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Fraternity, Dignity, and Democracy: Forms of Value in Northeast Brazil's Health Care Reform Movement

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Say it, no ideas but in things

—William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*

Introduction

This essay takes up Terence Turner's insight that human activity or production is the key to understanding the development of social value.¹ It applies this insight in the context of the daily activity of older women living in an urban poor community in northeastern Brazil. Scholars of the currently fashionable topic of urban poverty have tended to focus on creating an empathetic connection with their readers based on the perceived ideal of human unity (Robbins 2013:453).² In stark contrast to Turner's own work, such an anthropology proceeds by way of anecdote and conversational fragment, gathering its force from fine grained accounts of particular events; while it too may focus on human activity, it often eschews the search for pattern or metonym in favor of moral witnessing.³ This approach has produced some of the most celebrated anthropological works of the last decade (e.g., Biehl 2005; Das 2007; and Jackson 2013), but has not necessarily lived up to its implicit promise of reducing the suffering it so poetically chronicles. The time is ripe for experimentation.

Among the many salutary effects of Turner's approach is that it can be used by anthropologists to directly address questions emerging in their worlds. Why, for example, were the Kayapo more successful than other indigenous groups at collective political action? Turner's response (1991, 1995), that the Kayapo exhibit an awareness of the essential constructedness of reality by human action, interprets Kayapo agency as something internal to their conceptual paradigms (Sangren and Boyer 2006:7). Turner's insistence on the concrete ways in which local details give form to macrolevel phenomena and his conviction that politics was at the center of an anthropology of value offers a compelling alternative through which to understand the lives and dilemmas of low income residents in Fortaleza.

In the remainder of this essay I use Turner's close attention to the socially situated productivity of human beings as a way to interpret a particular impediment to health care reform: the declining participation of Fortaleza's low income residents in the health care councils that were created as part of a broad series of reforms that accompanied the establishment of universal health care in Brazil in 1988. I focus in particular on the daily activities, such as wash-taking and courtyard maintenance, of older women and the sources of value they produce through these activities. I argue that these values—*dignity* and *fraternity*—stand in tension with representations of democracy that circulate in Fortaleza and that older women's fears of the dispossession of these values, implied by the joining of health councils and other related activities, can in part explain declining levels of participation in Fortaleza's health reforms. In the discussion that follows I use the term "older women," or sometimes "senior women," to refer to a category of actors that share a set of experiences (e.g. having moved to Fortaleza from the interior of the state, cooking and bathing using traditional northeastern techniques, and depending on rather than caring for one's children). "Older" is thus only loosely correlated with biological age (Jerome 2015).

Health, Democracy, and Participation

In 1988 a new Brazilian constitution was adopted, charged in part with implementing the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS), an ambitious new health care system that sought to provide universal health care for all Brazilian citizens. Among other reforms the constitution stipulated that the new system must be governed according to democratic criteria and include the participation of civil society in its decision-making processes. In order to enact these principles, *conselhos de saúde* (health councils) were created at the federal, state, and municipal levels and were composed of service providers, government officials, and—most provocatively—local residents, who made up a full 50 percent of council membership.

The councils were initiated on a state-by-state basis, beginning several years after the SUS went into effect, and almost immediately became an object of scrutiny and academic research. Scholars have questioned, for example, the councils' potential to offer new spaces of democratic deliberation and participatory government (Cornwall et al. 2006; Coelho 2007), as well as the effectiveness of health council leaders at promoting citizen participation among working class residents (Cornwall 2008). These concerns resonated with my own observations of the multiple health council meetings I attended while conducting fieldwork over the past two decades in Fortaleza, the capital of the northeastern state of Ceará. Participation appeared particularly difficult for leaders to maintain in health council meetings that were convened in the small local health posts (*postos de saúde*) located in the working class communities on the city's edges.

After observing one such meeting held in a covered patio astride what was soon to be a new *posto* in the neighborhood of Pirambu,⁴ I discussed the lack of attendance and growing apathy among community residents with a doctor who had led the meeting. The meeting had been held in order to develop an understanding of what the medical needs of community were so that the city could focus on the most important of them when planning the *posto*. The residents in attendance were largely older women, with only a few older men. The doctor noted that while he had wanted to discuss health problems (for example, what sorts of ailments were most common, whether asthma was as much of a problem as he had heard, and so on), the residents had brought up other concerns. And indeed they had—a long list of them! Concerns included having to wait in line once they arrived at health centers, safety when approaching the health centers at night, missing medications from health center pharmacies, an ongoing problem with rats in the neighborhood, and their own (or more often a neighbor's or child's) intermittent hunger. The doctor tried occasionally, but always without success, to return the conversation to what he thought was most important, namely the medical ailments the residents had and the ones they most wanted to see the health post address.

