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MIDDLE CLASSES, LTD.: CONSUMPTION AND CLASS IDENTITY DURING BRAZIL'S INFLATION CRISIS

by

MAUREEN O'DOUGHERTY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1997

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in the Brazilian middle class precedes fieldwork undertaken in 1993-94. Prior to that time, I had spent three years in Recife, Brazil, first as a high school exchange student for six months, later for a semester to increase fluency and travel in the Northeast, and then as a resident. I married a Brazilian, and we lived in Recife for two years. My debt to Brazilians correspondingly stems from my first visit to the country to the present.

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This experience occurred at the end of the Brazilian "miracle," and coincided with the worst repression of the dictatorship. Returning there in 1984-85, I was met with an optimistic fervor in the final transition to democracy, shown by the 1984 campaign for direct elections ("diretas já!"). Even civilian president-elect Tancredo Neves proclaimed defiantly that Brazil's debt to foreign banks was not to be paid back at severe cost to the Brazilian people. At the same time, one soon came to see a change to middle class homes: the "economic crisis" which had begun in 1981. Living on local wages as a teacher I felt it myself, albeit with the possibility of departure. For this time in Recife I would like to thank Johannes and Nadia for their lunch invitations and concern. To Claudia, Jucá and especially Patrícia, I thank for conversations about the political economic circumstances operating, advice on practicalities and most of all, their unwavering friendship.

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The deep concern all these friends have for Brazil and Brazilians gave me a sense of this middle class not always recognized.

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To the memory of my father, James Aquinas O'Dougherty,
to my mother Patricia Coyne and to my brothers and sisters,
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Chapter 1
This Class which is not One: Introduction to the Brazilian Middle Classes

Brazilian homes are graceful and gracious. Welcomed in from the hot sun into cool, soothingly uncluttered rooms, the visitor is offered refreshment, and if the stay stretches, enjoined to dine with the family. Apartment buildings have 24 hour doormen, however, and security gates. Houses have barred windows, and the walls surrounding them are built higher as years go by. The middle and upper class Brazilian home appears to be separated and protected from the outside world where the majority of the poor live. But it has been "invaded."

Over the last decade in Brazil, in the worst economic crisis since the 1930s depression, at any moment the rules of daily life could be and were changed. With high inflation, the currency changed five times between 1986 and 1994. A hefty accompanying devaluation was the norm; the calculation for base salaries was altered, as were house and rental contracts. The side effects were multiple. In this period one could literally wake up to a dramatically new scenario -- and even lose one's job. In Brazil (as in other Latin American countries), where "crisis" became a constant, apparently ineradicable reality, the extraordinary became everyday.

Brazil's middle class has experienced the recent global economic crisis in exaggerated proportions. And what

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happened? People responded to such a threat to their living conditions. They "adapted" incessantly and in unheard of ways. While we allknow that the middle class home is neither the world depicted in "Father Knows Best" nor a "haven in a heartless world," still many of us in the US manage perfectly well to solve daily problems without constantly reading the newspaper or watching the news. In Brazil such nonchalance became a luxury. All Brazilians, it is often said, are now economists. In this context the private was "invaded;" middle class households became an arena of the public crisis. In a TV broadcast in July 1994 the Finance Minister advised people on how to do their shopping.

The project I formulated for my dissertation research aimed to analyze the impact of Brazil's economic crisis on material conditions in São Paulo's middle class and on the ways middle class people redefined and represented their social positions. With the supports of middle class living threatened -- job security, education, housing, savings, ease of consumption -- the meaning of middle class-ness and its means of social reproduction were put into question. Conducting fieldwork in São Paulo from August 1993 through November 1994 with 24 middle class families, I addressed such questions as: How do inflationary conditions affect household budgetary decisions and consumption practices? What do these practices reveal about identity? Are middle

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class Brazilians undergoing downward mobility? How can one read the changes occurring to the middle class through their discourses? How does the experience of crisis differentially affect men and women, and older and younger people? What is the role of the media vis-à-vis the middle class during the crisis? What are the political implications?

Brazil's middle class, recently formed and quickly plunged into a destabilizing economic crisis,[1] provides an especially dynamic case for research on class identity as manifested in everyday life. My research focused on: practices directed to maintaining social position; the ways in which middle class identity is represented by members of the class and in society; and national-political dimensions of the crisis for the middle class. By practices I include the range of activities which emerged as tactically relevant to maintaining social position. These could include making elaborate cost comparisons prior to grocery shopping and bargain shopping in Miami, opening a small business, sending children to private school, being active in a social or religious organization, and criticizing the government. By representations I refer to people's own ("native" or "emic") conceptions of the middle class. I include the discourse by

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[1] For economic discussion of Brazil's inflation, see Bunker 1986, Frieden 1986, Bruno 1988, Singer 1988, Baer 1989, Markoff 1990, Dinsmoor 1990, Markoff and Baretta 1990, Cardoso 1992, Barbosa 1993, Earp 1993, Garcia 1995.

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middle class people concerning their own identity in relation to society, and representations of the middle class in public contexts, especially in the print media. Aware that the construct "middle class" is heterogeneous and the conditions were tending to exacerbate internal differentiation, I gave particular emphasis to differences by gender and generation and responses to class differentiation.

The complexity of inflation--why it developed, why it persisted, how it could be stopped, its pervasive intrusion into daily life, and the growing understanding of governmental responsibility for it, made politics and the nation's course a constant issue for middle class adults concerned with their own and their children's futures. Accordingly, I examine how middle class Brazilians articulated, evaluated and acted on their situations in relation to their community, the nation and the government's handling of the crisis. I study the presidency of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-92), when Brazil suffered its worst recession, and the remarkable public activism of middle classes demanding the president's impeachment for corruption. I then examine informant political discourse collected during fieldwork, which included one year of high inflation, then an end to high inflation with a new government plan (the Plano Real) beginning just before the 1994 general and presidential elections. My concern was to

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understand how middle class informants were positioning themselves in the nation, newly democratized but plagued with political and economic crises. For this analysis, I discuss the role of the press in providing middle class readers with an understanding of the national crises, and I consider how press coverage on the middle class was contributing to redefinitions of identity.

This dissertation strives to provide an ethnography of middle class people in a Latin American country, one which documents this historical period and contributes to theories of class in everyday life and to cross-cultural comparisons.

Part I: Theoretical Approach

Middle Class and Consumption

I formulated this research in response to a number of imperatives. My approach to the study of everyday life was initially inspired by feminist theory, which has demonstrated that the category gender is critical in social determination, mediating in processes of class differentiation. Its exploration of questions of subjectivity and difference, and its emphasis on the problematic interrelation of the personal and the political in daily life, furnish a theoretical perspective for investigating everyday life (see, e.g., de Lauretis 1986). In addition, Bourdieu's (1977) and de Certeau's (1984)

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perspectives on the workings of class in everyday life provided points of departure for this study.

The literature on rural and urban working classes is extensive. By comparison, research is limited on that social sector so central to the shaping of cultural and material life in contemporary society. Furthermore, what knowledge we have of middle class practices, ideologies and positions in the overall class structure is partial, as it has derived mainly from studies of early industrialized areas where a large percentage of the population came to enjoy middle class living standards (but see Austin 1984 and Johnson 1985; and for Brazil, Velho 1972, Hansen 1976, Pastoré 1979, Bianco-Feldman 1981, Saes 1985, Da Matta 1985, Romanelli 1986, Needell 1987, Quadros 1991, Caldeira 1992 and Owensby 1994; see discussion below).

Besides the basic issue of lack of empirical knowledge of middle classes cross-culturally, this research responds to the call to complement structural approaches with a broad and synthetic middle class study (see e.g., Albuquerque 1977). Various Marxist approaches (Poulantzas 1975, Althusser 1984, Wright 1985) have analyzed objective correlates of middle class position. They have usefully teased out the complex locations that middle class groups occupy in the economic structure. Yet their analyses of identity and politics have often been limited to deductions of "class consciousness" based on these locations.

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Recently, Wright (1989) recognized the need to study arenas other than the workplace in order to understand class based consciousness and acts.

Theorists have based definitions of the middle class either on their role and position in the productive system (the Marxist structural model) or have focused on the market, income differentials and manifestations of status (the stratification model and Weberian perspective). Without wishing to overlook the differences in perspective and implications of the Marxist analytic/structuralist position on the question of class versus the Weberian one, we can nonetheless see that theorists of both orientations repeatedly note that the middle class is: (1) fostered by and fostering of modern capitalist society, both in production and in consumption; (2) at the same time unstable, moving upward or downward; and (3) heterogeneous, or better, internally differentiated. Sociological theorists have concurred that it is precisely these specific features and their intermediary placement in the social structure which influence middle class views and acts.[2]

These conditions and questions are of key interest and yet must be adjusted for Brazil. As in most "Third World" areas, Brazil's middle class emerged relatively recently and

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[2] See Parkin 1971, Giddens 1973, Albuquerque 1977, Giddens e Mackenzie 1982, Heffren 1982, Abercrombie e Urry 1983, Althusser 1984, Portes 1985, Saes 1985, Wright 1985, 1989, Burris 1986, Guimarães 1991, Loeaza 1993.

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as a privileged minority. Processes of internal differentiation and subjective dimensions of class identity need to be viewed against the composition of this wider class structure. Wood and Carvalho (1989) estimated Brazil's middle class at 20 percent.[3] Overall income distribution shows a bottom heavy pyramid shaped stratification with a very small sector possessing the wealth; the crisis exacerbated these inequalities. In fact two years in a row (1995-96) the World Bank ranked Brazil first in the world in income disparities (Jornal do Brasil 9/7/96).

The emphasis of my research is people's own representations of class identity and acts of preservation, as these are worked out in a period of high instability, downward mobility for most and income concentration within a minority. One major focus for my analysis is consumption -- an interest at once critical to the group concerned and the context (indeed consumption issues make newspaper headlines until the time of writing) and which joins a steadily growing field of research.

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[3] Economist Belik's (n.d.) estimate from 1991 data is slightly lower. According to the the declaration of almost 33 million Brazilians, less than 2 percent of Brazil's population (of 150,000 million) earned more than the equivalent of US $40,000 per annum; about 16 percent earned between 10,000-39,000; 69 percent earned between 1000 and 9,900; and 13 percent earned less than 1000. By comparison, Belik reported 40 percent in the U.S. fall into the 10,000-39,000 category.

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The works of Bourdieu (1977, 1979) and Douglas and Isherwood (1979) marked a turn, in Miller's (1995) view, in anthropology towards consumption. Bourdieu shows how in our daily acts, especially details of consumption, we not only reveal our class position but actively produce and reproduce it. What might be taken as pre- or un-social (the home, taste and consumption more generally) is centrally involved in this reproduction of class society. Bourdieu emphasizes unconscious naturalization processes. For their part, Douglas and Isherwood find that goods would embody cultural categories, and that their function is to make sense. Perhaps the longest held interest in Western consumer goods has concerned fashion. Symbolic examinations of contemporary fashion, notably Barthes' study of fashion makers (1967) and of advertising (1972) and Hebdige's (1979) analysis of counterculture style drew attention to questions of the power of producers over consumers (see also Sahlins 1976 and Ewen 1976, Ewen and Ewen 1982).

Also beginning in the late 1970s, other works in history and anthropology have had a broad historical interest in the role of consumption in the formation of modern capitalist society. While claims differ, these works share in demonstrating that consumption is more than a mere aspect or consequence of capitalist production; rather it figures centrally in processes of accumulation (see e.g., Schneider 1977, Mintz 1985).

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Regarding the growing consumerism within Europe, McKendrick (1982) argues that the consumer boom (1690s forward) predates and prompts industrialization in Europe. He associates this expansion with the opening of class society, and he follows Veblen (1936 [1899]) and Simmel (1957 [1904]) in finding the motive for modern demand (and fashion) was to imitate nobles. Others argue that the developing middle classes were less geared to the elites and concerned, rather, with forging new identities different from other adjacent sectors in the newly emerging class system. Furthermore, the goods and the means were distinct. Thus Mukerji (1983) shows for 16th century Europe that groups previously with a low level of material culture staked claims of social station not only in display but in investments in material goods; in so doing they "shaped the environment in which capitalism could develop" (1983:15). McCracken (1990) distinguishes middle class preference for novelty as a break from elite preference for patina. In an ambiguous context of a rapidly changing social hierarchy, consumption became a primary means for making new social identities (Miller 1987). This statement applies particularly well for rising "middling" sectors, who distinguished themselves through geographic segregation, housing construction, style and organization, forms of consumption and valuation placed on them and forms of socializing (see Da Matta 1985, Frykman and Lofgren 1987,

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Blumin 1989, Wilk 1989 and Colloredo-Mansfeld 1994).

Such works directly contest the bias perceivable in the preceding dismissal of consumption as unsocial,[4] extending in a new direction what has widely been analyzed with respect to gender (see e.g., Young et al 1981). The "private sphere" and consumption have become recognized as central to processes constituting class. The consumption literature is showing that social difference is not merely "expressed" in consumption, but rather that consumption has its own force in producing noncapitalist and capitalist societies, cultural forms and identities (see e.g., Weiner and Schneider 1989). Studies also branched out from a focus on objects to analyses of sites and activities relating to consumption. Here Williams (1982) and Carrier (1995) draw attention not only to social differentiation but to desires of and for the self and life experienced in shopping.

While a number of works have pointed out that modern consumption concerns ideas about the individual, society and self-definition, it is Campbell (1987) who most squarely takes on the question of the subjective motivations and legitimations for modern consumption. He identifies its major quality in the development of unlimited wants, emphasizing that this culturally constructed desire and

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[4] The "silence" Ferguson (1988) and Miller (1995) have noted regarding consumption may be tied to biases that the subject is frivolous, or outside social life due to an association with the private sphere and female gender.

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related sensibilities are aptly tied to novel consumer goods and to making consumption an end in itself. Campbell ingeniously links moral idealism, new doctrines of the self and self-expression to -- (enlightened) commercialism, thereby contesting both Veblen's idea that modern consumption was all about display and emulation of the wealthy, and Weber's claim of asceticism in the development of capitalism.

Another body of works parallels the interest in social change related to capitalism, yet debates extend elsewhere. The examination of the introduction of commodities into noncapitalist societies prompted a revision of works in economic anthropology (e.g., Malinowski 1922, Mauss 1925, Polanyi 1944, Bohannon 1955), which classically dealt with exchange relations and spheres of exchange outside the capitalist centers and which were viewed as if antithetical to each other. The volume edited by Appadurai (1986) explicitly moves away from dichotomous typological understandings (e.g., Gregory 1982) in which the contrasts between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies -- nonmarket/market, nonmonetized/monetized, noncommodified /commodified, socially instituted economies/ impersonal market forces, use value/exchange value (regarding the last pair, see Sahlins 1976, Baudrillard 1981, Schneider 1988) -- were exaggerated. As Ferguson discusses, the Appadurai collection both departs from a tradition in economic

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anthropology and is a "homecoming" (1988:491). The focus decidedly changed from typologies to processes (from this volume see Kopytoff on the plastic quality of goods) and expanded to power and politics (see Appadurai's introduction and Bayly's analysis of Indian cloth and politics), all the while concerning objects in circulation.[5] Subsequent contributions with similar revisionist intent (such as the volumes edited by Bloch and Parry 1989, Thomas 1991, Dilley 1992 and Heyman 1997 explore social and moral concerns presumed to have been altered once money and modern markets took precedence. Far from being divorced from social values and censures, consumption is in any society associated with strongly held ones, such that any break in consumption patterns must have a justification or encounter conflict.

The volume Social Economy of Consumption (1989) edited by Rutz and Orlove consolidates the emerging sense, one which reverses the notion of consumption as an unsocial aftermath of production, locating consumption, instead, in processes of capitalist accumulation, the constitution of class, gender and national identities and moral ideals. The works in the Rutz and Orlove volume apply their analyses to the study of "Third World" areas. Noting the relative lack of consideration of the extent to which symbolic categories might be introduced along with modern Western goods into the

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[5] It is unfortunate, as Ferguson points out, that the work attempted to anchor its new footings on the dubious notion that exchange creates value.

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"Third World," Philibert calls for attention to the meanings and classificatory schemes that come with the package--the commodity imported. A number of works deal with the association of "First World" goods with "modernity." Thus Lindenbaum (1987) examines western changes in Bangledeshi diet; Wilk (1989) analyzes foreign goods in middle class Belize as ways to achieve First World modernity, acquire a related stability in the goods and sense of bright future. (See also Lofgren's historical study of modernization of middle class homelife in Sweden; regarding modernity in Brazil, see Ortiz 1985 and Ardaillon 1995).

While some studies on the transnational circulation of goods celebrate hybridization and creolization in the development of social and national identities (Hannerz 1987, Friedman 1991, 1992), rather than view the new consumers as passive victims sadly engaged in a subtraction of their cultural "authenticity," others remind us to look at self-conscious modernity and nation building outside the centers of wealth without losing sight of new entanglements in unequal power relations and the reproduction of inequalities (Appadurai 1990, Abu-Lughod 1990, Lee 1993, Nash 1993). Critical that the emphasis on consumption has led to a one-sided and one-dimensional reading (symbolic, rather than political economic), Carrier and Heyman call for analyzing the "efforts by household members to maintain and improve their location in a world of unequal social groupings"

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(1997:9).

This brief, selective survey reveals continuities in interests, but also that in the past 20 years, one has moved a long way from viewing consumption solely as cultural meaning fixed in the objectified past or as a static expression of status. The literature shows, instead, "consumers" not only acted upon by producers (as Frankfurt School-influenced perspectives would see it) but rather as "agents" formulating their self-understandings, social knowledge, identities and national dreams through goods, consumption acts and styles. Though perspectives vary greatly, these works have moved the anthropology of consumption from a peripheral status to a central concern, in keeping with the recognition of its role in the production of modern society -- and, of course, the production of middle classes.

A work of evident comparative relevance for my own on the middle class and consumption is Bourdieu's. I share with Bourdieu a skepticism of accounts of "class on paper" and an interest in understanding class dynamics in our daily acts, especially details of consumption. However, the context of this research requires emphases and attentions which don't overly concern Bourdieu's work. Despite acknowledging that change is ongoing, Bourdieu focuses on practices long since formulated, such that they have become largely "unconscious," "natural(ized)," "reproduced"

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"habit(use)s" (see DiMaggio 1979 and Calhoun et al 1993). If this continuity is applicable to a society like France where middle classes have a relatively long generational depth and degree of stability, such time depth and constancy have not been characteristic of Brazil's middle class. For Eagleton (see Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992) the problem with Bourdieu's approach to the workings of class and culture is that Bourdieu makes a transposition of Marxist economic language onto the cultural and symbolic sphere in reaction to economism, rather than registering the weight of the economic on the cultural. One might further point out that Bourdieu renders social agents in rather one-dimensional, calculating and rationalistic terms. His concepts of habitus and doxa specifically disregard self-understandings; the correspondences made between class and taste verge on reflection theory (Rutz and Orlove 1989); and the theory is not well equipped to account for practices and ideas in circulation in times of great disruption.

This research aims to register the economic "weight" without accepting a unidirectional determination, narrowly rationalistic behavior or disregard for social knowledge. It is starkly clear to Brazilians that fundamental economic changes have been occurring, the outcome of which is unknown. Middle class people have had to respond to dramatic, ever changing conditions on a daily basis and adopt new strategies or tactics (de Certeau 1984); they have

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done so consciously and with a lot of commentary. Towards an understanding of the processes reconstituting class identity, I consider both discursive and practical areas. Unlike many class and consumption theorists, I wanted to learn the commonsense understanding of class per se, and in relation to the wider political economic conditions. I will return to this point. Let us turn now to studies and theories on middle classes developed by Latin Americanists.

Middle Classes in Brazil

The majority of works on middle classes in Latin America have concerned their political and structural particularities (see e.g., Pinheiro 1975, Albuquerque 1977, Zenteno 1977, Loaeza 1982 and 1989, Portes 1985, Saes 1985, Boschi 1986, Oliveira 1988, Pierucci 1991, Guimarães 1991, Simões 1992). As noted for Brazil, these societies are characterized by great income disparities. Yet while the upper middle class is privileged, it and a less affluent middle class sector are also isolated from either extreme. This raises the question of their allegiances.

Brazilian middle classes have long been described as conservative and lacking in autonomy (see Weffort 1965, Fausto 1970, Pinheiro 1975 for early to mid-century analyses). That is to say, these theorists have not found it to be a class in and for itself, but rather to be under the shadow of the bourgeoisie. Another, and especially

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damning, critique of Brazilian middle classes of more recent times claims that they were bought out by the dictatorship (1964-85) with the lure of consumption (Saes 1985). While in my view that argument is presumptuous, it is known that many did support the coup d'état[6] and the dictatorship, and that middle and upper middle classes were the beneficiaries of the blossoming consumer society which ensued from the "Brazilian [economic] miracle" of 1968-74 (see Quadros 1991). This period of the military's most violent repression was also that of national development, promoted by incurring a massive foreign and mostly public debt, regressive wage policy for workers and prohibition of strikes (Frieden 1986, Baer 1989). These led to great economic growth (GDP rose to 11 percent between 1968-74; Dinsmoor 1990:20), expanded work opportunities and prosperity for middle and upper classes. Moreover, it is clear that Brazil's middle class has been maintained, held together, buoyed up -- or not, by political plans and policies which give -- and withdraw -- support. This support can be seen in an economic environment favorable for middle classes in the 1960s-70s, and in specific programs created in those years, notably financing extended to middle class home buyers.

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[6] See Simões (1985) for a study of the support of middle class women for the 1964 takeover. Nun (1968) reminds us that the military officers have middle class backgrounds.

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This era was shortlived, and the same factors which made the middle class prosper came to threaten its future. Class differentiation, exacerbated due to the inflation crisis (Kovarick 1985, Pastore 1986, Singer 1988, Wood and Carvalho 1988), raises the question of how middle classes (hitherto benefitting in capitalist society) would respond to relatively disadvantaged circumstances. In Brazil, where state involvement in economic development has been prevalent and overt, and where its responsibility for the inflation crisis became notorious, one finds Brazilians drew direct connections between their losses and misgovernment. Or rather, explanations for the crisis developed in the following order. During the transition to democracy (the early 1980s), politicians placed blame for what was then only a four year old inflation crisis on Brazil's foreign debt, thereby targeting the policy of the military dictatorship and foreign banks. Over the next years, however, economists and the news pointed to the government's fiscal policies (from presidents Sarney to Collor to Franco) for reproducing inflationary conditions. The recessionary economic environment, prejudicial wages for most salaried workers, indirect and direct "taxation" of middle class savings through inflation and government confiscation led to widespread disapproval of the government.

It is interesting to compare Brazilian middle class understandings of their downward mobility with that of North

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Americans, as shown by Newman (1988). In brief, in the US context, middle class people blamed themselves; in Brazil, they blamed the government, and acted on it in the 1992 impeachment movement. Even before that time, some analysts (Boschi 1986 and Bonelli 1989) pointed to a leftist politicization of middle classes due to the crisis and downgrading of middle class employment. Considering the early years of the crisis, Bonelli argues that middle class Brazilians were no longer identifying with the upper class, and that this new consciousness was revealed in their political activity, as evidenced by strikes. Indeed it is noteworthy that an elite occupational group, engineers, demonstrated as well as teachers--long since underpaid public employees. Others have found instead contrary evidence of middle class politics: in anti-populist voting by middle classes in the 1990s and elitist maneuverings within the workforce (Pierucci and Lima 1991 and Grun 1992, respectively). In her review of middle class labor, Simões (1992) underscores the fragmentary quality of the sector; this might inhibit collective action.

Anthropological and historical works on the Brazilian middle class have focused on its internal development and social reproduction. Taking the early 20th century, anthropologist Bianco-Feldman's dissertation (1981) studies small town (Paulista) traders and bureaucrats whose strategies for upward mobility included buying up property

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from poor farmers, working the patronage system and making advantageous marriages. Hansen's (1971) ethnohistorical dissertation on the outlying São Paulo neighborhood of Santana (north zone) traces the contrary paths into the middle class: upward for immigrants, and downward for declining rural elites. She emphasizes that middle classes formed less from upward than from downward mobility and exclusion from opportunities. Taking a structuralist line, Hansen sees the middle class as functionaries of those in power; they lacked political participation and instead merely received consumer opportunities. Historian Owensby's dissertation (1994) traces paths over a century (1850-1950) into the middle classes of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, taking into account both occupational trajectories (via industry, public service and commerce) and symbolic manifestations. He argues that the middle class was formed principally in oppositional relation to working classes. The middle class distinctions rested on their nonmanual labor on the one hand, and consumption practices on the other. The latter included different home size, servants, clothing, and an insistence on their own superior education and culture to further distinguish the class and naturalize a hierarchy. My research shows these supports for middle class identity remain crucial, and that the opposition to the working class has racial aspects.

Anthropological works focusing on the more contemporary

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Brazilian middle class are as yet few; the few published have as context the 1960-70 period of expansion and prosperity. Thus Velho's late 60s study (published 1972) of a middle class neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro centers on the "social project" entailed in residents' move from an outlying (north zone) working class neighborhood to Copacabana (south zone); the geographic change confirmed the new class standing. Family and friend exchange networks for employment advancement have been described by Leeds (1964; see also Miller 1979). Other works have dealt with the "traditional" versus "modern" paradigm of families, studying dynamics of family interaction (Heilborn 1984, Lins de Barros 1987, Romanelli 1986), gender relations of couples (Corrêa 1983, Salem 1985) and in household operations (Bruschini 1990, Ardaillon 1995). Perspectives on symbolic expression of class identity in daily life include essays by DaMatta on the declining bourgeoisie (1985, 1991) and by Velho on individualism (1981). These works, as well as Owensby's, signal the middle class preoccupation with hierarchical distinctions.

These several works from a range of disciplines raise questions regarding the kinds of middle class strategies and expressions of class that might develop when economic decline left most middle class people in a stationary or downward path, but allowed a minority to rise. To my knowledge, one study exists of Brazil's crisis and a non-

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popular sector.[7] Anthropologist Caldeira's dissertation (1993) documents spatial segregation in São Paulo of wealthy people in closed condominiums, or with high security systems in self-defense of homes increasingly prey to burglary. She integrates her study of space with analysis of the discourse on violence among upper (middle) classes.

Studies of the historical development of middle classes and essays on the recent crisis conditions have led Latin Americanist scholars to draw out political dimensions of consumption in relation to class, in ways which I have not encountered elsewhere in the consumption literature. A notable collection of essays by a variety of social scientists (Vieira et al 1993) recently appeared exploring social implications of the crisis. It included the argument (first presented by Singer 1988) that the inflation crisis was a most insidious, or even "perverted" form of class conflict. Through consumption we not only work out class identity and express it, but reproduce or exacerbate class divisions. In turn these practices have implications for

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[7] Other studies examining middle class strategies elsewhere in Latin America during the crisis include Selby, Murphy and Lorenzen (1990), Selby (1991) and Winter (1991), who found isolation of Mexican households suffering the impact of the crisis. In contrast, Lomnitz and Melnick's (1991) study of teachers in Chile during the crisis found reciprocity and exchange, but also that this sector sensed a symbolic undermining of status. Petras (1989) analyzes responses of small business owners in Argentina. Davis (1991) considers political responses among middle sectors.

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the national community and course. With respect to contemporary Latin America, in its state of economic instability coupled with ever rising consumerism, Garcia Canclini has emphasized social conflict in this way: "To consume is to participate in a field of disputes for that which the society produces and for the ways of using it" (1995:45).

Given the lack of political activism among informants, it was important to understand what the "inactivity" signified; and in what ways people expressed their class and in what arenas they acted.[8] While middle class Brazilians remained apparently uninvolved in party politics, their opposition to the state took overt political form in the Collor impeachment and in legal suits; covert form in informal sector work, related tax evasion and in contraband shopping; and most frequently, in anti-state discourse decrying its immorality and backwardness and in support for neoliberal policy and "globalization" (i.e., opening of the national market to international competition). These acts and positions will be discussed in the course of the dissertation.

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[8] It was interesting to note that several informants were religiously active. Seven were highly active Spiritists, and three belonged to bible study groups. Although religion is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would be fascinating to take into account attitudes towards the material and the spiritual by a social group constantly linked--with intriguing incompatibility--to consumption and morality. See Campbell 1987.

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This dissertation attempts to contribute to the developing literature on the middle class and consumption issues in Latin America by assessing how the middle class Brazilians in my sample, an obviously small and regionally specific group, position themselves materially and symbolically in the immediate and wider community and vis-à-vis the state. Considering both their daily and long terms acts of reproduction, I show that consumption remains integral to the means, meaning and future of the Brazilian middle class.

The Middle Class Imagined

The centrality of consumption to middle class formation and identity, their purported conservatism and the political implications of their consumption raise questions about hegemonic processes. It is good to keep in mind that in the popular imaginary the Brazilian middle class (like other middle classes of the "Third World" developing in the twentieth century) symbolizes an ideal in part because of its modernity--itself most often proved through consumption practices (Garcia Canclini 1995). As elsewhere it is the barometer of "progress" and of stability. Brazil's crisis led to an impasse in the project of attaining "first world" modernity. It lowered the middle class standard of living and reduced its possibility for upward mobility--and this rather than stasis is needed to prove middle class position.

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At the same time, there developed an anti-corruption movement and discourse of cultural and moral superiority by middle class people in contradistinction to other classes, other Brazilians. The development of middle class culture and ideologies in Europe (see e.g., Elias 1978, Mosse 1985, Frykman and Lofgren 1987) provide an important comparative reference. In previous centuries in Europe, the middling classes distinguished themselves not only from the lower classes but also from the aristocracy in good part on the basis of their (self-assigned) superior morality and respectability. This "moral" position is important to consider in itself and in relation to consumption practices.

In the works of many consumption theorists, whose main interest has been in showing how new technologies, goods and practices engender cultural change, discourse is left somewhat behind. In class theory, the "actually existing" "consciousness" of social actors has often been dismissed in favor of one imputed from the imagined impact of the workplace and workers' situations in the wider economy (Lukacs [1968-orig. 1922]). In contrast, discourse is emphasized in this dissertation. De Certeau (1984) affirms (in a critique of Bourdieu) that a theory of narration is inseparable from a theory of practice, not only as its product but as its condition. Without denying this, Bourdieu recently (1992) reaffirmed his position that the social world doesn't function in terms of consciousness but

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in terms of practices and mechanisms. Such a position underestimates the complex interactive role of discourse and is dismissive of actors' subjectivity. As Voloshinov said: "It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around -- expression organizes experience" (1973:85; emphasis his). Soon after, he changes perspective: "The organizing center of any utterance, of an experience, is not within but outside -- in the social milieu surrounding the individual being" (ibid:93). In a word, the linguist draws attention to the fact that social experience and linguistic understandings are mutually constitutive.

This dissertation recognizes the complex interaction of discourse and practices, and analyzes both. Attention to discourse -- and what is not discussed -- as well as other symbolic representations are of particular interest during moments of significant change, and in relation to that sector designated with legitimating a social order. Specifically, I work with informants' statements on class and nation and related discourse produced in the mass media. Gramscian influenced works on the media (i.e., from cultural studies and notably by Stuart Hall) turn away from a notion of top-down ideologies to more context and group specific studies of hegemonic processes. These studies have often focused on popular classes. What of the middle?

During fieldwork, I was struck by a similarity of style

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and perspective in the words of informants, in text transcriptions of middle class focus groups (see description in Appendix A), and in the news. I therefore gave close attention to the lexicon and narratives produced (those focusing on the crisis, and the impact on the middle class), styles of identification (what topics are associated with the middle class), understandings and arguments (about Brazil's problems, their causes, and what is to be done), what issues were not open to discussion--in short to issues of identity and social knowledge in the media (Gerbner 1985, Morley 1983, Thompson 1984, Dijk 1985, Bell 1994).

Regarding the "middle class" as a socially recognized category, Owensby finds the phrase already figured in 1940s literature, and that by the 1950s the term had gained currency. In small towns and rural areas, however, one still spoke of someone from "a good family" perhaps noting the place of birth, if the family had moved to a city, rather than directly mention class. In my view, the reified sense of "the middle class" was importantly expanded and disseminated through national television, notably by the propagandistic arm of the dictatorship, the TV station Rêde Globo (from 1965 forward; Lins da Silva 1985).

In Brazil one becomes quickly aware that media texts and images are a central force in the constitution of Brazilian middle class identity. Of special note is the enacting of middle class characters and lives in novelas --

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the soap opera form which attained unparalleled sophistication in Brazil (Miceli 1972, Vink 1988, Mattelart and Mattelart 1990). Analysis of the novela is outside the scope of this dissertation, which privileges, instead, the print media, a genre produced for middle (and upper) class consumption. The print media provides material for the processing of class identity and engendering of a social imaginary (Castoriadis 1987); it also raises to the foreground questions of an imagined community (Anderson 1983) -- in this case, a sense of an impaired class, community and nation. From the 1980s on, the media was constantly engaged with re-imagining the middle class. Media representations of the middle class were one primary source for the reconstitution of their identity during the crisis.

At a more literal level, the media became a key instrument for middle class maintenance, through its up to the minute reports on financial dangers and safety nets relative to unruly inflation and abrupt changes in government policy, as well as reports on how to deal with consumption hassles or acquire new products. Thus the media was an important (re)source of the crisis -- delivering the latest "reality" (Grossberg 1991), "helping" its readers but also acting as an irritant. Finally, I consider media involvement in middle class politicization; its role in shaping publics (Kress 1983, Anderson 1983, Dahlgren 1991,

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Curran 1991, Blumler and Gurevitch 1991); whether it promotes or stands in for political activism (see Fausto Neto 1994 and Rubim 1994, Albuquerque 1993, Castro 1993); whether readers/audiences act in accordance or in disregard for the media's "influence" (Fiske and Hartley 1978, Hall 1980 and 1981, Woollacott 1982, Hartley and Montgomery 1985, Dahlgren 1991 and Newcomb 1991).

* * *

In sum, this research engages with contemporary theories of class calling for analyses of "subjective" dimensions to complement "objective" ones, and with processual approaches to the middle class linking its formation to the historical context, to the social and symbolic aspects of consumption and to representation. Accordingly, my emphasis on consumption and homelife responds both to the developing understanding that middle class identity is realized in and through these activities and arenas and to Brazil's crisis conditions. The inflation crisis prompted me to take due account of the impact of the political and economic conditions on social life, both the critiques of the government and support for policy changes, and the process of income concentration and related class differentiation. In this period of extreme disruption, I give close attention to discourses by and on the middle class.

For this study of Brazil's middle class, I draw on and

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integrate symbolic and political economy approaches. I work from the premise that only through attention to material, practical and representational / symbolic aspects of middle class life will we come closer to an understanding of the role, meaning and relevance of the middle class in the nation-state today. To that end, I take a lesson from E.P. Thompson (1963), who has demonstrated that the defining of a class occurs processually in a specific historical context; it emerges through the practices of the agents in question, who act and respond in relation to the local and wider conditions. Documenting the encounter of personal, familial and social trajectories with processes at the local, national and international levels, this dissertation hopes to bring the connections and conflicts of the private and public lives of middle class Brazilians into sharp relief.

Part II: Fieldwork Issues, or Which Middle Class?

Fieldwork focused primarily on three areas: (1) household practices directed toward maintaining a social position, especially those regarding increasing or protecting income, consumption and children's advancement; (2) representations (discursive and symbolic) of class identity by middle class adults; (3) national-political dimensions of the crisis for the middle class. I accomplished these field research goals through continuous participant-observation and cycles of visits with

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informants. Additional material was gathered from the media and from focus group material given to me by an advertising company. (See appendix A for details on methodology.)

It is immediately necessary, however, to discuss some peculiarities of a study such as this one. Although in Brazil the middle class refers to a much smaller portion of the population than in the US, still the numbers would seem to prohibit anything other than a quantitative survey. This problem is compounded in a city like São Paulo, home to 16 million and the largest number of middle class people of any Brazilian city. With this target population, deciding whom to work with provokes questions at once theoretical and methodological. The idea of finding a "representative" sample quickly becomes a dubious goal; rather one had to select a group of some significance and/or based on some significant criteria. I tentatively decided to follow the lead of much of the recent theoretical literature on the middle classes, that is, to target mainly the "new middle class" (Mills 1969) of salaried workers in liberal and technical professions.[9] This sector is known for a rapid increase and upward mobility in Brazil in the 1960s-70s (Bresser Pereira 1962, Pastoré 1979, 1986, Quadros 1991)

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[9] The literature on the new middle class is lively; however, it tends to remain within the traditional discussion of the relevance of the middle class in the overall economic structure; as a political force or not and so on. See Perlmutter 1970, Poulantzas 1975, Ross 1978, Heffren 1982, Saes 1985, Boschi 1986, Burris 1986, Wright 1985, 1989, Beck 1987, Betz 1992.

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and is associated with Brazil's modernization and modernity--and nowhere more so than in São Paulo, the country's industrial center. Studying the impact of the crisis on members of this sector (new in time and in occupation) would, I reasoned, be especially relevant for my research.

At the same time, any decision about delimiting the Brazilian middle class was premature, in part given the relative dearth of research. A project aiming, as mine did, towards an understanding of native conceptions of class in the process of reshaping itself should hardly make such a judgment a priori. The theoretical/methodological conundrum notwithstanding, one had to begin somewhere. I was required to initially identify a target population, if only provisionally.

The problem of how to target potential informants is part of the wider one of working in contemporary complex societies, particularly in large urban areas. It does not surprise me that, aside from their great value, so many recent studies are of readily identifiable populations, notably of organizations or people who clearly share an identity. In contrast, middle classes seem very amorphous, not to mention altogether "mainstream" -- and studying people with that characteristic has not traditionally been the realm of anthropology. (Nader [1969] was bold in calling anthropologists to "study up" to counter the prevalent studies of the poor; she did not say study "us."

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See Burris 1986.) However, these issues needn't dissuade us from fieldwork; on the contrary, they might well incite it. In the end, as I suppose is also commonplace in fieldwork, the start up problem turned into data, in this case, on native conceptions of the middle class.

In the following pages, I recount the process I went through of determining which middle class families to work with through discussions with academic contacts. This narrative is intended to at the same time convey a sense of definitions of the middle class "in circulation" among Brazilian social scientists and others of the milieu (college or graduate level) consulted. These contacts, it is worth pointing out, are doubtless themselves of middle class background, broadly viewed. What I found most important to illustrate below, in their regard, was the ascriptive processes they employed; that is, how they identified, located, labelled, evaluated the construct middle class in response to my vague statement that I intended to study the Brazilian middle class. I did not initially disclose to these contacts my thoughts of locating a "new middle class," or of working in a certain part of town. The responses in the intellectual community show immediate readiness (almost an urgency) to categorize others of the middle class in very distancing terms, leaving themselves "exempt," as if that were possible, from any such classification. The vocabulary of class is indeed large,

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pervasive, and potent even as it is stated inconsequentially. In contrast to the ascriptions one hears even in brief encounters, the usual sociological indicators (amount of wealth, categorized occupations, and so on) seem listless.

* * *

When I announced to Brazilian classmates in New York City that I intended to study the Brazilian middle class, I was told, with sardonic, or even rueful humor, "go soon, before it disappears," "that will be quick work" and even further, "that will be archaeological research." Upon arrival, discussing the project with intellectuals in São Paulo, I was asked questions of an analytical rather than quantitative order: "what do <u>you</u> mean by middle class?" or "how do you define the middle class?" and, more intriguingly, "<u>which</u> middle class do you intend to study?" To the latter question I was eventually tempted to reply (impertinently), "why I like them all, which group would <u>you</u> like me to study?" With each new contact, I was challenged to provide a rigorous definition to this social category which, by some views (emic and etic) is not even one group, much less an analytically unified class. As is well known, many social scientists eschew the singular for middle class, preferring middle classes. The phrase conveys heterogeneity, often underscored as being characteristic of this sector. It can also suggest a group neither "in

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itself" nor "for itself," by the reasoning that "class" must have an analytically distinct and conflictual position in the economy and in politics. Such linguistic care[10] may appear reassuringly scientific, but raises questions -- on what bases these distinctions or divisions? What might the intellectual insistence on difference refer to here?

While it is obvious that the middle class is diverse and internally differentiated, it is not clear that heterogeneity per se is especially unique to this class. The literature on working or popular classes has shown divisions by race, gender, ethnicity, as well as by circumstance in the labor market, i.e., formal or informal. As I will try to show, the very insistence on the internal divisions is something that middle class people I encountered share. I chose to use the term in the singular in Brazil because I found that it violated categories important to the native definitions, and thereby provoked revealing commentary.

Once the presentation of my research switched to the practical, these Paulistanos (inhabitants of the city of São Paulo) suggested that, in my search for a middle class group to study, I would find the most examples, that is, the most representative middle class, housed in the bairro

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[10] In Portuguese, "classes médias." The variant "camadas médias" (middle sectors) elides the issue of class in relation to the intermediary groups altogether. In my view plural reference avoids more than advances our theoretical understanding of class.

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(neighborhood, part of town) of Santana or Moóca. These references meant nothing to me. On previous visits I had spent my time in the south zone (Zona Sul). The south and west zones are home to the middle to upper classes, the east and north zones to the middle on down. I soon gathered that Santana, in the north zone, is famed for its "traditional" middle class, that is, petty bourgeoisie shopkeepers, often immigrants. (See Hansen 1977 for an ethnography of the middle class of Santana.) Recently, Moóca, in the east zone, has captured attention for producing a number of nouveau riche families. What strikes nonresidents as curious is that natives of Moóca, upon making it, stay there. "They feel better there," explained an acquaintance who offered me a car driven tour of some São Paulo neighborhoods my second week there.

This contact, inhabitant of the bohemian, now gentrifying bairro called Vila Madalena, showed me first the exclusive area of the bairro Alto dos Pinheiros, making a point of driving by São Paulo's top rated private school, Colégio Santa Cruz, where (with great financial sacrifice) his children studied. These streets were almost completely devoid of traffic -- so odd for São Paulo. The many guard stations -- one per home in many cases -- replicate the kind of security created for an entire apartment building or residential block. My guide, a civil engineer who had had some building projects in Moóca, then insisted on driving us

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(his wife, daughter and me) across town to see the Moóca phenomenon. I could not at the time fully appreciate the nonresidents' astonishment that people who didn't need to stay there did, as the area looked to my undiscerning eye like parts of the south zone of São Paulo -- new highrises immediately next to, mixed in with, older townhouse style homes (e.g., as in Paraíso). Only much later when I saw other bairros of the east zone did I realize what it was known for: slum housing in a vast industrial area (loosely equivalent to Greenpoint in New York City; the latter is much smaller). Moóca was an intriguing site, but I decided that in an exploratory study like this one, I did not wish to focus on a curiosity.[11]

The more I was pointed in the direction of the "traditional" middle and lower middle classes, the more I wondered about other middle classes living in the south zone. Yet that initial elimination still left me with a huge geographic area of several bairros. Expecting to find diversity within any middle class group, I was fearful of having a sort of Noah's Ark sample, by which I mean every variety of the middle class. Moreover, I had read that São

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[11] I was at the time put in mind of a comment from my 1991 preliminary field trip to São Paulo. Towards the end of the visit I was asked what I had gotten to know of the city. I told the woman, a friend of the person housing me, only downtown and the south zone as far as Santo Amaro, adding apologetically that I didn't know anything of the north or east zones. This woman, a lifelong resident of Jardim América (an exclusive bairro), raised her eyebrows and said, "why there's nothing to know there."

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Paulo bairros were undergoing great differentiation (see Rolnik et al 1991). I decided it would be wiser to discriminate not only by bairro, but that I should also try to identify two different groups within a bairro. Partly for these reasons I chose to work with adults whose children attended the same private schools (cf. Romanelli 1986). My ideal was to find a "bom colégio de bairro," that is to say, a well thought of neighborhood school, yet not so famous that people would cross town to have their children attend it (as is the case of Santa Cruz of Alto dos Pinheiros). I would compare these informants to families whose children attended a school of indifferent repute. I reasoned that many of their parents would have liberal professions, so that the schools would serve as good proxy indicators for my target population of new middle class families.

Finally, the choice of schools as an entrée to homes was a strategic decision: advisors warned that middle class Brazilians are "closed," unwilling to meet people without some mediating person who provides an introduction. (In professional relations, this is called "Q.I.," quem indicou, or who recommended you.) I wanted to gain access to families without having to rely on a snowballing technique (which would create its own distortions). Having the blessing of a school would, I expected, justify me in the minds of potential informants. Academic contacts agreed

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with the rationale.

Hearing that I wanted my pool of informants to derive from private schools in the south zone, local specialists (i.e., intellectuals) maintained a consistent stance: they continued to suggest a "traditional" middle class. Most suggested first off the Colégio Bandeirantes -- thereby targeting a recently emerging petty bourgeoisie. As Bandeirantes is famous for a pedagogy geared very specifically toward the extremely competitive college entrance exam (the vestibular), it exemplifies two royal roads to middle class-dom, commerce (in the parent generation) and education (in the next). Occasionally, they recommended Colégio Dante Alighieri; in this case, the indication of an older and upper middle class of São Paulo's "Jardins"[12] and this school in particular signalled ("traditional") upper middle class conservativism. These qualities seemed to approximate the south zone families to those in Moóca and Santana.[13]

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[12] The "Jardins" refers to those bairros in the south zone carrying the name Garden x (Jardim Paulista, Jardim América, Jardim Europa). Home to upper middle and upper classes, some areas contain mansion styled homes, others have luxury or at least large apartments. Such bairros are called "noble" in Brazilian Portuguese. They are centrally located in the south zones, moving south from Avenida Paulista, and are flanked by middle to upper middle class neighborhoods -- on the east Paraíso and Vila Mariana, and on the west, Pinheiros. The "Jardins" could be compared to New York's Upper East Side.

[13] I don't know how to discreetly convey that the statement likening the south zone to the east zone is "heretical" -- it could outrage the south zone families and make my advisors conclude I was hopelessly dense! It may

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Just as with the indication of certain bairros, here again with private schools, I found accompanying the insistence that the middle class is heterogeneous, an implication that some sectors were more qualified, more ideal-typical representatives than others -- these others remaining nameless, or rather, were qualified as "modern" or "alternative" (non-traditional) or simply "not typical" middle class. (I use quotes as these were the words used.) Having come to what I imagined to be Brazil's largest center of the middle class, I was surprised to hear that its members were confined to a couple of bairros or attended very specific schools.

Such comments reminded me of an old TV game show. Three participants in "To Tell the Truth" all claimed to be a certain Ms. X or Mr. Y -- not celebrities who could be identified by their looks, but simply folks. The resume of their life story, usually quite unremarkable, was told to the three contestants competing to discover the true Ms. X from the two imposters. The questioning period concluded, their guesses made, the game host would then ask: "Will the real Ms. X please stand up?" By academic standards, in my research I chose a less "real" middle class, the nameless or

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help readers to know that when this whole passage was read to Paulistano friends, it provoked frequent guffaws. Also heretical was the study by A.F. Pierucci and Lima (1991) which confirmed that voting patterns in the 1990s were similar in the two zones. Their study contradicts the notion that middle class conservatism is restricted to the north and east zones.

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qualified one. Yet -- and this may provide some consolation -- the group I chose treats the "more real" middle class as "other."

I did greatly benefit from the information of friends and colleagues, who eventually directed me to the schools in the study. As I will report shortly, I later followed their advice to a certain extent, choosing an "ideal-typical" middle class as a comparison group. I initially chose a different middle class sector not because I felt they were wrong to point me to what evidently was a classic middle class (whether "traditional" or "nouveau riche"). Yet I became increasingly intrigued by the fact that those intellectuals consulted were pointing me towards stereotypes and away from a middle class group closer to home. These contacts lived in the south and west zones.[14] In fact, some contacts even suggested I move out of town altogether, to do the study in Curitiba, Paraná, the city which has the highest standard of living in Brazil, and a very white population.

Only when I came to specify my interest in the "modern" middle class did I receive a different set of indications. I myself had reached no opinion as to how the families were

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[14] Interestingly, when I reported details of this start up story to two Paulistano colleague-friends, one confided he had grown up in Santana, the other in Moóca! Both moved as adults to Pinheiros, a sort of irreproachable middle class bairro from the intellectual standpoint -- immediately next to but not in the haughty "Jardins."

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or were not "modern," but found this description set me towards the group of salaried liberal professionals and white collar business people I was targeting.

As noted, I operated under the assumption that many parents of children attending a school deemed good by intellectuals would have jobs in these categories. Prior experience in Brazil, as well as news reports of the crisis telling of mass exodus of middle class families from private schools into public schools (this "drastic" measure being due to inflation-related tuition hikes and declining salaries), led me to suppose that public school versus private school was an internal division of contemporary relevance. My concern to not have too much diversity in a small scale study pulled me away from doing a public versus private school comparison. Working with families from a limited range of socioeconomic levels, as suggested by school tuition (at these schools, the monthly tuition approached 300 in US dollars) and reputation, would allow me to see how certain middle and upper middle class people dealt with inflation. And working at the household level with couples or single parents (two divorced women; one couple separated during the fieldwork year) precluded confining the sample to one occupation.

I assume full responsibility for making a "nonrandom" sampling and want to be clear that I chose to do so. I worked without pretensions of selecting for

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representability, a rather unrealistic and unnecessary hope in such an exploratory study. In the end, the arklike quality prevailed: my non-random sample of 24 families (chosen from an initial survey of 42 households) included informants from all over the south and west zones: Vila Madalena and Pinheiros on the west crossing through the Jardins to Vila Mariana, south to the Ibirapuera area, into Butantã and beyond.[15] Informants' children frequented three schools, and their occupations and material circumstances ranged from low paid salaried teachers to liberal professionals turned successful business owners. In retrospect, I would now argue that the families I worked with did exemplify the middle class -- the instability of the category, whether in terms of time, occupation, economic or geographic mobility, style and more. The variety I had tried to avoid was irrepressible and desirable, in order to assess the range of middle class-ness. (See Appendices A and B for descriptions of participating schools and families, respectively.)

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[15] Though reassuringly traditional in ethnography, it is questionable whether a bairro corresponds to a community. São Paulo's south zone housing boom developed from massive real estate ventures in the 1970s. Comments of informants (and my own experience) have shown that middle class people may only have a couple neighbors with whom they (or more likely, their children) are friendly. On the other hand, bairros (and more generically zones) are strongly marketed indicators of internal differentiations of the middle class.

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Part III: Chapter Breakdown

The chapters are ordered in what I call "progressive contextualization," by which I mean to provide background and contextual information about the inflation crisis gradually, as issues arise. Another way of looking at the order of presentation is to see the six chapters in three sets of two, all of which examine middle class identity, but through different angles. The first two present readers to the informants of the study through home, work and a variety of self-presentations. The next two chapters focus on practical strategies regarding consumption and class continuity in circumstances of high inflation. The final two chapters consider the political context from 1990 forward and broaden the analysis to the national level.

Chapter 2, "The Dream Class is Over: Home and Work during the Crisis," introduces informants and outlines their circumstances during the crisis by "subjective" and "objective" means: through stories of their homes -- desired, owned, lost, and through income generating strategies to offset salaries eroded by inflation or jobs lost due to recession. Examples of work efforts show that the crisis did indeed have an impact on the middle class in material terms. Degradation of middle class occupations also affected people's sense of status and honor (see Lomnitz and Melnick 1991). The choice of homes follows both the precedent in the literature on its central importance

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for developing middle class culture (Frykman and Lofgren 1987 and Halle 1993; for Brazil see Velho 1972 and Da Matta 1985) as well as informants' emphasis on home and car ownership. Stories about home and work also situated and distinguished families better than the family histories gathered.

Collection of (partial) family histories showed that informants were representative of the racial and ethnic specificity of São Paulo's middle class. Thus, the grandparents of the adults in the sample were 43 percent Brazilian born and the rest immigrants: 16 percent from Portugal; 12.5 percent from Italy; 11 percent from Japan (the largest urban population of people of Japanese descent outside Japan lives in São Paulo); 10 percent from Spain; 7.5 percent other. The stories of immigrants and native Brazilians were similar: their trajectory into the middle class is a very recent one of rapid upward mobility, often entailing a rural or small town to capital move in their own or their parents' generation.

Chapter 3, "Discursive Boundaries of Class," analyzes native representations of class. I consider how informants defined themselves in relation to other classes, and their views of differences within the middle class. Their definition of middle class by home and car ownership acknowledges middle and upper class privilege versus the vast majority. Their explicit definition of class is

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complemented by analysis of other representations of their identity; these concerned differences within the class and by ethnicity and race.

Education is an important part of their identity; this strategy as a means of class continuity was reinforced during the crisis. At the same time, informants also presented their prioritizing of education as a value which separated them from other middle class sectors. Through these statements, informants enlisted a hierarchy of investment and consumption standards separating themselves from adjacent rising sectors.

The next chapter, "The Shopping System: The Intensification of Daily Life," details the daily complexities of maintaining a middle class household under wildly fluctuating inflationary conditions, in which devaluations, currency changes and other effects obliged Brazilians to dedicate enormous amounts of time and concern to money and led to increasing resentment of government failure to achieve stability. Highlighting novel "survival strategies" of various institutions and agents --consumers, merchants, bankers, Chapter 4 provides microlevel support for what political economist Singer (1988) and others have called "distributive conflict," i.e., the mechanisms of income transfer characteristic of inflation. I show how class differentiation processes occurred as middle class people attempted to protect their money and economize.

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Chapter 4 closes by adding another, and crucial, layer to the inflation crisis. I describe the first governmental "stabilization" plan, the "populist" Plano Cruzado, which proclaimed a price freeze. It prompted a frenzy of consumption, reactive black marketeering, and eventually backfired, moving Brazil into ever higher inflation. The government's failure and irregular business dealings bred an atmosphere of mistrust and defensive acts in Brazilian society; these were deplored by informants.

Chapter 5, "The International in Daily Life," examines the multiple uses and meanings of international travel (especially to the US) and of modern imported goods: the former as a rite of passage supporting claims to validate and upgrade the family in the local status hierarchy, hence a family strategy to accumulate cultural capital; the latter (obtained via what are technically contraband methods), a literal means of acquiring "first world" modernity and symbolic positioning in that world. I place these material/symbolic consumption practices in the context of exacerbated social differentiation. These practices towards constructing middle class identity can also be seen as acts against the state, held responsible for a crisis prolonging "third world" conditions in Brazil and for protective policies making local shopping and leisure more costly than in the "first world."

Between 1986 and 1993 a spasmodic series of

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governmental "stabilization" plans tried and failed to stop inflation. The government plans were misnamed: rather than stabilizing, they destabilized middle class households and threatened their capability of class maintenance. Chapter 6, "Delivering the Crisis: The Media and Middle Class Households during the Collor Presidency," and chapter 7 focus on middle class political culture during the inflation crisis. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the government "stabilization" plan which most directly and adversely targeted the middle class, the Plano Collor (1990-91), notorious for confiscating bank account holdings. Against these conditions, there was an increasingly militant middle class stand against the Collor presidency, which prompted middle class legal disputes against his economic policy and culminated in a middle class youth movement to impeach the president for corruption.

This chapter serves both to provide the immediate context for fieldwork in 1993-94 and to analyze the ubiquitous role of the media in the crisis. Mass media overall represented middle class households as the central arena or even target of the public crisis. The print media (which targets middle class readers) insinuated itself, I argue, into middle class households by variously alerting readers to safe or dangerous investments and shopping methods, narrating horror stories of middle class decline, taunting readers with luxury consumption, and presenting

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governmental policies and scandals with heavy criticism and irony. The media's role in providing social knowledge of the crisis and the government are the focus of the analysis. Given the political inactivity acknowledged by informants, the congruence between views they presented and those in the major media, and praise for the press's political investigations, I find (as did some informants) that the media became a kind of "proxy" for middle classes in the public sphere.

Chapter 7, "The Middle Class and the Nation" analyzes informants' views and positions on the nation and state. My fieldwork began less than a year after one of the most significant middle class movements in 20th century Brazilian history. Informants recalled the impeachment movement as a positive democratic act, but the mood was pessimistic during most of my fieldwork period, which began a year after the impeachment. Whereas Chile, Mexico and Argentina had overcome the inflation crisis, it remained entrenched in Brazil. Indeed 1993's inflation of 2,700 percent broke all previous records.

Among my 40 plus informants, only a couple were politically active. Their preferred "act" was discourse. It was permeated with moral indignation against government corruption scandals, and with anxiety for their children's fate in what was viewed as an increasingly dog-eat-dog society contaminated by pervasive opportunism and

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corruption. Coupled with the ways informants presented their own cultural and moral superiority in contradistinction to several "other" groups negatively appraised (as shown in chapter 3), I argue that this anti-state and anti-Brazilian discourse, registered after a decade of crisis, isolated middle class Paulistanos from their immediate and wider milieu and from the Brazilian nation-state, leaving them ambivalent. It also served to increase support for neoliberal policy. By the 1990s, economic restructuring (including privatizations and downsizing) and the opening of the market to imports (after a history of protectionist policies for industrial development which made Brazil a relatively "closed" economy) were being heralded, from the top government levels to the middle classes, as the much awaited, long needed means to curb chronic inflation and bring stability and true modernity to Brazil.

As of July 1994 and until the time of writing, Brazil's chronically high inflation has been put to an end, through the first after ten stabilization plans to successfully control inflation, the Plano Real. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, elected president in November 1994, is credited with developing the plan while Minister of Finance under Itamar Franco (Collor's vice-president, who replaced him as of 1993). This chapter analyzes their position regarding Brazil's economy in a negative and censuring and a

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cautiously positive way. In either formulation, informants were consistent in supporting deregulated, competitive capitalism, finding it both modern and moral.

Chapter 8 presents conclusions.

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Chapter 2
The Dream Class is Over:
Home and Work during the Crisis

The dream ended.
For those who didn't sleep in a sleeping bag
and didn't even dream.
The dream ended.
It was heavy that dream for those who didn't dream.

From the song "O Sonho Acabou" [The dream ended/is over] by Gilberto Gil, circa 1972.

This chapter serves as preliminary introduction to families in the study as well as to several themes to be elaborated on in the course of the dissertation. The method of introduction which immediately presents itself is a family history. In fact, I did gather them from informants and found they produced similar trajectories. Their immigrant grandparents (from Portugal, Italy, Japan, Spain and other, in that order of importance) worked in agriculture or in modest service occupations in the city (e.g., policeman, chauffeur). A move to the city of São Paulo occurred during their parents' or their generation; in many cases, they themselves but not their parents achieved middle class educational and occupational status. A majority of informants (57 percent) shared the recent immigrant background for which São Paulo and the south of Brazil are known, and which distinguish those regions from the rest of the country. But I found the stories of these first to third generation immigrants lacking in detail, attesting to the geographic mobility.

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When I turned instead to stories they told me of their homes, then I received a wealth of description and affect as well as a means of differentiating families and situating them, if only partially as yet, in the context of the economic crisis. So I have chosen to present informants in Part I of this chapter through discussion of the material possession of greatest importance to them, and which informants said defines middle class membership (see chapter 3), namely their homes.

If the inability to buy a new car was more aggravating than painful for informants, the desire to own a home or to move to a larger home was of critical significance. Among the 25 families of my study, all but seven already owned a home, and thus had attained the essential status and means of building middle class culture (see Velho 1980, Da Matta 1985, Frykman and Lofgren 1987, Halle 1993). For most, homes had been acquired during the dictatorship (1964-85), a time of rapid economic growth, increase in middle class employment both for men and women, and broader consumer opportunities. Almost all long term, unchanging homeowners (15 families) told me, as if each were paraphrasing the other, that they were lucky to have acquired their homes when they did (usually about 15 years before), as they would never be able to do so since the crisis. There were three families, however, who effected moves during the time of the study; and three had moved into a new home since 1990. One

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family lost its home in the 1980s.

Although inflation complicated the process, what also rendered it more difficult to buy a home was the end of the National Housing Bank (Banco Nacional de Habitação, or BNH) in 1986, or rather its replacement by a very reduced version, called Financial System of Housing (Sistema Financeiro de Habitação, or SFH). Roughly comparable to FHA housing in the US, the BNH was created in the 1960s during the dictatorship to offer subsidized housing to low income people. If it had income restrictions on upper margins, however, these were either high or not enforced. Those who most benefitted from the subsidy were middle class people, able to keep up the (low interest) housing payments. Six families (one-third of homeowners) in my study acquired their homes through BNH or SFH.

Part II of the chapter presents informants through their employment, especially during the crisis. I examine the income generating strategies undertaken by the men and women to counter the erosion of their salaries by inflation or even job loss. The research sample was characterized by a good number who retained their employment, despite the fact that this was Brazil's worst depression since the 1930s, one affecting middle class employment. Review of their work since 1980 shows, however, that about half the members of the sample had to increase hours, find new sources of income, or develop their own businesses to

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maintain themselves. At least eight informants lost a job in recent years.

Although the sample had a majority of "steady state" families who already owned a home and retained secure employment (and recognized their good fortune in this), this chapter focuses on those who underwent change. The discussion of housing is divided into those who did not yet own a home, moved into a new home, or lost theirs, to be covered in that order. The second part moves from the most minimal work initiatives to offset the decline in income due to devaluations to the greatest change; in this sample that entailed a move into full reliance on self-employment. Just as I include description of employment circumstances in the first part, so too in the second part I give information on their housing. My intention is to outline the circumstances of the families in the study in an overtly "subjective" as well as an ostensibly "objective" way. Since not all informants can be feasibly discussed or presented in the same detail, Appendix B gives survey information for all.

Besides examining middle class strategies for counteracting downward mobility, it is important to take into account emerging attitudes towards work and possible shifts in occupational patterns. Part III considers reassessments of middle class occupations and some implications for middle class employment in terms of gender identity and relations and generational change.

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PART I: A Home and a Car

The Dream Home, Out of Reach

Aninha and Milton: Milton, an engineer employed for more than 20 years in the government institution which offers home financing (SFH, formerly BNH), told me his case would have been different if he had been born ten years earlier. His cousin, with the same ethnic background (Japanese, third generation) and education, but starting earlier, bought a big house in São Paulo, a country home, a beach house, and had a firm with 40 employees. Now, the firm lost, he works with one partner; they have opened an antique store in the traditionally exclusive Jardins area, which relies on the labor of the partners' wives. Although this example somewhat contradicts his point, Milton said nonetheless that starting ten years earlier, his family could have done well, or even fine. This set him into recalling the 1970s economic miracle, its phenomenal growth, and the stagnant 1980s decade. Milton drew clear connections between his own life's work and Brazil's economic development. It was as if he and Brazil could have made it together, but, like poet Edwin Arlington Robinson's Miniver Cheevy, he had been "born too late."

Aninha has a degree in industrial design. At the time of fieldwork she had been working sporadically as a freelance designer of college entrance exams. After having children (two, grade school aged), she began working on her

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own in order to have more "flexibility," obtaining contracts with state-owned firms. As of the Collor presidency (1990-92), however, she was no longer able to find work. On our first meeting Aninha told me she had then tried to work in a boutique as "a salesperson, in a beautiful shop in the Jardins, a chic one, but it is not my profession, and I couldn't..." Her voice trailed off. Then she resumed, "it's great to work with the public, though, I like it." At a later meeting, she confided that she had taken a job in a lingerie store on the Rua Augusta but quit. This boutique-lined street went into decline since the rise of shopping centers in the 1980s (see Pintaudi and Frúgoli 1992). Her look of disgust when recalling having to wait on (middle and upper middle class) customers clearly conveyed a sense of personal affront or indignity. Besides, the pay was low, so that she began to ask her husband for gas money. Aninha explained: "But then the whole thing became sort of disconnected [meio desconexa]; it became senseless, so I think that I spend less by staying at home, taking the children to school, and doing work at home than I would working outside the home." Like the other women who dedicated full time efforts to housework, Aninha emphasized their strategic role as economizers -- an act which required careful accounting and time. (Part III of this chapter considers demoted middle class work and gender issues in the crisis; for description of economizing strategies, see

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chapter 4.)

A year into fieldwork, Aninha picked me up along with her children at School 2, which was near my apartment, and drove us back to her home in the bairro Jardim Bonfiglioli. Past Butantã, it is a suburban area of the southwest zone with two storied houses on quiet streets. With bright excitement she told me her news: they were buying a house, not the one they lived in, though that would be fine, rather one in the neighborhood. For the rest of the time together that day, we discussed the new house, the deal in the process of going through, her moving and decorating plans. She spoke with precocious nostalgia of the house they were living in, and with almost uncontained joy of the home to be. On the way to dropping me off at the bus stop, she drove me past the house, and told me about the owner. Aninha said he was very very rich -- in fact, the father of the late Airton Senna (Formula I car racer) was to move into the same apartment complex -- yet he was, as she kept repeating appreciatively, "extremely simple," that is, unpretentious. (Why is it that middle class people so often admire the wealthy for their "simplicity"?!) Learning I was to leave at the end of November, she exclaimed, "then you'll be able to see us in our new home!" Yet by the time I left, the closing still had not taken place. At the time of writing, I am not sure what the status is. In Brazil, there is almost no financing except for new constructions. Buying

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a house from a homeowner usually requires payment outright in full.

* * *

Sandra and Carlos: The situation of Carlos and Sandra was somewhat similar, both in the sense that they and their two teenagers lived in comfortable but rented housing: an apartment in a small, older complex in the bairro Moema (which has increasingly become an attractive area for upper middle class highrises), and in the sense of lost opportunity. However, whereas Milton and Aninha emphasized disadvantaged careers, for Carlos and Sandra it was loss of savings. Carlos has been in bank administration for 17 years; formerly full-time housewife, Sandra was then setting up her own jewelry making business. The excerpt below of a taped conversation should indicate difficulties with making a large purchase such as a home during the crisis.

> Carlos: So you start to plan and suddenly you see ... like us. We plan to buy a house. We have lived here for 18 years, this is rented. You try to save money in the bank, but if you do, it's worse. You can't save.
>
> Me: You have to invest in something.
>
> Sandra: Yes, even if in a lesser good.[1] In

---

[1] As to their lesser goods, three deserve special mention: the European coffee pot, removed each time from the sideboard, where it was carefully stored in its original wrapping (see chapter 5); the sideboard itself, an heirloom (crafted by Sandra's grandfather); and two new family cars, bought in 1994. A few other informants unable to buy real estate did buy cars since 1990, remarking on how essential they are for their work.

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> Brazil, to save money is not an advantage. We separated off some of the monthly budget, kept saving something. In some of the government's plans, what they call "packages," which were made by ministers ... new rules were made. These plans fooled with savings a lot [see chapter 6]. If you reached a certain level, the government would have to give you a lot. They'd say, 'well now, we're giving a lot to these people. Let's make a system to cut this off.' Many times the savings, at a given moment, it was pushed down [jogado lá para baixo].
>
> Me: More than once? Because I know in the Plano Collor--[Sandra jumps in]
>
> Sandra: Yes, more than once! The Collor Plan was the most. Before this it was done, though in a more subtle manner: 'Let's just get part.'
>
> Carlos: Delfim Neto[2] for example, in 1980 somehow the inflation of the year was fixed at 50 percent when in reality it was 100 percent. [...] I only woke up with Collor. It was a coup. Besides taking it all, he pushed us into hyperinflation.

(Note the references to Collor and the ironic anti-government stance. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss politics.) Carlos lamented not having succeeded in taking an opportunity in the past to buy a house when it was more feasible.

I watched two of the soccer world cup games with Sandra's extended family, once at her sister's apartment and

---

[2] Currently a representative for the state of São Paulo, Delfim Neto was one of two main finance ministers during the dictatorship, and is associated and largely credited with the "Brazilian [economic] miracle." Delfim Neto has been the economist most turned to for an authoritative opinion -- on whatever plan or problem is pressing at the time. He is eminently quotable, with a gift for sharp, brief, devastating barbs, and is not unwilling to criticize the right. One wonders, though, whether his criticisms are so "democratic" because he criticizes all civilian government...

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once at her closest friend's home, a kind of fictive kin (both of whom live in large apartments in Brooklin Paulista, a nouveau riche area). Sandra pointed out to me that they couldn't host these potluck-snack events because their apartment would not hold everyone. Indeed it would have been cramped. This inability to reciprocate seems to have pained Sandra. When I later asked for a "tour" of their home (hoping to inventory their goods as they described them), Sandra looked uncomprehendingly and then hard at me: "this is it," referring to the joint living and dining room (about 14' by 18'). The next time, though, I was invited into the kitchen.[3]

Soon after the Plano Real, which as of July 1, 1994, ended three and four digit inflation, Carlos and Sandra began seeking in earnest to buy a house. They found the prices high: more than 100,000 reais. (At the exchange rate of the time, add 10 percent to get the US dollar equivalent.) I was informed by Carlos that they were eligible, due to Carlos' long tenure at his job, for some bank financing. However, the bank in question, Citibank, only allowed them to buy in a "bairro nobre," that is, the wealthier neighborhoods of the Jardins, or bairros to the south and west, Moema and Brooklin Paulista. It also

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[3] Da Matta notes (1991:56ff) that foreign observers have long found (upper class) Brazilians to guard parts of their home, such that only certain areas are for public intrusion.

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stipulated that the credit rating they had arranged would only be valid for two months, so that if a deal did not go through by then, they would have to reapply all over again.

During one of the last visits, Sandra showed me magazines from the subscription she had spoken of, Victoria magazine, published in Florida. Its romantic turn of the century photography of home interiors reminded me of Howard's End. When I asked if she imagines how she will decorate their house, she said flatly, no, she would have to see the space. The last time I visited Carlos and Sandra, I was told they were holding off a bit on the search for a house. They had been looking during lunch hours and in the early evenings, but Carlos, who wears a pacemaker, had become too fatigued with this tight schedule and added stress.

