

Waging Class Struggle With Plants: Intra-class differentiation and greening labor in a public housing project in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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Abstract

Intra-class differentiation needs to be brought back into the analysis of gentrification. In this article I argue that in the context of gentrifying pressures, greenspaces are an important site of struggle between segments of the working class. By paying attention to how different clusters of low-income residents in a housing project in Rio de Janeiro deploy plants, we gain insight into differently-situated working-class life projects, and into how neoliberal capital exacerbates competition between them. Through the lens of greening labor we discover a working class that includes not just victims of the forces of gentrification, but active resisters and savvy collaborators with those forces. [Intra-class differentiation; greening spaces; Rio de Janeiro; gentrification]

Introduction¹

Over the past fifteen years, it has become increasingly clear that gentrification, long a phenomenon of cities in the global North (Glass 1964; Lees et al. 2008), has taken root in the cities of the global South as well (Lees et al. 2015). While this reality has prompted a vigorous debate over whether concepts developed to analyze gentrification in urban Europe and North America can be applied to cities such as Mumbai, Durban, and São Paulo (Garmany & Richmond 2020), my intention is to sidestep this debate and focus instead on the fact that analysts of both hemispheres have failed to grapple with a specific social force—the internal differentiation of the working class—that, I will argue, is vital to understanding gentrification, wherever and however it unfolds. In this article, I examine the specific relations between intra-class differentiation on the one hand, and socio-natural stances on the other (Exner & Schützenberger 2018), as working-class residents of a government-subsidized affordable housing project near the center of Rio de Janeiro face growing pressures from gentrification.

I understand the notion of gentrification in its broadly descriptive meaning as “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use” (Lees et al. 2008, xv). Thus defined, gentrification is highly variable: it can transpire quickly or slowly; partially or fully; in a fragmentary, hybrid

fashion, or as a continuous juggernaut (Lees et al. 2013). In recent years, anthropologists have joined sociologists and geographers in the study of gentrification, bringing to it their sensitivity to cultural difference and their method of finely grained ethnography. The themes they have highlighted have been rich and varied, including showing how investors have deployed nostalgia to take cities into neoliberal futures (Morris 2018); how infrastructure has been deployed as a tactic of racialized urban displacement (Solomon 2019); how public art has facilitated gentrification (Novak 2019); and how grassroots movements have pushed back against gentrification by de-commodifying urban space (Scott & Szili 2018).

Yet despite its richness, the ethnography of gentrification has adopted a fairly superficial approach to class. By “class” I mean the projects, identities, and powers associated with different positions within systems of socio-material inequality defined by capital (Kalb & Mollona 2018). Class has never only been about “the big three”—the working, middle, and upper class; it is, rather, about the power of capital to inflect and divide populations into ever-more finely graded systems of inequality, and to construct upon these corresponding hierarchies of value and worth (Graeber 2011; Rao 2016). Understanding class this way allows for complex portraits of inequality that combine cultural value, subjective self-definition, and objective power (Wolf 1999). Still, when conceptualizing the relationship between class and gentrification, anthropologists have all too often failed to delve into this complexity, relying instead on simple binaries—“middle class” versus “working class,” “rich” versus “poor,” “better-off” versus “disadvantaged”—leaving each category undifferentiated (e.g., Solomon 2019).

I take a different approach. Focusing on the working class, I argue that scrutinizing how differently situated clusters of people respond to gentrifying forces permits us to move beyond seeing such people mainly as victims of forces over which they have little or no control. It allows us to see the working class, more realistically, as differently positioned clusters of agents engaged with gentrifying forces in a variety of intricately patterned ways, each shaped by the capacities that each differentiated cluster brings to the encounter: sometimes, yes, as distressed absorbers of forces beyond their control, pushed involuntarily toward displacement, but sometimes as people endowed with sufficient resources to push back against displacement; and sometimes as savvy collaborators, taking advantage of the forces of gentrification to better realize their own life projects.

To be sure, these are subtle, socially embedded differences, not usually clamoring to be seen and heard, often overshadowed by the more ostentatious working-class/middle-class contrast. They become more visible and audible, I suggest, when we pay attention to the finely patterned variations in how working-class people think and act in relation to adapting, changing, and transforming the built environments of their homes. While numerous studies have explored how working-class people use their houses as canvases upon which to communicate social

aspirations (e.g., Klaufus 2012; Elinoff 2016), there has been, surprisingly, very little research that connects these aspirations to the forces of gentrification. In contrast, I argue it is essential to examine working-class efforts to upgrade their homes in the context of larger shifts in land values, rental rates, and the movement of higher-income populations into or near low-income neighborhoods. Upgrades are not just a vehicle of intra-class symbolic communication (Bourdieu 1984); they are tools of engagement within the larger political economy of real estate markets.