The doctor had numerous suggestions in response to these concerns, despite the unforeseen direction that the conversation took. For example, he recommended forming community groups that would take turns at night acting as watch people (to address residents' security concerns), walking in pairs to reduce the chances of being victims of assault, and installing a doorman to guard the health center at night. If neighbors were stealing medications from neighborhood centers to sell them, as the residents had intimated, the doctor insisted that they denounce them. "You must speak up," he urged. With regard to the rats that residents despised, the doctor suggested that this was also an area in which community leaders be asked for help and that residents should be careful about where they put their garbage. Multiple times during the meeting, the doctor stressed that the residents not act as individuals, but rather as a group. For example, he advised them to organize a group of people to take turns bringing garbage to the central dump or to gather food for residents who were hungry, perhaps even creating a food pantry in their neighborhood. Organizing and working collectively, he had concluded, would bring into being the kind of community necessary to address the concerns they had articulated.

As I reviewed the meeting with the doctor, he stressed his frustration at not being able to get the residents to discuss the things he thought were important, such as the medical ailments that were most common in the community. Rather than blaming the residents for the

chaotic meeting, however, he allowed as how they were likely to have a different, possibly broader, idea of health than he did as a medical doctor. Sounding much like an anthropologist, he offered that incommensurable definitions had likely doomed the meeting from the start: "How can we talk about what a health post should do, when we don't agree how health should be defined?" It was for this reason, he suggested, that attendance had dwindled at the health council meetings. The doctor further interpreted the failure to generate participation in local health council meetings as residents' refusal to engage in basic democratic processes, explaining that for many residents their concerns with the day-to-day overwhelmed their ability to participate in long-term, potentially transformative, activities, such as attending health council meetings.

The doctor's frustration with residents' reluctance to take part in the type of formal participation required at the health council meetings led me to think about my time in Pirambu and the activity I had observed there, particularly among the older female residents who had been at the meeting. My experiences in the field suggested that older women did in fact participate, repeatedly and at times effectively, in matters of health and community, albeit on different terms, and with different ends in mind than those outlined by the doctor. When closely analyzed, I realized, following Turner, that even the daily activities performed by older Pirambu women (such as courtyard maintenance, caretaking, wash-taking, and stoop-watching) could be understood as producing social value. I have come to see values in the plural and to refer to them as *fraternity* and *dignity*. I understand them to be critical to the esteem with which older women are held in Pirambu, as well as to the vitality of the social networks which sustain their households. It is precisely these values that stand in opposition to the putative democratic values (particularly autonomy and justice) glorified by the doctor during the health council meeting, and this may help explain the council's relative lack of success.

In what follows I present a series of observations about daily life in Pirambu that focuses on the activities of older women in the community. Pirambu is one of nearly three hundred working class communities that lie outside the business district of Fortaleza but within the city's official boundaries (Feitosa 2011). It is formally composed of four neighborhoods, though the boundaries are dynamic. The observations have been culled from visits that began in the fall of 1998 when I began fieldwork until July 2016. Throughout that time the neighborhood remained extremely heterogeneous and dynamic. Rapid modifications of whole blocks have transformed dirt or cobblestone paths lined with simple cinderblock homes into smooth asphalt, rimmed with streetlights and serving as conduits for snaking city buses that pass through the neighborhoods on the half hour. The ambitious commercial ventures, which abut worn shop fronts stocked with ancient Singer sewing machines, mirror the complexity of individual households of extended families. The married couple from the old generation may reside in the downstairs portion of a house, where they sleep on traditional hammocks and insist on bucket bathing and cooking over a wood fire. One floor above their children and grandchildren may live in a remodeled upstairs apartments that features platform beds and electric ranges where they study furiously for the *vestibular* (college entrance exam) or a *concurso* (civil service exam) to earn a place in Fortaleza's municipal workforce. As in most working class neighborhoods, entire swaths of the community depart each day to the city center, and its business regions for work. Even those not engaged directly in the formal economy may leave for some part of the day to attend school, visit a relative, sell or buy household goods, or consult a doctor.

