further out working alone. Women walked past us carrying buckets filled with marisco on their heads, chatting and laughing as they headed back home. We walked on stopping in some places to scrape for marisco. We were prepared with our bent knives, bent spoons, small butter containers, and plastic bags.*

*Marisqueiras* use similar tools to easily and quickly scrape large areas that may have a lot of *marisco*; they walk down the beach testing different areas until they find one where they can

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<sup>32</sup> Journal entry, pg. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Dada is the woman Claire is living with during her field research, and Jefferson is Dada's cousin who travels with Claire and sometimes me to various places; he is trying to learn English and likes to have us teach him some words.

<sup>34</sup> Tiny calms.

collect a good amount of *marisco*. There they bend over—folding their upper body toward the ground and maintaining their legs straight, with one leg stretched out slightly more to one side than the other—and scrape for hours moving only after exhausting a large area of sand. Moving slowly from one space to another, *marisqueiras* move with their hand tools; they scrape with one hand and use the other to hold the shellfish until they have a full hand, then they walk back to where they left their things and toss the *marisco* into their small baskets; when these baskets are full they toss this batch into their larger buckets.

*We weren't having a lot of luck finding marisco. We had walked far down the beach and nearly passed Praia Grande when we stumbled upon Dada's aunt, Isabel. One of the first things she told us was that she was hungry; she had brought a small snack with her and had already eaten it.*

*Marisqueiras*, generally take a piece of bread and water with them in their buckets when they go out to the maré. **Da muita fome na maré!** (You get very hungry out in the maré, *marisqueiras* proclaimed.) Because *marisqueiras* go out early and do not return home until lunch (which they still have to prepare), they need something to keep them going. However, many *marisqueiras* complain that their snacks are never enough because being so close to the bay, and with so much salt in the air, they get extremely hungry.

*Unlike us who were dressed in shorts and tank tops, Isabel and all the women out mariscando were wearing sleeved, cotton t-shirts, and had their head well wrapped. It made a lot sense since marisqueiras are bent over in one place for so long; the sleeved shirt and head wrap protected them from the violent rays of the sun. As I bent over, along side Isabel, I could feel the sun burning my back.*



*Marisqueiras* will either wrap their head with a simple cloth, or they will wrap their head and wear a cap over the wrap. This is very important because long hours in the sun will cause terrible headaches. *Marisqueiras* protect themselves in order to hold out long enough to fill a bucket and one or more plastic bags of marisco.

*Walking along the wet sand, I was forced to stop when my sandals came apart and were sucked off my feet by the sand. Everyone laughed telling me that marisqueiras work barefoot. I picked up my sandals and my feet sunk deep into the sand as we walked; the soft sand squished between my toes only becoming painful when I stepped on broken shells or other things in the sand. The majority of the marisqueiras we saw on the beach were older women; there were some children, mostly girls, and even some adolescents, but no men. I don't think there are usually adolescents out mariscando in the morning, however, the teachers of São Tomé have been on strike since Tuesday of last week and no body has been going to school since then. Most marisqueiras were bent over collecting marisco and some were in the water catching siri<sup>35</sup> and other types of crab. Marisqueiras catching siri have long sticks that are forked at one end and that are used to pin down the crab before picking it up to throw it into a basket. After an hour, the sun disappeared and it began to rain or pour without warning or even an initial sprinkle. The rain was cold and painful on my sun-beat back and head. Some marisqueiras, who had finished, tossed their buckets on their heads and headed back home, but most marisqueiras continued to work unperturbed and apparently not surprised it was raining. The day continued in that pattern, after it rained the sun came out as strong as before for another hour before it began to rain on us again. Watching marisqueiras work, I noticed that they didn't shift*

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<sup>35</sup> Siri is a type of crab that marisqueiras and fisherman collect to sell in market. Siri is one of the easier and more abundant crabs to catch with bare hands, without requiring a net or having to go out far in to the water.

*position very much, and very few women kneeled to work. Women remained bent over only rising occasionally to rub their rightfully sore backs. The work of marisqueiras doesn't end after hours of collecting marisco, when they have filled their containers they still have to walk back home carrying the marisco on their head.*

“Aren't you tired?” I asked Isabel.

No. My blood is still hot from working...I'm used to this.