In order to more fully understand this engagement, it is important to pay attention to the full palette of upgrades used by the working class to shape their relationship to the housing market. Especially revealing is how the working class transforms the *green environments* near their homes. Domestic gardening is, in Brazil as in other societies, a mode of deploying human labor to create deeply meaningful social landscapes. Cross-culturally, households have shaped, clipped, and invested labor in plants to do such things as symbolize boundaries of descent groups (Sheridan 2016), define the limits of domestic households (Von Hellermann 2016; Cloke & Jones 2004), shape inter-household relations through exchange (Winkler Prins & de Souza Oliveira 2010; Ellen & Komáromi 2013), and deepen attachment to homes (Corlett, Dean, & Grivetti 2003; Armstrong 2004). In addition, the ways that greenspaces can symbolize class-status difference (Maurer 2017) is familiar to low-income urban dwellers not only from mediated sources and television but also their own first-hand knowledge as custodians, doormen, and domestic laborers in upscale apartment buildings elsewhere in the city. It should therefore come as no surprise that working-class residents of social housing that allows for no structural alterations turn to gardening to symbolize status: after all, designed greenspaces have the advantage of being immediately visible to passersby. Thus, a focus on greening labor provides an important potential window onto how differently positioned segments of the working class respond to the status-differentiating forces unleashed by gentrification.²

The mode of gentrification in the case I consider here has been designated in the housing literature as “downward raiding”: cases in which state-subsidized housing intended for the poor—because of its location on land rising in price due to proximity to a renovating urban center and/or infrastructural improvements—becomes the target, mainly through informal, irregular, and illegal practices (though sometimes legal ones), of appropriation by middle-income groups (Thirkell 1996; Payne et al. 2009; Lemanski 2014). In part because of the value of the state subsidy, the working-class residents of housing targeted by downward raiders come to the table armed, as it were, with a significant resource, and cannot simply be swept aside (Arrigoitia 2018). In the case I consider here, the capacity of working-class residents’ resistance to, and manipulation of, downward raiding was manifested in part through their transformation of greenspaces.

This is where attention to intra-class differentiation is important, for it reveals greening labor as a site for the expression of social projects specific to distinct clusters of the working class as they are buffeted by the pressures of downward raiding. As we will see, certain segments of working-class residents (not, quite notably, the middle-income “raiders” themselves) were ardent ornamental gardeners of the greenspaces near their five-story walk-up housing blocks. Transforming three-by-three-meter rectangles of bare ground at the entrances of buildings into gardens bursting with bright red *ixória* (*Ixora coccinea rubiaceae*), yellow-speckled *brasileirinhas* (*Codiaeum variegatum*), golden *pingo-de-ouro* (*Durante repens aurea*), feathery dark green ferns (*Polypodiopsida*), and tall sword-like *espadas de São Jorge* (*Sansevieria trifasciata*) was, to be sure, about aesthetics and intimacy (cf. Archambault 2016); yet, since the plants were physically occupying spaces that had competing uses by different potential users, it was also about territorial power. Inspired in part by recent studies that argue that plants have agency (e.g., Boke 2019), I have attended to how people understood and responded to what they took to be plants’ specific spatial, physical, behavioral, and agentic properties. By immersing myself in how different clusters of the working class thought about and deployed plants as agents of spatial control, I gained insight into differently situated working-class life projects, and, crucially, into how gentrifying real estate forces were seized upon by different segments of the working class to further their own materially situated interests.

The article is organized as follows. I begin by introducing the reader to the social and physical environment of the low-income housing complex that is the focus of my analysis, and explicate the study’s terms, design, and methodology. I then turn in three subsequent sections to key cultural domains—the fear of disorderliness (*bagunça*), the love of fruit trees, and relations with ghosts—as windows onto how differently positioned segments of the working class use plants in distinctive ways to help themselves establish a measure of control over the forces of gentrification. I conclude by suggesting that “bringing intra-class differentiation back in” offers broader benefits to the anthropology of human-plant interactions and to the analysis of gentrification.

Intra-Class Differences Inside a Social Housing Project

Elizete Cardoso³ is a state-subsidized, centrally located public housing project in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The project, completed in 2014 on land once occupied by a 150-year-old prison, under the auspices of the Workers Party’s famous federal program *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (Kopper 2019), is home to five hundred identical apartments, each with a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and two bedrooms, designed to serve low-income households in the one-to-two minimum salary range (in



View of Elizete Cardoso housing complex, photo by author, 2017. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

2019, between \$260–\$520). The apartments cannot legally be altered or expanded by residents. Crucially, residents receive legal title to their apartments after ten years of occupancy and payment of a highly subsidized monthly mortgage on the order of US\$25 to US\$50, plus condominium fees, utilities, and residential taxes. All told, residents of Elizete Cardoso ideally paid, on average, about US\$100 per month for housing. Comparable two-bedroom apartments in neighboring *favelas* rented for about twice that much, and in neighboring non-*favela* areas from three to four times that. Consequently, receiving a unit in Elizete Cardoso, especially if one came to it from the rental market, was a major material benefit.

Over the course of three years (2016–2019), geographer Jeffrey Garmany and I rented apartments and resided in Elizete Cardoso, participating in everyday life there for approximately twelve months. During this period, Garmany and I conducted participant observation on inter- and intra-household social relations, and carried out about fifty recorded and one hundred unrecorded interviews. (This work was part of a larger multi-sited study of affordable housing projects in which an eight-person team undertook immersive fieldwork in each of four differently organized housing projects located within a radius of two kilometers from the center of Rio.) The data upon which this article is based come from my fieldwork in Elizete Cardoso.

Elizete Cardoso's built environment presented special fieldwork challenges, most notably by discouraging informal visiting. Each of its twenty-five buildings (five-story walkups with four apartments per floor) had locked front-door entry. Many of our informants lived on first floors, making it possible to hail them through windows; but for informants who lived above the first floor it was necessary to make appointments, and to

stay in regular contact to ensure they would show up. One might contrast this with neighborhoods where front doors face directly onto streets, and it is possible simply to drop in. It also needs to be noted that middle-class buyers, given their irregular status, were understandably wary of talking with inquisitive anthropologists. Most of the information I was able to gather about them relied on the testimony of legal residents, observation, and three particularly generous self-identified middle-class residents.