The daily activities described below are thus largely undertaken by those who do not labor elsewhere: older women and men, babies and their caretakers, and school-aged children. Though my descriptions focus primarily on the activities of older women, I have included several examples of pursuits undertaken by middle-aged and older men, and young girls and boys. These "counter" examples elucidate the totality of significant others whose recognition is needed to realize the values that older women produce through the activities I describe. The activities themselves are, not remarkable or readily classifiable from the perspective of the participants; women would not identify them as religious, or political or ritualistic. Nevertheless, I will argue in the subsequent section that, following Turner (1995), mundane

daily activities become the source and conveyor of highly regarded values among older women in Pirambu.

Notes on Daily Activity Undertaken in and Around the Household in Pirambu

Courtyard Maintenance

For many older female residents of Pirambu, mornings commenced in 2015 as they did in 1998, with tending to their courtyards. Older residents date the emergence of courtyards in the community to the early 1990s, noting that when they arrived from the interior of the state to Fortaleza several decades earlier there were almost no courtyards in Pirambu. At that time, peoples' homes opened directly onto the street and were entered without prelude. By 1998 a growing number of houses in Pirambu had been rendered less visible, and more protected, by three walls and a small entry gate that framed a small interior courtyard surrounding the front door. The heights of the courtyard walls are variable, but they typically extend above the head of an adult male (roughly six feet) and are most often composed of cinderblock and cement. Many courtyard walls are decorated along their tops with shards of glass, forming a ridge of dragon-like scales that make the walls difficult or impossible to scale.

The interior of the courtyard serves as a formal entry to the small and modest home beyond it. Floors are likely to be paved with cement (though in less prosperous homes they may also be covered with hard-packed dirt) and often have plants that line their edges. Thin string cords for washing are strung diagonally from end to end of the courtyards and maybe hammocks, too, depending on how many extra guests or residents sleep there on a particular night. Courtyards are used for socializing, particularly in the late afternoon and evenings, and small plastic or wooden sitting stools come in and out of the house to line the courtyard walls on a frequent basis.

These courtyards are tended almost entirely by women, usually older or retired, who begin their days by picking up stray plastic bags and other bits of garbage that have collected in the courtyard during the previous day. Stools, if left outside, are wiped down and stacked in a corner and hammocks are rolled up and left hanging in a bundle on one side. Plants are watered and the rare stray cat is given a plate of water or chicken bone. Then the entire surface of the courtyard is swept. Dirt and bits of trash are gathered in a plastic bag, which is knotted twice and then placed outside the courtyard gate along with any other bags of trash from inside the home.

In some areas this relatively recent activity of "tending one's courtyard" may already be on the wane, since courtyards in Pirambu are increasingly being transformed into open or covered garages for cars. Individual car ownership has become a preeminent status symbol in Pirambu and is understood among the younger generation in the community as a prerequisite to holding long-term employment in Fortaleza's formal economy. While older women can occasionally be heard mourning the displacement of the courtyard's private/public space, their sons and daughters view parking one's car in a covered and secure location as strongly preferable to leaving it on the street because of reports of rampant theft in the neighborhoods. Depending on the size of the car, the vehicles can take up the entire courtyard, leaving hardly enough room to reach the front door of the house and forcing residents to tiptoe awkwardly around the car to reach their homes. In these cases, it is not uncommon to see older residents bringing stools out to the street side of their courtyard walls where they sit during evening visits.

Wash and Wash-Taking

Washing clothes is another early morning activity that is almost always undertaken by older women. Despite the presence of the Internet in nearly every home, cellphones, computers, flat screen TVs, and gas stoves, washing machines are still a rarity in Pirambu. Typically, the oldest woman of the household will collect bags of wash the night before and place them on the outdoor sink and washboard units that most houses have directly outside their back

doors. In the morning, clothes are sorted according to color and cleanliness and then cleaned in stages. First, they are soaked in a mixture of water and light powder soap. Then they are scrubbed with a hard bristle brush and picked over for stains and other areas needing extra attention. Next, the clothes are soaked again in clean water and are finally rinsed in running water, before being hung up to dry on the long lines that adorn the interior courtyards. The hottest sun of the day hits between approximately noon and three o'clock. Directly following these hours (and often after awakening from an afternoon siesta) individual items of wash are taken down and neatly folded. Clothes are placed in stacks in their appropriate rooms or returned in plastic bags to neighboring households. An early morning rainstorm is the only event that would interrupt this pattern of activity.

Wash-taking is a chore performed by the one or two women residents on the block who take in the wash of their neighbors and/or kin, sometimes in exchange for meals or money. Often these are long standing arrangements that merit little discussion or comment, and residents themselves have trouble recalling their origin. If such an arrangement is in place, extra loads of laundry are brought over by the expected parties the previous night, and returned the following afternoon or early evening.