*Big and small women carried their pounds of marisco all the way back down the beach and up to their homes. They walked barefoot along the broken shells that littered the uppermost part of the beach and disappeared between the houses.*

<sup>36</sup>*May 18, 2004: 7:30A.M.: Arriving out by the bay, the first thing Isabel asked us to do was give **benção** (bless) to the earth and the water asking Yemanja, goddess of the ocean and all salt waters, to cleanse us and bring us luck in our day of work. The sun was as violent as it was yesterday. Isabel was concerned that Claire and I wouldn't be able to work all day wearing tank tops and no head protection. Having brought an extra t-shirt to bunch up and put between her head and the bucket of marisco at the end of the day, Isabel gave this t-shirt to Claire to wear. We passed by George, a young boy out collecting marisco with his mother, and Isabel asked him to lend me his shirt—“Our skin is already burned and accustomed to the sun,” she said as I took the shirt from George who lent it to me without any hesitation. After about 45 minutes mariscando and conversing with Isabel about her workday and our studies, cold, hard rain shocked our bodies and showered us for about half an hour. Bent over, I couldn't keep up the pace, my legs and lower back would not hold up. I bent my legs in a low squat to relax my back*

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<sup>36</sup> Journal entry, pg 66-67

*but could only stay down for less than 4 minutes. Isabel never budged; she remained bent over, her legs spread, her feet buried in the wet sand and algae, her head bent down as one hand scrapped the ground in front and all around her direct area quickly and with agility; her other hand grasping a fist full of marisco. I squatted, sat on my legs, dug my knees into the mud, changed position every 10 seconds attempting to find a non-existent, comfortable position to work, and wishing for a rock to sit on. As the tide began to rise around 11:30, Claire and I went out into the bay to catch siri (with very little luck). We went back to help Isabel move her work bucket, which would soon be under water if we did not move it further up the bay. Around noon, Isabel hadn't filled her bucket but we had to head back because the tide was rising fast. We all went into the water to wash off before leaving. Isabel blessed the waters again and this time she even blessed us. We all walked back tired and burnt; Isabel was smiling as she walked along side us with marisco on her head.*

Some of the most prevalent concerns of *marisqueiras* involve their health and the income they will receive for a day's collection of *marisco*. As was described, even when *marisqueiras* begin to work early in the morning, the sun is always beating strong and directly overhead on the island. Women have learned to cover their heads and bodies well enough to work through more than five hours. The length of time *marisqueiras* are out largely depends on how much of their bucket they have filled; they do not leave until they have collected at least one kilo of *marisco*. Before it can be sold, *marisco* has to be cooked and the meat removed from the shells. After working out at bay, women go home to drop off the *marisco* and then go out to the *rosa* to collect *lenha* or firewood to cook the *marisco* of the day. After the *marisco* has cooked, *marisqueiras* sit or stand in their *quintais* (outdoor area behind their homes) or on their porches

to separate the meat from each shell. This shellfish meat is what *marisqueiras* send off to be sold, usually by husbands, sons, or other men, in the big market of São Joaquim in Salvador. For a kilo of shellfish meat women receive between three and four *reais* (about one U.S. dollar) in the market. Thus, more than a full day of collecting *marisco*, carrying firewood, cooking *marisco*, and removing shells is rewarded with very little money—and is actually less money than it costs to travel to and from the market, a trip that costs six *reais* including the bus fare to the market from the port of São Tomé. In sum, the work of *marisqueiras* is a long and hard process. *Marisqueiras* remain in painful positions, under the hot sun or cold rain, for several hours, and carry a lot of weight on their heads in order to help provide some form of consistent income for their families. Moreover, the fact that their work is not recognized or even well-known throughout Bahia and most of Brazil, makes it much more difficult for *marisqueiras* to demand respect and higher prices when selling their *marisco* in the market. In a specific study of the lives of *marisqueiras* in Fortim, Bianca Santos, a student in the SIT Brazil program, wrote that even in Ceará, which like Bahia has many small fishing communities, the word “*marisqueira*” is largely unknown. Although most of the *marisqueiras* in Fortim have organized their labor and are *cadeistradas*, or registered with employment cards, they are still fighting so that their work is valued and recognized by the government and society of Ceará. Bahia is still far behind Ceará, which ratified the Law of *marisqueiras* in 1991, and where there are non-governmental organizations, such as LABOMAR (Laboratório de Ciências do Mar), Terramar, and DED (Serviço Alemão de Cooperação Técnica e Social), working closely with *marisqueiras*, as well as artisan fishermen/women, to help them retain and promote their ways of life amidst increasing industrial fishing, and in a society that hardly values their existence. On Maré, the strength and, in their own words, “courage,” women must have to go out every day, and often