Many families awarded apartments in the project found that living here was financially challenging. Some had, until their move, been residing in self-built homes with no rent; and many who'd lived in favelas before being placed in Elizete Cardoso were unaccustomed to paying utilities (cf. Koster & Nuijten 2012). Elizete Cardoso soon became a target of middle-income buyers making offers that, given the prohibition against buying and selling before the expiration of ten years' occupancy, were illegal. A vigorous gray market, known as "*contratos de gaveta*" (drawer contracts), sprang up.⁴ Many of the original awardees, burdened by the project's new monetary obligations, sold their apartments illegally to these buyers at below-market prices. The incoming buyers include self-identified middle-class people fallen on hard times, young professionals eager to purchase a first home, taxi drivers who saw advantage in the central location, and civil servants attracted by the proximity to downtown. Given the irregularity of these arrangements, it is hard to know for sure the precise percentage of residents in Elizete Cardoso who were middle income, but several residents offered estimates of 25–30 percent, and rising.

The result of this growing contingent has been a rise in costs for everyone. Given the capacity of better-off purchasers to pay higher condominium fees, the housing administrator more than doubled them—from BR\$80 in 2015 to BR\$200 in 2019. Those who owe fees are now charged a 50 percent surcharge for every month they are late, plus lawyers' fees of up to BR\$2,000, effectively making it impossible to pay off the debt. As added pressure, the superintendent has begun cutting off water to people who fall into arrears. These forces have triggered a new round of distressed sales, pushing out working-class residents and drawing in middle-class ones.

I applied *two self-reporting criteria* to designate households as belonging to the "working class" and to distinguish them from households I designated as "middle class." First, heads of working-class households had to explicitly reject the designation "*classe media*," and instead refer to themselves by one or more of the following terms: "*classe popular*," "*humilde*," or "*trabalhador*." Second, they had to *claim* that they had been awarded their apartment in Elizete Cardoso because they belonged to one of the two key disadvantaged categories for which the apartments were officially intended: having suffered involuntary displacement due to flooding, mudslides, or a government infrastructural project; or having an income that was two minimum salaries or less. It should be noted that this last criterion opened the door to a good deal of fudging. To be

eligible to be awarded an apartment due to income meant entering a lottery from which names were drawn. According to one reading of the rules, a household could qualify as long as the head's income did not exceed two minimum salaries; however, another reading said the household would be rendered ineligible if the sum of its incomes exceeded two minimum salaries. Faced with this ambiguity, many applicants made sure their reported household totals remained under two minimum salaries. Hence, from the start, my category of "working class" undoubtedly encompassed a range of household incomes broader than the reported two.

Delimited by these criteria, I got to know thirty-five working-class households quite well. Most pertinent to this analysis, I came to see these households not just as "working class" but as belonging to three distinct clusters, differentiated by a) their ability to keep up with monthly housing bills, and b) the degree of vulnerability that their heads felt in having to leave Elizete Cardoso on unfavorable terms.⁵ People in the first cluster expressed strong anxieties that they would not eventually be able to stay in their apartments due to growing economic pressures. They included people who, due to low or disrupted income, lack of extended family support, size of household, health issues, and other variables, found themselves falling behind in their monthly bills. Some had limited or no experience paying rent and utilities before moving to Elizete Cardoso. All lived with the constant anxiety of having their water cut off and being evicted. A common refrain from people in this cluster was that the fear of how they would pay their bills interfered with their sleep. Those who could think about selling were on the lookout for buyers, and knew that, given their weak bargaining position, they would have to sell low and use much of the proceeds to pay off debt. I call members of this cluster "on-edgers"; in my sample, there were ten of these.

A second cluster included residents who had better and more stable incomes, fewer small children, and a larger number of income-contributing members in and outside the household. People in this cluster did not experience the constant anxiety felt by those in the first. These households included both dual-working couples and older mixed retiree-and-working couples. Many of these households had pre-move experience paying rent and utilities, and generally felt that Elizete Cardoso represented a significant improvement in their lives, usually because it allowed them to escape the burden of paying rent. These people did not worry that they would eventually have to leave Elizete Cardoso; indeed, they had no interest in thinking about selling their apartment, either now or once they had secured legal title. They intended to remain in their apartments as far into the future as they could imagine. People in this cluster tended not to express aspirations for their own social mobility; they limited themselves to hoping that their children would be able to do better than they had. Most intended to bequeath their apartments to the next generation; indeed, this inter-generational project was an

essential part of their use-value. I call households in this cluster “long-termers”; in my sample, there were nineteen of these.

A third cluster included households led by people who for various reasons—including a favorable position in the labor market, small household size, and a lack of health crises—were able to nurture what they felt were realistic aspirations for their own limited upward social mobility. These people could pay their bills; but more important, living in Elizete Cardoso—a place that allowed them to avoid the burdens of rent—had, they felt, given them the opportunity to push ahead with mobility plans based on education, training, professionalization, and petty entrepreneurship. Crucially, people in this cluster did not see their apartments in Elizete Cardoso as the housing endpoint in their lives. They expected, sooner or later, to sell their apartments when and how they chose, and at a maximum possible market value. Indeed, they were interested in doing what they could to increase the exchange value of their apartments, in preparation for the day when they would sell. Thus, while their life project involved moving up and out of Elizete Cardoso in order to buy (as one of them put it) “a bigger or better house,” they felt little anxiety about having to sell or leave their apartments before they were ready to do so. I call households in this cluster “up-and-outers.” In my sample, there were six of these.