Cuida

Cuida (caretaking) is an activity that is so ubiquitous among older women in Pirambu that it almost defies a limited recounting. An individual example may be helpful to explicate the variety of activities that are commonly associated with this category.

In July 2015 I lived with a woman close to my own age and her mother, Dona Alicia. The month I was there the grandson of Dona Alicia was also staying at the house. He was the first child of her eldest son and had been raised by Dona Alicia and his aunt from the time he was three months until school age (five years) and now spent most holidays and weekends with his grandmother and aunt. During these periods, Dona Alicia's caretaking began with providing breakfast for her grandson. Following the courtyard maintenance and wash-taking, she walked over to a neighboring house where she saw to the breakfast of woman in her eighties and gave her a sponge bath. Coming back to the house she cooked a full lunch for herself and her grandson and then took a portion of this to her elderly neighbor for the woman's lunch and dinner. Several afternoons a week Dona Alicia also went to visit her elderly father, who was bedridden and nearing the end of his life, in a neighborhood several bus rides and a long walk away. During these visits she sat with him and read passages from the New Testament, leaving to make her way home before nightfall. Upon arrival back home, Dona Alicia again saw to the dinner of her own daughter and grandson and again went to check on her elder neighbor.

Patterns of activity such as this one are repeated in households throughout Pirambu. Though not often discussed as a significant noteworthy activity (more often it is glossed as *coisas do dia-a-dia*, or "everyday things"), caretaking nonetheless takes up the majority of many older females' days. It is particularly common in the Northeast to take in extended family members as young children and perform the off again/on again social responsibilities of raising them as a child of one's own. Elderly residents of the neighborhoods are also understood to need more or less constant attention, and at the very least require daily "checking in." Both of these activities (child raising and elder watching), commonly meted out between neighborhood kin and non-kin, are chores, that are reciprocally shared within the (female) community. It is this reciprocity that in my view is the crux of the fluid and dynamic category of family in the traditional Northeast.

Gaming

By eleven o'clock as older female residents are organizing large midday meals in their homes, groups of older men in Pirambu have taken their places in the bars that line *Leste-Oeste* the broad busy avenue to the neighborhood's eastern edge. Sitting in shifting groups of four and five on the plastic stools that are also found in court yards and around matching plastic tables, men play a variety of card games, drink *cerveja* (beer), and chat for much of the afternoon.

These bar/restaurants form the public face of Leste-Oeste and by later afternoon can become quite raucous as money changes hands during continual betting and card games. Once the afternoon turns and dusk begins to fall, the bars pack up their thin rows of patio seating, and the men begin to walk back to their homes. The homologous oppositions that the gaming activity of men present in contrast to women's work in and the around the house are explicit; men laugh, revel, drink, and play in a public setting that lines the most public facing street of the community, while women engage in less unruly and more detail oriented activity in private spheres hidden behind the commercial strip. The groups of men carousing in the long line of bars and outdoor cafes glimpsed through their car window may be the only view of Pirambu seen by many wealthier residents of Fortaleza.

Kite Flying

Primary school typically ends at about one o'clock in Pirambu. At this time groups of young boys make their way home from school, stopping in clumps of six or seven to fly paper kites. The kites are inexpertly made from the ubiquitous plastic bags cast aside in Pirambu and fixed to wooden sticks or dowels, and then strung with a long piece of string that is sometimes decorated with paper flags. Large group of boys will run down neighborhood lanes to set their kites aloft in the early afternoon wind, the group often guiding just a single one aloft between them. This activity can continue for upwards of an hour without interruption from neighboring adults (despite occurring in the center of relatively busy streets) before a general agreement is reached to return home for lunch. If there is a holiday, or in the not uncommon occurrence of a strike called by schoolteachers, the boys begin the activity much earlier in the day.

Older women often comment affectionately on the kite flying as they move about the community during their day. "*Veja as crianças brincando—que coisa ter tempo livre!*" (Look at the children playing, what a thing to have free time!) Like the gaming of the adult men, kite flying presents a publicly visible structural contrast with the activity of older women and is homologous with the gendered oppositions that exist within the privacy of the household.

Siesta

Directly following lunch between early and later afternoon most neighborhoods are quiet in Pirambu. Residents of both genders, old and young alike, unwrap their hammock bundles and rehang them on the patios. If it's too hot or rain is threatening, they retreat in doors. Uninterrupted sleep appears rare, but residents still largely insist on the ritual of lying down. I have often seen older women fingering their rosaries as they nod off or murmuring words of comfort to a baby who has been put to sleep adjacently. Although everybody in Pirambu takes siestas it is a largely an individual affair the niceties of which are most often, with the exception of the very young, negotiated with oneself, unlike most other activities which are fundamentally social in nature.