On a personal note, I would like to add a couple more things: Sandra, active Spiritist (practitioner of Kardecism), has a low but sharp voice and a determined manner. Her religious belief includes strong personal responsibility, including for the "vibes" one emits; she practices chromotherapy at the religious center they frequent. Carlos was soft spoken and had an air of constant fatigue. This evidently related to his heart condition; yet though a Spiritist himself, a discouraged manner colored most of what he said. (Seven informants were Spiritists.)

Although home and car ownership were the criteria

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informants chose for defining middle class-ness, the fact of living in a rented apartment could not be taken as proof of marginality below the class. On the contrary three families who rented (Larissa and Rodolfo, Elisabete and Antônio, Simone and Roberto) owned property. They were living in very comfortable, large apartments in good neighborhoods until their own luxurious homes were ready. These renters are quite different from those who were unable to buy a home: Carlos and Sandra, Aninha and Milton, Alice, Miriam and Marquinhos, Nicole and Miguel. These families had the following disadvantages. Neither Sandra nor Aninha produced any income. Miriam and Marquinhos were burdened due to prior family obligations, she supporting her mother, he had his father and a child by a previous marriage to care for. Alice has rented since divorcing her husband, a retired military officer.

Although I find it hard to do so, I wished to convey something of the subdued, understated, yet intense affect relating to home ownership by these couples long hoping to have one. However, there were always counter examples. The attitude of the non-home owners depicted below reflects their vocational choice of work and religious involvement which have made money making secondary and difficult.

* * *

Nicole and Miguel: Nicole and Miguel have been persistent in pursuing art as a living and vocation, making

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very little as actors. They also dedicated a lot of time to Spiritism, and are part of the regional directorate. During the crisis, they started freelance teaching, adapting acting techniques to courses on public speaking and interpersonal relations, and marketing of the business method called "total quality" through a comic play Miguel wrote entitled "Acertar é Humano" (To Do/Get it Right is Human). Although the combined income of these artists was less than the equivalent of US $1000 a month at the time of the study, their freelance marketing of "total quality" (which they say was created in the US but dropped, moved to Japan and was elaborated there) showed signs of promise. Besides having the lowest income of informants (their three children had scholarships), they also lived, with constant good cheer, in a dank apartment, with moldy bathroom and salvation army-styled furnishings in the marginal, downtown area of Santa Cecília. Miguel, who had immediately told me they were inappropriate for the study, being "proletarian," later explained -- thereby concurring with the consensus -- that they were not middle class because they owned neither home nor car.

Although material concerns were low in importance, the couple was enthusiastic about their increasingly lucrative work as business consultants. Nicole also spoke wistfully once of US styled houses she'd seen on film; the big kitchens and yards without fences captivated her.

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I would like to turn now to families who managed not only to buy one, but to buy a second home or traded up during the crisis. Most families upgrading their housing or increasing property were established doctors and successful businesswomen/men. The section also features, however, a family whose form of economic mobility was exceptional in the study.

Buying Up

"A man with a car don't need no justification" -- Hazel Motes, Wiseblood, Flannery O'Connor

Not only home but also car ownership is a criterion chosen by informants to identify and distinguish middle class people. My main focus is homes; however, cars enter in and warrant some introductory remarks.

People often noted the national obsession with cars, explicitly calling them high status symbols. At the top is a new car (often called "carro zero," car with zero kilometers), or "car of the year." Car ownership, of course, offers nonverbal communication and proof of an important amount of wealth, beyond the reach of most Brazilians. Not having a fairly new car (not to mention not having one at all, which for middle class Paulistanos is unthinkable) can be a source of embarrassment. I was always impressed in Brazil with the attention to upkeep; it gave me the feeling that most cars were new. (The same went for appliances.) Cleide, public employee in educational

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administration, divorced, living with her two teenaged sons in an older apartment of Vila Mariana, said this of her ex-husband:

> ...he always had the habit of trading in his car every year. This was not justified financially. But he would say that one day after a year passed he was already losing money. Because after the first year the car devaluates. [...] Even when we were married and things were difficult, he would exchange his car every year. It was his investment. For me, it had a lot more to do with a dream, an ideal of having the car of the year, but he'd rationalize it. In the last three to four years, he hasn't traded in his car anymore. He replaces cars through his father. His father still buys a new car every year. So what does he do? He sells the car of the year before to his son. ... I joked to my son, 'Now your dad always has the car of the year before' [carro do ano passado]. Now isn't that a drag [achatamento, isso é]! (emphasis added)

A couple, friends of mine outside the study, confided that their acquaintances had become envious of them for having bought a new car in 1994 (Fiat Uno Mille).

For about one-third of the families in the research, the strategy used with regard to cars was simple: keep the same old car(s). Yet just as keeping a job can be seen as a positive strategy against the recession, so too having the luck to hold onto a car. Of 20 couples I asked, 13 cars had been stolen in recent years, and a total of ten car radios and tape players as well. Three children had had their bikes taken from them; a few others had to return home barefoot, having lost their brand name tennis shoes to other children. The next story contains an interesting "symbiosis" of the home and car, in the case of the sole

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family who had no assaults of any kind to report.

* * *

Clarinha and José: During our first encounter, Clarinha (spontaneously) told me their house/car history.

> We did the following in order to marry. We went out for five years. He bought a car, and I helped. It was an old car, we traded it and bought a new car. We sold the car when we finished the payments and put this money as downpayment on a small apartment in Pinheiros. Two bedrooms, kitchen, livingroom. And we got married. He bought another old car. Our house financing was for two years. We paid for it. After less than a year and a half of marriage, I had my first child. I worked until the last week. He was born, and two weeks later I was already working again.

Most other informants in their 40-50s also waited to marry until they had their own home. By the 1990s, many young couples remained living with their respective parents without such prospects.

Currently a housewife (dona de casa), Clarinha did not complete secondary school and had worked for eight years as a seamstress. This can be a very meager living, but she had sewn for a boutique on what was for years São Paulo's fashion center, the Rua Augusta. Her husband José's work situation was similar: an immigrant from Portugal at age 12, he had always worked at a banquet hall in Itaim-Bibí. This family illustrated one road to the middle class; they acquired material means prior to cultural refinements. The

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split was represented generationally,[4] as the children were "college material," attending one of São Paulo's most expensive private schools.

Clarinha explained that when she worked, she would go to the boutique, get the sewing work and take it home.

> At the time I had a girl, 14-15 years old who stayed with me, so that I could watch the baby. We continued paying for the apartment, then we exchanged the old car for a new one. We moved up through our work. We didn't receive help from my parents or from his.

After dropping this comment differentiating their family backgrounds from more privileged middle class families, the conversation switched momentarily to a discussion of Márcia's 15th birthday party, held free of charge at the buffet house where José worked. (See chapter 5 for a discussion of debutante balls.) Then Clarinha returned to the housing and car sales.

> So we decided to sell the new car and buy some land -- this land [where we were, at their home], because where we were living was really small. We already had two children. We sold the car. We thought that if it worked once it could work a second time. We bought the land and kept the old car so that my husband could work. We started buying the materials and began.
>
> A friend designed the house for free. All this

occurred between 1974, when they married and lived in Pinheiros, and 1979, when they moved to their home in Vila Suzana. Sometime later they inherited another plot in their

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[4] However, though José had only primary school education, his sister became a college professor.

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neighborhood, a semi-urbanized one, and built a house hoping to sell it, but were unable to find a buyer. It is of contemporary design, with swimming pool and barbeque area (the rage), and has three bedrooms and two and a half baths. As just mentioned, such sales require cashing out, obviously difficult at any time, but more so during the inflation crisis. Clarinha felt it was also less saleable because the house was on an unpaved road. So, just before my departure, they moved into it from their home (with barbeque and on a paved road, but no pool) two blocks away. Clarinha spoke to me of her idea of turning the vacated home into a garment making business if a sale didn't go through. She would have more time now that the children were nearly grown up. Besides, José's buffet employment was suffering from the crisis and from increased competition.

What I most want to emphasize here, beyond the fact that cars were so instrumental to the buying of homes, is the remarkable upward mobility of this family (see Quadros 1991). Expressing disbelief that people with such employment could have the means to send their children to private school, friends of mine supposed that the children had scholarships. Although this was not so, tuition was indeed a financial burden that they were managing, perhaps because it was nearly over. It was clearly a relief as well as a joy that (then) 19 year old Marcos had made it into USP, the public state university, rather than a less

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renowned and costly private college. Márcia was still in high school, but my hunch is there would be reluctance to spend money on her college education, as she was deemed less academically inclined. However, in the 1980s their estate increased through inheritance, and they even had sufficient funds to build an entirely new home as an investment. The crisis and the limits on financing eventually threatened to turn the second home into an inalienable possession, or rather, white elephant.[5] At this point, Clarinha was finding a way to keep one of the homes as profit making real estate.

One final point about their situation as upwardly mobile middle class people. The fact that they were able to buy property and build homes was due not only to their industriousness, but also to the area they lived in. Vila Suzana is an obscure, outlying suburb. When they first built there it was all vacant lots; even now it is not fully urbanized. Thus the status of the bairro is dubious. As

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[5] This is a malady affecting others in the study. Besides the lack of financing, is my impression that middle class Brazilians do not like "used" homes any more than they like secondhand clothing. However, the fact that an estimated 2,500 rental apartments in São Paulo lay empty in 1993, cutting the rental market down by more than 50 percent (source: Estado de São Paulo 9/12/93) attested to the fact that the new renters' law of 1992 greatly favored renters during the crisis. In a word, rental contracts would soon lag well behind inflation, creating what to the owners felt like squatter conditions for their rentees. In these circumstances, the apartment owners revealed a distaste for commercializing their property and for letting strangers inhabit their homes.

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Citibank knows, it is not only the home, but where you live that counts.[6]

Before considering another family who acquired a new home recently, I would like to report almost the reverse situation, which happened to Miriam and Marquinhos, regarding homes and cars. In this case, the family owns no home and has had difficulty retaining cars.

* * *

Miriam and Marquinhos: Miriam, Marquinhos and their two preschoolers live in a comfortable but dilapidated rental apartment in Pinheiros. With grim energy, Marquinhos itemized its many technical (e.g., plumbing) problems. Miriam, abandoned by her parents, of poor background, became remarkably fluent in English as a young adult by studying in England. She has had her own freelance teaching going since 1992, and figures with just two other women distinguished for making more than their husbands. During college, Marquinhos was a sociology major and radical. He did work in marketing research, lost the job in 1980 and then went through years of unstable, ad hoc employment, including bartending, working in an American restaurant, and even at McDonalds, and as manager at the Eldorado shopping center.

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[6] Like Clarinha and José in upward mobility and in living in a somewhat obscure residential area -- though far less so than Vila Suzana, and in throwing debutante balls, Laura, Nando and family are featured in chapter 5. In contrast, Mariza and Renato (see the end of the chapter), specifically moved to Moema for a better apartment and address for their daughters.

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When the latter did not pay overtime, he sued and won. That brings us to his current position as advocate for a small union. This family (Marquinhos's second) are among the four families of lowest income of the study. Marquinhos self identifies as lower middle class. His unstable work history is rivalled only by Nicole and Miguel and Mário and Márcia (see below).

Miriam recalled that in 1989 they "could say we had some buying power, because at that time our car was stolen. We didn't have insurance, yet in the span of two months, more or less, we managed to buy another. Our car was stolen a month ago..." I interrupt, "now, for the second time?!" "Now, the second car. But this time we had insurance. Now, for instance, our financial situation is better, but if it had been the contrary, if the car had been stolen without insurance, it would have taken us much longer to get one." This statement echoes those who said that they had been lucky to buy their homes in the past, later becoming hard pressed. A few moments later, Marquinhos announced that "1990 was a really hard year. Let me give you an idea. I spent two years with the car 'illegal.'" (i.e., he didn't pay the yearly taxes on it.) He then decided that "nothing was worse than 1989." (Marquinhos had earlier noted that in that year "inflation had corroded my salary so much that it had fallen to 500 dollars.") Miriam jumped in: "I think 91 was worse. That was the year João was born. Those were two

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really hard years and coincidentally, I was pregnant. So I couldn't do much about it. I couldn't work more, so they were terrible years!" Their situation improved in the last couple years, with Miriam's business and the wage policy reform in Marquinhos's union.

This couple met through their involvement in the Workers' Party (PT). While Marquinhos expresses strong political interests, Miriam seems currently more interested in Spiritism (a bent not at all shared by Marquinhos). Their dream is to live in the country. At the time of fieldwork, this dream seemed remote; of immediate concern was the welfare of Marquinhos's elderly father, who spent some time living with them until they found him an old folks' home.

These stories suggest how contingent, transitory, transient is the middle class state--and how much it subsists on plans, or we might call them dreams (cf. Williams 1982). In fact, when I asked one informant her definition of the middle class, one woman said, "the middle class is a dream, it's an illusion." When I remarked to a wealthier informant that the middle class has constantly been associated by the print media with dreams, this long time homeowner (who finally in 1993 realized her plan to redecorate their apartment) immediately responded: "yes, I recognize myself in that [description]." It was precisely the ability to plan, as informants reiterated, that was

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completely jeopardized by the high inflation and chaotic economic environment of the 1980s forward.

The next family was marginal to my sample, in terms of wealth. But just as Miriam and Marquinhos are struggling to get a hold on their standing, and Clarinha and José's children will possess higher education to complement the material wealth their parents achieved, so too I include some whose wealth is taking them beyond.

Trading Up

Maria do Carmo e José Claudio: Maria do Carmo, immigrant from the Azores, started working at age 18. She taught in her early twenties, but ten years later, after having her fourth child, she stopped. (They have the most children among families in the study.) José Claudio has built up a successful private practice as OBGYN. They live in a huge apartment (four bedrooms, five bathrooms) in Paraíso, a traditional upper middle class neighborhood distinguished for being very close to the main uptown commercial avenue, the stately Avenida Paulista. To follow José Claudio's story, please note that "correction" refers to monetary correction, or increases in salary, savings, or prices to offset the devaluations. José Claudio told me:

> ...1990 was the only time in my life that I got worried, it was because of the apartment we're buying. There was this distortion. I signed a contract in which my debt could be corrected during the construction of the building via the correction of the savings. When I got the

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> apartment, this correction was no longer valid, because this correction, it was equal to inflation, but there was another inflation index, from civil construction, by the construction company. Obviously they pushed the index way above inflation, and I had to pay the difference. They [initially] wanted us to pay what I imagined would be one-third of the debt, but then said it was -- this is more or less common, in the other apartment that we bought this also happened. It's just that the difference was, let's say, ten thousand dollars, but then they put it at 150 thousand dollars.

I exclaim, "that can't be true!" Maria do Carmo says: "it's really absurd... we lived here alone [in the building] for nearly a year [1992]." José Claudio explains: "many people gave up, lost...all but 20-30 percent of their investment." In response to my query about the legality of the proceedings, José Claudio told me they had figured that legal recourse would be as much or more of a risk than paying. A few minutes later, he informed me: "I had expected to pay about 300,000 dollars, but they charged me 450,000" [sic].

Resuming the story, José Claudio said that the trouble was he earned less due to the Collor administration. "In the end I assumed the debt, a very high one. Today my monthly payments are practically half of what I earn, and at the time [1990-92], 60 percent, an absurdity. [...] I had to start working more. Luckily in my line I can work more...with my private practice."[7] In contrast consider

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[7] José Claudio gave differing reports of his income. Once he said his salary teaching, at $7000 (US dollars) was just three percent of his total income; he later said he

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another housewife, Irene formerly nurse and active secretary for her husband, a doctor, Heitor. They have three children and have been living in their 76 square meter apartment since 1983.[8] It was bought with SFH housing financing, in which they assumed the debt, an older, more advantageous, contract from Heitor's cousin. The price was lowered further by their accepting a shorter payment period. Irene told me:

> we are desperate to leave. As you can see, we don't fit inside it. As you entered, you could see the bookcase with things on top. The bedrooms are full of piles. We don't fit in here. But we can't get out of here either. The investment would be too high. We just have this apartment as capital. With the expenses of schooling -- probably with that money we could make monthly payments on a new apartment. But I prefer to stay here and keep the children where we think it's better (i.e., School 2).

Irene reported that her husband works a lot, not only as a practitioner, but is also heavily involved in presenting research and in professional organizations.

Heitor was still struggling to establish himself, whereas José Claudio had done so, so could "simply" work more to manage. Note the age difference between the couples: José Claudio and Maria do Carmo were then 49 and 46, their children teens (one already in college); Irene and her husband have a young family (then aged 8, 6 and 3), and

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earned 6-7000/month.

[8] The apartments of many informants had similar floor space and family size.

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they were in their late thirties (then 36 and 38). Even at the end of the period, with an end to inflation, Irene did not mention any prospects for moving. The last time I saw her she was exhausted--from being secretary and super mom I thought. Mothers spend inordinate amounts of time chauffering their children to and from schools, extracurricular classes (cursinhos), clubs, shopping centers, friends' homes and more.

Another informant told me that her sister-in-law, a young doctor, had only three or four appointments per week in her office. She added two days a week at a spa. This doctor's brother, 14 years older, has developed a solid medical practice over twenty years. As a rule, the doctors in the study with more than ten years of practice had plenty of business to withstand the crisis; all doctors seemed to work tremendous amounts. While I only managed to see José Claudio twice -- and the second time I felt absolutely guilty, as he arrived in his white clothes direct from work and his fatigue was almost frightening -- I never met Irene's husband. I spent a good deal of time with another family of five in which the father, Flávio, is a doctor. Frequently Danaka, social worker, invited me to spend weekends in the country home while Flávio worked.

Although it is traditional to separate out the petty bourgeoisie from the liberal professions, in these cases, the entrepreneurial potential of doctors becomes more overt.

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However, both engineering and medicine, the top choices for liberal professions, and "royal roads" to upper middle class status until the 70s, were shaken by the crisis. Perhaps Milton was right about being born too late -- but not entirely, as "luck" varied. I had another contact in banking, a cousin of an informant who is a good ten years Milton's junior. An analyst for a bank in São Paulo as of 1992, Eliane invested 25,000 dollars in the electrical company, Light, soon after the government announced it was to be privatized. Three months later she sold her shares for 50,000 and bought a small, nice apartment in Paraíso. Just after the 1994 elections, however, Eliane lost her job, proving economist Belik's prediction that layoffs would be delayed only until elections, and would occur especially in banking (where operations would scale down without inflation).

I close Part I with a longer story of a lost home.

Violence, Home Loss, Restitution

Maurício and Paola: This couple experienced a tragedy. In 1986, Maurício, in his early thirties, was gunned down by an assailant and became a paraplegic. In a terrible way, their life story reflects recent tendencies of Brazil and the middle class of the crisis years: spiralling violence, which mostly targeted the poor, but did include assault on middle class people, who became fearful of being on the

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streets; quick upward mobility followed by downward mobility and informal sector work; variable family connections; and gender issues.

I report their story here with some reticence, as I fear trivializing or demeaning their circumstances by using them for social analysis. But the couple told the story readily, with apparent interest in providing the details. The recounting was extremely confused in chronology, in part due to the fact that the two told me the story at once. The urgency in explaining might also have affected the order. Furthermore, Maurício frequently made errors about basic things, such as the main government plans, and years they moved, got jobs, etc; he even erred on the year of the accident. These discrepancies attest to his trauma, as did his anger at Paola's corrections.

At the time of the accident Maurício had his own business of mounting promotional stands for shows. Before opening up his own advertizing business, which he started with unemployment funds [FGTS],[9] he had been salaried for some time, working for the city, and at a bank for five years in marketing and promotions. He had a secretary, architect, office boy; the business was his and only his.

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[9] The Fundo de Garantia pelo Tempo de Serviço, or Guarantee Funds per Time of Service, has other purposes besides unemployment compensation. The money deposited obligatorily (in principle, but not always in fact) by the employer, eight percent per month of employment, can also be taken out for retirement, disability, death, and to buy one's first home.

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This was in 1983 and lasted three years, the best of his life. They had three-four cars, a country home, a beach house, and an apartment in São Paulo, said Maurício with pride.

It was then, when he was at the top, that the assault occurred. At the time, he had some financial investments earning interest legally, he emphasized ("agiotagem, nao ilegal"), but paying higher than the market. Coincidentally (soon after Maurício got out of the hospital) his lawyer doing the applications went bust, disappeared and was never seen again. He left with everyone's money, but Maurício had been the biggest investor. At this point Paola mentions that there was always some doubt about the subject, the shooting. Maurício disparages this: "this is sort of soap operaish." Paola insists: "if it really was an assault...so for him to have disappeared one month after you left the hospital...It was a lot of money at the time." Although unclear of the plot, I was reluctant to press for further explanation, but gather that Paola suspected that the lawyer, fearing that Maurício would demand return on his investment, vanished with his liquid assets.

Returning to the accident, Maurício said the first two years were really hard: he was between life and death. His company had worked with six big clients, all accustomed just to him, so that it couldn't maintain itself afterwards. After recovering, Maurício sold cars; it was something he

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could do by phone. Paola began selling frozen prepared foods.[10] She helped Maurício with the administration of car sales, doing the banking. This sounds like a viable recourse; however, precisely in 1990 when Collor froze the nations' savings accounts and changed the currency (see chapter 6), the check Paola had received from a car sale was suddenly worthless, just when Maurício was in for another surgery. Overall, said Maurício, during the Collor administration, no one had any liquidity to buy. Dealers had to sell at any price, if, for instance, they had doctors' bills to pay. Cars were more saleable than houses, though. Indeed, prior to the Collor administration, they ended up selling their house in São Paulo--of all their property, the easiest to dispose of--and going to live in their country home, in the mountainous area near Minas Gerais. It has a pool and sauna. "Anyone who'd look at us would have thought...but we had no work, we sold what we had in order to..." Paola said, trailing off. They lived there from 1987 to 1993.

Also in 1990, Paola opened up a lanchonette at the school her oldest boy attended; this paid for the boy's

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[10] The frozen foods (congelados) craze hit middle class Brazil in the early 1980s, not in the form of mass produced TV dinners (which I don't believe existed before imported foods came), but rather produced artisanally by cooks contracted by a household, usually to make a month's worth of main meals. The fad can be associated with the increase in middle class women's professional employment and an increasing middle class view that domestic workers were difficult, costly and wasteful. See Ardaillon (1995).

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schooling. For this venture, Maurício did the bookkeeping, while she prepared the food. At some later point, Maurício started working for Paola's sister, who has an ad agency in São Paulo. The agency won the account of Paulo Maluf's campaign for mayor. After Maluf's victory Maurício was taken on in the Maluf administration, moved back to São Paulo (before Paola did), and was working for the mayor enthusiastically at the time I knew them. They found an apartment to rent in Higienópolis which accommodated his wheelchair. Since 1993 Paola, degreed in psychology, has worked at an NGO advocating for disabled people.

Unlike other couples in the study for whom the women's contribution of paid work did not seem to be resented by the men, here it was a source of distress for the disabled husband. Thus before the discussion of the period they spent in the country, Maurício pointed out, "the problem was Paola started to work, as of that year, she had never worked before, since our marriage." She disagrees: "I worked!" Maurício states that she first started to work at the school. As Paola continued protesting, I ask, "what was this work that wasn't work?!" Paola then says she was a waitress at a school, and further defends herself, ironizing: "I did a zillion things, but this was never work, understand?!" Still confused, I wonder if what was meant was that her work wasn't remunerated. She says ironically, "when there is no schedule and boss, it isn't

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work, see?" Maurício objects, "in 16 years of marriage, there was just this one time, the rest you didn't work, so why are you saying this?" When Paola spoke with vehemence against the lack of accommodations in Brazil for the disabled, Maurício shrugged saying he was able to go anywhere he wanted. Similarly, when the topic of violence in São Paulo arose, Maurício said dismissively that it was just like any other city.

PART II: Making It (Se Virando)

The Brazilian middle class is usually held to be the beneficiary of prestigious formal employment, privileged consumption, and the standard of stability and progress. During Brazil's crisis of the 1980s-90s, chronic high inflation eroded the salaries and security of middle class employment, prompting "adaptive strategies" to offset the decline in living standards and/or downward mobility. Part II looks at middle class employment through informants' strategies to maintain their standing during the crisis. The four I identified include maintaining the same job. Given white collar layoffs, no change may be counted as an accomplishment, yet in these cases, salaries declined. The more noticeable strategies to offset declining incomes were: to increase hours in the same line of work; to increase income by moonlighting; to enter into part or full-time

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self-employment.[11] To better withstand the crisis the key was hard but simple: generate more income, if possible by working more hours in the same area or by creating one's own income. In this recessionary economy, prejudicial salaries made self-employment a more attractive risk, and for some the sole alternative. Let us look at each in turn.

The Same (with lower returns)

Informants in this category (about one-third of the sample) have not changed their work. All have salaried employment which, during the crisis, invariably meant declines. There was no such thing as a real wage increase; at best, the employees would receive monetary corrections not far below inflation. Attitudes varied, but there was a tendency for the heads of household to be discouraged or worse.

Edilson, bank employee, spoke long and hard of having to keep his mouth shut, grin and bear it, as lower echelon employee in a bank hierarchy. He added that "in Brazil, I at 41 years of age, am no longer a well-regarded professional. I'm already old." In fact, he added, "it's the case." He complained of being worn out, unmotivated, after having moved from one job to lower positions. Edilson

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[11] See Iutaka (1971), Farias (1983) and Guimarães (1987) for perspectives on socioeconomic changes in mid-twentieth century Brazil in relation to class structure and to middle classes.

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left his wife Bruna during the fieldwork period. She later became so busy seeking work and then working in a nearby boutique that we were unable to meet. She and their son live in the apartment she and Airton own in Pinheiros.[12]

Alice is not bitter about her work, which is satisfying, nor her apartment, which is rented, cheaply furnished and located on the "wrong" side of the street (i.e., off the very harsh, low tech thoroughfare of Avenida Santo Amaro in modest Vila Olympia rather than lush and ritzy Vila Nova Conceição), but rather she is angry about the low pay for her field and at Brazil, for not providing a decent living. She is a teacher, university professor and graduate student. Alice is divorced; her husband, retired military officer, pays for their two sons' education, health care, club membership and allowances, but she shoulders the daily expenses on the equivalent of US $1400 per month income from her two teaching positions.

Ademar manages a firm which manufactures cutting tools for export (to the U.S. and Canada). Since 1989, it has reduced its employees from 180 to 49. Grim Ademar is married to cheerful Mara, an attorney with occasional work,

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[12] Incidentally, this apartment did not have maids' quarters. This innovation apparently occurred to cut corners and in the expectation that modern life and its appliances would render the work of professional domestic workers obsolete. It has not done so. A couple informants had, however, converted the maids' room into areas of their own use. In current real estate lingo, this room is being called a "reversible third bedroom."

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and manager at the large building complex where they live. I found their apartment in the huge concrete complex on the Avenida Francisco Morato (almost a freeway in speed of traffic and volume) to be institutionally drab and meager in furnishings.

In contrast to these modest and declining incomes, consider João, graduate in civil engineering, who has built an ever more successful career in banking, currently with Citibank, and lives with his wife Wilma, homemaker, and two daughters on the opposite side of the street from Alice, in a large luxury apartment in Vila Nova Conceição, the neighborhood of São Paulo then boasting the highest real estate values. He repeatedly noted with apparent satisfaction that graduates in the dictatorship had a great ease in getting jobs. "My whole class graduated employed. One could even choose jobs. The demand for educated professionals was great. [...] It was a golden age, the whole decade of the 70s." He later added, "We passed through a black political period, in an exuberant economy." Given João's interest in economic history, I wondered why he did not draw connections between the dictatorship's administration and the ensuing crisis. His and Wilma's unfaltering optimism contrasts with others whose "strategy" was to retain their salaried employment. Let us turn to the strategies to offset declining income.

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More of the Same and Moonlighting ("bicos" de emprego)

Maria Regina and Ricardo: This family is among those who bought their apartment before the crisis via SFH financing. It is small; their three girls share one of the two bedrooms. Regina explained their situation as follows.

> We got married in 1978, and we have three children, born in 1981, 83, 84. So we really caught the beginning of all this mess of the country. At the time, I taught for the city and for the state. Eight hours per day. When the children were born, I left the state job. My husband worked the whole day. And we managed. We maintained our children on this, private school for the three. Today I work from 7:30 in the morning to 7 p.m. at night. I give almost 50 class hours per week. I doubled my hours.

But, she added, even with this additional work, they can't maintain as before. This year her oldest girl went to public school, and the others only stayed in private school with a tuition discount. Midday she drops by the house to bring the children to school after their lunch. She herself eats at school. As she put it: "Eu levo marmita. Virei bóia fria," that is, "I carry a lunch box. I became a day laborer." From the countryside (and with a heavy country accent), Regina ironically likened herself to rural workers condemned to eat a cold lunch in the fields.

Ricardo lost his job in 1992. He was reinstated five months later, but with a 30-40 percent salary loss and as a consultant paid hourly and without benefits. As Ricardo put it, "a scalded cat is afraid of cold water," that is, people don't want to return to a place where they have lost a job.

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He didn't really look much for a job -- there were none. A technician, he found the demand dropped a lot in the engineering area. Without projects, there was nothing to pay employees. In his department 28 were laid off, and colleagues in other areas with a higher level of training were laid off as well. While laid off, Ricardo picked up work filming parties -- book signings, birthdays, weddings, baptisms, 15th birthday parties, and began to invest in it. It was at this point that Regina started at the other school, which offered health insurance -- lost since Ricardo's unemployment. After working for three months as consultant for a large manufacturing company, Ricardo was contracted as an employee and given a slight raise, to act as their representative in Cubatão (notorious for being Brazil's most polluted industrial city). Ricardo recalls that during their first years of marriage (1978-80), there were days when

> ...if I hadn't had a ticket, I wouldn't have had lunch. Money was set aside for transportation. It was a sacrifice. But you do this counting on arriving at 50 years of age and retiring,[13] being at peace, diminishing work and retiring in a good situation. But what is happening? It's completely inverted. Her with two jobs, me with an extra one.

Not incidentally, Regina makes slightly more than Ricardo:

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[13] Although the system was recently changed, at the time of fieldwork, retirement was either according to years of service, 35 for men and 30 for women, or age, 65 for men, 60 for women.

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the equivalent of US $1500/month to his $1200. (For further discussion of salaries by gender, see Part III below.)

The declining salaries and lay offs prompted these strategies of working extra hours. The next strategy, going beyond moonlighting to starting a small business, often called microempresa in current Brazilian Portuguese, appears in the first example less motivated by the crisis than by the woman's professional ambition. However, Larissa noted early on that they would not have the home, car and schooling they had if they had relied solely on her city job and her husband's salary. Said Larissa, "I only manage to maintain myself in the middle class with two jobs."

Party Films, Gas Stations, Plastic Cards, Bread Boutiques: Microempresárias/os -- Small Businesswomen/men

From the very first potential informant interviewed, who pressed upon me three issues of the magazine Microempresas, and throughout fieldwork, I learned of middle class informal and independent business ventures. These initiatives involved 13 of the 47 informants, or one quarter of the sample, and ranged from being a sideline to full engagement.

* * *

Larissa and Rodolfo: Without my prompting, Larissa told me her full work history at our first meeting, a fact which I register as indicating that her identity, positively presented, stems importantly from her profession. An

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architect, she now works half-time (at modest pay) for the city government, and with two partners, runs an arquitectural firm. They have an office in Itaím-Bibí at a short walking distance from her home. When she was first married, Larissa worked for a construction company. But after having two children two years in a row, she felt the babysitter was not able to handle it, and she quit for one year. Then as she put it, "in those days, I was really a kid, I think I didn't have much patience. That wasn't a very agreeable activity for me -- to stay at home taking care of them, but on the other hand, it was a responsibility, they were my children. I took a civil service exam because at the time the city was offering a job at just six and a half hours per day. This matched what I needed." Larissa was then reminded, though, of problems at home, and recounted the following horrifying incident. She returned home one day to find firemen at the apartment building, people outside, but her maid and three children indoors, unaware. Said Larissa, "I almost killed the super. He had an obligation to knock on people's doors and warn them. Second, I fired the maid. Third, the problem [of childcare] remained..." Her mother stayed with the children for a time, but she herself was busy. "I don't like to even remember that time," said Larissa of the preschool years.

Her business started in 1981, when poor people of the region in which she worked on projects for the city came to

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ask for help planning homes. She and her sister-in-law began this way. Larissa's three children were small, all sleeping in one room, leaving her bedroom for an office. "We worked on projects from 7:30 p.m. until midnight, or 12:30, every day, including Saturdays and Sundays. We worked in my bedroom, in my apartment. It was extra (money) that we had. Extra money that helped us a lot. To pay medical bills, it was I who paid..." (emphasis added). The business took off in 1987 with a large project for an industrial company lasting two years. At this point they rented an office, but were afraid they wouldn't be able to keep up on rent. Her father then sold a house in Tatuapé (a bairro in the far eastern part of São Paulo, where Larissa grew up) and this money and hers enabled them to buy a small row house in a "vila" (cul de sac) with a low selling price, which they converted to an office.

Her husband Rodolfo, engineer, is head of the planning department for what was until 1995 the state owned telecommunications company. (This high position was attained in the Itamar Franco presidency, 1993 forward.) During the Plano Cruzado (1986-7) when salaries were frozen, their union sued the government and won. With the money from salary compensations, they are thinking of building a home.[14] Larissa, Rodolfo and their two boys live in a

[14] They own a plot of land in a gated community, called Alphaville, but are debating whether to build in this ultra wealthy enclave, given recent bad reports of the

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large rental apartment in Itaím-Bibí, with a very old, reasonable, rent.[15]

* * *

Euclides and Gilda: With his brother in Germany and father in Brazil as partners, Euclides, second generation Japanese, opened a gas station. He is an engineer who lost his first job with the state oil monopoly, Petrobrás, owing to involvement in a student organization during college. He told me his salary was now one-quarter of what it had been in the late 60s, and that his patrimony hadn't changed one bit in 15 years. Euclides himself never mentioned the gas station. His full-time employment remains in engineering. Gilda barely spoke the first time we met, beyond saying she was a housewife. The next time talking with me alone in their comfortable three bedroom apartment in Pinheiros, she told me how for years she had been, as she jokingly put it, a "madame" not working at all; then "one fine day" she decided she wanted to work. Now she and her father-in-law

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delinquent rich kids in it. Because of Larissa's irreverent, alternative style, I was surprised they had ever been interested in the bairro. See T. Caldeira (1993) for analysis of what would in the US be called "white flight" to gated suburbs like Alphaville.

[15] Another less successful architect in the sample, Gilberto started his firm later in the crisis (1990), and probably has a more restricted client base than Larissa. Chapter 6 contains discussion with Gil and Esther of the difficulties of buying a home during the Collor years.

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manage the station. She works there every morning.[16]

Perhaps Euclides omitted this information as it was inconsistent with other commentaries; yet it also seems likely that this business, even if fully legal, was not mentioned because from his point of view it did not confer dignity on him or his family. Similarly, I had the strong suspicion that another informant was selling clothes as a sideline, but she never discussed it. Personal sales like these are common among poor people.

Thanks to Larissa's successful contracts, parental financial help and Rodolfo's high paying government job, they are in the upper range of the sample. Euclides and Gilda seemed to be median. Ricardo and Regina lack wider family financial support, and their combined household income is second lowest in the sample. I did not obtain information from the following couple about their income, but their status might have been similar to that of Ricardo and Regina.

* * *

Adalberto and Helena: Adalberto started his own business in 1989, and like Larissa, told me all about it right away without my elicitation. Adalberto does mechanical design related to computers; for instance, he

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[16] Gilda said she did not know their income and that Euclides does the gas station books. I didn't dare ask either! All other couples whom I asked for this information responded. (See Appendix B.)

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designs the model of the series of plastic cards for telephones and for photocopies. Although the first two years were rough, it now holds promise, which his previous salaried employment as a mechanic did not. Their family lives in an apartment in Pinheiros they inherited. A young couple with two grade schoolers, they told me they would never have been able to buy an apartment, and their children have tuition scholarships, due to their friendship with the school owner. (I discuss Helena's work in Part III.)

PART III: Future Directions: Work in the Crisis, by Gender and Generation

"The Engineer who Turned into Juice"

In this section I discuss attitudes developing towards the new avenues of middle class employment through stories by informants and in the media. Examples have already indicated some identifiable tendencies. Those whose positions once earned the title of "new middle class" suffered setbacks in the crisis; the dissatisfaction of these informants was apparent. The following examples show that those jostled into subcontracting or small business became wary of salaried employment; they embraced private enterprise, or adjusted to lower status service and sales jobs.

Like Ricardo, no sooner did the micro business owners describe their work than they provided social commentary. After describing her own trajectory, Larissa brought up the

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illegality involved in these business ventures:

> Most people became aware that it wasn't worth trying to make demands [reivindicar]. The solution had to come from the bottom up. How would you get this solution? Everyone became aware that the income from salary was no longer enough to live on. Everyone went into a third line of work, what I call "bico" [literally a beak, and by extension, what draws something in]. Because generally you don't pay taxes and it's sort of clandestine. Just like I did projects in my house, clandestine, not paying taxes, nothing. There were people who started making cakes, selling hotdogs, clothes...

I asked, "people you know?" "Yes, people I know. For example, my sisters-in-law, they learned how to make candy. When it was Easter time, the poor things spent nights up, making Easter eggs. And their husbands sold them in their companies, as an alternative to the market, which was much more expensive." Larissa explained that the money earned "wasn't even to maintain their former living standard, but to fill needs." Dental care was her example. She noted how people make trips to Paraguay; these are the contraband merchants who go there by bus and resell in Brazil. "Careful with that tape recorder!" she warned me jokingly, and added, "because you see, at the same time that the Brazilian population got poorer, the population continued to have Christmas obligations, and so it sought alternative solutions to the [formal] market." She then justified the irregularities:

> I don't pass judgment [nao recrimino] when I see people working illegally, without paying taxes, first because it's a case of need. Second we lived through something that came from the top

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> down. Because the Brazilian has good character [tem boa índole]. If you had a dignified, decent government, everyone would collaborate. I have no doubt of this. But the way things are, nobody feels like obeying the law. There isn't much law in this country. [...] It's a misgovernment [desgoverno].

Despite these harsh sounding words, Larissa was the picture of happiness, and she optimistically found that political life in Brazil has been taking a turn for the better since 1992 with the Collor impeachment (see chapter 6).[17]

Adalberto's attitude towards politics was decidedly negative. He insisted that he had no trust for anyone, that it was just he and his family, and then burst out with this dramatic depiction of middle class downward moves into lesser employment:

> Middle class people, people who had a more European education, let's say, and really it [his education] was, what conclusion can we draw, over what this generation, children, grandchildren are going to do from now on, if I know engineers who are car mechanics, if I know doctors who are elevator operators. Do you know what an elevator operator is?! They make the elevator go up and down, doctors, a guy who studied five years in college..."[18] Waiters, civil engineers who are waiters, a friend of mine, personal friend, a civil engineer, sells fritters now at the market.... Where are we going to end up?

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[17] Larissa's description of these businesses qualifies them as "informal" according to Hart's recent reformulation, which emphasizes "the lack of established regularity, in this case, to economic evasion of the bureaucratic rules which underpin state management of the national economy" (1992:217).

[18] Brazilian colleges don't have "liberal arts." One enters directly into the major. So to be a doctor in Brazil, prior to specialization, takes five years of college.

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This led immediately, without break, into a description of the poor who raid trains for goods ("arrastão de trem" as he said), just like on the beach or on the bus. "Do you know what this is called? It isn't banditry, it's hunger!" And yet, Adalberto added, he warily puts his daughter on the bus to go to school, thinking of these dangers. (Pickpocketing on buses in São Paulo was frequent; in Rio cariocas would say it was continual.)

Previous expansion of middle class employment relied on government jobs or state-assisted development (Quadros 1991); the work here described--bicos de emprego and microempresas--were created in spite of the government. Informants' defiant or self-righteous attitude regarding businesses outside legal norms of incorporation or involved in tax evasion registers their antagonism against the government, held responsible for the chaotic economic environment.

Though the numbers in my sample are too small to generalize, it did seem that small business ventures were often undertaken by people with architectural, technical, and especially engineering training. Adalberto's reference to doctors notwithstanding, in the popular imagination, the "classic" instance of a move out of one of the traditionally "noble" professions was from engineering to quasi-marginal sales or services.

It was from José Rodrigues, engineer and member of a

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board directing a successful engineering firm, that I learned first of the engineer who had turned into juice. "A while back there was an expression, a very common one, because there was a real fact, 'the engineer who turned into juice.' It was an engineer who was finding everything very difficult, he built a small lanchonette, where his strong point was selling orange juice." This "fact-based" tale received national press coverage (probably in Veja magazine or in a Sunday newspaper feature). The expression alludes to a movie title, "the man who turned into juice," a story of a poor Northeastern migrant who works himself to the bone in São Paulo industry. The later mock horror story satirizes middle class downsliding by comparing the professional workers to those of the humblest means. Yet I must underscore that the sales were not just from a mobile juice cart, such as are found in declining downtown São Paulo, but rather from a permanent store on the most important uptown street in the city, the Avenida Paulista. Hence it must have provided an excellent revenue.

In fact, since the early 80s the news have reported an employment crisis for engineers, first attributing it to the increase in number of college graduates and Brazil's dependence on technology from outside, and later to the recession. Three thousand engineers in Rio marched in protest of unemployment in 1984 (O Globo 3/28/84). A report later noted that for every unemployed engineer, 250 workers

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were without work (Jornal do Brasil, 6/22/87). A 50 percent drop in jobs occurred during the Collor presidency; by 1993, only 25 percent were reported as working in the field (Jornal do Brasil, 5/30/93). The news also advertized stories of liberal professionals who lost or dropped out of salaried jobs, and began their own businesses. Indeed, cottage industry and the matching entrepreneurial spirit seemed to be turning up everywhere. Two "housewives" in my sample were planning businesses.

In this shifting economy, stories circulated of middle class workers defying their declassification in the decadent economy by taking initiatives outside the formal sector. Another small business owner (who dropped out of the study) commented on the growing number of liberal professionals in small business. As Maria Cecília put it, "São Paulo at the beginning of this year had 200 thousand unemployed executives, that's a lot of people! The opportunities to open something outside the area are running out [se esgotando]; for example, what there are of engineers, architects, administrators who opened a lanchonette, coffee house, pizzaria, tons of them! São Paulo is already saturated with this..." Her husband, an engineer, lost his job after 18 years, but was lucky: he was reemployed in six weeks' time elsewhere at a higher salary. She told of her neighbor, an engineer who "opened a bakery, pretty, like a bread boutique." Actually, the most famous baker in Brazil

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is Vera Loyola of Rio de Janeiro. Her "bread boutique" (in the fancy Rio de Janeiro suburb of São Conrado) placed her as a leading figure among the nouveau riche, now ironically called the New Emerging Society (Nova Sociedade Emergente, as coined by society columnist Hildegard Angel, for O Globo newspaper).

Given commentaries on middle class unemployment in the recession and downsliding, I wanted to further consider how informants subjectively dealt with such challenges to middle class work and identity. Towards this purpose I wrote a list of occupations and asked informants to check whether any items on it were not, in their view, middle class occupations. I included in my list both liberal professions and others (see Appendix A), such as clerk, nurse, receptionist, car salesmen, which I imagined to be lower than middle class, and banker and industrialist, which I imagined to be higher. The couples were generally together for this survey, but I asked each to fill out a separate form.

Although there was not one trend, I did detect a certain tendency toward broader acceptance of occupations than I had expected, which may be due to a number of reasons. My prior experience in Northeast Brazil had led me to surmise that "pink collar" occupations and store clerks were not of the middle class. It is conceivable, given the different trajectories into the middle class in the

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Northeast, where a good part developed from a declining native bourgeoisie, as compared to the Southeast, where it developed from upwardly mobile immigrants (as in my sample), that these lines are differently drawn by region. Alternatively, inclusion or exclusion of the lower jobs might reflect the status of the person in question rather than the region. Thus bank executive João was magnanimous in accepting a broad range of occupations as middle class. In contrast Ricardo, struggling technician, vigorously denied these same categories from middle class membership. Occupations often marked as not middle class and which were uncontested were typist, receptionist and banker--the last for being "very rich."

Several occupations provoked the comment "that depends." Thus, I was told that hair cutters could be poor, but they might own the shop, in which case they could be middle class. Similarly, industrial, car sales and merchant businesses could be small, medium or large and some might earn a lot. For counter clerks, it depended on the boutique. Everyone seemed to know that the fancier ones, such as in the shopping centers, hired middle class staff (some required bilingual staff). Finally, the "office boy" (the English is used for this occupation) category prompted the explanation that this depended on whether it was a person from the poor periphery or who had middle class parents. For those occupations traditionally outside the

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middle class and not associated with college degrees, those which paid little were not included -- unless it was known that young people from middle class families were taking on these jobs.

Thus there is a third possibility for the broad inclusion. It might suggest something like, 'if we do it, then it's a middle class job,' which is precisely what one parent said, referring explicitly to her daughter (see Mariza and Renato below). In other words, there may be a collective lowering of standards and broadening of the categories included as middle class.

It also became evident that income was a factor. Here the test case was metallurgist. A blue collar field offering a good salary, most informants accepted it as middle class. Some told me that they considered whether a given job could support a household. As noted, Carlos specified that a monthly income of 3000 (US dollars) was needed, while Milton had noted 1-2000.

Frequently discussions showed a sense of injury to the "noble" liberal professions, as epitomized by the engineer story, or silence (i.e., Euclides' example). Informants most often remarked upon the degrading of the teaching profession, telling me it had been perhaps the most respected occupation in small towns of Brazil when they were young. They noted that it had never been well paid, not to show its lesser value, but precisely to emphasize (in

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Weberian fashion) that in those days it was respected for superior reasons.

Some informants worried that the decline in education and noble professions and the increasing commercialism would be damaging to the nation's future course. Maricarmen (married to José Rodrigues, immigrant as a child from Spain, occasional Spanish teacher) was shocked that college hopefuls are going into advertising, not into teaching. In fact, relatively speaking the most competitive field for entrance into college is now advertising. Thus 3,340 students applied to enter the advertizing school of USP. Since only 40 could enter, the ratio, 1:83.5, was the toughest of all. Similarly, tourism had room for just one in every 50 applicants. In contrast, the School of Medicine, which remains the top choice in numbers of applicants (14,000), accepted one in 29 (source: USP, 1994 figures). Said Maricarmen: "It's a dream for you in this country to want to be in advertizing. ...either you expect to import everything, or they're going to advertize for what?!" José Rodrigues told me there was a time when the financial market offered higher returns than any productive activity.

We have seen that the categories petty bourgeiosie and new middle class[19] remain analytical indicators of position

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[19] See Mafra (1993) for a comparative analysis of lower echelon bank employees, considered to have taken a route to upward mobility from lower margins, and men in

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within the economic structure. They do not, however, separate out individual families or even individuals, who may well move across these categories within their lifetimes. Despite ambivalences about downsliding, informants as a whole set their endeavors in positive contrast to unproductive speculative activity so damaging to the national economy. (See chapter 4.) Use of the term "bico" in "bico de emprego" connotes marginality and informality, thereby downgrading the sideline employment. Yet the term "microempresa" redeems the petty bourgeois honor of self-employment. Although my material is scanty, it is my impression that a new petty commercial class (i.e., petty bourgeoisie and related service and sales personnel) is becoming the dubious vanguard of the flexible, globalized economy emerging in Brazil, leaving behind the once privileged, now declining "new middle class." Let us now look more closely at implications by gender and by generation.

Middle Class Employment by Gender in the Crisis

In this study, the most obvious areas to look for indications of how the economic conditions were affecting gender relations and identity were in employment, gender division of labor in the household and related attitudes.

The women with gainful employment were almost

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commerce, whose risks but also possibilities are greater.

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unanimously enthusiastic about their work. That includes those with low paying jobs such as teaching or social work to the architect who worked up from doing small projects out of the home to now successfully running a small firm, to a graduate in industrial design trying to start her own jewelry business, as yet without profit. The several women (seven) who did not work outside the home pointed out the strategic importance of their work as economizers. Overall, women in the study viewed their contribution, be it in economizing on household expenses, or earning in the paid workforce, as essential. Their manner of discussing their work -- freely, in great detail, with vigor, as shown by Larissa, indicated they viewed it as an accomplishment as well as a contribution.

Formerly a secretary at the state university, Helena (married to Adalberto) came to manage a micro business that sells bathroom accessories. She explained that she had had no experience with sales, in fact had been very embarrassed ("super acanhada, envergonhada"), but received encouragement and now does quite well. Simone, degreed in chemistry, was highly adaptive. First in São Paulo, she worked at her husband's computer consulting business. Then when her husband, a government employee, was transfered to Ribeirão Preto (the current boom town of São Paulo's agricultural belt), she worked as a sales rep selling advertizing space. They returned to São Paulo in the 1990s leaving a trail of

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white elephant houses: their first in Alphaville, another in Ribeirão Preto, which they put up for sale. At the time I knew them, they were living in a sparsely furnished rental apartment in Pinheiros and hoping to negotiate a sale of the Alphaville house. As Simone put it, she didn't want to be "slave of a big house." (It was she who said the middle class "is a dream, it's an illusion.")

My sense is that the lower limits of middle class employment are being stretched ever further by women and youth entering into service and sales (six women out of 24 in the sample). Just a few women informants resisted new lines of work. Aninha had not been able to find steady employment in the area of her college degree in industrial design. She confided that she had tried to do counter sales at a lingerie boutique, but quit. Her face showed disgust as she recalled this experience. (Yet it was she I suspected of selling clothes.) Bruna, recently separated from Edilson, was obliged to work in a boutique. Bruna had not completed college and lacked work experience. The job was also possibly unappealing to her eight year old boy, who had to hang out with her at the boutique after school.

While some informants flaunted the illegality of small business practices, others, who presented their work as if in confidence or refrained from discussing it, seemed not to be concerned with legality but with honor--violated with employment hitherto associated with working class and poor

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people. In particular, it appears that counter sales, traditionally a low paid working class position, too overtly puts the salesperson in a subservient position to others whom she would not like to consider her social superiors. In circumstances lacking such negative associations, selling goods can be appealing. Thus a social worker informant about to retire (in her early 50s, after the required 30 years of service for a woman) confided her wish to become an international (US-Brazil) contraband merchant!

Without any prompting on my part, women discussed their work, in some cases giving entire histories at our first encounters. Only a few men told me about their work without my asking -- precisely those with advantageous positions or their own companies. Most men (and all were employed) were by and large unenthusiastic about their work. Attitudes ranged from impassive (middle management) to silent, overworked (doctors) to bitter (lower level banking). Those few who were happily engaged were not surprisingly so: high ranking administrators, firm directors, successful small business people. Although this is impressionistic, I did infer from such responses that the crisis "validated" women's economic contributions, but deflated men's, even though men were almost always the bigger breadwinners. Making a monetary contribution per se was an advance for women.

This brings up the disposition of income and overall

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changes in household organization. Studies (e.g., Young et al 1984, Narotsky 1989) have shown that household income is not ungendered; that is to say, money is not put into some undistinguished, generic pool and then used for whatever expenses; rather it is earmarked for certain expenses according to the moneymaker. I therefore looked into whether such a pattern was occurring.

As noted, women's income tended to be far less then men's, starting with zero for the full-time housewives. Thus Milton, José and Carlos all supported their families on 3000 or slightly less (in all cases I give per month dollar equivalents); the doctors, high level bank administrator and medium sized business owners earned the most, 5000-10,000 (eight families). Among the families with gainfully employed women, in six cases the pay difference was dramatic: Mara made 350 to Ademar's 2500; Maricarmen 480 to José Rodrigues' 5000; Danaka 600 to Flávio's 4000; Mariza 1500 to Renato's 5500; Carla 500 to Chico's 4100. However, only Danaka and Mariza in this group worked full time. Two women made about half of what their husbands did: Larissa made 2000 to Rodolfo's 4000; Paola 1500 and Maurício 3000. Two earned similar amounts: Laura 4000 to Nando's 5000; Nicole and Miguel, 400 each. Finally, four women earned more: Maria Regina made 1500 to Ricardo's 1200; Esther 2400 to Gilberto's 2000; Miriam's 2500 to Marquinhos' 1500; Ursula's 2200 to Reinaldo's 720. Thus, overall 15 women

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earned less than husbands (or nothing), and six earned as much or more. (Income is unknown for Edilson and Bruna, Euclides and Gilda, Adalberto and Helena.)

The exceptions in the group were Ursula, who shouldered major costs: housing (condominium) and school, from her banking position at Bradesco, and Alice, divorced and receiving child support, but otherwise living on 1400. Otherwise women either did not pay for family expenses or, if they did, these were confined to three areas (in this order of frequency): gas for their cars; maid's salaries; and in a few cases classes for themselves, or they split expenses for children's classes outside the school (such as English or sports). Mainly, they paid for their mobility and their housework substitutes! That left housing, food and household, school, insurance, loans, leisure, to men's salaries.

Another line of inquiry into gender relations concerns household organization and division of labor in the household. All employed women said domestic servants (full or part-time) were the sine qua non of their work. Those employed exclusively as housewives also said that a domestic servant was indispensible, explaining that as there was so much to do, housework would otherwise become overly burden- and tiresome (and how!). As the literature on domestic servants has shown (see e.g., Jelin 1977, Souza 1980, Chaney and Bunster 1989), the work of paid domestic help has made

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it possible for middle class women to have outside professional work without rocking the boat, so to speak, in terms of the division of labor between spouses.

Didn't the inflation render such service a luxury? No. Only one family, Nicole and Miguel, did not have any paid domestic worker. All informants who employed a full-time worker (wealthier families and those with small children) paid about the equivalent of $100 in US dollars per month in 1994 (i.e., at the time somewhat more than the minimum wage). Daily rates varied, from about $6-12 per day.[20] In these cases, the employer would concentrate the laundry, cleaning and possibly some cooking into the two or three days per week the worker was there.

Given paid domestic labor, two important areas to consider for division of labor between spouses were grocery shopping and banking. The latter was primarily a male activity; the former a female one. As I describe in chapter 4, in Brazil many bills, from utilities to condominium charges to loans, are paid directly at the bank. Due to inflation, many of the bills had to be recalculated at the time of payment, updating the (devalued) nominal sum to a standard of value. (A bank employee at a desk installed by

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[20] Domestic workers charged transportation costs separately. Since by 1994, fare was 0.50 reais, or about 50 cents, and most people need to take two busses each way, not charging bus fare extra would have meant a significant loss in pay.

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the waiting line did this.) Furthermore, those with discretionary income had to do research on what kind of investment would be viable for them. All this took tremendous amounts of thought and time. I laughed when a friend said morosely after we agreed to meet one morning, "great, then I can spend the afternoon at the bank."

Two television ads in 1993-94 played on the topic of banking and gender. One ad has a woman calling her husband repeatedly, to which the secretary always responds, "he's at the bank." Another countered the male monopoly on the verb "bancar" (in the past one would say, "I'm going to the bank;" since the crisis one would say, "I'm going to bank") with an ad in which the wife brilliantly remembers to invest, to her harried husband's delighted relief. Fifteen men did the banking by themselves; four couples did it together; four did it separately; one woman did it alone (a harried doctor's wife). As if in direct symmetry, 15 women did all the grocery shopping by themselves (this includes the two separated women); four couples did it together; four men did it alone. However, if you add the last two together, you find a fair number of men buying household goods. Although I am not sure that men didn't grocery shop in the past, it does seem safe to say that there was increased male involvement in household operations, and probably a tightened grip on expenditures.

In sum, from this material it seemed as though the

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gender scales were shifting and reshifting in both directions: greater women's contributions and a certain validation for their work; greater pressures and frustrations for men in theirs, yet possibly increased interest and control over household areas.

My research did not focus on marital relations. However, one might imagine some tensions relating to the household financial crisis.[21] Reading transcripts from focus groups with middle class participants (from Standard, Ogilvy & Mather),[22] I ran across the following depiction of conflict over household expenditures. A full-time housewife stated, "What bothers me is the accountability [a cobrança]. My husband gives "x" amount and [later] says, 'what--you already spent it all?!' He makes it seem as though I've thrown the money out the window! This bothers me a lot." Another participant commiserates, "I detest having to be accountable" (February 25, 1987).

As a final means of inquiring into middle class work identity, I looked at parents' concerns for their children's

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[21] In fact, the 1990s saw an increase in marriage break ups. Legal separations rose 22 percent in four years. In 1994 there were 86,000 divorces and legal separations, versus 70,000 in 1990. Besides separating more, Brazilians are marrying less and later. Marriage rates fell 24 percent between 1986 and 1994 (Folha de São Paulo 8/4/96).

[22] This is one example of 60 hours of transcript material from 24 focus groups that I have generously been conceded for analysis by Clarice Herzog from the advertizing company Standard, Ogilvy & Mather. (See description, Appendix A.)

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careers. For this, I chose an episode with a family of the traditional petty bourgeoisie.

The Weekend at Guarujá: Generational Changes

Each visit to Mariza and Renato's was on a Friday evening. Each time I was served a variety of hors d'oeuvres and imported liquor. According to Renato, there are some things you cannot substitute. Mariza is school teacher and director. With his brother, Renato co-owns and runs a welding business his father had started. On the first visit to their luxury apartment in the upper middle class neighborhood of Moema, where they moved expressly so that their daughters would associate with that (upper) social circle, I met the younger daughter, Luciana, who showed me pictures of her 40 day stay on Fernando de Noronha, an island off the coast of Paraíba famous for the diversity of its flora and fauna, and also for the expense.

The most extraordinary news was that she had earned the money for the trip by selling sandwiches at the Shopping [center] Ibirapuera -- not at a cafe or fast food shop, but on her own -- much like beach vendors. She was so successful that she expanded, incorporating cakes into her basket, which the maid prepared (and for which she received some compensation). She was eventually "caught," but by that time had made many friends -- she mostly sold to sales personnel, so that she then worked for two months as an

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"extra" during Christmas rush. Renato says he would have been too embarrassed to do such a thing, but he saw with satisfaction that his daughters know how to fight ("sabem lutar").

The elder daughter Silvana was in her first year in advertizing at the respected private college MacKenzie. Her father didn't like the choice of major but said he wouldn't impose his wishes on his children. Silvana had three jobs, two related to advertizing, one teaching English at the time. Renato pointed out they don't have that middle class malady of being spoiled children, who then turn into adults waiting for the government without doing anything. His daughters can look out for themselves ("sabem virar"), can make it.

Renato began work at an early age at his father's store. In college, despite an interest in medicine, he completed a degree in economics, as this would be most applicable to him as the future owner. Twice he told me the following. Renato asked a friend of his who is a doctor whether he wakes up with a positive outlook on the day's work; the friend said yes. Renato himself said he doesn't get out of bed looking forward to the day's work. (On a return visit in 1996, he repeated this story.) Mariza works part time as a teacher, part time as a school director. She always looked fatigued. Mariza told me that she came from a poor family and that she had always been tight with money.

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The next time I was there, Silvana arrived at about 11:00 p.m., announcing she was going to Guarujá for the weekend. A beachtown highly frequented by upper middle class paulistanos who have apartments there, Guarujá is about an hour's drive from the capital. She and two girlfriends will stay in their apartment, Silvana explains, and the three boyfriends will stay in another person's apartment (how convenient!). She asks for an advance of 20, stating the dollar value explicitly, then leaves to make a call from her bedroom.

The parents, impassive so far, then show and tell me that they are upset and why. Renato tells me that he had already gone through this so much that finally he threw up his hands, telling her to just go ahead and do as she wishes without asking. Still, they are very displeased with her lack of consideration. It was that she had just announced this plan with no warning, very late. Furthermore, the short trip entails a drive through a range of hills, which can be dangerous at night. Mariza goes into Silvana's room; I hear loud voices.

An issue in all this is the boyfriend, Renato meanwhile explains. They don't like him, he's not welcome in the house. One thing they don't like is that he is very possessive/jealous ("ciumento"). Renato tells me that he has asked Silvana, 'what will happen when you finish and I want to send you to the US for three years?' He notes that

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he has no connections, but knows that lacking this, post-graduate training is a way for people to get good jobs. A bit later he says he's concerned, he doesn't want his daughters to be housewives, and then comes to the point: he is concerned about pregnancy; in fact he has told Silvana that if this occurs, 'many things you would like to have happen in your life won't be possible any longer.' (I found this a very striking way of stating the outcome of pregnancy. Abortion is illegal in Brazil.) The episode concludes after Renato gives his daughter the $20, reporting that he has told her she had been inconsiderate, and that she was lucky he had gone to the bank. (Perhaps this was said for effect since it seemed Brazilians had to go almost daily.)

Renato expressed two views about his daughters' work: he is concerned that his daughters become liberal professionals, which he had not been able to do. Although the field of advertizing is distasteful to him, he wants to ensure that Silvana will have a successful career, which may require foreign training, given the high competition and small number of jobs. Earlier he had been pleased that his daughters were not afraid of work, even if low status. In both cases he values the wherewithal to <u>make it</u>--perhaps less out of a sheer admiration, than assessment of the economic environment for those who wish to remain middle class. The few highly sought after high paying positions in

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advertizing most certainly required connections.[23] Besides this concern, Renato's worries for Silvana clearly involve elements of his own frustrated career outside the liberal professions and his concern about the feasibility for her in her chosen field.

Other families in the study in nouveau riche situations and lacking either education or connections also displayed a good deal of concern that the children enter into viable professions traditional to the upper middle class. The children themselves were fully cognizant. Thus Marcos (son of Clarinha and José) told me his field of production engineering at USP promised "100 percent employment." Laura and Nando's daughters were on a rigorous training for college. These same families also invested in manifesting their heightened status symbolically, through debutante balls, as well as the "obligatory" Disney trip.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to these rites and intergenerational issues. For now, I would underscore that the kinds of concerns parents had for their children's careers seemed to be associated with their class background and work trajectory. The nouveau riche set their aims on the traditionally successful liberal arts professions (medicine and engineering being tops), while the more established educated middle class wanted to guide their

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[23] I have witnessed social gatherings of those in the field and hopefuls in which shop talk and networking was an important component.

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children into a vocation, realistic or not.

For their part, more often than not, the children themselves were often bent on what seem to be commercial and service vocations: advertizing, hotel management, tourism are all on the rise, as is psychology. We can also see television's support for precisely the trends here identified into small business, service and sales, in soap operas (novelas). Thus a 1993 prime time soap opera (i.e., airing after the 8 p.m. news and geared to adults of all ages) had the mayor's daughter, no less, actively running a cottage textile industry ("Fera Ferida"). In the next novela, on spiritism ("A Viagem"), the older and younger major male characters were in the classic fields of law and architecture; the corresponding main female protagonist, however, was the owner of a video rental (offering glamour through its modernity). In the time slot (7 p.m.) geared to youth, the main plot of another 1993 novela ("Olho no Olho") showed psychic powers to be the special talent of youth. While perhaps an ironic commentary on what might be needed to make it in Brazilian society of the 90s, it was clear that dancehall ownership was presented as an attractive occupation for youth,[24] as well as waitering, long the province of working class men.

Ventures into small business and service -- legal and

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[24] The magazine Vejinha São Paulo regularly featured stories of young, eligible entrepreneurs -- often dancehall or restaurant owners, thereby glamourizing the work.

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not -- might in the early years of the crisis have been seen as the discrete sales of a dishonored bourgeoisie, prompting dual responses of discretion/indiscretion and honor/dishonor. But they are quickly becoming visible, and thanks to the media, gaining if not unambivalent honor, a "chic" appeal for the next generation.

Concluding Reflections

The two part organization of this chapter, home and work, cannot but call to mind the already classic study, A Casa e a Rua (The Home and the Street, 1985), by Roberto DaMatta. The anthropologist argues that the Brazilian world view is strongly marked by the oppositional categories of the title.[25] Thus the home would be the calm and safe haven of people whose social stations are known, respected, natural-ized. The arquitecture and social use of the space reinforce the separation from the street and the stranger. The street is the agitated place where unknowns in a heterogeneous space mix in ways that are materially and socially dangerous (among other things DaMatta notes theft and misrecognition by others of one's sense of social standing). Da Matta points this "emic" understanding out, while advising that what is of interest is the interrelation

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[25] DaMatta includes another third category, the other world, thus creating a trinity (an analogy he explicitly uses). Yet the presentation remains structural, as he aligns the other world to the sphere of the home.

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of the two spaces. He later observes that

> What is curious, fascinating, miraculous -- and perhaps this is really the Brazilian miracle -- is that we don't perceive these radical changes in our behavior as having any politico-moral or ideological implications. That is, we live in a divided universe and we don't realize it. So, when we speak of change, transformation, modification, reform or revolution, we are referring almost exclusively to the sphere of problems that emerge in the public world: the universe of politics and the street. The home and the supernatural are very rarely incorporated [englobados] in our transformative proposals about the world; they are the place where time doesn't pass and history rarely knocks at the door. (1991:114; emphasis his)

Thus Brazilians would be dichotomists for whom the interrelation between the spheres, or the contaminating of the sacrosanct private sphere, could not occur.

DaMatta's frame of reference for his essays tends towards crystallized representations in Brazilian society: his genius for elucidating social preoccupations and presumptions is through colloquilism; his examinations are of the "traditional society" as depicted by Gilberto Freyre and Jorge Amado. The complexity of these works should not be underestimated. Yet it can well be argued that their writings, which have very effectively created national characters, becoming major founts for nationalist ideologies, emphasize harmony in race and class relations, hence a top-down view. DaMatta examines a social world which is already there, and the ensuing concepts and relations. The social actors are already bourgeois, their homes were long since built, the insecurities and dangers

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were kept outside on the street.

This chapter took a microsocial look at middle class families whose home and street lives were not already there. Their homes were built, bought, rented, lost from the time of the Brazilian "miracle" to the "crisis." Similarly, the adults' work in support of these homes and families was beset by challenges, losses and successes. Both these "spheres" were "invaded" by the crisis, just as they were fostered by the "miracle." Yet it is perhaps curious, and bears witness to DaMatta's original insight, that the middle class world view attempts to maintain these dichotomies, even when they have visibly, overtly collapsed -- and these same people know this. Although fractured along many lines and living in vastly different material circumstances, the middle class reveals commonality in the ways class identity is represented. "Native" conceptualizations of class are the subject of chapter 3.

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Chapter 3
Discursive Boundaries of Class

In this house no one wants your good education.
On the days there's food, we eat it with our hands.
And when the police, disease, distance or argument
separates us from a brother,
We feel the pain can never be contained in our hearts.
But we don't cry just for anything,
We don't cry just for anything.
[...]
Refrain: Go back to your home. Go back there.

From the song "Volte Para o Seu Lar" [Go back to your home] by Arnaldo Antunes, interpreted by Marisa Monte, 1990.

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze discursive representations of middle class Brazilians in São Paulo. My questions were: How can one read the changes occurring to the middle class through their spoken discourse?[1] How is middle class identity being reconstituted in conversation by diverse groups of middle class people? In chapters 2 and 7 I consider informant lines of thinking on work and politics, i.e., areas often considered to identify class position and consciousness. Here I wish to broaden the scope of what is considered to define the middle class, in accordance with the vocabulary of the people in the study. As their

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[1] My use of the term discourse stems from the basic linguistic definition of "connected speech or writing occurring at suprasentential levels" (Asher 1994:940). I do not mean to imply a broad, imposing discourse, such as the "discourse on madness." Rather, from informant conversation, I identified a body of statements which share in vocabulary and "argument" or "drift," thereby comprising a cohesive corpus.

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statements will show, consumption is the principal defining criterion.

One could imagine that preoccupation with consumption is an artifact of the moment. That is to say, the inflationary circumstances made this concern foremost. If, however, we can trust the academic accounts, middle classes were similarly preoccupied during the times of prosperity of the military dictatorship. As I will show, in middle class Brazilian conceptions, this connection is essential; consumption is key both to representations of the Brazilian middle class vis-à-vis the other major classes, and vis-à-vis "others" of the middle classes. Middle class Brazilians distinguish themselves from another part of the middle class, broadly conceived, according to a hierarchy of consumption standards of their own design. They attach to their own consumption practices moral and cultural superiority and condemn those of others as vulgar or morally suspect. This perspective on consumption reveals ambivalence.

Given the short history of the middle class, it seems safe to say that the association between it and consumption is so constant and meaningful because the latter has been and is central to processes of social identity formation (see, eg., Friedman 1994). Not surprisingly, much of the literature on consumption charts the rise of the middle class concurrently with, conjointly with, in relation to,

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modern consumption (see e.g., McKendrick 1982, Williams 1982, McCracken 1988). This chapter presents material showing this process remains central to the self-definition of the Brazilian middle class under circumstances of downsliding.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In Part I, I discuss definitions of the middle class as a class, which I elicited from informants. Next, and in relation to this definition, I consider another representation of identity (raised by some informants without encouragement on my part). In this section I show that one way Brazilians self-identify is through the "idiom" of region. In the discourse of some informants, the people from their city, state or region are presented as radically distant from an "other" group, of the Northeast region. In an analysis of identity, it is important to see how the group studied presents another group as its negation. It is not incidental that these Northeastern others differ by race and class, as well as by region. I present this discussion here because the idiom of region conflates, in a complex way, the issues of class boundaries and race and ethnic differences. The discussion of regional differences should also be seen to bear on national identity, yet I emphasize that these representations are especially peculiar to middle class natives of the Southeast and South regions, whose histories and personal biographies distinguish them from those in

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regions to the north. Put at its crudest, this section is about middle class whites who identify themselves variously against poor black and decadent rich Northeasterners (classified white). (In this conceptualization of the Northeast, there is no middle class.) This particular construction of radical racial difference may resonate familiarly to North American readers.