Now it turns out that people in these clusters interacted with the green environment of the housing complex in distinctive ways, and that these were key in understanding how they defined their relationship to the place, to each other, to their own social hierarchies, and to outsiders interested in buying their apartments. I got to know well twelve individuals who were actively engaged in transforming the greenspaces near their buildings by planting flowers, ferns, bushes, and fruit trees (in the entire housing project, there were fifteen active gardeners). A first key finding was that of these people, *none belonged to the “on-edge” cluster*. On-edges were quite clear about why they did not garden. When I asked, they would reply with some version of Grandão’s response: “Why put in the time if I don’t know how long I can stay?” A second key finding was that *none of the gardens in the housing project were planted by middle-class buyers*. The main reason for this was that they did not wish to draw attention to themselves, as their legal status in the complex remained questionable. Only one middle-class purchaser was willing to say anything about this. “Well, I would garden,” he said, “but I don’t want the attention. And in any case, I don’t really need to, since others are already gardening.”

In contrast, the other two clusters—the long-termers and up-and-outers—produced all the housing project’s gardens. Gardeners in both clusters related to their plants as sentient and interactive beings whom they treated with courtesy and affection—talking to them, singing to them, confiding in them, making sure that they got just enough water and sunlight. All the gardeners I got to know felt grateful for their plants, for helping calm them down, and giving them respite from the stresses of everyday life. At the same time, there were deep contrasts between how

long-termers and up-and-outers conceptualized their relation to plants. In what follows, I will discuss how the meanings and effects of greening labor varied between these two clusters in relation to three symbolic arenas: the rooting out of *bagunça*, the planting of fruit trees, and relations with the dead. As we will see, in each of these symbolic domains, people in differently situated clusters used plants to distinguish themselves from their neighbors, not just as a matter of pure status competition but as part of a complex interaction with the gentrifying real estate market. Thus, I will argue that in order to understand the socio-natural conduct and understandings of each cluster, we must see these not just as expressions of micro-relations between clusters but of macro-relations between each cluster and the larger forces of gentrification, manifested in this context as the pressure of downward raiding.⁶

Battling *Bagunça*

The language of making gardens in Elizete Cardoso is spatial, martial, and driven by the desire to mark and defend fine social distinctions. Both long-termer and up-and-outer gardeners insisted, an edge to their voices, that one of their main motivations for starting a garden in the first place was not for pleasure or to commune with non-humans; it was, often quite brutally, to *ocupar espaço* (occupy space), in order to *negar espaço* (deny space) to neighbors who would otherwise use said space for that most nefarious of purposes—to do *bagunça*. In these gardeners' use of the term, *bagunça* referred to a specific set of disorderly and offensive uses of common spaces: throwing refuse, failing to dispose of empty beer cans, leaving dirty grills, parking motorcycles, speaking loudly and obscenely. They called this kind of behavior “*não-civilizado*” (uncivilized) and spoke of it as peculiar to people who had come from the *favela*, but from whom “favela-ness” had not been eradicated (cf. Corboz 2013). They referred to such people as “*bagunçeiros*,” contrasting them with “*gente boa*” (“good people”)—themselves. Both long-termers and up-and-outers wished to distance themselves from people who did *bagunça*; they were eager to eliminate *bagunça* from their buildings to make sure visitors knew that only “*gente boa*” lived here.

Consider Alfredo, a bow-legged, barrel-chested, bespectacled, light-skinned man in his mid-sixties, who had grown up in favelas and prided himself in having shed his favela ways. Alfredo was a long-termer. He had worked most of his life as a metalworker, and now received a regular pension; his wife, Margarida, worked as a domestic servant. Together, they regarded their apartment in Elizete Cardoso as the culminating reward for lives of hard work and discipline, and they looked forward to bequeathing their good fortune to their one grandchild. Alfredo and Margarida took fierce pride in their record of never having fallen behind in paying their monthly condominium fee, as high as it was and as much as they disliked doing so. Alfredo laughed heartily when I asked him

whether he ever planned to sell. “Sell? What on earth for? To drag ourselves around trying to find something comparable? Never.” This place, he had decided, was where Margarida and he would grow old together. Living here required adjustments that tested not just economic capacity but also moral fiber, something he—lowering his voice—found lacking in some of his neighbors:

The people who are *bagunceiros*, have not been able to adapt to this new reality. They complain all the time that they can’t meet their bills. . . . Because they spend all their money on beer. They get an extra *real*, they spend it on something irrelevant instead of doing something useful, to give value to the place, for their children’s education. So they get nowhere, they can’t pay their bills. . . . You can take people out of the favela, but you can’t take the favela out of people.

Or consider Aroldo, an energetic, muscular, dark-skinned man in his late thirties, constantly cheerful, who worked as a doorman and custodian in a middle-class apartment building in the city’s northern zone. A single father with a reliable income and excellent health, Aroldo was a gifted cook who nurtured his ambitions to take a course in gastronomy, start his own fruit-drink stand, and eventually establish a chain of such stands around the city. For him, the apartment in Elizete Cardoso was a blessing that had radically reduced his monthly outlays for rent, giving him the chance to dream big. He had no doubts that eventually he would sell the apartment at a high price (“lots of rich people want to live here,” he told me), but he was biding his time, keeping an eye on housing prices. “I won’t stay here,” he explained. “I want someday to buy a nice house with a large garden in back.” Aroldo was an up-and-outer.

