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Histories of Conviviality in a Northeast Brazilian *Periferia*

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Dignité, convivialité et contestations morales d'appartenance

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article aborde la convivialité de manière critique, en identifiant les compréhensions communément confondues du concept, qui incluent les discours émiques, étiques, normatifs et historiquement contingents. Je soutiens que la convivialité peut être comprise comme un mode particulier de socialité, et qu'en tant que tel, elle est nécessairement façonnée par des modes de socialité antérieurs et les valeurs qui y sont associées. La convivialité est ensuite appliquée de façon analytique à l'observation participante menée dans une communauté urbaine périphérique du nord-est du Brésil. Je montre que, dans cette communauté, les résidents abordaient la vie en commun à travers les valeurs distinctes des Nordestino : l'autonomie et la dignité. Cela a produit un mode de socialité que les anthropologues ont qualifié d'« autonomie inter-foyers ». Je décris également les changements dans l'expérience de la convivialité entre le début de mon travail de terrain en 1998 et 2015, et ainsi, je démontre comment les modes de socialité sont eux-mêmes historiquement contingents.

Histories of Conviviality in a Northeast Brazilian *Periferia*

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Abstract: This article critically discusses conviviality by identifying commonly conflated understandings of the concept including emic, etic, normative, and historically contingent discourses. I argue that conviviality can most usefully be understood as a particular mode of sociality, and as such is necessarily shaped by prior modes of sociality and their attendant values. Conviviality is then applied analytically to participant observation conducted in an urban peripheral community in Northeastern Brazil. I argue that, in this community, residents approached living together through the distinctive *Nordestino* values of self-reliance and dignity, which produced a mode of sociality anthropologists have characterized as "inter-household autonomy." I also describe shifts in the experience of conviviality between the beginning of my fieldwork in 1998 and 2015, and thus demonstrate how modes of sociality are themselves historically contingent.

Keywords: conviviality; inter-household sociality; peripheral communities; Brazil; rural-urban migration

Résumé : Cet article aborde la convivialité de manière critique, en identifiant les compréhensions communément confondues du concept, qui incluent les discours émiques, étiques, normatifs et historiquement contingents. Je soutiens que la convivialité peut être comprise comme un mode particulier de socialité, et qu'en tant que tel, elle est nécessairement façonnée par des modes de socialité antérieurs et les valeurs qui y sont associées. La convivialité est ensuite appliquée de façon analytique à l'observation participante menée dans une communauté urbaine périphérique du nord-est du Brésil. Je montre que, dans cette communauté, les résidents abordaient la vie en commun à travers les valeurs distinctes des Nordestino : l'autonomie et la dignité. Cela a produit un mode de socialité que les anthropologues ont qualifié d'« autonomie inter-foyers ». Je décris également les changements dans l'expérience de la convivialité entre le début de mon travail de terrain en 1998 et 2015, et ainsi, je démontre comment les modes de socialité sont eux-mêmes historiquement contingents.

Mots-clés : convivialité ; socialité entre foyers ; communautés périphériques ; Brésil ; migration rurale-urbaine

Introduction

"Not even one cup or saucer in the house for guests, did you notice? *Foi sem um mínimo de dignidade!* (it was without a minimum of dignity)," my friend and interlocuter Josefina[1] stated, on registering her disbelief at the lack of hospitality we had witnessed while on a visit to see a mutual friend, Vanessa, in the fall of 2017. "It doesn't matter how poor you are, you always *dar um jeitinho* (find a way) to host your guest," she finished.

This remark punctuated the end of a special trip Josefina and I had made in Barra do Ceará, a low-income peripheral neighbourhood on the outskirts of Fortaleza, Brazil, to see Vanessa's ten-month-old. Our visit had combined a reunion, the delivery of baby supplies, and a wide-ranging conversation covering the ongoing and epic drought threating Ceará, the host's move out of her extended family's home to a state-built apartment block, her husband's recent unemployment, and the growing tension over the upcoming presidential election; but it was the perceived lack of hospitality that had elicited sharp commentary upon our departure.

At the time of the visit, I was struck by the sharpness of my friend's rebuke and her insistence that even someone as poor as Vanessa should be able to provide for others. I thought Vanessa's situation demanded more empathy. She had just moved to a cramped home, she was caring for a young child, and her husband was unemployed. In my fieldnotes I asked: "*Why should she be worried about hosting? And why was J., typically generous in her assessment of others, so clearly unsettled?*" In fact, hospitality had been a pervasive feature of my experience of social life in Barra since my first arrival to the community in 1998 and I had come to associate its intricate practices with residents' descriptions of their neighbourhood as being one in which there were always "*braços aberto*" (arms wide open) and full of "*convívio.*"

But my friend's assessment of our visit as a failed hosting event revealed to me just how much convivial social life in Barra seemed to be structured by values more typically associated with rural Northeastern regional culture, such as self-reliance, personal dignity, and household autonomy. This article explores

this claim in more detail, examining how inter-household sociality in Barra do Ceará continues to be shaped by residents' connections to the interior of the state, and how household autonomy in particular was central to the experience of "living together with difference" at a particular moment in my field site.