Residents wake up, usually a half an hour or so later, in a slow and unhurried manner. And it is only after the midday break that food preparation for dinner resumes along with discussion about when residents may be expected home. Despite the absence of overt commentary about the activity of siesta, it is a form-giving event. Daily activities (including those listed here) must be undertaken *antes* (before) or *depois* (after) the lacuna marked by the siesta, and thus the day is split into two parts.

A Tarde

In the late afternoon after the afternoon winds have died down before dusk, an activity quite different from the siesta takes place. Walking through the community in the later afternoon sun, one sees older women (and the occasional man) take up residence in their open courtyard gates to take in the afternoon scene. This activity can be accomplished by standing with an arm slung along the courtyard gate, sitting on the courtyard steps that descend to the street, or leaning against the courtyard wall while standing on the street. Occasionally, residents will bring out pillows or a thin mattress from their houses and place them in their vestibules. Sporadic conversation between neighbors of adjacent homes and across the road

may accompany this activity, but in general a gentle stillness pervades the neighborhood, unlike noisier periods of the day, a kind of settling before family members who work in Fortaleza start streaming home. In contrast to the more private activity of the mornings and midday, when, for example, exits to and from the house are undertaken in a hurry, the languid nature of *a tarde* appears to mark the transition to what will become a very public and community centered end of day.

Janta

In the interior of northeastern Brazil more generally, as well as Pirambu, *janta* (supper) is a light meal. It often consists of *sopa* or *caldo* (soup or light broth), accompanied by a piece of bread left over from the morning meal. If rice is left over from lunch—traditionally the largest meal of the day—it is added to the soup, as are fragments of meat. The meal tends to be eaten late (typically after seven o'clock), and can be enjoyed alone in front of the television or with family and friends, but it is rarely a formal, sit down meal.

One relatively common practice in Pirambu is for residents (generally older, retired women) to host *janta* by pulling out a few chairs, making a big pot of soup or stew, and offering it to neighboring residents for a very small fee. The *janta* is typically served on plastic plates and these are thrown out after the meal. There were several of these *janta* venues on the street where I stayed in 2015, and I observed them during other field visits as well. After the meal has been served, residents tend to sit back in their plastic chairs and take in their surroundings and discuss and fret over memories of the past.

One theme of conversations I participated in compared how children were raised in the past with how particular neighbors choose to raise their children today. According to these conversations, children are less disciplined, more distracted, and left more on their own to run in what today are far busier streets. Individual moral commentary often slid into a lament for an idyllic neighborhood past during which trees were fuller and more ubiquitous, children could play in the roads until late at night without fear of harm, and street vendors selling traditional northeastern sweets walked up and down the dirt lanes.

Dinner isn't the only activity that is set up outside and invites community in Pirambu. Some families set up trampolines or other games outside their homes (if only for a night), also charging a small fee for their use.

Reproducing Social Persons and Community in Pirambu

The subject brought into being is not a Cartesian ego, a pure form of consciousness or idealist intentionality that inhabits the body while remaining distinct from it, but the living body in action, consciously orienting and directing its engagement in social forms of interaction with the ambient object world.

—Terence Turner

In a characteristically dense article packed with ethnographic detail, "Social Body and Embodied Subject: Bodiliness, Subjectivity, and Sociality among the Kayapo," Turner (1995) argues that among the Kayapo the collective treatment and decorative alteration of the body is the technique which tames the changes of the body in order to produce persons and communities. A general distinction arises from this description between social groups that formulate representations of the body in terms of abstract mental categories, such as sex or age, and those like the Kayapo that do so in terms of concrete social activity (ibid.:164). Using carefully documented examples of different ritual processes, Turner demonstrates how representations of the body are built up out of agency, subjectivity, and social relations embodied in material social activities. Crucial for Turner is the connection he draws between Kayapo representations of bodiliness, which recognize both the objective and subjective aspects of the living social body as they are realized in social activity, and an awareness of the

essential constructedness of reality by human action. It is this awareness, Turner argues, that the Kayapo have channeled into successful collective political action over the past decades.