Now, let us consider the greening tactics that both Alfredo and Aroldo used in common in their fight against *bagunça*. First, they used plants to occupy space. Gramsci might have called this a war of maneuver, the seizing of territory to exclude others from its use. Said Alfredo:

When I arrived here in the *condomínio*, I saw this empty area in front of the building and saw what people were doing there. *Bagunça*. People would stand around, right in front, hanging out, barbecuing, but then they would just leave it there, not clean up, and that attracted stray animals; and drinking, leaving bottles and cans. Others would just drop garbage there, others would leave their motorcycles there. This place was like a favela. So I thought: let me plant a garden. I thought: I have to occupy that space, or they will just turn more and more into *bagunça*.

The idea of using a garden to rescue space from use by *bagunceiros* was a recurrent theme not just among long-termers like Alfredo but also among up-and-outers like Aroldo. Said Aroldo:

Soon after moving here I could see what was happening in other *blocos*, and I said to myself: “Not here.” I realized that the only thing I could

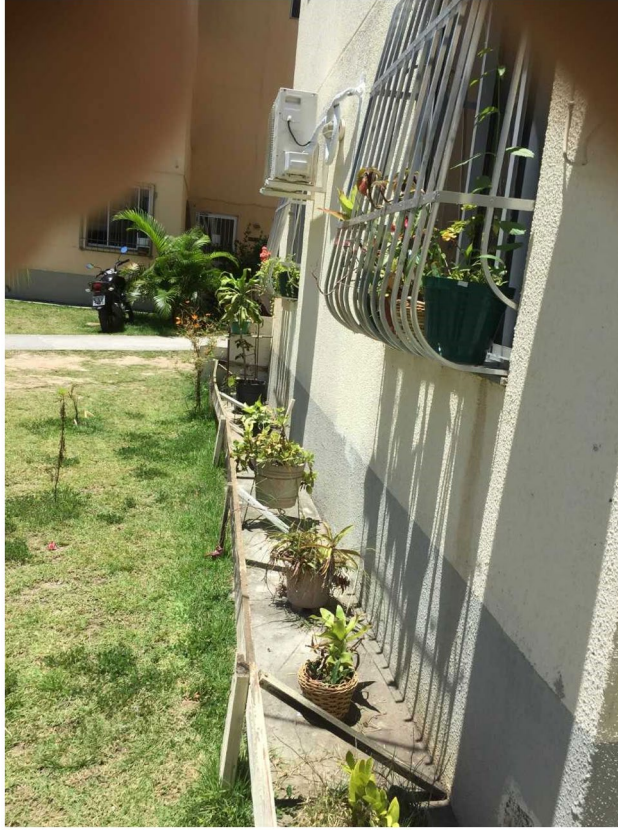
do, was to come down here and occupy space, and plant a garden, because I knew that if I didn't occupy it, other people would move in their own way.

Now an outsider might assume that planting flowers, shrubs, and ferns would be anything but a controversial act; yet both long-termers and up-and-outer gardeners discovered this was not so. Rodrigo, a long-termers, recounted how early on, when he began to fill the rectangle at his *bloco's* entrance with white roses and green-and-yellow *brasileirinhas*, adolescents would pour water on his head from three stories up, ridiculing him. "They would yell down to me: Who do you think you are? You want to plant a garden, go to the Zona Sul!⁷ You think you are better than us?" But, green warriors like Rodrigo recounted, they persevered, wearing down the other side. Luzinete, a woman in her forties who grew up on the periphery working in grocery stores and factories, and who aspired to become a lawyer and judge, was an up-and-outer, and an enthusiastic cultivator of many ornamental plants both at her *bloco's* entrance and around the two-meter-wide stretch of grass that girdled her building. Recalling the first months of establishing her garden, she used militaristic language:

At first it was a real struggle [*luta*]. Those people did not accept it. They would tear up the plants, trample them. But I was persistent: they would pull them up, I would plant again. I kept at it, and eventually they stopped. Finally, the garden chased them away, 100 percent. This was a conquest [*conquista*], a real conquest.

Among the bitterest battles in this war was the clash for the stoops. For the first year he lived in Elizete Cardoso, Grandão, an on-edger, took pleasure in doing what he had always done in the favela: cooling his heels in a public place with friends, drinking beer. Grandão, a wiry light-skinned widower in his fifties, and his two teenage children had been awarded an apartment in Elizete Cardoso because, in the eyes of the state, they were living precariously in a home without adequate foundations in a favela. Grandão had given condominium life in Elizete Cardoso a try, but the costs were simply too great; he was months in arrears, faced periodic water cutoffs, and was on the lookout for a buyer or renter—anyone—who would take the apartment off his hands. In the meantime, life went on. Given the absence of bars in Elizete Cardoso, Grandão, like many others, gravitated to the concrete stoops that bordered each building. There he and his friends would hold court, beers in hand, philosophizing until after dark. Predictably, the stoops became an arena of conflict between stoop-sitters and anti-stoop-sitters. The latter complained that the former would talk until way too late, and should go back to the favela where they could stoop-sit to their hearts' content.