In one of the many recent overviews of the sociological turn towards conviviality, Linda Lapina highlights the "slipperiness" of the concept and the inconsistencies in its use (Lapina 2015, 34). Part of this "slipperiness" comes in the slippage between emic and etic uses of the term, and in its, sometimes, unexamined normative dimensions. For example, when Nowicka and Vertovec ask in their 2014 introduction "under what conditions people constructively create modes of togetherness," conviviality appears as an etic category, to be identified by researchers. "Constructively" seems to imply that people are living together in a successful fashion, though it is not specified if the authors mean from the perspective of the researchers (an etic category), or from the perspective of those who are doing the "living together" (an emic one). As multiple authors point out, the normative dimensions of the term have deep roots; one of conviviality's earliest and most influential advocates, Ivan Illich (2014, 343), elaborated on the term with an eye towards "helping people live compatibly in complex social systems."

While Illich and his followers used the term prescriptively as a tool for urban planners or policy makers (Fincher et al. 2014; Morwaska 2014), other scholars have viewed conviviality as an emic cultural category that becomes objectified under different historical and political contexts. See for example Erickson (2011), who examines "convivència" as a discourse which shapes host-immigrant relationships in Catalonia, or Maisa Taha's essay in this volume, in which she examines the cultural category of *convivència in the discourse and practices of Spanish schooling.*

Amidst all this slipperiness, there is broad agreement that researchers should focus on the context of everyday life in order to probe the limits of conviviality (Boisvert 2010; Heil 2014; Neal et al. 2019; Wise and Noble 2016). "Convivialism should entail a perspective on the human that 'starts and ends' in the everyday," notes Boisvert (2010). Amanda Wise and Greg Noble, in their introduction, "Convivialities: An Orientation," go further and argue that "the everyday" must be understood and examined as social practice(s), which generate "lived togetherness" (Wise and Noble 2016, 425).

Cultural anthropology's long-standing interest in modes of sociality, a broader and usefully less normative concept than conviviality, as well as its inherent commitment to the "everyday," make it an ideal discipline from which to draw theoretical inspiration to deepen our understanding and re-assess the concept of conviviality. Anthropology reminds us that all modes of sociality are historical and imbued with values which shape routine encounters as well as ritual activity. As Marshal Sahlins (1978) argues, it is precisely these values (or "culture concepts" to use Sahlins' term) that work to shape new forms of sociality including, for example, something like conviviality. This concept—in both an etic and emic sense—emerged in my field site when migrants from the rural interior of Ceará arrived on the outskirts of Fortaleza and began to build the dense, multi-religious, socio-economically heterogenous community of Barra in the early 1930s.

In the sections that follow, I build on Sahlins' idea of historically grounded socialities, focusing in particular on how the values of dignity and self-reliance, famously features of rural *Nordestino* culture, structured inter-household sociality in the urban periphery in the late 1990s, and on the shift in later years to an objectification of conviviality as memory. This analysis thus contributes a historical dimension to the study of conviviality and argues that in the particular place of Barra do Ceará, it is household autonomy that is its constitutive feature.

A Note on Methods

This article is based on data collected at my field site from three extended and separate research trips I took to Barra do Ceará. The first section of my article uses data I collected during a year-long period of doctoral fieldwork (1998-1999) that I conducted about Brazil's universal rights-based health care system that was being implemented in Fortaleza. The second section of the article uses data from two shorter trips to my field site to gather data on topics related to the impact of health care reform in Barra. These two trips were approximately six weeks in length and were conducted in 2016 and 2017.

During each of these visits I lived with families in the community of Barra. Throughout my visits I participated in a wide range of community activities from local healthcare meetings and protests to more intimate events such as weddings, funerals, and holiday celebrations. Each time I returned to the field I conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with a core set of approximately ten families plus additional residents in the neighbourhood, as well as conducting archival research on the history of the community. My access

to these families was facilitated by friendships I had made with a group of Barra women towards the end of my first year of fieldwork in 1999. All in their late teens and early twenties at the time that we met, the women took me into their homes and lives as well as to beaches, shopping malls, festivals and neighbourhood events and spent hours explaining the intricacies of life in Barra to me. Though I was older by five to ten years than the women I had befriended, as well as being whiter, richer, and further along in my education, there were other qualities we shared that facilitated an easy companionship: we were all childless, had access to a limited disposal income, and were eager for diversion. I leaned on these relationships for everything from accessing key figures in Fortaleza's health care reform movement to relief from homesickness, and in turn provided a variety of financial and material resources as our friendships strengthened (for a fuller account of these relationships, see Jerome 2021). Because I spent the vast majority of my time in the field in the company of women, I quickly accumulated more detailed data about the younger and older cohorts of women than other groups in the community.