even nights, to *mariscar* is a central part of being a mother. The bay is one of the largest community resources that women have available, and one on which they can always depend for food and some income. As a result, women must endure health risks and other hard working conditions in order to keep their children and themselves from experiencing hunger. Certain very basic resources, such as large freezers for Praia Grande, as well as Santana and Bananeiras (the three largest fishing communities),<sup>37</sup> would radically improve the quality of life of *marisqueiras* by allowing them to store their *marisco*; meaning they would not be forced to immediately cook *marisco* after every work day, and they would be able to bargain prices in the market without the concern that if they do not sell, the *marisco* of the day will spoil. Altogether, *marisqueiras* need to be recognized and valued for the amount, difficulty, and importance of the work that they do. Only after *mariscagem* is acknowledged both socially and politically as an important field of labor for women, will there be a more broad, flexible, and inclusive definition of motherhood in Bahia and in all of Brazil.

Ser mãe é um dom de Deus

~Group Discussion with mothers of Praia Grande

### **3.) In Their Own Words: Maternal Bonds and Community**

*Emilzete is 65 years old; she gave birth to 21 children and only 12 survived to adulthood.*

*Emilzete worked as a marisqueira, made and sold doce de banana, vasoura (a hand-made house broom), cakes, and farinha (fine flour made from manioc root) to feed her children, and to take them to the doctor when need be.*

In her re-formulation of Engles' theory of private property and production exchange on the social status of women, Karen Sacks' argues that, "the key variable in the subordination of

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<sup>37</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, "Relatorio de Ilha de Maré," Salvador, Bahia.

women in class societies was their confinement to production within the domestic sphere and their exclusion from the ‘social production for exchange’” (1974: 207-22). I have already demonstrated how the domestic role is constructed and played out on Maré, so as to illustrate how Sacks’ argument is fundamentally inappropriate for discussing *marezeiras*. Furthermore, Western social science tends to divide and separate the roles of women and men into spheres or domains: the domestic and the public. These categories are usually discussed within a hierarchical system, in which the woman, because she belongs to the domestic sphere, is subordinate to the male who functions within the public sphere, where power and authority are said to be concentrated (Sudarkasa 1996: 166). In discussing the social roles and statuses of *marezeiras* and *marezeiros* it is more appropriate to consider their relationships in terms of the community and kin group—in terms of a community in which men and women combine domestic and “extra-domestic” (1996:168) responsibilities in a way that is functional and necessary in order to maintain the household. On Maré, about 56 percent of the population called themselves “married;”<sup>38</sup> however, most conjugal relationships on Maré are not official civil unions. This is largely because of the lack of *cartórios* on the island.<sup>39</sup> Both Catholic Church marriages and civil unions can only be performed in Salvador; therefore, most *marezeiros* that say they are “married” are actually *juntos* or simply “together.” In thinking about the role of women, and most importantly mothers, on Maré, it is important to remember that in Praia Grande the role of “mother” is a social role under which women organize themselves, their work, and even their emotional strength. Mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, grandmothers, and other women and men on Ilha de Maré are all prominent and critical in the survival and day-to-day existence of children. In her research of a Bedouin society, Lila Abu-Lughod writes that, “the

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<sup>38</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.

<sup>39</sup> Miranda, Damiana, et al, 2003, “Relatorio de Ilha de Maré,” Salvador, Bahia.



two most important bonds between individuals are maternal kinship and co-residence” (1986: 59). In Praia Grande households are largely organized matrilocally.<sup>40</sup> Households are extended and include generations of family members that may all be living under one roof, and are usually all living along the same small street; at the center of these kinships are women. Mothers hold a special role in maintaining large families together; children live in their mother’s home until they marry and even then they are not expected to leave. Often men remain in the house longer where women move out to become wives and mothers of a new household—they become the *donas de casa* (heads of their own households). A mother’s house is always a point of reference; a place where it is certain to ask for help with children, to pick up bread, or to cook the meals of the day. Contrary to the image Nancy Scheper-Hughes paints of rural communities in the northeast, where she states that, “no self-respecting *morador* of the Alto [do Cruzeiro] wants to ask a neighbor, or any other equal, for what she desperately needs” (1992: 100), in Praia Grande “asking” is an important part of the community dynamic. Dada, although married and living in her own home with her husband, regularly cooks and eats in her mother’s house. Dona Joana raised nine children who, now adults, each day go to her house to cook for her, wash her clothing, and clean her home. There is an interesting exchange between mothers and children, each sharing both material and emotional support with the other.

I asked Deborah: “Do you have time to spend with your son during the day?”