Dignidade

Turner's insight into and detailed evidence about how bodily representations among the Kayapo emanate from practical activity invites us to think more formally about the daily activities of older women in Pirambu and the social representations that they embody. Senior women in Pirambu, almost always addressed with the honorific "*a senhora*," or sometimes "*Dona*" (followed by the surname), command an enormous amount of respect in the community. They are often the sole caretakers of large extended families, which can include children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces and nephews, as well as nonkin. They are likely to have raised their own children alone or with only sporadic help from fathers. Their homes are the center of shifting networks of reciprocity and pooled resources over which they reign with almost total authority. The dignity bestowed on older women in the community is commensurate with that conferred upon the figure of the mother in Brazil more generally and is the subject of a vast literature (Amaral 1948; Aragão 1983; Freyre 1967; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Less often discussed, however, are the social processes that are generative of the *dignidade* (dignity) they are accorded. Here I want to focus on the specific activities that represent and intensify the value of dignity in Pirambu.

Courtyard Maintenance and *Siesta* are two distinct categories of social practice that offer evidence about the contrasting ways in which the value of dignity is generated. Despite the initial appearance of being a forlorn urban wasteland that merely connects home and street, courtyards are almost always carefully tended to in Pirambu. As described in the prior section, older women perform this work early in the morning, organizing and beautifying the space for the activities of the day. All living objects within the courtyard receive attention (from the dry tendrils of plants to the stray cats that might roam through the yard). Marks of nighttime sociality (such as hammocks or empty beer bottles) are carefully stowed away. Upon the completion of the women's work, the courtyard stands ready for wash-taking, and to receive visitors that often come in the afternoons and evenings. This cleansing/socializing ritual is repeated inside the house during the hotter middle part of the day, but it is the more public facing outer part of the household that demands women's attention first.

Dignity is thus conferred on women in the process of maintaining the cleanliness and sociability of their courtyards (and by extension homes) as a whole. Older women are often the most senior and certainly the most venerated person in the household. The activities associated with courtyard maintenance allow her to visually represent her dignity (embodied here by a carefully tended courtyard) to herself and to her neighbors.

Siesta offers a counterpoint to the sociality that emerges from the activity of courtyard maintenance. It is, as I described, an individually negotiated affair and marks a distinct return to oneself. Publicly performed activities of the morning come to a halt and siesta represent a renewal before the increasingly public nature of the night. Though siesta time is generally protected in the community, I have observed the siestas of older women to be more zealously guarded than that of other family members. Regardless of what happens in the house during siesta time, it is understood that older women are not to be disturbed during their naps. I have often seen a line of grandchildren waiting outside their *avó's* (grandmother's) room patiently waiting for her to awake so they can ask for a favor or to respond to a question. "She needs this time to recover," explained one nephew who had been staying in the house where I was living. "She needs her beauty rest!" explained another when I wanted to wake the *senhora* of the house to help locate a pair of lost scissors. Siesta is the one occasion during the day when the needs of older women are prioritized and embraced, and this respect is mirrored by women's personal behavior. They are often reluctant, for example, to share a beloved blanket with a child while napping (though eager and insistent to do so at any other time of day) or to forgo their customary siesta spot, usually carefully chosen to favor a felicitous mixture of sun and shade. Dignity emerges from and is generated by older women's engagement with each of the social practices associated with siesta.

Fraternidade

The intimate rules of reciprocity that govern social relations among working and lower class residents in rural and urban areas of the Brazilian Northeast are a topic of interest and debate among scholars of the region (Albuquerque Jr. 2014; Ansell 2014; Lanna 1995; Rebhun 1999; Schepher-Hughes 1992). In her classic ethnography of a shantytown outside the northeastern city of Recife, Nancy Schepher-Hughes (1992:99–101) identified an implicit ethic of reciprocity among the residents of the community in which she worked and described the communal sharing of responsibility for individual residents. In contrast, Aaron Ansell (2014:60), writing two decades later about a rural community in Piauí, describes a norm of household independence which validates the productive autonomy of households and generates a “non-invasive mode of sociality.”

Throughout the roughly two decades I have conducted fieldwork in Pirambu the unit of the household has reigned supreme. Family members pool their salaries, divide bills, share infrastructure, and organize their futures from the fluidly defined but limited boundaries of the household. Almost without exception, senior women organize and control these households. But unlike the rural Northeast described by Ansell, where household security is generated through a carefully maintained independence, in Pirambu I observed household prosperity to be crucially dependent upon the creation and flourishing of extensive social networks. These networks, formed and maintained primarily by older women, are held in place by a social value that I have glossed as *fraternidade* (fraternity), the state or feeling of friendship and mutual support within a group. Unlike the value of dignity, which consolidates the venerated position of senior women in the community, fraternity is outwardly focused, extending the web of social relations through which a household’s future is secured.