When I began work on a book-length project (Jerome 2015), I started looking retrospectively at all the fieldnotes I had gathered thus far. I realized that I had collected a number of observations about what I would broadly call "sociality" in Barra that I could not fit into other types of papers I was writing about healthcare reform. Language patterns, use of social space, and the norms around hospitality and food sharing all made their way into my field notes. It was only when I was asked to contribute an article to this special issue on conviviality that I began to think more systematically about how the social and linguistic practices I had observed helped residents "live together with difference" (Wise and Noble 2016). The longitudinal nature of my fieldwork involving repeated visits to the same families over many years allowed me to track the shifts in patterns of sociality which I present below.

Barra do Ceará: The Country in the City

Barro do Ceará is one of nearly three hundred working-class communities that lie outside the business district of Fortaleza but within the city's official boundaries (Feitosa 2011). Comprising a population of approximately eighty thousand residents according to the 2010 census (IBGE 2010), Barra is socio-economically heterogeneous and commercially dynamic. In a walk I took down one of the narrow streets that was a central artery of Barra in 2016, the neighbourhood thrummed with activity in the middle of the morning. On a single block I passed

a hair salon whose interior had been painted black and featured pool tables and pulsing *forró* music; a storefront *comida a kilo* restaurant, full of young men on an early lunch break; a small store selling birds and guinea pigs; an older man in a doorway sewing canvas on an antique Singer sewing machine; and a large warehouse storage space that was being used to reupholster couches. Major commercial activity is confined to several of the paved streets that snake through Barra, but smaller stores such as *vendas* (all-purpose bodegas ubiquitous in the Northeast) are scattered throughout residential areas. Residential streets are also socio-economically diverse with multi-story, intricately tiled homes abutting simple one-room *barracas* (shacks) with dirt floors and missing pieces of cinderblock.

Though not home to the multi-ethnic or religious "super-diversity" described in many scholars' accounts of conviviality (for example, Vertovec 2007; Wessendorf 2014) living in Barra entailed repeated daily close encounters with diverse others who had immigrated from all over Ceará. The community emerged in the 1930s when Cearenses left rural villages and outposts fleeing drought, land erosion, a rigid barter economy, and few options for schooling or medical care; waves of migrants have arrived in Barra every generation since. Over time migrants secured schools, paved roads, electrical and water infrastructure, health posts, bus service, internet providers, housing materials, and land rights from government officials and class elites (Jerome 2015). Academics and politicians saw poverty rather than diversity as the defining feature of the new Brazilian urban poor (Goldstein 2003; Pearlman 2011; Scheper-Hughes 1992) and state and national governments tended to view their role not as "managing difference," as has been described in some of the literature on conviviality, but rather as reducing poverty through the introduction of democratic norms such as citizenship, universal rights, and equality.[2]

Residents uniformly refer to where they and their families came from as "the interior" despite the intensely varied topography of Ceará, which includes beach communities to the north and south of Fortaleza, a vast *sertão* in the centre of the state, and the *serra*, a densely forested mountain range that rims the western portion of the state. The social and economic variation I saw manifested in Barra throughout my fieldwork can be traced in some degree to historical divisions in the rural population. Until the 1980s, capital penetration of agriculture in Ceará remained remarkably low, and manual labor was the primary input to the state's vital cotton and cattle exports. But even amongst the poorest segment of Ceará's backland population, which was composed almost

entirely of agricultural workers, the lives that Barra residents left behind differed in important ways. For example, some of the older residents I knew had worked as tenant farmers, or sharecroppers (*rendeiros* and *meeiros*) and had a formal agreement with their *patrões* (bosses) to provide labour in exchange for shelter and a percentage of the crops which were sold at weekly *feiras* (markets). Rights of grazing, subsistence cropping, and guaranteed shelter all provided hedges against having to subsist solely on wages.

Other residents defined themselves as *moradores* or *camaradas* (squatters) and grew up living on small or medium-size cotton *fazendas* (farms) in *casa de taipas*, huts made of mud and adobe, growing subsistence crops of corn and beans when they could. The poorest residents in Barra had been *agregados* in the interior, ambulatory labourers who moved from farm to farm looking for work and subsistence.