In Part II I focus on intraclass definitions, starting with my earliest contacts with people, in which I could assume they exhibited heightened awareness about self-presentation to an outsider. I found that informants went to some lengths to emphasize differences within the middle class. Adjoining this section is a discussion of theoretical views bearing on the issue of education in relation to class mobility. As a complement to these self-conscious discussions, I also offer examples of how informants demonstrated their class at home.

Contrary to what a functionalist standpoint would predict, there seemed to be a heightened importance of the symbolic during the crisis. Why is that? One answer is obvious: as I will show, the middle class not only aspires to higher education, but finds "educational," and by extension "cultural" and "symbolic" capital essential to its continuity. In the past the career path was clear for all with college degrees. Now there are more competing, and in the more restrictive economy of the 1990s, fewer positions.

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The prioritizing of education, the ambivalence regarding consumption, the stance of moral correctness vis-à-vis the wealthier, and the fear, resentment and silence vis-à-vis the poorer are "classic" expressions of middle class identity, but here exaggerated. This exaggeration attests to the context of instability and widening class differences.[2] The final section integrates representations of middle classes, reflecting on the significance of symbolic boundary making within.

PART I: Class Differences

The Middle Class as a Class

Although I did not do so initially, I eventually did ask informants "whom would you classify today as middle class compared to the past?" or more simply "how do you, after all, define 'middle class'?" (See Appendix A for interview questions.) Responses fell into three categories. The first set gave a set of criteria. Larissa said:

> The middle class of ten years ago, which continues to live off a salary, lost a lot in buying power. Ten years ago, middle class was someone who could buy a car, their own house, maintain their children in private school, frequent, let's say, good restaurants, take a trip once a year. [...] Today, if I had to live from my husband's salary and my city job, my children would not be in [School 1] studying, I would not have a car, we

[2] I must, however, emphasize at the outset that the discussion is specific to members of São Paulo's middle class. A study of middle classes in a small town of Brazil would differ in several significant ways. See Abreu Filho (1980).

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> would be reduced to one car and I don't know, I would be living in Tabapuã" [a lower class suburb].

And travel? I ask. "Forget it. The most would be to go to the country, to the cabin of a friend..." She then added (as noted in chapter 2): "I only manage to stay in the middle class with two jobs."

Ricardo said this of the middle class:

> At times we lose sight of it [perde a noção], not of status, but of class itself. What am I? When you don't manage to invest in something at the end of the month, when you break even and the overdraft is in the red, then you can't consider yourself, you don't know, you can't maintain the middle class standard. You can't go to the theater, you can't go to the cinema. You can't say that you are middle class. Leisure doesn't exist. Not that we don't have activities...we go to the park [Ibirapuera]. But to buy five ice creams you have to think twice. If it is the end of the month, forget it. [Not to] have an ice cream on the corner. Caramba!

Milton's phrasing was more affirmative:

> The middle class, especially in São Paulo, in this central-south part of Brazil, still exists...But it is being pushed down [comprimido pra baixo], because this class is still very dependent on salary. [...] We can classify someone as still middle class today who has a family income of 15-30 minimum wages[3], or less, but that's basically it. That person can keep his child in private school, manage to go to the shopping center, have a pizza out on the weekend, take a trip during vacation.

Aninha questioned whether the last possibility was still

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[3] At the time, in US dollars, from 1,000 to 2000 per month. Besides Milton, Carlos mentioned income necessary for a middle class family, finding the equivalent of 3,000 in US dollars was needed.

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true. Milton commented instead that a middle class person would have a relatively new car.

How informants compared their parents' generation to their own was helpful in understanding how they measured middle class. Sandra said of her father: "My father was a grade school teacher, he had his own house, raised two children, took a vacation every year." Then Carlos recalled of his grandfather: "He was a simple chauffeur, yet had three houses, lived very well, had five children." Sandra joined in, "even us. We used to buy cars all the time. Now it's a lot harder." Carlos explained, "she says we switched cars, but we didn't have two children then." José Rodrigues stated succinctly that the middle class was able to "buy a car, an apartment with a BNH subsidy."

In sum, one set offered a lengthy definition, including house, car, private schooling of children and the possibility of spending on leisure activities and travel. With the majority, my question provoked silence, then a hesitant response. I took this to indicate discomfort with the social scientist-styled question and/or that the unstable times had made it more difficult to answer. The response eventually produced by nearly all informants was that middle class meant having "a house and a car."

Now informants could perfectly well have offered another definition, for example, profession, parental education or neighborhood in São Paulo. They could also have

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given a lot of different responses; but no, most gave the response of owning one's home and car. This definition of home and car may seem too simple or mundane to be taken seriously by social science. Yet it offers precisely what a definition or classification should: an unambiguous designation, classifying the middle class according to property and a durable good, and stated concisely. In contrast to those offered in the class literature, this definition refers to the private sphere. It is at once metonymic (i.e., names something associated to the subject in question) and akin to a Weberian understanding of class conditions. Yet like the analytical view of class, the basic definition makes a "clean" split between classes; it is not a continuum view of stratification. Note that it places the middle class with the upper class. By the same token, it is rather telling of this period of crisis and perhaps of middle classes in the majority of world areas, that the definition is so "reductionist." That is to say, during high inflation, goods, not money, may hold their value.

Yet besides the relation to upper classes, this definition also indicates (a variously indifferent or fearful) recognition of the hugely differing living conditions by class in Brazil, in which the vast majority live in substandard, precarious housing and, not having their own cars, are subjected to a gravely deficient public

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transit system as well as an alarmingly high risk of pedestrian accidents.[4] While public transportation is a major problem in all Brazilian cities, in São Paulo, where most of the population of 17 million lives in poor outlying suburbs, a conservative estimate for a round trip commute is a three hour bus ride. In short, the definition "sides" with the wealthy, yet an important referent is the poor.

At times this reference was not so oblique. For instance, Ademar, whose own financial situation was among the more modest of my informants, disparaged the industrial workers at the firm he manages of 49 employees. They constantly complain and have a pessimistic outlook, he said, and yet 19 of them own cars: -- "Only cars falling apart. They use them to come to work. Keeping up a car is expensive. But they are improving their lives. But if you ask them how they are doing, you get that gloomy response [é aquela tristeza]." While formal sector working class people may have cars (perhaps obtained from the efforts of several household wage earners), this is certainly not the case for the working poor overall. Car ownership is the privilege of a minority.

Adding to this baseline the gamut of items referred to by the others (notably leisure), it is striking that precisely all those things held dear and held to be the

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[4] The traffic is horrendous for drivers, but the risk of pedestrian accidents is far more terrifying.

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proof of middle classness have been threatened in this period, in two senses. First, financing for cars and homes became risky due to inflation, currency changes and surprise government interventions in the economy. I was told over and over by informants that if they had not bought their house when they did (before the crisis), they would never be able to now. Augusto's opinion notwithstanding, to own a car is not within the reach of most Brazilians. Sixty percent make minimum wage, which in the early 1990s was merely the equivalent of 70 dollars per month. A new "economy" car runs about 8,500.

Second, due to a high risk of theft and burglary, both homes and goods have been increasingly guarded -- with extra locks, bars, walls, and 24 hour watchmen (not electronic systems) for buildings, and, on the street, self-elected car watchmen. As to the other items included in the fuller definition of the middle class, informants told me that the crisis required diminishing what was often called "superfluous" consumption (but highly valued and sorely missed) in favor of private education for children. (These matters will be discussed later in the chapter.)

Perhaps a half dozen informants soberly suggested that there was no longer much of a middle class, just rich and poor. Euclides said: "A person who can be considered middle class is one who has his own home, stable employment... Today the middle class doesn't manage to save, it only

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subsists. What we have now is people leaving the middle class and going down." Note the reference to employment stability (rather than occupation), itself endangered in the crisis, notably for engineers, as Euclides, himself an engineer, knows well. Even more strongly, Mara (an attorney with occasional work) said:

> I think that today, the middle class hardly exists anymore. It is getting closer and closer to the poorer class [classe mais pobre]. There isn't such a big difference anymore between the poor class and the middle. There is a big rift in relation to the richer.

Her husband Ademar, just cited above, said:

> Ten years ago, what characterized someone from the middle class? You had a car, you belonged to a [social/sport] club, you had your children in private school, you lived in your own aparment or house, you traveled. Today you don't travel anymore. Car? Everyone [sic] has them, better or worse. Your own home? Yes. The poorer class also got these things [foram conquistas que a classe mais pobre conseguiu]. Today, the middle class is not very characterizable [não está bem caracterizada] (emphasis added).

Some people felt they themselves had almost joined the ranks of the poor. Thus said Ursula: "We thought we were middle class, but I feel kind of poor! I don't feel miserably poor -- it would be a sin to say we were poor, since there are so many people with great problems, you know?" Overall, these comments suggesting a two class split refer us to the process of class differentiation occurring

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during the crisis.[5]

Informants over the age of 40 had a strong sense of change. Comparing today with the middle class of ten years ago, they described the current situation of un-ease -- "at times we lose sight of it [class position]." Some felt compelled to point out that the middle class "especially in São Paulo, still exists," but others claimed that it just "subsists," or "hardly exists." I was especially caught by the phrasing of Ademar: "Today, the middle class has lost its distinctiveness [não está bem caracaterizada]." It recalled a similar comment I had heard from a younger man who told me that the middle class "descaracterizou-se" (de-characterized, lost its distinctiveness) in the crisis. I found here expressed by a verb form I have difficulty rendering in English what others rendered by silence. On two other occasions, casual acquaintances in the graduate school milieu, upon hearing the subject of my study, also fell silent. This prompted me to inquire jokingly, "guilty?!" -- meaning of being part of this class. One said, "well in the past I would have said upper middle class, now perhaps middle." Another said he was pondering

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[5] Finally, there was a minority who offered a slightly different view. One I will disqualify, as one might a potential jury member. This informant, leftist sociologist Marquinhos, gave a perfect analytical definition of the middle class role in the economic structure. Another, Simone, gave a poetic description, which I related previously, calling the middle class "a dream, an illusion."

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the issue of his own placement, unsure of where it might be these days. These last examples come from people aged 30 or under. Whereas those over 40 naturally had a longer time frame, which often included 20 years of employment, hence could outline basic contrasts of pre-crisis and crisis times, those in their twenties or thirties often said, as one woman (Esther) put it, "we have never known anything but inflation."

Whether an impression of the moment or an accurate recollection, many of the older generation painted a sort of good-old-days picture of the pre-crisis period when they never had to count money, pay attention to bills or restrict their leisure and spending. Yet, in case there is some doubt about the difference between the downwardly mobile middle class and the lower middle class and poor, another contact provides clarification. This woman's children attended the private school free of charge where she taught. Her husband is a mechanic. She was unsure as to whether she should be part of the study, and later said, "I don't know what class I am in. I come from a very poor family. I don't see so many changes [since the crisis]. It has always been hard."

From an affluent perspective, the definition of home and car ownership might prompt a question like 'is that all these middle class people see as what separates them from the popular masses?!' While a fear of sliding so far as to

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move to a shantytown is probably remote, fears of the working classes, even of being momentarily mistaken for someone poor, certainly drives a good deal of middle class practice. Or better, it is not just or necessarily a question of fear, but rather (given the vast gulf between classes and the deplorable conditions of the poor), there is no possibility but to be middle class (see Ehrenreich 1989).

An evaluation of native representations of this kind should note what was not brought up. It is curious that occupation was not offered for the definition of middle class. As the previous chapter suggested, this may in part be due to the recent shifts, and to a sense of general variability in the category, thereby prompting people to avoid this complicated means in favor of a clearer, more stable or "universal" definition.

Region, race, ethnicity

While still considering differences between classes, I would like now to change the terms of the discussion to include informant discourse on another issue relating to social identity. I do not at all mean to subsume ethnicity or race under class, but rather wish to analyze the uneasy issue of race and its relation to middle class position.[6]

[6] For anthropological research focusing on contemporary race issues in Brazil, see Winddance Twine (in press), Sheriff (1997) and Norvell (1997). Winddance Twine and Sheriff focus on race and racism as experienced by people of color in small town Rio de Janeiro and in a

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Informants did not bring up their ethnicity U.S. style. Rather, the "idiom" for such identifications was a regional one. Many times certain of the informants emphasized being Paulistas (from the state of São Paulo) and Paulistanos (from the city of São Paulo), and more generally, belonging to the Southeast, or for some, the South.[7] This regional identity came out in discussions of a political economic order, and in discussions of downtown São Paulo or the favelas, as well as in "domestic" discussions, for instance, relating to foods and especially to maids. The material I will present shortly was not representative of the group in my study, rather it was a minority position. I discuss it because I strongly suspect these views to be fairly prevalent in the middle class of São Paulo.[8] In order for readers to better appreciate the particular quality of these matters, a minimum of background information on regions in

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shantytown (favela) of the capital, respectively. Norvell considers the attitudes of white middle class cariocas, inhabitants of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

[7] I had very few exceptions: one carioca, one Nordestina--from a northeastern state. Two claimed some Indian heritage; none claimed African heritage.

[8] My opinion stems from focus group material, from the Southern separatist movement, from commentaries I continually encountered due to my own "background" experience in the Northeast -- derogatory or condemning comments seemed irrepressible. A few informants distinguished themselves for their critical observations. Thus José Rodrigues condemned the discrimination in clubs against Northeasterners. And Sumiko reported a saying that shocked her: "Branco pode mais que Deus," that is, the white man can do more than God.

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Brazil is necessary.

The three major ports in colonial Brazil were Rio de Janeiro, Salvador da Bahia, and Recife of the Pernambuco captaincy (which included what is today Pernambuco and Alagoas). Although Brazil had many "booms" (e.g., gold in Minas Gerais, rubber in the Amazon, and most successfully, coffee in São Paulo; see Lockhart and Schwartz 1983, Weinstein 1983, Viotti da Costa 1966), the first major export cycle was based on sugar production in the Northeast, from the 1500s forward. The interior of the Northeast, called the sertão, is semi-arid and plagued with periodic droughts. A cattle raising area, it has furnished the export-oriented coast with food. Pernambuco was "by far the richest and most important of the sixteenth century captaincies" (Burns 1970:25). The sugar boom was produced through African slave labor in a latifundista, plantation economy.[9] Miscegenation in the Northeast was high, producing a native population which is predominantly moreno (brown in skin, hair and eye color), and includes Indian as well as African mestiços (see below). The Northeast lost its leading role in cane production to the Caribbean cane production already by the late 17th century; though it remaines a region of cane production, it has been in decline

[9] The works I consulted from the vast literature on slavery in Brazil include: Cardoso (1962), Boxer (1969), Fyfe (1976), Miller (1976), Lockhart and Schwartz (1983) and Karasch (1987).

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for centuries (Stein and Stein 1970, Furtado 1963, 1977, Correia de Andrade 1973, Eisenberg 1974). Successive waves of exodus brought rural Northeasterners to other, often "boom" areas.

Which brings us to São Paulo. The initial claim of the Southeast region's contribution to the colony, and specifically that of São Paulo, was the "bandeirantes." Literally flag-bearers, these men (sometimes "half-breed" mercenaries) engaged in capturing and killing or enslaving native Brazilians and in settling the hinterlands. Before the nineteenth century, São Paulo had been characterized as a fringe area of pioneer smallholder settlements (Lockhart and Schwartz 1983). Its glory would date from the coffee boom. First starting in Rio de Janeiro state in the mid 1800s, coffee production declined there by the end of the century and expanded enormously in São Paulo and inward into the "frontier." Southeastern planters relied on slavery and vigorously protested abolition)[10], but by the 1870s launched into the active recruitment of cheap European labor first and later Japanese, all of whom came -- often lured by free ocean passage and false promises -- to work as tenant farmers on the coffee plantations (Viotti da Costa 1966, Dean 1976, Holloway 1980, Stolcke 1988). After abolition,

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[10] Brazil managed to carry on the slave trade until 1850, long after Britain had declared it illegal, buying almost 1,900,000 African slaves in the nineteenth century (Wolf 1982:195ff.)

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Southeastern planters specifically restricted the employment of ex-slaves. Reid Andrews (1991) shows that pro-immigrant policy favored European workers over Afro-Brazilians. Subsidized passage in the early 20th century brought 2 million Europeans to the state of São Paulo (ibid, 279). While these immigrants made their way, over against freed slaves, huge fortunes were won by the "coffee barons," whose mansions graced the Avenida Paulista, a then outlying uptown area of the city.

The world depression had an enormous impact on coffee sales. However, by then São Paulo had become the leading industrial center as a result of continuous profits from coffee (Dean 1976, Baer 1989, Font 1990). São Paulo industry long preceded World War II, and for years coffee planters received government subsidies for their product, such that their gains could be transferred into industry. After the war, Paulista industry took off when "import substitution" became official policy, protecting the development of national industry. As Weinstein (1982) points out in a review of works on regionalism in Brazil, decentralization, implemented with the First Republic (1889), served to the advantage of the state of São Paulo, which obtained a lion's share of federal revenues and economic policies to its advantage -- and to the exclusion and detriment of other states and regions, particularly the Northeast (see Levine 1978 and Love 1980).

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A massive rural exodus (Camargo 1968) occurred throughout Brazil in the 1950s. European and Japanese immigrants moved from the interior of São Paulo to the capital (Saito 1980). The Northeast, meanwhile, had long since moved from center to margin (see Leff 1972). With a dense rural population, the severest poverty and intermittent droughts, it (like the large state of Minas Gerais) sent people literally everywhere, including to the Amazon at various times, in larger numbers to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and specially to Brasília, for the construction of that city (Epstein 1973). Although migrations were not only out of the Northeast rural areas, the latter has a long history of out migration. These "retirantes" (migrants) are depicted in clay figures by regional artisans.

Allow me to make two more comments in this brief review pertinent to the wider discussion. In contemporary Brazil, from a romantic, nostalgic perspective, the Northeast region connotes opulent, graceful colonial days. Or even without such romanticism, it epitomizes the colonial past. (A Japanese Brazilian woman I met in New York City called it the "real Brazil.") Northeastern writers and themes are well-represented among Brazil's literary classics. Though samba is all Rio, Brazil's music is far more diverse, and much of it produced by Northeastern musicians, whose rhythms, melodies and themes are distinctive. In short, it

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is a cultural fount. On the other hand, the Northeast may be viewed as the locus of seigneurial decadence, rural political corruption, illiteracy, poverty, backwardness. And a final odd twist: although the states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo are famous for producing politicians, the Northeast has held considerable political clout in recent times.[11] In contrast, São Paulo's post-colonial Southeast region connotes European immigrants, "brava gente" (brave folk) who pioneered the territory, creating agricultural and later industrial wealth. Its past (grafted onto the idealization of trailblazing "bandeirantes") may be narrated as a path of rags-to-riches through hard work and perseverence; its present a new modern world seen as utterly unlike the majority of Brazil to the north and inland. The concept of "two Brazils" captures this notion of separate realities. It was expanded in the 1950-60s studies of unequal development (see Furtado 1963); however, the dualist construct dates farther back with divisions of the "developed" coast versus the "uncivilized" hinterlands, such

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[11] The vice-president turned president (1985-90), José Sarney is from Maranhão, and ex-president Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-92) is from Alagoas. The ultra-wealthy, powerful conservative Antônio Carlos Magalhães is senator for the large state of Bahia, and of course the radical workers' party leader, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, is from Pernambuco. Also counterbalancing the conservative Northeastern politicians is Teotonio Villela, Senator from Alagoas who fought for amnesty for exiled Brazilians during the dictatorship and for direct elections of the president at the end of the military rule, in the movement called "diretas já!"

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as is described in Euclides da Cunha's 1905 classic, Rebellion in the Backlands. In short, the old colonial center became the modern day periphery.

A portion of intellectual debates on Brazil's "development" is dedicated to the investigation of differential development in these two regions. A view that victimizes the Northeast may be seen from a Southeasterner's perspective as very slanted (and I overheard just such a view by two historians from São Paulo). Sidestepping these matters, it is, however, clear that the capital shares the highest living standards of Brazil with certain other cities of its region and the South, and with Brasília. As noted, large numbers of poor Northeasterners now reside in these oases of urban modernity.

From a certain Southeastern perspective, the political economic argument runs as follows. The Southeast and the South are the breadwinners for the nation, while the Northeast is a (parasitical) drain on resources. Qualifications as to why there might be such imbalances and redistributions of this kind were not offered. Rather than discuss these possibilities, the "drought industry" (indústria da sêca) might be alluded to. After a feature story on this subject appeared in the news magazine Veja in 1993, the diverting of these emergency funds "suddenly" became a matter of common knowledge -- and outrage by those outside the Northeast. The outrage was not on behalf of the

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Northeastern poor whose corrupt politicians and not the poor themselves are the main beneficiaries of relief funding during droughts. Rather it was the indignation of the hardworking folk of the breadbasket of the nation who felt abused by such unchecked corruption. I am not suggesting that there is no knowledge of the "victims" in the Northeast; I am merely reporting that no mention was made of this majority in reference to such issues there. Perhaps the fact that the droughts, cyclical as they are, are so repeatedly depicted on the news (and in popular song) has made the problem incapable anymore of arousing sympathy. Some mentioned "coroneis," i.e., landowning political bosses of rural areas, with disgust.[12]

A wealthy doctor's wife (interviewed once) noted that "we hear all the time about poverty in the Northeast, but everyone there has farofa-farinha [she first cites the roasted meal, then corrects to the generic term for manioc meal], pumpkin, rapadura--" She broke off to ask whether I was familiar with the latter term, which is hard block pieces of brown sugar. Then she continued, "the farinha has starch, the pumpkin, glucose, the rapadura, glucose. Now we might find this very poor, but this is relative, this is

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[12] One day a back page article in the São Paulo newspaper the Estado de São Paulo reported that there were coroneis (literally coronels) in the south. The association of Southern political bosses with coroneis will probably not hold, especially as Northeastern politicians remain true to their corrupt ways. Witness the Collor presidency and the 1993 congress corruption scandal (see chapter 6).

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relative...."

As if proving the point in reverse, another informant told me that he wasn't convinced that there was all this poverty so often described of the Northeast. He said he had done a lot of travelling in Brazil, including a road trip made once from Maceió, the capital of Alagoas, to Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, the neighboring state north. Telling me of the abundant seafood (shrimp and lobster) and of the fruit growing everywhere in this coastal area, he made the point that there was ample sustenance--of luxury foods, no less.

Having made this same trip several times in different eras, I can attest to the lush tropical coast (the area is similar to that described in Kottak's 1983 work Assault on Paradise), and to a time in the 1970s when most rural housing was mud huts and schistosomiasis was rampant. From then until now in this densely populated rural area, workers have done the rigorous work of cane cutting for minimum wage, or less. The Northeast is the poorest region of Brazil and one of the world's most depressed areas. Demographic data on infant mortality, life expectancy rates and education show the regional imbalance to be consistent. Thus Wood and Carvalho (1988:117) report infant mortality to have been 64/1000 in São Paulo at the end of the 1970s. Working from IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) figures published in 1986, Scheper-Hughes

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(1992:279) reports the rate of 116/1000 for the Northeastern states. Life expectancy at birth in São Paulo in 1980 was 64 years; in the Northeastern states, 53 years (Wood and Carvalho 1988:73). Average literacy in the Southeastern states was 79 percent in 1980, yet just under 48 percent in Northeastern states (ibid:73). In the Southeast in 1980, 81 percent of households had electricity, 56 percent had sewage or septic tanks and 70 percent had piped water. In the Northeast in 1980, 42 percent of households had electricity, 16 percent had sewage or septic tanks and 30 percent had piped water (ibid:73).

During the three years I spent in Recife, I would continually hear that São Paulo was the richest and most advanced (most first worldlike) region. On a brief visit there in 1985 I attested to its modernity and abundance. It therefore came as a surprise to me that Paulistas felt so nationally downtrodden.[13] Complementing this negative view was their comments on Northeasterners living in São Paulo. A few voiced resentment that these people have come to São Paulo without there being work for them, with the result of becoming burdens on the natives, and/or of making the city impossibly overcrowded. If an explanation was

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[13] Paulistas have told me that the Northeast is overrepresented in Congress. Representation is proportional by the constitution. It may be that census corrections have not recently been made, but I have not been able to verify this claim.

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offered, it was the lure of money, a pull factor, not the conditions in the rural areas, much less a broader systems analysis. Indeed, one could surmise that the poverty of these others was an affront to some middle class South(east)erners.

Two terms are often used in these parts to identify Northeasterners besides "Nordestinos," which is used by the people themselves. One term, Bahianos, i.e., those from the state of Bahia, is used to refer to people from all Northeastern states (besides Bahia, there is Sergipe, Alagoas, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, Ceará, Maranhão and Piauí). Bahia is the most populous Northeastern state. It is also the state with the highest proportion of African Brazilians. The stereotypical Bahiano is a carefree black, always ready for the beach and (Mardi Gras) carnaval, never for work (i.e., a regional embodiment of the mock national character, the black Macunaíma, created by Mário de Andrade in 1928). The other term, "Nortistas" (Northerners) is also used to refer to Northeasterners, who, however, know that Nortistas live instead in the Amazonian region. (Brazilian school children are taught to identify the five regions of Brazil.) Perhaps to a Paulista (like New Yorkers in relation to the rest of the U.S.) the term includes anywhere from Rio to Belém do Pará. Although I admit to having a hypersensitive ear in this regard, I am quite sure "Nortista" is a dismissive or even derogatory

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name. In sum, the regional terms and identifications scarcely mask racial oppositions.

According to Hasenbalg's assessment of figures from censuses (by PNAD, National Research of Domiciles), the non-white population in São Paulo went from 5.9 percent in 1940 to 10.7 percent in 1976. In the Northeast, the non-white population was 53.6 percent in 1940 and 47.2 percent in 1976. (1985:29). He notes, however, that

> ...there are reasons to think that the 1976 PNAD [census] overestimates the increase in the concentration of nonwhites in the Southeast... the geographical polarization of the two racial groups is still considerable, with almost two-thirds of the white population living in the Southeast and a greater proportion of non-whites in the rest of the country, particularly the Northeast (47.2 percent) and the Minas Gerais-Espírito Santo region (14.1 percent) (1985:28).

Compared to the Southeast and South regions (São Paulo on down), the Northeast has had a much higher population of Brazilians of African background, and high rate of intermixture (including of Native Brazilians). The South and Southeast had significant recent immigration of Europeans and Japanese. The regional identity not only pits the worthy immigrants against the decadent colonial natives; alternatively, these same good folk are overridden by the Northeastern lumpenproletariat. Oftentimes, I had the impression that the reference to Northeasterners was an indistinguishable amalgam of the two -- as if the two groups, so worlds apart, were one homogeneous mass of

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undesirable "native Brazilians" -- indiscriminately poor and black and corrupt and decadent.

Perhaps the most readily offered, unself-conscious interclass commentaries in women's conversation concerned domestic workers.[14] Criticism or ridicule of them was not uncommon. Twice with one family there was amused discussion of the maids' language. Speaking thus of his customers, an informant's brother-in-law claimed that poor people didn't speak clearly, so one had to guess what they wanted. He then recalled laughingly how his maid said "forgo" for "fogo" and "bloco" for "broccoli."

A common criticism was that domestic workers wasted things (e.g., overused oils, threw out leftovers). Noting her domestic worker was from Bahia and overused cleaning agents, a woman said ironically, "her strong point is not scrubbing." She also complained that the maid did not heat the oil before cooking, which to me indicated that the worker had little or no prior cooking experience. Another woman told me indignantly that she had caught her worker who, as she put it, had come practically straight from the interior of Ceará (the most drought-ridden Northeastern state) throwing garbage out onto the area behind the apartment (guintal). She also spoke with annoyance of a friend's maid who had used bleach to wash a colorful

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[14] The literature on domestic servants in Latin America is large. For a review on the subject in Brazil, see Azeredo (1989).

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embroidered shirt, ruining it. My notes say, 'I don't really know how to react, as I don't feel it was so shocking or tragic, but I nod.' And at the end of that field entry: 'The domestic servant, always there, always in the back of one's mind, always accompanying, disturbing.' (For revealing accounts of employers' and domestic workers' thoughts on the matter, see Patai (1988) and Sheriff (1997).

A woman in the upper income range of the sample became angry when she learned, after a maid had quit abruptly, that she was known among the other workers and the street guards for spending the night out. Most problematic was the fact that in order not to awaken the employers (and be caught?), she would leave the gate open, as it creaked and was directly under the master bedroom, thereby inviting rather than deterring burglars. This informant also complained that servants didn't work properly, so she had to make them repeat the work until it was done right.

Another woman told a story of her maid in order to explain why she had to change our meeting date. The maid had been saving to buy a TV to send to her father in Bahia. She did the "research" (price comparison shopping) for it, found a good deal, but was afraid the price would go up the next day, so the employer agreed to take her that evening to the shopping center. As if to explain why she had acquiesced to the maid's urgency, she said, "You know how things are with maids." Another time, she sounded shocked

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when confiding that the maid's brother lived in a favela. My thought was: 'Where does she expect him to live?' That is, I wondered how she could have so little knowledge of the living conditions of the people she employed. (Perhaps, instead, her concern was of imagined dangers.)

Perhaps the male counterpart to this preoccupation refers to those in the formal economy. A Portuguese immigrant informed me that 90 percent of all workers in São Paulo are Northeasterners, but "they don't like to work, don't remember what you tell them." His wife (from a southern state) said they just like parties, adding that in the south people do work. Interestingly, outside his parents' presence, their son later made a point of explaining to me that the minimum wage was so low as to scarcely offset transportation costs. The preceding anecdotes varied from a scoffing tone to openly critical or hostile one. Other stories were benevolent.

For instance, a woman told me the following story of her son's generosity. Their maid's 16 year old son was saving to buy a bike. At the same time he started a year long program on treating fabrics and doing silk screen which paid minimum salary. Once transportation was deducted, he was left with 14 reais (14 dollars) net per month, which the teen turned over to his mother. The middle class woman's teenaged son bought a (used) bike, and gave his mountain bike, functioning except for a flat tire, to the maid's son.

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The latter managed to get it home, fix the tire and win in a bike race the following weekend (the weekend before the story).

The issue of maids' pregnancies (cf. Chaney and Bunster 1989) is a recurrent one. A friend of an informant spoke admiringly of our hostess' generosity in keeping on her live-in maid, who had just given birth. She then said her maid, whose husband was unemployed, was about to have her fourth or fifth child. She had told the maid that although she herself was against abortion (and it is illegal in Brazil), she could arrange one for her in a hospital (with a doctor friend of her husband's), but the woman's husband opposed abortion. Before the maid had gotten pregnant, she had agreed to have her tubes tied. "What to do," asked the acquaintance, "when there is no sense of family planning, unlike upper class families with two children?" She gives her rice, beans, etc. every month, two minimum wages and transportation, she helps as much as she can, but.... She trailed off.

The discussion reminded me of the one episode of the TV program "You Decide" (Você Decide) I'd seen earlier that year. The novelty of this show is that the TV audience is polled to vote on the resolution to a dilemma posed in the episode, and then this resolution is shown. The show I saw dealt precisely with this issue: should the employer keep or let go the maid who gets pregnant? The answer was a

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foregone conclusion because, as anthropologist Suely Kofes de Almeida did well to point out (in class at UNICAMP), the key, or deciding factor is always "love conquers all." The resolutions called for and voted on by the TV audience often contradict the most empirically common denouement: in this case firing the worker.

At any rate, after the field visit just noted where an informant so warmly introduced me to the maid happy with her newborn, it was odd to see that my fieldnotes from two months before recorded something very different. While proudly discussing the abundant meals and desserts she makes, the woman had said that she has to buy six liters of milk every other day. This added up to more than one salary, she calculated, more than she pays her maid. Yes, I was informed that she spent more on desserts than on her maid for her work.

These commentaries are surely classist, but not solely. People did not fail to identify the region or state of the offending worker, as if this information was explanatory of the purported misbehavior. I have never heard anyone specifically complaining of a worker noting (s)he came from São Paulo.[15] In fact, the person who transcribed some

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[15] Curiously, the many workers from Minas Gerais, a large state in which one area has conditions similar to the sertão of the Northeast, and has a high population of African descent, did not receive negative criticism. It is possible that the proximity of the area to São Paulo and the lack of reputation for decadence makes this group less a target, but the reasons for differential attitudes remain

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tapes for me claimed that they had better critical powers than other workers. The discussion was sparked off when, aware of her annoyance with my informants for blaming "the people" for political problems, I noted that although middle class people often say the people aren't critical, in my experience they are. She responded that this might be true here, but not elsewhere, and proceeded to give the example of her cleaning woman from Bahia, who did not know the value of the new currency, the real. (This conversation took place in July, 1994, a few weeks after the inauguration of the currency.) She told of another time when the cleaning woman wanted to buy cream for her hair at nine reais. The typist reminded her that her half-day's pay of five reais (i.e., the equivalent of five dollars) would need to be doubled in order to afford it, thus she would have to wait a month to buy it. Instead she should have her hair done at the hairdresser's for 12 and it would last 6 months. The woman, said the typist, did not get it. Neither did I -- why would it be easier to come up with 12 than 9 reais? -- and I was surprised that difficulty with math, at a highly confusing moment of change in currency, was given as an example of lack of critical thinking. I told the typist that the laundress I employed didn't know about the real currency either, yet she was from São Paulo. I was then informed most of Brazil is rural. Layers of distancing...

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unclear.

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A Paulistana of Italian background, whose family was exactly median in financial terms in my study, was often led to bring up Northeasterners. On my first visit Sandra wondered what I knew of São Paulo, noting that she and Carlos liked downtown. The center of the city has suffered a decline commercially; its many pedestrian walkways, however, are always thronged with people. She said that although her friends wonder how she can stand going downtown, she and her husband enjoy going to the municipal market there. When I mentioned having been to the Museum Pinacoteca (located alongside the train station and in the vicinity of the market), Sandra warned me that I should be careful (not because it is traditionally a red light district but) because there were lots of Northeasterners around there.[16] Noting the many street vendors in the area, she was led to ask whether street vendors in New York City were New Yorkers. Yes, I said (although certainly I was wrong in part). Sandra informed me sharply that this was not true of São Paulo, and that furthermore, during the

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[16] This struck me as particularly odd in a warning directed at me, as this was one of the cases of families to whom I recounted my prior experience in the Northeast. How did she think I managed forever surrounded by Northeasterners in the Northeast? In fact, I found that people would self-censure when I noted I had lived in Recife or had been married to a Northeasterner. The typical practice would be for the person to cut the criticism, immediately switch gears, saying "it's very beautiful there." This happened so often that I stopped my frankness policy, thereby "allowing" such comments to flow uninhibited.

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mayor Erundina's term, lots of Northeasterners had migrated here. (Erundina, first female mayor of São Paulo, is from the Northeastern state of Paraíba.) Sandra's rather loud and sharply clear voice struck me as being always a bit shocked. As this was our first meeting, I was not sure whether these last comments were neutral or negative. At any rate, her point on migration is unconfirmed. Raquel Rolnik of the City Planning Department told me in 1991, thus still during Erundina's administration, that São Paulo's population growth was native, not through migration anymore. So, a recent influx might be rumor, or might have been registered only later.

Mere contact with Northeasterners was, I came to see, problematic in Sandra's eyes. Talking on the phone during the World Soccer Cup, Sandra asked where I had seen the previous game. When I reported having seen it downtown (at Anhangabaú) with a friend, she exclaimed: "but it's full of Nortistas -- Bahianos, Pernambucanos!"

I became therefore especially interested in seeing how the family dealt with downtown visits. I went one Saturday to the municipal market, a huge indoor emporium, with Carlos, Sandra and their daughter Raquel. Driving through the streets of this older rundown section of downtown, Sandra notes it is full of dirty people. Raquel says she wouldn't want to live downtown. As they compare products and prices of specialty items (olives, cheeses, Japanese

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peanuts, capers, dried fruits, spices), Sandra points out to me the sun-dried / salt preserved beef (called carne de sol), saying that poor Nortistas without refrigerators have to eat this. A few minutes later, seeing some again, mother and daughter say they wouldn't eat this food "nem sonhando," i.e., they wouldn't dream of eating it. I do not mention that about every month in 1984-85, while I was living in Recife with my former husband, we would receive a basket of food from his family in the rural interior, containing fruits, fruit compote, manioc flour, and carne do sol, which we would store in the refrigerator if it wasn't to be consumed soon. While carne de sol does preserve meat without refrigeration, it would now be more accurate to say that it is traditional, not poor people's food in the Northeast (and doubtful in the North, where fish is far more a staple). As meat is so expensive, this premium beef is considered a delicacy (and some São Paulo restaurants serve it as a specialty). After leaving the market, we stop by the Praça Dom Pedro momentarily. A street some distance ahead is filled with people. These are the "camelô" (street vendors), I am told. Here are the "Nortistas, Erundina's people," says Sandra derisively. "Don't speak badly of Erundina," says Raquel. "Will she win [the election for senator]?" I ask. No one responds. On yet another occasion, speaking of the need for people to rethink their attitudes, Sandra pointed out that it was poor people who

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had voted Collor in.[17]

Granted, the comments are aimless. But it definitely seemed that Sandra was preoccupied with the subject of Northeasterners; it seemed their presence disturbed her. I did not at any moment question her attitude, nor did I ever again, after the first meeting, mention my acquaintance with the Northeast. In another case, when the contrary occurred (earlier on in fieldwork), a heated debate ensued.

An intellectual acquaintance who had brought me to a party presented me to a friend of hers by saying we both had been married to Northeasterners. This woman had been married twice and twice divorced. "So you must like Northeasterners," I joked. She said "not at all" and pointed out how violent they are. The discussion turned to how Nordestinos are prejudiced against Paulistas, and how they come here to live but then spend their money back in Bahia. Moments before, several people had been telling me how well Paulistanos integrated. When I had objected that I

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[17] In numbers this was surely the case. Yet, as Pierucci (1991) shows, Paulistano votes in 1989 showed that while 19.7 percent in the poorest areas of São Paulo (capital) voted for Collor in the first round, 19.9 percent there voted for Lula. In contrast, while a lower percentage, 15.5 percent of voters, in the "noble" neighborhoods (Jardin Paulista, Pinheiros, Moema, i.e., bairros of my informants) voted for Collor, just 7.9 percent voted for Lula. While the South Zone did come out strongly for leftist Covas (39.9 percent), voters in the poorest zone were not meager in this support (31.9 percent). Furthermore, the South Zone was supportive of the conservative Maluf's candidacy, giving 21.9 percent of the vote to him, or slightly more than the poorest areas (19 percent).

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had heard São Paulo was stratified and segregated, my acquaintance informed me that there are no ghettoes in São Paulo. On the way home, I confided to the academic contact that I had been shocked by the discussion because in my mind it sounded like a racist discourse. The acquaintance immediately launched into a diatribe against Northeasterners, repeating that they are prejudiced against us, they don't like São Paulo, they talk up the Northeast, they have the wealth. I responded that São Paulo is their city by now as well, they are Brazilians, and after all Brazil is one country. (I said this fully aware of the "two Brazils" construct.) The woman laughed saying "that's an old story." I repeated the point I had tried to make at the party that in the US, negative views such as these are often stated of poor minority ethnic groups. This attempt to show parallels was "too theoretical," said the acquaintance, who added, as the evening reached a grand finale of heated argument, that I knew nothing of Brazil, its history, and in particular, nothing of the realities of São Paulo and having to live with "those people" on an everyday basis. (As noted, she knew about my marriage.) After recounting this story to my sister- and brother-in-law, then visiting from Alagoas, Zélia recalled the well-known fact that Nordestinos literally built São Paulo (from the 1950s forward, being heavily in construction). Zé said a taxi driver had asked him the other day where he was from. Hearing he was from

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the Northeast, the driver said: "but you don't have a flat head [cabeça chata]."

It was startling to me that Nordestinos were treated in the evening's discussion as foreigners. Such an identification of Northeasterners was not limited to one case, but came up with another informant. Speaking of how development eventually exacerbated the problems of the rich and poor, João said:

> At the moment when they look at themselves, the real truth is this difference between the rich and poor is what creates the momentum/movement [fluxo]. Just like the movement from country to city, like the Northeast to São Paulo, he goes from the poor country to the rich one. The Mexican enters the United States, the Arab, the African goes to Europe for a better life...Like the Northeasterner, who left the sertão and came to live in a favela here, here he has food, there he hadn't had food for days.

Even though João had spoken of the "two Brazils" (again, of regions vastly differing in socioeconomic levels), he immediately compared Northeasterners to foreigners. For the Paulistano, however, the main point about Northeasterners is, as another informant showed, that they come to São Paulo to cash in. Cleide told me how she had teased a friend who had moved from the interior: "I said to him, you're just like a Northeasterner, you came here after money." (Evidently, these migrants are not comparable, from such a standpoint, to the European and Japanese immigrants to Brazil who later migrated from the rural areas to the capital. And clearly, the view of them is so unfairly

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critical that, as my mother Patricia Coyne would say, "they can't win for losing.)[18]

As these everyday comments suggest, the "idiom" of region is important and versatile in representations distinguishing identities. That the identification of the poor as Nordestinos, Bahianos or Nortistas omits race from overt discussion is not exceptional, but rather the rule, and in no way can be taken to mean race doesn't matter. In fact, the racial basis may well be assumed and taken for granted in a group for whom racism is (given certain "qualifying" factors) acceptable. To use this idiom of region serves, I argue, to widen further the oppositions which are already great due to racism and classism, in a way that is peculiar to the Southeast and South of Brazil. It is not that the other regions lack racist and racialist discourse (see Winddance-Twine, in press, Sheriff 1997 and Norvell 1997); rather, they lack resort to this layer of discriminating distancing by region, which conflates region, race and class. Recalling the view of pioneers, this

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[18] I detected a similarly limited capability to integrate history in the reading of the informant cited above on Northeasterners eating shrimp. This informant cited an article from the Jornal da Tarde (conservative, middle middle class São Paulo newspaper) entitled "Where are the Paulistanos?" What struck him was the point that the city was overrun with Northeastern migrants. When he reviewed the article in my presence, however, he found that the immigrant category included Italians and Japanese together with Northeasterners, an integration that was clearly unacceptable to him, so he quickly dropped the issue.

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ethnic/racial construction makes the region and especially São Paulo's middle class (uncorrupt, upwardly mobile workers) economically and morally more worthy (Williams 1989) in the national hierarchy.

PART II: Intraclass Differences

Middle Classes, Internally Distinguished

With the exception of those few who, like my New York friends from Brazil, told me there was no more middle class since the crisis, for the majority of participants initially surveyed, the middle class does exist, with the following unanimous qualification: it has lost buying power; it has a lower standard of living than before. This is hardly a revelation, but it will lead us in the next chapter to consider how middle class families have actually dealt with reduced circumstances materially in household practices and in this chapter to consider how these informants present practices and definitions of the middle class.

In the initial contacts, participants either said they had to establish priorities in the household budget and/or that they could only spend on the basic necessities. Predictably for my sample, private school education was deemed a necessity. Informants often explained that this was so given the current absence of a viable alternative in public school education.

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Many told me how in the past, public schools were good,[19] even better than private, the latter derided with the alliterative expression "papai-pagou-passou," literally "papa paid [so (s)he] passed." Now it seems the tables have turned. As more than one put it, "it's all I can give my child." The parent generation is putting stakes in what it can still afford -- quality education -- perhaps with even greater force and intensity than before, considering the cost. At two of the schools tuition was nearly $250 per month in December 1993 (68.000,00 cruzeiros reais). Ademar confided that the tuition for their two children consumed one-third of his salary (however, he later said his salary was US $2500). Alice said the tuition for her two children took most of her ex-husband's retirement salary (from the military). Many said tuition was their highest expenditure. According to budgets provided by eight families, tuition was the second or third biggest expenditure in the budget (always after food, and either after rent or a house payment or transportation). The schools were chosen by parents with due consideration to giving their children an extra good "start in life" (cf. Thompson 1976).

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[19] I do not know of a study corroborating this, but can only reiterate that many people and news sources pointed this out, sometimes referring to what apparently were certain well-known schools (pointing to a hierarchy within the public school system). Most informants themselves had gone to public schools some 30 years in the past, often in small towns.

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As is often the case, a negative definition provides us with a clear means of distinguishing ourselves. Some informants would point out that their prioritized choice was completely contrary to those people who "buy an expensive car yet put their children in a public school." I heard almost identical phrasing of this very charged statement over and over, leaving no doubt as to the opinion. New cars but public schools: what a complete inversion of values -- putting an ostentatious object of mere status and crass consumption in front of (as more important than) your children's education, culture and future!

Reinaldo, a professor of psychology, extemporaneously envisioned "a butcher in Moóca [as noted in chapter 1, this bairro of the industrial, lower middle class and poor, captured attention for a number of nouveau riche families there], who lives in a badly built house with secondrate furniture, has two new cars [carros zero] at the door, a studio at the beach, and his children study at a state school." This scenario was opposed to "a college-educated professional of the Jardins, Vila Madalena, Cerqueira César, etc. [upper middle and middle class bairros of the South Zone] who lives in a smaller apartment, well taken care of, with better furniture, as is our case, has an old car, but whose children study in a private school of excellent quality." Reinaldo added that college-educated, but salaried professionals in the Jardins might not have as high

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an income as "a butcher shop owner, a grocer, a bakery owner, who might have five or six times the salary," yet the expenditures and consumption patterns of professionals are much more laudable. Public school teacher Maria Regina confirmed that it was true that rich people drove up in expensive cars to drop off their kids at the public school where she worked. In fact, the unfavorable contrast (expensive cars vs. free schools) was particularly the point of teachers.

Others emphasized the problem of inverted consumption priorities. Alice noted the fixation on cars. She said:

> Here in Brazil there are people who live in a rental apartment, or in a house falling to pieces, horrible, in a bad state, in order to have the car of the year. For the Brazilian, a car is very important. It is the highest status symbol.

She lived in a rental apartment and had a ten year old car, which she said embarrassed her teenaged sons.

Miriam was perhaps the informant from the very poorest background of all the women in the study (matched on the male side by Reinaldo, cited above), having basically raised herself. It struck her that middle class people have become able, like rich people, "to buy nice clothes, wear tennis shoes, go to the shopping center and so on," so much so that "you don't know anymore how to distinguish who is who." (This remark recalls the issue of elite discontent with "democratization" of consumption, or better, mass consumption). Miriam continues:

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> Because you might go to the home of someone who earns a lot less, and you're taken aback [leva um choque] when you look at her house, because there's this glass-topped table, that more sophisticated sofa, some more or less pretty engravings on the walls -- in other words, she managed to get certain goods like a more or less higher middle class, even though she earns less than you. On the other hand, she invests less in culture, in leisure...

Informants repeatedly reported that Brazilians were very "consumerist," from which I inferred they separated themselves from this behavior. Yet when I asked them point blank of their own feelings about shopping, all but two informants, male and female, said they liked, loved or adored to shop. This didn't prevent remarks like the following. Bruna said: "Brazilians are very consumerist, aren't they? They like to have nice clothes, dress well. The house is falling down, right, but they need clothes." This hyperbolic comparison of consumption practices in order to expose an inversion of values (and lack of sense) was extremely popular. And Bia, a young psychologist who was working in the personnel department of a firm, but now assists her husband Marc in his medical practice, said:

> Sometimes I find the Brazilian people really superfluous. [...] [They say:] 'It's expensive, but I want these trousers anyway. I want to travel. I'll go without eating for three months, but I'm going to travel.' I don't know if it's a small group that is noticeable, but I hear this kind of conversation a lot. 'I prefer not to have a maid -- whatever -- to not eat well, to not eat filet mignon every day, but I'm going to travel. I'm going to buy clothes I like', understand? And then [the person] doesn't have his own home.

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The typist who transcribed this material for me (and struggled greatly to maintain her family, as her husband's health problems prevented him from working) objected that she had never met a soul who had gone without food in order to travel. Not incidentally, Bia and Marc made constant comparisons of life in Brazil to life in Paris, where they had spent six months while Marc did post-graduate psychological training. Bia was unique among informants for choosing travel as an example of a misguided expense. For most, travel was an elevated use of money in contradistinction to others. For instance, Pilar said: "we went to Europe instead of buying a car. There are people who insist on having status, a new sofa. We prefer to travel."[20]

It is interesting that while making these diatribes against consumerism, no one pointed out that during high inflation one could not store money. There were some options for those with discretionary income. One could invest in some banking scheme set up during the inflation years to protect money against inflation, or even earn through it; one could even "invest" in durable goods, which in Brazil do not devalue as in the U.S.; or one could spend diversely. (Chapters 4 and 5 deal with these issues in detail.) These matters were perfectly clear to people;

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[20] To this a friend remarked, "as if it were not another status symbol to brag about travelling, plus travel is a way of shopping." See chapter 5.

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however, the rhetorical aims here being quite other, such justifications were not offered. That is to say, the arguments evidently were made to critically appraise -- and identify -- other Brazilians atemporally, essentially through their consumption practices.

One further point seals "culture" as the homogenizing value for this group of informants. In Portuguese the term "cultura" indicates simultaneously schooling and general culture or refinement. People are frequently described as having (acquired) culture -- or not. It functions as a strong, stark division in the social hierarchy. Along with criticism of the merely material was an appreciation for another kind of good. When I asked what, if anything, the person missed not having, I would be told: theater/cinema and travel -- the reduction or privation of travel especially hurt. What can be seen simply as leisure was often presented in its enlightening aspect, its absence experienced as cultural deprivation.[21]

Thus Larissa regretted not having time to read, to study English and take gymnastics. Alice, who also regretted not being able to study English, contrasted her consumption habits to others: "I spend money on newspapers, magazines; they aren't going to do that. I adore art.

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[21] Interestingly, Rodrigues (1989) had similar findings in her 1977 study of low level government employees in São Paulo whose level of schooling, at most high school completed, was lower than those in my study, as well as their earnings.

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Classics, sculptures, I love it. If I had the money, I would be surrounded with things like that. They wouldn't spend money on such things." She adds, "I would never go to a churrascaria restaurant[22] because I detest it. I prefer to stay at home. They go. Because for these people this is sufficient, and for me not. So there are these tastes, these values which are different." (Reinaldo's comments were very similar.) However, moments later, she notes, of clothing: "I want a given piece of clothing because it gives me quality, it falls better, it's a different elegance." Recalling a dress she'd wanted window shopping, she adds, with wry amusement, "my eyes don't fall on the dress selling for 4,900 [cruzeiros reais], they always fall on the one for 16,000!"

As Alice's words so clearly show, for this middle class group overall, there is an "other" middle class (note the generic "they" she used) which is the (stereotypically) imagined one. This middle class, though reduced in material resources, distinguishes itself by maintaining a cultural standard for its family project (regarding "projeto de familia," see Romanelli 1986) and social project (regarding "projeto social," see Velho 1981). These informants scorned

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[22] These gaúcho inspired restaurants (where different cuts of barbecue roasted meats are circulated and cut from the spit), are prized by some, but scorned by others, perhaps as much for the clientele as the style of service or the food, which is of premium beef as well as served in unlimited quantity.

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another middle class for its lack of project and poor values -- or rather, for its futile ones of frivolous consumption or simply, poor taste.[23] Not surprisingly, these commentaries differentiating unrefined from refined culture were frequently presented by those with lesser discretionary income, but not only.

Marc, a psychologist with his own young but already successful practice, presents the division of one middle class from the nouveau riche clearly. (In Portuguese, the exact equivalent is used: "novos ricos."[24] However, informants did not use such classifications, relying instead on vague, disparaging references like "those people" [essa gente]). He said, referring to the upwardly mobile:

> They took the place of the others with less money, these people who were middle class...Today you see lots of people riding around in imported cars and they don't have the least bit of culture. <u>There is this inversion. It is not only economic, it's cultural</u> (emphasis added).

Once again, the car, material proof and symbolic icon of

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[23] Unlike distinctions within the white South African middle class, which rely on the difference of ethnicity (English versus Afrikaner) for the construction of radical difference (see Crapanzano 1986), here the marker relies on "lifestyle" and "values."

[24] A Rio society columnist, Hildegard Angel (reporter for <u>O Globo</u>, the newspaper of the TV station by the same name) recently coined an expression for the nouveau riche of Rio: "nova sociedade emergente," or new emerging society. The NSEs there would have come from the Baixada Fluminense, but unlike their Paulistano counterparts who stayed in Moóca, these cariocas moved to a lovely beach area, Barra da Tijuca, a new suburb of high rises as yet undercommercialized. Their ostentatious wealth is epitomized by the use of helicopters.

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class, is ubiquitous in discourse. An imported car can easily run the equivalent of 30,000 US dollars, due to a 75 percent tax. Whereas homes of the wealthy in Brazil are often hidden from view, with protective walls and gardens, cars offer ready opportunities for public display.

While Alice seemed secure in her own taste for expensive things yet also aware that she could not buy them, Simone expressed discomfort. When I asked how inflation had complicated people's lives, she said:

> I think one has lost a sense of values, no one knows the just price of anything, you don't know. For example, I'm talking about a problem with maids, maids became expensive--are they really expensive? I start to wonder, if she thinks that [is nice], I'm going to think it's junk [uma porcaria], but I can't pay much more either [than she]. So, there are no values, there aren't any more. This inflation, I think it does us in [acaba com a gente mesmo].

Downward mobility has made the possible expressions of taste open to her uncomfortably close to poor people, whose tastes "should" be worlds apart. It is also noteworthy that for Simone "value" refers to price, and that these changes are threatening to her.

A few informants distanced themselves from those engaged in commerce or whose manner of becoming rich was suspect. Said one of a co-worker: "De onde veio aquele dinheiro? Ninguém sabe," that is, "Where did that money come from? Nobody knows."

There is an obverse or underside of this picture. The value-laden division of consumption practices may offer a

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consolation of moral superiority for some, yet it also seems to make a virtue of necessity -- or does it? Alice spoke despairingly and bitterly of having worked hard to attain her education and employment, yet was so poorly remunerated as to be unable to enjoy a decent standard of living. She said she supposed any taxi driver made more than she did. Most striking of all were Alice's very first remarks to me. I present the unedited text in order to convey the intensity of the remarks.

> I think the worst change is despair. I am basing this affirmation on myself. The economic changes are reflected in changes in buying, in consumer goods. And this fatally is going to reflect on hope. The future doesn't have an outlook/any prospects [perspectiva] today. This has been the great dilemma of the middle class today -- the lack of outlook [não-perspectiva] for the future. It's the disbelief in the nation, a disbelief in the people, and in themselves. Because you want to do something for yourself, for what you believe, for your country, for your children, but you aren't sure these things can happen. So you can't make plans. I feel that the biggest change for the middle class -- I don't know if for the middle class, but the middle class on down -- is this internal change, not the material one. I think that this material change, this possibility of consumption...basic consumption, not crazy, compulsive consumption, but necessary consumption for a comfortable life, a life that the capitalist system offers. Not to enter into the craziness of this system, but to benefit from some things, which today you don't have that prospect of doing. For example: I like to travel. I can't travel.

Besides Ricardo, cited early in the chapter, who protested against constraints on every cruzeiro spent, only Alice made it clear how much she resented a confinement to necessity. It is important to note that most other participants in this

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study did not overemphasize hardship; in fact, they frequently qualified statements about reduced budgets by noting their "privileges," notably home ownership (perhaps adding the specter of favela-- shantytown housing) and being able to educate their children in private school. The reference to privilege indicates, of course, an acknowledgement of class inequality. The issue which irked, however, was the inequality closer to home. These middle class people have constructed their superior moral position on the supports of education and culture (plus old car and home) versus the polar opposite group of new car and superfluous consumption. One might question the adoption of the ascetic attitude, given the insistent references to the out of reach items.[25]

There are some parallels with the position of ressentiment, which, as Bernstein describes Nietzsche's formulation, is a "slave morality from the outset [which] says NO to what is 'outside,' what is 'different,' what is

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[25] As I found a nearly ascetic rejection of the material in the discourse of participants, I was interested to read, in the important volume dedicated to the study of culture and inflation in Brazil, Neuma Aguiar's (1993) application of Simmel's classification of attitudes and habits of consumption to her discussion of the Brazilian economic crisis. The attitudes Simmel outlined in relation to money are, besides asceticism, greed, extravagance, cynicism and a blasé attitude.

Again what informants did not mention are also worth noting. Thus in the first contact very few mentioned clothes, perhaps due to the formality of the encounter, and in accordance with their somewhat anti-materialist self-representations. Consumption practices are the focus of the next two chapters.

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'not itself,' ... this need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself -- is of the essence of ressentiment..." (Bernstein 1989:201). For 19th century fictional characters, ressentiment resulted from self-consciousness of their mediocre mimicry. Similarly, the circumstances here described would refer us to anxieties of class, by those stuck in a stationary position. What interests me is that this position is prey to ambivalence.

Misrecognition and Cultural Capital

By now it should be obvious that all this makes for a fairly "classic" representation of a middle class. The group as a whole showed they were grasping ever more firmly onto education and cultural enlightenment both as means of attaining or retaining middle class-dom and as the badge of their social standing. The adoption of a critical position in relation to nouveau riche consumption patterns is also "classic," or more particularly, the attitude of a middle class that is less economically favored.

Such discourses, which identify and divide the middle class symbolically -- and allude to material markers -- recall a number of sociological debates on "class" and "status." Due to the stark clarity of certain of Weber's assertions of the differences between these two, status and

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class,[26] we may forget that he gives space to discussing their interrelations. Qualifications noting the influence of class on status abound. Thus the "style of life" associated with a status group depends on life chances, i.e., Weber's class; status is "usually conditioned economically" (in Gerth and Mills 1946:190); "class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions" (ibid:186); and "for all practical purposes, stratification by status goes hand in hand with a monopoly of ideal and material goods or opportunities" (ibid:190).

Weber also finds, however, an ebbing of status during a period of economic instability. He says:

> When the bases of the acquisition and distribution of goods are relatively stable, stratification by status is favored. Every technological repercussion and economic transformation threatens stratification by status and pushes class situation into the foreground" (ibid:193-194).

Not surprisingly, status here is associated with stability and the ladder-like differences of a stratification model, and class with polarization. Would this mean that subtle distinctions of style of life operate only when there is affluence and leisure? Perhaps not. While I agree that class situation becomes an overriding concern in times of instability, my research material shows that threatening

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[26] Thus he states that "'mere economic' power, and especially 'naked' money power, is by no means a recognized basis of social honor" (in Gerth and Mills 1946:180). And he states, as we know, that status often stands in "sharp opposition to the pretensions of sheer property" (ibid:187).

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circumstances do not lead people to de-emphasize issues of social honor and lifestyle distinctions; much to the contrary. It is Bourdieu, of course, who hammers it home in Distinction (1979) that class and status are inextricably linked, both in times of stability and not, whether for those going up, down or nowhere.

Indeed, Bourdieu has an almost frightening ability to show how certain attitudes rather indiscreetly relate to (identify, belie) one's positioning in the class structure. Thus for instance, Bourdieu (1979) points out that making a choice of necessity is the lot of a lower class, whereas those freed from economic constraints can indulge in a taste for the nonfunctional.[27]

Now that Bourdieu's name -- so nearly irrepressible in these preceding pages, with references to distinction, to privilege, to education, to cultural enlightenment -- is in the open, I am tempted to say further, recalling E.R. Wolf, who said (in class, spring 1989) that certain peoples seem almost "made to order" for anthropological theory (he said this in relation to the Bororo, whose social conceptions

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[27] I said Bourdieu's perspective is a bit frightening because at times the impression one gets from it, despite how well he can hit the mark, is that the attitudes are merely poses. I do not see poses, rather people pursuing courses seriously, strategically for their families; even the self-presentations have a seriousness which needs to be acknowledged. I would hope the "tenor" of the discourses presented, which include those most financially strapped in my group of families -- would prompt respect for the expression of anxiety contained in them.

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were so perfectly mapped out geographically) that is, I am tempted to say that these Brazilian middle class people seem almost perfect proof of Bourdieu's theory of "educational" or "cultural capital." They display it so clearly in discussions of their priorities in relation to schooling and in terms of "taste" and "culture" which distinguish them from less cultured others. But, paradoxically, making this very confirmation of the theory at once produces a criticism of it -- or rather, of one part of it.

One of Bourdieu's major arguments, both in his analysis with Passeron of education (1977) and his treatises on taste and culture, is that these systems work so well to legitimate dominant culture and the reproduction of class relations precisely by "concealing this ... function" (1977:164), appearing instead to be in a realm "autonomous" from the economic and political. What is concealed, of course, in the case of interest here, is the close relationship between educational attainment and social origin. Social recognition of the legitimacy of the school, say Bourdieu and Passeron, "rest[s] in turn on misrecognition of the delegation of authority which establishes that legitimacy, or more precisely, on misrecognition of the social conditions..." (1977:206).[28]

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[28] In Distinction (1979), Bourdieu says similarly, with reference to taste, that "'symbolic capital' is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, mis-recognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and

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They impressively conclude with the ironic commentary that in a society in which academic credentials are so important for obtaining social privilege, this system "confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged [and] manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits..." (1977:210).

In Bourdieu and Passeron's work on education, it is the French system which is under study. Conventional wisdom imagines it proceeds by its own internal logic, that is, that students progress, excel or fail on their individual merits. Because the French educational system is so fully developed, centralized and universal, such an understanding of its educational excellence and opportunities would be readily assumed. To criticize the integrity of this system was of course bold. Now, nearly 20 years later, major critiques of inequalities in education have been made for other Western, "advanced" industrial societies (see e.g., Leacock 1969, Willis 1981 and Kozol 1991), through case studies exposing institutionalized discrimination in the school system. What of a country outside these realms?

In Brazil, education has always been kept a scarce resource. During the colonial period, Portugal forbade the institution of higher learning in Brazil. Native Brazilians needed to go to Portugal for college, or enter the religious

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always in the long run, guarantees 'economic' profits.

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life in Brazil. The first institutions of higher learning were the law schools of Recife and São Paulo and the medical schools of Rio and Bahia, created after the Portuguese monarchy moved to Brazil (in 1807). Portugal also disallowed publishing, once again favoring the center and inhibiting the colony. Brazil's educational tradition has been solely elite, and not only at the university level. Primary education has not been universal either. Considering its relative wealth compared to many other Latin American countries, Brazil's public educational system gets very low scores.[29]

Schooling in São Paulo has been far better than other regions, but it has suffered greatly in the past decade. Even during Paulo Freire's term as São Paulo secretary of education, the city's public school system was said to be in a shambles. (At least since the mid-1980s it has been considered "falido," failed, or that it "não existe" doesn't exist). It is hugely inadequate, undersupplied and insufficiently staffed (teachers are ever more underpaid, and less and less trained). A case for national alarm, as

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[29] The rates for the 1970s reported in the 1992 Latin American Statistical Abstracts reported illiteracy in Brazil at 33.8 percent. This places it closer to Bolivia (36.8 percent) than to Mexico (25.8 percent), and far from neighbors in the Southern Cone (Chile 11 percent, Argentina 6 percent). In 1991, just 16 percent of Brazilians of secondary school age were enrolled in secondary school.

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is frequently noted (cf. Veja 2/15/95).[30] Thus, informants found it horrifying that those with the means to provide education -- which can in this assessment, only occur in private schools -- don't bother, but send their children to a free public school. As Alice said: "It is impossible to put your child in a public school today. It is unthinkable. It is to know with certainty that the child is not going to learn absolutely anything."

It is a commonplace remark that this state of affairs is deficient by design. Yes, the powers that be are seen by many middle class Brazilians I have met as complete machiavellians wanting to keep the mass of the population ignorant. I was also informed of the irony of the fact that in order to get into the best universities -- the best higher education being free-of-charge state institutions, students must have had to previously pay for education in primary and secondary schooling. Private colleges, with very few exceptions, are considered inferior.

One has only to go to a Brazilian federal or state university campus to be instantly aware that they were designed without pretensions of democracy. The green expanses are too vast to be commons or gardens, rather they

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[30] The mayor of São Paulo from 1992 to 1996, Paulo Maluf, is rumored to have pilfered from the education budget for his interminable roads for the wealthy construction projects. A recent newspaper reported that only 25 percent of public schools have bathrooms.

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are pastures; this rural serenity is completely disfunctional for pedestrians. Furthermore, the few busses which go out to the campuses are usually packed for most the ride. The campuses were designed having in mind students who can drive to and inside campus. Although it is true that in absolute terms the numbers of college students increased greatly from the period of the military dictatorship (mid 1960s) forward, the campuses were designed for an elite, vis-à-vis the population overall.[31]

The moment of truth in the system is the highly competitive college entrance exam. Called the vestibular, separate exams are required for entrance into each institution. São Paulo students may well take three or more grueling, two day exams, for instance: one for the state university of São Paulo (USP); one for São Paulo's other major state university, UNICAMP (these two are among Brazil's very finest establishments of higher education); and one or more for a good quality private school, whether the Catholic University, or one of the business schools

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[31] Brazilians are proud of their campuses; I know I always offended people by my criticisms. It might interest readers to know that the design of these campuses was inspired by, modelled after, U.S. university campuses. But their scale in acreage is often much bigger. These campuses are fairly new, as it was not until about the 1940s that the "university" system as we know it was extended in Brazil. Prior to that time, there existed separate, isolated institutions, such as the law, medical, and engineering schools, the last having been created in conjunction with the military. My presentation of education has benefitted from discussions with Jorge Luís Souto Silva.

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(MacKenzie, or the Fundação Getúlio Vargas); or finally, to a lesser private college. The vestibular preoccupies parents and students alike for at least a year -- the last year of high school, and often the next, as many students need to take preparatory courses (called cursinhos, literally little courses) for six months to a year at private schools dedicated to these exams. The competition for entrance into the top universities, such as the University of São Paulo (USP) is very stiff: 8,400 enter out of 140,000 applying, or six out of 100 (source: USP, 1994 figures).

The inequality of this system of inaccessible, elite primary and secondary education leading to a minority of positions in the colleges is very openly recognized. The covert tracking in other countries where public education serves all classes is perhaps not immediately obvious. In Brazil, the economic and educational divide occurs clearly and early between the public and private schools. No misrecognition here.[32]

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[32] Differences within the privileged classes may be more comparable to what Bourdieu and Passeron describe. Thus one could compare the class background (indicated by mother and father's occupations) of those who make it into one of the major universities immediately after high school, versus those who first enter "cursinhos," or go to second rate colleges. Yet again, the "exposing" of such differential tracks would hardly be seen as classified information. In Distinction (1979), Bourdieu reports that those most aware of the differential chances according to class and education are the middle classes! See Marceau (1974) for an examination of education and class mobility in France; and for Brazil, see McDonough 1981.

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Thus I must emphasize that rather than misrecognition, there has been tacit acceptance of the status quo. People in the study criticized the collapse of public education, but left it up to other middle class people, those forced out of the private school system and into the public, to make demands to improve the quality of public education.[33] Although perhaps not well known, it is the case that relatively much more funding goes to higher public education than to public schools at the primary and secondary levels.

Perhaps one should also, in order to reflect on reasons for differences in "recognition" and "misrecognition" by different groups of their educational systems, consider the differing concepts of democracy. Liberty, equality, fraternity have not been the anchors of citizenship in Brazil. The highly unequal class structure has not fostered democratic illusions, rather an acknowledged, if not everywhere accepted, division between a few groups that are privileged and powerful and the masses who are denied. The "order and progress" ideology of Brazilian nationalism, dating from the turn of the century (and which even today are the words embellishing the Brazilian flag), has been consistent with anti-democratic views. One hears such views espoused in many ways, such as that the masses are ill-

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[33] In the opinion of a child psychologist, for years employed with private schools and their families, even when public schools were better, middle class people eschewed mixing with poorer groups.

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prepared to vote (a view which was shared by some on the left and on the right when illiterates were granted the right to vote, as of 1983). One might ask whether, in fact, the elites do rely on the privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged. It is my impression that such sectors do not feel it necessary to dissimulate their privileges, or to take much care in covering up their abuses. There remain those of the middle sectors who criticize, but compete within the private school system from their (relatively privileged) means.[34]

Lessons in Class Distinctions

As I hope the preceding discussion of education and taste has made amply clear, Brazilians are perfectly able to and often do verbalize their class. In this section, I would like to complement the discussion with examples of nonverbal manifestations of class.

In this highly class conscious society, demonstrations of class are ubiquitous, reinforced through redundancy[35]

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[34] Of course, such an acknowledgement is diametrically opposed to the ideology in the US. See Vanneman and Cannon (1987) on the refusal to recognize class in the US.

[35] Bourdieu, of course, points out that repetition reinforces class distinctions. As he puts it:

> In a class society, all the products of a given agent, by an essential overdetermination, speak inseparably and simultaneously of his class -- or, more precisely, his position in the social structure and his rising or falling trajectory -- and of his (or her) body -- or, more precisely, all the properties, always socially

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and organized by at least two principles: attention to form and separateness. As geographic segregation is the focus of a recent anthropological study (Caldeira, forthcoming), I will simply point out that middle and upper middle class families maintain separateness in public spaces by providing private schooling for their children; driving in cars, not in public transportation; using shopping centers and avoiding downtown; spending weekends at beach or country homes or at private social/sport clubs. This semi or full privatization of public space includes play areas for children and is justified with reference to the high crime rate. Thus when Maria Regina and Ricardo's two daughters received roller blades, they wanted to play in the street, but the mother refused, fearful of assault. So they practiced instead on the ground level recreation area inside the apartment complex. All the spaces frequented could be ordered hierarchically as well: which school, which shopping center, which beach or country area, which club, as well as consumer goods (what, which brand, etc.).[36]

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qualified, of which he or she is the bearer -- sexual properties of course, but also physical properties, praised, like strength or beauty, or stigmatized (1977:87).

[36] Gilda once produced a long classification of shopping centers. Briefly, the shopping center of the nouveau riche neighborhood of Morumbi has her vote over Brazil's first center, the "traditional" upper class Iguatemi, whose workers dress better than she. At the same time, Gilda looks down on the two more central middle class shopping centers: Ibirapuera is large, but uninteresting; Paulista is tainted by having been a Sears building.