One of the weapons of this intra-class battle were potted plants. Up-and-outer and long-termers gardeners used ferns with shallow roots



Potted Plants, photo by author, 2017. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

as a first line of assault. Luzinete, the up-and-outer, took the lead. “So I started to put big potted ferns on the stoop,” she recalled.

You can see them there, I put them there to make it harder for them to sit down. Then the war started. It was a struggle [*uma luta*], it was a battle [*uma batalha*]. One of them would move the plant, or they would break them. So I kept putting those plants there, until that wore them down.

The battle was joined by at least half a dozen buildings. On stoops all around Elizete Cardoso, potted plants appeared. Stoop sitters moved pots, and potters moved them back in a tense back-and-forth. When potted plants were not enough to keep the stoop-sitters at bay, the long-termers and up-and-outers cultivated ferns along buildings’ edges and put up jagged fences around them. Then, after nearly two years, the stoop-sitters finally began to give up. “There were simply no more places to sit,” Grandão lamented. One steamy afternoon in December, I found him sitting inside a patch of cool shade cast by the corner of one of the *blocos*. The more convenient place to sit on the building’s stoop had been rendered inaccessible by a long line of potted ferns. I asked him what he thought of these. “Wrong, brother!”

People need to sit outside because of the weather and hang out. Here we have lots of people who work hard, they need some leisure, they need recreation, there's nothing else to do here. So what are we supposed to do? It's not fair to keep people from sitting comfortably and talking to each other.

"Don't those people [the placers of pots] have a right to some privacy?" I asked. He shot back: "But we also have a right! Whose right is stronger?" Adding: "They want to run us out of here."⁸

The gardeners' other principal mode of action was what Gramsci might have called a war of position. In this mode, long-termers and up-and-outers sought to use plants to transform the hearts and minds of their neighbors. In what some of them explicitly called "*um esforço de civilisar*"—an effort to civilize—they imagined *ixória* and *pingo-de-ouro* as having the power to instill in neighbors the values of respect, calm, stewardship, and self-discipline. For Madalena, a long-termer, the public display of plants had a clearly didactic purpose: "Ah, Madalena is so good about keeping things pretty, placing these beautiful plants in the hallway," she imagined a neighbor as saying. "And so she thinks, 'Hey, I'm gonna do this on my floor, too.' It starts with cleaning up. And after cleaning, they start planning other things. And so, the building gets organized." Other gardeners remembered stories of neighbors and children who, through the simple act of seeing the garden, found their subjectivities transformed. Listen again to Aroldo:

Now that they see we have this garden, they don't want to do that anymore. If someone sees that there is some trash here, a neighbor will now go there and pick it up. And now, if someone sees someone disrespect a plant, break it, pull it up, trample it, they'll go over and say, "no, you shouldn't do that," or they'll tell me. Now if someone puts trash wherever, someone will say—even someone who has not been involved in planting!—they'll say, "hey, what are you doing? That is so pretty, but you are *bagunçando*? Come on, be better educated." See, the garden educates people.

While I have so far focused on points of convergence between the long-termer and the up-and-outer gardeners, I also discovered a key point of divergence between them: the two clusters imagined their civilizing work as unfolding on *two different spatial terrains*. Long-termers used plants to fight *bagunça* in *their own bloco*, while up-and-outers imagined their plants as helping to root out *bagunça*, not just from their own *bloco* but also *from the housing project as a whole*. This contrast, I suggest, derives from the difference between use- and exchange-value. Long-termers were most interested in using plants to enhance the use-value of their homes. Uninterested in chasing after a rising property values, they had no reason to concern themselves overmuch about any building other than their own; their priority was to ensure their own building's respectability.

"I can't be trying to take responsibility for plants in other buildings," said Madalena. "I have enough to look after here."

In contrast, up-and-outers, wanting to appeal to buyers, actively sought to influence the exchange value of their apartments. They did this by trying to reduce *bagunça* not just in and around their own building but in the housing project as a whole. They were aware that every visitor to Elizete Cardoso, as a potential buyer, had to pass by multiple buildings. They reckoned that these potential buyers needed to be reassured that Elizete Cardoso *as a whole* was a place where *bagunca* was hardly to be seen, a place where they would feel comfortable and safe. They wanted visitors to see that the *whole place*, despite being public housing, was inhabited by *gente boa*. Up-and-outers tended to use physically larger, more exuberant, exotic, colorful, and more expensive plants in order to offer displays to visitors. They were, in effect, always on a mission: they wanted *outsiders* to see Elizete Cardoso as the kind of place where they *might live*. "Look," Aroldo said, "how will someone who comes in here, and sees *bagunça*, anywhere in the condo, is he going to want to buy? That is why we need to get rid of *bagunca* not just from one building but from all of them." I never heard this idea expressed by the long-termers.



Cluster 3 Garden, photo by author, 2017. [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Rows of carefully cropped *pingo de ouro* and ferns were key to producing this broader territorial reassurance. "Someone comes in from outside," Aroldo explained, "and is walking along over here and there. I can get rid of *bagunça* with my garden here, but to get here [the outside visitor] has to pass by other buildings. That is why it is good that we see gardens in front of lots of buildings." I met other up-and-outer gardeners who had become "garden missionaries," doing everything they could to get people in *blocos other than their own to become gardeners*. Both Aroldo

and Luzinete spoke of creating ornamental floral extravaganzas that would be visible to residents on all sides of their buildings, not hidden inside the three-by-three-meter rectangle at the entrance. “That way,” said Luzinete, “neighbors can do likewise in their own buildings.” I asked her why that was important. “Because,” she said, “that way the value of all of these apartments goes up.” Aroldo and Luzinete visited neighbors, talked to them about gardening, and encouraged them to plant, referring to exchange-value as an incentive. “I showed a neighbor,” said Luzinete, “I said every square meter will be more valuable; [I said that] with a garden, he can depend on the resale value of his apartment going up.”