Characteristic of Ceará, where free and small landowners were more common than in other Northeastern states (Santos 2012), some of the families that arrived in Barra had owned land in the interior, which they passed down through generations. These families might have possessed as many as ten to twenty acres of land and sometimes even had servants, though, like all of the social groups described above, they were constrained by a lack of cash liquidity. Without a margin of safety against the periodic environmental crises that wracked the state, such as drought, or the invasion of boll weevil, and before the introduction of social assistance programs such as *Bolsa Famíla* and *Fome Zero* in the early 2000s, the city continued to draw thousands of individuals and families every year.

Like other scholars who have traced rural-urban migration patterns in countries as culturally distinct as Kenya, Yugoslavia, and Mexico (Ross and Weisner 1977; Simic 1970; Lominitz 1977), I observed strong and persistent ties between the country and the city. As migrants made their homes in Barra, they frequently returned to extended families and places of origin in the interior, while also bringing cultural forms and values from rural *Nordestino* life to the city.

In addition to resemblances in its social structure, which I will detail in the next section, I was struck upon my arrival to Barra in 1998 by how closely aspects of its physical layout resembled descriptions of rural Northeastern village life and *Nordestino* culture I had read in classic ethnographies of the region (see Harris 1956; Forman 1970; Johnson 1971; Pierson 1948; and Rebhun 1999). For example, the *praças* (centre squares) that these earlier studies described

as being the social centre of every rural town I now observed interrupting a tangle of streets in Barra, providing a patch of green and a place for the kind of "ostentatious preening" described by Marvin Harris (1956, 49) in a monograph written in the mid twentieth century. Freshly ground manioc flour and coffee began the day in both the rural past and in contemporary city homes, and household walls continued to be adorned with old calendars, prints, or statues of patron saints (*santos*) and treasured family photos.

To drive the point home, here are a few more connections I made in my earliest fieldnotes from 1998 and 1999 between the ethnographies of rural Northeastern Brazil I had read before going to the field and what I was seeing in Barra: just as they were in the interior, senior women in Barra were the backbone of their families and households. In both country and city, they tended to be responsible for a similar set of domestic tasks ranging from food preparation (shelling beans, processing manioc, grinding coffee) to maintaining the *terreiro*, a yard or patio space that was swept daily and used for afternoon and evening socializing (see Harris 1956 and Jerome 2018 for a more detailed description of this practice). Older women in Barra also continued to take in laundering and sell buttons or lacework as they did in the interior to supplement household income (Johnson 1971; Rebhun 1999). Men and women who were first-generation immigrants from the interior were more likely to sleep on hammocks, take bucket baths, and cook over a wood fire (*poia*), all part of customary life in the interior. And Barra residents of all generations enjoyed the *festas juninas* (June festivals), which have their origin in the saint celebrations of the interior and feature the traditional costumes, dances, and music of rural villages brought to life every June in plazas throughout Fortaleza.

Conviviality 1998 -1999: Interhousehold Autonomy in Barra

Scholars of Northeast Brazil describe a regional culture in which dignity and self-reliance are core features of personhood. *Sertanejos* (as people of the *sertão* are sometimes known) are often described as "*duro*" (hard), and always as fiercely independent (Johnson 1971; Marin Dias 1978). These stereotypes permeate Barra residents' self-conceptions of what it means to be Cearense, in which life is still described as a *luta* (fight) or a *batahlha* (battle), and personal dignity is accrued through surviving a life of hardship and hunger. These themes also circulate in popular culture: figures of a proud but bowed *retirante* family retreating from the interior to the city with their meagre possessions

balanced on their heads and their starving dog figured prominently in the local tourist art that I saw throughout Fortaleza.

Inter-household autonomy (in which neighbouring households act as individual and autonomous units rather than communal ones) is another frequently commented-on feature of sociality in the rural interior of the Northeast. According to anthropologist Aaron Ansell (2014, 60), this produced a "non-invasive mode of sociality" in which non-kin members interacted with one another cautiously, always wary of a diffuse enmity that might erupt if not treated with care.

When I began fieldwork in 1998, the modes of sociality I experienced in Barra appeared to be the diametric opposite of the more restrained and formal sociality ascribed to the interior: Barra was loud, boisterous, with porous households, and a frenetic street life. According to my fieldnotes, residents of Barra in 1998 and 1999 also spoke about their community in different terms. While a common expression in rural *Nordestino* culture was, "Here everybody is friends, each in his [sic] own house" (Marques 2002), residents of Barra were more likely to stress the openness and amity they felt within their community. *"A nossa rua tem uma boa vizinhaçam, senti convivio—isso a faz se sentir em casa no barrio,"* opined the woman I was living with, as we wrapped up an evening spent socializing in her open courtyard ("Our street has a good atmosphere and feels convivial, I feel at home in the neighbourhood"). However, close observation of specific patterns of social interaction revealed that a key component of cordial, sociable conduct in the urban periferia was bound up in recognizing the autonomy of one's fellow residents, and particularly, non-immediate kin.