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Roberto DaMatta (1991) emphasizes the enormous preoccupation in Brazil with social position and tremendous consciousness of all the rules and resources relative to the maintenance, loss or threat to this position. Faced with seemingly "intolerable equality" after the advent of capitalism and liberal legislation in Brazil, the outmoded aristocracy, says Da Matta, "established a whole current of countercustoms aiming to demarcate differences and in this way reclaimed the hierarchization of the world in the realms where it was possible. The privileged areas for such gradations would obviously be the house and the body" (1991:153).[37] The statement applies to middle class claims as well.

Given the importance of homes, it may be most appropriate to describe indications of class through home visits. Most buildings had from ten to 20 stories and were of contemporary design (rather than European classic style).[38] Invariably a tall iron gate bars the entrance; visitors must ask the doorman (posted in a cubicle) to announce them. Buildings usually have a rule requiring all visitors to be announced, in order to control for burglars

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[37] I have slightly modified the translation, reverting to a more literal one.

[38] Apartment buildings are named in Brazil and reflect status aspirations. Those in the study were not, as I recall, pretentious, but I would run across others. For instance, a large building in a wealthy neighborhood (Vila Nova Conceição) had the name "Toulouse-Lautrec Mansion," and one in the Jardins, "New York, New York."

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(who have been known to pose as pizza deliverers). Once allowed in, visitors wait for the "social" (not the "service") elevator next to a lobby in which the furnishings signal the collective wealth of the residents. Perhaps the initial most significant indication of wealth, however, is the number of apartments per floor. Arriving by elevator onto one sole apartment was the ultimate. (Three families of the sample, the "marginally" rich, had floors to themselves.)

In first and subsequent visits, all informants graciously offered me refreshment; tray service is customary, whether it be a silver tray covered with a lace doily, and demitasse cups of white china with silver gilded rim, or plastic. The solemnity of presentation was broken once. Irene (at our first meeting) offered me a beverage, then informed me impishly that it would be served on "crystal Cica," that is, recycled jelly glasses (the standard glass and cupware of the poor). Walking to the kitchen, she added that it would not be served on a tray either. She also reported that when he heard about the first interview, her husband Heitor was horrified that it was to take place at their home. "Nessa porra toda?!" he exclaimed (the translation, "in all this mess?" doesn't capture the crudeness of the term "porra"); he reminded his wife that the apartment was filled with (medical) equipment.

Another apparent counter example to the insistence on

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form occurred during first field visits. I was a bit surprised, when for the very first time I met several women informants, that they did not dress up at all, wearing instead sweat pants, etc. Because of the importance of fashion and form often noted by Brazilians themselves, and contrary examples of other informants, I cannot attribute this informality to being at home. Was it my impression or is it that what someone else wears can also serve as their evaluation of you? On the next home visits, I imagined I could be more informal, when to my surprise, these same women dressed up! It was as if I had risen in their estimation, and they decided to indicate their approval this way.[39]

The menus of meals I was especially invited to showed hospitable concern for marking the meal as an occasion. Thus special dishes were prepared: Bahian style fish (moqueca de peixe); barbecued beef; shrimp in catupiry cheese sauce served in a baked pumpkin (as was the fashion). Again, the presentation was of great importance. Thus Gilda was annoyed that the shrimp filled pumpkin had not been transferred from a cake pan to a serving tray. Perhaps the

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[39] An analysis of clothing fashion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Clothing fashion and interclass distinctions was the subject of a paper I presented at the 1992 American Anthropological Association meetings, entitled "Resisting Democratic Fashion: Maintaining Distinctions through Consumption Practices in Northeast Brazil." Obviously, fashion consciousness combines attention to form and separateness. In clothing, fashion should be the latest, the newest and of a brand name (de griffe).

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most bothersome aspect of the dinner, however, was 16 year old Martha's lengthy description of a friend from her school who lives in Alphaville (a closed condominium in a distant, wealthy suburb). Each of the three children, she reported enthusiastically, has his/her own bedroom, own bath, own TV, own sound system, etc. etc., and there's a pool and they have x and y cars.... Gilda raised her eyebrows, and Euclides looked unhappy, but neither parent responded. Elisabete's style was to overwhelm with a huge array of dishes.[40] Her husband joked (embarrassing her), "she'll think we eat this way every night!"

These examples show both the "proper" attention to formality and what violates the code. As a final example, I would like now to describe a long afternoon visit with a family who has enjoyed upward mobility.

Laura has worked for 20 plus years at School 3, teaching and writing curriculum. She now directs a branch in a town about an hour outside São Paulo, with the assistance of Nando, long time salesman, who lost his job a

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[40] Perhaps because the meals were mostly dinners or weekend lunches, maids were not present. However, once I was surprised to discover a cook was there, but remained entirely in the kitchen. I then wondered whether they were kept invisible in these Paulista homes. In Northeastern households, maids would serve and remove dishes. I point this out to note that the issue of separateness also applies to domestic areas, and that the practices in relation to domestic workers may differ by region and/or trajectory into the middle class--down from the bourgeoisie or upward. See Frykman and Lofgren 1987.

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few years before. They live in a middle middle class bairro far south in town (Planalto Paulista). They extended their row house by buying the one next door and integrating the two. Daughter of a Portuguese immigrant, Laura delighted in offering elaborate meals. A week or so after the party for their 15 year old daughter Juliana (see chapter 5), she held a tea party. The table was set with huge amounts of hors d'oevres, a homemade chicken pie, imported cheeses, eight different teas, also imported (Celestial Seasonings), and later a choice of desserts. Food was served on silver trays; our dishes were blue printed china. A charming hostess at this European styled meal, Laura encouraged the three guests, two of her dearest friends and me, to indulge in all.

It was only after we adjourned to the living room that I discovered the purpose of the visit: to inspect the gifts Fabiana had received for her birthday, with the benefit of Elena's expert eye; she, I then learned, owned a jewelry store. One piece shown early on caught the greatest attention. Elena said she was unable to read the numbers of the necklace with her contact lenses on, so she began to take them out. "Imagine!" Laura kept exclaiming (as if in surprise and protest at the inconvenience and fuss). Laura said that she was to see the gift giver that evening and would tell her that she planned to replace the necklace because it was almost identical to another piece received.

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Juliana (who had arrived late into the tea) asked her not to, saying she would not be able to face her. In response the other two women reminded her of Laura's tact. Finally, Cristiana was able to decipher the numbers on the chain, which was pronounced gold; the dangling heart, however, was not. Evidently, Laura's plan was to let the gift giver know that the gift was unacceptable (else why mention anything at all?).

The women agreed on the principles of gift giving: it should be according to means. Elena recalled that a plastic item given to her was precious because it was from her maid. While this was excellent, it is inadmissable for someone who can afford it to be cheap. Laura noted that she herself had given a fine gift to the heart chain giver (or her daughter), who evidently could have returned in kind. Helena pointed out that people had come to expect lovely gifts from (wealthy) Laura.[41]

After this debate, the other jewelry boxes (perhaps 40) were opened for inspection. In each case, the criteria for appreciation seemed to be: gold jewelry versus costume--with Helena verifying the gold factor, and brand. Concerned that some gifts had lost their labels, Laura chastized Juliana for throwing them out. The latter claimed some had come without. Coffee was served in the living room, and the

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[41] Criticisms of Mauss' classic The Gift (1967 [1925]) e.g., Carrier 1995, don't contradict the argument that gift giving can be an assertion of unequal social ties.

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inspection turned to purses; we viewed just a few of the 180 [sic] that Juliana had received. For her part mostly silent, Juliana was delighted with a velour top she had received from a "chiquéssima" boutique at the Iguatemi Shopping Center.

In short, the tea party shows in exaggerated fashion that manifestations of status are worked out through goods and commentary. Whether verbal and non-verbal, making invidious intra-class distinctions is an absorbing task. It is my impression that these descriptions do not so much distinguish the Brazilian middle class from other middle classes; on the contrary, they seem to reveal commonalities cross-culturally. Thus rather than claim this preoccupation stems from the crisis, I would say it is endemic, both acute and chronic. Yet the high level of self-conscious attention to form belies any sense of naturalization.

The Intellectual Perspective on the Middle Class, Revisited

In this final section and as a means of reviewing issues of intraclass differences, I would like to reassess the attitudes of local intellectuals of the middle class. This should lead us towards a more inclusive understanding of "native" conceptions of class. In chapter 1, I pointed out that for intellectuals whom I met in São Paulo, one ideal-typical middle class is the petty bourgeoisie, and another the nouveau riche. While the former seemed to

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arouse no further description than "typical," the latter appeals to the imagination of these academics. Somewhat like participants in the study, intellectuals associated the middle class with unrefined consumption. This was the recurrent identifying feature in their commentary. Without specifically defining the middle class around car ownership, their frequent comments on cars made them if not a defining feature, the example par excellence, of a middle class consumption they scorned. Especially remarked upon were new cars ("carro novo," "carro zero," "carro do ano") -- and all new cars, including economy models, are by definition expensive. Home ownership was never mentioned, however.

It is perhaps not surprising that the literature on the historical development of the Brazilian middle class also associates the middle class with consumption, but in this case the term crass would be insufficient. A widely cited perspective (Saes 1985) on the rise of the middle class is that they were coopted by the military into accepting the dictatorship, being "paid off" as it were, in access to consumer durables during the "miracle" years of 1968-74, when Brazilian industry entered heavily into this kind of production. This is hardly a flattering portrait. Consider the terms of the deal: accept the hunting down, interrogating, torturing, killing or exiling of political suspects; accept repressive labor policies towards the masses; accept the loss of civil rights to free uncensored

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speech and organization; accept the replacement of democratic process in the legislature by an official government party and an easily dismissed official opposition party; accept decrees arbitrarily and sporadically imposed for legislative process; accept the presence of military bases at the major entrances of all major cities; accept all this and more, in exchange for ... Volkswagons and electric blenders![42] Those wanting to add to this theory could note that not only consumer durables (cars on down), but also home ownership was facilitated starting in these same years through government subsidies.

It is Baudrillard (1981:34) who called the tendency to classify middle classes by their possession of objects "naive empiricism." Yet when the natives themselves adopt the criterion (regarding themselves and others), it might be called metonymic. In addition, the intellectual definition is synechdochal, for they name the part (the vulgar materialists) for the whole.[43] In contrast, the informant

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[42] Cooptation might not really have been necessary as, after all, there was almost no resistance to the takeover, and, for instance, there was preliminary movement in that direction by a conservative women's movement (see Simões 1985). My point, however, is that the initial acceptance of the coup d'état of April 1964 did not mean that the population supported the repressive measures enforced from 1967 forward.

[43] I follow Fontanier (1968) in my use of the terms synecdoche and metonym. While both can mean the part for the whole, Fontanier assigns the more abstract examples to the former term, as in Washington for the government. Metonym then refers to a thing associated with something else, such as crown for king.

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definition on the one hand was inclusive (in the home/car definition) and on the other seemed "balanced" between us versus them, between our cultural consumption and educational investments versus their vulgar materialism. I have decided that the intellectual and informant formulations differ in their conceptualization of class boundaries. As usual, this point was reinforced to me through a casual conversation.

Complaining to an American friend that I had to travel so much and so far to visit informants, the friend retorted, "well you could have done your study on your block." This prompted his friend, a Paulistana who had been the first to recommend Moóca to me as a perfect location for my middle class study, to ask where it was that I lived. When I told her the street name, a well known one of the area called Cerqueira César, which is part of the Jardins, she stared at me silent and aghast. Granted it is my interpretation, but I took this to mean that it was impossible, in her view, to ever use middle class as a designation for any part of the Jardins, an upper middle class neighborhood. Put in terms of social geography, it is fine to call inhabitants of the East and North Zones middle class (and to attach to them traditional or nouveau riche qualities), but not those of the wealthier South Zone areas. I had long known of the different referents: upper middle, middle middle, lower middle. But what I did not realize initially, and came to

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learn, was that while it is fine for lower middle class people to latch onto the middle class designation, such is emphatically not done in the other direction, from upper middle class on down, in the academic perspective.

For many intellectuals, middle class is almost an insulting designation. One might well assume the repudiation is due to middle class political conservatism. That is, these mainly leftist intellectuals would advocate for the poor and against the wealthy. Yet no one made this (obvious) comment; rather, the preferred criticism was of their excessive consumption, making one suspect that they share, with informants, a preoccupation with nouveau riche sectors.

As we have seen both among informants and intellectuals, verbal repudiation of an "other" middle class is common practice. In the latter case I would say that this barrier is so strong in the conception of intellectuals that the upper middle class and the middle class are simply not (thinkable as) the same class. A briefer way of reading this difference in perspective: intellectuals adopt a bourgeois versus middle class view (Elias 1978). The "unqualified" middle class, by which I mean that which is unadorned adjectivally, refers in elite discourse to what is also called the middle middle or lower middle -- never upper middle. The differences connoted by such references (to name and place) are considered so great as to be not only of

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degree, but of kind. Judging from omission of references to their own class background, it might appear that intellectuals consider themselves exempt from this condition of class--or find their line of descent in the bourgeoisie. However, it seemed to me that through their very efforts to distance themselves from the middle class, to exempt themselves from the taint of this class, the intellectuals simultaneously betrayed their self-same "roots" -- or preoccupations. My purpose in presenting their views is less to "expose" their position than to show that commonalities exist in the representations of diverse middle class groups. The hypersensitivity to class and discomfort with middle classness so pervasive in this sector is symptomatic of strong concerns over class boundary maintenance. It also provides illustration of cross-cultural difference, for instance as compared to the US, where even the wealthy might well embrace the designation of middle class, and where anxieties of class are differently constructed.

In sum, this discussion of differences and distinctions, both between classes and within classes, bears witness to the centrality of symbolic boundary making to middle class social identity. Diverse sectors of the middle class represent themselves (identify, define, present to others) through at least two hierarchies of distinctions: one based on consumption (dividing good and bad realms of

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education, culture, home, cars, and other special items like travel and clothes); and the other based on region and race. Identifications of "I'm this not that" lend foundational support to the middle class position and against others threatening to it. So much so that one is at a loss to decide which threat of encroachment is stronger -- by those within the sectors or outside the class entirely. With so many outside the boundaries, one wonders who is left within.

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Chapter 4
The Shopping System: The Intensification of Daily Life

Something happens in my heart
Whenever I cross Avenue Ipiranga and São João

From the song "Sampa" [São Paulo, contracted]
by Caetano Veloso.

In this chapter and the next I analyze Brazilian middle class reproduction and identity through consumption and especially exchange. The inflationary context demanded a focus on the steps leading to the point of purchase: shopping and related money issues. The setting is not one of an expanding national market, upwardly mobile middle classes, or the "democratization" of consumption, as has so often been the focus of historical studies of Western Europe and the US (see e.g., Ewen 1976, McKendrick 1982, Mukerji 1983, Frykman and Lofgren 1987, McCracken 1988, Blumin 1989). In those circumstances of increased discretionary income and/or cheaper goods, the act of shopping, for all its social significance, seems optional. Shoppers could buy, or if only in fantasy, it was not nightmarish.

Conditions in Brazil were almost diametrically opposed to this well-documented scenario. From 1980 through 1985, the average rate of inflation was 150 percent; the next seven years averaged 1000 percent;[1] and then in one year

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[1] The 1980s can be divided into the period prior to governmental intervention plans and afterwards. The first such plan started in February 1986.

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alone, 1993, 2,700 percent. For a few souls, there was a way to beat inflation (i.e., via financial speculation), but not for the vast majority. Several questions arise: What were the procedures of exchange? Could consumer dream worlds (Williams 1982) subsist in such conditions? What might replace them? What went on in the inflationary marketplace, in a country where, as a Brazilian concluded, "saving or not saving is the same thing"? This statement, made by a Standard, Ogilvy & Mather focus group participant in February 1987, sounds outrageous or exaggerated. But as we will see, it was not that saving versus spending didn't matter (and she didn't say that). Rather, where the currency was increasingly devalued and savings often useless, Brazilians formulated a number of unique strategies and tactics to counteract damages to income.[2]

The preceding chapter considered how middle class informants verbally represented their identities during the crisis. This chapter shows these concerns "in action," by focusing on exchange practices as shaped by inflation. It details the complexities of maintaining a middle class household under inflationary conditions, highlighting local practices which are either novel or specific to the middle class: "research" before shopping (comparison shopping); stockpiling of household goods and buying through pooled

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[2] The literature on household economizing strategies (e.g., Schmink 1984, Selby 1990) has usually not looked at the middle class, but see Winter 1991.

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funds, among other practices. Obviously, money is a necessary component to this discussion. From the money perspective, I describe responses to inflation in banking and in commerce, especially banking "protections" against inflation and credit arrangements, namely installment plans and special uses of checks. I will show how the inflation, devaluations, currency changes and related effects obliged Brazilians to work out still more strategies and to relate constantly to money -- and the government handling it.

Although the strategies of the different agents (consumers, merchants, bankers) were diverse, they can altogether be grouped under one guiding principle. With money value disintegrating as the clock ticked, the principle governing these many protective acts was the same: avoid cash, or better, convert away from the currency in circulation to a more reliable, steady repository of value. The rule is easiest to see when applied to shopping: one should convert into goods. If not often appropriately termed an investment (as the term presupposes a higher return), these might be called acts of salvaging against future inflation. With high, unrelenting inflation, this principle had generalized validity. Part I details shopping practices.

When money devaluates, one might imagine a resurgence of barter. Indeed I heard of some cases, for instance, a psychologist friend received woolen sweaters from a client

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for some therapy sessions in 1991. Also in the first phase of the Collor plan (1990), when most money was actually removed from circulation, barter exchanges took place (see chapter 6). Otherwise, my inquiries did not show barter to be an important strategy for money avoidance among middle class informants or in their commerce. And although it is usual in hyperinflationary conditions for the domestic currency to be substituted by one or more foreign ones, this did not occur in Brazil. Dollarization never became generalized. Instead Brazilians managed to avoid the national currency through their own banks.

Due to the complexity of finance, I will forego detailed discussion of it until Part II of this chapter. Suffice it to note here that innovations in banking enabled those with accounts to avoid using currency directly (Sachs and Zini 1995:5) and hence to avoid, to some extent, inflation devaluations. Thus a protective money practice, also conforming to the principle previously noted, can be translated as: don't convert to cash unless and until you absolutely have to. Central to the discussion in Part II is appraisal of how these strategies led to exacerbated income concentration, and hence an increasing polarization of classes.

Part III of the chapter adds a layer crucial to the understanding of the inflation crisis, the government's involvement. In Brazil between 1986 and 1993, there were

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nine intervention plans aiming to lower inflation and stabilize the economy. Yet until the Plano Real of 1994, all of these "economic shocks," as economists refer to them, failed. I focus here on the first such plan and the changes it provoked. (See chapters 6 and 8 for the two other plans of greatest significance.) The chapter is necessarily detailed. By keeping the three areas of analysis in one chapter, I hope to present the complexities involved in shopping and banking. Hardly "spare time," inconsequential activities, they had important social and political implications (Rutz and Orlove 1989).

Provided with the microlevel descriptions, we can then reflect on how these "survival" strategies, these attempts to exert control over a precarious daily life, influence class differentiation and political culture. Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides one counterpoint for reflections on daily life during the crisis. In Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977), Bourdieu develops the concept of habitus, the idea that the ("objective") conditions of the external material world structure and orient "subjective" perceptions accordingly.[3] Although recognizing habitus to be an

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[3] The concept of habitus contains Bourdieu's response to the notion of subjectivity or consciousness. That is, habitus would be the result of an interiorization of structures, by means of mechanisms of learning that are then exteriorized in practice. Thus: "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g., the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable transposable dispositions... (1977:72) [...]

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ongoing process, Bourdieu most often places the accent on what is already entrenched, naturalized, turned "unconscious" or mechanical. That is (as noted in chapter 1), his work presents the end result, the features of habitus and doxa already completed in history, and then reproduced. In his focus on mechanisms and practices tending to reproduce class society, Bourdieu presupposes the "objective" sides of the economy and politics, making them (certainly without wishing to) a bit too stable and static for many contexts, such as the one I analyze (see DiMaggio 1979 and Calhoun et al, 1993).

Brazilian daily life would have to be called an instance of the repeated disruption of "habitus" or perhaps habitus in the process of reformulation. The crisis offers a context for examining the disruptions and reformulative processes more than ingrained products (routines and dispositions). Or rather, because the period of high inflation was fairly extended, the material calls for speculation on naturalization processes. How might these time-consuming activities affect dispositions? Throughout the chapter, I include informant and focus group participant

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[Habitus consists in] lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions..." (ibid:82-83) [...] [Habitus is] a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and aperception..." (ibid:83).

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commentary on what I'm calling the "intensification of daily life." Statements collected from middle class Brazilians cover a broad spectrum of problems; they are uniformly negative, registering a crisis in their sense of identity, community and nation.

The news is directly pertinent to this discussion of the crisis and the middle class. Newspapers literally "delivered" the crisis with every edition. From the time of the major (35 percent) devaluation of the Brazilian currency in 1979, newspapers have regularly produced state-of-the-middle-class reports. One kind of report is statistical. Thus "Who is paying more? Once again, the middle class" (Jornal da Tarde 12/30/81) is the title of an article stating that a government measure would adversely target salaried workers and consumers. Another announces "The middle class is poorer and eating less" (Journal da Tarde 1/22/82). Generic reports confirm "Buying power of the middle class is falling" (Jornal do Brasil 1/9/93), "Middle class income fell 175.41% in 1984" (Folha de São Paulo 1/24/85). A variant of this type of article is to use the metaphor: the middle class "shrunk" (encolheu) or was "flattened" (achatado).

Lengthy feature articles associate the middle class with two words: paradise and dream--lost, diminishing and over. Thus "The middle class loses paradise" (Folha de São Paulo 12/9/79); "The middle class is more modest in its

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dreams" (Folha de São Paulo 11/8/81); "The dreams and superfluities were abandoned" (Jornal da Tarde 7/10/82); "The middle class cancels trips and restricts buying" (Folha de São Paulo 3/11/84); and a few years later, "For the middle class the dream is over (Folha de São Paulo 10/13/87). Money, standard of living and consumption are always addressed immediately in such articles, and in some cases the association of paradise and dream with consumption is explicit, as in "Study finds that the middle class has returned to the paradise of consumption" (Folha de São Paulo 1/3/85). Still other variants talk about threats besieging the middle class: "The middle class enters into sacrifice" (Folha de São Paulo 10/23/83); "The middle class entered into war" (Jornal da Tarde 6/6/84); even "The end of the middle class" (Estado de São Paulo 10/23/83).[4]

Besides these diverse "barometer" readings, which define the middle class in terms of consumption -- and hence can be considered in relation to the discursive definition of middle class identity, as discussed in the preceding chapter -- the newspapers provided financial advice, of necessity constantly updated. During fieldwork I was struck by the many articles advising the best bet of the week for investment (e.g., dollars, gold, CDBs, savings, etc.); the going price on some consumer goods investment (e.g., phone

[4] This last was written by a journalist whom I interviewed for my informant pool but then eliminated, as the case seemed to present complications.

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lines); how to adapt to what employers are now looking for in personnel; how to set up a cottage industry and what capital and equipment would be involved. (An informant pressed upon me three issues of a magazine dedicated to small business.)

For all the news was vital -- one could not permit oneself the luxury of ignoring it. All Brazilians learn the jarring change of the moment from the TV or radio news, which alerts them to what they have just lost and what they might do to not lose their businesses and shirts. The news media made itself indispensable to middle class households during the crisis with information extended to help protect resources and to simply get along on a daily basis in a context where the rules changed greatly and erratically.

The news media assumed what I call a kind of guardian angel/irritant attitude vis-à-vis middle class readers. It provided bad news of decline, tips to help those with some goods to protect and, as chapter 6 will show, elaborated interpretations and critiques for dissemination. It was, I argue, an integral part of the crisis -- source on and of it, and resource for it. Chapter 6 analyzes the news itself and political implications. Examples given in this chapter show that the news magazine Veja continuously provided both business advice and evaluations of the crisis.

This brings me to the final issue of this chapter: the developing "folk" understanding of the crisis. For this

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discussion, I refer to two recent works. In the introduction to their collection Money and the Morality of Exchange, Bloch and Parry contest the views inferred of such different thinkers as Marx and Simmel that money in and of itself has transformative power and "gives rise to a particular world view" (1989:17). Bloch and Parry argue instead that cultural systems govern the meanings and practices of money. Their introduction concludes by noting that a comparativist, relativist perspective on money is needed, and that "the lesson is also one which we need to take to heart if we are to understand our own representations of exchange" (1989:30).

The studies in the Bloch and Parry collection deal with non-capitalist contexts. My analysis is intended to lead towards an understanding of representations of exchange in a capitalist society. This brings me to the second work, On the Tightrope: Twelve Studies on the Culture of Inflation (Vieira et al, 1993, hereafter called Cultura da Inflação), an important interdisciplinary collection by Brazilian scholars on what came to be called in Brazil the "culture of inflation." The comparison of erudite versus folk evaluations of the inflation crisis puts another perspective on the debate as to the meanings and functions of money, exchange and their relation to "world view" and political culture among middle class Brazilians.

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Part I: To Market to Market (Fazer Feira)

Stockpiling of Household Goods (Strategy #1)

My first exposure to the shopping system during Brazil's crisis was personal. Living in Recife in 1984-85 became a situation of unplanned participant-observation, in which I had at least two occupations, those of housewife and teacher. I earned less than five minimum wages teaching English at two institutions.[5] With inflation officially at over 100 percent, and more realistically at 130 percent, in the 16 months I worked my two salaries in real wages declined 30 percent, from a starting equivalent of 450 US dollars. I derived wry amusement imagining a graph depicting how salaries steadily, indeed increasingly, were approaching zero. Yet, due to inflation, that near-zero would be registered in millions or (if they didn't remove devaluated zeroes) billions of cruzeiros. How to manage

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[5] The minimum wage was established under President Vargas in the 1938. The law also set a "basic basket" of goods (cesta básica), which includes foods, such as rice, beans, cooking oil, sugar, coffee, powdered milk, and household goods, like soap and detergent. The estimated cost of provisioning a household with a minimum of these goods has since been used for adjusting the minimum wage to cost of living increases. It is a standard reference for salaries; studies divide income brackets into the following: 0-2 minimum wages; 3-5; 5-10; 10-20 and more than 20. (See e.g., IBOPE, Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics). The standard is relevant for most Brazilians, who earn less than five minimum wages. It is not usually used for middle and high income earners (ten and beyond), rather the amount in currency would be given.

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living expenses on declining incomes?[6]

As to the other occupation, friends immediately taught me how to do the shopping. One was to start by going to one of the government subsidized outlets (COBAL) to buy sugar, margarine, rice, manioc flour and other dry goods. Then one should go to another subsidized market called Sacolão (literally "Big Bag") to buy fruits and vegetables at one price per kilo for all produce. I hated this step in shopping; picking through the rotting tomatoes was especially loathsome. Although not solely to economize, if one wanted something special -- a freshly killed chicken cooked in its blood is a regional delicacy, but I'd more likely pick up chicken breast or fruit not available in the formal sector, one shculd go to the traditional farmers' market in the adjacent bairro, Casa Amarela, which had both open air and building sections. The very last stop would be at the Bom Preço, a supermarket, to get what wasn't found in the other markets. This weekly routine of discount, or price-controlled shopping would last a good part of the morning. It is associated with the next.

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[6] I discuss technical details of the inflation in the course of this chapter. Briefly, one of the most important aspects of Brazil's inflation, and which accounts to some extent for its durability, was the fact that the economy was "indexed." These regulatory mechanisms to adjust to inflationary increases themselves created a sort of tide of increases in which price increases in some areas were responded to by accompanying increases in others, notably in salaries. The latter increases were therefore compensatory in theory. The salary "correction for inflation," however, always lagged behind price increases.

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In the Bom Preço supermarket I was amazed by the sight of housewives flanked by two or three shopping carts filled to the brim with several foot-long bars of laundry soap, mounds of sugar sacks, cans of cooking oil, sweetened condensed milk and Nestle's powdered milk, extra milk bags to freeze, many kilos of meat, dozens of oranges, varieties of bananas ripe to dark green, and so on. They had large households, probably families of five or six and a maid, but still, I came to see that this excess was not merely to sustain large households, but to get a jump on the next jump in prices. At the time these would come unpredictably, which lent an odd urgency to grocery shopping. Later, during my research in 1993-94, the price leaps were bigger but more "tamed."

One day in Recife, I remember thinking, "this is not wartime," yet the tactic of stockpiling made it seem so. I thought then that someone should document this surreal aspect of middle class daily life. I thus began this research seven years and nine plans later, when inflation was in four digits (1993 was the record breaker, with 2,700 percent inflation). How could things possibly be now?

The shopping procedures I had adopted in Recife were based on a general recognition of what goods to buy most cheaply and where. Those with larger households had more elaborate ones, involving "market research" (pesquisa de mercado), which is literally the expression used in

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Portuguese to refer to comparison shopping prior to buying, and "stock(pil)ing" (estocagem) or "monthly buys" (compras do mês).

Adalberto gave the most elaborate explanation of shopping. His bulk shopping was done every 45 days; meat was stocked every two weeks in the freezer, leaving weekly shopping for fruits, vegetables, dairy and bread. For perishables, Adalberto did not simply go to a nearby Sacolão outlet; he went straight to the source: CEASA, the municipal food distribution center, in São Paulo's West Zone. Adalberto compared their prices to the neighborhood open markets, which have become very expensive.

> I do CEASA on Saturday. There's an open market right nearby [the apartment] on Saturday, too. If I put 50,000 cruzeiros [reais] in my pocket and go to the open market, I don't get the shopping done with 50,000. If I put 30,000 in my pocket and go to CEASA, I do the shopping for two weeks.

A popular expression was coined for stockpile shopping: the "ant effect" (efeito formiga). Besides shopping for bulk either at a Sacolão outlet or a municipal supply center, two kinds of stores call our attention: the Lojas Americanas and its rival Lojas Brasileiras (both national chains) and the "hyper" or "mega" supermarket chains (national or regional). Lojas Americanas and Lojas Brasileiras (American and Brazilian Stores) are a Walmart type of store, drawing shoppers not only for incidentals, but for household goods and food.

Just as this kind of discount store blossomed in

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Brazil, so too, since the 1980s, have the huge supermarkets. São Paulo boasts many super-supermarkets; for instance the Extra (formerly Jumbo), centrally located, is just off the Avenida Paulista on the Avenida L.A. Brigadeiro. The two-storied complex with outdoor and underground parking contains a few small convenience stores on ground level, which give it a mall-like appearance. Brazilian supermarkets have long had sections of household goods (e.g., not only pots and pans, but bathroom towels and "flip flop" rubber sandals). Megasupermarkets expand these aisles to a whole floor. The bottom floor of Extra is a monstrously huge supermarket with (considering its size and US supermarkets) a dearth of brands and mediocre produce. The upper floor sells household goods, utilities, appliances, and so on. It profits through economies of scale, but not only. Business owner Antônio explained that since many operated on 30 days credit, supermarkets could profit even without any mark up on the wholesaler's price! Not incidentally, some of the wealthiest people in Brazil are supermarket owners, for instance, the Diniz family, of the Pão de Açucar chain, which ranks as Brazil's 20th largest company (Veja São Paulo, 11/17/93:18). Though I emphasize here the discount megasupermarkets, there are upscale versions. In the same general vicinity of Extra, though on the wealthier Jardins side of the Avenida Paulista divide, is Eldorado. Its second floor approaches the look

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of a department store. Perhaps its most important feature, however, is the imported goods section in the back of the main floor. Entrance doors close this section off from the rest of the store, creating an inner sanctuary. There one can find fine wines and whiskeys, Pringles, European jams and canned specialties like artichokes, American pancake mix and maple syrup. etc. Stores of expensive imported specialty foods, such as European cheeses, and so on, are now springing up all over urban Brazil. The Eldorado is following suit.

Doing Research (Strategy #2)

In São Paulo, I noted that the average sized supermarket in my neighborhood (Pão de Açucar) counterbalanced its special offers -- some of which appeared as coupons in the Sunday newspaper -- with goods which were highly overpriced. Maria do Carmo called this a lure ("chamariz"), noting that the supermarket owners bank on the person picking up other items for convenience. In so doing any savings might be cancelled if the shopper were not careful. Thus for those many shoppers needing to buy at the cheapest price, both large supermarkets and discount variety stores were a regular part of shopping. "Research," however, goes beyond choosing the store by its general price reputation; it consists in shoppers making item comparisons in three or more such stores prior to making the big

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periodic household purchases. In what became a sort of classic media depiction, middle class Brazilian housewives (brava gente!) were shown notebooks and calculators in hand in these aisles, jotting down the various prices of a set list of goods a day or so prior to buying.

There were times when such a delay was not possible, when the indispensable pocket calculators[7] were outdone by the price marker machines. People outside Brazil always want to know, when told of the high inflation, how storekeepers kept up, fixing new prices at all times. Indeed that occurred, but only for a limited phase. Brazilians recall times (in the 1980s) when store employees were continually changing prices with their sticker machines, and lucky customers would grab items yet to be marked up. Before this time, it had been worth the effort to check the goods in the backs of shelves, in the hopes of finding goods whose prices had not been changed.[8] Informants also angrily recalled having seen products with three to six stickers on them. By the 1990s, apart from supermarket and large discount outlets, in many stores a code number or letter rather than the price was on the item.

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[7] Even pocket calculators per se were not up to the task of inflation, as the magazine Veja reported. Most often they allow only for ten digits. The company Sharp smartly responded to this acquired need, producing a 14 digit version (Veja, 6/9/93).

[8] Testimony by Mary Ann O'Dougherty, personal communication.

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The clerk would consult conversion tables applicable for that period (a maximum of two weeks) to quote the price.

Both the Lojas Americanas and megasupermarkets have local TV advertising, announcing weekly specials complete with prices.[9] (Informants reminded me that watching the TV news or reading the newspaper was indispensable.) On one busy Saturday morning at Extra two huge metal crates each containing about 200 of the liter bottles of Brahma beer were emptied in a matter of minutes; immediately afterwards another crowd restocked. The price offered that week at Extra was the lowest in the South Zone. Despite as many as 40 check out counters, at prime time the wait could be lengthy.

Such research and buying for basics at diverse locations was a tactic of those middle class families on a tight budget -- an observation confirmed by the fact that those who practiced had to use time to save money. However, it is also the case that stockpiling as a means of economizing requires a higher income. Poor people lack this means generally, as did many middle class people during the Collor presidency (1990-92).

One consequence of the chaotic inflation path concerns

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[9] At least one pharmacy chain joined these stores advertizing their best buys on TV. Alluding to the produce outlet Sacolão, it first calls its promotions sacolinho (little bag), then the ad ends correcting itself: "with savings so great it should be called sacolão," the blond actress says brightly.

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the deterioration of money as a standard of value. Having just come from a country with stable currency and negligible inflation, I carried with me a conception of the "true cash value" of a given item. I noted endlessly that Brazil had become much more expensive. (For the first time from about 1990 forward, this was so not only for those living on the currency, but also for those relying on the dollar. There developed inflation on the dollar, a fact which always seems bizarre to people outside Brazil, yet which stems from the fact that it is a market.) Many items were half the US price, which made them expensive for Brazilians, and this included food: the price of beef in 1994 was about the equivalent of four US dollars per kilo. Others seemed to be higher than in the US. When shopping for some cheap item, I would often be quoted what seemed a jarringly high price. For instance, a plastic plug adaptor priced at the equivalent of $4 US dollars was said to be a good deal, a judgment relating to the immediate context, not a price established in a non-inflationary economy.

Prices varied greatly over time. Veja reported a man having bought a carburetor piece in 1988 for 900 cruzeiros. Fourteen months later he paid 72,000 for it -- a 7,900 percent price increase versus an inflation rate of 800 percent during that period. Such a disparity may reflect the fact that the official inflation rates were a composite, an average of increases of a variety of goods. Thus

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individual items may be well above or well below the published rates. The enormity of the price difference, however, points to merchants' self-protective calculations.[10]

Prices also varied from place to place. One day the doctor Flávio announced to Sumiko that he had just compared prices for tires at three locations, two of which were major department stores, Mappin and Mesbla. The prices were: CR$150,000, 75,000 and 60,000 (in US dollars, the range was roughly from $40-100). This variance demonstrates the logic of prices being raised "de acordo como as lojas quisessem," an informant explained wrily, that is, "according to the store's wishes" -- in other words, any which way. Vera reported the price of one product being 6,000 cruzeiros in a supermarket and 3,000 in a pharmacy. She said: "you turn the corner and the price is higher, you turn another and it's cheaper, so you see, you spend a lot of time with this." Laura's comparison conflicts with TV news which reported in 1993 that pharmacy prices were far beyond the average inflation, thereby discriminating heavily against the aged and infirm. Assuming her recollection is accurate, we are led to emphasize again that shoppers could not rely

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[10] Though Veja did point out in the article here cited on price variations (1/22/92) that in some cases the variance was due to different moments of receiving a shipment, overall, they indicate the problem as due to "protectionist" policies of wholesalers and retailers -- that is, protection to ensure that the customer and not the seller pays for inflation.

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on a certain kind of store for economizing, rather had to be careful comparison shoppers.

Maria do Carmo's recounting showed how the shopping system could try one's time and patience. She spoke at length:

> I think, for example, you stock things, like food, it's absurd, when there's a sale, you have to run. My maid sometimes arrives saying, 'look, aren't you going to go to Tulha [supermarket]? Today there's 'tornado,' there's a sale!' And so you go and everyone has already taken everything. ... This [stockpiling] is terrible too, it's no good for anyone, because everyone will start doing it... It's terrible, this business, you fill your cart full and at times you don't want to. You have to. The difference of one market to another is huge. If you don't take advantage of this and you have children... [...] It's tiring all that. You get the car: 'I'm going to the Jumbo [Extra] on [Avenida] Brigadeiro, I'm going to the Eldorado, I'm going to the Sé.' First some don't even have parking... [...] I find this all very unpleasant, because I think like this: '<u>if everything were just one price, wow how great</u>! I'm here by Tulha, I'll go and pick some things up.' Someone else lives by the Eldorado, and goes there to shop. Why this thing of having to go to various supermarkets for the offers? You lose time, even" (emphasis added).

I note in passing that Maria do Carmo's preference for stability seems counter to a free market. She concluded by criticizing the dirtiness of the Extra supermarket, and reminiscing how much nicer it was when she could shop at Eldorado, which was cleaner, had everything there, but it was a lot more expensive.

The range in prices extended to most products. Thus a ten inch TV screen sold for 391,000 cruzeiros at one store, 584,000 in another; a pressure cooker (indispensable in poor

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homes for cooking beans while economizing fuel) ran for 13,900 and 27,000; and new flip flops could cost 5,700 and 13,185 (Veja, 1/22/92.) The Veja report adds a final surprise: goods within the same store chain had varying prices! Interestingly, both in 1992 during high inflation and instability and well into the period of low (2 percent per month) inflation, during the Plano Real in 1995, the price variance could be very high -- in each case the variance noted was 170 percent (Veja 1/22/92 and Estado de São Paulo, 9/11/95). The newspaper noted that this variance also occurred with the items of the "basic basket," that is, food and household items deemed basic, and under government price controls. By contrast, the variance in a stable capitalist economy runs 20 percent for consumer goods.

Some price increases were, unfortunately, more predictable. Thus the price of gas (critical to all: to car owners and bus riders and all kitchens) tended to rise about twice a month. On the fated day (and not before), came the announcement, "gas prices are going up xx percent as of midnight tonight." Car owners would scramble to the stations, waiting at times for over an hour to fill their tanks in the remaining hours, while in 1993, bus riders had to endure large hikes as of the last Sunday of the month.

Buying Miniature Real Estate (Strategy #3)

This discussion has mainly focused on grocery shopping

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as the very banality demonstrates how grave, complicated, pervasive, indeed invasive the inflation crisis was. It also illustrates the overriding principle for combatting it: buy anything that retains value. Discretionary income was also used to buy durable goods, in what I call a strategy of miniaturization in real estate investment. In Brazil, although the car of the year is best, cars don't depreciate as in the US. Given inflationary distortions, the resale value might be equal to or better than the original price! Thus when one family in the study had health problems, they sold theirs. Like cars, telephone lines are a significant "investment." To obtain a new line from the phone company takes years and costs about 2,500 in US dollars. It is common practice for people to sell or lease their phone lines (and it is a specified item in divorce proceedings). Market rates for leasing vary tremendously across and within cities. In 1993, a good deal was a monthly rental of about 50 in US dollars -- and dollars were often the referent in such informal contracts. Since one could not necessarily or only invest in expensive resaleable commodities (a house or apartment being the limit), the tactic at a lower level was to buy anything non-perishable. One would also resort to converting currency into -- laundry detergent or Guaraná soda, as here described.

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Consumer Goods versus Devaluation

As a result of the currency losing its validity as a store of value, it appears there was a re-unification of use and exchange values. Where money loses its functions of storing or reliably measuring value, people revert to other forms. The tangible goods may also give a sense of security. Contrariwise, the strong devaluation of money meant it came close to losing its functionality not only as store, but also as standard and measure of value.

It seemed throughout 1993-94 that with the zillions of price changes, many people had lost a sense of base price. Part of the problem with keeping a fixed notion of "cash value" of course was that it was extremely hard to compare prices of things bought previously, or even to recall prices. Even if one did, or had a sales receipt, the basis for calculation was obscured due to inflation, currency changes (five between 1980 and 1993), or a combination of these. Thus, homemaker Clarinha noted that the cost of the college entrance exam for July 1995 was CR$ 38,000, whereas it had been CR$ 4,000 the past January. Were these the "same" prices, correcting for inflation or had there been an additional increase? Consider Adalberto's comments on bulk shopping:

> I'd like -- for example, people talk about middle class, lower class, upper class -- I'd like to see the Minister of the Economy go personally to the supermarket to shop, just to see. I shop every 45 days, there are things that go up, it is not like they say, 40 percent, 50 percent, it's a soap that

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> was 126 cruzeiros [reais], you go to the supermarket 45 days later, I did this, I know, I paid 120 for Lux soap. Forty-five days later it was 560. This isn't only a 100 percent increase. [...] I paid 760 for a can of soy oil, Lisa [a common brand], and 45 days later, I paid 1,370. That is nearly a 100 percent increase.

Was his comparison of price increases of soap and oil correct, or was he omitting some relativizing factor in his calculation, such as one can detect from the following report from DIEESE: "variation in prices around 54% in the month means that the effective salary lost 35% of its initial buying power" (January 1990).[11]

The dollar was indeed quoted for certain items -- imported goods and airfare leap to mind, but also for some consumer durables. This referent was not generalized, though; and it certainly did not enter into the minutiae of daily life. (Also even when used as a referent for contracts, it was never legal in Brazil to use dollars in them.) Thus it seemed that in relation to many minor, but ubiquitous areas of home and streetlife, it was possible to lose a sense of whether something was cheap, a good deal or

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[11] DIEESE stands for Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Sócio-Econômicos, or Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies. Its monthly bulletins provide quantitative reports on the cost of living, reports on the activities of different employment sectors and brief editorials on the political economic state of the nation. There were several inflation indexes, geared to various sectors of the economy. DIEESE focused on household costs; it tended to report inflation at higher than what the government would publicize.

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quite expensive. As a Brazilian friend put it, "let's say you go once and spend ten dollars on groceries. Another time you have *no* idea what you will be able to buy with that amount." An American colleague with considerable Brazilian experience summed it up this way: "everything is expensive in Brazil now -- except labor."

I must underscore the issue of having a different basis for comparison. In non-inflationary conditions, one tends to find, as Simmel points out, an "inelasticity" in the money value, which gives money a validity despite fluctuation. Thus:

> Inelasticity is a consequence of the fact that the money price of a commodity, despite its relativity and the absence of an inherent connection with the commodity, nevertheless acquires a certain stability and appears to be the objectively adequate equivalent. [...] The association ... between the object and its price has become psychologically so firmly fixed that the seller will not readily admit a decline or the buyer an increase... (1990:163).

In contrast to this perspective from a stable economy, informants from the younger generation (about 30 years old) often said they had only experienced adult life with high inflation; this unstable way of life and the wildly fluctuating prices was the rule. Or rather, there was one rule: prices would go up, never down.[12]

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[12] Helena told me of a friend who lives in Switzerland who had made the following astonishing report: a can of mushrooms had cost 75 cents ten years ago and today. Her husband Adalberto added, for emphasis, "not ten days ago, ten years."

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A further singularity of Brazil's inflation was its longevity. Most historic cases of high inflation were acute but short-lived. In Brazil's extended inflation, the question became not the "true cash value" of the item, but the price today ("Como é o preço hoje?"). For many economists, Brazil did not experience hyperinflation, since its inflation, although high and wild, had certain regulatory controls, which I will describe later in the chapter. But the country experienced it subjectively, as Sá Earp describes:

> Agents...progressively became aware that the official inflation was not accompanying the evolution of the real price of goods -- and they moved, therefore, to develop a defensive comportment, always trying to readjust above the prices. With this, the very system of prices transformed into a fiction, rendering inviable the use of any standard of value. The result ... hyperinflation [which] is characterized by the absence of parameters of reference, hence the end of positive economic calculations and the concentration of survival strategies by agents in paranoid defense of buying power (1993:106, emphasis added).

Let us turn, then, to strategies relating specifically to money and their implications.

Part II: The Money System

Certainly many travellers from "First World" countries are familiar with "gliches" in money systems of the "Third World." It may seem quaint to receive candies instead of penny change or a coupon, even though useless to the traveller soon off to another locale. Such practices did

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occur in Brazil with respect to coin change. During the crisis years, however, transactions involving all kinds of money were newly elaborated with each government plan and currency change, triggering all sorts of repercussions.

Three matters which caught my attention upon arrival in Brazil to do fieldwork can serve to introduce these money matters. First, devaluation. On the first of August, 1993, the currency was devaluated, turning a bill of 1000 into a one note. To inaugurate this latest devaluation, the currency was renamed, from cruzeiro to cruzeiro real [plural: reais], or royal cruzeiro. The running joke I heard upon arrival (that month) referred to this new name. It punned on the fact that "real" can mean either royal, the intended meaning here, or real. And so the (state-and-nation) deprecating saying went in relation to the new currency: "é muito realeza para esse povo," or "that's a lot of royalty/ realness for this people." (And I recently heard another joke: "'Real' means now your money is really going to disappear.") Brazilians had become accustomed yet not impervious to the deflation of pride and trust (cf. Simmel 1990:161) that also occurs with such a devaluation.[13] Devaluations sparked off defensive

[13] Not all comments were jests. Adalberto, who spoke with such energetic force as to startle, showed me a 10,000 cruzeiros bill and told me that "when it was first issued, in 1991, it was the largest denomination Brazil had had in all its history. When it came out it could buy [sic] 40 dollars. You know a bill like this to buy 40 dollars is not a joke. Do you know what you need today to buy 40 dollars?

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practices, reflected in the following curiosities.

Carpooling to the state university about two hours (and two tollways) away was running the equivalent of eight US dollars round trip per rider. One person, who recalled that she was owed from her previous trip, calmly wrote out a check for a sum which was the equivalent of four US dollars. By so doing, I later learned, Brazilians (partially) avoided the devaluation of cash. Another curiosity was gas stations advertising for drivers to fill their tanks now and pay eight days later. How did they track down these errant customers? -- By (illegal) use of the "post-dated check" (cheque prédatado).

To better situate money practices like these, it is necessary to discuss what was occurring to money generally during the inflationary years, and how this affected the population. As a preface, one can say that the crisis affected all of Brazil and all Brazilians, and that its impact was differential.

Do you have any idea? They already cut 16 zeroes after this bill here. Do you know what this shows? That we lost our heroes in bills, we don't have anyone left to put on them." I mentioned in response that when I had arrived the biggest bill was 500 cruzeiros reais. The informant responded: "with 500 today [10 months later], you can't buy five bread buns." Avid reader of Veja, Adalberto perhaps had seen the "bullet" in a satirical news brief entitled "The Comical Face of the Tragedy" (6/9/93) which asked what 20 famous personages (from statesmen to artists) all had in common: they all had been devalued by inflation -- having all been effigies on bills.

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Money, Banking and Differentiation

It is obvious that money devaluates in an inflationary economy. In Brazil, the currency has also periodically suffered decreed devaluations, such as the one just noted. Let us take a very simple example, however, of the continuous devaluation. A worker takes home the equivalent of 80 US dollars, i.e., somewhat more than one minimum salary in the 1990s, on the first of the month. Inflation turns out to be 20 percent during that same month. Inflation rates altered dramatically, so I choose this as a modest average. (In a particulary bad month, June 1994, it was 50 percent.) If (s)he spends no money and "saves" this cash under the bed, this worker will have $64, or $16 less on the 30th of the month. If the daily inflation rates were even -- which is never the case, the daily loss would amount to close to 50 cents. Multiply that salary by ten and you have a (white collar) worker losing $160 in this same month. A given sum of money in 1967 was worth 80 percent less in 1992 (DIEESE, July 1992). So what to do?

An informant (with modest means) pointed out the following:

> The poor person doesn't have anything to spend ... the rich person has everything he wants, that is, he can put money into savings, because he has money leftover. Now the middle class person, what he earns he burns.

Those Brazilians subsisting on a minimum wage or not much more lacked the funds required to open or keep a bank

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account. (In 1993, the bank Itaú required the equivalent of $65 dollars, which was one month's minimum wage, plus approval at the bank's discretion to open an account. A minimum balance was also required for customers to receive checks.) Much as one might wish it were true, as some maintain (cf. the economist Eliana Cardoso [1992] and many others), that these poorer Brazilians were not as touched by the crisis since, as the argument goes, they spend their money immediately (buying all goods and perhaps subway or bus coupons for the month), that is not the case.

On the contrary, the crisis hit different sectors of the economy differently. To simplify, we will disregard for now the fact that certain economic sectors were more affected by the recession than others (construction leaps to mind as a sector most adversely affected), and consider wages and expenditures only. Critical to riding out the inflation were salary corrections for inflation. Overall, salaries were corrected for inflation periodically and at a lower rate than the actual inflation. In the 18 month period between February 1986 and July 1987, salary losses came to 44 percent (DIEESE, September 1987). This statistic does not differentiate by class, however. In 1983 most working people received semestral corrections. (But even if the correction for inflation were perfect, such that a salary of 1000 in January would be brought up to 2000 in July if inflation for that semester was 100 percent, this

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correction doesn't entirely make up for the losses that occurred over that semester.) The lag was later reduced to three and then to monthly corrections, but again not for everybody. As late as 1993 those working for from one to six minimum salaries -- the working class poor majority of Brazilians -- received quarterly corrections only, thereby lagging greatly behind the wealthier minority (DIEESE, August 1993). Obviously such delays presented hardship and triggered vicious circles of debt.[14] That inflation and recession hit the lowest paid workers for the longest time and most severely is indicated by changes in the minimum wage and cost of living indexes. Minimum wage in the 1960s was the equivalent of 100 US dollars per month; yet by 1986 it had dropped to $58 (in a 48 hour work week) -- this after thousands of price hikes. Many middle class people could also report substantial losses in their salary. Yet without minimizing such losses -- while recognizing a significant decline in living standards for most and dramatic downward mobility for some, as well as a far more restricted, competitive and uncertain economy, it is necessary to acknowledge that it did not put this class into the dire straits of workers subsisting on one or a few minimum

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[14] One way of dealing with the declining salaries prior to their "correction" was, if one was fortunate, to ask for an advance on the salary or on what is called the "13th [month] salary" in Brazil, a kind of vacation salary. Many teachers I knew would "tide" things over this way. Needless to say, the vacation trip evaporated, and the vacation period would be tight.

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salaries. The impossibility of living off a minimum wage was clear to informants, one of whom cited the wage in cruzeiros reais (as noted, then about 65 in US dollars), subtracted the amount of four bus fares needed for the round trip to work, multiplied it by 22 work days, demonstrating that more than half this wage went to transportation, leaving about a dollar a day to live on. (A grilled ham and cheese sandwich then cost about 75 cents at a cheap cafe; a loaf of bread, liter of milk and half pound of coffee ran about $2.50 at the market.)

In addition to affecting salaries differentially, inflation also had a differential impact in the realm of consumption. As DIEESE has amply documented, the price of goods rose variably, creating or reinforcing pockets of greater and lesser vulnerability in the population.[15] One reason it is said that inflation targeted the middle class

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[15] The cost of living reports by DIEESE provide itemized information of the increases in household goods, per genre, i.e., food, housing, transportation, utilities, health, clothing, education and culture, and by item in the category; for instance the last section contains costs of magazines. It then weights these many goods according to the kinds of expenses incurred per income sector. The latter is divided into three categories, those receiving from one to three minimum salaries (up to roughly $225 US dollars/month), from one to five (enlarging to a slightly less rock-bottom poverty group), and from one to thirty (encompassing middle and upper middle classes). This last category does not include absolutely great wealth, as 30 minimum salaries was roughly the equivalent of $2,250 US dollars/month in 1993. With the consumer goods index matched to these three categories, DIEESE derives an estimate of how the current inflation targets these different sectors in terms of consumption expenses.

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most is due to the fact that inflation hits categories of food, housing, clothing, transportation, health, schooling differently. Thus when transportation and food costs rise, the poor are especially targeted; when school tuition and clothing does, the middle class, and so on. Since some inflation hikes affected goods and services available only to the latter, the idea that inflation is "worse" for the middle class finds some empirical support. However, the strongest support for the view that the middle class was especially targeted by inflation stems from the Plano Collor, which confiscated savings account holdings over the equivalent of 1,200 US dollars (at the time in cruzados novos, $ 50,000). Until this time, middle classes and above had been playing money market options which had become available precisely through the inflation. Thus if the inflation crisis can be said to date from about 1981, then the middle class was most overtly affected as of 1990 when the country suffered a greatly deepened recession.

Making Bank Applications (Strategy #4-1,000,000!?)

The banking system developed means which also left some more, others less, vulnerable to inflation. Several different banking measures were devised to "protect" clients' money against inflation or, for those with higher minimum incomes, increase it through "applications." In the early 1980s the applications were called the "overnight" or

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simply "over" and "open" (these English terms were used). As with all else, the system changed throughout the crisis years. However, the general principle was that the more money one had to invest, the less time it took for a return, and the better the return.

In the 1990s, the following options[16] existed: first, for those with the least money to invest, savings account interest. It must be noted, though, that it became undesirable to simply keep money untouched in a savings account, as it was inadequately corrected for inflation and earned negligible interest. Furthermore, after the Collor measure, great suspicion surrounded savings accounts. A good sign that these negative appraisals of savings accounts persisted is shown by the fact that, with the change in July 1994 to the Plano Real and the new "stable" currency, the implementation publicity found it necessary to stress that savings accounts would thenceforth be a good strategy. Though simple savings with interest was always an option, other "applications" usually offered superior returns.

For the portion of money to be depleted over the short term, from February 1991 on there was a form of checking with interest (interest-bearing, checkable deposits), called

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[16] For basic information on banking options, I conferred with UNICAMP economist Walter Belik, in an interview of May 3, 1994.

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Fundão (the big fund/fount).[17] For just 16 days the money must be untouched, to avoid taxation. It was as if there were two boxes in the checking account, one which acted like a savings account and the other like a "running" account, out of which checks were paid and money withdrawn. The latter money did not earn interest. The savings, or Fundão, part did (or rather was corrected for inflation), up until the moment when a disbursement was needed, in which case the transfer was made automatically. I was disappointed to learn, however, that each time this was done, a minimum amount was transfered. Thus if a check came to CR$ 12,000, and the running account had been drained except for 2,000 by a previous transaction, not 10,000 but 26,000 -- for some banks the minimum transfer (an amount close to 25 US dollars was the minimum at Itaú) would "spill" into the running account from the Fundão; at other banks some other rounding up occurred. It might seem "petty" to focus on this matter. However, Garcia reports that "41 percent of the financial revenues of the largest six Brazilian banks in 1993 came

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[17] Sachs and Zini (1995:5) point out that "banks were not required to hold central bank reserves (monetary base) against these accounts," rather short-term securities. They worked something like money-market funds in the US, say Sachs and Zini. However, anyone with a checking account could have one. Significantly, the authors note that "the monetary base is only 7.5 percent of Brazilian transaction balances [i.e., checkable accounts plus currency). In the U.S., by contrast, the monetary base makes up for 33.7 percent of that aggregate." (ibid). In this way, Brazilians avoided use of currency, relying instead of "inside money, substantially de-linked from the monetary base." (Sachs and Zini ibid).

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from those 'inflationary' gains..." and it has been calculated that "2 percent of the Brazilian GDP has been yearly transferred on average to the banking system in that form" (Garcia 1995:17).

Returning now to the four dollar check. With such a system, the bank customer is comforted by the knowledge that the money in the Fundão was being corrected for inflation -- not exactly equal to inflation, but approaching it. And, as Rio inhabitants especially will add: this allowed Brazilians to carry very little cash on their persons, which somewhat alleviated fears of pickpocketing or assault, as well as preventing minute-by-minute devaluation.

Although the ubiquitous use of checks[18] and acceptance of them by vendors would surprise many Americans and

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[18] It is hardly surprising that the tax imposed by the government on all bank account movement (IPMF), instated in August 1993, but soon after deemed unconstitutional due to the timing of its application, was unpopular. It taxed every "movement" of the individual's bank account by 0.25 percent of the amount automatically. This tax, called Imposto Provisório sobre Movimentação Financeira (IPMF), was slated to be temporary, as the name suggests. Although the tax passed in legislature, Brazilian constitution states that new laws can only go into effect the following year. Local governments were the loudest to complain -- and the first to refuse to comply. Never slow to analyze underlying issues of such measures, Brazilians criticized it for being inflationary, saying that businesses would surely transfer this additional cost onto the prices (repassar para os preços). It remained highly unpopular, and was not put immediately into effect when the appropriate time came; rather Fernando Henrique Cardoso delayed it during the first months of his presidency.

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probably most New Yorkers,[19] money itself was still essential for many formal and informal transactions, such as tickets to a movie, and the popcorn sold by the outdoor vendor. Money also was needed for bus and subway fares, though buyers could stockpile tickets. As these prices often rose on the last Sunday of the month in 1993-94, it was advantageous to buy just prior to the price hike, when the price was at its greatest devaluation relative to the increase the month before. However, once again precisely this sector, users of public transportation, were highly unlikely to be able to buy in bulk. In fact, only a few could play against what came to be a more regular inflation hike at the turn of the month. The many who received their monthly salary after the first of the month could not. I realized the constraints on playing against the system when early on I asked an informant, a single head of household, about the timing of her major shopping. She said drily, "it's very simple -- I shop when the monthly salary comes in."

Savings accounts and the Fundão entailed little risk, as they were based on government bonds. All other

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[19] While it is true that the existence of the "cheque especial" -- bank's coverage in case of bouncing for clients who leave the equivalent of 3-5,000 US dollars permanently in the bank -- indicates a potential mistrust of checks, I still found the generalized acceptance very remarkable. All the more so, as I was told that Brazil was a record breaker in bounced checks. At least it breaks its own records. It went from 5 million in 1994 to 6 million in 1995 (Estado de São Paulo, June 27, 1995).

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investments involved greater risk. The dollar market was an absolutely informal expansion, and perhaps the most accessible to the "common man." However, although the dollar seemed a good bet as a stable currency, it was also a market, therefore speculative as well as susceptible to vacillations in the national economy. The commodities market (fundo de commodities) required a minimum investment of 100 US dollars. Its profit (i.e., beyond inflation correction) was three percent per month. That means a 50 percent rate of profit per year, hence big time and foreign investors became very interested.

Medium term (60 day) investments like bank deposit certificates (CDBs) were remunerated at variable interest rates, earning good returns well above inflation. (The initial investment required was low, but the more invested the better the return. These are now defunct.) Whereas in 1991 savings and Fundão had negative balances, meaning their returns fell below the rate of inflation, CDB returns were 26 percent. Better yet, the stockmarket rates were 331 percent! (Veja 1/8/92). Those with lots of money to play the market, or in the know, were in a position to gamble and win high stakes, with these and other options.

Other applications required higher initial investments: most brokers required a 50 million cruzeiro minimum in 1991

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(Veja 1/22/92).[20] The specific market investment was left to the banks' decision to either play the money markets via speculation abroad (carteira livre), or via the stockmarkets (fundo de ações and bolsa de valores). In this case money would remain only for a question of weeks; no one bothered with dividends, noted Belik.

There are parallels between shopping and banking. If grocery shopping prompted "research," applications did all the more so. Account managers at branch banks came to assume new importance, advising clients on such momentous decisions as the commodities applications. (Ironically, the occupation itself is a rather lowly one, though it provides information on financial opportunities which could be put to action.) A systems analyst at a bank told me that people could receive the inflation indexes and marketing reports on the radio on the way to work or through "telemessages," a gift from banks to certain clients. People could also read the "Economia" section of the newspaper they received, which

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[20] In the year 1991, when inflation was nearly 1000 percent, that nice round sum of 50 million had a given dollar equivalent just one day out of 365. My best guess is that the minimum required was between 500-1000 dollars (hence the sum in national currency would have been altered periodically). More interesting than making that estimate is the issue of monetary disunification. That is to say, the dollar was not the referent or equivalent used by Brazilians in many calculations; as a result, conversions were not so readily made. Thus currencies and their related "values" were often different for separate spheres, a phenomenon which somewhat recalls classics from economic anthropology (e.g., Bohannon 1955).

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would appraise which applications or investments were doing better or worse at any given moment.

Further discussion of this complicated system (whose profitability drew in five million dollars daily by 1992, when mostly Brazilian speculators with accounts in foreign banks decided they could risk it back home; Veja, 1/22/92) is beyond my knowledge and perhaps not necessary to make the following point.

This system, presented as a way banks protected clients' money,[21] was highly profitable for banks, who obviously used monies placed in their coffers for their own financial operations. Lest one imagine that, in all, the banks were providing a service, DIEESE reports that during the Plano Cruzado (1986), 100,000 bank employees were fired, many agencies closed, services which had been free were now charged, and clientele were "rigorously" selected (August, 1991). The capacity to profit from inflation continued: during the Plano Collar (1990), profits were "expressive."

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[21] João, high level bank administrator, patiently explained monetary correction and banking protections to me, in order to conclude that in fact to say that inflation was, say, 25 percent in one month was just not the case, as one's money was protected until the moment of cashing it. While it is true that Brazil's recent (mid 20th century) development has been inflationary, and that since its economy is so large and diverse it still produced during the recession, the non-productive speculation, the depressed economy (Brazil fell from 8th to 10th largest economy), the social costs of those suffering with no or little protection for their salaries -- the majority of Brazilians, those laid off -- all these grave problems are ignored with such a formulation.

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Not only did the selection of clients continue, but employees engaged were younger (18-39 years of age) and often women, allowing for lower salaries. Furthermore, banks eliminated unprofitable operations--housing, sanitation, agricultural credit -- in short, financing for social and productive causes (DIEESE September, 1990). Whereas banks are generally seen as lending institutions, in Brazil they are specialists in capturing resources, said an economics professor of USP. The government is a major client for the banks, providing banks with one-third of their profits in 1991 (Veja, 8/11/93). As I have described and found corroborated in more exacting detail in the report which made the front cover of Veja in 1993 (showing superman as a bank carrying a cloud of money, and the ironic caption, "the fabulous, breathtaking, unbelievable success of the hyperinflationary financial system"), banks also accumulated huge profits through the microprocesses of holding momentarily onto monies passing through their system, of offering and then at another moment cutting off the interest/monetary correction paid to clients, and so on.

Whether or not banks produced inflation, they did profit from it, the higher inflation the better, as Veja reports: "In 1992, with inflation over 1000 percent, the banking system profited 56 percent more than in 1991, when inflation was 475 percent. Conclusion: banks make more with high inflation (Veja 8/11/93). In 1970 the financial sector

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held seven percent of the nation's income; by the end of the 1980s, that proportion had grown to 15 percent. In 1991 alone banks grew 26 percent. Profit of the ten largest banks in Brazil was one billion dollars in 1985; that profit reached four billion in 1989 (DIEESE, August 1991). Their profit in 1991 was almost double that of the US (13.6 percent profit versus 7.4 percent in the US; Veja 8/11/93).According to the former president of the Central Bank, Ibrahim Eris, "It's almost impossible for a bank to suffer loss under inflation of Brazil's kind. If some Franciscan monks left the monastery and were called to open a bank, in a few days they would realize a profit" (quoted in Veja 8/11/93). One prosaic way banks increased profits was through the following service. In Brazil, one pays gas, electric, phone and condominium bills at the bank, not to the company directly. Holding onto these monies even for two days, as was usual, afforded great profits. The relation between the crisis and bank profits are also shown by the fact that since the end of high inflation there have been many bank closings. Most significantly, the banking applications contributed greatly to the process of income transfer, and hence widening social inequalities.

Let us return to shopping strategies.

Money and the Perils of Buying on/versus Time (Strategy #5)

It seems obvious that inflation and recession would

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hinder retail sales. Certainly the most obvious strategy was to not buy. Yet, as Helena points out, it was hardly an enlivening one:

> So, you see, you're obliged to wear the same pair of shoes for a year, for six months, depending on how you wear them, or two years at the most. In the past, you'd open the closet, in the middle class, and you had ... I once had four pairs of shoes, a bunch. So, this discouraged [desanimou], you see? There is nothing left for the middle class to do, what for? It's just go to work, come back home tired, then get into a series of things -- for those who don't have a maid for instance, there's a lot to do...

At least two credit practices developed to encourage people to buy. Returning now to the gas station and the post-dated check. The buyer, on June 10th, for instance, fills her tank with gas and pays for it with a check dated June 17th. The congenial gas station owner holds this check until that date and then deposits it. In a monthly inflation of 20 percent, the buyer will have paid roughly five percent less for the gas than the price offered. Forms of this system became commonplace in many retail sales, both in large department stores and in small shops.[22] Thus someone buying an outfit, a pair of shoes or even a shirt would pay half the amount with a check dated that day. At that same

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[22] The post-dated check was to be extinct after the Plano Real (July 1995 forward). However, as the TV channel Globo reported (February 2, 1995): "the government measure to hold down prices confronts the champion of consumption, the post-dated check. In some stores, it accounts for more than 80% of the sales, extending the consumption dreams of many" (emphasis added).

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time of purchase the buyer would also write out a check for the balance due; however, it would be dated at some later moment. Very often in 1993, as this was a full two weeks later, the customer realized a significant discount -- at least this is the logic of this promotional scheme. (Of course, those without checks lacked this option.) We might well suspect, though, that the retail price had already calculated in such devaluations. At any rate, prices placed next to goods in a store window would often have an amount written in big letters, for instance 199. In the small print, one would read 2 x. Graphically that would look like this: 2 x 199. The smaller "2 x" might well be in a faint red, with the price listed (just half) in bold black. In my opinion, this advertising style would trick only momentarily, working more as an attention catcher. A Brazilian informant assures me, however, that it had a persuasive psychological impact: "it gave the illusion of low prices."

Promoting sales of goods with a "discount" if bought outright was another way commerce reached out to consumers. I accompanied Danaka, who was shopping in Embú (an artists' colony and haven of old-style furniture and crafts) for several pieces of furniture for her new home, including a large, country-style table (in vogue among part of the middle class). The array of quotes and deals offered easily

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confused.[23] One merchant quoted a price equivalent to 600 US dollars. He then said, but if bought outright, there would be a 40 percent discount, i.e., bringing the price down to $360. It occurred to me that the $600 price, if broken into two installments and not corrected for inflation, would come to about the same. Such offers did not necessarily fool; rather they offered alternatives to those unable to put forth a given sum of money at one time for a purchase.

By far the trickiest system was the older, more formalized installment buying, or layaway plan (o crediário). Here if an item (let's say a large domestic appliance) was to be paid for in nine monthly installments, the woman-on-the-street would have to have more than a calculating mind to make a good deal; she would have to be clairvoyant. Instead, two scenarios can more readily be envisioned. One is the customer who effectively spends a lot more than the asking price of the item. As Carlos explained: "for example a tape deck for the car. It costs 200 dollars [sic] if you buy it outright; if not, you pay in three installments of 90 dollars." Installment plans could also include interest applied as well as the store's reckoning of future inflation. Again in Brazil, much as

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[23] People never tired of explaining to me that money dealings were far beyond the capabilities of the vast majority of ignorant poor people. I too found the task overly demanding.

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with the weather, the forecast of future inflation is best made after the fact. One might imagine beating the system through use of credit cards -- buy now, pay at that rate at a later date. That is to say, each credit card company bills on a certain date. If you had bought an item long before that, the price would devaluate prior to the billing date, affording you a discount. This tactic was most certainly attempted by smart shoppers, but squashed by retailers, who devised a parallel, higher price for credit card payment.[24] Again this rate was based on merchants' defensive pricing.

One Brazilian family touring New York spoke to a friend in banking recently transferred here. The newcomer hastened to point out the simplicity of buying in the US due to such low credit rates. When told credit card loans ran 15 percent, the informant asked, "per month?" -- and was corrected, no "per year." Interest rates in Brazil are higher per month than US rates per year (for instance, 38 percent per month in 1991; Veja 1/1/92); the annual inflation in the US is less than two digits, whereas such could occur in a week in Brazil. Brazilians have told me their interest rates are the highest in the world.

This was a slight, understandable exaggeration. In May

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[24] While Finance Minister (1993-94), Fernando Henrique Cardoso ruled it illegal to have this dual price system. However, I did not notice any store changing its policy to comply.