Planting and Not Planting Fruit Trees

An especially remarkable contrast between long-termer and up-and-outer gardeners was their deeply differing sentiments toward fruit trees. As in many tropical and subtropical societies (Von Hellermann 2016)⁹, fruit trees are deeply embedded in Brazil’s rural dwelling culture, signifying abundance, community, and a hedge against hunger. Jorge, a long-termer, remembered the fruit trees of his youth as God-given sweetness, the banana and guava trees on his grandfather’s land in Minas Gerais yielding fruit so abundantly that “we had to give most of it away.” Because of their sturdiness and longevity, trees in many cultural contexts symbolize long-term attachment to place (Clope & Jones 2004); in large swaths of rural Brazil, as in many societies, associations with fruit are drawn into such attachments. Several of my interlocutors explained that in adulthood, they had traveled to their parents’ family land to plant fruit trees, as an expression of their desire to return eventually to the land on which they were born. The symbolic connection between land, home, and fruit trees was driven home to me by Maria, a petty vendor who rented the apartment above me. She had grown up in the interior of the state of Espírito Santo, where her family still owned land. She showed me a photo of the tree she planned to plant there, and the seed she would use, which she had preserved carefully. I asked her whether any tree would do. No, it had to be a fruit tree. Why? “Because this is my family’s land. You know, the sweetness. A fruit tree is more family (*é mais família*).”

The love of fruit trees among some segments of the working classes in Brazil is not just about a longing for a return to the countryside; it is about rendering urban neighborhoods more habitable. In a working-class district in the city of Santarém, Winkler-Prins and her colleagues found that for houses with sufficient greenspace, nearly a third of all planted vegetation were fruit trees (Winkler-Prins et al. 2010, 576). In urban settlements in Curitiba, Ottmann found that fruit trees such as lime, orange, guava, peach, plumb, and pitanga represented up to half of all cultivated plants—far more than home-raised vegetables (Ottmann et al. 2011, 107). Similarly, many residents of Elizete Cardoso, gardeners

and non-gardeners alike, grew up with fruit trees not just in the countryside but also in the city. In Rio's northern zone, my informants relied on fruit trees for nutrition, shade, and beauty. They remembered those trees as providers of projectiles in youthful play battles; of joyful messiness at mango slurping contests; of gifts to family and neighbors; of shade during backyard barbecues; of sweetness to lovers.

Yet not all the gardeners in Elizete Cardoso planted fruit-trees; in fact, *roughly half of them avowedly rejected the idea of planting them*. At first, I was puzzled as to why some gardeners were so firmly opposed to fruit trees. Then it dawned on me: the divide corresponded to the difference between residents who regarded Elizete Cardoso as the culmination of a lifetime of struggle and hope, and those who saw the housing complex as but a resting place on their march up the housing hierarchy. The correlations here were complex. Up-and-outer gardeners, for starters, worried that fruit trees would become magnets for *bagunça*. "Look," Luzinete explained,

fruit trees create headaches. These people with children, who don't have a drop of good upbringing. Their behavior is to destroy things. . . . A neighbor planted a graviola tree. It was beautiful, covered with fruit. And then the kids started throwing rocks to get the fruit. Someone had a beautiful banana tree. And kids started picking off the fruit long before it was ripe. . . . And acerola trees. When the berries are small and green, the kids just tear them off.

Aroldo, the up-and-outer gardener, felt the same way:

I am not going to plant fruit trees, because they just lead to *bagunça*. When they start giving fruit, kids come along and jump onto the tree, and they end up breaking the other plants. . . . The fruit trees will attract too much movement, it will ruin everything there.

These anti-fruit tree partisans belonged to the segment of residents who saw their residence in Elizete Cardoso as a stopover on their way up and out. They felt little need to take permanent possession of this territory, to stake a permanent claim. They were not looking ahead to a time when their children and grandchildren might savor the fruits of the labor invested in this place. Their sense of temporality in Elizete Cardoso was at odds with the embodied long lives of fruit trees. They saw such trees not for their potential value in a long-range imagined future, as protectors of the neighborhood they planned to bequeath to the next generation; but rather for the potential risks they presented in the here-and-now with respect to exchange-value, as potential vectors of *bagunça* that might scare off buyers.

As for the long-termers, we have already seen that they, too, were anxious about *bagunça*. Yet their sense of long-term place attachment to Elizete Cardoso, as far as fruit trees were concerned, mitigated that anxiety. Trees, given their deep roots, size, and longevity, are closely associated with rootedness, spatial definition (think of the specific reach of

a tree's branches, shade, and smell), and long-term, inter-generational durability. I identified half a dozen enthusiastic fruit-tree planters in the housing complex, all of whom were long-termers. One of the more devoted was Jorge, the retired metalworker who grew up in Minas. In the stretch of grass between his building and the sidewalk, he lovingly tended two *carambola* and two *pitanga* trees, which had begun to sprout citrusy sweet fruits. His passion for these trees was, in part, rooted in his intra-class position, which enabled him to look forward happily to bequeathing his apartment to the next generation. "I plant trees," he said, "because I want my son and grandson to look at these one day and say, 'look what our father and grandfather did, he made sure we would have shade here... I want these trees to be around for the coming century.'"