Household Zones

When I arrived in Barra in 1998, the vast majority of homes were one-story, cinder-block dwellings, that consisted of one, two or much more rarely, three rooms. Residents replaced dirt floors with tile as soon as they could; kitchens and bathrooms started as outdoor features in the backs of homes and were only enclosed as resources became available. Families built second stories and upgraded their homes regularly, but wood burning stoves and outhouses often remained at the request of more senior residents.

Homes in Barra were built as close to each other as physically possible, sometimes even sharing a wall, creating a dense, urban street topography. Residents commented on their physical proximity frequently. "I can hear my

neighbour breathe" was a common refrain, or as a friend observed, "When Seu Z. has fits of madness, we all share in it together." Standing on the corner of any of the lanes in Barra, I observed a steady stream of people trickling in and out of each other's homes; children, in particular, ran freely back and forth. The pedestrian traffic slowed down during the mid-afternoon siesta period (two to four p.m.) but always picked back up again towards evening.

Though not apparent from the street, the space inside individual homes, albeit tiny, was tightly controlled. For example, when neighbours, friends, and extended kin approached one another's houses, they stopped at the threshold and asked permission to enter with a sharp clap of their hands and calling "*De Casa!*" Only adult children who no longer lived in the house would break this rule, bursting into the residence, shouting "Mae" to announce their arrival.

Upon being granted entrance, non-kin guests would typically stand in the doorway, passing questions, requests, and gossip back and forth or otherwise conducting their business. Threshold socializing was thus extremely common in Barra and lent a feel of "conviviality" to the neighbourhood, even as it created a distinction between exterior and interior and accorded privacy to the rooms that lay within.

Some of the homes in Barra had front-facing courtyards in 1998. These courtyards, as well as the first room (what in North American would be referred to as a living room) of residents' homes were also used for socializing and non-kin immediate kin moved with relative ease within them. For example, I was quickly admitted to courtyards and first-rooms but not to other rooms of the house. Hospitality exchanges, of the type I describe below, almost always took place in one of these two spaces. The public nature of these spaces was delineated in part by the noticeable lack of family photos (which were almost always confined to bedrooms) or any other objects suggesting personal adornment, with the exception of religious images or iconography.

Being offered a siesta—a key feature of hospitality in Barra—was something that would be provided to non-kin and extended family either in the courtyard or the first public room. When after many years I was offered by a friend's mother to take a siesta in one of her *backrooms*, I concluded I had been accepted by the family. Thus, despite the initial appearance of a porous, almost invasive household sociality, the delineation of residential physical space according to public and private zones and the social norms that regulated their use reinforced inter-household autonomy in Barra.[3] That these norms persisted despite how

small and often impoverished the spaces were suggested the strength of the value of autonomy in the organization of social life.

Tone and Address

The tone of social relationships among people of different households in Barra also helped to maintain household autonomy in the neighbourhood. For example, when visiting one another's homes, including those of next-door neighbours, the respectful use of a title *(senhor/a, dona/seu)* was used even in instances in which the families had been living next to each other for years. During conversation, I only rarely observed residents' default to a pronoun - *vocé or tu* (you), including in instances where the name was repeated multiple times in a sentence. The respectful use of a title lent a tone of formality to inter-household relationships in Barra that was similar to what has been observed in more rural communities in the Northeastern interior (Ansell 2014).

This formality of address is in stark contrast to other linguistic expressions and gestures that people use with all members of the community. Like Northeasterners throughout the region, residents of Barra sprinkled their speech with tag questions such as *não é*? (isn't it) or its contraction *né*? They also invariably finished their sentences with words such as *entendeu* (you understand) or *sabe* (you know) or most common, *viu*? (you see). These had the cumulative effect of drawing listeners in, forcing a response and creating a space of shared experience between the interlocutors.[4] It was also very common, particularly for older residents of Barra, to reach out and poke or pat the listener as they spoke. Physical connection was a common sight in general in Barra—people greeted each other with affectionate kisses on both cheeks, multiple children slept in beds together, women walked hand in hand, and men draped their arms around one another's shoulders.

The repeated use of more formal types of address with people from different households mixed in with the linguistic tags and gestures that draw non-household members into conversation suggest a basic tone of sociality that combined public displays of warmth while respecting the autonomy of individual households.

Hospitality and Food Sharing Practices

From my first year of fieldwork, I observed Barra residents regularly passing goods, services, and money back and forth. These included both raw and cooked food, clothes being handed down from older to younger children, household chores such as washing shared and children watched over by a shifting array of (female) adults. The easily observable and repetitive flow of exchanges initially highlighted for me the necessary interconnectivity of households in Barra, rather than the prized independence I had read about in rural *Nordestino* culture.