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1995 I read that Brazil's interest rate on bank loans was fourth highest in the world. At 64 percent, it was close to Mexico, but both stood behind the former Soviet Union's at 242 percent (Estado de São Paulo, 5/9/95). The rate of 30 percent per month for credit cards was quoted to me in 1995. If Brazil now seems "expensive" to Americans used to spending nothing in "Third World" countries, it is also the case that many things in the US seem cheap, and/or far more accessible to Brazilians. (See chapter 5.)

For the record, anti-usury laws (from the Middle Ages), part of Brazil's constitution until 1964, were reinstated in the 1988 constitution. Article 192, paragraph 3 states that "the real interest rates ... cannot exceed 12 percent per year." As economist Belik inquired rhetorically: "What are they going to do, arrest the president of Bradesco [Brazil's largest private sector bank]?" Indeed. Television commentator Joelmir Betting had this to say of the layaway system in February 1995, after inflation was halted: "Many stores are going to continue layaway payment schedules with interest rates of 15 percent per month or more. In 12 payments, therefore, the consumer buying a stove will have paid for it four times over. In a civilized country [sic], this transaction is not a subject for the Central Bank, but for the Federal Police."

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Taking Turns Buying (Strategy #6)

In response to such challenges to consumption -- and violations to a sense of fair business, a popular practice proliferated in the population. The solution to the problem of wanting to buy something for which one cannot amass the total price at one time was the so called consórcio (consortium) system.

In the consórcio, a given number of people agree to put into a single fund money sufficient to buy an item, not once but as many times as there are participants. The amount contributed has to be adjusted each time for inflation on the price. Those who have joined the consortium put their names in a hat to obtain an order of who receives the pot when. Given the unpredictability of inflation, hence value of money and price of the item, and in some cases, the potential that some will have to default, those closer to the top of the list are in the best position. With inflation corrections as part of the system, the consortium came to be used for the purchase of many things. Developed in popular sectors, where they had been used for large purchases, e.g., cooking gas tanks (which ran about 35 dollars), consortiums had already been extended to middle class life by the 1970s, where they were initially used for a few specific purchases, principally buying cars.

As Renato explained, a consortium is a way to buy a car on a monthly installment/layaway plan.

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> It's a group of 50 people, all make payments, let's say you are buying a car in 50 months, you divide the value of the car into 50 payments, and each participant pays an installment of the equivalent of one-fiftieth of the car. When the price of the car goes up, the payments do accordingly. So you always pay the current price. And when your name is drawn you get your car and continue paying. This is a system which the middle class has used a lot in order to buy cars.

When I inquired as to why the system developed, he explained: "it's because the interest that you pay today in financing is more than the inflation correction on the monthly payments for the car. If you go through financing, the company will require 60 percent interest or 50, when the monthly inflation might be 30 percent, 20 percent. [...] You can't buy a car on installments, you don't know where the payments will end up."[25]

This system therefore initially developed in response to lack of affordable financing; it expanded among the middle class during the crisis in response to greater and more diverse needs. Maria Regina and Ricardo reported that the consortium can function for many ends. They used a consortium to buy a microwave oven, redo their kitchen and even to buy chocolates. That is to say, a related practice at a simpler level is pooling of funds in order to buy goods available at a better price only if bought in bulk. At the school where Regina works, staff routinely buy in gross and

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[25] Although it may seem contradictory, in fact, car dealerships also advertise and organize consortium sales.

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then subdivide. She leaves a large box of chocolates out for their three girls. They can eat it all right away, or bit by bit, but have learned that when the chocolates are gone, that's it for the month.

In review, we can consider the practices thus far presented as novel: whether by expansion of practices already existing, but more prevalent in other social sectors (like the consortium and, as we will see shortly, immediatism in buying), or by practice unique to the class (as in the elaborate comparison shopping, stockpiling, use of checks and money markets).

Consumers Retrained?

After this detailed discussion of shopping and banking practices, the question arises: how did all this "sit with" the people in the study? This question is difficult and perhaps best assessed through indirection rather than through comments directly made. Chapter 3 provided several indications of how informants verbally counteracted the "hidden injuries of class" with assertions of their status via culture. But it is worth outlining the types of responses given in the course of discussions on these strategies.

There were those of the upper middle class who made it clear that they had not been particularly involved in such measures. Danaka said at the end of the interview focusing

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on the middle class crisis that she was afraid she had not been helpful to me. She was among the few who did not give personal examples of difficulties or of economizing strategies. A social worker, Danaka spoke of how poor people were affected. Others (as noted in chapter 3) pointed out their privilege in a society of great poverty and/or that they were not as materialist as others. Still others avoided the topic of economizing perhaps less out of embarrassment than that it had become too tiresome.[26]

Not surprisingly, it appears that those of lesser means and full-time housewives made the most direct comments on economizing. As noted in an earlier chapter, housewives affirmed the importance of their role as economizers. Still, a few of these informants, like Maria do Carmo, expressed frustration with the time-consuming efforts. Thus Aninha once lamented, "at times I feel like a witch for controlling so much [ás vezes me sinto bruxa de tanto controlar]".

To other middle class people long familiar with buying restrictions, economizing may appear to be just a "fact" (a part of the class "habitus"). Even if economizing as a whole was erroneously presented as new, it is still instructive to note that people's impressions were that the

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[26] In this group I would also place a few who distanced themselves from Brazilians whom they said simply complain without doing anything. This grin-and-bear-it position was held by some Spiritists and some nouveaux riche informants.

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crisis had prompted this, and/or that people were trying to make an impression on me that such economizing had not been necessary to them in the past. Either way, this "becoming middle class" (as I saw it) or moving down in the world, perhaps, in theirs, was presented by informants as a result of the crisis. While counting in distorted recollections of easy times in the past, it remains true that food and other household goods used to be cheap for middle class people, but this has changed. When asked what expenses weighed heaviest on their budgets, many informants said food.[27] To be obliged to count pennies, even for food, is, if I may put it this way, a mark of de-class-ification (or of being de-classed).

Most often, informants presented the economizing practices as due to the crisis, an external cause and then, like Adalberto below, would launch immediately into a diatribe against the government. Adalberto was very detailed in his descriptions, yet worse than unenthusiastic about the budgeting control one derives from comparison shopping. He said:

> Control between quotation marks, because one supermarket asks one price, another asks an

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[27] As noted earlier, Brazil has had price controls on basic food since 1938. According to the "Engel curve," those with higher incomes spend relatively less on food than others. Simmel (1990:219) also pointed out that when there is a lid put on prices of basic foodstuffs, this also helps the wealthy, who then have even more discretionary income.

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> entirely different one, so you are obliged to go all over, worse than a peon [que nem um pião aí] to get the cheapest things. Now, from this perspective, what is the vision that I have for the future? Very bad, I don't believe in absolutely anything more that this government might do, not the FHC [plan: i.e., the Plano Real], nor any other. I don't believe in absolutely anything.

Their understanding of downward mobility differentiates this middle class group of people from the groups Newman (1988) studied who underwent downward mobility in the US. As Newman reports, such misfortunes occur to individuals or to certain occupational groups, which hides their prevalance. This obscurity, coupled with the ideology of the self-made man, leads to an interpretation of downward mobility as individually caused. Brazil's crisis affected the majority of the population, obviating the need for self-blame. (However, see chapter 7 for discussion of ambivalence.) For instance, as noted elsewhere, Euclides told me in our first meeting that his salary was one-quarter of what it had been twenty years ago. If any blame could be put, he placed it on the government -- for not only did his salary decline due to inflation; during the dictatorship he had been fired from his high paying job with Petrobrás (the national oil and gas company) for previous membership in a student organization.

The concluding section of this chapter and chapter 7 will take up informant political responses in detail. For now, let us simply underscore that one common reaction by informants was to give examples of "absurd" prices or

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practices, cite the external cause, the government, and to criticize it. Whether good-humored or caustic, such critical statements surely provided one (dignified) means of "venting" indignation at this declassification. As suggested in reference to the depreciation of money, one reaction was registered on a national, not a personal level. That is to say, for many the wound of the crisis was to national honor. Brazilians have long prided themselves on their ingenuity in getting through or extracting themselves from difficult situations, even turning them into positive ones. This knack, known as the "jeitinho brasileiro," had soured by the 1990s.

In a discussion of the transnational interests promoting contemporary forms of consumption, Rouse (1995) speaks of "retraining consumers,"[28] or what might more broadly be called reformulations of habitus. By arguing that one principle guided the many practices, that is, to convert away from the national currency, it may seem as though I am imputing a certain "rationality" to Brazilians, making each one an "homo economicus." To that I would reply with how I imagine Brazilians would. The idea of rational shopping -- any Brazilian would laugh at such an ascription. Even if one were really up to date, errors were likely. The great price variance and many methods of buying and banking

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[28] This is coupled with "restructuring desire," which in similar fashion, I deal with in chapter 5.

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made navigating through the shopping system and money market games perilous. And as we will see shortly, due to government interventions, the rules changed unexpectedly. So what worked here, won't there, what worked today, won't tomorrow. The system challenged "rationality."

Brazilians would also object to the attribution of rationality for another reason. It is not that they did not act rationally with their self-interested economizing strategies -- they had to do that. What irked among other things, as I have suggested, was being reduced to that. Rather than comforting consumer fantasies, the immediate and recurring shopping experience was of preoccupation, calculation, worry, uncertainty. As inflation came increasingly to saturate daily life with financial issues, so too informant attitudes towards shopping strategies registered frustration, resentment and anger. Discussions of inflation and money matters prompted protestations of unreality, senselessness, wrongness.

Informants and focus group participants often made the point that bank applications for "interest" were an "illusion." As Maria Cecília put it:

> Savings is a very illusory business. All this application of money here in Brazil by the middle class, it is a mechanism for you to not lose money, because if you leave money at home, you lose -- 30 or 40 percent at the end of the month. All this craziness of going out, applying, savings, CDB, is a mechanism for you not to lose what you already have. This is nothing that is going to help you live better four or five or ten years from now. This money that you're simply

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> fighting not to lose, not to devaluate, it's nothing that is going to increase.

As described earlier, the durability of Brazil's inflation is clearly related to the nonproductive, speculative financial market known disparagingly in Portuguese as the ciranda financeira. As ciranda is a ring-around-the-rosy type game, the phrase condemns the vicious circle of financial markets. The success of these national and multinational banks is monumentally displayed on Avenida Paulista, formerly a street lined with coffee baron mansions, now São Paulo's Wall Street. Referring to one of its most imperious buildings, headquarters of the bank Safra, a friend of mine said, "only in Saudi Arabia..." -- would such a monument find its rival in presentation of wealth, is the way I believe he intended the phrase to be completed. For such services -- to deposit and pay bills, Brazilians had to wait in lines in lofty banks like this one, or more modest ones, in a process endlessly repeated, reaching heights of lost time around the first of the month and when the utilities bills were due (often the tenth of the month). One major headache produced through inflation was the payment of monthly installment plan bills. A novelty in Brazilians banks was a counter set up by the waiting line for customers to consult a clerk who would make the calculations from relevant tables in order to update their regular bills and translate them into the currency of the moment. Euclides commented drily that this lost time in

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bank lines was itself inflationary.[29]

It is interesting to compare subjective evaluations of money in contexts of high inflation. Tracing Israel's period of high inflation, Dominguez (1990) discusses the monetary disunification that occurred as the dollar took the place of the national currency as the repository of value. She notes that as dollarization became the norm, Israelis referred to the devalorized national currency as "not real." Unlike Israel, where dollarization was de facto, and Argentina, where it was de jure, Brazil's inflation was singular for not reverting to another currency; instead the banking system developed means to minimize direct use of cash. In this situation, Brazilians also conveyed a strong sense that the monetary situation was "illusory" or "unreal" (read: shouldn't be real). They further criticized the mechanisms and institutions which profited from the chaotic economic environment. However, their own economizing, as we have seen, developed through consumer reliance on large corporations and banks.

Douglas and Isherwood (1979) argue that the function of goods is to make sense. In a place where money went awry we see that it, too, is quite significant to people's sensibilities and evaluations of reality. Crudely put, when

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[29] Business owners had to deposit money constantly, at least once a day, to avoid leaving cash "out" devaluating. Correction: not all Brazilians had to wait in line. Some firms employed "despachantes" (dispatchers) to execute these payments for their business and for certain of their staff.

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money loses its functions of being a standard, measure and store of value -- and all these were lost or drastically reduced in Brazil's megainflation -- the (economic) world -- and more broadly the social context, seemed unreal, topsy-turvy, wrong to people. People were not, however, so deluded as to reify money, as to imagine that the problem and power rested in money; rather, they drew connections to the governmental institutions and agents they felt were responsible for contradicting the economic system. Perhaps the best way to end this section and introduce the next, is to recall Walter Benjamin: "Never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power" (cited in Lave 1988:313-314).

Part III: Government Intervention: (Baixar um Plano)

It would in at least one respect be misleading to say the systems of handling shopping and money in the crisis described thus far became fully routine. This would imply stability. If a practice once became entrenched to the extent of being accomplished without premeditation or reflection, it was later disrupted. Actors' attempts to impose control, their daily "tactics" (de Certeau 1984) in the fight against inflation, were often thwarted and/or had to be abandoned or revised with each new government

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intervention. For it was not just that new tactics were devised or had to be incorporated into daily life; it was that things started out one way, and then, with the series of government "stabilization" plans, these tactics had to change, and things had to be done another way. These disruptive changes occurred over and over in a period of less than ten years; as noted earlier, there were nine plans between 1986 and 1993. Several people noted how one would go to bed with the situation one way, only to wake up the next to an entirely new one. As a focus group participant sardonically put it, comparing the government officials to little elves or mice: "While you're sleeping, they are up, tracing out their plans. The following day, you turn on the news, the TV, at seven in the morning, and you find out everything they planned and did during the night -- <u>against you</u>" (February 26, 1987; emphasis added).[30]

This last section of the chapter draws out more directly the connections between the instability of middle class "private" life and "public" developments. Brazil's economic instability came to be characterized by spasmodic, surprise government plans, which provoked dramatic changes for daily life. These interventions created very specific conditions and circumstances which prompted frequent

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[30] This and all other citations from focus groups are from Standard, Ogilvy and Mather, São Paulo.

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critical evaluations by Brazilians -- about themselves, each other and the nation. I consider how the first government plan, the Plano Cruzado, affected the middle class sense of community, and their political sentiments and acts. (Subsequent chapters deal with two other major plans, the Planos Collor and Real.) For this analysis, I draw mainly from focus group material recorded during the period, which provides a lively contemporaneous body of material for analysis of Brazilian middle class responses, noteworthy for their ethico-political commentary.

Plano Cruzado

The first government plan to combat inflation and a "populist" one, the famous Plano Cruzado, froze all prices and salaries overnight on February 28, 1986, and inaugurated a new national currency, the cruzado.[31] The freeze (and fixing of the exchange rate) was an "unorthodox" measure against inflation, aiming to reduce or eliminate inflation (DIEESE March, 1986). Orthodox measures reduce fiscal expenditures, decrease money supply, and apply wage and price restraints (Cardoso 1992). This plan was an ingenious and perhaps necessarily unorthodox way of countering Brazil's form of inflation. A few words on inflation vocabulary are in order.

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[31] The word cruzado refers to an old Portuguese coin; it also means crusade, crossing and cross, as in boxing.

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Inflations are different beasts in different places. In Brazil, we are not talking only about simple demand inflation, that is, limited supply and high demand. Rather, in general, inflation involves a devaluation of the currency, hence a rise in prices. More crucially, Brazil suffered from "inertial inflation" or "stagflation" as it was also called. This form of inflation is one in which public policy mechanisms buffer the impact of inflation -- yet in so doing, allow for it to endure. A major buffer against inflation is called monetary correction, or indexation of the economy, that is wage and price adjustments for inflation applied with reference to inflation indexes. These anti-inflationary policies have been in place in Brazil since the military dictatorship (against the high inflation of the early 1960s and later against the oil crisis). Once acclaimed for being a form of social welfare, it is now argued that they, more than budget deficits, are primarily responsible for inflation in Brazil (Cardoso 1992, Bruno 1993, Sachs and Zini 1995, Garcia 1995).

As the magazine Veja (6/9/93) caustically described indexation for lay readers, "This is the mechanism of automatically correcting the prices and contracts with reference to inflation indexes. It protects those with money to receive and prejudices those with bills to pay, principally salaried people, whose earnings aren't indexed."

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That is, the bill you receive would have been adjusted for inflation; your salary adjustment might not come until months later. Inflation one month is 25 percent; your bank adjusts at 22 percent, and so on. There was always a lag time between corrections, and adjustments usually didn't favor the ordinary citizen. During the 1980s there was a decrease in lag time, but the protective mechanisms were never simultaneous, nor evenly corrected from sector to sector of the economy. Different sectors had different indexes (totalling 11) and time frames for adjustment. (Indeed, in this flight and chase syndrome time became the key element.) One might not be surprised that, as public enterprises in Brazil, utilities prices were controlled centrally. But the government also determined when and by what percent private schools could raise their tuitions. In a word, this is a highly regulated economy, with a long history of governmental controls on national development[32] and, since the 1980s, public emergency measures to prevent hyperinflation. This term describes a short term, acute situation lacking such regulatory mechanisms. In hyperinflation, the national currency becomes useless, a standard value is lost, and the society reverts to a foreign

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[32] Though denationalization has received middle class support since the late 1980s, and was a key part of Collor's campaign platform, it did not occur during his presidency, nor with the vice-president who replaced Collor, Itamar Franco. Privatization, even of "strategic" companies such as telecommunications, began in the Cardoso presidency, 1995 forward.

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currency. Though hyperinflation has been averted in Brazil, it became another beast: inertial inflation. (Garcia [1995] proposed "megainflation.") Besides being distinguished from hyperinflation due to the fact that the indexation puts some "reins" on inflation, the existence of various indexes gives agents very different ideas about the inflation rate, hence uncertainty, defensive price mark ups and great variance in price (Garcia, ibid, 22-23; Sá Earp 1993), as described earlier.

Provided such information, outsiders can easily wonder: Why not stop all this nonsense?! Why not have everyone just stop raising their prices?! Indeed, in lay terms, Sarney's plan tried to do just that--by imposing measures requiring all to stop raising prices. This unorthodox/heterodox plan instantly earned the minister of finance who designed the plan, Dilson Funaro, admiration for "manag[ing] something no one thought possible in Brazil: he's a populist Finance Minister" (Veja March 19, 1986).[33]

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[33] Indeed it was populist in some other senses. About five months into the plan, in an effort to contain spending, the Sarney government decreed: a compulsory loan surcharge on the price of fuel and on car sales -- loan, because in principle this would be repaid after by the government after a year; a tax on international air and sea travel; and a sharp tax increase on short term, less than 60 day bank investments. These measures clearly left "the people" out of it and taxed the better off (Veja 7/30/86). It also took the wind out of the sails of banks, which, as I never tire of recalling, were making stupendous profits out of the inflation (see Veja 7/2/86).

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The Public Responses

The first important response to the Plano Cruzado was a frenzy of consumer sprees. This was not surprising, since household real income did increase, especially for popular sectors (Cardoso 1992). As of April some economists were worried that excessive consumption in itself would provoke inflation (demand inflation). The excesses ranged from meat consumption, which doubled in the middle class (DIEESE, July 1986), to amassing consumer durables.

Another response to this government "package" was consumer "activism." President José Sarney, in a manner of speaking, made all citizens his inspection agents. Popularly called "fiscais de Sarney," all citizens were empowered to denounce any store which committed an infraction, i.e., raised its prices. A store could be closed down if reported (to SUNAB). According to testimony from focus groups of the time (April, 1986), women were the most ardent "fiscais de Sarney." According to an all-male, upper middle class focus group, this was so not solely because women handled more household shopping than men, but apparently because this would not be a ... manly ... thing to do. When the all-women focus groups of the time were asked whether they were "fiscais de Sarney," all assented. These women said they had almost been afraid to read the papers, and had become ashamed of being Brazilian but now were relieved and happier.

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In contrast, note the following interchange in a focus group of upper middle class men (April 16, 1986). Said one: "Who closed the supermarkets at the beginning of this plan? The masses ("o povão"). My wife, yours -- not so far. As for us [men], wouldn't hear of it ("A gente, nem se fala"). Because I am not ever going to show up at a supermarket and yell. I couldn't face it. I'd be ashamed." In response, another man said: "I simply turn my back and don't buy." But then another added: "I fought with the guy, but call up the agents, no. For the love of god, the guy was marking up the prices right in front of me!" Said the first later on, and others agreed: "From the beginning of the plan, the one who made it work, who took it to the streets, was the woman." But still later another man said: "let me tell a joke that a friend of mine told me. The most corrupt people in Brazil have always been inspectors. Today we have 130 million corrupt people." (The group laughs.) And at the end, the men lament the necessity of counting pennies. Says one: "now that I am more worried about what I spend, I feel poorer."

The problem of shame arose in a similar context in another all-male focus group. A man (in a middle to upper middle class group) confessed he had reported a butcher in his neighborhood to SUNAB, but had later felt ashamed. He didn't explain the reasons for this, but one might guess one reason to be that class-related dignity prohibited public

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display of money troubles -- in this light the women's acts become a convenient way to sidestep the issue. That is to say, male dignity was preserved by displacing the economizing onto women. He may have felt ashamed for perhaps two other reasons: the severing of a relationship with the (male) butchers and/or perhaps a sense that he had acted against the wrong target. In this case, the "right" target would have been, not the retailer at the end of the line, but the supplier or the government itself.

Being truly a surprise measure, the Plano Cruzado came at a moment when some merchants had not yet "corrected" their prices for inflation, so those items frozen at low, devalued prices especially hurt some storeowners and producers of certain items. Some real scarcity did result from excessive buying. Yet both real and artificial scarcity at times led to blackmarketeering, referred to as usury fees (ágio). Meat, chicken and dairy products, which were central to the consumer jubilee, became scarce. Without wishing to reinstate a need/luxury distinction, it is worth noting that meat, poultry and dairy products became at times absolutely and relatively scarce. (These products are staples for middle class consumers, but often difficult for others, whose poverty restricts them to rice and beans.)

The recollections of Euclides and Gilda underscore that the plan was for the people but provoked shortages and blackmarketeering. Euclides immediately characterized it as

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> ...populist, it was intended to please the people, it raised everyone's salary. If I had to buy something over time, the inflation projection lowered that debt. If on the first of April, I had to pay 100, I would pay 85; there was a 15 percent discount. A month later it was 15 percent lower still. So the deal doubled. Whoever had money, had more [quem tinha dinheiro, o dinheiro sobrava].

It is easy to imagine a large consumer increase, after the preceding period of "repressed consumption." When Gilda recalled the "fiscais de Sarney," the following discussion ensued:

> Euclides: What happens when there's a shortage of a product? The price goes up, isn't that so? There was a supermarket in Curitiba that raised its prices one night, and suddenly a guy appears saying, 'I'm a fiscal de Sarney, I'm here in his name, and I close this supermarket.'
>
> Me: What guy? Anyone?
>
> Euclides: Yeah, any citizen. He closed the store, and the people, everyone got together, you know? The press covered it, Sarney covered it. All the merchants, they went under [ficava com a maré baixa], everyone was an inspector [fiscal], everyone who went to buy, went with a list [of published prices]. [...] There were shortages, because the demand was big. You can imagine with this mass of population that hadn't been in the consumers' market, they suddenly have a bunch of money, and go after this consumption.
>
> Me: So it was a party!
>
> Gilda: It was horrible.
>
> Euclides: There was meat shortage. The butcher shops that followed the rules could hardly sell. I remember that a kilo of <u>alcatra</u> [prime cut of beef] cost 31 cruzeiros -- that was the suppliers' price.
>
> Me: There was no profit.

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> Euclides: There was no way to sell. On the other hand, there were people who blackmarketed, who bought from a supplier that didn't pay taxes, did the transaction in the middle of the night, and the guy sold. If an "inspector" arrived, he'd buy the inspector. I remember that in the Plano Cruzado, my recollection was of lines at the butcher store, the whole day long.

Other informants also especially recalled the long lines at butcher shops, and the scramble to get milk before it ran out for the day. Gilda remembered that there were restrictions prohibiting people from buying in bulk, yet, the shortages remained.

> Gilda: It was almost Christmas and there was no sweetened condensed milk, which we use a lot, and there wasn't any!

> Euclides: The price of cars skyrocketed, it was all with mark ups. The dealer, he'd pass an increase along to the salesman, by charging interest, and the salesman did, too. A lot of people dealt like that, under the counter, selling outside the list-price, all hidden, and got rich doing so. So you ask, was it hard for people? No, some people got rich. ... In Brazil, social mobility, it was an exceptional thing, quite variable.

Transcriptions from focus groups after the Plano Cruzado had run its course show references to blackmarketing were frequent and provoked great commentary. As a rule, men and women emphasized not so much the wrongness of the retail merchants -- who were often caught in a bind with suppliers' prices so high that the frozen retail prices would afford no profit; rather, they censured the willingness of middle class people to go along with it. The most forceful statement against those who accepted the illegal price hikes

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was from this all-female group: "It's a [group of] people for whom it does not occur that in buying [at the blackmarket price] this will automatically make it impossible for those other people who cannot pay the excess charge to ever have the item" (February 25, 1987). Again, the item in question was usually meat. Discussants emphasized the initial solidarity among people and then decried the ensuing loss of it with antisocial "salve se quem puder," that is, each man for himself or dog eat dog practices. This example raises the issue of ethics, a recurring preoccupation.

Strategies Inverted

The Plano Cruzado led to social or ethical dilemmas, such as competition over goods. Referring to the lack of solidarity, one woman (in a focus group of February 25, 1987, i.e., a year after the plan was implemented) recalled the following supermarket conflict she had witnessed. A woman in the checkout line has six liters of milk. A second woman who has arrived after the stock has run out implores her for one. The first woman refuses, saying she has children. The second says she has a baby. Said the observer, "the people around her found this [refusal] revolting." A focus group participant asks: "Was she [the woman with six liters] Brazilian?" The observer responds, "I don't know, I didn't ask." The participant says, "I

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think that if she were Brazilian, she would have given it." Says another, "Actually I was just thinking the contrary." Said yet another, "It would depend on one's upbringing." "Yeah," another agrees. And then the witness decides: "She must have been 'nortista' or something like that, from her appearance." At this moment the focus group moderator, evidently finding the conversation to be going off topic, interrupts.

I found this interlude fascinating. Although one might say the women's judgment against the ungenerous woman was due to an ideology of motherhood, it is interesting that national identity is the explicit referent. The consensus emerges that Brazilians would normally share and be generous with respect to children's needs, until one person questions this. At this moment, the consternation this moral dilemma provoked in the group appears to have prompted the storyteller to quell doubts as to the character of the culprit hoarding milk: being "Nortista," that is, Northerner, a conclusion she says was drawn from appearance. Whether or not her memory is accurate, the explanation produced (i.e., even if not recalled) would ostensibly have derived from a reasoning of "dark, therefore Northern."[34]

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[34] If this was a recollection, she would also have heard and recalled the distinctive accent. One of the many problems with focus group transcripts is of course we don't know much at all about the people beyond simple class designations and occupations. Also with respect to what participants say, it is obviously impossible to probe for further details after the fact.

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In any case, for the witness of the event, as for most of the others, such an antisocial, anti-children act could not be done by anyone of their ilk -- hence not by a Brazilian, at least not one of their region or color (which comes to the same for them?!).

Most often the era of the Plano Cruzado is remembered for benefiting "the people" due to price freezes, as Euclides pointed out. Initially, it eliminated the need to make consuming price comparisons and allowed for consumer sprees. However, for middle class people who economized but still had discretionary income, the plan became more a hassle than a help, as it soon entailed waiting in lines, food shortages and the dilemma of black marketeering. Furthermore, it was only a partial stop to inflation since the price freezes affected only a finite array of goods -- the "basic basket" of food and household items, leaving unchecked "nonessentials" like clothing and shoes. The plan, then, did have a populist side to it, and contrariwise curbed those with higher consumption potential. In any event, it backfired. By mid-1987, prices had skyrocketed, moving Brazil into inflation over 50 percent per month.

Why did the Plano Cruzado fail? According to Cardoso (1992), "among the factors leading to the failure of the Cruzado Plan, the most prominent was the overheating of the economy through loose fiscal and monetary policies...(1992:

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75).[35] She summarizes that "with the budget deficit left untouched and growing trade surpluses, all the three plans[36] amounted to attempts to stop inflation by decree" (1992:176, emphasis added). In crude terms, the solution of shouting "everyone stop!" requires a de facto agreement of the agents concerned. As Sachs and Zini explain, "These plans (wage and price control plans) collapsed for several reasons. [...] On the political side, they engendered significant pressures from affected business interests that undermined public support and credibility in the controls. Economically, controls led to shortages, black markets and growing economic distortions with each month in which controls were in force" (1995:8).[37]

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[35] Cardoso continues: "On the fiscal side, tax revenues rose disappointingly little, revenues of state-owned companies were hurt by the price freeze, spending ran higher than anticipated and subsidies, cut during 1983-1984, staged a come back in 1986. The public sector wage bill also increased. Loose monetary policy produced very low interest rates that permitted firms lacking confidence in the program to build up speculative stocks. Furthermore, the increase in real wages...and the fast-growing economy rapidly expanded wages and sustained a consumers' boom" (1992:175).

[36] The major subsequent plans of the Sarney administration, Plano Bresser (1987) and Plano Verão (1989), included price freezes as well. Both failed. Inflation in 1987 was 400 percent; in 1988, 900 percent and in Sarney's last year of office, 2000 percent DIEESE: September 1993).

[37] Sachs and Zini continue: "Since Brazil was relatively cut off from world markets, both because of structure and policy, imports did not generally relieve the shortages. Also very important, the controls tended to turn the terms-of-trade against the government sector. Private prices kept creeping up while state-enterprises were held in place... In this way, the price controls themselves enlarged

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The Plano Cruzado and later plans with price freezes were intentionally abrupt, so as to prevent last minute mark-ups. In turn, rumor of a plan could prompt mark-ups to avoid what had occurred for businesses in the Cruzado period. The surprise tactics led to boomerang effects. Overall, the plans were unpredictable and could create opposite conditions from those preceding. Thus the Plano Cruzado disrupted the middle class strategies of savings and stockpiling, making the one unnecessary and the other impossible for a time; the Plano Collor, as we will see in chapter 6, defeated both. Through the several "stabilization plans," attempts at control or beating the system were periodically thwarted, prompting still other tactics and accompanying attitudes.

A legacy perhaps dating from the Plano Cruzado forward is the so-called "fever to consume" (febre de consumo), a malady said to afflict many middle class Brazilians. Indeed, this was perhaps the most criticized "strategy" in relation to the crisis. Stated otherwise, unpredictability most likely prompted a tactic called "immediatism" in buying. Although unplanned, this refers not to impulse buying exactly, rather to opportunistic shopping due to a serendipitus combination of having the money at the time a good offer is made. Sounds simple, but it was rare and

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the public-sector deficits, and thereby further undermined the controls" (1995:8).

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unforeseeable.[38]

It is certainly logical to suppose this practice dates from the Plano Cruzado when suddenly, and no one knew for how long, money was stable and prices were accessible, and then that the practice developed in the overriding instability of the economy. Here is the testimony, perhaps rather extreme, of a woman who participated in a focus group one year after the Plano Cruzado:

> I changed my thinking about life lately. Until, let's say, about two years ago, I prepared myself for the future, I was a very secure person. I achieved a lot with this, but I then came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth it, for the times we were going through. [...] So, today I live for the day. So, let's say, if I think I have to have a car, I don't want to hear about tomorrow, and what I'm going to have to eat. Today I'm going to have a car. If I hit upon the idea of taking a trip, I'm going to catch a plane and travel, you see? I don't want to hear about getting into debt, what is happening is I'm living for the day (2/26/87).

This practice likens middle class people to those for whom having money is always unpredictable and savings and planning inapplicable. A pithier, perhaps more universal explanation for the spending strategy was offered by a female focus group participant in 1986 and noted in the introduction. The full statement was "No one is concerned to save money because we know that <u>saving or not is the same thing</u>" (emphasis added).

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[38] This and other plans had some topsy turvy aspects, such that new cars were fixed at lower prices than used ones (<u>Veja</u> 7/3/86).

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Folk versus Erudite Models of Exchange during Inflation

This chapter has shown that middle class people developed "survival strategies" in relation to the inflation. At times these were akin to those of poor people but novel to the middle class, and at times they were new responses, specific to the times and their class. Middle class livelihoods and pocketbooks were better protected than those of the poor; however, the former were not at all consistently protected from inflation. Disasters did occur to some, the Collor confiscation of bank account holdings (to be discussed in chapter 6) affected all, and it is also the case that most middle class people did not have the potential to benefit from the inflation, as did the wealthy.

That noted, it is instructive to compare erudite models of inflationary practices, which focus on governmental (indexation/monetary correction) and banking policies (demonetization) as negative adaptations to inflation with the judgments of the middle class "folk" model.

Economists chart the increasing rate of buying consumer durables; yet do so merely to register the impact of inflation on the population. What they call "flight into consumer goods" reveals an avoidance of money. Monetary correction and banking procedures seem to have been the more important culprits for furthering inflation. Economists' analyses focus both on the long term effect of monetary correction, i.e., turning high inflation from an acute into

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a chronic form, and likewise the role of "demonetization" in the financial sector in making Brazil's inflation chronic. The means that banks allowed people to avoid direct use of money (by using "inside money, substantially delinked from the monetary base" as Sachs and Zini [1995:5] put it) were identified as important for the entrenchment of chronically high inflation. Precisely these protective-fostering forms -- inertial inflation -- distinguished Brazil from those in which the rapid devaluation of the national currency prompted dollarization, as in Bolivia, or hyperinflation in general (Cardoso 1992, Sachs and Zini 1995, Garcia 1995).

Social scientists taking a political economy perspective have characterized inflation as a kind of distributive conflict. Singer highlights the state's role in general as redistributor of income, and as arbitor of distributive conflicts over the material wealth of a society (1988:94 ff). Such a situation is aggravated with the income concentration increases resulting from inflationary processes. In Singer's view, inflation is a "perverted form," one which diverts or disguises class contradictions (1988:133).

In Cultura da Inflação (Vieira et al, 1993) anthropologists, sociologists, economists, political scientists and others analyze the cultural impact of the crisis. Economist Fábio Sá Earp, cited earlier, defines inflation as "a kind of social relation through which is

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expressed the conflict over the distribution of the product" (1993:96). This conflict involves the whole society, yet most unfairly, the poorest citizens. According to another economist, Fernando de Holanda Barbosa: "in fact, inflation is an aggression on citizenship, because it consists in a tribute paid fundamentally by the poorest sectors of the population, without there being a legal norm established for this taxation" (1993:33). Wealthier sectors, he adds, "have access to mechanisms which give them greater protection against the devaluations" (1993:39). And Barbosa points out, following Singer, that inflation could be "the most perverse manner of resolving distributive conflicts in society" (1993:35).

The data shown here on consumption in daily life demonstrates this process of social differentiation on the "micro" level. The various practices by very different and at times conflicting agents and institutions -- bankers and banks, merchants and stores, and different classes of consumers need to be viewed as unavoidably (and for some shrewdly) engaged in (contributing to, provoked by) the insidious process of income concentration. The inflation crisis exacerbated long held class inequalities. A World Bank study of 1996 ranked Brazil first in the world in income concentration; it had been second.

In what I am calling the middle class "folk" model, blame is placed variously on the government, financial

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speculators, retailers and buyers. Here I would like to note evaluations of spending: the middle class perspective was marked by a far sharper criticism of the rank and file responsibility, and by ambivalence.

At some moments, informants noted that the possibility of real estate investment -- buying a home -- was out of reach, given the absence of any reasonable financing and the crisis. Even without the possibility of resale, buying durable goods was deemed more than valid; it was necessary: Why let money literally burn a whole in your pocket unspent? If much of the banking services only provided "illusory" savings, then why not spend on real goods? (For further discussion of retaining value in goods, see chapter 5.) This type of commentary is similar to that cited of focus group members who justified spending and immediatism after the Plano Cruzado.

The recourse to consumer goods could be defended -- and was by informants. At other moments, however, they censured Brazilians for consumerism. The expression "fever to consume" and "consumerist" are disparaging of consumers. If in the US or Europe, criticism of consumerism might be aimed at environmental problems as well as at self-indulgent people, consumerism in Brazil could be seen by the populace as inflationary, hence as damaging to the national economy and society. Thus informants (and focus group participants) decried businesses which "passed along" inflationary

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increases to the next in line (called in Portuguese "repassar os preços"), i.e., the wholesaler to the retailer and (s)he in turn to the customer, as well as consumers who paid blackmarket prices or "overheated" the economy by overspending and stockpiling. An expression which conveys the notion that the rank and file population furthered the inflation was "culture of inflation" (cultura da inflação).

One important middle class response to the inflation crisis was a growing negative self-evalution of the Brazilian community. Extended to the national level, as it often was, there was a sense that during the crisis people were behaving in a divisive, anti-community, anti-solidary way. The community effort to enforce the Plano Cruzado backfired. Attempts to save oneself went highly remarked as anti-social, as shown by the censuring description of "salve-se quem puder," whereas the communitarian, group buying efforts (consortium) received no honorable mention. Some found the anti-social behavior to be an inversion, a de-characterization of national identity; others found it to be typical (see chapter 7). In this context of deepening social inequalities, condemnation of self and other for participating in the "culture of inflation" and antisocial practice was widespread.

Besides this heightening social malaise, the intensified inflation following the failure of the Plano Cruzado provoked mistrust and anxiety, as in following

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comment of a male focus group

> At the time of the Cruzado, we were hopeful, but today, I believe it's disillusionment. If we were to really analyze it, we are worse off than at the change to the Cruzado. The situation is complicating, without brakes. I say this from the system of my wages, expenses, it's so much to keep my children and to maintain myself. [...] The thing busted [descambou]. If there's no way to put a brake on this, who knows where we'll end up (3/17/87).

With each ensuing failed plan, with each "maxi" devaluation, such an attitude could only be exacerbated. Why trust banks with money that can be depreciated with lower than inflation correction, taxed or even confiscated? This "last straw" of governmental intervention provoked the greatest middle class responses, from mistrust and anger to direct actions against the government, as chapter 6 reports. After so many disturbances damaging to the Brazilian society, it is no wonder that in 1993 my informants did not want to hear of another plan. The crisis era bred strong middle class disapproval of and disillusionment with the state and its politics. Instead, as I will discuss in chapter 7, middle classes voiced support for small business, as well as privatization and the opening of the market to foreign imports.

In Cultura da Inflação, social scientists of various disciplines converge on a reading of the impact of the inflation crisis that matches that of informants. They note that the era bred "mistrust" (desconfiança), doubt, uncertainty, creating, as one put it, an "ethical crisis,

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associated with the culture of inflation... [which] corrodes modernizing values, like those of citizenship, discipline, individual responsibility in the face of universal norms, etc. and also corrupts traditional values that sustain the relational society" (R. César Fernandes 1993:46). If the erudite position gives less attention than did informants to the invidious little man practices than to powerful agents determining the course and duration of inflation, both the folk and the erudite models coincide on the corrosive social and political effects.

I have tried to show that a look at the "subjective" conditions of daily life offers a means of analyzing the relationship between consumption, class and the nation-state. Chapters 6 and 7 will take up political implications of the crisis in detail. For the moment, let us simply recall that the period under study, whether viewed from the 1960s economic miracle or from the global and national financial processes of the 1980s forward, major changes in the national course have occurred, implicating the work, private lives and futures of more than a generation of Brazilians.

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Chapter 5
The International in Daily Life

I want to see Uncle Sam play the tambourine and dance the samba.
Refrain: Brasil, heat up your tambourines,
light up the area
for us to samba.

From "Brasil Pandeiro" [Brazil Tambourine] by Assis Valente, from the album Os Novos Baianos, circa 1972.

Accounts of living through high inflation and recession normally feature austerity. Indeed my middle class informants in São Paulo have economized and worked more since the economic crisis of the 80s and 90s. Still one might also ask the following: in a context of high economic instability, to what cultural pursuits, if any, were middle class Brazilians committing themselves?; in what arenas were symbolic claims to middle class identity being formulated (Bourdieu 1979, Appadurai 1986, Lamont and Fournier 1992)?

Threats to class position have led to a reinforcement of "classic" middle and upper middle class ways and means (Leeds 1964, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), primarily through expensive private primary and secondary education (e.g., monthly tuition the equivalent of 200-300 in US dollars) to ensure children's entrance into the better public universities. For a better CV, students may study abroad before or after college. In the more competitive and restricted economy of the 90s, the great concern for education is significant, timely and obvious. What I found

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surprising was the strong involvement in symbolic pursuits abroad which did not seem directly translatable to economic advantage (Frow 1987:71). Continually encountering instances of transnationally obtained goods and experiences, I inferred that non-local, non-national elements are vital to contemporary Brazilian middle class identity, figuring importantly in the local status hierarchy. In this chapter I investigate current forms of transnational consumption through fieldwork episodes and from the perspective of the actors involved. I posit three components to the complex and attempt to find not one but an array of motivations revolving around it. Let us turn to an episode which especially stayed with me due to the apparent frivolousness of the foreign experience.

Episode # 1: Disney

One night after watching TV at Gilda and Euclides',[1] she and Martha, soon to be high school senior and oldest daughter in a family of three girls, drove me home. In the car Gilda told me that they wanted Martha to be in an exchange program with an American family and wondered if I could help set this up. Several weeks later, the willing family found in my hometown Minneapolis, I called Gilda with the information about our friends and daughter about

[1] Euclides is an engineer, and though Gilda is officially a housewife, she co-manages the family-owned gas station.

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Martha's age. She countered with the following. Otávio insists on going to Disney ("Euclides faz questão de ir a Disney"); he says they are going no matter what ("vai de qualquer maneira"); he refuses to give up the idea of going to Disney ("ele nao vai deixar de ir a Disney"). In other words, Euclides was determined to go to Disney -- that the family should go to Disney, even if that meant, as Gilda explained, that Martha would have to postpone the exchange for another year. Gilda did not at any moment say that the kids had been pestering Euclides to make this trip. No, she stressed that Euclides had determined that if just one trip were possible now, that trip would be to Disney.

International versus Local Rites and their Motivations

At the time I was a bit deflated at the less than enthusiastic response to my news and the decision to forego this rather special exchange set up. Later, I became intrigued with the fact that although an educational experience abroad was desired for the eldest daughter, the father gave priority to Disney (World), a place more "invested" with parental hopes than one might expect. How to understand this? It was not due to the frivolousness of the parents or carefree financial circumstances. Euclides had an understanding of Brazil's economic path and problems which was very personal. His career had started exactly with the economic "miracle" (1968-73), but like Brazil, fell

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into "recession" thereafter. Salary decreases eventually prompted him to find an additional source of income.[2] Why was Euclides prepared to violate the unassailable middle class principle of education first and foremost?

In a recent essay, Colin Campbell (1994) addresses precisely the issue of motives with respect to consumption, especially the conspicuous variety. He criticizes Veblen's theory of status emulation for imputing motives without regard for subjectivity, and psychoanalytic and Marxian theories for assuming that people do things without knowing the "real" reasons. Campbell conceives of motives as beyond instrumental, means-ends purposes (which he calls intentions); rather they are multiple and involve moral and ethical concerns brought to bear both in motivating the act and in providing a meaningful explanation for the actors.[3] Although Campbell's focus is the subject, he presents motives and justifications as developing through the cultural context.

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[2] It was Euclides who told me that his salary was one-fourth of what it had been in the 1960s when he had been employed by Petrobrás. The dictatorship did not favor him. Euclides was later fired from the state owned oil and gas company for having belonged to a student organization during college and had to take a lesser position elsewhere.

[3] Thus Campbell states: "the crucial question to be asked is what kind of valuation is placed on the different outcomes in a series of acts the intentionality of which is readily apparent" (1994:29). See also Smart (1993), who similarly criticizes Bourdieu's concept of social capital, through analysis of gifts / bribes in the People's Republic of China.

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Unfortunately, during fieldwork I was inhibited from questioning Euclides. Besides being intimidated by his severity and less than forthcoming manner, I was reluctant to set him up with a question like "why do you want to go to Disney?" In a word, it can be hard to get at motives when self-evident reasons provide barrier explanations, or when one is otherwise hindered from probing.

I therefore needed to have recourse to other sources than Euclides for interpretation of what I'll call the "Disney complex." Martha's testimony after the trip confirms that one imperative was social. She said: "now that practically everyone has gone, we couldn't really keep going on without making the trip." Martha quickly added a sentimental motive, pointing out that the trip "united" the whole family.[4]

Another perspective on this phenomenon may emerge if we compare it to the debutante ball or coming out party, now celebrated as the 15 year old party (festa de 15 anos) in Brazil. An extravaganza version of this old-fashioned event is especially popular now among nouveau riche families in São Paulo.

I attended the 15 year old party of Juliana, Laura and

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[4] Please note that after returning from Disney and talking to me about the actual expenses of sending Martha to Minnesota for a month, the decision was made to send her here. Possibly the advantageous exchange rate of the new "strong" currency (the real) to the relatively "cheap" dollar helped. This later development does not, however, alter the prioritizing of Disney.

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Nando's daughter. Laura has worked for 20 plus years at School 3, teaching and writing curriculum. She now directs a branch in a town about an hour outside São Paulo, with the assistance of Nando, long time salesman, who lost his job in the early 90s. They live in a middle middle class bairro far south in town (Planalto Paulista). The upward mobility enjoyed by this family is shown in their housing: they extended their row house by buying the one next door and integrating the two.

Highly ritualized, the phases of the debutante ball unfold like a stylized pageant. The event culminates in the midnight descent from a stage of the 15 girlfriends (damas) and then the 15 year old, who has changed costume from one prom styled dress in the color she chose for herself and friends, into another gown, white of course. The girl now turned young lady (mocinha) dances three waltzes -- first with her father and godfather (or other relative) and then with a young man--as if for the first time. The banquet hall this family rented (at Mac Buffet, Rua Augusta) charged the equivalent of $7,000 US dollars for the hall rental and (the more economical) buffet-style food service. To this must be added the costs of music, flowers, photos, filming, invitations, presents to the damas and unlimited wine and whiskey -- costs which increase the sum significantly. When they first told me of the upcoming ball, Laura said it would

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cost the equivalent of a new car.[5] Perhaps the closest US equivalents besides the debutante ball itself are the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Italian American wedding reception.

I suggest viewing the Disney trip in light of the debutante ball both for their similarities and differences; a comparison will bring into sharper focus the specificity of Disney for Brazilians. One major difference is of course gender, since in the ball, the young woman is key for representing the family and in the past more specifically for making marriage alliances within the white elite,[6]

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[5] The sky is the limit, but 15,000 in US dollars is perhaps an average sum.

[6] Even as we reject Levi-Strauss' careless gender objectifications in his alliance theory, we must still acknowledge that the marriages of white elite Brazilian women have been key for family strategies either to expand or to consolidate wealth. Until this century a young elite woman's marriageability was enhanced by her social graces rather than her education. If elite women in the early part of the century did study language, literature, music and perhaps painting topped by a trip to Europe, back in Brazil they would find their final vocations: to be perfect wives and mothers, revealing the education to have been a finishing school whose main purpose was to make an upper class match (Lewin 1979, Nazzari 1984, Nizza da Silva 1984, Silva Dias 1984, Balmori et al 1984, Needell 1987; Lopes 1989, Bueno Trigo 1993; for comparisons, see Schneider 1971 and Martinez-Alier 1974). According to Needell: "Arranged and early marriages, a private but superficial education, a jealously guarded childhood and adolescence, and a strict regimen of prejudice surrounding virginity, Society, and marriage, all directed toward preserving family status and lineage..." (1987:136-137).

Currently, the young debutantes go to college; any marriage would occur years after the ball, and potentially stem from a different circle. In 1965, the female to male proportion in higher education in São Paulo was 28.5 percent (Saffioti 1978:177). Like Saffioti, Rosemberg et al emphasize gender inequalities in Brazilian education. Yet if one compares within the group who attends college in the

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whereas Disney is gender neutral. Yet there are similarities. For instance, the debutante ball is coated with sentiment (especially in the father-daughter waltz), family love and friends. Thanks to Martha's clear statement, we see that Disney can also be idealized as a moment for family unity.[7] Without assuming that the intention was beyond a desire to shower love on the children,[8] one can still imagine additional motives and benefits.

Like the trips to Europe in previous eras by elites with daughters after finishing school or sons prior to entering a profession, Disney marks a turning point. It has become a highly desired rite among upper middle class Brazilian (and generally Latin American) teens, a requisite for social validation. That said, I would like to emphasize

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1960s, thus among the upper middle class and elite, one finds a fairly substantial showing of women in law (21 percent), architecture (27 percent) and medicine (16 percent) (Rosemberg et al 1982:55).

[7] Among the authors of Inside the Mouse, Susan Willis especially emphasizes the Disney vacation as a moment of family unity -- not because this is her feeling, but because most visitors she came into contact with implicitly and explicitly "choose Disney world as the site for confirming family" (1995:49).

[8] The current smaller family size (usually three children), in those families with more discretionary income, allows for rather high concentration of expensive attention on the children. But again, at the same time, the parents' participate in the lavishness. Note the elaborate birthday parties held for one year old babies, attended by a broad circle of family, friends and associates. I am told that in Colombia parents hold baptism parties (Patricia Tovar, personal communication).

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here that this event is also central to the parents' class identity. Like the debutante ball, this packaged "magical" experience, arranged by parents for their children, attests to concern for the children's social positioning and to the parents' own.[9]

The pressure and possibility to see Disney is perhaps strongest in the upper middle class, as it "rubs shoulders" with a wealthier sector (which the former sometimes call "classe A," a kind of tongue-in-cheek adoption of the term used in market research for the highest social class). Euclides' teenaged daughters attend a school in which classes A and B "mix." Thus Euclides was investing in Martha's education -- in Brazil. Quite possibly he as well as his children experienced peer pressure. By making the Disney trip, the family followed a strong, recent precedent. In 1985, 86, 576 Brazilians entered Florida; in 1990, following the opening of MGM studios, the figure rose to 207,156, and in 1994, the year of Gilda and Euclides' trip, 334,793 passed through (Florida State Division of Tourism, source: US Immigration). Even discounting the very wealthy and business travellers (including informal sector buyers),

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[9] Though a few informants mentioned having attended such parties, just two of the 24 families in my study, bonafide "nouveau riche" had held them. These same two families plus seven more of the 24 had gone to Miami-Orlando in the past few years. Among the many ways one might internally divide the middle class, the accomplishment of Disney might currently be as reliable an indicator as any.

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these figures are impressive. Of these, probably most first time visitors went to Disney.

Disney has been well identified by Moore (1980) and others (e.g., Worsley 1981:245 called it the "tourist mecca") as a case of a pilgrimage and, as such, akin to a rite of passage (van Gennep 1960). As a rite of passage the trip to Disney should, like the debutante ball, accomplish a change in status. Ideally, it should signify the incorporation of the teen and family into the higher stratum, or more realistically, a new or particular branch of it, or at least express how the family wishes to represent itself or with which reference group it identifies.

Ever interested in middle class affairs, the media has given attention to debutante balls and to Disney. Besides finding it curious that youth of the 90s should have such an old-fashioned, corny, nostalgic desire, the press underscores the social milieu. The Estado de São Paulo (9/29/89) located debuts variously in the ("traditional") rural areas and in the ("modern") central South Zone. Likewise, Rio newspapers note that balls were being held in the Baixada Fluminense, among "high middle class" (alta classe média) families (Jornal do Brasil 9/28/87) as well as in Ipanema, that is to say, in an area mostly known as a working class suburb as well as a solid upper middle class one. A later report informed readers that debuts were being

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held not only in social clubs, but in samba courts (e.g., quadra da Escola de Samba Beija Flor, Jornal do Brasil, 11/4/90). By the very fact of pointing to the resurgence of the one and the "must-go" and "can-do" phenomenon of Disney, the media imposingly reinforces their reality.[10]

Let us review some differences between the two rites. Whereas the rounds of debutante balls can also be seen as examples of what Appadurai has called "tournaments of value" (1986:21),[11] the family trip to Disney, recalled in stories, photos, camcord films and theme park tee shirts,

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[10] Roland Barthes makes this point regarding fashion. Phrasing like "'prints triumph at the market,' 'accessories make the spring'" (1967:63) feign to simply register a fact, while "in fact" they are attempting to impose a fashion. While I don't claim that the media intends to "sell" debutante balls or Disney (see news citations in the latter part of the chapter), it may have a quasi-advertizing effect.

[11] Inspired by the example of the kula system (one could add the potlatch as well), Appadurai describes the tournament of value as:

> complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them. The currency of such tournaments is also likely to be set apart through well understood cultural diacritics. Finally, what is at issue in such tournaments is not just status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question. Finally, though such tournaments of value occur in special times and places, their forms and outcomes are always consequential for the more mundane realities of power and value in ordinary life (1986:21).

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makes for a fragmentary circulation of status claims. And although also an instance of family solidarity, the Disney trip, conducted by the family off by itself, isolated in time and space from the social milieu, lacks engagement in the social ties as well as the anxieties and entanglements entailed in the large party.[12]

Another basic difference between Disney and the ball is that the latter is a pageant for immediate display, involving guests who are actors and witnesses for this event, one which is highly ostentatious without being public. In some eras and places, only a predefined circle of (wealthy) families could participate in the balls.[13] A feature story on the debutante fad in the Sunday magazine of

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[12] Jane Schneider (personal communication) reminded me of this difference. This is not to say, however, that the Disney trip is carefree. As foreigners in the US, Brazilians may demonstrate anxiety about whether they are adhering to imagined norms, or about the behavior of other Brazilians -- usually avoided. To wit, I learned from Inside the Mouse that Brazilians are notorious among Disney workers. "They turn up everywhere in worker narratives, always playing the part of the out-of-line guests who use language or ethnic difference to excuse unacceptable behavior" (1995:150). The author of this chapter, Jane Kuenz, aptly notes that whether or not the workers are capable of distinguishing Brazilians accurately, they universally designate the "difficult Disney guest" (1995:151) as Brazilian! I have no doubt that my informants would be horrified to learn this.

[13] In contemporary New Orleans only a set circle of families are eligible. Civic exposure is also a dimension, as they are involved in Mardi Gras (Kimberly Flynn, personal communication). Such public exposure is emphatically not part of the Brazilian version. The The New York Times Magazine reported for Cubans in Florida (Feb. 1995) that the North American balls involve a pageant competition, in which a queen of debutantes is chosen.

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the Jornal do Brasil (11/4/90) dates the first Brazilian debutante ball in 1944, and notes that it was rare for a girl to give one by herself. The first Rio balls were held only in the Copacabana Palace, according to one of the original debutantes.[14] In the 60s and early 70s in Brazil, social clubs would put on a yearly party for all 15 year old members at which the birthday girls all wore white. Wealthier families would hold a party in the home or even rent the social club for an evening in honor of just one debutante. The banquet hall rentals evidently are a variant of the latter.

The conspicuous consumption, potlatch-like, spectacular nature of the debutante ball further differentiates it from Disney. Imagine 15 thousand dollars burned in one night's festivities.[15] If one went to the US instead, as many upper middle class parents found, one could kill several

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[14] I have as yet been unable to find scholarly discussion of the festa de 15 anos in Brazilianist sources. Those which I have consulted, such as Pinho (1970), Pierson (1972), Azevedo (1986), Needell 1987, Lopes (1989) mention balls in general for members of high society in different eras, from the late 19th century forward, but not coming out parties. If in the past their introduction into Brazilian society signified emulation of Europe (see, e.g., Miles 1992), in the late 20th century it is experienced as being a tradition of the Brazilian upper class.

[15] The family proves they have no need to store every value in tangibles. For comparison, see Schneider (1980). Also, see Silverman for a study of "symbolic forms in which unequal distributions of resources and power are phrased" (1981:163). While the "rituals of inequality" she examines often reveal an inversion or obscuring of the cultural and economic connections, the ones I present announce them.

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birds with one stone. Faced with the prospect of one or more expensive debutante balls -- and the decline of the fad among youth during the 70s, upper middle class parents started to suggest that their daughters substitute a trip to Disney for it--and then all would go, sons and daughters. Herein lies one practical reason for Euclides' decision: all three children, all daughters -- and Gilda -- went to Disney in one trip.[16] By comparison consider that on the night of second daughter Juliana's debutante ball, Nando was already talking to me about how he needed to save for his third daughter's party.

It might strike one that the debutante ball is the more high status event, but that inference is questionable in terms of current local distinctions between "traditional" and "modern." If for some families, such as this last, both rites are desirable, others would now repudiate the old-fashioned debutante ball in favor of Disney. The debutante's ball is quickly dismissed as square ("careta"), corny or kitsch ("brega") and scorned by some Brazilians of the milieu, if not the financial level. An academic friend called it "brega-chique" as did the press.[17] (I asked many

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[16] There are tours such as that offered by the large Brazilian tourist agency Stella Barros for teens accompanied only by a guide, which cost $2,000, including airfare, all theme parks, hotel and breakfast. I would argue that even here the parents' status is at stake.

[17] "Brega e Chique" (corny and chic) was the name of a soap opera of the 1980s.

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academic friends to accompany me to the ball. All declined.) For their part, the ball critics wish to take or do take the Disney trip, either readily affirming or confessing their enjoyment.

These sophisticates probably find the emulative quality (Simmel 1957) of the ball somewhat ridiculous. The debutante ball overtly imitates the traditional bourgeoisie, for whom the practice is now outmoded. In contrast, Disney is associated with modernity and a transnational social circuit. The Disney trip positions these Brazilian travellers symbolically among the citizens of the First World, thereby renewing class identity. Yet it too refers to the local status hierarchy, and gaining validation for class standing via foreign experience has a long tradition among local elite (see Needell 1987).

Those who insist on demarcating differences underscore the unease produced in this era of heightened social differentiation provoked in and through the inflationary conditions. Hence the constant struggles, on material and symbolic planes, by those less favored financially to separate out the rising class members, or better, to delegitimate the candidacy of nouveau riche people for higher social status.[18] Through enactment of these rites

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[18] Colloredo-Mansfeld (1994) analyzes architecture among Ecuadorians of different occupations and points out as well that the housing forms appeal variously to modernity or tradition and that conspicuous consumption is not necessarily socially "effective" (1994:854). He argues that

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and evaluative idioms, middle class families -- some more stationary, others wealthier -- make conflicting claims to social distinction. Again, the press takes part in these disputes, acting almost like a goad. Feature stories on these and other such doings of the newly wealthy have appeared regularly during the crisis, particularly since the Collor recession.

The mundane outcomes of these symbolic struggles for the next generation is as yet unknown, but there are at least two alternative scenarios. One might envision that the unproductive and wasteful trip expenses of either will be an income leveller.[19] Or in line with Brazilian precedents and theorists (e.g., Bourdieu 1979, Appadurai 1986), one might predict the accomplishment of either symbolic rite could be put to social and economic advantage.

Travel abroad per se accrues cultural capital. Acquiring this form of capital became an especially noteworthy accomplishment during the crisis. As to the ball givers, considering that Laura and Nando run a private school and that the guests included their colleagues, their

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their housing is more than a display of wealth; it also shows (following Rutz and Orlove 1989), that "conspicuous display ... initiate[s] new appraisals of socially appropriate activity" (1994:862).

[19] Worsley held this view, in reference to expensive rural social rituals: "No one is going to get too rich anyhow, as long as the wealth gets converted not into more wealth but into social status via extremely costly rituals that do not distribute wealth" (1981:247).

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daughters' classmates and parents, there is no question that putting on the ball conferred prestige and a boost for their business, which relies heavily on informal reputation. Though there needn't be a final decision over which will prevail, the "traditional" or the "modern" rite, one thinks of Edith Wharton's (1913) satire of the nouveaux riches, The Custom of the Country, which acknowledges their staying power. As still 14 year old Juliana told me some weeks before the event, evidently with her parents' assurances to back her: "I can travel any time, but I will only turn 15 once." Indeed, this family had already gone to Disney.

If the popularity of the debutante ball rose after the nation witnessed the maximum debut -- President Juscelino Kubitschek's two daughters, who were invited to share in the debut at the palace of Versaille in June 1959, the current craze is associated with a TV depiction of that era. According to the press, the TV miniseries "Anos Dourados," a nostalgic depiction of the 1950s which aired in the 1980s, triggered the revival. Then only "traditional families" (i.e., elites) could partake in them; now that identification may be the inspiration. Thus one family interviewed said, "our family has a traditional mentality" (O Globo [7/16/89]: "somos uma família de mentalidade tradicional"). Nostalgia is understandable stemming from parents, themselves children in the 1950s, but why, the press sensibly wonders, do the youth want it? Indeed,

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Juliana's statement declares it to be a priority, without telling why. The exact comment was cited repeatedly in news stories, as well as some variants with amusing gender and class implications. Said one girl, "I can marry several times, but a debut, there's only one" (Jornal do Brasil, Sunday magazine [11/4/90]). A debutante at a samba school site claimed "only those that can't, don't [debut]." The explanation ventured by the media -- of youth seeking more romantic and showy means of presenting themselves to each other (albeit, in the press' sardonic view, in Cinderella fashion) and a heightened conservatism in this generation -- does not entirely satisfy. I relinquish the question on youth in favor of recalling that the desire for the ball seems often to unite two generations at an historical conjuncture where daily life for the majority could hardly be more contradictory. That said, let us return to our initial question on Disney.

Explanations of status competition and search for cultural capital give the activity purpose, but do not adequately address the intensity of the desire to go to Disney. Moore suggests that the popularity of theme parks is a response to "endemic crisis in our lives caused by geographic and social mobility" (1980:216). For Zukin[20]

[20] Zukin's main interest is to emphasize the material aspects of Disney, namely its involvement in capital accumulation, but she also analyzes the ideological controls of the "friendly face of power" of this post-fordist built environment (1991:228).

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themes ranging from old-fashioned small town America to futuristic Epcot Center exude control and security. This touristic experience chosen by largely white visitors, reports Zukin, both offers escape from "individual social realities" (1990:44) and more interestingly "ultimate predictability" (1990:45).

The authors of Inside the Mouse (1995) study a range of features engaging Disney goers, such as Disney's designation of technology as the historical agent and people as consumers in a controlled environment. As they put it, Disney offers a "system of social relations based on consumption" (1995:57) and "purposeful consumption" (1995:187). Observations keying into appeals for American visitors, such as the nationalist representations helping them feel good about themselves and their history (1995:60), raise the question of the experience and messages for foreign visitors.

These analyses move us into areas not dealt with by status emulation and competition or symbolic capital, namely the possible side effects, fringe benefits or ulterior motives of these travels. Not only does the Disney ideology match Martha's characterization of family unity; the Disney experience and wider US stability would have special meaning for Brazilians, as they have lived in a chaotic political and economic environment this past decade in which the only future one could count on was wildly fluctuating inflation

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and failed government "stabilization" plans.

I wondered whether Brazilian travellers thought of ex-president Collor while at Disney. An article in the news magazine Veja (9/9/92) during the Collor impeachment movement described the two million dollar garden that the Collors had landscaped at their home (the Casa da Dinda). Featuring five artificial waterfalls and a lake, 15 tons of stone, tropical trees from outside the region, and even a pau-Brazil tree brought from Africa, a quartz grotto, special nightly illumination creating a fairylike wilderness, this garden was expressly likened to Disney's Typhoon Lagoon. News like this must have fueled the indignation of Brazilians against the monstrous extravagance of the president who had confiscated all but the equivalent of 1,200 in US dollars from their bank accounts and plunged the country into the worst depression of its history. Veja exempts Disney from criticism: it was not built for a single owner's "babylonian" styled pleasure, rather for the profit of a company and thousands of tourists. This mass, semi-public recreation experience is itself a novel experience, as middle class families in Brazil, as always a minority, eschew mixing with other social sectors.[21]

As to this family's experience, Gilda wrote the following letter: "We returned from the US January 30

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[21] Barbara Weinstein (personal communication) pointed this out to me.

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[1995]. I loved Miami, we had a three day cruise on the ship "Seaward" to Cancun.[22] It was wonderful. In Orlando we loved the parks, especially Bush Gardens. If you haven't been it's really worth going, very entertaining, and fun to scare yourself on the roller coaster. We bought a lot of things because there it's very cheap, and we really took good advantage of it. They were unforgettable days, I loved the trip." (Note the tips to the American friend.)

Though still confined to the more prosperous middle class, Disney has become increasingly accessible.[23] Package deals now allow payment over several months, as do international credit cards made available to Brazilians since 1990, features which also bring out that Disney is an investment. And by not declaring goods bought in the US over the value of 500 dollars, that is, by circumventing the protectionist customs tariff policy, this family joined other Brazilian travellers and informal sector merchants in a national pasttime: US discount shopping. This brings us to the second dimension of the Disney complex.

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[22] The 17 day travel itinerary of this family included, beyond Orlando for theme parks and Miami for shopping, a three-four day cruise to Cancun.

[23] Urry (1980 and 1990) draws attention to the increasing democratization of travel for pleasure (recalling that travel for pleasure was confined to the elite until the 19th century), and to the opposition of the practice, in space and in activities (e.g., gazing), from the world of work.

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International over Local Bargain Shopping

In 1991, checking in at JFK airport on a flight to Rio de Janeiro, the middle aged Brazilian man in front of me tried, unsuccessfully, to get the airline agent to dispense with the excess baggage charge -- or perhaps it was excess weight, as the item in question was a microwave oven. Later, in São Paulo, I recounted the incident to a Brazilian friend. I noted that the man had tried everyone's patience with his erroneous assumption that he could talk his way out of the charges. The friend didn't react until I derided the troupes of Brazilians who return from the US with mountains of merchandise. Then it was my friend's turn to become impatient. I later realized the North American arrogance of my position: after all, we are faced with the option of buying a readily available, reasonably priced microwave oven -- or not, but in any case, we do not have to carry our houses on our backs intercontinentally.

The microwave incident was critical for me, as the confrontation made me start to think non-ironically[24] about the relationship of middle and upper middle class Brazilians to global things and experiences. Countless incidents before and after come to mind,[25] and I will recount a few

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[24] The issue of irony and the anthropologist was also brought to my attention by a dear friend and colleague, Hélio Belik (deceased).

[25] For instance, the first request I received, in 1973 from a college student for a Nikon camera; in 1985 from a 20 year old for high top Converse All Stars, and also from a

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in order to consider what greater acquaintance with "First World" goods during this past decade has entailed for Brazilians wanting that world for their country and themselves.

As pointed out elsewhere, in a country where housing financing was nearly lacking, and where savings accounts were unrewarding or even unreliable, a "strategy" of spending discretionary income developed. This fever to consume (as Brazilians put it less rationalistically and more judgmentally), extended to international travel and goods.

For despite inflation, recession and salary devaluations on the one hand and Brazil's restrictions against, and heavy taxation on, imported goods, on the other, Brazilians have been pulled into the expanding transnational consumer market during the crisis.[26]

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woman friend for a hand vacuum cleaner for her mother; and in 1991 from a classmate doing fieldwork in a favela in Rio for two large bottles of Swiss Formula hand lotion, which she wanted to give to domestic worker informants; and later from my hosts in São Paulo, for a water purifier to guard against the cholera epidemic.

[26] By highlighting the current trend, I do not claim that the middle class focus on consumer durables first developed during the economic crisis. See Dean (1969) for documentation of the combination of national industrial products and those imported, as well as popular opinions of them in the early 20th century. For an empirical study of the rise in acquisition of consumer durables by middle and upper class sectors during the "economic miracle" (1967-73), see Wells (1977). He associates the increase with increasing income differentials, i.e., real wage gains on the part of middle class sectors versus depressed wages of working classes, and layaway plans.

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Furthermore, Brazil's continuing import taxes, years of price inflation and risks of layaway plans have continued to discourage Brazilian consumers from buying locally and have made the US a giant bargain basement for shopping.

Just as I asked the motives for Disney per se, here too I ask of the global dimension of the shopping system of middle and upper middle class Brazilians: What is at stake in the consumption of transnationally obtained goods? Anticipating, I argue that the stake is social distinction (Bourdieu 1979) through modernity (Romanelli n.d., Philibert 1986, Friedman 1989, Wilk 1994). These consumption practices to attain social distinction and modernity are central to the realization of middle class identity, not only as symbolic means of presenting and proving status outwardly, but as the material means of securing and living it at home (Frykman and Lofgren 1987). This pursuit has a long history. Again, in the empire and republican eras, foreign goods were significant to bourgeois-styled social reproduction. Our task is to consider the current

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To specify the middle class in terms of consumer durables has heavy precedents in the academic literature on the economic miracle and in marketing research. Since the late 1970s, Brazil's marketing research has assigned what might be called a metonymic definition of class, in which classes (A to E) are determined according to possession of durable goods and education. See Almeida and Wickerhauser (1991). As noted earlier, political scientist Saes (1985) views the rise of consumer society and specifically, the dynamic growth of the domestic industry in consumer durables, as a means of buying the support of middle class sectors for the military dictatorship (1964-85).

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relevance.

Episode # 2: Christmas Shopping

I was invited to spend Christmas 1993 with a family at their country home (sítio) outside of Embú, a town adjacent to São Paulo. Sumiko, daughter of Japanese immigrants, social worker, mother of three, and married to a medical doctor (Flávio), picked me up around noon of Christmas Eve day. We stopped by her parents' house to pick up the pork tenderloin (leitão) and visit for a bit. There in one of the daily newspapers (the Estado de São Paulo), I noticed an article about a credit card company which had just held a number of raffles. The winners were to go immediately to New York City, that is, the next day to spend $4000 in US dollars in one day's shopping. The news pointed out that this meant the winners had to spend $240 dollars per hour (in a 16 hour day) to avoid suffering any loss. This dramatic calculation struck me as particularly funny. On the TV report, one winner, a delighted teacher, was shown at the Shopping Center Norte, which is the most "popular" (i.e., of the people) center in São Paulo's north zone. (All contests and contestants were in shopping centers.) On the way to Embú, I discussed the raffle with Sumiko. She said doing the trip for herself would be fun, but she would have her children in mind.