Sometimes in the morning I make him breakfast...make a juice for him. And during the day, if he’s hungry I get up [from where she is sitting weaving baskets] and make him a *merenda* (snack).

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<sup>40</sup> I suspect this to be true for all townships on Maré.

What does being a mother mean to you, I asked?

Its good sometimes to have a child in the house, to care for, to give love, educate, and give my life to...and its good to have someone to talk to when my husband is gone and I am here alone,” she described looking out the door to the street.

During the group discussion with thirteen mothers, I asked the same question<sup>41</sup>:

“What does being a mother mean to you all?”

The first person to answer was Altamira, the lay Catholic minister.<sup>42</sup> She began:

To be a mother is to be a mother from beginning to end. It is a big responsibility to be a mother, but it’s also something that brings a lot of happiness and satisfaction...mothers have to be loyal.

Altamira calls attention to the rest of the women in the room and states:

I know, for example, that none of these mothers here feel any regrets of being mothers...or are there?

Immediately every woman responds:

Eu não! (Not me)

Não, eu não! (No, not me)

Altamira continues:

None of them have any regrets of being a mother: one time, two times, three, times, four times, five times, six times, seven times, they don’t have any regrets.

Another woman asserts:

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<sup>41</sup> A full account of the focus group discussion with mothers is on pages 71-76.

<sup>42</sup> Ilha de Maré does not have a priest, thus, Altamira is a highly respected women who heads the Catholic church and leads each service including those of religious holidays.

To be a mother is something divinely marvelous and it's a shame that a man will never know how satisfying it is to be a mother...that he will never know the love that a mother feels for her child.

Other women add:

*Amor de mãe é único* (A mother's love is one and only).

*One woman disagreed and added that some men are more mothers than women. Every woman in the group disagreed with her statement affirming and reaffirming that a mother's love is one and only—something a man can never know.*

The responsibility of motherhood is very strong in Praia Grande; women are expected to do everything within their reach for their children with the resources that they have, and one of the strongest resources is the community itself. Most of the women interviewed, when asked who helped them take care of their children, responded with the names of their mothers, grandmothers, mother-in-laws, sisters, and aunts. Kinship was described by several people as a resource net—knowing that one could walk over to the home of any family member, and in some cases a well-known neighbor, and share a meal, ask to watch a child, or borrow something. Further still, people used the word “solidarity” to describe this kin network; a word that evokes the idea that regardless of a person's individual feelings toward another person, they are members of the same community and thus responsible for one another. I was able to observe this feeling of responsibility to the family and community<sup>43</sup> when people stopped in the middle of the street to have a long conversation with a passing family member or friend; or when people walking down the street stopped to converse, drop something off, pick up bread, ask for a cup of

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<sup>43</sup> “Community and Family” are only written separately for emphasis in the levels of responsibility—one being to family and the other to the community within Praia Grande as a whole. In Praia Grande, most people are related and families extend through complicated and unregistered family trees, therefore, the term “community” ends up meaning the family in most cases.

water or coffee, and/ or give *benção* (a blessing) to people working in their door ways, or sitting at their windows or in front of their houses. Further still, during lunch when school lets out and herds of elementary-school children filled every street,<sup>44</sup> people seemed accustomed to having children walk straight into their houses (doors are normally kept open so kids do not need to knock, they just walk in) to ask for a cup of water; often, women will make children a *suco* or fruit juice and give them a plate of *biscoitos* (cookies or crackers) to snack on. This is so common that most of my afternoon interviews were interrupted by children walking in to ask for water and snacks. This strong feeling of responsibility to others in the community, illustrates how the community dynamic of Praia Grande functions so that individuals “feel morally obligated” (Rebuhn 1994: 167) to behave in specific ways toward others. Those few *marezeiros* who do not maintain their responsibilities to their family and community, those who send children away from their houses with no water or snack, who walk by the homes of family and friends without stopping to visit or give a blessing, and who keep their doors closed and locked during the day, are criticized and scolded, but are still supported within the network. This form of kin support is in fact a safety net and is rarely seen as “a stress [on] already limited material and emotional resources, spreading them even more thinly among a larger network of people. (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 124).

“What happens when a child dies,” I asked Benedita, the doctor’s assistant.  
Everyone goes out, the community participates in a *caminahda* to the cemetery.<sup>45</sup>

Benedita remembered her daughter who had just passed away a year ago and recalled that:

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<sup>44</sup> Over 45 percent of the population on Maré is between the ages of 0 and 19. About 20 percent are between 20 and 29. (Miranda 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Benedita, pg. 59.