Janta exemplifies an activity undertaken by older women that generates fraternity. In place of an organized food drive or the establishment of a “food pantry” suggested by the doctor during the health council meeting, management of hunger in a community in which intermittent food insecurity is pervasive is addressed in part by pop-up venues that invite particular local residents to partake in food and sociality. Jantas are not explicitly associated with alleviating hunger, although the repeated visits of particular residents suggested an observable pattern of participation by those who were lower income and food insecure. The venues allow residents to casually drop by and are focused primarily on the conversation and hanging out that occurs before and after the exchange of food.

In the case of my last field visit in 2015, the woman who hosted jantas on her block loved to cook and had recently retired. She wanted the company in the evening, she explained, and given the economic recession encroaching on Fortaleza, she was looking for some extra income. Her gregariousness enhanced the evening chatter as she brought people (mostly older women) together from different families and parts of the neighborhood. Tips were traded about which streets to avoid for fear of drug trafficking. Gossip about sons, daughters, and in-laws was punctuated with advice about how older children could register to take college entrance exams, notices of job openings, and who to talk to in order to avoid late fines for utility bills.

The recreation of memories also surfaced routinely during the jantas I attended. Most of the women who attended these gatherings were from the generation of Brazilians that had lived through the dismantling of the dictatorship. They were conscious of the ways their community had been transformed through that time (Jerome 2015). Despite their awareness of the privations of earlier years, visions of an idealized past invaded the present, allowing the women to objectify and reassess their understanding of their community.

A less explicit but equally important example of fraternity can be seen in the activities undertaken during *a tarde*. I related the experience of walking through Pirambu in the late afternoon and seeing multiple residents absorbed in moment-to-moment acts of watching, idling, and sensing. After one such walk, I found myself recalling Walt Whitman’s opening invocation from “Song of Myself.”

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease . . . observing a spear
of summer grass.

But it is not clear that introspection and self-knowledge are what residents seek during this late afternoon activity. It seems that social knowledge and an awareness of others and of one's own belonging to a community outside of the courtyard and home is at stake. Standing in front of, lying down in, being halfway in and out, occasionally calling across the threshold and then returning to a placid stance at the entry gate are all activities which older women engage in and which appropriate and resettle emerging divisions in the household that have occurred during the previous night and early day in Pirambu.

The time that older women put into the household in the form of material labor, through courtyard maintenance, caring for kin and nonkin, and preparing food is now represented to the community at large through taking up an "at ease" stance on the pivot between the private (interior) world of the home and the social world outside of it. Women can both see who is at home in their neighborhood and represent themselves to other community residents as having created a stable viable home that is open to the reciprocal relationships which sustain it.

Public Representations of Democracy in Fortaleza

Several decades after the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, amid the unending accusations of political corruption within the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party), democracy remains a strongly held ideal among leaders of the healthcare reform movement in Fortaleza. Building on the associations between democracy and social justice that have been made by Brazilian politicians throughout the country (Alvarez 1993; Avritzer 2002), city officials routinely organize workshops to cultivate what they understand to be the experience of civil and social citizenship necessary to produce a democratic rule of law.

During these workshops, politicians praise Brazil's universal health care system in abstract terms, citing its devotion to equality and its aspiration to produce a just society. Like the doctor, they talk about the need for representation at health council meetings from all social classes and their expectation that democracy will redefine the priorities of the health care system and ensure that it addresses the needs of all social classes. In this sense, discourse about democracy in Fortaleza should be regarded as part of an ideology. Understanding it as such, we discern that, as Turner (2008) contends, ideological representations tend to objectify themselves as the producer rather than the product of social activity.

In Pirambu, at least among the older women who are often the target of well-meaning government attempts to increase social participation, the values of equality and justice are not held in particular esteem. Every older woman with whom I have talked in any depth has advanced a firm and idiosyncratic vision of her neighborhood in which some residents are held in high esteem and deserving of the fortune that occasionally appears in their lives, while others, whether because of a poor work ethic, a stubborn addiction, or some other personal failing, are considered pitiful. Social networks take into account these considered appraisals and are woven around them. In this connection, social justice in the abstract was not a widely discussed ideal among older women. More often, the wish for justice would be expressed in relation to one's own family and to a limited set of deserving friends and neighbors.