After dinner on Christmas Eve, Sumiko casually passed

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her 16 year old daughter Fabiana a gift: the perfume Volupté. Later she told me that it had cost $70 in US dollars, and that she had ordered it from a muambeira. A muambeiro/a is the person who carries the muamba. These are the quainter, lighter terms for contrabandist/contraband and used preferentially for such cases. (Muamba is a Brazilianism, probably of African origin.) Sumiko explained to her daughter that she had asked the muambeira to open it because she had heard of a case of someone buying perfume only to find a candle inside the box. Sumiko had also ordered CDs from the muambeira from a list from her two sons. After the gift openings, Fabiana and her grandmother rewrapped the presents. I saw something similar at another family's house (of Italian background): the European glass coffee pot (the push-down kind) was carefully put back into its original case after each use.

Informal Importations

Let us consider first the presentation of international shopping practices in advertising. Clearly the intent of the Christmas promotional trip to New York City was to boost both credit card and shopping center usage.[27] The $240 dollar per hour calculation seemed designed to encourage viewers/readers to concretely imagine what their shopping

[27] An important gauge of the impact of inflation on national commerce was Christmas sales, which received high media attention.

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strategies and buys would be in a more risk free state than Brazil. For, in Brazil during the last decade, buying anything and especially consumer durables, became complicated. In the US people have the option of buying large appliances on a layaway plan or through a credit card loan. Precisely these purchasing methods were the most risky during the 80s and 90s in Brazil. Layaway plans entailed paying according to merchants' forecasting of future inflation. In an economy of high and wildly fluctuating inflation, the smart shopper would have to have more than a calculating mind; she would have to be clairvoyant. Given the risks of buying through a layaway plan, the exorbitant interest rates (38 percent per month in 1991 and 20 percent in 1995, making Brazil's financial market attractive for speculation, but awful for most citizens), and the increasingly high cost of living -- allow me to emphasize that by 1994 prices even of some food items were as high as in the US -- and finally, given the risks of assault associated with being out on the streets of the nation (cf. Caldeira 1993),[28] the US has come to offer easy sale prices, as well as a playground for leisure.

The ad scheme served best, I would say, in inciting desires for shopping sprees in the US, not specifically to use credit cards. The promotional hype was in tune on other

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[28] The very same imports are targets for assault: tennis shoes and cellular phones.

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accounts, however, to the Brazilian context. To buy frenetically, as the winner would have to do, was compatible with the "strategy" which expanded during the crisis known as immediatism in buying -- that is, to buy when one had the rare, serendipitous combination of the money and a good deal. One final point: as is often the case with Brazil's media, it simultaneously acknowledged and abolished class barriers. The TV presentation of the winner was felicitous: what could be more (lower) middle class than a school teacher, for whom the possibility of a trip to New York City is remote?

For those not able to travel, imports can be obtained, albeit informally (illegally), either from muambeiros or, for a limited set of goods, from employees affiliated with the duty free. Such was the way another couple in the study bought a microwave. Sumiko's Christmas presents and other instances I continually encountered during fieldwork attest to how routine the contraband practice has become, contributing to a burgeoning informal sector catering to the transnational tastes of Brazilians. But why the illegality?

Brazil has long had protectionist policies against imports, notably since the 1930s, when national industry was promoted through import substitution (Baer 1989). Only since the 1990s has the Brazilian government assumed a favorable position towards "opening" the market to foreign goods. Though popular sentiment is very favorable to the

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opening of the market to foreign goods at international prices, industrialists and unions exert pressures against it to this day. For instance, a male informant criticized the government's attempts to curb consumption just after inflation was halted with the Plano Real as of July 1, 1994. The informant said it was not right for the government to tell people not to consume. "Let the people consume," he said, "and bring in imports." Nearly a year later, an opinion poll of the Estado de São Paulo (4/1/95) found a majority were against restrictions on imports. A few months later, the metallurgical workers' union of São Paulo staged a protest against car imports (Estado de São Paulo, 7/31/95). In October 1995, front page headlines reported that products from the "Asiatic tigers," including domestic appliances, textiles, shoes and rubber are withheld from the domestic market (which produces precisely all these items) unless their prices are equal to or higher than domestic ones (Estado de São Paulo, 10/2/95). With their characteristically satirical bent, the Brazilian newspapers called this practice "Operation (Back) Drawer." A commonly held opinion against Brazilian businesses is that they are forever shielded by the government from foreign competition, and therefore can extract exorbitant profit rates (see chapter 7). The nationally protected businesses were called "artificial industries" as early as the 1890s.

Thus even after 1990, imports of goods produced locally

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remained liable to such heavy duties at customs (e.g., an 85 percent tax on stereos and beer in 1990, Veja, 8/1/92) as to effectively prohibit legal entry.[29] Customs currently allows Brazilians to bring in, tax free, up to the equivalent of $500 US dollars worth of goods. Beyond that a tax is to be levied.[30] For those returning with an excess of $500 in goods, there may be recourse to the "jeitinho brasileiro." Made famous by Roberto da Matta (1990), this refers, as noted in chapter 4, to the national, self-assigned knack for extricating oneself from difficult situations, in this case through informal, extralegal transactions with muambeiros or customs agents. At customs, there are two types of gambles: one is to get the green light in the nothing to declare line. If the red light situation occurs, the gamble then depends on working with the official inspecting all baggage in order to: get off free or with a pay-off, rather than pay a tax which would effectively wipe out the savings originally accrued. The safest bet is to have previously arranged with an official

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[29] In 1995, the tax on imported cars was raised to 70 percent after having just been lowered to 32 percent. For comparison, the tax on electrodomestic products was placed at 42 percent, having been 72 percent; that on foods varied from 2 percent to 12 percent (Folha de São Paulo, 4/29/95).

[30] The US consulate confirmed that there is no formula for calculating import duties for individuals; rather, according to the employee whom I asked, it depends entirely on the official and the situation. However, the magazine Veja calculated (7/27/94) taxes close to 100 percent with respect to goods brought in by Brazil's soccer players (and see below).

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to go through customs without inspection. Interestingly, agents even have a catalogue from a Miami publication with prices on relevant merchandise to consult for accuracy in verifying retail values.

Like the man with the microwave, Brazilians returning from US travels typically have impressive amounts of baggage. Arriving at São Paulo's international airport to do fieldwork in 1993, I noted many travellers who, remaining undaunted at this last phase (after nine hours in flight), entered the duty free shop, later emerging with a case or more of scotch (the prestige drink in this sector). Please note: the duty free shop is open to passengers arriving, returning to Brazil, when it is heavily used, as well as departing, in which case it is not of interest.

Illegality at the airport borders has generally gone unchecked. Two incidents in recent years, however, have made front page headlines. Brazil's soccer team returned last July triumphant winners of the 1994 world cup; they also attempted to sneak in 12 tons of imported goods, and in fact filled five moving trucks with items including a refrigerator, washing machine and gas BBQ range. The president, Itamar Franco, wished to waive the duties (later estimated at one million dollars) for the national heroes, an attitude which further disgusted the public.[31] In July

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[31] The fact that the goods were delivered immediately to the players' homes made it complicated for the Customs Bureau (Receita Federal) to later verify the goods in

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1995, the São Paulo newspapers reported that two sisters returning from shopping in the US were pressured to pay R$930 (or $1,000 US dollars) in order to receive their bags from customs. Ensuing investigations at São Paulo's and Rio's international airports estimated that the customs racket afforded one million US dollars in profit per day (Estado de São Paulo, 6/26/95 and 6/27/95).

This fairly elaborate system of obtaining imported goods at international prices has a long history, making it perhaps not so troublesome to those long familiar with it as it may seem to outsiders. However, there are novelties: of scale and of the actors involved. Brazil's middle class (both professional-managerial and petty bourgeois) has entered full scale into consumption of transnationally offered goods, engaging in what had been an elite practice relating to Europe.[32] Why all this trouble? Again, what is at stake?

As usual, the Rêde Globo TV satire "Cassetta e Planeta" has the first word. In November 1994 it declared: "A trip to Miami -- not even military service is as obligatory." ("Viagem a Miami que nem serviço militar: é obrigatorio.")

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question and calculate taxes.

[32] See Jeffrey Needell (1987) for elite consumption of European goods in turn of the century Rio de Janeiro. The case of carioca use of woolen suits is a striking example of status imitation, revealing the importance of it regardless of reason. See e.g., McCracken (1988) and Lamont and Fournier (1992) for analysis of symbolic class boundaries through fashion in Europe and the U.S.

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Also instructive was a comment of a Brazilian friend who came to the US for the first time last January. She said: "well now I will no longer have to put up with/endure people saying, 'when I was in New York...', or 'when I was in ....'" International travel experience is a critical milestone for middle class social identity. In "public" situations, the verbal display of international experience and knowledge is perhaps as operative as goods for claims to social distinction.

It is curious that the means of appropriation has entailed what is technically "white collar" crime. For Brazilian travellers themselves become muambeiros when travelling. I dwell on customs because it is the site where the class-directed tactic (de Certeau 1984), one conflicting with state policy, is exposed. Appropriation of these things is clearly central for claims to a class identity at or above the level of the individual or family in question. The great and at times extralegal efforts of middle class travelers and the increasing informal sector testify that imported goods and travel remain crucial to the local status hierarchy today, as in the past.

We must also consider why these goods. Observations from various trips to and from Brazil, photographic evidence at airports, visits to 47th Street Photo and downtown Miami, and fieldwork, including an interview with a muambeira, show that the following are now the favorite items: large screen

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TVs, VCRs, personal computers, camcorders, FAX machines, cordless phones, cellular phones, microwaves, stereos, CD players and CDs, walkmans, tennis and more tennis shoes, toys, everything for beauty, hygiene and health from drugstores and of course, clothes. The trend to experiential consumption (Featherstone 1990, Urry 1988 and 1990, Lee 1993, Rouse 1995) has not displaced the importance of consumption of durable goods in Brazil. (Veja magazine [12/4/91] estimated 300 million dollars worth of goods per year brought in buy Brazilians returning from the US, but it is known to exaggerate.) These goods can be categorized as the latest in fashion for the body and the latest in hi-tech home appliances.[33] As to the latter, anyone can tell you that the brands available nationally are considered inferior, or the range too limited, or the specific item is not made; or again if the imports are now available locally, that their prices are prohibitive. Given the circumstances of attainment and the national context, these might well be called modern luxury goods.

Appadurai proposes, however, that "we regard luxury goods not so much in contrast to necessity...but as goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs" (1986:38, emphasis his). It is

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[33] Campbell (1992) describes the appeal of the new in three ways, as being unused, improved, and novel, which in turn correspond to declassé groups who are "pristinian," "technophile" and/or "neophiliac" in tastes.

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interesting that the luxury/need distinction and the symbolic/material one collapse so perfectly with consumer durables. What is more practical than a phone? Yet, as Brazilian critics have scornfully pointed out to me, what more useless at a friend's home, when that friend has a phone? I refer here to cellular phones, of course. At a more popular level, tennis shoes have become obligatory and attainable, as are many brand name clothes or theme park tee shirts; at the other end of the spectrum is imported cars, an unrealizable desire for most, yet so incessantly debated in the media one would imagine otherwise.

Besides things presented on the street which support claims to distinction through modernity, there are those which stay at home, a central arena for working out middle class identity (see Frykman and Lofgren 1987 and Rutz and Orlove 1989).[34] These imports are not only arguments of status in public, they are important in private home consumption.[35] Analysis of the impact of the introduction

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[34] One might suppose that the placement of TV and sound systems in the livingroom is a means of show for invited guests. However, the placement might have more to do with space constraints. As noted, the living space of middle class people in São Paulo is small (a fair estimate of an apartment is 75 square meters) and does not include a den or family room.

[35] Please note that many of the goods are not for individual consumption. What Wilk noted for Belize applies here: "When incomes rise above a certain threshold, cash is reallocated to household luxuries and consumer goods; items like the house and furnishings that belong to the household as a corporate entity rather than to its individual members" (1989:305).

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of such goods in Brazilian households is outside the scope of this chapter.[36] Suffice it to note here two issues, first their value as miniature investments in a period when real estate investment was out of reach and car prices exorbitant. I would also point out the very different function of such items in a Brazilian home in which a domestic servant works (see e.g., Souza 1980 and Azeredo 1989). Issues arise since the items do not "replace" the maid, as the modernist aim might be, but coexist uneasily. For instance, the middle class owner of these appliances often fears the maid will lack the knowledge or be careless -- and break them. This special attention calls to mind their preciousness.

Consider briefly the practice of keeping imported goods (the examples were perfume and a coffee maker) in their original packaging (for some period of time). Such care given to the rare and exotic sacralizes the objects, in a

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[36] Philibert suggests: "A symbolic, but all too real, capitalist penetration takes two forms: (1) that of status-given goods and activities borrowed from a prestigious Western world in order to share in this highly valued modernity; (2) the largely unforeseen insertion of Western classificatory schemes in local symbolic systems when such goods and activities become accepted" (1989:61). For a study of the uses and meanings which a freezer takes on in the homes of Brazilian women professionals, see Ardaillon (forthcoming). See Lindenbaum (1987) for a study of the changes in eating habits and in cognitive shifts which occurred with the increasing importance of wheat in the predominantly rice based diet of Bangladesh. Children's involvement as consumers also merits analysis in the discussion of transnational consumption. For an analysis of minority children and consumption in the US, see Chin (1996).

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way not usually associated with disenchanted, mass produced goods. It may be that through this practice owners are making the goods somehow nonconsumables, turning them into quasi-permanent values.[37] The special value of the imported becomes even more obvious when the price is low and rarity lacking (such as the special purchase of Crest toothpaste). The consumption of these goods is an index of the very strong desire to live with, or better, to incorporate a modernity and alterity on an intimate daily basis.[38]

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[37] Shirley Lindenbaum (personal communication) suggested this to me. See also the discussion in Belk et al (1989) on sacralization. This response to new purchases contrasts with Hirschman (1982). His charming perspective is that consumers become disappointed after purchase of consumer durables. This may strike the right chord for US society, but cross-cultural comparison may lead to other directions.

[38] The cognitive approach to consumption as developed by Douglas and Isherwood is relevant. Pursuing the subjectivity of consumers, Needell (1987, 1988) follows Walter Benjamin in studying the "interiorization" or personal identitification with European goods (and courtesans) by turn-of-the-century Rio inhabitants. Friedman (1991) considers how peoples of the Kongo consume modernity and alterity through non-local goods and how Hawaiians produce their identity as commodities for others. Weiner (1994) counters the now classic emphasis on gifts and exchange with an analysis of the contrary: the retention of inalienable possessions whose value has a symbolic "density." See also Carrier (1995).

These investigations owe a debt to Marx's perspective on commodity fetishism, but direct us further into the subjective aspects of consumers in relation to things consumed rather than the direction Marx indicated: to expose the inverted understanding of what is involved in the exchange of commodities in a capitalist society by reinserting the issue of labor and social relations of production.

As if mocking Marx, Tannenbaum once forecast class revolution through the influx of imports. Thus: "Americans are unaware of their role as the gravediggers of class-

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As this material shows, the trend to experiential consumption (Featherstone 1990, Urry 1980 and 1990, Lee 1993, Rouse 1995) has not displaced the importance of consumption of durable goods in Brazil. (Veja magazine [12/4/91] estimated 300 million dollars worth of goods per year brought in buy Brazilians returning from the US, but it is known to exaggerate.) As to the preference for novelty goods, one might recall McCracken's (1988) study of the rise of consumer society in Europe, especially England, which documents the change in preference from old inherited goods to novelty items from abroad. In contrast, Campbell (1992) describes the current appeal of the new--the unused, improved, and novel, qualities which in turn correspond to the tastes of declassé groups who are "pristinian," "technophile" and/or "neophiliac." The opposition between these two readings is only on one level: both instances indicate responses to social mobility.

Whether the current trends towards foreign goods will "overwhelm and undermine" the Brazilian lifestyle (as Appadurai [1990:305] finds TV and cinema have done for the "rhetoric of national politics" in the Middle East and Asia) whether, the deed being done, what remains to be seen is the

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ridden and stratified societies. They are merely selling toothpaste, fountain pens, and modern plumbing. In fact they are undermining the stratified society characteristic of Latin America and of much of the world" (1960:203). I came across this citation thanks to Hirschman (1982:55). Sounds good on paper!

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process of "creolisation" (Hannerz 1987), or indeed, whether transnational businesses will overwhelm the national ones, it is clear that the actors in question have not only been incorporated but have jumped head first into the "global flows." To reinforce a final aspect of the international schemes, I call upon one more fragment.

Episode # 3: Velvet Roads

After finishing high school, Marcos, an engineering student at the University of São Paulo (USP), went to the US with his cousin, a travel agent. He claimed they had driven from Miami to Orlando (a 230 mile drive) in just 2.5 hours. Waving his arm out to span the horizon, he recalled fondly, "The roads there are like velvet." After this warm recollection he remembered with annoyance that he had spent an entire day of his week trip looking for a 27 inch screen TV. Including tax it cost less than $400 US dollars but in Brazil, he said, it would have cost (the equivalent of) $1,200 (no exaggeration). His ticket was only $400 US dollars (his cousin had found a last minute charter deal), so, as he put it, the trip was free.

Out of Brazil

Indeed, besides the specific motives covered thus far, one cannot forget that the travel is international. The best way I can emphasize that the desire to travel

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internationally is great is to point out that Cancun has recently become a target vacation spot. Now Brazil has more than 7,500 kilometers of coastline, most of it breathtaking and diversely so, and invites bathing and boating. People often told me with indignation that a trip to the Northeast coast would run higher than an international package deal to Florida and/or Cancun. Airfares are comparable: round trip to Northeast cities from São Paulo runs $500 in US dollars, as do flights to Miami or Orlando. Brazilian tourists frequently rationalize travel expenses as absorbed in the low costs of items bought in the US portion of a trip.

Such has been increasingly the case, as Brazil's inflation developed, and that includes the present, post-inflation period. By the time the latest plan came into effect, domestic prices had reached an all time high,[39] and the dollar was set below the national currency, making travel to and shopping in the US even more accessible and no less "necessary."

Beyond economizing, however, it appears that what is desired by the Cancun travellers is not the "untouched beauty" of the deserted beaches of Ceará or Bahia, or even the noncamping, deluxe hotel version, but the First Worldly, out of Brazil experience. By going to Florida or Cancun,

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[39] The inflation rate projected for 1994, based on the first semester, hence the period immediately preceding the Plano Real, was 7,350 percent, as reported by economist Márcio Garcia (n.d.)

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one has a respite from the crisis (in whatever shape it has taken since 1981) and one avoids the continually ineradicated poverty of the "less developed" parts of Brazil. Perhaps also one avoids acknowledging the the inability to pay for a trip to the island Fernando de Noronha (PA), renowned for its Jacques Cousteau paradise, or the lack of a beach home in Angra dos Reis, for instance, which is one of Brazil's most exclusive beach and boating areas about three hours away from Rio or São Paulo.[40]

In anticipation of a conclusion and in connection to discussion of native distinctions regarding Disney/the US versus debutante balls, I would like to point out that despite the highly individualistic character of these practices, the quest for foreign goods and travel is one

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[40] Veja baptized the Orlando-Disney World trip as cheap after the Plano Collor (March, 15, 1990) took effect, for thereafter dollar prices fell (Veja, 4/11/90 and 10/3/90). Veja has done frequent feature articles on US travel, variously emphasizing the surprising fact that it has become cheaper to travel internationally than to the Northeast (4/11/90), the popularity of Florida for Disney and goods (12/4/91) -- noting that 50 flights a week go to Miami, and pointing out the novel experience of stability in "firm land in a sunny First World, protected by a developed economy and free of bank confiscations (1/2/91). An article on (im)migrants to Florida also cites as their object "to have their feet on solid First World ground, [where it is] sunny, protected by a developed economy and safe from bank deposit confiscations" (Veja 1/2/91). It expressly recommends escaping the crisis through a trip to the (cheaper) Caribbean for its beauty and casinos. It discourages going to Argentina, precisely because it is "going through a more acute crisis than Brazil" so that it cannot serve to "alleviate" the "economic hangover" of Brazil. Thus my interpretation is explicit in Veja, the news magazine most read by middle classes.

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which unifies the Brazilian middle class. This statement may seem innocuous. However, through it I disregard distinctions important to some Brazilians (the intellectual and sophisticates) who take pains to distinguish their more cultured consumption and travel from that merely done with the object of "international bargain shopping." I point this out not simply to distance myself from a "native" (or "emic") distinction, but to register it.

There is a hierarchy of distinctions with respect to travel: Europe remains the irreproachable cultural experience; however, New York is now surpassing it in popularity. Ostensibly, one goes to these places for cultural pursuits, and to Orlando-Miami for theme parks and shopping. An academic friend called those who travel to the US for consumer rather than touristic purposes "sacoleiros do ar." The translation I offer, "international bargain shoppers," loses two important referents: first, the government subsidized discount warehouses for fresh fruits and vegetables called "Sacolão" (literally big bag), where shoppers fill their bags and buy according to total weight, obtaining a much better bargain than in the supermarkets for selected items. "Sacoleiros" then are those who come with bags to these discount houses. The phrase "do ar," by air, recalls lower middle class people and informal sector merchants who go by bus to buy duty free goods in Paraguay. This expression teases the upper middle class and nouveau

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riche by likening their air travel to these cruder images. Such scoffing (some of it self-directed) has become a favorite pasttime[41] of certain Brazilians. But not all. An informant in my study to whom I reported this joke scoffed back at the "snobs." One could easily argue as well this that even if the trip is largely or unabashedly devoted to buying, one doesn't get away with only that, for, of course, commercial transactions abroad are "cultural" experiences. By the same token, even if "culture" is the main objective for travel and one is anticonsumerist, one can't return home to Brazil solely with intangibles -- relatives and friends will surely make requests for purchases.

Conclusion

This discussion took as starting point for analysis of middle class involvement in transnational consumption a call by Campbell to look beyond immediate calculating intentions to a broader subjectivity. This directive was helpful in

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[41] Some may go so far as to say they are ashamed of their "sacoleiro" compatriots. Joking comments of Brazilians who heard of my work when presented at the September 1995 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) meetings in Washington, DC revealed that part of the irony was self-directed, indicating a preoccupation with "consumerism." The joking pasttime has been raised to an art in the absolute treasure by Guadalupe Loaeza (1992), Compro, Luego Existo. In this acute social analysis in fictional form, the international consumption driven practices are satirized through a stream of consciousness presentation of wealthy, indeed millionaire Mexicans.

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preventing us from arriving prematurely at a conclusion as to the motive for Disney, and it encouraged us to consider motives as multiple. We saw that involvement in the newer teenage rite renewed the standing of the entire family. Advantageously positioning the travellers in the First World arena, the Disney trip holds its own against the traditional/revived rite of passage, the debutante ball.

Several consumption theorists (e.g., Miller 1987, McCracken 1988, Rutz and Orlove 1989, Friedman 1989, 1991, Campbell 1994, Lofgren 1994, Wilk 1994) incite us to go beyond viewing consumption solely (and judgmentally) as a status-seeking venture. This element, however, must not be disregarded. Heightened status preoccupations have been associated with deepening disparities of income distribution (see Belk 1988). For the past several years the World Bank has ranked Brazil either second or first in unequal income distribution. The uncertainties of position and identity in societies characterized by class mobility exacerbate such concerns. It is well known that mobility occurs between adjacent strata (Luckman and Berger 1964). Accordingly, the economic instability in Brazil has led middle class individuals and families to place great store in "cultural capital." Such efforts remind us that middle classes depend highly on symbolic groundings for social and economic claims.

The material presented here counters the perspective of

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some transnational theorists, such as Featherstone (1990), who predicts a blurring of distinctions and the "deconstruction of symbolic hierarchies" (1990:18) due to the great quantity and worldwide circulation of goods and consumption experiences. Featherstone suggests that "it may be that there are different modes of identity and habitus formation and deformation emerging which make the significance of taste and lifestyle choices more blurred -- if not throughout the social structure, at least within certain sectors, for instance the young and fractions of the new middle class" (1990:13). On the contrary, Brazilians have long been adept at adjusting things international to local classifications; the young and the old readily update intra-class distinctions. This brings us to another motivating factor for these international schemes.

Rouse (1995) has recently analyzed the directions taken by the dominant transnational bourgeoisie towards inculcating the sense that one's "worth" is related to engaging in particular forms of consumption,[42] including new global experiences. Certainly Brazilians are responding to the expanded consumers' market and related media, which

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[42] As Rouse puts it: "an extension and intensification of a general ethos of consumerism, an attempt to persuade more people in more profound ways that their worth as persons is intimately linked to their capacity to acquire and consume particular kinds of goods" (1995:365). Rouse also points out "the introduction of ever finer distinctions into the semiotics of consumption" as the direction in the industry at present (ibid).

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engage an imaginary worldwide about what must ground the middle class and what special experiences it should have. Yet the terms or urgings for Disney, its impact and its meanings are in good part homemade. While I agree with Rouse's statement that the new consumption practices bring people in deed, if not in intent, to "counter...established ideologies of citizenship" (1995:358), he finds the state passé, which I don't.

In a nation where stability was out of the picture, where Brazilians lost faith in an increasingly infernalized daily life and, specifically, were blocked from consumption practices so central to the realization of their class identity, one means of bypassing or surpassing the national blockages has been through the circuitous, informal attainment of international goods. Garcia Canclini has recently stated: "To consume is to participate in a field of disputes for that which the society produces and for the ways of using it" (1995:45)[43] -- and for that which the society does not produce or provide access to. At the risk of stating what some deem passé and others obvious, I have emphasized the national-international division rather than the fluid notion of transnationalism for the simple reason that the nation-state is pivotal, precisely with respect to

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[43] The translation is mine, from part I, chapter 1, "El consumo sirve para pensar." It reads: "Consumir es participar en un escenario de disputas por aquello que la sociedad produce y por las maneras de usarlo" (1995:45).

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the means of appropriation of these goods and confrontations thereof. Furthermore, I find the intensity of the significance attached to these goods and experiences relates to the nation as well as the tactics do. For again, it seems to me that middle class Brazilians have become especially attached to "things international" in part to compensate for or even to surpass the nation-in-crisis. The decade long crisis kept them grimly facing a continuing or aggravated "third world" at home and constrained their ability to have but fanned their desires for "first world" modernity. This statement presents the first world/third world hierarchy as validated by middle class Brazilians. Indeed, these international goods and experiences prompt the Brazilians who have them to reinscribe these terms.

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Chapter 6
Delivering the Crisis: The Media and Middle Class Households during the Collor Presidency (1990-92)

Walking against the wind, without handkerchief, without ID [card], the sun divides into crimes.

from "Alegria, Alegria" by Caetano Veloso

For more than a decade, the print media has told middle class readers that their buying power is down, the crisis and government plans target them, their dreams of paradise are reduced or lost (see chapter 4). What is involved in the relationship of the media to the crisis and the middle class? To promote itself, the media provided information for middle class readers to rely on financially and to situate themselves socially, via reports on the decline of the middle class. I find that the media not only reported the crisis, and was a bridge between the public and private (Morley 1991), but that it was an integral part, a (re)source of the crisis involving the middle class and therefore merits study. In this chapter I examine how the political and economic crisis was "delivered" into middle class households via the media-tion of the print news, taking for examination the two plans of the Collor presidency and then the corruption investigation.

My wider aim in this chapter and the next is to trace how middle class Brazilians articulated, evaluated and acted

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on their situations in relation to their communities, the nation and the government's handling of the crisis. This chapter looks at the period immediately preceding fieldwork, that is, the Collor presidency (1990-92). This context also serves as frame of reference for the political discourse and acts of informants at the time of fieldwork (1993-1994), the focus of the next chapter. I consider the Collor plans at length because these drastic austerity measures and the ensuing depression, the worst since the 1930s, were what informants agreed really hit them -- their sector of the middle class. That is, if some felt that they had been spared before then, most said that from 1990 forward they were adversely affected by the crisis, and by the only president for whom many had voted.

Precisely because daily life for middle class Brazilians became so overtly subject to governmental intervention and prey to downsliding, this examination has direct implications for middle class politics (see Ang 1990). The Collor scandal prompted an unusual middle class politicization, in the form of a call for his impeachment for corruption. Informants often referred to it as a major turning point in recent history and a major conquest. Yet at the same time, they claimed that the media was a crucial catalyst to the movement. Some analysts have argued further (see Fausto Neto 1994 and Rubim 1994) that the media both produced Collor as president, i.e., got him elected, and got

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him impeached. Thus the media not only insinuated itself into the minutiae of daily life in novel ways; its involvement in Brazilian politics may have had an unprecedented "agency."[1] Analysis of the Collor presidency and the impeachment movement therefore raises questions about the formation of social knowledge, beliefs and attitudes in a "mainstream" sector, as well as their political agency, in and through a mass mediated society.

What theoretical resources are at hand for an examination of the Brazilian press?[2] Studies of the media find orientation from theories on hegemonic processes in discourse. One may take as a baseline assumption the following statement by Althusser: "ideology is not a distorted representation of real relations but rather a real relation itself, namely the relation through which human beings live the relation to their world" (1984:165). The

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[1] The situation to be described of the Brazilian media's "involvement" in daily life and national politics (not to mention the strong localism of the novelas, Mattelart and Mattelart 1990 notwithstanding) counter Meyrowitz's (1985) sweeping claims that the age of electronic, transnational media have radically altered our "sense of place." More to the point would be the fact that Brazilians had first learned of impeachment through the US Watergate scandal, an important but specific exterior influence.

[2] Much of this discussion applies equally well to broadcast and print media. My concern, however, is solely with the latter. According to Spitulnik's recent review (1993), there is as yet no "anthropology of the media," rather stimulating suggestions of the role in the media in forming interpretitive communities and studies of ethnographic film.

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news media intervenes centrally in the making (i.e., not merely reporting) of this "lived" relation to the world, or, as de Certeau puts it, in the "establishment of the real" (1984:184 ff; see also Grossberg 1991).[3] Furthermore, if it is true, as Roberto da Matta says, that the crisis could be read as a "collapse of some of our instruments of self-comprehension" (1993:17), then it is especially interesting to examine the symbolic representations--the lexicon, categories and narratives selected in the construction of social knowledge (Gerbner 1985, Morley 1983, Thompson 1984, Dijk 1985, Bell 1994) at a time of crisis. Some argue further that the media contributes to the shaping of publics (Kress 1983, Dahlgren 1991, Curran 1991, Morley 1991, Anderson 1983). In Brazil, as will be discussed in the course of the chapter, claims were made that the media went beyond shaping interpretations, having important political effects.

This examination is concerned with debates regarding the purported ideological message contained in and delivered by the text. Questions have been raised as to the efficacy of the ideological message: Is there ever just one message?

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[3] Likewise, Bourdieu said that social science should study all the battles "à conserver ou à transformer la réalité, et en particulier celles que ont pour enjeu l'imposition de la definition légitime de la réalité et dont l'éfficacité proprement symbolique peu contribuir à la conservation ou à la subversion de l'order établi, c'est-a-dire de la réalité" (Sens Pratique 1972: 244).

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Do the several voices in news texts (the reporter's, those accessed, and the collage of other news sources which altogether result in one article) represent or simulate diversity (Albuquerque 1993, Castro 1993)? Even when there is a dominant message, how effective is it in getting through to the reader/listener/viewer? That is, all the textual features supporting a given ideological position might be uncovered, exposed, but critics and empirical reception studies have shown a disjuncture between the message sent ("encoded") and received ("decoded"), such that one cannot predict that readers will "decode" according to the textual indications. Considering topical features, what of the efficacy of the "agenda" set by the media in structuring the framework for social understanding? Contrariwise, in what ways does the very construction of the text depend on the readership (Newcomb 1991, Bakhtin 1986)? And, of special interest here, might a "critical" cast in a given media have "repercussions on political legitimacy" (Blumler and Gurevitch: 257)?

Some critical media analysts have turned attention to reader reception, finding the possibility of readers adopting any one of three alternatives: the dominant reading, a negotiated or partial one, or an oppositional one (Fiske and Hartley 1978, Hall 1980; see also Woollacott 1982). Such critical discourse analyses are not bounded by the traditional linguistic concern with grammatical

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features.[4] Thus Hall identifies three ideological functions, not solely of the news, but of the media overall.

> The mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis upon which groups and classes construct an 'image' of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality ... can be coherently grasped as a 'whole." This is the first of the great cultural functions of the media: the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge.
> [...]
> The second function is to "make sense of it [the world] with preferred and excluded explanations and rationales.
> [...]
> The production of consensus, the construction of legitimacy...is the third key aspect... (1979:340-341).

Aware of the pitfalls of unidirectional models of ideology in the media and that linguistic features don't create their own effects or ensure a given interpretation, I wish to work towards a more complex protocol for analysis of the interactions of the media and readers and the "interpretive practices of media audiences" (Spitulnik 1993:296). I will therefore take under advisement not to read the effects from the text; however, like Spitulnik, I find it important to attend to linguistic forms which "materially" construct the major news events, to then compare these to informant interpretations and acts. My specific interest in learning how informants understand the

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[4] As is well known, most linguistics has worked at the sentence level and below, thus not at discursive features, i.e., beyond the sentence level. Of course classical linguistics did, in the study of rhetoric.

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crisis guides my selection of the media sources.

In my view the most promising protocol for analysis is an examination of style, in the two ways Ducrot and Todorov identify it: "...at the level of the utterance, that is, at the level of its verbal, syntactic, and semantic aspects...and at the level of enunciation, that is, at the level of the relationship defined among the protagonists of the discourse (speaker, listener, referent)" (1979:301). Or similarly, as Hartley and Montgomery (1985) suggest, analysis should be conducted on two levels, the relational, or how the reader is addressed (and how a relation is proposed and established between the text and viewer), and representational.

The emphasis on the text-reader relationship seems particularly appropriate for a news magazine, the source which is the major focus of this chapter, due to the freer rein it has for elaborating a narrative, and within that, for setting up this "relationship." Restating the issues thus far raised as questions for my examination of Brazilian news: what "voices" does the news magazine in question represent and endorse? Who is the implied reader and how is he/she positioned by the text (Kress 1986, Connell and Mills 1991)? What strategies for creating a bridge with the readers are discernible from its vocabulary and narrative? Much of the Gramscian-influenced cultural studies work on the media has focused on subaltern, alternative,

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oppositional positions from popular culture, where one might expect a lack of correspondence between the message sent and that received. It has been found that the media can't depart too greatly from the conceptions and values people bring to the news -- or it will not be assimilated or perhaps be rejected outright (Dahlgren 1991, Hall 1991). Hence the "influence" of the news (Seaton 1981) might confront significant boundaries. The question that arises in my study, with respect to the possible readings: What of the "influence" of the mainstream press on middle class understandings? These Brazilians, who read much the same news sources from a press targeted to them, had access to a common language and evaluation about the way people were acting and the direction the national community was taking. In this case, is there an ideological "fit?" Does the preferred or dominant reading work best where they are concerned?

This line of inquiry is informed by cultural studies and in turn by other discourse theorists. Althusser's concept of interpellation encourages us to look for how the text producers posit, or better, presume an addressee's subject position, how the text positions the reader in a preemptive way. In contrast, I also keep in mind Barthes' critique of literary critics. It is well to recall at length his luminous appraisal of the reader for interpretation of discourse. Said Barthes:

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> [...] there is, however, someone who understands each word in its duplicity and who, in addition, hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him -- this someone being precisely the reader (or here, the listener). Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination (1977:148, emphasis added).

Barthes' sense of the reader's comprehensiveness might seem less likely than forgetful or impervious readings (see Blumler and Gurevitch 1982). Yet given the complexity of issues involved in such analyses, it makes sense to weigh and counterbalance the various perspectives on the media. That is, a view on the authoritarian style of powerful media makers should be tempered by an understanding that some common ground is needed to create a bridge to readers, as well as a recognition of the complexity of reader responses.[5]

In sum, my protocol for analysis is to ask how the text constructs its voice(s) and the reader's voice and position, and what understandings and commonalities (e.g., notions of common sense, right and wrong) it implies are shared. This will allow me to characterize the mainstream news media's

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[5] Discussion of wider constraints than textual features on the influence of the media, as informed by Foucault's work on discourse, is developed in the final section of this chapter.

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narrative strategies in terms of what I call voicing.

Part I of this chapter focuses on the news coverage of the first year of the Collor presidency, especially the news magazine Veja's narrative style and voice. I will argue that the media positioned itself as middle class like the readers, constructing a discourse "for" them and encouraging some attitudes and acts while discouraging others. However, at times the voice seemed to be a virtual representation of business interests, which makes for a somewhat incompatible duality. Overall, I find that ambivalent representations of and relation to the middle class were characteristic of the media.

Part II, covering the second Collor plan through the impeachment, studies the media and middle class people in the public sphere. I find that the media appeared to assume the role of proxy for the middle class in the public sphere, a view which raises questions about agency. The chapter concludes with a discussion of reflections on the role of the media by informants. Let us begin by looking at how the initial moments of the Collor presidency were presented in the middle class press.

Part I: The Plano Collor: Confiscation and its Discontents

A. Biodegradable Money (Post-Cruzado/Pre-Collor)

The news magazine Veja wrote with pride that president-elect Fernando Collor de Mello was to meet the US president,

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George Bush, twice in one day during the US portion of Collor's pre-inaugural travels. It recalled that Collor promised to "take the country out of the hole it was in through one simple and sacred formula: the opening of the economy" (1/31/90). Other pre-inaugural news focused on the dubious results of Sarney's presidency, in particular, the fantastic bank profits through the "overnight" financial markets.[6] The banking windfalls occurred in a monthly inflation of over 50 percent.

A Veja writer points out sarcastically that "with the interest on the overnight up to 100% last week, the third currency used by Sarney in five years, the cruzado novo, followed the same path as the cruzeiro and the cruzado, into disuse. All over the country, accounts were being done in dollars, in BTNs, LTFs, VRFs, and even a currency used exclusively by taxi drivers, the UT (taximetric unit). Even the UT is less exotic than the cruzado novo, that biodegradable money: suffice it to stay in your pocket one day for it to lose 2% of its value. By making money a lie, Sarney transformed it literally into the expression 'time is money.' [...] Anyone who buys and pays two days later is making a great deal. On the other hand, anyone who receives

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[6] The "overnight," or quick investment with high interest was Sarney's final means to curb (consumption-driven) inflation. Brazil's largest private bank, Bradesco, had a profit of 74% more in 1989 than in 1988 (Veja 1/17/90). Other banks had similar winnings, prompting one bank director to say "it was a great year" (Veja 2/7/90, in an article entitled, "The Sky was the Limit").

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with any delay is fated for trouble" (Veja 2/14/90).

At this time, anxieties surfaced as to what Collor would do. He had announced on French TV that "the price of his economic plan will be paid by Brazilian elites, who have already made a lot of money with a development model that benefited a few too much, and was insensitive to our social problems" (2/14/90). Veja reported rumors that the only way to solve the problem of government debt would be confiscation or a tax imposed on the financial markets. Fearing some change in the overnight, elites began to defensively diversify into dollars and gold -- and the savings account. It was calculated that at least 25 billion cruzeiros, worth 400 million dollars, moved into savings accounts nationally in a period of four days.

Characteristic of Veja was a major feature article on the state of the nation (2/21/90) containing a description of a hypothetical horror scenario of hyperinflation. What if those fearing the end of the overnight banking application all took their money out? In this case, according to Veja's prediction, all would lose. "The government would have to remit the equivalent of 70 billion dollars [sic] to honor the investments. This inundation would bring the country immediately into hyperinflation. There wouldn't be gold, dollars or goods sufficient to absorb this money, which would totally lose its value. Prices would explode and the 70 billion dollars in cruzados

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novos would be worth half the price two days later and nothing two weeks later. Factories would stop producing, for there wouldn't be currency capable of buying anything; commerce would stop and chaos would prevail. This is the scenario of galloping hyperinflation, but the nightmare seems distant at the moment..." If so, then what's the point? Whose nightmare was Veja conjuring?

While speculation of various kinds was going on, Veja noted that other consumers were busy stockpiling supermarket wares, that is, taking more modest protective measures against any change, particularly in case of a freeze provoking shortages and illegal price mark-ups. Two days before the inauguration, the Central Bank decreed a bank holiday from March 14, a Wednesday, through Sunday. The overnight and stock markets were suspended as well. Monday and Tuesday prices rose enormously, for instance milk from 41 cruzados novos to 128. Already by March 15th, the lack of cash ran up against high prices. Even so, shopping continued intensively with people fearing, rather than hoping, for a price freeze, due to its backfiring effects. In what had become a routine service, newspapers published lists comparing prices of basic goods at a variety of stores.

B. The Plano Collor is "Lowered"

The Plano Collor, announced March 17, 1990, had many

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measures, but the ones of immediate interest were these: As of that day, the currency was to be the cruzeiro. "The cruzado novo will be substituted by the cruzeiro, without cutting off of zeroes, from today forward. The symbol of cruzeiro will be Cr$. This, however, doesn't mean that the old cruzeiro notes, extinct in 1967, will have value again" (O Globo, 3/17/90).[7]

This now familiar currency change was far overshadowed by the next: "Withdrawals from checking and savings accounts of deposits made until the 13th of March of this year will be limited to Cr$50,000. Values beyond this will be sent back to the Central Bank and converted into cruzeiros 18 months hence--that is, after September 16, 1991" (emphasis added). Another subsection of the news article explained that this money in the Central Bank will earn monetary correction and 0.5 percent monthly interest (later calculated to 6 percent per year). This amount, 50,000 cruzeiros, was the equivalent of 1,200 US dollars. Informants vividly remembered the stunning effect when

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[7] The cruzeiro dates from 1942, when it replaced the rei (mil reis). In 1986, Sarney created the cruzado, and in 1989, with the Plano Verão, the cruzado novo, that is, the cruzado minus three zeroes. Between independence [1822] and 1990, the country has had 7 currencies, thus averaging 24 years per. The most durable one was the real--undoubtedly Cardoso's reason for choosing it in July 1994. People unfamiliar with high inflation find these changeovers senseless, and remain sceptical when told that a good part of the reason for changing currency is to get rid of the tainted, untrustworthy devalued one. Many don't realize the unpleasant alternative of lopping off zeroes. Cf. also Dominguez 1990.

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suddenly, from that day forward, they had only a very finite sum of savings.[8]

The Folha de São Paulo's economy section estimated that Collor's economic plan "'vai mexer' (will interfere or mess) with about 35 billion in US dollars or 10% of the National Gross Product" (3/17/90). In fact, 74 billion were blocked (26 billion from savings and checking; 48 billion from the overnight). Called a "brutal drying of liquidity," the economic team responded that the intention of the drastic reduction of currency in circulation was precisely to curb spending -- and speculation. In brief, then, the Collor plan featured, on one level, the freezing of monies (and only a brief price freeze) and a cosmetic currency change. The other parts of the plan, cutting public deficit and opening the economy to imports, did not receive much immediate attention. The removal of restrictions on imports -- intended to counter local inflationary prices -- was gradual and partial; and though Collor threatened a drastic cutting of public budget with employee dismissals, this

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[8] The difficulty I had in learning the dollar equivalent is telling on many accounts. For one thing, it attests to the fact that the country did not dollarize; people did not have the dollar as a common referent. Second, it shows that due to rapid devaluation, any equivalency was difficult to come by. Guesses on the exchange ranged from 50 to 1000 dollars. The former would have been due to an erroneous assumption of a straightforward devaluation, that is, from 50,000 cruzedos novos to 50 dollars. The small sums that what informants recalled was that the 50 thousand was very little money.

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orthodox anti-inflation measure was not accomplished.[9]

Planners reasoned that a major error of previous plans had been the consumer sprees following price freezes. They assumed Congress would approve as the plan did not adversely affect workers, but rather penalized speculators. Brazil's problem was glaring: of a GNP of 350 US billion, 120 US billion was in the financial market. Ninety percent of savings accounts held less than the 50,000 limit, said the president of the Central Bank, Ibrahim Eris; as Finance Minister Zélia Cardoso de Mello put it, just ten percent of the population was affected. Besides, said Zélia, the alternative was hyperinflation -- and we know from Veja what that meant.

The ten percent targeted by the measure included those 12 million of the middle class earning between 18-120,000 cruzeiros (that is, from $425 to $2900 dollars per month), a group described by Veja as having "children [who] go to

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[9] As to other aspects of the plan, such as cutting public budget, Collor announced the laying off of 360,000 public employees, yet did not do any such thing. Although to do so would seem anti-inflationary, in fact its effect would have been the reverse. Given the laws for payment of indemnities to those laid off, the sums would have been enormous. As to the promise of opening of the economy, in came luxury cars. An Alfa at 38,000 in US dollars would, however, cost three times more in Brazil. A manager at Volkswagon commented that it was "obvious that we are not going to bring in cars to compete with our products" (Veja 6/20/90). The new law did cancel bureaucratic impediments, and left only lowered and varying rates of taxation of goods as a deterrent.

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private school, go to restaurants, buy cars once in a while and even travel internationally on occasion and who put 17 out of 100 cruzados novos in savings" (3/28/90). (This description matches my informant pool.) Collor's only and constant concern, said his aides, was to be informed of any impact of the plan on the low income population (who were in any case without bank accounts). Congress approved the plan with all its austerity measures.[10]

Immediately the press recounted how the plan upset the population. Veja's first major commentary article (3/21/90), headed "Week without end: Rumors, bank holiday and a plan with drastic measures made last week one of the most hallucinating that the country has lived through," recounted the confusions peculiar to this plan. What if one had more than one bank account? What about older checks yet to be deposited? Would stores accept old money?

Even though the 50,000 rule may appear clear, problems arose, from checks with the old currency not being recognized (despite official rulings) to banks not allowing withdrawals for employee paychecks beyond the 50,000 amount,

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[10] Congress expressed only weak reservations about the plan. Interestingly, a senator requested a list from the Central Bank with names of people who had made withdrawals of over 500,000 cruzados novos before the blockade. Zélia refused to allow this, then rescinded, with the result of raising suspicions. At the time of the plan, its secrecy seemed close to complete, but for one possible leak: the governor of Alagoas had withdrawn 1.5 million cruzados novos from the overnight (Jornal do Brasil 3/24/90).

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to banks improvising a variety of other blockages. In some cases the disruption turned violent. The newspaper O Globo reported a near riot outside the Citibank of Rio, when people learned after three hours wait in line that they were not to receive their unemployment compensation (despite the exemption of the FGTS funds from the ruling). The situation calmed down only with the shock forces of the Military Police and word from Citibank that the FGTS payments would be made (O Globo 3/21/90).

In Mato Grosso do Sul, there was a one man battle by a 41 year old farmer who had, on the 12th of March, sold his ranch including buildings, cattle, tractors and home, and then invested in the open market. A few days into the plan, desperate, he rammed his car through the glass doors of the bank and shouted: "'I'm poor, miserable! This government took everything I had. It stole my money.' ... security responded quickly" (O Globo, 3/21/90, 17). The types of injuries varied. O Globo told Brazilian readers that the New York Times had identified a range of misfortunes: from heart clinics in Rio receiving double the number of cases since the measure, to a 12 year old Paulista girl who could no longer go to Disney World that year (O Globo, 3/24/90). Although one heard of real suicides, more rumors of them spread. The media did manage to provide some relief. Leftist economist Maria da Conceição Tavares was interviewed by the late night talk show comedian Jô Soares. She said,

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"Now isn't the time for joking." Ever quick, Jô responded, "What?! They're even going to confiscate that from me?!"

"Typical" sorts of misfortune were as follows: Someone had just sold an old car and put the money in the "open" when the bank holiday was decreed. The Plano Collor left him/her with no money and no car. Still more grave, those who had sold an apartment, also making an open market investment prior to buying a new home -- with the result of having no money and the prospect of no place to live. Such misfortunes, in which "insult added to injury," were quintessential to the Collor Plan.[11]

C. 'A Collor in Your Life': Informant Experience of the Plan

Among my informants, recollections of the first moments of the plan ranged from trivial to catastrophic. Thus, Laura laughingly recalled that upon hearing of the plan, she dashed out to buy her godchild a birthday present, cleverly dating the check the day before so that it would be valid. As reported in chapter 2, Maurício and Paola's car sales business, begun after the near fatal attack on Maurício, was severely jeopardized.

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[11] Surprisingly enough, the government did indeed "open its coffers" and liberate the money confiscated, albeit in stages, primarily to avoid consumer sprees. But this return as promised 18 months later never sat right, being unconstitutional and outrageous, nor could the losses and lost opportunities -- of a house, car, dream honeymoon or trip, new business venture -- be compensated (Veja 8/21/91).

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Esther and Gilberto's story illustrates the complications the Collor plan posed for their home and work. When I asked whether they had experienced any surprises in the past decade, Gil responded that all one needed was "a Collor in your life" ("um Collor da vida"). They had begun making payments on an apartment under construction. Then

> Gil begins: "Collor lowered that marvelous plan on the 16th of February [sic]. Between then and May, not even the contractor knew what to do, with what money would he pay? The guy needed money to finish the building."
> Esther adds: "The old currency, whoever accepted it, you had to negotiate with it."
>
> I ask, "Really? It wasn't changed automatically?"
>
> Gil: "The cruzados novos were blocked in the bank. Everyone had just 50 thousand cruzados or cruzeiros, and the debts were all in cruzados, so you had to negotiate. Let's say something was worth one million cruzados novos. You'd sell it for 50 cruzeiros because you had to pay your employees. So I got really enthusiastic about buying, but when I arrived at home, I discovered that this [50 cruzeiros] was all I had."
>
> Esther continues: "we payed in installments, the blocked money was [nonetheless] negotiable."
>
> A journalist herself, Esther explains the plan:
>
> Esther: "The intention was to stop money from circulating and start a new economy. The fact was that the plan was designed in a very closed way, it required absolute secrecy of the economic team, the story couldn't leak, because the idea of the plan was the impact. In his inauguration speech on television, with the whole population watching, he had already said [she interrupts herself], one of his campaign slogans was that he was going to kill inflation with just one shot. This was the most curious because he --"
>
> Gil interjects: "he almost killed everyone."
>
> Esther continues: "The slogan became famous. So

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> panic was generalized. Because suddenly there was a finance ministra--the first woman minister--saying 'from now on you have 50 thousand cruzados, each.'"
>
> Gil corrects: "No, it was cruzeiros. Cruzados was..."
>
> Esther goes on: "So everyone had debts in cruzados novos [the old currency]. So we negotiated on the basis of an exchange of debts. The old currency continued circulating, but not in the circulating realm [meio circulante]."

Note how middle class people had to learn to deal with yet another substitute for the currency--in an imaginary realm! Gil continues his discussion of surprises, now in terms of his profession, architecture.

> Gil: "This was the first big surprise. The second big surprise, we discovered that with this plan the market ended [acabou]. I will never forget, one day, a Wednesday, there were no cars on the streets. It seemed like Sunday. A few days later, the stores were closed, everything had stopped. I went to the office, [but] I didn't know what to do..."
>
> Esther: "There was the highest incidence of bankruptcy."
>
> Gil: "I went to the club to clear my head. On the way, I heard the daily quote of the volume of São Paulo's stock market. It was what I had in my bank account, understand, this the stock market of São Paulo! I live off building projects. So it was over. Works stopped, there was nothing to do. The third big surprise, the price of buildings fell."
>
> Esther: "No one had money. No one could buy, no one knew what would happen. All markets stopped."
>
> Gil: "We had no more means to buy the apartment we were buying. We lost our reserves. But since I'm crazy, I signed a contract saying I would buy."
>
> From there, the couple discussed how the plan

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prejudiced their salaries. The inflation from the four months preceding the plan was not calculated into the new currency, hence their salaries were lower. The difference between the actual inflation and the lesser salary adjustments continued until the moment of the interivew. I say as a wrap up, "you live with all this, right?" Esther: "constantly," at which we all laugh. She concludes: "--ever since we were born. We don't know life without inflation."

Let us return to the press.

D. Veja Magazine Narrates the Collor Plan

The material presented thus far gives a sample of the news directed at the middle and upper middle classes. Although there are intraclass and political distinctions among the newspapers (e.g., the Folha (de São Paulo), more intellectual, leftist and artsy, the Estadão (Estado de São Paulo) conservative and businesslike, the Jornal da Tarde, owned by the Estado de São Paulo, more middle middle class and center), it is interesting that in terms of this topic -- the crisis and the middle class -- the newspapers are similar in message and style. Their discourse offered common references, language and perspectives on the crisis.

I find that the newspapers assumed a role of guardian angel, among others, in favor of middle class

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readers/consumers.[12] Veja goes further, conveying "anxious" expectations of the Collor presidency. I focus from here on primarily on Veja, the magazine most widely read by the middle and upper middle classes. I am most interested in Veja, less for documentary purposes than for its distinctive voice, narrative style and commentary on the government.

Meaning "look," Veja is similar to Time, Newseek and the French L'Express magazine, in terms of providing weekly state of the nation columns and business updates, and features on society and the arts. Started in 1967, Veja is published by the large publishing company, Editora Abril. Abril produces many magazines, including those focusing on fashion and famous personalities. A family enterprise, its first owner was Victor Civita (1907-1990), Italian immigrant to São Paulo; his son Roberto has replaced him. Veja's first editor was Mino Carta, also from Italy. According to former journalist-editor Marcelo Tognazi (interview 7/96),[13] Carta is the best and most skilled editor in the country. (Carta eventually moved to the competitor magazine Isto E, and was

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[12] Although analysis of the media outside the crisis is beyond the scope of this research, I did note that the frequent stories on new forms of wealth and new practices of the wealthy, especially fashionable consumption practices, seemed to me to goad people. Doing so, the media counterbalanced its role of guardian angel, being in this case an irritant. Once again the media was dualist in its representations of and relation to the middle class.

[13] At the time of the interview, June 1996, Tognazi held a position in the Ministry of Communications.

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there until 1993.)

Veja is much longer than Time and offers a number of special attractions. Each week a personality is interviewed. These range from politicians to intellectuals (anthropologists included!) to artists, who give their "two bits" on Brazil (and other issues). There is an initial page-long comic piece, currently done by Jô Soares, a late night talk show host watched by many middle class Brazilians (including most of my informants), and an editorial on the back page. In the magazines sent to subscribers in the major cities, an additional magazine is inserted, which gives a New York Magazine like entertainment listing. It has a few articles, usually about some consumer fad among the wealthier classes.

With a circulation close to one million, Veja is by far the most widely read "serious" magazine in the nation. It has no pretensions of being "popular" in the sense of being "of the people." Feature articles provide information for privileged groups, such as on foreign vacations and international credit cards. Perhaps most important for gauging its audience is its advertizing. It regularly features cars, jewelry, major brand stores (e.g., Forum), Varig airlines, car insurance, tennis shoes, and since the Collor presidency, imported goods available nationally, such as beer or furnishings from "Tok & Stok." In a word, it targets those who can afford such things and the "wanna

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be's" -- the upper and middle classes. Its price has steadily risen. Currently on news stands, Veja costs three reais, or about $3.30 in US dollars. A year's subscription was $150 dollars in 1993.

Among my informants, more than half (12 out of 20 households queried) had a subscription. Of those who didn't subscribe, some had recently discontinued it, due to the price, but bought it off the stands on occasion. Just four informants bought a competitor. (Two received Exame, one Newsweek [sic], and one Isto E, but the latter also subscribed to Veja.) Thus a simple majority subscribed to it, and most had it and no other news magazine. Whereas the informant pool was evenly split between the two main São Paulo newspapers, the Folha de São Paulo and the Estado de São Paulo, Veja was a common referent. Six million newspapers circulate daily in the major cities. Tognazi estimated three readers per newspaper, and six for every Veja issue. Thus six million may have access to Veja, and 18 million to a major newspaper. But, as Tognazi noted, one might occasionally miss reading the newspaper, but not Veja.[14]

Indeed, newspapers and news magazines tend to differ in voice and narrative style in important ways. While articles in the former are often signed, and the editorials are

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[14] I imagine that the phrase 'did you see the cover of ....' would most often be completed by 'Veja,' in this target population.

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signed or clearly the "voice" of the newspaper, in Veja, the major articles on the nation usually are unsigned, which creates a complex, yet at the same time, imposingly authoritative voice. And while the newspaper is all about printing the latest, the news magazine, always delayed, concerns itself less with daily fare reporting, and much more explicitly with developing stories laden with commentary (which in Dijk's [1985] analysis of the narrative structure of news articles was deemed "optional"). Let us look at Veja's commentary on the Plano Collor.

A month into the plan, Veja (4/18/90) dedicated a long article not yet to the developing economic depression, but to the psychological impact, described as provoking a "paradoxical confluence of extreme nervousness with paralyzing apathy." Like the newspapers it reported a bankroom brawl: a 34 year old merchant, after ten days in bank lines, "had a misunderstanding with a guard at the Itaú bank in Belo Horizonte, where he had gone to rescue the part of the money allowed to the bearer and took a close gunshot wound." Said the merchant, "'I couldn't tolerate that sterile anguish anymore. I've never seen a more tense atmosphere than that bank.' Wounded, he still had time to turn in his documentation to the bank before going to the hospital. Now he is trying to get the money to pay his hospital expenses." The most angered Brazilians, said a psychologist, are those who voted for Collor. They feel

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both "cheated and accomplices."

Combining injury and insult, in late April the government circulated a memorandum stating that retirees had two days to present the necessary documents to obtain their blocked money. Veja wondered (sarcastically) why the government alone had not been able to predict what a cruel problem this presented for the 13 million elderly and disabled who had to spend hours in line (5/9/90). Yet another area of mismanagement was again with the unemployment compensation fund (FGTS). Within a two month period, the FGTS accounts were frozen; freed for one week; freed in general, except for withdrawals related to buying a home; freed for a certain unemployed group; blocked in general; unblocked. This was Finance Minister Zélia's handiwork, Veja (5/16/90) points out, as usual sarcastically.

Collor himself was soon ridiculed for incessantly needing to fix the plan. He signed 348 acts regarding the financial sector alone, many of which rectified errors in preceding ones, and in 1990 alone, instituted no less than 146 measures, prompting political scientist Francisco Weffort to calculate an average of one emergency measure every two days. Said Weffort, "'Collor claims he's modern, but he's a caudillo' [rural boss]" (Veja 3/27/90). Collor's provisional measure #173 became especially notorious. It attempted to prohibit the Judiciary from allowing cases

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against the economic plan.

But the worse result was that the heterodox measures did not stop inflation. Within two months, varying estimates placed it at 9 (FIPE), 15 and 17 (the INPC and IPC respectively, of the Fundação Getúlio Vargas and 22 percent (DIEESE).[15] The austerity measures hurt business badly. After the plan, the money in circulation dropped from 120 billion dollars to 40. Within a month, lacking financial means for production or salaries, businesses registered a slow down or halt (paralização). Production dropped 25 percent, moving the country from recession into depression (Veja 4/18/90).

Veja's sharp criticism laden with ridicule is surprising so early into the presidency and from a mainstream magazine. Thus far the tone and point of view create a voice which seems to model mainstream Brazilians, that is, produce a virtual representation of its target audience of middle and upper class readers (not those with modest means). A closer look at the language shows this more clearly.

If "paralysis" was the most common initial reaction to the plan according to Veja, while fury was expressed in isolated cases, without much delay middle class people, said

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[15] These acronyms refer to four of the 11 inflation indexes created during the crisis. They vary according to sensitivity to different areas of the economy. Those listed above focus on cost of living increases affecting the household.

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Veja, "abandoned their customary silence and began to complain." In this effort, they counted upon the magazine's agreement. (Note how the declarative mode, which states what is or did occur, lends an air of conviction.) Scarcely a week into the plan, the magazine reflected on the difference between stopping the overnight and confiscating bank accounts: "One could even say that anyone who decided to put his savings in the 'over,' where, indisputably, the highest interest rates in the world were paid, was involved in a high risk operation -- for obviously the interest rates were so high because they were being paid by a bankrupt/broke client [cliente quebrado]" (3/21/90). This tough luck evaluation, Veja suggests, should not have been applied to checking accounts, which are not an investment. After identifying this unfair inclusion of middle class people as targets of the measure, Veja concludes that it was unjust for all. Besides breaking a campaign promise, "in confiscating money from the checking account, Collor intervened in an unheard of way in private property, leaving people to think that nothing is really safe from the government..." (Veja 3/21/90). This argument is certainly coherent. More importantly here is the fact that at one point arguments are made for middle class people rather than wealthy speculators, and then with the phrase, "leaving people to think," the group is broadened, making it seem as though Veja is privy to "everyone's" concerns--"everyone"

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being those with private property and bank accounts.

Collor's "bullet" became a "bomb" or an atomic bomb or even an earthquake in the hyperbolic words of its journalists. Veja said (again speaking as if for "everyone"): "one fears that the package has the virtues and defects of the neutron bomb, that which leaves people alive but destroys everything around them" (4/4/90; emphasis added). The president had predicted that his government would "leave the right indignant and the left perplexed." Veja writers now move to yet another subject position, this time reporting the view of the (whole) First World. They point out that the First World was apprehensive of a president who "wakes up one day with the idea of confiscating 80% of financial activity and presents this as a non-negotiable fact." Such an act, they continue, is not surprising from a country moving into socialism, but is when used by a politician with a liberal discourse. The fact that such was done in Germany of 1948 did not inspire faith, for in that case taking people's money occurred where there was nothing to buy. Accompanying this attempt to criticize Collor's politics and economic plan -- with an assumed corroboration of the middle class, all Brazilians and the First World, for whom Veja spoke -- were charges of the measure's unconstitutionality.

Said a middle class claimant interviewed in Veja, "the confiscation is not only theft, it is a violation of our

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constitutional rights" (3/28/90). By the end of May 1990, 27,000 cases were initiated against the blocking of bank accounts. The constitutional basis for suits against this law (law # 8,024 created the confiscation) was that no one can be deprived of his/her goods without due legal process. A former minister of justice noted that "undue appropriation of goods is theft." Other critics were cited who also said it was an "affront" to private property. Legal cases began from this time forward.

E. The Media as Catalyst to Middle Class Activism?

It was in legal disputes that one finds the first major political expression of the middle class versus the Collor administration. In this, the news media played a part, as the following discussion with informants attests.

In order to render comprehensible the legal basis for middle class suits against the plan, including that of an informant, I must explain another measure. Collor wished to suspend salary increases conceded by the Regional Employees' Court. Called the "dissídio," this is the difference between the salary corrections given in a period (e.g., a quarter) and the de facto inflation. Thus if inflation totalled 20 percent for three consecutive months, but salary corrections had been 16.5 percent, the dissídio would make up the difference. One method adopted by the Sarney and Collor governments was to ignore the inflation of the time

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just preceding a plan. Given the fact that in such periods devaluation is at a height, the salary losses could be significant. Legal claims were also made regarding monetary correction of salaries (and FGTS funds) at lower than inflation.[16]

I first learned of the possibility of legal action from an informant. Carlos said: "I only woke up with Collor. That was a coup. Besides taking everything, he pushed [us into] hyperinflation. Even I have filed a claim to recover the money. Inflation had been 80 percent and he hadn't paid [the dissídio, or difference between inflation increases and salary]. So far, I've recovered 20 percent." Sandra adds, "He says recover, [but] do you know how he has to do this? Taking legal action. Although it is his right, he had to demand it, in an action against the government. He had to pay a lawyer to get this money back, this money which is his right." I ask: "Did you win?" Sandra: "We won." Carlos: "I won 20 percent. Now I'm in another suit to get the rest. In this case my bank says the Central Bank has to pay. The Central Bank says my bank does." He also has a suit going to recover the FGTS payments made at lower than the inflation.

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[16] Claims too were brought against the "cumpulsory tax on gasoline." In principle the latter was reimbursable after some period of time, but receipts were hard to come by, provoking those arbitrarily taxed to contest the measure in the courts.

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Sandra then entered into a long discussion about how "everyone complains but no one here goes to fight for their rights.[...] In the beginning, people got really really mad (bravas) at the government, criticizing, but no one had the courage to do anything. With jurists who came on TV and the radio, some well known ones, they said that by the constitution he [Collor] could never have done this with the money of the people. But people here don't fight for their rights.... Always wait for someone to do things for them.... Some got brave and went and won. Then people thought it was worth it and started too."

It is important to point out that there are at least three words in Portuguese for people: a gente (we/us), o povo (the [poor] masses) and as pessoas (people in general). Sandra used the last, therefore her complaint targeted not her group (in which case a gente would have been used), but rather those of the wider social milieu, including middle classes (and probably excluding the poor). Significantly, in her rendering, the media was an educator and catalyst. Yet her reason for pointing this out was to criticize people for not taking the initiative totally on their own. (Consciousness raising was a constant concern of Sandra, to which she directed efforts via Spiritism.) I will further consider informant views of the media and its "agency" versus middle class inactivity in the concluding section.

If the preceding citations appeared to show one

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position against the plan, Veja also came to hold a very different one, which I register, without being able to resolve the conflict. Lest one imagine the government's measure was simply anti-populist, Veja, in June 1990, reminds readers that with salaries at 35 percent of the GNP, or 10 billion dollars, the attempted repression of the dissídio was of anti-inflationary intent. An extra 166 percent, the sum of inflation in February and March, 1990, would raise that amount to 27 billion. Veja notes that "in the opinion of economists, there is no way to produce additional monies for these readjustments -- unless by putting the Printing House (Casa da Moeda) to work eight shifts a day. But then there would be hyperinflation the following day -- one calculates a jump of 40% in the first month, and higher thereafter. Another consequence of this increase would be to throw close to 30 million workers into the street. In this case, the Brazilian economy wouldn't enter into the realm of recession or depression -- it would return to a tribal state similar to the Yanomami Indians [sic]" (6/13/90).

Interestingly, Veja here sides with the Plano Collor, through this (eventually offensive) narrative of hyperinflation. Like the Finance Minister, the magazine uses this specter as the ultimate and indisputable defense for the measure. It then goes on to chastise readers, who might imagine they were losing 166 percent of their purchasing

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power in the absence of monetary correction in the months prior to the plan. That is "obviously" not so, it notes. If that were the case, the person would not be able to buy even a match (to calculate currency devaluations in terms of this specific purchasing power was "classic" in Veja). It is obvious, say the writers, because if that had been the case, the plan would not have the support of 75 percent of the population, and the general strike which Central Workers' Union (CUT) announced would come to be.

Why this was obvious three months into the presidency of the first democractically elected president in 30 years, five years after the ending of a 21-year military dictatorship forbidding freedom of speech, congregation and strikes, is not explained. It is important to recall, though, that all plans have received initial positive reception, a fact which I believe attests more to a desperate hope for deliverance than support for any specific policy. Veja does explain that salary corrections, albeit below the full amount, had been made, such that the real loss for January was "just" 13 percent and then in February another 10 percent before the plan. Readers can add for themselves. In a word, Veja defends this inflationary "tax."

Meanwhile it ironically deems the president's image "cinematographic." Collor's first months in office were a study in motion. He was photographed on jet-ski and

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submarine, piloting a supermarket cart to research prices, and otherwise constantly jogging or training with Brazil's soccer team (Seleção Brasileira de Futebol). Veja reports (tongue-in-cheek), "since assuming the presidency, Collor has publicly practiced a dozen sports, travelled more than 50,000 km., and worn 9 uniforms..." (6/20/90). A friend of mine called his presidency "athletic" and his government one of "marketing." Collor took incessant runs, each time wearing a different tee shirt, and in so doing, advertised for that brand name! It is interesting that the media, so important to Collor's rise to power, should now scoff at its "creation." That is to say, it has been convincingly argued that Collor was created by the media (Rubim 1993). He rose out of obscurity when Veja made his alleged war on maharajas its cover story in 1988. He was known during the campaign for his adeptness on TV; certainly his glamourous style matched his platform to modernize Brazil into a "First World" country. With his first plan, the media turned a satirical eye on this media-made president.

F. Plural, Dual and/or Unitary Voices

Although São Paulo and Rio readers choose between two or three newspapers, and likewise, many watch TV Globo (but other channels compete), Veja is a common news source, bringing upper and middle class readers together for its highly elaborated narrative reworking of "the news." Thus

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far, Veja's reporting has given a never understated and sometimes apocalyptic perspective on the crisis and the Plano Collor. Its recountings of people's anger and frustration may have been intended to provide a kind of vent for readers' feelings, an exacerbation of them or perhaps a replacement for them. (The casualty stories depict a kind of impotent rage.) Its "voices" are plural, yet it not only accesses experts, politicians, middle class people and more, whom it cites, it also presumes to speak in "everyone's" place.

In this case, however, I find its style marked by dualism or ambivalence: that is, it gives strong criticism of the government, but then defends it, as the preceding condescending explanation of the dissídio and salary losses reveals. Stated in terms of class, Veja assumes two or more positions: on the one hand thoughts and criticisms aligned with a virtual upper and middle class. At the same time, it seems to position itself with the government, or perhaps some position on the national welfare (over specific class interests). Its re-thematization of issues specifically about and for the middle class at times sounded like a middle class or upper middle class person thinking aloud, and at other times like a public official arguing with it.