The whole town went out...and I would look back during the walk and see all those people and that helped me so much.” “Its very difficult for a mother, you know, it hurts a lot.”

Solidarity and organization among women is especially strong in relationships between older women and young mothers. Although, in group discussions and informal conversations, older mothers always criticized young mothers for being foolish and not knowing how to be a mother, these older women always helped and gave advice to young mothers—to the extent that none of the young mothers that I interviewed were raising their children completely alone. Young mothers, such as Deborah were either living with their mothers, living next door to their mothers or, in the case of Deborah, her son was being raised by her mother-in-law. Solidarity is largely illustrated by the “open-door policy” practiced by *marezeiros*. Walking down any street, people are expected to stop and give *benção* to their grandmothers and/or older women in their family. As has already been described extensively, conversations largely occur in front of houses and in the streets. Because the street itself and every house on one street can make up a household, it again becomes clear that the term “private sphere” is not always synonymous with household—a space that, on Maré, belongs to the extended family and numerous friends and acquaintances. A house is a building with a door where one family sleeps; however, *marezeiros* live and work in and out of different homes and in streets surrounding their homes throughout the day and at night. Therefore definitions of the home, the house, and the household are flexible and cannot easily be restricted to any one space. Also, because women and children are part of this kin network, women’s work, and what they feel about their work, especially in childcare, is something that involves the help, advice, and opinion of several people in the community.

Everyday she comes over to have lunch in my house, laughed Isabel.

“Is she family?” I asked.

No, she tells me she doesn’t like the lunch her mom makes so she comes here to eat.<sup>46</sup>

Space, knowledge, food, and even emotions in Praia Grande are communal, and the company of others is highly valued. Knowledge: home remedies, teas, and vaccination campaigns, are shared in everyday conversations, just as are important events and criticisms about other families. Both the physical and emotional responsibilities of a mother—feeding, bathing, and taking her children to a doctor when necessary, as well as, housework, providing an income for her family, and being loving and loyal to her children, husband, and kin all fall within these kin relations or network. Moreover, mothers in Praia Grande describe all of these physical and emotional responsibilities when they define motherhood.

To be a mother is to be *cuidadosa* (careful or attentive), take care of the house, of her children, and of her husband.<sup>47</sup>

Surrounding this kin network is the socio-economic reality in which *marezeiras* live: working three or more jobs everyday and having very little time to rest; living from a limited and unstable income, and having very few social resources on which to rely. Many women in Praia Grande complain about spinal problems, back pains, and migraines from collecting *marisco* all day and then carrying a great deal of weight on their head. *Marisqueiras* work more than five hours daily under hard conditions to collect only enough *marisco* to sell for three or four *reais*. Women have very little room for bargaining in the market, they have to sell their *marisco* or else it will spoil. What’s more, often there are other people in the market who, because they have

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<sup>46</sup> This was a conversation with Isabel right after the young girl who lunches at her house had come back to ask Isabel for juice.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Emilzete, pg. 69.

more resources or know certain people, can sell their *marisco* for much less forcing *marisqueiras* from Praia Grande to lower their prices even further. Simone explained this phenomenon:

Some people will sell a kilo of marisco for five or six reais and others for only 2.50, that's not fair it's the same labor but one is getting more than the other. There is no job security for us, we don't know from one day to the next how much we will sell or what price we will get.

Further still, women have very few social resources to depend on. There are no medical services in Praia Grande and any illness or emergency, including childbirth, requires either waiting for a boat or pleading with the owner of a boat to take them to the city. The health agent of Praia Grande explained:

When there is no boat, which is usually the case, children are born wherever the mother is at the time she is trying to secure a boat...many children have been born in the street or in a canoe. Often boat owners will say that they do not have oil or that the tide is too low for them to take the mother to Salvador...there, the mother and the family have to run to another township to try to secure a boat wherever they can.<sup>48</sup>

Commenting on the services of the clinic in Santana, Benedita affirmed:

I don't see many severe illnesses, mothers know that there are not adequate services here and usually go straight to the city.<sup>49</sup>

Illnesses are not easy to prevent on Maré. Children play in streets where sewage is flowing freely and out in the open. Often, people leave their pens open and large pigs roam around the streets in trash and wallowing in muddy areas; all of these things expose children, who run around with no shoes and very little clothes, to a number of diseases and infections, including *vermes* (stomach worms) one of the most common. Women of Praia Grande describe their lives as hard and in many cases filled with suffering. As a result, in addition to other women available to help and