In her landmark ethnography of favela life in the northeastern state of Pernambuco (just to the south of Ceará), Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes a similar level of interhousehold dependence and writes of a generosity of spirit that suffused the community in which she worked. She notes, "On the Alto do Cruzeiro there is no household so wretched that it will refuse hospitality to visiting or migrating kin from the *mata* or deny help to a neighbour whose *feira* basket is completely empty" (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 99).

Although it is tempting to agree with this description of all-inclusive generosity, what I observed over time in Barra revealed instead a delicate politics of exchange that occurred only within discrete reciprocity networks made up of a stable cast of extended kin and the occasional non-kin member. For example, I observed food being exchanged continuously among one extended family network I knew well. Rice, beans, sometimes fruit and spare vegetables or morning bread would flow back and forth between three and four households throughout a given week. The matriarch of the family, Dona Fatima, often hosted informal meals during lunchtime, and multiple members of this network would show up, eager for a hot meal.

But there were also instances of far poorer neighbours approaching the doorway of Fatima's home during these lunches and waiting to be invited in. When she would eventually call out to them to join her, they would almost always resist the invitation, claiming they were not hungry or had just eaten. Fatima's invitations to eat rarely appeared sincere to me and were not encouraged by other members of her network who would bend conspicuously over their food-laden plates appearing to shield them with their forearms. This is just one example of many instances I observed in Barra of needier residents being excluded from food-sharing practices which tended to be reserved for those within specific social networks who were deemed deserving of honour and compassion.

I also observed reciprocity exchanges in Barra correcting social and economic asymmetries that might otherwise have disrupted idealizations of household autonomy and dignity. The case of two sisters, Dona Maria José and her older half-sister, Dona Irene (with whom I initially lived) offers just one example of such a correction. Though raised by the same father (to different mothers—Dona Irene's mother had died soon after the birth of a third son), Dona Irene did not leave the dusty town of Acaraú until her late teens. She was initially helped by the same aunt who had provided Maria José with housing assistance but married a man who gambled away the money she was given before they could turn it into a more durable asset. By the time Maria José arrived in Barra some ten years later, in the early 1980s, Irene was separated from her husband and living in close quarters with her stepmother. She had always wanted children, but her staunch Catholicism prevented her from asking her husband for a formal divorce and she had remained single.

With the birth of Maria Jose's fifth child, Joelma, she began to discuss the possibility of Irene raising Joelma as her own. Irene readily agreed to the plan and was elated about having a daughter. From the time I met the family, Maria José insisted that it was Irene that had *helped her* by agreeing to foster her youngest daughter long-term. But this arrangement also enabled Maria José to transfer a substantial amount of food, material goods, and crucially money to her poorer sister. This help was most often given in the guise of being for Joelma but it also slowly improved Dona Irene's standard of living, allowing her to live "autonomously" within her own household while also mitigating the disparity between her and her sister.

Although initially the neighbourhood of Barra appeared porous and to have an almost invasive mode of sociality, what I have described in this section are the ways in which inter-household autonomy, self-reliance, and dignity, distinctive values in regional *Nordestino* culture, continued to shape forms of life in the urban periphery: the delineation of household space, linguistic practices, and reciprocity exchanges. The emic experience of a "convivial" neighbourhood, commented on by residents during this initial phase of fieldwork was thus, perhaps surprisingly, produced through the performance of these values and the preservation of household autonomy.

Conviviality 2015 to 2017: Co-existence and Memory

I returned to Barra in 2015 for an extended period of field research after completing a series of shorter trips in 2005, 2007, and 2009. In the intervening fifteen years, the women I had grown close to in 1999 had completed college degrees, professionalized in a variety of fields, including healthcare, and developed informed and sophisticated views on local and national politics. They took a serious interest in my research and increasingly asked me to explain exactly what I was researching and offered nuanced commentary on my theories.

Although I was still researching aspects of healthcare reform, the community of Barra had undergone substantial changes. Most noticeably: Nearly all of its streets were now paved, more frequent and air-conditioned buses snaked through the neighbourhoods, increasingly prosperous commercial venues and residences dotted an increasing number of streets, and widespread internet access and cell phones had quickly replaced the once ubiquitous network of *orelhãos* (public phones, known as "big ears" in Portuguese).

The interhousehold autonomy I had observed in the late 1990s also appeared to have intensified: Open courtyards had been replaced with walled garages used to house cars and other vehicles, the younger generation often contributed substantial salaries to household incomes thereby mitigating the need for interhousehold food exchanges, and with more residents working in the city centre, the community was quiet for long stretches of the day (for a more detailed overview of these changes see Jerome 2015 and 2016).