Rubim points out, however, that the media was very free with its criticism of the government, but remarkably silent

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on business. Thus: "The bank lines, the precarious service, the low productivity, the poor quality of merchandise, etc., besides being an indispensable private arm of corruption, disappear in the media" (1994:157).[17]

In sum, although I argue that Veja's position is complex, it makes sense to include the position of speaking for (big) businesses, while registering other "voices." Speaking "for" business complicates Veja's capability of doing so for the rank and file middle class population. That is, although both business and middle class people were prejudiced by the plan, their positions and strategies would

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[17] There is another possible subject position and imagined readership that Veja might be seeking to engage in its one sided dialogues. It may be that Veja does not so much voice the government position as side with it on issues sensitive to business owners. This possibility was presented to me by a political reporter for Veja in 1985 and in 1988. When I mentioned my curiosity about Veja's political position, Tognazi responded without hesitation or qualification that it has "strong connections with FIESP, the Paulista business bourgeoisie" (FIESP: The Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo). "Veja is at the service of the Paulista businessmen. [...] The role of Veja is to represent their interests." Tognazi also emphasized its influence on readers. "Its great role is to form opinion. It came to disseminate in a very heavy-handed way ["de forma contundente"]. It has a large influence." When I noted my curiosity about Veja's shifting views, Tognazi agreed, noting that it only came to take an unqualified stance against the Collor administration in 1991 -- just when businessmen, reacting violently to the administration, began to meet (privately) that year with politicians to find a way out. One could find support for Tognazi's claims in the July 1996 issue of Veja on the purported evils of big businessmen in Brazil. Apparently since the Plano Real, they have been the focus of a good deal of criticism from the middle class. The feature story about those in power makes a scarcely veiled attempt to defend business, and tries to spread blame on the population.

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not necessarily be compatible -- they might even be adversarial, in this period of depression, hence my characterization of the magazine as ambivalent or dualist.

As we move on to the news commentary, however, we find that Veja's "plural" or dual voices tend towards one major "reading" of the crisis. Hall's point that the media attempts to delimit understandings of social events leads us to register how, despite all criticisms, Veja has defended the plan on the grounds of "or else" -- or else Brazil will revert to savage hyperinflation. It thereby tends to delimit consideration of other possible directions out of the crisis. The next passages demonstrate that despite a presentation of diverse "opinions," Veja's preferred explanation for the crisis was that of a "culture of inflation."

G. Ambivalent Self-Evaluation: The Culture of Inflation

By July of 1990, the theory of the "culture of inflation" had been launched, and Veja embraced it. By this theory, "after decades of living with inflation, a good part of Brazilians developed an almost accomplice behavior with the regime of rising prices" (7/11/90). Guilty players included merchants who choose to raise their retail prices ("remarcar os preços"), or raise them once gross prices are raised ("repassar os preços"), go beyond the inflation level ("preços absurdos"), or adjust prices without due

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calculation. Also guilty are shoppers who buy needlessly (thus Veja ignores the folk and erudite understanding that goods are a safekeeping measure when money is devalued). The second of two main finance ministers of the military regime, famed economist and now Representative Delfim Neto (7/11/90), countered in this same article: "Don't delude yourselves. Inflation is a mechanism which transfers wealth from the worker's pocket into the government's. If the government stopped producing inflation, all this culture of inflation would vanish in the air" (ibid). For some, Delfim Neto's view would be incisive and authoritative, for others, tainted by his involvement in the economic "miracle" of the dictatorship. In any case, the culturalist explanation prevailed in Veja's analysis. It represented the cultural bent as a pervasive historical pattern (citing high inflation in 1577, 1690, 1808, 1822, 1890, 1937, 1945, 1964, 1985, 1986, 1989 and 1990). Although it ends by calling inflation the "worst tax that there is," as it doesn't let anyone off, attacks the poor more than the rich and cites the government as the motive force, Veja's last word is that government operates within a society that moves in an inflationary direction.

The several voices/views presented may complicate the text, but there is an overriding, preferred reading, such as Hartley and Montgomery describe: "each speaker is subordinate to the overall discursive unity of the bulletin

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at this 'higher' level of unity, the variety of voices contributes to the flow of sense, no matter who is speaking, certain terms, concepts and registers are brought into play, and in the course of the story as a whole they are either taken up, confirmed and endorsed, or set in opposition to others, or left unexploited and neglected" (1985: 257). As Brazilian analysts have argued, the plurality of voices might simulate and substitute for democratic representation and process (Castro 1993:137; Albuquerque 1993:147), an open forum is not necessarily desired. (Veja cites Delfim Neto, but has its own argument.) On the other hand, a preferred reading doesn't ordain reception: readers can well remember or prefer one part, perhaps that very citation by the economist, and not the rest.

Veja is outspoken in its criticism of the government; sarcasm and irony permeate the pages, but its messages are conflicting: criticisms of the plan and reports of dire straits in the economy are countered by defense of austerity measures and the culturalist explanation for the inflation crisis. That a mainstream magazine should be ambivalent, contradictory and conservative "underneath" is hardly surprising. Yet it is important to see the means by which it appeared to "think aloud" for the middle classes, variously urging and inhibiting different positions.

Allow me to give another instance of how the magazine produces an overt diversity but promotes one reading.

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Regarding the Collor Plan measures, an economist is quoted in Veja criticizing the Collor economic team for lack of expertise: "I'm shocked when I hear the minister say she intends to reduce consumption by 40%. It doesn't need to be 40%. Twenty is enough; more would then create equal unemployment" (12/5/90). Furthermore, he added, taking so much money out of the economy was a paralyzing act, from which businesses might not recover. These objections, however, are tossed in as if for good measure. They are not reinforced in the article, which dwells instead on the culturalist explanation.

This construction of an array of attitudes eventually subordinated to one (cultural) explanation for the crisis can be seen across articles as well. In the second semester of 1990, reports focus on the adverse impact of the plan on the economy, which put the country into the worst recession since World War II. Bankruptcies increased 233 percent in September and October (10/31/90). State accounts were wiped out, employees paid late, works interrupted. For lack of cargo, 240,000 trucks out of a fleet of 1.2 million were halted. Steel consumption was down 33 percent in the six months following the plan; transport of food was down 15 percent; electrical usage of diverse industries fell 11-17 percent; exports were the lowest in three years. Just before Christmas, an article about favela (shantytown) settlements reported that 60 million citizens had no homes or schools

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for their children. By then, 100,000 people were living in the streets in São Paulo (population 16 million), and a shocking 120,000 in Recife (population 1.3 million).

Although reporting these discouraging trends, Veja maintained the culturalist explanation, saying that "the difference between Brazil and other countries which managed to deal with the recession has a cultural basis. [In Europe] the automatic remedy for rising prises is recession. The society accepts it as a routine fact. 'Here recession is an ugly word,'" a foreign researcher of the Fernand Braudel International Economy Institute is cited saying (12/5/90), thereby offering support from a foreign expert no less for Veja's position. Elsewhere, Veja continues, businesses don't depend on banks so much, so suffer less with interest rates, and in addition, they do not lower production and raise the profit margin. These "sins" are Brazilian "habits."

Although it is difficult to discern where to assign most responsibility in the vicious circle of inflation, economists (as discussed in chapter 4) tend to center on the government's fiscal policy and expenditures, and the very public and banking policies intended to buffer the dramatic effects of inflation. The following passage by economist Sá Earp was cited in chapter 4; I repeat it here to focus on the sequence, the direction of actions and reactions of those on the inflationary path. He said: "all agents came

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to discover that ... the official inflation wasn't accompanying the real evolution of the price of goods, and they came therefore to develop defensive practices, of always trying to readjust prices above this [official rate]..." (1993:106). From this perspective, the defensive acts respond to the (unreliable) official inflation rate. These reactions are neither condoned nor seen as the motive force of the inflation. In Veja's rendition, the direction is reversed: it is the government which operates within an inflationary society.

Because their collective understanding of economy and access to leading economists should have led to a very different emphasis, the magazine's position is suspect, warranting attention. In Hall's view, media interpretations tend to be "most preferred by and least challenging to those in economic power" (cited in Seaton 1981:240). In Seaton's view, this is a "determinist" reading of the media, one which sees it as a "powerful agency of social control--and means of inhibiting opposition to the social order" (1981:243). If the media have such a mission, their power would still depend on reception. In this light, note that Veja's cultural explanation for Brazil's problems predominated in my informants' readings (see chapter 7). The source of the "culture of inflation" explanation being unknown to this writer (and perhaps undecidable), it is impossible to determine who influenced whom. It is clear

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that this "common sense" explanation naturalized Brazil's problems and made them out to be be so generalized as to seem incapable of solution. (Chapter 7 deals with this subject further.) Or conversely: the problem is easy to solve, just change behavior!

With the new year and second Collor plan, Veja comes to disown the culturalist explanation, claiming, suddenly, that it was the government's version of where the blame lies (2/6/91). As we will see, their position became unambiguously anti-Collor. Part II considers these changes and debates among Brazilian scholars as to the motive force of the media in the momentous events of 1992.

Part II: Plano Collor II (1991) to Impeachment (1992)

A. When Money Buys Literally Nothing

Collor's second plan, launched in early 1991, was received by Veja (2/6/91) with a reminder of the bad first plan -- 65 percent of financial goods confiscated, GNP reduced 4.6 percent, layoffs impoverishing 2.5 million unemployed -- and then disparagingly shrugged off with deep sarcasm and irony. Regarding the first item, a price freeze, Veja decided: "this is not going to work, as the previous ones have shown." The next measure of readjusting salaries with an average of the last 12 months of inflation, plus freezing, prompted: "this is going to work; every time they freeze the salaries, they stay frozen." To item three,

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higher public utility prices, Veja commented drily: "this will also work, in fact, it has since last Friday." Regarding a measure replacing long lived indexation measures (the BTN and BTNF indexes), by something called taxa referencial de juros: "This is illusion: to exchange the [inflation] indexation of the past to that of the future." The press spared no sympathy for Zélia, who defended her price controls by insulting businessmen. In her words, they had shown they couldn't "behave themselves with the liberty" (of lack of indexation). The magazine response was curt: "price freezes don't work because they discourage production and stimulate consumption."[18]

Continuing in an ironic vein, Veja (2/6/91) notes that Plano Collor II had managed to go beyond all other plans in complexity. For instance, the method of calculation for the readjustment of salaries is different for those who receive their wage once a month from those who receive twice. It is different for those who receive the first and the tenth and the fifteenth. The employee who receives once a month must make 14 mathematical operations to know the month's

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[18] The one useful novelty of the Plano Collor II was the Fundo de Investimento, instantly nicknamed Fundão. The Fundão would replace other short term investments, like the overnight. With this fund instated automatically into one's bank account, all banking citizens were really buying government bonds. Former finance minister, Mailson da Nobrega (architect of the Plano Verão), called it a "sovietization of the financial system, without the advantage of perestroika" (Veja 2/6/91). This one measure, which helped the government problem of marketing its bonds, proved itself viable and popular.

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adjustment. For those who receive biweekly, 26 operations are necessary. Those paying monthly installments need to check to see if the amount is listed in BTNs or cruzeiros. If in the now extinct BTN, the value will be exactly as it was the month before. If in cruzeiros, the calculation depends on a "little table" used to annul the interest exacted by commerce, which in a price freeze period should not exist. Biannual school readjustments will allow a 30 percent increase for inflation but also 70 percent relating to the staff. As to rents: those contracts signed in October will be readjusted in April. For the calculation of a new rent, the BTN between October and February is to be used. If the contract is in indexes of FIPE, then all months of inflation will be incorporated into the new rent.

As readers can see, the service of elucidating the plan is clearly secondary here to the rhetorical one. Veja adopts an unambiguously irritated, condemning position on the government.

With Plano Collor II, the country entered into the worst recession of its history. The number of people laid off was higher than in the 1982 recession and twice that of 1988: one million people in São Paulo alone. (The number of citizens suing to receive their cruzados novos back reached 120,000 (4/24/91).[19] Another highly indicative result,

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[19] Veja said that the average value of the accounts was three million cruzeiros -- not enough to buy a Monza zero, they add, but evidently a fair sum. (Conversion

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after 14 months, Zélia left the ministry (5/15/91). In late 1991, when fears of hyperinflation resurfaced with a stock market tremor, Veja finally presented a sober definition of it. In the terms of a USP economist, hyperinflation is "that moment when you try to buy something with money and no one accepts it. At this point no one wants to sell as at this moment any price charged won't be enough to cover the producer and factory or the merchant to replenish stocks" (11/6/91).[20]

One article had the headline "salve-se quem puder," with a subheading of "money literally buys nothing." The expression "salve-se quem puder" can be translated as "each one for him/herself" or, and this works better, "dog eat dog society," for the situation envisioned to be the nightmarish result of hyperinflation. The popular expression brings out the image of moral chaos in a civil society destroyed by economic crisis. As we will see in the next chapter, it was

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information is not available.)

[20] It complemented this with a delirious description of speculation. Thus: "last Tuesday the country tried to reinvent the end of the world, with a version that its GNP of 400 billion dollars would disappear in plain day in the exchange speculation, which averages (in the better or worse hypotheses) 20 million dollars per day." This black hole would then be eaten by ants (Veja 11/6/91). Apparently, its most hyperbolic, metaphorical language is reserved for description of inflationary aberrations. As pointed out in chapter 4, informant description of inflation was that its "reality" was "unreal."

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this negative effect of the crisis on society that informants emphasized.

A series of depressing reports ensued without relief between November 1991 and May 1992: from middle class children whose parents could no longer afford private education going to public schools, to children murdered in Rio (by November of 1991, 350 children had been murdered in the year); from engineers bartending, to a wave of supermarket sackings (29 in May in Rio). All these sickening occurrences were suddenly superseded by Pedro Collor's revelations about Paulo César Farias.

Although it is tempting to extensively review press coverage of the Collor impeachment movement, I will outline the major moments of this unusual middle class political movement and focus on debates about the media versus the middle class role in the movement.

B. Investigations and Impeachment

Interrupting and superseding all other news were the accusations leveled by Fernando Collor's youngest brother, Pedro, in May 1992 against "PC" Farias. Farias was campaign treasurer for Collor and known to have been central in the first year of government. Pedro Collor claimed that PC had pocketed 15 million of the 100 million campaign dollars; engaged in election fraud in Alagoas; and handled everyday business affairs through extortion. For instance, for

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ensuring that a paper company won a government contract, PC was said to be receiving 3.3 billion cruzeiros per month since late 1990; for solving a debt problem of sugar cane industrialists of Alagoas with a British bank, one million cruzeiros per month. Pedro also said PC had presented pearls and fine clothing to former Finance Minister Zélia in return for answering his requests.

For a man of so many gifts and possessions, it was odd, noted Veja, that PC's tax returns showed his salary was just 5.5 million cruzeiros, or 2,100 dollars per month. Now everyone knew that since Collor's election, PC Farias circulated among politicians and businessmen, even naming state employees and doing business. Why expose these irregularities now, unless the idea is to shake up the democratic institutions? This was the (what one could call jaded) reasoning Veja presented initially. One reason first advanced was that through PC's dealings in Alagoas, Pedro's own branch of the family business (an Alagoas newspaper) suffered. Pedro also said PC had used state funds for personal speculation. Veja immediately supposed that the real target (despite Pedro's pleas to the contrary) was the president. For this it chastised Pedro, saying ever since Cain and Abel such brotherly fighting has been deplorable, and added that given the country's grave difficulties, the fight acquired "um carater de irresponsabilidade temerária" (5/20/92), a character of bold irresponsibility.

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Pedro Collor's interview was made exclusively with Veja. Yet is interesting to note that prior to the Collor scandal, Veja ruminated over impeachment, warning conservatively: "don't believe that an impeachment process can be contained within the limits of the president's person, without damaging faith in [sem desacreditar] the institutions" (10/9/91).[21] Then, with the scandal opened, and through its own doing, the magazine seems to have been reluctant, not to attack the president verbally, but to foster a proceeding against him. It immediately worried over acts against the government by the Congress or by civil society which would counter the status quo, including impeachment. On the other hand, it did cover the corruption scheme of PC Farias exhaustively (revelling in the details), decry and deride the president, and after middle class youth took massively to the streets, covered the movement. My reading of Veja shows that it fed into anti-Collor sentiment, but lagged behind the public demand for impeachment. Eventually, Veja followed the middle class lead in demanding the president's resignation. It is

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[21] In late 1991, just as in the pre-Collor days, Veja anxiously "wonders aloud" as to whether the country had or would hit bottom (o fundo do poço). It cites one of Brazil's most honored statesman, Ulysses Guimaraes saying, "The climate is almost one of civil disobedience" (9/11/91). Soon after citing leftists who had begun debating whether impeachment was desirable or possible, Veja responds with an insult: that Brazil, as in the Third World overall, one preferred a more direct method: coup d'etat (golpe de estado).

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important to know that impeachment had no precedent in Brazil, and the language does not have the word. Watergate was the referent noted, and the English word was imported.

This reading of Veja's involvement both concurs with and counters that of Fausto Neto's analysis, "Voices of Impeachment." He argues that Veja was in no way external to the facts or merely reporting them, but made itself the "center of the crisis" (1994:172) -- of the corruption proceedings and became a kind of "paper parliament" in which "the areas of media and politics constitute each other, meet each other [entrecruzam], not only by external forces of a representational order, but through injunctions coming from its own discursive strategies" (1994: 176). Fausto Neto attempts to demonstrate that Collor was a construct of the media -- particularly Veja, and by it destroyed. In a word, Veja was a political actor, making events happen.

I agree that the case is remarkable for the high involvement of the media -- especially the news magazine Veja and, as I'll report shortly, an important interview in the competitor Isto E, and a TV program. Yet I find this reading goes too far. The public movement -- no matter how influenced it was by the media -- was its own. Rubim (1994:163) points out that the news didn't even cover the first protest marches. Furthermore, I question how "vanguard" Veja was. Fausto Neto's analysis (which was restricted to the magazine's short editorials) ignores

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something crucial for his claims: the timing of its demand for the president's resignation. Veja did so in September, whereas the protest marches began in July.

This criticism notwithstanding, the media's role was striking. As the next section shows, informants join Brazilian scholars in finding that the media has become the middle class proxy in the public sphere. And its words were veritable "speech acts" with major political repercussions. As Rubim said, "the bombastic declarations of Pedro Collor to Veja magazine in May ended up making the CPI of June 1992 viable..." (1994:159). In his reading, the magazine exposure created such significant pressure on Congress that the congressional investigating committee, called the "CPI," was prompted by the media. Again, I would qualify the news coverage created such public exposure that Congress felt compelled to act. But if Veja can be credited this feat, Isto E had its own pivotal role.

Isto E exclusively covered the declarations of Francisco Eriberto Freire Franco. Former chauffeur at the Collor home, "Eriberto" provided the first material evidence which supported Pedro Collor's disturbing, but as yet unsupported, accusations. Eriberto's testimony to Isto E, later repeated to the CPI, was that he had delivered money from PC's business to the Collor family home (the Casa da Dinda), turning the money over to former secretary, Ana Acioli. These monies paid for such things as Rosane's

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toilette and utilities bills.[22] He also deposited sums that the Collor secretary gave him in bank accounts under another name.

Isto E's coverage of Eriberto's appearance before the CPI emphasized his character. Not only was he consistent (and all facts later verified), the worker from the northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte had an awe-inspiring courage, sincerity and dignity. Collor sympathizers (both congressmen of Collor's party and others) who tried to denigrate his position by insinuating motives of personal gain appeared almost cynical by comparison. Printed in bold was the following exchange. A congressmen asked, "and senhor mean[s] to say that you are acting only out of patriotism? [O senhor quer dizer que está agindo só por patriotismo?]" Eriberto replied, "and senhor thinks this is little? [E o senhor acha isso pouco?]." The front cover that week shows a portrait of the chauffeur, and the headline "Eriberto, a Brazilian."

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[22] Ana's bank account had an unlikely average monthly deposit of the equivalent of 53,000 dollars. Ironically, since the Plano Collor when Zélia outlawed investments with unnamed beneficiaries (a huge tax haven), the system became more traceable. The fact that Rosane's hairdresser was paid by PC was noted repeatedly -- revealing, of course, the terrible intimacy of dealings and the president's perjury. Detailed reports on the 2.5 million Collor home reform exposed the first family's unlimited extravagance. PC's connections with Brasilia were easily traced in his phone calls, yet he carefully avoided calling the president, but for two instances. However, an electrician employed for a time at the Casa da Dinda also confirmed that PC frequented the home.

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Ensuing investigations soon showed a direct connection between PC and the president's home, to the amount of 230 million dollars. The investigations of PC Farias revealed a series of crimes, including receiving payoffs by businessmen wanting funds from the federal bank loan institution (CEF); making a false declaration of campaign funds to the Justice Department; accepting illegal contributions. PC cynically pointed out, as if in his own defense, that everybody does such things in campaigns. PC's illegal activities were said to extend to involvement with cocaine traffickers. In Veja's summary, "the 40,000 checks stored in the CPI safe form up to now the most impressive set of monetary connections between Collor and PC Farias. They document that the ex-treasurer of the president mounted a bank constellation with a team of [8] phantom bank account owners to pay for the expenses of the Collor home..." -- and expenses of other Collor relatives. In the end, over 100 cases were brought against Farias, many of which implicated the president. By July middle class youth of Brazil had begun demonstrating.

Described as "beautiful, good humored, habituées of shopping centers and the beach," these young people, said Veja, "understood very well what was happening in the high spheres of power" (8/19/92). The youth who propelled the impeachment movement became famed for their exuberant, theatrical protest style. Called the "caras pintadas"

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[painted faces], they painted their faces with verbal protests and jeers, using green and yellow, Brazil's colors. They sang Caetano Veloso's "Alegria, Alegria." From the Tropicalism period,[23] the song became an anthem for the 60s. It refers to political exile, which Caetano had gone through more than 20 years earlier -- when the demonstrators were not yet born.

If news magazines can be credited with prompting the CPI investigations, television has been linked with the youth movement. As noted by Rubim (1994), and highly emphasized by journalist Alma Guillermoprieto (both in her 1995 New Yorker article and her book of the preceeding year), the mini-series airing that June and July on the Globo TV channel gave an object lesson in youth political activism. The series, called "Anos Rebeldes" (the

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[23] Tropicalism refers to a musical movement of the 1960s-70s led by Northeastern musicians (mostly from Bahia, notably Gal Costa, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethânia, Macalé, but also Edu Lobo from Pernambuco), and which took off in Rio de Janeiro. Whereas bossa nova had sought inspiration from North American jazz, creating a sort of "intellectual samba," (Mary Ann O'Dougherty, personal communication), this movement (like Modernism of the 1920s) is pointedly rooted in and revolving around Brazilian rhythms, melodies, themes and lyrics. For example, the song "Berimbau" uses the guitar to imitate the indigenous instrument. It refers to the Afro-Brazilian martial art, the capoeira. The song by Caetano "Tropicalia" plays ironically with icons of Brazilian identity -- bossa nova, mulatta, Carmen Miranda. The fact that it was not overtly political (unlike some of the musical movements in Spanish speaking Latin America), rather was indirect, ironical, playful may in part be due to the censorship, but also accords with long term Brazilian styles.

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rebellious years), depicted the radical youth of Brazil in the 60s. The main characters were modelled after those guerrillas famed for kidnapping a US ambassador in 1969 (after the dictatorship had hardened). It included clips from youth movements worldwide. One from the US of flower children was seen as a model for the caras pintadas. Again, it is quite probable that the caras pintadas had known little or nothing of the 60s youth movement in Brazil due to their young age and censorship. This series and its theme song, "Alegria, Alegria,"[24] are widely considered to have been inspirational for the youth street demonstrations.

Against terrible evidence and public protest Collor tried to assume a bold co-optive stance by calling the people to "patriotically" take to the streets on the upcoming Sunday (August 16th) in the Brazilian colors. Thousands and thousands did march on that day wearing not green and yellow but black. (The wearing of black is uncommon in Brazil. It remains associated with mourning and

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[24] The song is a series of fragmentary references, mostly a very intimate evocation of the tropical beauty of any ordinary moment in Brazil, but represented as if the singer is then departing (more likely in nostalgic recollection). And there are brief political references. Thus the opening lines tell of the (forcibly chosen) exile: "Walking against the wind, without handkerchief, without ID [card], the sun divides into crimes." A verse recalls "the sun on the news stands fill me with a lazy happiness. Who reads so much news? I go between photos and names, my eyes filled with colors, my heart filled with love. I go, why not, why not?" The song moves towards a finish with "I go between photos and names, without a book, without a rifle, without hunger, without telephone -- [from] the heart of Brazil."

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(happily, in that heat) has not yet been fashionable, except for a small fringe minority which adopted the punk style, called "dahhrque" in Portuguese.) Demonstrations in several cities averaged 20,000 on that Sunday; in Rio, 50,000.

Insults abounded. Investigations found that most of the 40,000 checks between PC and Collor's secretary dated May and June, 1990, exactly when most Brazilians were left empty-pocketed after the recent confiscation. Several last minute deposits and then withdrawals by the able secretary immediately prior to the bank holiday and the "lowering" of the plan allowed PC and Collor to escape the confiscation with 260,000 dollars. As any lawyer knows, Veja pointed out, the use of privileged information should mark the end of any public official's career. Veja's opening editorial on September 2, 1992 finally read: "the president ought to step down." Becoming defiant after he was voted down in the preliminary CPI, Collor went on TV saying he refused to do so. The youth of the nation responded tenfold: 250,000 students marched on São Paulo's Avenida Paulista, shouting "thief, thief, thief" (a particularly despicable thing to be called in Brazil).

Presidential investigations moved rapidly. They were set in motion by early September 1992, and the demand for the president to step down (authorized through articles 85 and 86 of the constitution) was presented to Ibsen Pinheiro, chair of the CPI, almost immediately thereafter. Jurists

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said the president had "lost all moral authority to govern the nation" (emphasis added). The third week of September brought 300,000 protesters to downtown São Paulo (Vale do Anhangabaú). September ended with a public vote: 441 representatives in favor of the Senate judgment, just 38 against, one abstention and 23 "cowards" who were absent. Only at the very end of the year did Collor resign. Evidently Collor's bet was to be pushed out without due process, in which case he could be a victim with rights to exile.

At the time of his resignation in late December, what came to dominate news instead was the tragic, vile and violent murder of young TV actress Daniella Perez by a male co-star (possibly with his wife as accomplice). After a nuanced analysis of the intermingling of news and fiction on TV, Guillermoprieto presented it as bizarrely more important to the nation than the impeachment. It might just as well be argued, as did anthropologist and media analyst Esther Império Hamburger (personal communication), that closure had come at the end of September, and Brazilians were already living their post-impeachment lives.

C. The Middle Class and the Media

The anti-Collor movement has such clear connections with the adverse economic position and instability middle and upper middle class people were put in under Collor that

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it is almost useless to further rehearse them. It was not until Collor's plan "pickpocketed" the middle class en masse that middle class resentment against the government channelled into action, in the form of legal suits contesting the plan's constitutionality. The Collor corruption scandal, which showed the president to have directly benefited from the very austerity measures hurting the population, was the ultimate outrage prompting unusual middle class public protest -- or rather, by their youth. While in no way denying or lessening the ethical motives of those who participated in or supported the impeachment movement, I would still argue that in forcing the resignation of the country's first democratically-elected president in thirty years, middle class Brazilians voiced their outrage not so much at Fernando Collor de Mello's corruption as at their own collapse after years of governmental failure to achieve economic reform. Whether engaged in aggravating the injury or worrying over a challenge to the Plan or the president, the media, while not sufficient, was essential to middle class responses to the crisis. It assumed a very powerful and vital role during the crises -- both the economic and the political varieties, and this is clear to informants.

Having presented the views of Brazilian analysts on the media's influence in the Collor presidency and my own, I would like now to consider how middle class informants saw

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their voice, representation and acts in the public sphere in recent years. I was aware that the most important middle class movement since restoration of democracy had been the Collor impeachment. (Immediately prior to this transition, there was in 1993-94 a mass, cross-class and cross-generational movement to deman direct elections.) Yet every single informant who discussed it with me a year later insisted that it had been a youth movement and that she/he had not participated in it. No, the youth had done it all and deserved all the credit. One informant specified that it was upper middle class youth, and not the poor, hence those who propelled the movement were not acting against economic pressures. As Cleide put it:

> there is this evolution, even if you consider the economic aspect, you see that either certain values exist or they don't. I don't believe it was the economic crisis that led the upper middle class youth -- it wasn't lower class youth -- to the streets to take out Collor. No, it wasn't the lower class. Because it's who has access to the press. Parents, schools in the periphery (poor outlying slums), don't even know from the television or newspapers. It was four of five of the top [private] schools who organized the marches on Avenida Paulista."[25]

In her view (like Sandra's, reported earlier) the press was a key catalyst.

After identifying the political actors as youth, informants went on to explain their own lack of political

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[25] While it may be that poor Brazilians have limited access to the press, most Brazilian homes have TVs (see Kottak 1990).

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activity: it was due to their having lived through the dictatorship, through which they learned to fear reprisal from the military authorities. (I am sorry to admit that I was initially skeptical, imagining it to be an 'excuse.' But I now believe that was very unfair.)

Brazil has a history of military interventions in the government, since the beginning of the republic [1889], in fact, and long dictatorships. Concerning this one, though amnesty for political exiles was declared in 1979, the dictatorship only ended in 1985 (with a civilian president elected indirectly by Congress). The numbers of tortured and killed citizens was small in Brazil compared to Argentina (9,000 proven killings in Argentina versus 125 proven in Brazil [Catholic Church 1986]), but the Brazilian authorities were exceedingly thorough. Even if one did not personally know anyone arrested, an incident (e.g., arrest for questioning) could well have involved a neighbor, or a neighbor might have been in the military. One informant told me he had done military service during the repression and had witnessed horrors. The thoroughness of investigations (thanks to advances in information systems), the many prohibitions, especially against freedom of speech and assembly (through Ato Institucional # 5), the knowledge and rumor of torture and killings, the forced exile of many illustrious politicians, intellectuals and artists, and the ubiquitous presence of the military in the cities created a

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threatening and hopeless atmosphere. In the event of an arrest, one São Paulo site for questioning -- and torture and murder -- was a military base located until today in the center of the South Zone, i.e., the area comprising the several neighborhoods where my informants lived, just off the well travelled Rua Tutoia. The height of the repression coincided exactly with the "economic miracle": 1968-73. The youth of the impeachment movement were infants or unborn. Two-thirds of my informants were in their twenties during the dictatorship.

Maria Cecília spoke at length, and with enthusiasm, about the Collor impeachment. She recalled an article in the Folha de São Paulo that had come out 10-15 days prior to elections giving a psychological profile of Collor as "megalomaniacal" and "fascist." But she concluded, it all turned out for the better, due to the corruption investigations uncovering years of mud. Then she explained that her generation had been "super quiet...I was 12 years old when the military took over. No one gave an opinion, no one talked about anything, you got accustomed to that sort of thing, my generation was very quiet." She added, "my oldest brother, who was in medical school, one of his friends was arrested, tortured and killed. The whole med school class went to the burial and there were people there taking pictures of all who had gone to the boy's funeral, and the next day, they were there on campus interrogating

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students. It was enough to make us real quiet. At 18 or 20, you wanted to do something, but when you saw that it was really ugly, you adapt to it, you settle in ["você se acomoda num canto"].... Now the generation of my children, they caught another period." Maria Cecília's daughter had participated in the impeachment movement, while her son had not. She concluded, "hope could return, PC was arrested yesterday [i.e., 11/29/93]. There is still hope." (Note that other parents with views like hers did not give themselves credit for influencing their activist children.)

Besides their fearless youth, informants felt that the media stood in for them in the public sphere. While discussing the corruption investigations taking place in 1993 (see the next chapter), Maria Cecília mused over middle class inactivity. She said "we watch these things passively. I think deep down there is hope of seeing things improve. I don't think this brings emotional instability to people.... We want to see them punished, those who are doing the wrong things, this is a general feeling. For example, when there was the denunciation that Collor was stealing, was doing this and that, everyone armed themselves [sic] to go there, to see, let's uncover all this. I don't think this changed people's lives, everyone kept on with their little lives, but they were concerned with what was going to happen."

Psychiatrist Marc connected passivity to watching the

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news. Giving a much more negative appraisal, he said, "it's a pathology. You laugh at suffering. You use the suffering as a transfer (intercâmbio). You always watch the news. 'I want to see the corruption investigations, the disgrace.' Even the press changed over the years with this, over the last 15 years [this figure coincides with the end of the censure]. On TV there never was so much disgrace as today. The level of masochism of the people is huge. They sell disgrace." Marc was sceptical that there was any real political interest, rather that it was soap operish, and that, as viewers, people were paralyzed from acting.

A line in a Ginsburg poem reads, "I am obsessed by Time magazine. I read it every week." While public interest in certain scandalous or horrible events could be described as obsessive, vicarious enjoyment, the Collor plans and the corruption scandal of his government affected Brazilian readers/ watchers directly (albeit to varying degrees). Marc's view was uniquely censorial, both of the press and Brazilian people. I include it as one extreme view that the media worked against activism.

Without using the psychological language of Marc, Milton felt the media had taken over the middle class voice, autonomy and power. He said the middle class used to be the

> ...shaper and leader of public opinion. Someone of the middle class would think 'this is wrong!' ...and all would think that this was wrong. The middle class had this power, today it doesn't. It was the shaper of public opinion because in its midst were the intellectuals, the press, the

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> educational system, teachers...[...] I think that today the great shaper is the major media, television, radio, newspaper, the large scale media. They even command political economy and finance. In my opinion, it is the major media which directly influences all these questions.

Thus here again, the imagined increase in the media's agency translates to an imagined decline in that of the people. More commonly people noted that the television news was "sensationalist" or overly influential on people. I did not get a sense that informants felt there was mutual influence or interaction between the media and its audience.

Another set of views of the media did not object to this tendency. Several praised the press for its critical reporting against the government. Thus Larissa said:

> This is a very good thing, the position of the press. It is taking the lead [carro-chefe] and making demands [reivindicando]. If it hadn't been for the press, we wouldn't have gotten Collor out! [...] The same way it had a role in electing him, it did in removing him. And now this Congress investigation, the press isn't letting us forget it. The press is demanding responses, and I have the impression this is going to keep on. This is the hope that I think the Brazilian has.

There are clear parallels with this sense of the press' role in democracy and Watergate. Confidence that the press served as a kind of check against those in power countered my received opinion that the news had a conservative underpinning. Yet as Curran (1991) discusses, the radical press is one potential. A critical press was a novelty in Brazil after years of heavy handed censorship. Others who had a very positive evaluation of the press' criticism of

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the government often alluded to the repression by the military dictatorship.

While praising the press, these informants also worried over how certain people could be swayed. Brazil, Ricardo lamented, shouldn't be like this; it had had a chance with direct elections, but voted for Collor. The population, said Ricardo, has a short memory. He feared a military takeover again and recalled how in the past "the press couldn't speak, now it can--not the TV, not the 'spoken' press but the 'written' one." He and his wife, Maria Regina, mistrust the TV news, which they say is confusing--for "the people." According to Regina, "the people have no consciousness," and this leaves her anxious, anguished (agoniada e angustiada) because "the population doesn't know, we need to educate them..." (Regina is one of the very few in my sample who voted for Lula in the 1994 elections.)

Another informant took this positive attitude towards the press to an extreme. Cleide referred to the investigation of congressional corruption that was taking place at the time and asserted that "the press has to divulge the news, even if the next day it says, 'I made a mistake.'" As it is perfectly possible to say "I made a mistake" -- by "errei" or "eu me enganei," rather than what she said, literally, "menti," or "I lied," I read Cleide's choice as one intending dramatic emphasis. A friend

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listening objects that this attitude is too "modern" for the population, who see what is in print and believe.

Note the tendency of Maria Regina and this woman to worry that "the people" (poor people) are too ignorant to understand what is happening. Something other than ignorance, perhaps, would be needed to explain why 50 percent of São Paulo's middle class voted for Collor (see Pierucci 1993). This included both the "conservative" North Zone of petty bourgeoisie and the "modern" South Zone. How could my informants not know that one out of two in their milieu (as well as poor people) had voted for him!

Thus, some informants worried about "the people" being duped, while others expressed concern about the hegemony of the media, including the written press, in relation to the middle class. In one reading, the rising strength of the media corresponds to a lessened political inactivity of the population. More often, informants were encouraged by the investigations of those in power (cf. Curran 1991); excepting Marc and Milton, they did not seem troubled that the media was acting for them. These attitudes of informants towards the press varied from positive to negative; however, they shared a view that it stood in for the population in the public sphere. Again, informants did not consider whether they could "influence" the press back; rather they acknowledged their own inactivity, and that the media (for better or worse) was their proxy in politics.

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This brings me to one final question on the media: what are the topics and treatment it authorizes? This level of analysis (as indicated by Foucault) may be more important to consider with respect to the media than whether readers register or agree with this or that point. Perhaps most significant for this research was the way the media supported the view that the middle class was the target of the crisis. Although it did not state this expressly, by constantly focusing on the impact of the crisis on the middle class, the media built on and reinforced this idea. Part of this understanding was supported by a view that the poor are already at the bottom, have no place further down to go -- which is sadly very false, and that inflation doesn't hurt the poor because they immediately spend their income. The reasoning stopped here, yet the obvious question is what about the rest of the month?![26]

References to the increasing immiseration of poor Brazilians were infrequent during discussions I had with informants of the crisis and problems in Brazil. Why? Perhaps some did accept the received interpretation that the crisis only or mainly targeted the middle class. But there are other possibilities. Perhaps because informants knew that the focus of my study was the middle class in the

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[26] As discussed in chapter 4, many Brazilian scholars and other Latin Americanists have appraised the inflation crisis as "distributive conflict" in which the poorest sectors are most severely affected.

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crisis, they therefore refrained from broadening the discussion. But other issues and classes did arise, even during our first meetings. The investigation of corruption in Congress was constantly brought up in the second semester of 1993, but not the massacres of the children at Candelária, the Yanomami or the many in Vigário Geral, which occurred that same semester.

In 1992, in Rio de Janeiro alone, 424 children were killed. The last week of July 1993, seven children spending the night by a church in downtown Rio (Candelária) were murdered. Two more massacres occurred within two months: close to 40 Yanomami, by encroaching miners, and more than 20 in a favela of Rio (Vigário Geral), in a terroristic revenge act of the police. At the same time, the nightly news followed a trail tracking PC Farias, who, facing imprisonment in 1993, had managed to escape and elude his pursuers, traveling down from Alagoas into Paraguay and then to England, and then vanishing into air for five months. Finally sighted in Thailand by a compatriot, he was then extradited and imprisoned. However, a year after the Vigário Geral massacre, the police assassins remained free.

After less than a decade of democracy, the country was plunged into recession, confusion and violence. In this context, I entered middle class homes to ask "how the middle class was experiencing all these changes," as I chose to phrase my opening question to avoid any specific reference.

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Inflation was again climbing, breaking all previous records, yet the acting president, Itamar Franco (former vice-president) appeared incapable of choosing any direction. Among those informants hit most by the crisis, the mood ranged from angered frustration to hopelessness in the face of an unending economic nightmare.

I trust that for many informants the silence on the three massacres that had just happened was owing to horror, rather than indifference or worse.[27] It is worth noting in this light my impression (as well as that of other North American visitors to Brazil) of a reluctance on the part of Brazilians to name certain things directly. In the face of difficult or delicate matters many are silent, euphemistic or allusive. Thus people denounced white collar corruption and the impunity[28] of powerful people involved in crime rather than police raids killing poor people or the plight of homeless beggars.

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[27] In the song "Haiti," Caetano Veloso charges the population with indifference over the 1992 massacre of men in a Sao Paulo prison. Thus:" And when you hear the smiling silence of Sao Paulo on the massacre / 111 defenseless prisoners, but prisoners are almost always black / or almost black--or almost white, almost black, they're so poor..." Song by Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, on the album Tropicália 2, released August 1993. Sadly, an informant told me in 1994 that at the time of the prison murders, he had heard several times "only 111?"

[28] It is interesting that Rubim finds the news reports of corruption scandals lend themselves to an "ambivalent imaginary" (1994:157): on the one hand, a cynicism in relation to the State, and on the other, a demand for the end of impunity.

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A few did, however, allude to violence. Adalberto said, "I don't live in this country, as far as Rio de Janeiro is concerned." A couple of others said similarly, "Rio de Janeiro doesn't exist." One way to read this kind of statement is that the problems in Rio had reached impossibly unacceptable, horrifying conditions. Yet the phrasing rejects rather than confronts the problems as one's own. Given the complexity of discerning kinds of influence at this level, I can only suggest that the readers take everything in but do not speak about the most unspeakable things happening to Brazilians (see Glasser and Ettema 1991).

This discussion, both of what informants expressed and refrained from discussing, and their activity or inactivity in the public sphere and in relation to the media, raises the question of the means and meaning of direct political action for the middle class. The following chapter considers the aftermath of the post-impeachment moment, during which I conducted fieldwork, that is, from a very bleak period in 1993-94 of record breaking inflation through the (almost hopeful) initial phase of the Plano Real, in which the near-zero inflation attained is associated with the winning presidential candidate. From the perspectives of my informants, we can further examine the questions raised of the middle class "voice" and position vis-à-vis the nation, and their concerns for the "moral order."

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Chapter 7
The Middle Class and the Nation

They say that Cabral the First discovered a new branch.
They say that Cabral the Second couldn't make a go of it.

From W/Brasil by Jorge Ben Jor

In July 1992, while investigations were uncovering the Collor corruption scandal, the ad agency Standard, Ogilvy & Mather held focus groups to discuss the state of the middle class. Well into a session with men was the following exchange:

> R: Today you can't even plan your family life. There's no more planning. This kept changing more and more, it started years ago. Today the parameters are totally unreal. You buy something today from within an unreality.
>
> W. I think since '79 things took a violent turn.
>
> R. Or more precisely in 1973 with Senhor Delfim Neto and his "Brazilian miracle."
>
> A. I'm still waiting for this miracle.
>
> Moderator: Do you believe in the Brazilian miracle?
>
> W. We see miracles every day.

If one had to choose one word to describe the political sentiment provoked by the inflation crisis, it would be distrust (desconfiança), directed at the governments whose "stabilization" plans all failed, or even backfired, and untrustworthy public officials. The "lost decade" of the 1980s left people skeptical (desacreditadas).

This chapter recasts the discussion of middle class

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identity in national perspective, first through examination of informant commentary on the crisis as gathered during fieldwork in 1993-94. I consider how the array of grievances expressed by informants regarding the Brazilian community and state position them in the nation-state. Analysis shows that this political identity is founded on an assertion of a moral code versus one depicted as opportunistic and corrupt in Brazilian society and government. I find that this representation rendered the middle class distinct from other classes; furthermore, its position was ambivalent and isolationist vis-à-vis the national community.

Fortunately for Brazil, there was finally a miracle, or rather, the end to high inflation and the potential for a definitive move away from the chronic problems of the crisis. The second part of the chapter deals with the change brought in by the new government plan, the Plano Real, and its designer, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who, at the time of its implementation (July 1, 1994), was running for president against the Worker Party (PT) candidate Luís Inácio Lula da Silva. The shift in perspective which occurred in the second half of 1994 prompts another examination of middle class identity. Besides voting for FHC because of his successful plan, middle class support for the candidate and against Lula accords with ideals and antitheses of middle class identity and their vision for the

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future. Both informants' censuring statements and the political and economic ideals they formulated for Brazil reveal consistency in support for a deregulated economy, open to competition of foreign goods.

The Moral-Ethical Crisis

It is important to note that I began interviewing during the "CPI da Corrupção" (Parliamentary Investigating Commission). Yet although I did not bring up these congressional proceedings investigating embezzlement of public funds by members of the Congress (held October-December 1993), many informants did, usually starting with metaphorical allusion to "all that dirt" (essa lama toda) or "dirty laundry" (roupa suja).[1] Informants were indignant at corruption in the Brazilian government and in an ever more contaminated society. Consistent with the ambivalent material-rejecting stance outlined in chapter 3 and this political climate, many deemed the nation's biggest crisis to be a "moral" one. Over and over, I heard remarks such as Cleide's: "My colleagues at work are becoming aware that it isn't just the economic crisis -- that's obvious -- but the crisis of values, the ethical crisis..." Many people had begun saying one should refer to crises in the plural.

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[1] There is a saying in Portuguese against airing scandals in public that relies on a laundry metaphor: "roupa suja se lava em casa" -- one should wash dirty laundry at home. The corruption investigations since 1992 would counter this "tradition."

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Edilson had much to say of corruption. Thus he said of the government:

> You have a CPI on corruption, it's going to get one-quarter of Congress. It's going to get one-quarter that was there, because if everyone had been there, they all would have done it. [...] The country is like this: the president robs, his assistants rob, everyone robs, everyone wants to get into government. Why? For love of the country? No!"

And as if this wasn't enough, he added, bitterly:

> It's very hard to be genuine in a country like this, in a country in which the people are always suspicious about something. You can't be nice to anyone, because if you are, this person is going to think you want to get something out of it, you see, that you want to take advantage of something, that there is something behind it. There is a saying which goes 'when the alms are too great, the saint gets suspicious (emphasis added).

And a little later, he said:

> I think we live in the wilds, and in the wilds, it's the law of the strongest. [...]Here in Brazil, to be honest is to be a fool, to be honest is to be naive, credulous. Imagine a guy who worked on the budget committee and didn't steal money?! He would be famous for being stupid, naive.

Bruna, homemaker and building manager, married to Edilson, told me that she was treated with suspicion by some neighbors, who assumed she was taking advantage of her access to building funds to siphon some off for herself.

Men and women often censured opportunistic dealings in the workplace and society. As noted in chapter 4, Euclides pointed out the opportunism of merchants selling items whose prices were mandated to remain frozen at higher, blackmarket

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prices. Some gave eyewitness examples of unfair business dealings or government corruption at their workplaces. Milton, employee of the Caixa Econômica Federal, reported how banks took advantage of the easy profits accrued from the unemployment compensation funds (FGTS). Also in banking, Edilson complained of people obtaining their FGTS by making a deal with a boss to fire and later rehire them. The boss would receive a cut! Cleide, a public employee in educational administration, pointed out that at her "socio-economic level, I can't build a house with swimming pool." Yet other directors where she worked "all are finishing houses with pools and they earn my [same] salary." Cleide lived in a modestly sized, older apartment in Vila Mariana.

Cleide went on to argue that those who pilfer public office supplies such as pens, pencils and paper are just as reprehensible as PC Farias.[2] No, they are worse!, as she self-corrected, since "PC" knew he was committing a crime. She explained that the person who had confessed this pilfering had done so for her children's school supplies. Such a reason was not justified, in Cleide's mind. Sandra's judgments were similarly stringent. She condemned the accommodating, collusive attitude of those who accept government corruption. Those who say of a politician that "he might as well rob, since all do," are just as dishonest,

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[2] As reported in the preceding chapter, PC Farias is the businessman convicted of government embezzlement schemes for his own and Collor's profit.

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said Sandra. Ursula announced: "The middle class, I am feeling, has lost its moral values," and she gave this example of demoralization. "In the situation Brazil is in today, for example, if I get a bigger discount because someone messed up at the store, it would be difficult for me to go to the clerk and say, 'listen, you made a mistake on the bill!'"

I gathered many protestations against declining moral standards in the business and commerce of the immediate community. In contrast, however, was Aninha, who argued: "It's not that I think that the small theft is less bad than the bigger theft, but I think that the person who robs more, the worst is the one who uses cunning..." Yet her husband (Milton) retorted: "the little guy didn't rob more because nothing was left for him!"

Informants repeatedly used evaluative expressions for opportunism -- "ser esperto," "tirar vantagem" and especially, the "lei do Gerson," which mean, respectively, be shrewd, take advantage of and Gerson's law. Of the three expressions, only the first can have a qualified positive acknowledgement of the wits involved. The opposite of "ser esperto," is "ser bobo," be a stupid (honest) fool, which, as Edilson's comments showed, can be considered ridiculous. Sumiko pointed out that people think "bobo é quem trabalha" (stupid is someone who works). Gerson was a soccer player famous for always managing to turn a bad situation into one

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to his advantage. In the 1970s, Gerson did an advertisement for cigarettes which incorporated this idea. Interestingly, it was a huge failure, as people did not accept this strategy. Since one imagines that most people had heard of corruption in Brazilian society and in the government in the past, and as Brazilian Portuguese offers many expressions for opportunism, it is important to note that such outrage prevailed at this time in the middle class.

Informants often went from discussion of Gerson's law into concern for the moral upbringing and futures of their children in such a context. Several times I heard the report that middle class people were teaching their children to cheat (passar a mão), to be "malandro" (a versatile expression translating to shrewdly clever or deceitful). Alice expressed concern that the moral climate was having an ill effect on her children. She said:

> They could think: 'my mom works so much, studies so much [Alice was completing her doctorate], and to earn only this salary? ... To work like a maniac and earn nothing? So is that it? Why should I study? It's not worth it. [...] They see that your semi-illiterate politicians steal like hell, so they don't need to study. 'I'll be a politician and I'll steal.'

Reinaldo recounted a problem of improper business involving his own child. He explained that his teenaged son happens to know a good deal about computer hardware and got people interested in buying equipment for the graphics company where he was doing an internship. One of the suppliers he had mentioned called him and asked, "'Listen,

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how much is your cut [bola], so I can add it into the final price?'" [Reinaldo's son told his father:] "'Hey, great. I'm going to make some extra money!'" [And Reinaldo commented:] "He was so happy! This really shocked me, because I find this behavior unethical, I can't accept this business! But everyone I tell this story to says, 'no, your boy is right.'" I also demured, saying the boy is young, to which Reinaldo added, "Yes, and look at the other side. He entered as an intern, it was during a time when the school was on strike. He worked the whole month, a lot of times until late at night. At the end of the month, the company paid him 8,000 cruzeiros!"[3] Another couple with grown children reported that they have taught their children to pay taxes and not accept under the table commissions, but this is not clear to their teenagers, who see that this is how people make out better. I asked, "do your children actually say this?" The mother answered, "they do."

* * *

Curiously, I find that these statements recall, in a certain way, the notion of a "moral economy." I said 'curiously' first because to apply the concept moral economy to capitalism takes the opposite of what is usually at issue, namely, resistance to capitalism by those cultures in which the economy has been operating through social

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[3] It is not possible to know the dollar equivalent without the date.

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obligations and via principles of reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi 1944 and J.C. Scott 1976, 1990). Secondly, applying it to the middle class seems to stretch, even twist the meaning, as it normally refers to "the people" -- their grievances and acts of "resistance."

Recently, however, theorists (Schneider 1988 and Bloch and Parry 1989) have argued that the concept is overly dichotomous and tinged with a romanticization of pre-capitalism. Dilley reminds us that "moral evaluations, whose forms are always culture specific, result from the processes of contestation within, and over, exchange relations" (1992:6). Political scientist W. J. Booth has argued that the concept should not be assigned solely to non-capitalist contexts where the economy is instituted in (non-economic) social institutions, but rather it can and should be applied across the board. Says Booth: "all economies are moral economies" (1994:662). Wuthnow has argued that the marketplace, now a central arena of public life, is a repository of morality and values -- so much so that "it follows that any change in the fundamental principles of the market system, however subtle, is likely to threaten more than merely our material standard of living. An erosion of the market system may threaten the very fabric of moral commitment and challenge some of the cultural sources from which self-worth is derived" (1987:79).

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A kind of "moral economy" critique, if in times of stability dormant among middle classes, seems to have been awakened in Brazil's crisis. The informant commentaries here presented consistently decry violations in government and business in moral terms. Their vision of the "legacy" of the crisis underscored that the "powers that be" are corrupt and that the society was becoming increasingly contaminated by unethical practices in a dog-eat-dog ("salve-se quem puder") situation. People censured many things: the violation of official regulations on retail prices allowed for certain goods; petty or gross embezzlement of public funds -- and the impunity of the public officials; and illicit private sector deals.

In order to further appraise this type of moral economy, we need to consider not only what is decried but also what is indicated or desired. During a crisis, however, and particularly at the point at which I studied it, when the situation seemed doomed to remain at an impasse, a specific vision was not easily forthcoming. If comments of the "moral crisis" were often presented with righteous anger, other times one sensed a fatalist resignation. Some informants maintained, though, that Brazil had hit bottom ("o fundo do poço," literally the bottom of the well), and that it would be from this low, empty point that change and a new era would begin. Such an announcement was not readily accompanied by an elaboration

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revealing how the person knew this was the end and turning point -- other than by the reading that "it can't get worse than this!" (something I had learned to find over repeated stays in Northeast Brazil was always stated too soon). Nor was this prediction usually conveyed with enthusiasm. Euclides, who stated flatly in our first meeting that his estate had not changed a single bit in 15 years, said so without any. Edilson said: "What can you expect from a country like this? Do we have a way out? I think one exists, but it is far off." He referred somewhat vaguely to a lot of changes, including of politicians.

Just two people interviewed in the initial survey, both evidently very wealthy from the looks and locations of their residences, were optimistic about Brazil's future. The artist took a somewhat mystical, millenarian position, referring to the fin de siécle times. The banker (who acknowledged his privileged viewpoint) was confident that "out of this crisis new models will emerge!" He felt that what was still lacking was a vision on the part of the elite, something which had not been lacking during the dictatorship. As João saw it the country was "beginning to position itself as open, with an open economy, and will have to participate in the international market." For him, "the best path is privatization..." Later he repeated, "for the new to be born, the old has to wear away [desgastar] -- that is the process!"

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It is instructive to compare the views of people clearly outside the middle class on the question of Brazil's state and future with those inside. Consider another engineer in banking. Milton, who was in financially tight circumstances, worried that Brazil had hit bottom. He and Aninha feared for their children's futures. The crisis had already taken a toll across generations, one which they sensed was irreparable. Aninha said of her hopes that things would improve:

> I think this is a process of survival also, because I must believe that things are going to get better, if only because I have two children, and I want to believe that they are going to have a better world, a better life. Because if I stop believing this, my God in heaven, I'm going to struggle for what?! I am going to teach them to be what?

School teacher Lisete (married to a mechanic, and whose children attended the school free of charge) spoke first of financial barriers for her children, then her outlook:

> so then came the Plano Collor, plan such and such, plan, plan, plan. We told our little boy, when you were little, your grandparents opened up a savings account for when you grow up. They said it's for a trip to Europe, or to buy a car, or for anything he needs. Now he's growing up and the money in the savings won't be enough for absolutely anything. So you see how real the crisis is. How much we stop being able to do certain things. I don't see a light at the end of the tunnel. I think it's ever more reduced, the space for this light to appear.

Three other couples, all in public and lower echelon positions (like teaching), made a point of saying that they take care not to convey their pessimism to their children,

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so as not to raise a defeated child ("um filho derrotado").

The Culture of Inflation, Underdevelopment and their Roots

Beyond taking a general stand against pervasive corruption and expressing concern for their family's continuity in the middle class, informants volunteered explanations for the country's economic problems. A number of men gave macro-level analyses of Brazil's economic history, of a kind which recalled academic works on Brazilian development, and were lecture-like in style. (For instance, I was told of import substitution by one, the delay in industrialization by another, the cartorial tradition by another.) However, most explanations centered on culture; these had either long or short time frames.

Regarding the endemic crisis, informants would explain why Brazilians had an apparently limitless ability to adapt to the chronic inflation and economic instability. Three male informants felt that Brazilians wouldn't know how to live or even want to live in a non-inflationary economy. One explained that the gambling aspect of the financial market had become an attractive habit. Two tactics which Lourdes and Selmo identified for dealing with the inflation elaborates on this. One type "works to try to win out against [superar] inflation, the other type works to try to make enough to manage to live in spite of it." The one tactic put me in mind of treading water against the current,

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to which the informants agreed. Lourdes added that the other type "is trying to see whether he can find a way for the inflation to even help him make more money..." Selmo then exclaimed: "it's incredible how people win with the inflation." Lourdes went on to say:

> besides all this, I think that we waste energy and time with all of these things. The money can't stay still, what you earn that day you have to run to apply it because, if not, at the end of the month you're going to have to pay bills and the money will have devalued. What I feel, it's this race to try to keep money in financial applications, it's this and it's that, I think this is a big waste...

Her husband rejoined, "in the end I think this business leads to despair, because it really doesn't do any good to work," -- that is to say honestly, for he emphasized later how some people were making it through illicit deals and tax evasion.[4] Overall this couple argued that the inflation crisis was having a negative impact on productive work. Commenting on the insidious impact of inflation, a male Brazilian friend of mine said, "you can't imagine, not having lived in this, how corrosive this inflationary economy is..." (emphasis his).

Regarding the apparently bizarre claim that many Brazilians preferred high inflation, some informants emphasized this was due to confusing monetary correction,

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[4] A few people justified the latter, pointing to the ubiquitous corruption among government officials. A business owner was especially aggravated at having to pay taxes to a corrupt government.

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which barely accompanies inflation, with a real gain. With the change to the real currency at the end of inflation, several people commented that elderly people or poor people were (wrongly) imagining they were receiving less, since their monthly income would no longer be, say, 100 one month, 150 the next, but 100 two consecutive months.

An even more frequent assessment of the persistence of Brazil's inflation was that Brazilians are too "pacatos" -- calm, accepting, perhaps docile, and/or too "acomodados" -- accommodating, comfortable, conforming, resigned. The series of adjectives suggest the array of connotations of the two words. From this perspective, Brazilians were seen to acceptingly accommodate rather than fight against the situation. Thus Bia said, "instead of complaining 'this is expensive, I'm not going to take it!' the person says, 'oh well, it's expensive, but who cares, I want these pants.'" By identifying a disinclination to fight or more simply to act, these explanations recall a standard opinion often offered for the enlightenment of US citizens: that Brazilians are peaceful. People informed me with pride that Brazilians had earned their independence without fighting a revolutionary war, and had freed slaves without a civil war. In reference to inflation, however, this same tendency had negative implications.

Some explanations distinguished among Brazilians. Those who gambled with the inflation would clearly be middle

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class on up. In contrast, Milton explained that the accepting attitude resulted from the elite domination and precarious education, which made it easier to fool the (poor) population. After describing Brazilians as "pacatos," Ademar pointed out that Brazil is a tropical country, and that the income distribution is terrible. He too implied the "masses" were the resigned (or uneducated) ones. Renato said Brazilians wrongly expect the government to give them a house and health care, whereas they should rely on themselves. Marc gave a sneeringly sarcastic description of Brazilians as always complaining but then not acting. (He had come to Brazil from the Middle East as a child.)

Ceres, the typist who transcribed these interviews, told me she would become angry hearing some of the tapes, especially Paul's. So I asked her to type in her own comments as well when she wished. Ceres' response to Marc was that it was unfair to call Brazilians who are "miserable, hardly have a place to live, without basic hygiene and health conditions, how can one say that they are 'acomodados'? They get up early, take on the deficient transportation, work all day long. [...] It seems to me hard for people with such practical daily problems to have the psychological presence of mind to politicize, organize. This function behooves people like us..." (Ceres defended the poor, yet Marc's remarks were most likely directed at

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the middle class.)

A few informants attributed the perpetuation of Brazil's problems to another form of "acomodismo." Called the assistencialista attitude, i.e., welfare mentality, it is sometimes attributed to an entire region, namely the Northeast (which receives drought relief aid). Thus while some criticisms referred to "the people," i.e., poor people in general who were criticized for waiting for the government to solve their problems, others referred specifically to the ways the Northeast and Northeasterners were dragging the country down[5]. In chapter 3, I discussed the ways a regional idiom signified classist and especially racialist differences. This same tendency could expand into a discourse on national problems. Just as the south of Italy "has frequently been seen as the most intractable issue facing the development of the Italian state and society" (Davis 1996:53), so too the Northeast of Brazil. The mezzogiorno and the Northeast are assigned similar attributes: latifundist history, non-industrial, over dependence on the state--as opposed to the North of Italy and the Southeast of Brazil. The Paulistano folk view constructs regional differences on purported essentialized ethnic and racial qualities, ignoring social, political and economic factors in the history of differential development

[5] Yet poor migrants from the Northeast are also criticized for taking the initiative of coming south to urban areas to work...

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within the nation.

A look at works on 20th century Brazilian history would show, however, that the current situation of regional imbalances had its political groundwork laid in the First Republic (1889-1930).[6] Whereas São Paulo and Minas Gerais made links to heighten their political clout and economic advantage, the Northeast was splintered state by state, and prey to regressive policies of local elites. Weinstein (1982) points out that the strong regionalism is directly related to capitalist development, one which was especially uneven in Brazil. The folk regionalist antagonism explored in chapter 3 is conspicuously lacking in appreciation of these factors; in this light, we can see a kind of misrecognition that is not surprising coming from the region of relative advantage. The phenomenon of heightened regional imbalance as capitalism undergoes change, coupled with antagonism on the part of the advantaged area against the disadvantaged one reveals a pattern in the past and present. (Witness the Southern separatist movement in Brazil during the 1980s crisis and in Italy the rise of the Northern League, cf. Bull 1996.) The declining region and the people of it are radically "othered."

We have seen that in some representations, Brazilians are characterized as exploitative or opportunistic -- this

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[6] Leff (1972) shows that the economic imbalances developed earlier, in the 19th century.

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would be an active immorality. In others, the traits are not malevolent, but their passive submissiveness can have ill consequences. These criticisms notwithstanding, I did not find informants themselves to be politically engaged in any direct sense. Few had any party affiliation; only Workers' Party members were active. Instead, elaborate verbal critical analysis of Brazil's situation was the preferred political "act."

Reinaldo's perspective sharply contrasted with these evaluations of purported cultural traits. He had his own way of assessing the inactivity and immorality so deplored by other informants--and in fact, by himself. Reinaldo reflected, "In the same way that Gandhi did passive resistance, I think the people, this lack of morals that is being induced, I think it's the only way they've found to make a passive resistance. 'Let's buy without a receipt, that way it's cheaper, let's put out a bench and sell on the street'..." The clandestine forms of sale (cf. J.C. Scott 1985) may seem marginal; however, let me assure readers that almost every doctor I went to in Brazil had two prices: one with a receipt, one without, the latter illegal practice affording up to a 20 percent discount.[7]

These evaluations of the "culture of inflation" refer

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[7] Apparently some merchants similarly avoided taxes, hence the [unsuccessful?] governmental campaign in 1994 to induce vendors to give receipts.

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to recent history. Several informants took a longer term perspective in order to explain Brazil's problems. These informants found, from the very first moment of colonization, a sort of ineradicable tendency to exploit rather than to develop. I would hear near perfect renditions of Turner's thesis -- which unfavorably contrasts Brazil's "extractive" colonization to one idealized in the US of homesteading pioneers.[8] Thus one woman said:

> Our colonization was to take possession. We didn't colonize. People didn't come here to develop the country, as was the case of the US. This was an exploitative colonization. I see this as a characteristic of ours. This lack of love [desamor], this disrespect for everything. It runs in Brazilian blood, in mine too.

This informant, who said she had confirmed this on a recent trip to Portugal,[9] and one other of Japanese descent felt that this tendency was inherited from the Portuguese. Another noted that the US had been colonized by very different people -- English and Dutch, were the examples, whereas they had been colonized by the Portuguese. In this light an informant said similarly, "I think the structure of the country is sort of immutable. We are a colony-nation in

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[8] Turner's thesis is criticized in Otávio Velho (1979). See also Vianna Moog's (1954) work Bandeirantes e Pioneiros, which presents how São Paulo's "West" was won -- by "bandeirante" explorers whose aim was extractive ("predatory") fortune hunting in contrast to the pioneering homesteaders of the US.

[9] She even said the only solution for Brazil was to set off an atomic bomb and then start over with people of different background.

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which the idea was to grab [sugar] all that there was here and take it away. Today it's the same thing, grab to the maximum what the country has for oneself." And another, after mentioning US pioneer settlements favorably, said: "The first civilization in Brazil was predatory." Still another said "the country started being corrupt the day it was discovered." (This was an old joke, explained yet another.)[10]

These assessments of the roots of the crisis also recall and expand on Veja magazine's commentary, as shown in chapter 6. Both the magazine and informants find a cultural predisposition to inflation, both criticize Brazilians for accommodating to inflation rather than toughing it out, both make overt comparisons unfavorably juxtaposing Brazil against "First World" societies. In addition--and unlike Veja--informants expressed moral outrage both at the "acomodismo" and at immoral activity. Furthermore, there is in the informant testimony a focus on ethnicity lacking in the magazine's rendition.

Were the informants who criticized Luso-Brazilian traits of different ethnic background? A third generation Japanese Brazilian said in reference to the CPI da Corrupção: "here it doesn't work as in Italy or in Japan. People there have a different level of responsibility,

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[10] Patricia Tovar (personal communication) tells me that in Colombia people regret not having been colonized by the English.

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people commit suicide. If it were Italy, about three would already have committed suicide." Another of long term Brazilian background said that if the CPI investigation had occurred in Italy or Japan, the guilty parties would be in jail. These commentaries came from informants of various ethnic backgrounds. including a second generation Portuguese immigrant! After also running across Turner's thesis in the focus group transcriptions of Standard, Ogilvy & Mather conducted in São Paulo, I gathered it was a commonplace explanation. Although such formulations may be present in many post-colonial societies, the fact that Paulistanos are such recent immigrants makes for an ethnic distancing from the national community not so attainable by "longer term" Brazilians.

An economic crisis, especially a novel strain such as this one, is far beyond the ken of most people. Its causes and solutions have been the object of complex research and debate among specialists. However, it is also obvious to any lay newcomer that Brazilians had, by force of circumstance, developed a sophisticated understanding of the economic and political dimensions of the crisis. Yet this complex understanding could be reduced to a culturalist explanation. That is, like the culture of poverty theory, this one attributes (blames) the national problems (importantly of a structural order) to ingrained or inborn character traits. The long-sighted explanations of Brazil's

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problems focus on the ethnic make up of the colonizers: purported Luso-Brazilian traits contrast unfavorably to those of the US and Northern Europe.

It is possible to interpret the reasons for Brazilians' behaviors otherwise: the accommodation might attest, as Reinaldo claimed, to an assessment of insurmountable difficulty in effecting change. Said Reinaldo: "People end up resigning themselves [se acomodando] in the face of the impossibility of seeing their intentions, their ideologies of the world, concretized." (Maria Cecília associated the "acomodismo" with the dictatorship.) Significantly, a dissenting view on the culture of inflation/culture of underdevelopment theory also came from Reinaldo. After he and his wife had recalled the notion that Brazilians were untrainable and lazy, he commented: "I don't think it [the problem of Brazilian development] is the national character of the people; the problem is historical moments." Similarly Larissa said in defense of illegal business dealings (as cited in chapter 2), "...the Brazilian has good character [tem boa índole]. If you had a dignified, decent government, everyone would collaborate. I have no doubt of this. But the way things are, nobody feels like obeying the law. There isn't much law in this country. [...] It's a misgovernment [desgoverno]." These defenses (both by university professors, by the way) stood out among the many global censures of the Brazilian people.

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The Middle Class versus the Nation

A man in a focus group during the Collor presidency said this: "Independently of social class, the moral concepts of our time were of one kind. Today they are totally inapplicable. So it gets complicated, because you get to thinking, what should I pass on to my child? In the past, the more honest the better. Today it isn't like that, it's the shrewder the better, it's Gerson's law" (7/1/92). A few moments later, he continues, "who is it that produces? It's us [the middle class]. We move the businesses forward...and we're taxed out of our paychecks. And them? They have shares, [for them] it's a house in Morumbi [one of the most extravagantly rich newly developed neighborhoods of São Paulo], it's a trip to Miami with the whole family or even a trip to Cancun..."

This man's angry argument that honesty and work don't pay in this society, hence that the middle class is losing while the wealthy get away with...all the goods -- makes an explicit link between the declining social position of the middle class and their morality in an unjust society. His statements offer a self-definition distinct from other classes, in which the middle class is neither populist (pro-worker) nor does it side with the wealthy.

I also found that informants in my study opposed themselves to the poor and the wealthy, and were critical of, if not fully in opposition to the national bourgeoisie.

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The moral, anti-corruption discourse described here, combined with the stance of superiority in education and cultured consumption (in contradistinction to adjacent sectors), and the resentment concerning Nordestinos refer us directly to the adverse economic position and instability middle class people were put in during the crisis, and the increasing social differentiation. Although relatively protected, middle sectors were subjected to heightened instability and vulnerability in the crisis.

However, unlike the statement above by the focus group member which represents the middle class in positive terms, I found from informants' statements a positionality which was markedly isolationist and ambivalent. This came out time and again, in relation to consumerism (and forced asceticism), in their defensive-resentful attitude vis-à-vis other social sectors, and in explanations offered for the reasons Brazil's problems have persisted.

As readers may have noted, when informants spoke against Brazilians, it was often not clear whether they included themselves in the criticisms or not. Many times the speaker criticized the government, another social group, another region, making the latter an-other Brazil. Yet the critiques were often cast in a generalized way to the wider society -- but somehow excluding her or his own kind. In fact, two informants pointed this tendency out to me. Sandra's comments first criticize the (initial) inactivity

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of people during the Collor presidency, and then expand to a general assessment:

> In the beginning people just got very, very mad at the government. They talked badly about it, but no one had the courage to do anything. People here don't fight for their rights. They always take a paternalistic attitude and wait acceptingly [esperam acomodados]. They always expect that someone is going to do something for them. [...] People always talk as if Brazilians were those other people and as if I weren't Brazilian myself.

Mariacarmen (first generation Spanish immigrant) gave the most elaborated interpretation of this tendency. She said "deep down, they manage to not be Brazilians, they scold/rail at the Brazilian as if the Brazilian weren't he; this irritates me a lot. They criticize the Brazilian, as if the Brazilian were a neighbor, they don't put themselves in [não se inserem], but if you don't put yourself into the problem, you don't solve it. You have to become aware -- 'I am Brazilian,' look in the mirror -- 'I am ugly, I am beautiful, I am poor,' that is better." (Moments later she pointed out that Lula, not Collor, was the Brazilian who represented the people more.)[11]

The cultural and moral superiority claimed for their own social sector can only be offset or undermined by the negative appraisals about the Brazilian character and the

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[11] Others explained this tendency of complaining about others in the following ways: one felt it was a Catholic tendency to say "I'm not guilty," that is, to play the victim and shirk responsibility. As noted, Marc the psychiatrist felt it was an infantile, pathological tendency in which by complaining, one doesn't act.