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Maria, pg. 51.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Benedita, pg. 59.

share knowledge, women maintain faith in a greater power to help them make it through each day. Faith gives many mothers additional strength and hope, and demonstrates their sincere belief that things will be easier one day. Remembering her deceased children and how much she worked in her youth, Dona Joana firmly stated:

I suffered a lot... *eu aguentava, só eu*...It was a lot for a mother to go through but now I have the courage because I did everything I could for my children—now I have the comfort, the comfort given to me by Jesus...and people have to have that comfort.<sup>50</sup>

Marinalva, a mother from who Santana gave birth to fourteen children of which two died:

I'm glad they died, then I would have had more children to breast feed...I thanked God they left. Marinalva's son died while she was feeding him *mingau*. She showered and changed his clothes; fixed his little hands, placed them in a prayer position, and closed his eyes.<sup>51</sup>

Isabel showed me her hands that were tough and callused; the skin between her fingers was loose and tearing away:

I wash, collect shellfish, de-scale fish, clean the house, and bring firewood from the *rosa* since five in the morning, it's a struggle.<sup>52</sup>

I worked a lot, Dona Cenira recalls. smiling and nodding her head as she looks off into a space somewhere far behind me. My life was hard but I don't have any regrets. I asked God to help me...my life was a real struggle—*uma luta*, but I'm here and so are they (looking over to her son).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Dona Joana, pg. 55.

<sup>51</sup> Conversation with Marinalva in the clinic of Santana, back of pg. 61.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Isabel, pg. 66.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Dona Cenira, pg. 81.



### **5.) The Cultural Construction of Motherhood and Maternal Sentiment**

Recognizing emotion as a social and cultural construction, rather than a natural phenomenon, allows us to examine the discourse that *marezeiras* use to define motherhood and mother love. During interviews, conversations, and group discussions, women defined motherhood by describing the everyday activities in their homes, such as watching over their children and going out to the maré. On Maré the person is not a private element set apart from the social world of others. In contrast, the structure of the emotional life of *marezeiras* is based on the ideal that each person is first and foremost a social creature—specifically, the member of a family to whom she is responsible—and only secondarily and in a very limited way, an autonomous individual. The conceptualization of the self is central to the definition of motherhood for women in Praia Grande. An example of how motherhood is produced and reproduced is when Altamira, the lay Catholic minister of Praia Grande, responded first and for all women in the group discussion on what it means (or should mean) to be a mother. Margaret Lock describes a new movement in ethnography that is more focused on the “everyday lives of women, children, and other ‘peripheral peoples,’” and “which has led to a new theory of the social body...; one that is historically situated,...[and] is also an active forum for the expression of dissent and loss, thus ascribing it agency.” She goes on to say that,

These dual modes of bodily expression---belonging and dissent---are conceptualized as culturally produced and in dialectical exchange with the externalized ongoing performance of social life. (Lock 1993: 141)

Lock really hits on the central thesis of this essay. A mother’s love is something that is highly valued not only in Brazilian cultural history, but specifically within Afro-Brazilian cultural history--an ethnic identity that combines Western African beliefs with Portuguese, Catholic beliefs, and hybrid Brazilian practices. Motherhood is celebrated in Candomblé ceremonies,

represented by the high respect and honor for the *Mãe de Santo*, and further celebrated in Catholic devotion to the various manifestations of the Virgin Mary—especially during the month of May, which is dedicated to Mary and all mothers. Moreover, beginning at a very age, age six or seven for some girls, girls help their mother with all of her work, and are taught to cook, de-scale fish, cut and clean *cana brava*, and how to weave small baskets. Young girls also help care for younger siblings and other young children in their extended family, often treating them as if they were their own children. Very few children on Maré have toys. Dolls and figurines are a luxury, and children, as they are a majority on the island, play with each other, and create games out of shells, rocks, and dried coconuts. Bruna used to play with left over scraps of food from materials Simone used while cooking; she enjoyed pretending to cook lunch or dinner for the day. Simone, Isabel, and several other women interviewed, began to *mariscar* when they were seven and eight; Simone learned to de-scale fish when she was six. Maternal sentiment and love, like emotion in general, are “so culturally constructed that [their] stimulus, definition, expression, and meaning vary from culture to culture and within cultures over time, each cultural group believes that the way it currently constructs emotion is natural and thus [absolute] (Rebhun 1994: 167). The most important conclusion I came to on Ilha de Maré is that the naturalization of maternal sentiment—the “genuine” satisfaction of, and refusal to complain or regret being responsible for raising and protecting children, maintaining a household, and working for an income—is functional for a society that has practically been forgotten by the State in terms of social services such as medical programs, educational facilities, and infrastructure. *Marezeiras* are aware that they have had hard lives and have suffered a great deal. Unfortunately, on Ilha de Maré, under-valued and under paid labor is true for both men and women. What is incredible is that for decades and under much more violent situations of hunger, child sickness, and death,