Residents also described to me a new feeling of wariness about their neighbourhood. Part of this they attributed to the intensification of violent crime in the area due to the arrival of gangs from São Paulo and Rio involved in drug trafficking. But residents also noted a more generalized sense of anonymity among their neighbours and even between family members. These tensions rose to new heights with the emergence of Jair Bolsonaro, the polarizing presidential candidate and eventual President of Brazil.

During field visits to Barra in 2016 and 2017, I began to notice that *convívio* (conviviality), once invoked by residents as an emic category to describe their experience of social life in their neighbourhoods was now instead being objectified in memories. In recounting several of these occasions below, I take up anthropologist Deniz Dura's claim that conviviality is not only "sociable

sociality" but also "the production and performance of sociality, which also involves the control of tensions" (Dura 2016, 166).

One Saturday morning in October 2017, a small group of friends gathered at the house I was staying at to celebrate a recent birthday and share an early lunch. All women in their mid to late 30s, they had supported each other for nearly two decades through negotiating jobs, relationships, and the intense demands of extended families. Although they each remained part of the kin-based reciprocity networks they had grown up in, their enduring friendship group was its own mixed network (made up of friends and kin, as two of the women were sisters) and was a constant conduit of job assistance, resource trading, and aspirational dreaming. Petty if affectionate squabbling among the group was taken for granted, but more recently, deeper tensions had surfaced.

That morning it was pouring rain and we were all sitting in the backroom of the small house that one of the women, Andressa, lived in with her mother and nephew. She cut fruit and passed around rolls as the women joked and ribbed each other about spending whole days on beauty treatments or too much time in service to the Pentecostal church. The conversation turned serious when one of the women brought up an armed robbery that had taken place on the bus route just blocks from where we were sitting. She said her neighbour told her a man with a gun had gotten on a bus and asked the driver to hand over the cash box kept at the back. Several other women chimed in to remark on the increasing level of violence occurring in the neighbourhood. At this point, Lucy, one of the group's most passionate detractors of the leftist political party currently in power, interjected to say the robbery was exactly why a man such as Bolsonaro, then a senator from Rio de Janeiro, was needed as the country's next President—only someone like him would be able to put a stop to the violence that had become commonplace in Fortaleza.

"Nowadays we can't just come and go from our houses in freedom," she said, "we always have to worry, to strategize, and plan the route that is safest from the bus stops. Also," she continued, "Where are the police? They are always holding *concursos* (civil service examinations) for new positions, but where are they? We need more in this neighbourhood."

Another woman rejoined that a strong man like Bolsonaro was not necessarily going to solve the problem of violence by growing the police force, the city needed to focus on reducing the flow of drugs from cities in the south, like São Paulo. Several other friends chimed in, offering equally heated

suggestions about how to improve their city, when Andressa interjected to remind the group of how recent these changes to the neighbourhood were.

"Don't you remember how peaceful it used to be here in Barra? This street had so many trees on it, *goiaba* (guava), *maracujá* (passionfruit), *oliveira* (olive)—we could just eat from the trees! And you would walk along these lanes at any time of day and find someone home, the doors always unlocked."

"Kids were playing in the road until late at night!" Linda, who had grown up next door agreed, "We played kickball and soccer right outside until late at night, just playing in the street until our mothers would come out and yell for us to come home."

Lucy joined the women in reminiscing, "And it wasn't only kids in the road—do you remember when the boys selling candy would come down the roads?"

She turned to me to explain. "The *cocada branca* (coconut candy) *and doce de leite* (caramel) you find now in wrappers, it used to be sold by street vendors, with huge yokes over their shoulders and a bucket on each end. They'd come to the neighbourhood and call the children to the street with a triangle. Then they'd cut off a piece of caramel and put it directly in your mouth or give you *pé de moleque* (peanut brittle), and you'd have to run and find your mother and beg her for coins to pay for it."

Other women joined in as well. "On my block, there was a man who sold crepes—hot off the oven every Sunday. He'd walk along our street selling them, gathering everyone together to eat the sweets. Now you only find these vendors selling to tourists at the *Praia de Iracema*!"

These memories of a shared past helped control the tension in the room by evoking sensorial pleasures, such as walking down a shaded street full of fruit trees or finding local sweets for sale outside your door. They also performatively demonstrated the value the women and Barra residents more generally placed on living together with fellow residents.

Later that morning, politics once again threatened to destabilize the harmony of the group. This time, Linda, the only member of the group who worked outside of Fortaleza, was describing her job as a high school teacher in the rural interior of the state. She explained that her school had introduced a new applied program which promised to link students to jobs directly upon graduation. Despite the program's success, she was worried that if an opposing

party won in the upcoming presidential election, the first thing they would do would be to cut state-funded programs identified with the prior administration.