Older women do not associate community belonging with the activities (attending council meetings, organizing community groups, and being a representative of working class) promoted by the doctor. Rather, in a form of value creation akin to that described by other anthropologists albeit in very different contexts (Munn 1986; Turner 1995, 2008), the daily activities of older women in Pirambu create distinctive forms of value (dignity and fraternity) which mobilize social relationships from one sphere of life (kin and neighbor relations) into the professional and civil spheres that help secure the ongoing success of women's households. Crucially, unlike participation in health activities organized by the government,

women exercise control over the activities undertaken in and around the household. They can intensify the production of dignity, for example, by modulating the upkeep of their courtyards, or they can undermine or redefine fraternity by precluding its realization through early evening dinners or casual stances taken up in doorways.

Conclusion

The doctor leading the health council meeting I described at the beginning of this essay was right. In fact, most residents of Pirambu, young or old, have little interest in the municipal and state politics surrounding health care reform. Although Brazil's celebrated universal health care system has extended access to care in Pirambu, as in poor neighborhoods throughout the country (Gragnotati et al. 2013), the experience of access has not been dramatically changed. Residents continue to be required to awake early to stand in long lines. They are confronted with shortages in medications, ambulances and medical staff. And they continue to contend with violence and skeletal forms of infrastructure in their everyday lives. Neither regular attendance at health council meetings nor the types of community action urged by the doctor are seen by residents as adequate measures to address these realities.

But the deprivation and difficulties of life in Pirambu cannot explain the level of participation or attitudes towards government health care initiatives. It is not because community residents are so exhausted by day to day living that they can't be bothered with forging long-term solutions to enduring dilemmas in their neighborhoods. Rather, the daily activities described in this essay illustrate precisely the type of lasting solutions engendered by older women residents and embodied by the values of dignity and fraternity which help to ensure the vitality of their households. These values are at odds with the doctor's advice that, for example, residents establish a food pantry for hungry community members. Such a food pantry would reinforce the value of social justice, but only in a generic sense. In contrast, the practice of *janta* flourishes in Pirambu because it enables senior women to direct justice towards the particular social networks they believe will increase the success of their individual households.

Human daily activity—the quotidian and its observability—continually reemerges as the focus for making explicit the core of human creativity masked as habit and necessity: from Aristotle, who understood reason to be a means towards self-reflection and awareness embedded in the practices of day-to-day living, to the poetry of the New York School in which daily doings were elevated and used to strip away the artifice between “living” and “writing” (Nelson 2007). Anthropologies of urban poverty have also taken up this concern with the daily and, by way of example, in this regard Biehl (2014:96) points to the contention made in the works of Kathleen Stewart that ethnographic rendering illuminates “people's arts of existence and the political stakes that make up the ordinary.” In this genre, caregiving in particular has become a hyperfetishized realm in which the “moral and temporal texture” of care is investigated (Han 2011:8; see also Buch 2015; Han 2012; Kleinman 2010).

Terence Turner's approach reminds us that daily activity is not only habit or the site of ongoing ethical and political thought, or even, to return to poetry again, the “I do this, I do that” that Frank O'Hara was fond of chronicling (Nelson 2007:81). Rather, daily activity, including caregiving, is productive activity; and the ultimate product of the totality of daily activities is society and its members. Tracing out the objective and subjective aspects of phenomena as they are embodied in social activity requires the kind of close attention that Turner provided in almost all of his accounts of the Kayapo. He wrote about specific things (arm bracelets, penis sheaths, and body painting), in exacting copious detail, and not about some indefinite aspect of them. And in his “things” came brilliant ideas.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2013 American Anthropological Meetings, in a panel organized by Suzanne Oakdale and Michael Cepek in honor of Terence Turner. I am grateful to the organizers of the panel for the opportunity to celebrate Terry's

work, and to Suzanne Oakdale for her encouragement and energies in shepherding the initial papers into articles. The thoughtful comments of an anonymous reviewer and Tipiti's editor, William Fisher, were vital for transforming the piece, and I am deeply grateful for their engagement. The material is based in part on work supported by a 2014 Fulbright Scholars Program grant.

² This approach comprises a growing body of scholarship that Joel Robbins (2013) has referred to as the "anthropology of suffering."

³ This is not to say there is no overlap between Turner's work and what I am loosely grouping together as an anthropology of suffering. For example, both approaches share a deep concern for the people with whom they work, but even here its expression diverges. In the case of the latter, that concern is bound up with attempts to "write with care" (Garcia 2010:34–35). The written word did not carry this double burden for Turner; his activism was largely in and directed towards action.

⁴ Pirambu is almost always described as a "favela" by wealthier residents of Fortaleza, though people from Pirambu will refer to only particular (and changing) blocks of their neighborhood as being "favela-like."

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