women on Ilha de Maré were able to raise five or more children using only the environmental and kin resources available to them. Scheper-Hughes likes to quote Sara Ruddick, who created the term “maternal practices” and who states that maternal practices “begin in love; a love that for most women is intense, confusing, ambivalent, [and] poignantly sweet” (1992: 340).

“Maternal practices” on Maré are, however, flexible and divided into a number of things that women regularly do throughout the day. Although *marezeiras* live, raise their children, and work within a precarious socio-economic environment, the responsibility mothers feel for their children is about as certain as their knowledge of the cycles and behaviors of the maré on any given week; i.e. motherhood may be one of the roles of *marezeiras* that is most valued, respected, and recognized by all *marezeiros*.

“What are the differences between the way you care for your daughter and the way your mother cared for you and your siblings,” I asked Simone after interviewing Emilzete, her mother.

I have a lot more time than my mother had because I only have one child, unlike her who was always after one or the other. It could be that the *carinho* (affection) is the same, its just that I have more time to sit with her (Bruna) and converse or play. In that time she didn’t have time for that. But we were never without clean clothes, food at the right hour, medical attention, and carinho...eu não tenho nada que cobrar; ela fez tudo que tevi ao alcance dela. (I don’t have anything to charge; she did everything within her reach).

## **6.) Conclusion**

In sum, patterns of nurturing in Praia Grande are passed down through generations of mothers, grandmothers and other older women. These are patterns that are necessarily rooted in cultural values but which have also been shaped by the socio-economic situations through which women have struggled, and to a certain degree through which they continue to struggle. Mothers teach their daughters how to clean the house, wash clothes, and prepare *temperos* for the food;