One member of the group chimed in to say that while Linda's school might be doing good work, there were lots of people who were stealing from the government, scamming social security and other programs to get more benefits. She described her neighbour who she said was getting at least one if not two *Bolsa Família* stipends (a federal assistance program for low-income families), simply by lying about sending her children to school. She finished the story with a vivid description of the woman's children running around wild and naked day after day at home.

Glicia chimed in, "That was all of us though—wasn't it? I mean Lena, do you remember how *mãe* used to lock us in the house after we came home from school so she could go wash clothes at a friend's house?" There had been four of them in Glicia's family, two boys and two girls, and as she continued narrating her memories of their childhood, her tone grew more uproarious. "If she came home and found the house dirty, or if the neighbours said we had been too loud, she would beat us with an electrical cord! And then, one day you decided to melt the cord while she was gone—remember that, you just stuck it in the oven?" Lena nodded, "She was so tired at the end of the day—she beat all of us into silence, she just didn't want to hear anything."

Another woman related story about her mother giving plastic bags to her and her siblings every Saturday morning to take the *feira*. She told them to pick up any fruit or vegetables they could find that had fallen on the ground and bring them home, because that was not technically stealing. Her mother would carefully wash them and cut off all the bad parts, and then they would eat the rest. At this point in the conversation, a friend from the group turned to me and whispered that I should not hold all of these stories against their mothers. She said, "everyone treated children like this back then; we all have these memories—it's just how we got by, how we stuck together."

The social benefit referenced in this story, *Bolsa Família*, had been a subject of repeated arguments among this group of friends, in part because some of them felt it introduced an externally imposed form of economic equality among people who were undeserving. Success in this group continued to be attributed to individual self-reliance and personal dignity.

In response to emerging tension over this topic, a member of the group once again brought up shared experiences, this time in the form of bitter memories

of corporal punishment, going hungry, and being scared of parental figures. Though they are unpleasant, these memories unify the group of women like the idyllic ones did in the prior dialogue. Here, the memories also served to identify them with their neighbours and other residents of Barra who have very likely experienced similar episodes. As anthropologist Deniz Dura argues in an article on coexistence in Istanbul, "the management of tension is also a way of reproducing conviviality" (Dura 2016, 167). In this context, sweet and bitter memories were used to mitigate tension and focus attention on the group's shared sense of belonging in Barra.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have emphasized the need to first pull apart what are commonly conflated understandings of the conviviality concept (emic from etic, normative descriptions of affective experience versus historically contingent discourses). I have argued that conviviality can most usefully be understood as a particular mode of sociality, and as such may emerge or disappear under different historical, social, and political contexts, either as an emic discourse to describe people's own experiences of "living together with difference" and/or as an etic one that is promoted for example by policy experts and pedagogical programs. In either case, conviviality will necessarily be shaped by prior modes of sociality and their attendant values (Sahlins 1978).

Unlike many of the sites in which conviviality has been investigated, in Northeast Brazil, government officials and policy experts have not viewed multiculturalism as a defining feature of urban peripheral life. Instead, residents of Barra do Ceará have been left on their own to craft ways of living together in relationship with others. In the proceeding sections, I have argued that they approached this endeavour through the distinctive *Nordestino* values of self-reliance and dignity that produced a mode of sociality anthropologists have characterized as "inter-household autonomy" (Ansell 2012). I have also suggested that conviviality was present as an emic experience in Barra in the late 1990s, but by 2015 had become objectified by residents in memory and used primarily as a way of managing inter-household tensions that had intensified during a time of economic and political crisis. This change in the experience of conviviality over roughly two decades also helps to make sense of the story that I recounted at the start of this essay. Rather than simply ungenerous, Josefina's critique of our host now appears to me to be laced with nostalgia for the days when a proper cafezinho was a taken-for-granted aspect of sociality, as well as

pointing to the continued importance of inter-household autonomy for living together in Barra. Vanessa's lack of "*dignidade*" (dignity) in Josefina's words is tied in part to the conspicuousness of her poverty and her inability to rally the appropriate social networks to mitigate it. Her small household was visibly dependent rather than autonomous, and thus in conflict with core Northeastern values, including dignity and self-reliance.

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Notes

1 All names have been changed in this article in order to protect the identity of community residents.

2 See Jerome 2015 on the introduction of the universal health care rights and Ansell 2012 on the use of the Sem Fome program to disrupt models of patronage.

3 The exception to these observations were children (kin and non-kin) who appeared constantly in one another's homes without regard to public and private zones.

4 I thank L.A. Rebhun for bringing this point to my attention in her remarkable ethnography, *The Heart is an Unknown Country* (1999, 58).

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