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nation. As Alice said, there is a "disbelief in the nation, a disbelief in the people, and even in themselves." Negatively formulated discursive boundaries may have supported a middle class standpoint in isolation from others threatening to it. Yet from this position of ambivalence and isolation, with what national identity would that leave these middle class Paulistanos?! As Maricarmen suggests, what are the implications for their commitments to the community and nation-state? This location doesn't lend itself readily to a way out--beyond a "salve-se quem puder" (each one for him/herself) route.

Informants did find that the political and economic crises could be a positive thing if a major reform were the result. But though heartened by the impeachment and the investigation of corruption in Congress (also unprecedented), they gloomily deemed reform unlikely. As a rule, informants presented a strongly "government rejecting" view and firm scepticism, declaring they had no faith either in politicians or in "Plans"; in fact that term at best provoked raised eyebrows. Rather than hope for a solution through a government economic plan, several pointed to bottom up changes in the economy as positive moves, especially the growth of new small businesses (microempresas) and the influx of foreign goods to teach

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national businesses to set reasonable prices.[12]

This discourse of middle class Brazilians on the nation provides a kind of refractive example on what Coronil has called "Occidentalism." Inspired by Said's critique of Orientalism, Coronil (1996) explored the implications of the other side of the coin. In his analysis, the anthropologists' constructions of the West (really US and Europe) appropriates views of non-western others through "three representational modalities: the dissolution of the Other by the Self; the incorporation of the Other into the Self; and the destabilization of the Self by the Other" (1996:57-58). Although all three intend to be a critique of Western imperialism (i.e., through overt and symbolic forms of domination or assimilation), they too contribute to the erasure of the Other in their representations. In the discourse of my informants, one sees a demonstration of the impact of US and European hegemony, in which their self-understanding is not insignificantly shaped by Occidentalism. Thus while the analyst may wish to expose the dualist "assumption that the West is the source and locus of modernity" (ibid:78), it is pervasive in thinking,

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[12] It would be interesting to compare Brazilians' views of problems in national development, with those who have lived in a central European, planned economy. As Holy (1992) points out for Czechoslovakia, the nationals equate the planned economy with what is atavistic, stagnant, irrational, artificial and political and the market economy with what is modern, developing, rational, natural, independent of the market.

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both folk and erudite; and its effects can only be perverse.

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The commentaries presented thus far were recorded in late 1993 and early 1994, a time when the crisis had become chronic. No vision of a way out for Brazil was forthcoming in the year before the Plano Real; rather, after making criticisms of the Brazilian people, informants would go on to express the same lament. The frustrating thing was that Brazil was so rich in resources, had such great potential. This kind of statement strongly recalls the 1950-60s view of Brazil (big Brazil, country of the future) within the developmentalist framework. If in the 1990s, faith in the land remained, it lacked in the people. As Simone put it, "the only thing lacking is people with good will [boa vontade]." Years of recession, inflation, exposed corruption and more made it impossible, unrealistic, even futile by the year 1993 to imagine a future; uncertainty was all. Informants' backward looking, negative framework is of a piece with that. At this moment, the received wisdom of first world/third world dichotomies prevailed.

In July 1994, a new plan was launched, as designed by Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso. In the next section of this chapter, I describe what this plan was, how it was implanted, its initial impact and the change in attitude that ensued among middle class informants. By looking at the stakes these middle class Brazilians placed

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in the course their country should take and their chosen leader, we can analyze their class position in and on the nation, this time through a positive formulation. Let us begin with the actual changes that took place with the onset of the new plan.

The Plano Real

The Plano Real began with an announcement, towards the end of 1993 while Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) was Finance Minister under President Itamar Franco, that there was to be a plan, and that it would involve "anchoring" the next new currency to the dollar. The conversion was not to be, as in the past, a matter of lopping off zeroes, but rather was a relationship of the dollar to the cruzeiro real. To achieve the new value of the upcoming currency, to be called the real, a financial indicator was created. Called the Unidade Real de Valor, or Royal/Real Unit of Value ("real" in Portuguese is a homonym), its value, translated into currency, fluctuated daily more or less in sync with the dollar, but also in relation to other "indexes" or "anchors." By April, stores had started to use the pompous and clumsy term "URV." Illustrations of the new currency, the denominations and change, were shown on TV and in banks for the public awareness campaign. At the end of June 1994, the conversion was determined by the dollar exchange rate. Prior to this final determination, the URV

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values, as yet not readily translatable to any existing currency, were perplexing symbols. The very stability of the URV versus the actual varying price of the goods did not inspire confidence or increase understanding. One might be quoted a price in URV and remain none the wiser. By May, many window displays gave two prices, one in the currency in use, cruzeiros reais and one in URVs. Again, it didn't seem to clarify values but act as a mysterious futuristic allusion.

On the great day of the change, July 1, 1994, armored trucks and guards lined the Avenida Paulista, São Paulo's banking center. The atmosphere was quiet, the changeover deemed tranquil in the press, one of whose headlines read: "The real is born worth CR$2,750" (Estado de São Paulo, 7/1/94). Conversion tables were displayed in banks and distributed to retailers and consumers, to assist in making what would otherwise be hundreds of difficult calculations. As in previous plans, on the first days the public response was to avoid commercial interactions. Supermarket sales, for instance, dropped 13 percent in July (Estado de São Paulo, 7/30/94); shopping center sales went down 25 percent the first ten days (TV channel Rêde Globo: Jornal Nacional 7/12/94). Many informants noted "I'm only buying absolute necessities." Gradually people confronted commerce and the complications of dealing with two forms of currency. For two weeks, soon extended to six, one could still use the old

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currency or the new, and one could request either as change. In the end the most difficult areas were, as usual, the little exchanges -- at the bakery, news stand, food stand, and so on (thus informal sector vendors must have suffered during currency changeovers). The wait at check out counters was extensive, as people negotiated change, had questions or explanations to give, or had difficulties in determining or simply finding the right change.

Overall the changeover was called well planned and carried out, but daily hang ups occurred for the first weeks. For, as it soon became clear, there was not enough small currency in circulation. Not enough had been minted. Some suggested that this had been done on purpose. Although it is true that a favorite type of Brazilian explanation has a conspiratorial tinge, here it may well have been the case. Such an oversight would have been odd, after so much preparation and calculation. After all, how could they have underestimated the need for this low level of money, given the fact that -- as was true of all moments of devaluation -- the largest bill in circulation came to have a very low value? Thus just prior to the change to the <u>real</u> (when devaluation was extremely high), the largest bill (5000 cruzeiros reais) had a value of the equivalent of three US dollars. Despite this low value, bills with large denominations were invariably hard to change on the street. Once at a popular market in old downtown São Paulo, I gave

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the equivalent of 20 dollars to buy ten audio tapes. When the vendor asked a neighbor if he had ten to make this change, the latter immediately responded, "if I could do that, I'd have gone home by now! [Se pudesse trocar vinte, já tinha voltado p'ra casa.]" Ten dollars in a day would equal three plus minimum wages. Whereas Collor had dramatically prevented people from buying by literally taking money out of their reach, the Plano Real may have inhibited some "inflationary" spending by rendering it cumbersome.

A minor but nonetheless curious problem was the size of some of the change: 0.50 reais was approximately 50 cents, and a one real coin about a dollar, yet the two coins were almost the same size, requiring one to scrutinize change. This created delays, for instance, on crowded buses. Usage of checks was advised to allow people to avoid the hang ups with change during the transitional period. However, when confronted with difficulties in making change, middle class people shrugged off the minor losses (which could run much higher than pennies). Although the government had repeatedly advised that the new coins were going to matter, for middle class people (as I confirmed with informants), making a fuss over change, which normally had been of very small value, would be ridiculous (and undignified).

Thus even the preplanned for and pre-announced Plano Real was at the outset another wrench in the works, that is,

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the "norm" of inflation and related practices. While a relief, it was not at all familiar, and of course, one couldn't really be sure of any plan in the short run. After all, the nine previous plans had all failed. This plan, however, was successful in dramatically reducing inflation. Inflation went from 48 percent to about 2 percent per month and totalled 35 percent in the first year of the plan. (However, recession has accompanied the plan. See below.) At the outset, perhaps the greatest, most popular novelty was reduced prices. A business section headline announced: "supermarkets reprice goods downward!" (Estado de São Paulo, 7/9/94). But again, it was not possible in 1994 to predict what would come of the plan.

One could well imagine scepticism -- and there was, specifically that it was a plan designed to get FHC elected. Implemented just three months prior to the first round of elections, it led some to be suspicious that it had not begun earlier simply because it, like all previous plans, would not be able to last. However, a couple months into the plan just two in my sample mentioned this: the two who decided to annul their votes. What was there about this plan that lent it credibility? In what follows, I discuss various bases for support for the plan and FHC. By examining this shift in perspective, we can better understand the parameters of middle class politics.

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Reconciling with Nation and State

Unlike other plans, this one was not a shock measure involving price freezes. Rather, it was revealed slowly over several months. Stabilizing the currency by "anchoring" it to the dollar lent credibility. (In fact the currency stabilization was not solely based on the dollar, but that was the most publicized aspect.) Ample time was given for different sectors of the economy to establish prices and salaries, rather than the government freezing them at some arbitrary moment, against which there might be reactive behavior. Though the URV had been unfathomable to me as a consumer, its use was for merchants and employers to settle on prices they could keep, via a stable indicator.

Also unlike previous plans, this one was said to have been achieved through consensus building. A PT supporter and major FHC critic, Marquinhos, specifically attacked this assessment, finding it "equivocal...there is no negotiation. It was done in a cabinet meeting of intellectuals." The standard perspective on the Plano Real, however, is the following. If the other plans failed to stop inflation "by decree" (i.e, imposed top down, with price freezes on goods and/or on personal income) provoking agents to take reactive defense measures, this one was to have succeeded through negotiation, with the intended result that businesses and banks would comply. Furthermore, it promised de-indexing and ending monetary correction, mechanisms originally

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intended to buffer against inflation, but which came to be partially responsible for its durability. Many economists have said from the beginning until the time of writing that the plan has better potential for permanently ending high inflation.

Besides the specific details of how the Plano Real promisingly differed from other plans and hence garnered support, was something less rational, and perhaps of equal or even overriding weight: the hope (against hope) for deliverance. It is worth repeating that Brazilians have initially supported all stabilization plans, which did reduce inflation drastically for a short period of time, but then failed. Although it may sound melodramatic or presumptuous, I find that this "change of heart," from extreme disillusionment to hope, has been characteristic of Brazilian people at such conjunctures, middle classes included. (The restraint of cautious hope may be the most important difference.)

Certainly, the consensus achieved among major businesses and banks was crucial for the plan's success.[13] Yet during the pre-election, early plan period, I was most impressed by the adamant willingness of the population to

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[13] The question does arise as to how FHC managed to obtain compliance from those wealthy few who had benefitted most from the inflation. Interestingly, there was an absence, in FHC's campaign, of a social program. No one would have suspected he had been a socialist! Could such an omission have earned him support from conservatives concerned about his "past"?

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reject anything deemed inflationary and consequently anti-social. The general population treated the Plano Real as the plano sagrado (so to speak), so fervently did they wish the crisis would end. To strike for higher wages was widely disapproved, as it was associated with monetary correction, hence inflationary practices. From this initial period of implementation on, the platform of the Workers' Party (PT) and their candidate, Luís Inácio da Silva, Lula -- who ranked first in the opinion polls at least until April 94 -- were deemed antithetical to Brazil's successful end to inflation. Although Lula could not logically be held responsible for the previous governmental problems, he and his party came to represent a continuation of centralized government and state monopolies and a controlled economy (which had failed dismally to stabilize or end inflation). Even informants who said they respected his "honesty" and "integrity" criticized his outdated discourse ("envelhecido," "antigo"), especially for upholding state monopolies, and his corporativist party -- seen as advocating for special interest groups whose "inflationary" wage policies would not be for the welfare of the whole.

The timing of the plan's implementation could not have been more felicitous for the FHC campaign. No one doubts that FHC won the presidential elections of fall 1994 because of the Plano Real. Yet well before the plan was initiated, sociologist Grun (personal communication) predicted that the

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elections would hold no surprises. The votes would be, as he punned, "black and white." Indeed, informants voted almost unanimously for FHC. (Out of 43 asked, 34 votes were cast for FHC; five for Lula; two abstained; and two were not citizens.)

In my sample, I did find some diversity in the reasons and the kinds of support for FHC -- some didn't like his leftist past, but really disliked Lula; others had the reverse view. For instance, Irene voted for him, but she said FHC was "too clever and shameless, slippery, no saint. He criticized the military government but allied [with its party]," that is, with the PFL (the Liberal Front, formerly the party of the military government). A few were supporters of the party FHC belongs to, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), if not greatly enthusiastic of FHC (indeed I had only one gung-ho FHC supporter). Most others were not virulently for or against, but sided with the educated administrator statesman.

In the 1990 elections, the race narrowed to Collor versus Lula. With the choice in 1994 between Lula and FHC, those with center-left leanings (who may well have voted against conservative, unstatesmanlike, glamorous Collor) had a candidate closer to their interests and identifications. To the success of the plan, one could add other well-known reasons for FHC's support from middle class Brazilians. FHC represents the intellectual, sophisticated, urbane,

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Paulistano. These "collateral" reasons for preferring FHC over Lula were clearly consistent with the idealized self-definition of middle class informants. Furthermore, although well to do, he was an academic not a businessman (hence not associated with corrupt circles). In short, FHC could be seen as a representative of/for this middle class. The only point sullying this profile was his questionable, pragmatic alliance with the dictatorship party (PFL). Yet excepting Irene, informants made no mention of it.

Whatever other objections my informants had against the workers' party candidate (metalworker union leader and founder of the Workers' Party [PT], self-taught, modest background, Nordestino), they commented on Lula's lack of "statesman" qualities. As if to emphasize just how problematic lack of formal education and social refinement was for a president, informants would imagine (with a cringe) Lula socializing in an international setting. One informant said he refused to vote for a Nordestino. Although few were enthusiastic supporters, FHC was deemed qualified ("preparado"), able to give continuity to the plan, hence stability, and he stood for modern deregulated capitalism. Lula accordingly lost votes for his lack of preparation for statesmanship (or simply being "sem cultura," that is, uneducated,/uncultured). Many said of Lula "jamais," "nem pensar," never, impossible.

These assessments refer to the majority of members of

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the study. Before going further, it is worth looking at those who did not support FHC. The five Lula voters were exceptional in the sample: Miriam, Marquinhos, Miguel, Maria Regina and Sumiko. With the exception of Sumiko, these informants had the lowest incomes of the study; they also included three active PT members (Miriam, Marquinhos and Miguel). Maria Regina's experience as a teacher was probably influential in her militant position. Pro-worker out of conviction (as are her college aged children), Sumiko was the one person I spoke to who insisted that the idea that the poor had not become worse off during the crisis was utterly false.

There were also two abstentions. (Voting is obligatory in Brazil.) Can it be coincidence that the two people who abstained supported a dictatorship -- associating it with economic growth and measures inhibiting civil unrest? Citing Fujimori favorably for closing Congress, Renato said he wanted a government of the right, explaining "we still don't have enough culture, politicization to be able to have a democratic country." (I strongly suspect this view is not uncommon.)

Finally, let us consider the vision FHC projected for Brazil and informants' perspectives. While Lula's position suffered due to the success of the plan, the unpopularity of a government with excessive involvement in the economy, and the worsening image of the workers' party, FHC's discourse

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harkened to a brighter period of "development and progress," suggesting its potential return in an open economy. Listening to a campaign speech, I was struck by what seemed to be a 1950s modernization discourse -- when Brazil was heralded as the country of the future, a dream that seemed within reach. Having witnessed the expertise of public opinion research, I attribute to it this rhetoric, in tune with commentary I had myself recorded from middle class people. In the pre-election period, informants were most often careful to state their reservations about FHC and the future. (Although none stated it, one might wonder whether there were reservations about his position, since he had started his academic-political career criticizing modernization theory with dependency theory.) Still, the initial success of the plan moved many to say that signs were improving, and that god willing, Brazil might -- not soon, but in time be able to return to the modernization, first world track. Collor had promised that Brazil would join the first world; FHC reclaimed an earlier promise.

The inflation crisis inhibited people from detailing their "moral economy" in positive terms, but it was discernible. Years of "absurd prices" and knowledge of more competitive ones in the First World gave informants a strong sense that the national businesses were overly protected, and their profit margins too high. With the Plano Real, I heard affirmations of support for a free-market economy,

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regulated by fair competition. Informants welcomed the opening to imports -- both for the goods and against the excessive profit margins of national businesses.

It is important to recall that since Collor there has been widespread support for "opening" the Brazilian economy. In this way, Brazilians join others around the world who oppose state protectionism, "now viewed as artificial and irrational" (Coronil 1996:68). Crucial to the understanding of what might otherwise be seen very one-dimensionally -- that middle class people supported conservative neoliberal policy -- is an appreciation of the historical processes. The particular form capitalism has taken in Brazil, that is, of long term protectionism and the recent crisis, have led many on the left as well as on the right to move towards what seems to be straightforward neoliberalism.[14] Many aspects of the entrenched inflation seemed to follow the same unhealthy paradigm: protective mechanisms, rather than

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[14] Not everyone joined in. A friend of mine, himself successful in advertizing and a staunch supporter of Lula, specifically noted that the problem was not small scale merchants but big businessmen (called commerciante and empresário, respectively.) He said that big businessmen have an 80 percent profit margin, which "doesn't exist elsewhere, usually the profit is 20 percent." Brazilian businessmen were in the "stone age," he said, also noting the devastating wealth of banks. My friend went on to complain that in the privatization, Petrobrás, a company which knows more than any in the world about undersea drilling, was to be sold for a mere two billion to U.S. and British firms. "Brazil is going to become the backyard [quintal] of the U.S.," he concluded bitterly. This type of discourse is exactly what would receive the criticism of "outmoded."

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a "self-regulating" capitalism. Yet while people championed such a system -- both in terms of consumer prices and business restructuring, involving "downsizing" to a reduced, more competitive "job market", this view was tempered by a notion that certain "basic" goods should have price controls, as has been customary in Brazil, that profit margins should not be excessive, and so on.

This moral economy was desired not solely for the sheer beauty of idealized capitalism, but for one's own advantage. Yet it is interesting that though informants were well aware that the economy of the 1990s was becoming increasingly restricted and competitive for the middle classes than it had been, almost no one objected. The group as a whole did express a marked concern for the moral upbringing, education and futures of their children, and in some cases, for their own. However, most did not object to a more "rationalized" system -- which might not absorb them all, as already shown through downsizing as of the Collor recession forward. Their support was not for business as usual, rather for a reform which might not be to their immediate, self-interested advantage.[15]

Once again, there were exceptions. Those not themselves threatened, but sceptical of the emerging economy

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[15] This doesn't constitute a divergence, however, from the received wisdom (from Lukacs [1922] on to the "new middle class" literature that middle classes place their "strong stake in the capitalist system which differentially rewards them in status and income" [Ross 1978:187]).

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include PT supporters. Thus Sumiko was disturbed at the dismissal of employees with 20 years of service. In addition, Maricarmen feared damage to the national businesses with the influx of imported goods. But for the great majority, both in positive and negative formulations, informants presented consistent support for ethical, productive, and internationally competitive capitalism.

Concluding Postscript

This chapter documented my informants' political sentiments at two moments: during a stalement in the crisis and then at a moment of potential change, with a new plan and future government. As a final counterpoint to this examination of subjective class interests and the "objective" indicator of the elections, it is worth recalling how an analytical theory of class might explain middle class identity. One line of thinking predicts that the degrading of white collar positions in the direction of the working class should lead to their political approximation and alliance with the working class (see Braverman 1975). That reading might be applied to the minority of Lula voters. However, I imagine the majority of my informants saying, "nem morta," over my dead body! That is, although many middle class people experienced a decline in living standards and reduced potential for improved mobility, that did not lead them to ally themselves with the

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working class.

In an attempt to grasp such complications of the middle class position, Wright (1985) suggests "contradictory class locations," by which he means that middle class people align themselves with the bourgeoisie even though their de facto position and interests have (for those deskilled salaried workers) become working class-like. Without belaboring the old true and false consciousness debate, it does no harm to recall that (from Lukacs to Wright) it hinges on theoretical grounds and rationalism rather than empirical evidence. This leads to an unpromising situation in which one awaits impatiently for empirical agents to act as (a rationalist) theory would have them act. But even if "actually existing" middle class people knew their "real" interests, would they act on them? (And for whom, from what standpoint, would this be "contradictory"?!) Even in "rationalistic" terms, even taking into account the recessionary lay offs, it makes sense for middle class people to place their chips on the system that generally has gone -- relatively speaking -- their way, rather than be resigned to a lower position as individuals and as a nation (see Wallerstein 1991). This does not necessarily mean that the middle class lacks autonomy (as has been argued for them historically; cf. Pinheiro 1975, and more recently by Saes 1985): I argue that their position at this moment was not one which simply followed the bourgeoisie, or rather, it followed

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multinationals over national businesses. Perhaps the most viable approach from the new middle class literature would be to look for fracture lines along those in private versus public sector employment (Boschi 1986, Bonelli 1989, Betz 1992).

Unlike class "on paper" (in theory), class position seems to be worked out from what one would be (in which realism must be relativized and in which more than one position is possible), on contingencies, and on idealizations. The middle class votes seemed to have been based on a position against the workers' party, for deliverance from a crisis perceived as adversely affecting the middle class, and for the dream of Brazil returning to the first world track, via an open competitive capitalism energized by small business and international competition (called "globalization" since the Plano Real).

If their grave disenchantment isolated the Brazilian middle class during the crisis, the end to it allowed the resurgence of an ideal for the national community: a moral modernized economy. It remains to be seen whether they and the majority will benefit.

I left the field two weeks after the final round of elections. In February of 1995, Maria Regina, who had voted for Lula, wrote: "Brazil of the real is fine, though Fernando Henrique is no marvel..." Another PT supporter, Miriam wrote in June of 1995: "Well dear you should

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consider coming back and do now a special research on the impact of the 'real' on those families you worked with while you were here. I'm sure they are all even poorer." Alice said a few months into the Plano Real, "the plan brought in a reality. Before people had the illusion that they had money. Now it's harder, but it's more real." ("Agora é mais sofrido, mas é mais real.") Is that so?

Carla wrote twice about excessive consumption. "The illusion that everything is cheap [because prices no longer go up] led people to spend in excess. People bought so much by credit card, overdraft checks or through loans or financing, that they ended up in the red. The result -- an unheard of defaulting." Veja reports that three million Brazilians travelled abroad in 1995 (this includes two families in my study). The percentage of investments in savings accounts dropped from 41 percent in February 1994 (pre-Plano Real) to 23 percent in June 1996, principally from low (e.g., 500 dollars) to medium accounts opting to buy or pay debts. It seems that the "febre de consumo" has returned.

And what of the nation and business? Carla writes newsy updates. In July 1995 she told me that "Congress [had] voted to end the Petrobrás and telecommunications monopolies -- which is great -- [and] there are plans to de-index the economy and for a tax reform -- both fundamental." In February 1996 she reported that "Many industries have cut

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personnel; any business not competitive enough to survive with the open market, closed its doors." Many businesses filed chapter 11 bankruptcy, including her husband Chico's. Claiming this had nothing to do with the Plano Real, Carla continued: "But the situation is calm and stable, and Brazil once again has become a good market for foreign investment." I learned in June 1996 that Chico's company had laid off many of his close colleagues. Now reduced to half-time employment with them (after 18 years of service as a systems analyst and owed years of FGTS payments), Chico was picking up moonlighting computer jobs. Once a supplement, Carla's modest salary of US $500 per month has become central. As she put it to me before recounting this bad news, "if you were doing your research now, we'd have a very different story to tell."

The Plano Real was perhaps not a miracle: by the time of its onset, the cost of living had already soared. The basic basket is 130 reais -- or 30 percent above the minimum wage. A comic strip in Vejinha Rio made a joke about the price of a mango at seven reais: the "little woman" is thrilled with her man's "extravagant" gift to her of a mango -- this of one of Brazil's most commonplace fruits. Yet FHC announced at the end of 1996 that real salaries had risen 30 percent.

Globalization hits businesses, said the Folha de São Paulo recently (7/11/96); half of the ten most efficient

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businesses in Brazil ended 1995 with losses. The Estado de São Paulo (8/18/96) reports that 40 percent of new investments are foreign capital. The Jornal do Brasil (7/8/96) informs that according to the World Bank assessments, Brazil has led the world in indexes of social inequalities the last two years. Yet Veja (12/18/96) reports that the buying power of lower middle classes has soared, and the poorest sector is moving upward. Things international are ever cheaper.

Another cost of the Plano Real since 1994 has been recession and spiralling violence: 260,000 jobs were lost in São Paulo industry since the plan began, making a 12 percent drop in employment (Estado de São Paulo, 8/13/96). There were 27 incidences of multiple killings (chacinas) in the greater metropolitan area in the first six months of 1996; one out of six people in the area has been a victim of assault in the past 12 months (Estado de São Paulo, 8/25/96). On the other hand, one may find cheer in a heightening of accountability: a "CPI" commission has been investigating irregularities in the financial system (Estado de São Paulo 10/2/96), and FHC predicted at New Year's 1997 that 1997 would be the year for jobs.

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Chapter 8
Conclusions

The 2222 express train started to operate
departing directly from Bom Sucesso, [headed] beyond.

From "Expresso 2222" by Gilberto Gil, circa 1972

This dissertation examined the ways the Brazilian middle class was redefining its social position during an economic crisis dating from 1981. While at any time a processual approach might be advisable, it was all the more so given the relative lack of qualitative research on this middle class (and middle classes cross-culturally) and the circumstances of continual instability. How middle class-ness is being reconstituted in Brazil is very much an open, unresolved question.

Much of the literature on consumption charts the rise of the middle class concurrently with modern consumption. For this context of potential downward mobility, I also chose to examine middle class consumption. As an integral component of the study, I examined discourses on the middle class. This entailed studying statements by informants regarding their own class sector, other sectors of the class, other classes, regions and the nation. I also collected material from the print media on the middle class. The dual focus on practice and discourse and consideration of the interrelation of the two aspects was especially useful for understanding processes reconstituting middle

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class identity.

After discussing issues of how to initially identify middle class informants, chapters 2 through 5 looked at how class and consumption worked together. The salient goods were: homes (real estate), consumer durables and intangibles (goods and experiences). It was important to see how these were (or not) acquired, as well as their meanings for this class. Consumption proved to be, if anything, more central than anticipated. Middle class Brazilians define class boundaries and evaluate themselves and others according to consumption practices and standards. Home ownership was key to consolidating, indeed proving, class standing; this was so not only in fact, but also in the conscious, verbalized understandings of informants: home (and car) ownership were what made them middle class.

These forms of property (plus certain collateral consumption practices) rather than occupational correlates of class identity comprised their definition. The nearly 100 percent agreement was striking. Far from being a misunderstanding of class, I find that the native conceptualization recognized Brazil's class structure in an unambiguous, relevant way. One may speculate that occupation was not chosen because of its instability and variability. Even a simplified classification (management, liberal professions, small businesses) would leave doubts as to whether it could provide rigorous boundaries while being

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comprehensive. Most likely the short generational depth of people in the middle class and diverse paths into the class, and circumstances of instability during the crisis resulting in occupational shifts made work too disparate a category. A further complicating factor: work experiences and attitudes varied considerably within the sample; especially notable were differences by gender and generation. The declines in traditional middle class employment might have led some to avoid unpleasant aspects of the subject. On the other hand, I noted a tendency to incorporate work formerly not seen as middle class; that is, the reasoning was 'if we do it, it's middle class' -- to which there were certainly limits. At any rate, informants did not give employment as the baseline identification of the middle class; rather they settled on the private sphere and a definition which separates them from the poor, and, even if far off, aligns them with the wealthy. Their definition provides an interesting variant to structuralist and stratification models.

For some, there was a second part to the class definition. The most radically distanced "other" was the poor, dark skinned Northeasterner, blamed for many problems. Against the background of recent European and Japanese immigration to São Paulo (and the extreme south of Brazil), this racialist construction had certain regionally specific aspects distinguishing the Paulista middle class. Thus part

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of the inter-class definition for some informants relied on a racial/ethnic boundary and hierarchy.

Implicit to middle class existence is that members cannot remain stationary. It may be that consumption provides a fairly comprehensive (i.e., material and symbolic) way of renewing, improving and proving the standing. The context, in addition, produced certain particularities with respect to consumption. During the recession, when work and pay weren't obliging most with upward mobility, consumer goods received intense interest. Investment in any good (no matter now minor) was also a "rational" measure against inflation.

While I here emphasize how crisis shaped ideas and practice, I also maintain that the period produced an exaggeration, not a distortion, of middle class identity. Thus anxieties of class are not absent at other moments. Indeed the imperative to at all times, through dress and decorum, prove middle classness, reveals this preoccupation. The stark simplicity of the self-definition (have vs. have not) suggests that the inverse identity is unthinkable. If there is no possibility but to be middle class, then one must work at assuring that position even in the slightest instances.

Chapter 5 showed how a good deal of effort was put into making material/symbolic intra-class boundaries through prestigious foreign goods and experiences. Hardly

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"newcomers to the world of goods" (Gell 1986), this was, instead, a population for which advertizers might dream. The long "repressed" consumption due to a closed economy (under a policy of import substition) and the relatively high prices of locally produced durable goods heightened the interest in these imports. Their acquisition figured centrally in intergenerational family projects to prove standing in the local status hierarchy; and they were a complement to educational investments. For this sample, accumulating cultural capital via children's education was a central strategy aimed to maintain class position across generations, one perfectly complemented by cultural pursuits in the transnational travel circuit.

There is a language of goods which varies in culturally-specific ways. Yet I am uncomfortable with analyses that "read" into practices without regard for subjective motivations actually expressed. It was important to note that the people in question are not at all like Liliputians who, unable to speak, present their objects as arguments. As chapter 3 has shown, consumption is a very sensitive issue. The middle class seems to be in good part constituted by it, in search of it and plagued by it--in short, defined by and through it, and this is a subject of discussion.

It would be most accurate to say there was ambivalence regarding consumption. (Informants admitted to liking to

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consume, but not the consumerist aspect.) With constraints on spending, informants claimed that theirs was a refined, culturally enlightened consumption, as opposed to that of vulgar nouveau riche sectors. In this way, they redeemed status losses. The heightened, rather than lessened, attention to status issues, and against the upwardly mobile, is not surprising considering the context of exacerbated differentiation provoked through inflation. Their self-representation of cultural superiority (in education, cultured consumption and honest work) are of a piece.

Not to give due weight to status claims would wrongly ignore the well-known, great and deliberate attention these Brazilians give to such matters. (Their ultra consciousness extends to form as well as object.) Yet, like Campbell (1994), I considered motivations and purposes of consumption beyond status claims. For instance, I considered how the acquisition of imports related to the home. Through these goods, I argued, Brazilians made their immediate world according to their modernist ideals. The complications faced in the acquisition of these goods (i.e., illegal means) suggests the determination people had to fashion their world -- regardless of, in defiance of the national community and its political and economic constraints.

An interesting chapter in McCracken's (1988) work on consumption talks about how goods can reestablish access to ideals and meanings that have been unattainable. When there

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is a gap, a failure to realize a desire, one may find a displacement of the ideal -- it could be relegated to a future and/or the local scene could be blamed. But this lack can be (somehow) regained via goods, which offer the advantages of symbolic value and of offering either enduring or renewable variants. In McCracken's view, this compensatory function is a motive force of consumption in modern society. He finds the goods to be synecdoches -- parts for the whole. This perspective, based on a psychological analogy, may overstate the capability of compensation and lacks political referents. I argued that precisely the problems of consumption (and lack thereof) gave middle class Brazilians cause for ambivalence and to criticize their government for not leading them in the direction of the first world and its modernity.

Perhaps the most central examination in this research into consumption was on processes in the local market contributing to the reconstitution of classes. Chapter 4 looked at the daily nightmare of ordinary household provisioning (next to which the occasional consumption of foreign goods was a utopian counterpoint). It described the nitty gritty matters of finding or negotiating deals, making economies of scale, as well as the means of purchase and savings or investment possibilities that developed (by businesses and consumers) in response to inflationary conditions. Beyond presenting household measures to

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"economize" and "save" (or rather salvage money), I examined the practice from the perspective of exchange. Many consumption theorists have been most interested in the impact of new goods or the expansion of goods in a mass society and consequent social change (rather than seeing change solely from the standpoint of production). Others have looked at consumption as ways of working out identity. Those who have dealt with exchange have tended to consider classic debates, such as those on the gift, have critiqued the dichotomies of use versus exchange value, or have discussed de-commodification and the resignifying of meaning (Kopytoff 1986). The points and manners of exchange were an obvious emphasis for my research into the inflationary conditions; and it led to several observations on the outcomes of these forms of exchange. Chapters 4 through 7 increasingly concerned the national-political issues which developed for middle class Brazilians during this unstable period.

One outcome of the shopping system concerned the impact of such new practices on the (re)formation of habitus. Once the extraordinary circumstances became chronic, emergency measures turned routine. Although only future research will tell, it seems that the overall practice of economizing, finding deals, or simply thinking about money a whole lot, might have become entrenched in a particularly heavy-handed way. Two years after the end of high inflation the media

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reports continued "fever" to buy goods. Thus besides the goods themselves, these exchange routines are contributing importantly to the transformations of "habitus" and "mentalité" occurring in the middle class.

A second outcome refers to the mechanisms and sites of exchange. The capability of making economies of scale and protecting liquid assets or not differentiated members of Brazilian society. While merely attempting to offset part of their income losses due to high inflation, middle classes were unavoidably involved in practices which benefitted the wealthiest sectors, notably (nonproductive) banks, megasupermarkets and discount chains. The efforts at economizing were part of the income transfer spurring class differentiation. As I have often noted, Brazil was ranked first (worst) in unequal income distribution in the most recent World Bank studies.

A final outcome was very clearly political: the chaotic, even pathological economic environment provoked considerable reaction against the government, deemed most responsible for inflationary problems, and severely criticized for endemic corruption. The historical literature has noted the reliance middle classes have had on moral claims to distinguish themselves as above the wealthy and the poor. Here the middle class discourse against corruption was directed at the powerful, especially the political elite. The inflation crisis made the political

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dimensions of consumption overt.

I have attempted to demonstrate that consumption practices need to be viewed in light of related discourses. Thus I discussed acquisitions and objects along with the ambivalent discourse conveying status and criticizing consumerism. The complications of inflation raise the question of responses by middle classes in the public sphere. One type of response to the conditions was the (silent) effort at provisioning; another was involvement in contraband; yet another entailed informal business ventures and dealings. These wordless practices were matched by outcry against corruption in the government and society. The culminating moment was the impeachment movement against Collor. Yet while their own children may have taken to the streets in the impeachment movement, informants did not. (Similarly, informants lamented the death of Airton Senna, and cheered Brazil's championship in the 1994 soccer World Cup, not on the streets with "the people," but at home.) The articulate critical discourse which I gathered from informants in the privacy of their homes seemed not to have been matched by public "acts" of an explicitly political nature, other than voting--which is an obligation, not a choice, in Brazil. Instead, the "voice" of most apparent public effectiveness was that of the media.

Indeed, in order to take into account the context and forces important to the reconstituting of Brazilian middle

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classes, I had to consider the media. If middle classes plague themselves with consumption and corruption issues, they are further goaded by the media. It reinforced the constant association of the middle class with consumption and with relative standards of living; it offered vexing accounts of declining sectors and the nouveau riche. Along with market research, the print media, as I discovered, defined middle classes metonymically by association with consumer goods. If the (television) media solidified a reified notion of "the middle class" as an imagined national construct during the dictatorship, during the crisis the media made the middle class into a kind of reified imagined collectivity. The media not only delivered the crisis daily and its understandings of it, it represented the middle class as the target of the crisis (especially certain government plans). The terms associated with the middle class were very specific; the experiences it presented of the middle class were of a delimiting kind. From this pattern one might say that the media was a catalyst in unifying the middle class as some sort of collectivity--if only in an ad hoc or mainly imaginary sense.

However, as I investigated in chapter 6 on the Collor presidency, the role of the media vis-à-vis the middle class was ambiguous. It constructed a "voice" speaking about and for the middle class; it even assumed the role of "proxy" in the public sphere, criticizing government corruption and

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corrosive speculation. At the same time, it chastised the middle class, blaming it for the country's ills. Though the media (especially Veja magazine) can be held responsible for "spilling" the corruption scandal, it cannot be credited with the public movement for the impeachment. That credit should go to middle class youth.

Further research is needed on the complex relations of the media with the middle class. For now, one can say that the interaction created a powerful dynamic in relation to the middle class whether viewed in terms of the "private" or the "public" sphere. It is also clear that the relationship is problematic: note the self assigned lack of public participation by informants and their acknowledgement of the media's political role. Problematic, and at the same time consistent: to talk but not (have to) act accords with the middle class ideal of its place in society, at the very least at one remove from necessity (Bourdieu 1979); hence it can and should stay off the streets, the "popular" site.

This raises a final issue of the dissertation: the relationship of the middle class to other classes and the way it was positioning itself within the nation. Though downward mobility was a specter for many and a reality for some and downsliding in standard of living was common to most, I perceived no leaning (apart from the exceptional Workers' Party informants) towards the working class. On the contrary, differences were emphasized, from educational

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to cultural and racial. Note also the segregating protections given to children (private schooling, private clubs, apartment buildings and homes closing out the neighbors and passersby; see Caldeira 1993). Sympathetic views of poor people (for example, those who pointed out the minimum wage was inhuman) did not extend to any approximation.

Would the middle class be allying with the upper class? The support for neoliberal policy might seem to imply that; however, there was growing discontent with the national bourgeoisie and support for foreign "competitive capitalism" as model and supplier in the nation. Rather than draw the conclusion of contradictory class locations (Wright 1985), I find the middle class position to be coherent with ideals for advancement: after all, the system had gone their way in the past; and reform might set them back on track. Interestingly, there was not a support for a capitalism which would allow the widest profit margins possible; rather, such anti-social methods were condemned, as were "salve-se quem puder" (each one for him/herself) tactics in the populace. Informants did not support the actually existing capitalism, but a desired ideal associated with the current globalization trend.

The initial purpose for this research was to document, in however crude a fashion, something of the middle class experience of the crisis. It was not that I believe that

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the crisis targeted the middle class (as if not the poor); rather, I have argued that it affected all, in highly differentiating ways. My sense instead was that something important was happening to these Brazilians and their country that needed attention. So I looked at the processes reconstituting the middle class.

Though there is debate that one cannot rightly use the term middle class with a group so diverse and fractured, my research found considerable common grounding in this context. The formation of identity seemed to rely a good deal on negatively construed, "defensive" boundaries, leaving those in question in a position of isolation and ambivalence. Yet I would like to qualify this depiction: to see only the isolationist tendency would overstate the case and thus distort it. Those familiar with the US middle class might find in the isolation and resentment commonality beyond what is warranted. (Recall that the gulf between the middle class in Brazil and the poor is very vast, tempering a "fear of falling" [Ehrenreich 1989]. Such worries, again, were directed at adjacent sectors.) Nor did the moralizing supports of middle class identity convert into nationalism; on the contrary. When the character of the people was blamed (in the "culture of inflation" explanation) for the current ills of the nation, one could read as much self-critical ambivalence as distancing (e.g., by speakers relying on their ethnic difference from long term

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Brazilians). To further understand varying implications of middle class socio-political agency, more research is needed on them cross-culturally with an emphasis on historical processes.

I would like to conclude this discussion with a quick recollection of the historical context of the generation studied. Most came of age during the military dictatorship, thus lived in an atmosphere of fear and silence (witnessing exiles, hearing rumors of military crimes against the people). This disturbing political environment was strangely juxtaposed with an economic boom, favoring middle class upward mobility. Then came a transition (1979 forward), in which exiles were absolved, the censorship was lifted, and the return of democracy not only promised but planned with the gradual relinquishing of power by the military. The next period (1983-84), of the "diretas já," a campaign demanding direct election of a civilian president (rather than, as did occur, by electoral college only), was one bright with promise and effervescent presence of Brazilians reclaiming the streets and their nation. Although it too was marred by growing recession and inflation (in the early 1980s soaring to 100 percent), the return of democracy won the day. Then suddenly, a sobering tragedy: the death of president-elect Tancredo Neves. With the escalating inflation under the vice-president who replaced him, José Sarney, the euphoria was broken: the

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crisis engulfed all, becoming chronic by the 1990s.

Thus this generation has seen only brief moments of their ideal for the country -- democracy, functional capitalism, prosperity, the promise of "big" Brazil, country of the future. Instead the overriding experience has been of contradictory realities. What of the next generation?

I recently became friends with a 30 year old Paulistana. On a warm sunny winter day in June 1996 just after I had returned for a brief visit, we sat down in the quintal (backyard) of her parents' home. She asked me about my dissertation. I began by citing the title, but suddenly added to it the dates 1981-94 to indicate the time frame of the work. The friend objected and in a very vehement way: "If you put that in your title, people will be very skeptical," by which I soon understood, 'Brazilians will dismiss your work as unaware of their reality.' Leaving only four months after the Plano Real's commencement, I had then encountered optimistic reports from economists that Brazil was out of the danger of the inflation crisis and the economy was showing good signs. The news provided confusingly abbreviated reports of banking and political problems, but it too periodically noted the low inflation, so all seemed to be working out. But no, in my friend's view (and as others then attested) this was a wrong assessment. So, I must close by reporting that at the time of writing, 15 years into the crisis, it is not over.

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Appendix A: Methodology

Participating Schools

1. School 1

This school is located in Itaim-Bibí. Itaim is a new "upscale" upper middle class neighborhood, with well developed commerce (boutiques to fancy bakeries, discoteques to banquet halls). It offered the promise of a new middle class. The school itself was small, with no grounds and on a well-travelled avenue. But it was kept freshly painted and in fine condition. It had a good reputation among intellectuals. Yet, as I learned to my disappointment, families attending it might live as far as Vila Mariana and Brooklyn Paulista or in the bairro adjacent to Itaim, the much more modest Vila Olimpia. The wide draw of students indicates how NSG had become more "famous" in recent years -- something I had not been led to expect by contacts and which concerned me. In fact, just x years before (Collor years), its tuition had gone way up, provoking a major exodus, thus leaving for my acquaintance those who had been able to manage the hike. In some of the cases in my study, the financial burden was bearable for a short time only, e.g., to get a senior high student through. (Scholarships were not spoken of.) I had, however, been warned that the kinds of schools I was considering, including this one, would contain what is called "classe A" (upper class, or wealthy people). This I accepted, indeed it was interesting to think about the dynamics of such interactions. However, I had wanted to avoid schools in the league of Santa Cruz, and this school appeared to be joining it; i.e., it was beyond being a "good neighborhood school."

2. School 2

This school is located at the edge of Pinheiros nearest Cerqueira César, the bairro where I lived in the south zone. This second school was exactly right: a good neighborhood school, but not at all well known. Through school 2, I felt I would obtain all I wanted: liberal professionals, in almost all cases, but no red lights of wealth, as in school 1; rather the contrary. (The school did offer some tuition reductions.)

Although on an extremely big and busy thoroughfare, the school was pleasantly contained in two houses, with playground areas. It was an inviting atmosphere for

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children,[1] but nothing deluxe, and in need of painting. Families lived right in the vicinity, a part of Pinheiros with a mild amount of commerce, including a couple bar/restaurants. It was close to a "popular" part of the bairro which is intensely commercial, and far from the wealthy and strictly residential part, Alto dos Pinheiros. A large bairro, Pinheiros may be viewed as a south or west zone. It would not be too distorting to compare Pinheiros to New York's Upper West Side. While my contacts for school 1 were outdated on its upwardly mobile situation, here my contact was well aware of Soma's current status: it was going downhill. In fall 1994, it was sold (after a 25 year life) to the nearby highschool. With schools 1 and 2, I had two schools on opposite "mobility" paths, promising exactly the kinds of economic differences I wanted to investigate within the middle class.

3. School x

Though I reluctantly retain the cap of ingenue, in fact I have to admit that I truly did not arrive knowing the "vocabulary" for identifying the group I wished to study, nor the social geography of the city. This led me, as I solicited various schools, to become caught up in one of these famous fieldwork entanglements, a sort of wild goose chase. It was not completely useless, since through the initial inclusion of this school, I became acquainted with households "beyond the pale" of the middle class, being "classe A," and living in the bairro famed for the ultra rich nouveau riche, called Morumbi. Morumbi is a luxury suburb in the west zone; there money lets architectural imaginations run wild. Located on a hill with a long vista, this school slightly resembled a social-sport club, in miniature. Although I did meet six families from Galileu Galilee, I dropped the school, however, except two especially interesting cases of families who did not live in Morumbi, rather in adjacent middle class neighborhoods near Av. Francisco Morato.

Comparison School/Group

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[1] Whereas school 1 was primary and secondary, school 2 was only the former. I worried a bit over comparability. Having gone through delays with this tactic of approaching schools as my entree into middle class homes, I needed to get moving. As I initially interviewed far more families than I could feasibly work with on an ongoing basis, after a first visit, I dropped cases of parents both under 30.

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About midway through fieldwork, the contact with informants from schools 1 and 2 had made me intrigued with how, despite the wide material differences in the families of the study, there was a commonality in discourse. I will consider this further in Chapter 6, but for here I will simply report that informants contrasted themselves with an "other" middle class whom they looked down on. It felt it behooved me to seek out this "other" group to see what they might say and do for themselves.[2]

3: School 3: Objetivo

Thus midway through research, I repeated the search, this time taking the opposite tack, i.e., looking for a stereotype -- but in the south zone. The work was quickly done. Repeated and additional consultations firmed my view that the school system Objetivo was the perfect comparison school to the others. It was comparable in socioeconomic terms -- encompassing the two ranges, it had locations in the south and west zones, thus drawing families from the same areas, and had primary and secondary grades. Though certainly "modern," its reputation made it out to be the opposite of the other two "modern" schools in its narrow pedagogy and large, impersonal staff and atmosphere. It was certainly the most well known school, by virtue of its location on the Avenida Paulista and because its central school is housed in a building with a radio tower above -- a veritable symbol of São Paulo.

As it was a chain of schools, there are several locations of the school, but by far the most significant one is on the Avenida Paulista -- no school could be more centrally located at the dividing line of the south zone. Its fame derived partly from this visibility -- heightened

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[2] I became more firmly convinced of this necessity after a conversation with yet another Paulistana advisor from the intellectual circle. When I mentioned to her that the people in my study were "nice" (simpáticos), the friend insisted that my methodology had been wrong, that I should have looked through the phone book, for instance, to obtain a random sample. I explained that I couldn't hope for representability in this small, qualitative study, and in any case I imagined that these people would "perhaps have something to say" to other Brazilians. "Perhaps," she scoffed. Afterwards, I reflected on this exchange, amazed that the person felt that if nice, the middle class informants could not be representative, not to mention that representative middle class people could not be not like her! I did take the criticism of representability to heart, though, and sought out a comparison group.

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as it was housed in a building with a radio tower above. Its central location was all it has going for it as an environment. The entrance to these grey concrete structure is dark and cavernous with industrially dark staircases. The overall impression is of school-as-factory. The grade school was located in Pinheiros, very close to school 2, making it doubly good as a comparison. (Its tuition was competitive, and tuition reductions were given, at least to friends of the owner.)

The only contact I had had not been a teacher there for years and had negative recollections. I went on my own, with no names to drop, just armed with letters and smiles. I was accepted easily. The school wanted me to use its name in my publications.

Phase 1. First Contacts: Identifying Margins

On an initial round of visits with families who had agreed to meet me, I taped some preliminary discussion on their class circumstances. This material provided their sense of class boundaries as well. The 42 families surveyed came from School 1 (11 families out of 16 previously contacted by the school), School 2 (13 out of 21), School X (six out of ten), and Objetivo (12 out of 16). From this wider pool, I selected 24 families (43 adults in frequent contact, and perhaps a dozen preteens and teenagers) to work with on an ongoing basis, by the following selection process.

Before the first interviews I was forewarned by a Brazilian anthropologist, aware that I had a fairly diverse group of potential informants including some of "classe A," that I might offend certain people were I to call them middle class. Informants had been apprized that I was studying the middle class and the crisis. Rather than attempt awkward designation, in the first contact I opted to announce the middle class as a topic for discussion in impersonal terms. My standard introductory question was: "Brazil has experienced many changes these last years. How has the middle class experienced these changes?" The majority responded in personal terms, however, many times inquiring (charmingly), "may I speak of my case?" I found that the range and limits of the middle class were immediately suggested by responses to the first interview. (See below for the interview questions.)

Cases at the margins revealed themselves quite clearly. During interviews, certain people expressed difficulty in accepting a middle class designation. Such was the case of two teachers interviewed who stated soon after I arrived in their homes that they didn't know whether they should participate in the research, being poor and hence unsure as to whether they were middle class. One had recently removed

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her child from the private school involved in my study, placing him in a public school where she herself taught. The other taught at one of the schools in the study, so her children went tuition-free. She pointed out that the family would never be able to pay tuition. These two, and one other person, Clarinha, were the only ones uncomfortable with being taped. The latter did not, however, object to being called middle class. Clarinha's family (retained from School X) also qualified as marginal to the middle class in terms of occupation and educational background. Currently a housewife (dona de casa), Clarinha had not completed secondary school and had worked for eight years as a seamstress. This can be a very meager living, but she had sewn for a boutique on what was for years São Paulo's fashion center, the Rua Augusta. Her husband José's work situation was similar: an immigrant from Portugal at age 12, he had always worked at a banquet hall in Itaim-Bibí.

Although my first inclination was to eliminate this case due to the parents' occupations, I reconsidered. First, Clarinha, and soon, the family as a whole, extended me a warm and welcoming friendship and hospitality and interest in the study. Moreover, the family illustrated one road to the middle class; they acquired material means prior to cultural refinements. The split was represented generationally, as the children were "college material," attending one of São Paulo's most expensive private schools.

One person in the comparison school initially objected to participating in my study. Already over the phone Miguel said he and his wife Nicole (both actors) were not middle class, rather "proletarian." Like the preceding family, this one offered interesting commentary on what was and was not middle class in native conceptions, and so I urged them to participate. From within my group of participants, these and a couple more cases formed one extreme, one margin, of the middle class.

At the other extreme were people whose greater apparent wealth seemed to disqualify them. Thus one man had become a successful entrepreneur (having moved from being an engineer to a company owner), and his wife oversaw two maids; another enjoyed a successful private medical practice. I found these participants relatively unable to articulate issues about the middle class, speaking rather of the poor ("favelados"). This dislocation left me unsure as to whether they categorized the two together as "popular," or whether they felt uncomfortable (unwilling or unable) to comment on this class.[3] One person from School 1, who

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[3] Once those at the lower margin of my middle class sample were reassured they were appropriate participants, this group spoke readily and personally about the middle class in the crisis. Such was not the case with the upper

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eventually described himself as "elite," did find it possible to speak directly to the topic, commenting that middle class people were whining ("choramingando") about some minor inconveniences. This informant, João, had a highly remunerated executive position in banking. I did not comment that perhaps it was easier to say this from his apartment in Vila Nova Conceição (the bairro with the highest real estate values in São Paulo) than from the poorer neighboring Vila Olímpia.

At this margin I decided the cases were becoming or had become invalid as "representatives" of the class. But here as well I kept a few families (from School 1) in the study for reasons similar to those above: though moving up and out, their class background was apparently middle class, so that they too provided cases worthy of note on class boundaries. All these families extended warm hospitality and interest in the research. After eliminations the final sample became: seven families from School 1, eight from School 2, seven from Objetivo and two from School X for ongoing contact. Once again, the arklike quality in terms of material circumstances, occupation, bairro and more was irrepressible and, I decided, desirable, in order to assess the range of middle class-ness.

Phase 2: Family Employment Histories

The second phase of research involved gathering family employment histories, starting from grandparents forward, the distance about which informants had information. I gathered 40 histories in order to chart middle class employment trajectories and gender differences. I also surveyed informants on their understandings of what were middle class occupations today.

Phase 3: Class, Consumption and the Private Sphere

This phase involved the most ongoing data gathering, and ranged from household organization and consumption practices to family assets and sample monthly expenditures. Also of interest here were the gender divisions of labor and of financial responsibility, and reliance on domestic workers. I became familiar with household interactions by sharing meals, watching TV, shopping, and through special events -- the holidays, the World Soccer Cup, life crises rituals (a debutante ball, a wedding). Participant observation, of course, gave me practical experience of daily life in high inflation.

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margin group.

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Phase 4: Representations of the Crisis, Class and Nation and Middle Class Acts

Taped interviews and informal conversation provided the material for analysis of informants' discourse. I considered how they represented their class, other classes, the national community and the state. I was given an additional source of middle class commentary.

Sixty hours of transcript material from 24 focus groups were generously been conceded for analysis by Clarice Herzog from the advertizing company Standard, Ogilvy & Mather. Her department conducts focus groups, divided by sex and segment of the middle class (according to the marketing classification of A, B, C or upper middle, middle and middle middle), in which the opening question in an unstructured discussion (of about 2.5 hours in length) was either general, like "how is life like these days for you?" or more specific, like "how has [government stabilization] plan x affected you?" The purpose of the focus groups was not to elicit a response to some specific product. Rather, it was to gauge people's attitudes towards shopping during the crisis. Since consumption issues were quick to emerge, at some point a more specific question like: "do you buy by the brand or the price?" or "do you still stockpile?" would be asked. Although the company used only a fraction of the discussion group material, they did assess the "mood" or "frame of mind" people were in (gloomy, optimistic, etc.) in relation to the country and the government. The company turned this material plus information gained from phone interviews into highly professional periodic reports for major businesses, in a series called "Listening Post" (title in English). I found the hours of discussion very useful material for comparison with my own. It also provided commentary produced in the period prior to fieldwork, from groups run from 1986 forward.

Over the year, I followed the daily news in the newspaper and on TV. I also read back issues of magazines (especially the most widely read one, Veja) between 1986 and 1994 and did a newspaper search on the middle class, in order to obtain background on the crisis and the government's many plans in relation to it. This search revealted that "the middle class" was an important topic amply represented in the media. This material also served for comparison to the discourse of my informants on their class.

Although the main middle class political or public "act" was verbal, the field period eventually afforded a means of looking at an overt act expressing class. The last two rounds of home visits took place during the electoral campaigns and elections. In November 1994 Brazilians elected a new president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, as well as virtually all other public officials. I extended

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fieldwork beyond a year in order to witness the elections and the government plan implemented in July 1994.

Interview Questions

A. Middle Class and the Crisis

1. In the last years, the country has endured a lot of changes. How are people of the middle class experiencing this?

2. What changed for the middle class? Since when do you date these changes?

3. What was the main loss for the middle class? How do you feel in this situation?

4. Brazil is famous for having adapted to extremely high, chronic inflation. How does this work on a daily basis? How do you deal with this inflation?

5. How do you do household shopping? What changed in the budget?

6. Who today can be classified as middle class in Brazil? Is this the same as it was say 20 years ago? How would you define the Brazilian middle class? Complete this phrase, "a Brazilian middle class person is someone who..."

B. Family, Household and Consumption Data

1. Where do your children study? Since when? How did you decide on this school? Are they taking any additional courses?

2. What was the highest degree of instruction you reached?

3. What do you do for a living? How long have you been in this area? How did you get this job (newspaper, contact)? What was your previous employment? How many hours per week do you work nowadays? Was it always like this? What is your salary?

4. What are your paternal/maternal grandparents' names? Where were they born? Where did they live? What was their employment? How many children did they have? (repeat all with aunts, uncles on paternal and maternal sides).

Where did you pass your childhood? What differences do you see in your childhood from that of your children?

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5. How long have you lived in this apartment? How did you choose this place? Do you own the apartment? How was the purchase financed? How many square meters is the apartment?

6. What are the advantages of the apartment/building/ neighborhood? Disadvantages? Have you had any problems with the apartment / building / neighbors / neighborhood?

7. How many of the following do you have?

bedroom*	VCR*	washing machine	dryer*
refrigerator			
bathroom	TV (black and white/ color*)		radio
dishwasher*			
microwave*	vacuum cleaner		cellular phone*

* These items were not on the list from the advertizing classification system (Classes A-E). I added to "update," but soon found I had forgotten to include freezer, which informants wanted to be noted.

8. Do you employ a domestic worker? How long has this person been in your employ? Is she part-time (by the day) or full-time (by the month)? What is her salary?

9. What are the advantages of having a domestic worker? Disadvantages?

10. What is your monthly income (each adult)? Do you have any other source of income?

11. How do you handle household expenditures? Do you put your incomes together (joint account)? Does each person take responsibility for certain expenses? What are the areas which each person pays for?

weekly buys	monthly buys
condominium	other apartment expenses
domestic worker(s)	health insurance
school/children	extra courses (self/children)
things for children	leisure
car & transportation	travel
personal buys	communications
other	other**

** Informants provided a sample monthly expense sheet, filling in amounts (in reais, as the sheet was provided in August, 1994).

12. Who takes care of banking? Who does the supermarket shopping?

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13. Have you bought any imported goods lately? What? Where?

14. Do you like to shop? Do you think women are more consumerist?

15. What did you do last weekend? During the July vacation? During the last summer vacation? The summer before?

16. When was the last time you went out with friends? Where did you go?

17. How often does your family get together?

18. Do you belong to a club? How often do you go?

19. What is your religion? Do you frequent services? Belong to a religious group? Describe.

C. Society and Politics

1. What are the biggest problems for those who live in São Paulo?

2. Has anyone in your family ever been assaulted?

3. Do you subscribe to any newspaper or magazine? Which one(s)?

4. What do you think of the Plano Real?

5. Do you belong to any political party? Are you active? How would you describe this party?

6. What is your opinion of the presidential candidates? What do you want from the new president?

D. Consultation with Economists (three interviews)

1. Please explain banking options (from the "fundão" to investments).

2. Credit systems and finances: What was available for buying a car/ house or apartment 20 years ago, 10 and now?

3. What are the ways Brazil's inflation is viewed by economists? Why did it develop? Why is it persisting? How is it affecting the middle class?

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4. What are the uniquely Brazilian reactions and mechanismsm to deal with inflation?

5. Why is the dollar not protected from devaluation?

Middle Class Occupations

Please mark the occupations which are NOT middle class. Use the space below to explain your responses.

Administrator***
Attorney-at-law
Systems analyst
Architect
Counter clerk
Bank employee
Banker
Hair cutter
Merchant
Typist
Dentist
Nurse
Engineer
Industrialist
Doctor
Metallurgist
Office boy
Teacher
Boutique owner
Receptionist
Restaurant owner
Secretary
Electronics technician
Car salesman

***The list was alphabetical.

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Appendix B: Informant Data

The ethnographic present is used to refer to the period of fieldwork, that is, August 1993 through November 1994. Income is given in reais, which was so closely equivalent to the dollar that no conversion is needed.

School 1 (7 informants)

1. Alice (Vila Olímpia, south)

Alice (aged 40) teaches physical education at a secondary school and at the state university (since 1986), where she is completing her doctorate. She earns 1,400/month. Her ex-husband contributes to the household expenses by paying for the two teenaged boys' school, their health, sports club, and extra courses. Since 1992 she has lived in a rental apartment on the "wrong side" of a busy street dividing Vila Olímpia from a wealthy neighborhood, Vila Nova Conceição.

2. Larissa and Rodolfo (Itaím-Bibí, south)

Architect Larissa (40 years+) has been working for about 10 years half-time for a city housing office and soon after started her own firm (co-owned), where she works half-time making 1,000/month at each job. Rodolfo (50 years+) has a high administrative post at TELESP, where he has been for 15 years, making 4,000/month. Thus the total income is 6,000/month. They have been renting a large apartment since 1979 (hence rent is very cheap), but own a plot of land in Alphaville, where they are debating whether to build. They have three teenaged boys.

3. Sumiko and Flávio (Paraíso to Vila Mariana, south)

Social worker Sumiko works full-time (with prostitutes, on health issues), earning 600/month. Flávio, a sports doctor, works 50 hours per week (having always done so) making 4,000/month. They are about 50 years old, have one college aged boy and two teens. They moved from a spacious house in a cul de sac (vila), which they put up for rent, to another of similar or smaller size, but redone.

4. Wilma and João (Vila Nova Conceição, south)*

Wilma (degreed from a normal school) is a full-time housewife. João, engineer, is an executive for Citibank,

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works 50-60 hours per week and makes 10,000/month. His combined banking experience is 17 years. They have two teenaged daughters, one in college and have owned their large apartment since 1977.

5. Maricarmen and José Rodrigues (Santo Amaro, south)

Maricarmen (40 years+), native of Spain, teaches Spanish on a very part time basis. Her income of 480 reais/month pays for her own classes, including analysis. José Rodrigues (50 years+) works full time, earns 5,000 reais/month as one of seven directors of an engineering firm which has received large city contracts (e.g., relating to the subway), a position which he has held for 16 years. They have lived since 1978 in a large apartment bought with BNH financing with three teenaged daughters. Their apartment was repainted during the year.

6. Sandra and Carlos (Moema, south)

Sandra works part time building up a jewelry business (no income as yet, only expenses). Carlos (business degree) works full time in bank administration and has done for 17 years. He earns 3000/month. They are in their late 40s, have lived in a rental apartment for 18 years, and have two teenagers.

7. Elisabete and Antônio (Alto dos Pinheiros, west)*

Elisabete formerly worked as a lawyer in a practice passed on from her father, but ended it when her third child became ill and died. Antônio began running a manufacturing company in a factory site built originally by Kodak in the mid 1980s. The company makes a variety of products, including cassette tapes. He works 50 hours/week and his monthly income is 8-10,000/month. They moved from a large house they had rented for 8 years, to one they completely redid nearby. They are about 50 years old and have two teens.

School X (2 informants)

8. Clarinha and José (Vila Suzana, southwest)

Clarinha worked for eight years as a seamstress, but is now a full-time housewife. José has been a maitre d'/waiter for at least 20 years. Their income is 3,000/month. They have owned their spacious home for 16 years, and moved into

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yet another they own two blocks away. They are in their late 40s, have two teens, one in college.

9. Mara and Ademar (Butantã, southwest)

Mara works part time as an attorney and as a building manager, earning 350/month. Ademar is manager at a manufacturing company where he has worked for 22 years, earning 2,500/month, thus the total income is 2,850/month. They are about 50 years old, have owned their apartment since 1976 (bought with BNH financing), where they live with two teenagers and a primary grade school boy.

School 2 (8 informants)

10. Irene and Heitor (Sumaré, west)

Trained as a nurse, Irene works as a housewife and helps her husband, a doctor who is active doing research and giving papers. Their income from his practice ranges from 5-6000/month, depending on surgeries. Heitor has worked 12-14 hours/day for the last ten years. They are in their late thirties, live in a small three bedroom apartment which they have owned since 1983 (via SFH financing) and have three children, in preschool and primary grades.

11. Aninha and Milton (Jd. Bonfiglioli, southwest)

Degreed in industrial design, Aninha (40 years+) works as a housewife (and may be selling clothes as a sideline), with occasional freelance jobs from educational sources. Milton (civil engineer, about 50 years old) was working 30 hours per week but increased to 40-45, at the job he has held for 20 years with a federal banking and (housing) loan institution. Their income (Milton's salary) is 2,800/month. They have lived in a rented two storied house for the last 6 years and were hoping to buy one similar to it in the neighborhood. They have two children in primary grades.

12. Gilda and Euclides (Pinheiros, west)

Gilda (completed high school), formerly full-time housewife, now works (without pay) half-time at the gas station owned by her husband, his brother and father. Euclides is a mechanical engineer, salaried, full-time. Gilda did not know their income, nor did I ask. They are in their late 40s, live in a three bedroom apartment owned since the 1970s with three teenaged daughters.

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13. Miriam and Marquinhos (Pinheiros, west)

Miriam (completed high school) works as a freelance English teacher about 60 hours per week, earning 2,500/month. Marquinhos works as a union advocate, earning 1,500/month. This is Marquinho's second marriage, he has a son from another. This couple, she in her late 20s, he in his early 40s, have two preschoolers. They have been living in a rundown rental apartment together for 6 years.

14. Esther and Gilberto (Vila Madalena, west)

Journalist Esther returned to her position with a major newspaper after her pregnancy leave, working 45 hours/week and making 2,400/month. Architect Gilberto started his own firm in 1985 and began teaching in 1986, and makes about 2,000/month. His business nearly folded and remains unsteady. Their combined income is 4,400/month. They have owned their apartment since 1990 and have three small children.

15. Ursula and Reinaldo (Pinheiros, west)

Biologist Ursula (30 years+) works full time (40 hours) at a bank (Bradesco), earning 2,200/month. Psychiatrist Reinaldo works 40 hours between his office (begun three years before) and the state university (USP), where he teaches. His income is 720/month, solely from teaching. Their combined income is 2,920/month. Reinaldo (50 years+) has a teenaged son from a previous marriage. They have two primary grade children and live in a large three bedroom apartment.

16. Bruna and Edilson (Pinheiros, west)

The status of this couple changed during fieldwork. At the beginning, Bruna was a full-time housewife, but as building supervisor, received some compensation for condominium expenses. Edilson works at a bank, earning 2,400/month. They separated, prompting Bruna to seek employment, which she found at a boutique near their apartment. A high school graduate, she was trying to pass a civil service exam. They are about 40 years of age, and have one child, primary grade.

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17. Maria Regina and Ricardo (Pinheiros, west)

Teacher Maria Regina works 50 class hours/week at two schools, earning 1,500/month. Ricardo (completed high school) is a technician. As of 1992, he was laid off for several months, reinstated at a lower salary and without benefits, became a consultant and then salaried employee (1,200/month) at a large heavy manufacturing company since 1993, working slightly more than 40 hours per week. Their combined income is 2,700/month. They are in their early forties and live in their own two bedroom apartment (bought in 1980 with BNH/SFH financing) with three daughters, pre-teen aged.

School 3. (7 informants)

18. Mariza and Renato (Moema, south)*

Mariza works 45 hours/week at Objetivo, as teacher and director, making 1500/month. She has worked there for 23 years. Renato works 40 hours/week at the welding company he co-owns with his brother, taking home 5,500/month. Their combined income is 7000. They moved to their new large apartment in Moema in 1994. As Renato put it, they are practically buying it outright, as the financing from the contractor is for just two years. They are about 50 years old, have two teenaged daughters, one in college.

19. Carla and Francisco - Chico (Moema, south)

Carla has been working half-time (20 hours/week) for 14 years as librarian for a private collection, earning 500/month. Chico works 50 hours/week ("it has been worse") as a systems analyst, a job he held for 19 years, making 4100/month. Together, they make 5600/month. In 1995, after the Plano Real had taken effect and the economy opened to foreign competition, his computer company filed chapter 11 bankruptcy. Many of Chico's colleagues lost their jobs; his was cut in half, forcing him to seek extra money consulting. He also lost the company car. Carla's work gained a new importance. They are in their late 40s old, have two teenagers, and live in a small apartment they bought with BNH financing in 1980.

20. Laura and Fernando - Nando (Planalto Paulista, south)*

Laura has been working for 26 years for School 3 (Objetivo). After losing his job of 20 plus years in sales in 1992, Nando became a co-manager with his wife of an

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Objetivo school 1 1/2 hours outside of São Paulo. They each put in 60 hours/week. Laura makes 4000/month, Nando 5000. They bought their first home in 1973 with FGTS monies and BNH financing. They now live in a four plus bedroom home, after having bought the house next door (with adjoining walls) in 1988 and integrated the two. Two of their three teenaged daughters have already had their "festa de 15 anos." They are about 50 years old.

21. Paola and Maurício (Hygienópolis, west-central)

Degreed in psychology, Paola works 50 hours/week (since 1993) in a non-profit agency concerning disabled people, earning 1,500/month. Maurício earns 3000 at 60 hours/week as a promoter for the city government, since Maluf's administration (1992). Since 1993, they have lived in a large rental apartment with access for disabled people, with their two teenaged daughters. They are 40 years+ old.

22. Maria do Carmo and José Claudio (Paraíso, south)*

Formerly a teacher, Maria do Carmo is a housewife. José Claudio works 60-65 hours/week at his doctor's office (which he has had for 15 years), making between 6000 plus/month. (His figures conflicted.) They live in an enormous four bedroom apartment, which they bought in 1992 with short term financing from the construction company. They are in their mid 40s and have four children.

23. Helena and Adalberto (Pinheiros, west)

Helena (secretarial schooling) started in sales in 1988 but now also manages in a store that sells bathroom accessories. In 1990, Adalberto (schooled as a toolmaker) left his salaried position to start his own small business in mechanical design. Their two gradeschoolers have scholarships. They are in their late 30s, and live in an apartment which they inherited. Due to their hectic schedules, my data is partial on this family. Their income is unknown.

24. Nicole and Miguel (Santa Cécilia, central)

Nicole works 60 hours a week, and Miguel 80 (so he said) as teacher-consultants for small businesses, and in non-paid activity (theater, Spiritism). Their combined income is 1200. They are in their mid-40s; both attended college but quit for theater. Since 1983 they have lived in

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a small, ill kept older walk up, paying just 76/month. Their three children attend school with full scholarships.

* Families whose high income places them as "marginal" to the middle class, but whose trajectories and participation in the study were important for the research.

Informants interviewed once and cited: Pilar (private school teacher), Selmo (engineer) and Lourdes (housewife), Maria Cecília (English teaching school owner), Bia (works at husband's clinic) and Marc (psychiatrist), Simone (boutique owner). An informant interviewed twice and cited: Cleide (public educational administration).

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