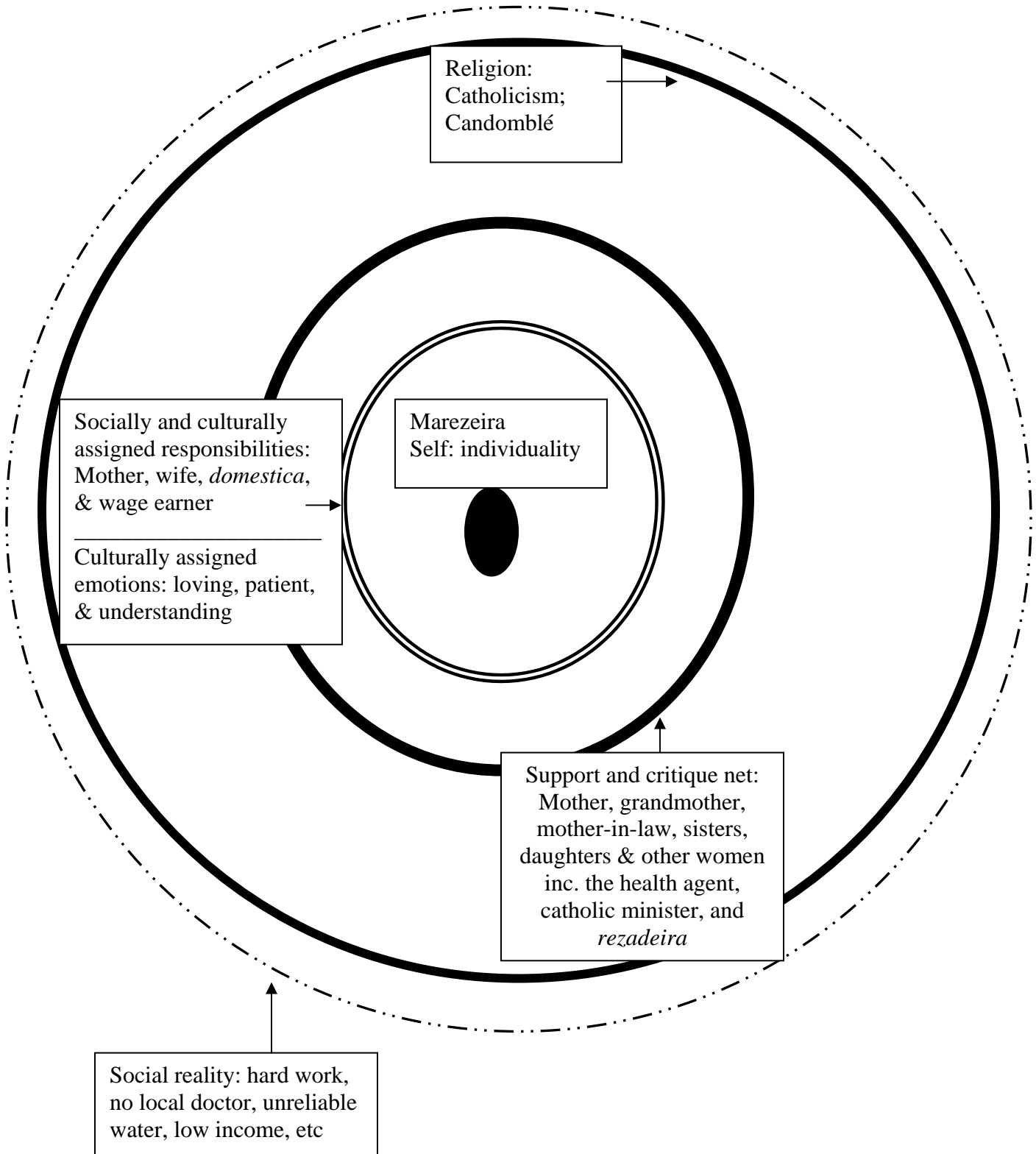
they teach them to *escamar peixe*, and begin to take them out to *mariscar* at a very early age. Young girls are also taught to cut *cana brava*, weave baskets, and to make *doce de banana*. Therefore, regardless of what young girl will grow up to be they are able to work all of these different jobs, which have been around for years and which have contributed to the survival of generations of women and children. Altogether, motherhood in Praia Grande is a public phenomenon and not a private role. Mothers are social elements made up of generations of women rather than a single woman, and a mother's love, and anything related to it, is communally and culturally expected and even demanded. In so much as it is able to do so, the purpose of this paper is to help re-construct the images of mothers in impoverished areas of Northeast Brazil, which Nancy Scheper-Hughes has largely de-constructed and problematized, almost without solution; as well as, to consider human agency and the role of a woman in determining her situation, despite deprivation. Although Maré is a different socio-cultural reality from the community in which Scheper-Hughes conducted her study, the island provides a unique opportunity by which to analyze the effects of a strong cultural history, economic/ material scarcity, and social change on the production of motherhood and maternal sentiment. It is worth creating a more inclusive image of the Northeast, to move beyond the labels of maternal indifference and mortal neglect constructed by Scheper-Hughes, in order to uncover the cultural factors within a community that allow for maternal sentiments and practices other than detachment and abandonment. Using the definitions of *marezeiras* for motherhood and maternal sentiment, we can begin to clarify how the basic values and traditions that women in poor communities follow as their social reality changes impact their children.

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# Appendix I

## The Cultural and Social Layers of a Mother in Praia Grande



## Appendix II

### Interview Questions:

#### Basicas:

1. Qual é seu nome?
2. Quantos anos tem?
3. Quantos filhos tem?
4. Você é casada, viúva, divorciada, solteira?

#### Dia a dia:

1. Me pode descrever um dia normal de trabalho?
  - a. Que faz quando acorda? E depois?
  - b. Que faz na casa?
  - c. Que tipos de trabalhos voce faz?
  - d. Você reposa?
  - e. A que hora voce dormi?

#### De Mãe:

1. Que significa ser mãe para você?
2. Que é a melhor e pior parte de ser mãe?
3. Que acontece durante um parto?
  - a. Quem esta presente?
  - b. Quem ajuda?
4. Que tipo de filhos são perferidos: mulheres, homens?
5. Quem a ajuda cuidar a seus filhos?
  - a. Sua avó o sogra le ajuda?
6. O que voce faz quando sua crança esta doente?
  - a. A quem chama?
  - b. Para onde vai primeiro para pedir ajuda?
  - c. Quem ajuda?

#### Morte:

1. Que acontece quando morri uma criança?
  1. A quem chama?
  2. Que se faz?
  3. Quem assiti o enterro?
2. Quando morri uma criança recém nascida, ele e batizado? Tem nome?
3. Quem assisti au enterro de uma criança ou outro membro da familia?
4. Você chora quando uma criança recém nascida morri?
5. Que doi mas, a morte de uma criança recém nascida ou um jovem?