Yet there was another layer of meaning to the fruit trees for Jorge: giving away all that fruit back in Minas formed in him a certain kind of *noblesse oblige*. "Those trees made me think," he said, "God wants us to be happy, He gives us these trees, so it is our job to make sure that everyone gets to taste their fruits." For other long-termers, too, fruit trees were partly about taking care of strangers. "You don't plant a fruit tree just for yourself," said Carlota, a long-termer, "you plant it so that everyone can eat. No matter what happens, with a tree you can take a fruit." Preto, also a long-termer, said, "Just because I planted and cared for a tree does not make it mine. It is God's. He made it grow, He is the one who is providing that fruit. I plant so everyone can use it." Yet another long-termer, Rodrigo, said,

Everyone will use this tree here, not just me! Tomorrow it will be different, it will be giving shade and fruit. If you are tired, nature gives you that! As I have planted trees, people pass by and comment: look at the trees he planted! Anyone who wants one will pick it and eat it! I don't know whether I'll still be alive. But this is for the people around here, for the children who are growing up here, for them to eat fruit (cf. Devore 2017).

For these long-termers, the planting of fruit trees embodied their success in having made it out of the favela; their wish to deploy that success, in a kind of working-class *noblesse oblige*, to take care of others; and their desire to take care of the place in the long term. Such feelings were strong enough to crowd out any misgivings about the association of fruit trees with *bagunça*. Put differently, for long-termers, the use-value of fruit trees pushed back against the pressures of gentrification, as such trees became, for them, an ineluctable part of why they would, they said, "never sell."

The Living and the Dead

The intra-class struggle waged with plants against *bagunça* in the world of the living had, it turns out, a mirror image in a more ghostly war waged in the world of the dead. The residents of Elizete Cardoso knew their homes were built on territory once occupied by a prison

erected in the nineteenth century. Some gardeners complained that the *condomínio's* subsoil was contaminated with the demolished prison's rubble and barbed wire; some said that when they arrived, they could still smell death. Stories circulated of an unearthed cache of crushed bones. "Here," said Carlota, a long-termer, "there were many cruel stories." Jorge's voice fell to a whisper when he confided that, "Here it was worse than Carandiru," a prison in São Paulo notorious for a massacre in the early 1990s. A common view in many parts of Brazil, particularly among non-Protestants (but also seeping into evangelical worldviews), was that the souls of those who'd died violent deaths were fated to loiter on Earth (Vilhena 2013). We may thus understand the concern of some residents of Elizete Cardoso that its premises were haunted. "There were massacres here," Jorge said gravely, "and that leaves something negative behind." One resident heard footfalls at night; another a mysterious sighing; another a whistle on a still, warm evening.¹⁰

This is where plants came in. I found that many of my informants subscribed to the view, popular in many parts of Brazil (Junge 2014), that the landscape was saturated with both negative and positive energies, and that plants, in particular, figured as prominent players on this energetic terrain. All the gardeners I got to know, both long-termers and up-and-outers, believed that plants possessed *energia positiva* ("positive energy"), a power that emanated from them and influenced places and people in their vicinity (cf. Tidball 2014). Other researchers on plant culture in Brazil have encountered the belief that plants possess apotropaic powers, the capacity to fend off evil influences or bad luck (e.g., Kawa 2016). Walk a block or two in Rio and you'll see plants deployed as the energetic guardians of perimeters and thresholds. You'll come across the tall spiky *espada de São Jorge*, or a *conmigo ninguém pode*, with its broad green purple-edged leaves, placed at the entryways of homes to keep evil eye at bay; or crowded in large pots at points of entry to places where bad things are known to happen, such as bars, hospital emergency rooms, and police stations. So it is in Elizete Cardoso—*Espadas* and *ninguens* abound at thresholds, both to buildings and to individual apartments. This is a topic about which neither long-termers nor up-and-outers felt self-conscious. I asked, and they told: "When someone comes along," said Aroldo, "with bad intentions... the plant counteracts that."

Upon closer inspection, however, what both long-termers and up-and-outers were willing to talk about were the impacts of plants on the negative energies of *the living*. When the conversation turned to the dead, a tangible contrast emerged between the long-termers and up-and-outers. Long-termers felt a dual duty: to expel from their own buildings the *bagunça* of the living and the *energia negativa* left by ghosts. They readily admitted to using plants to accomplish both of these goals, speaking openly of their use of greening to chase away the negative energies of the dead. "When I moved here," said Carlota the long-termer, "the woman who sold to me warned me, she said this place used to be a prison, there was still that energy from the ones who had died here. So I

thought—I am going to keep them away, they won't be able to penetrate. I planted a whole row of beautiful plants in front. And I've never seen or heard of a ghost here." Madalena, also a long-term resident, after hearing some noises in her building's stairwell, insisted to a neighbor that they plant flowering bushes near the entrance. "I never heard those noises again," she said. Preto thinks of trees as particularly effective evictors of ghosts:

Look, this here used to be a prison. Many people died here, and that left a kind of curse upon the land. A lot of anger. So whoever plants a tree, knows what he is doing. If I plant a tree, I know what I am doing: I am paying for all of the sins by doing something that is agreeable to God. . . . So when you plant the tree, care for it, it is like you are lightening the load of those who died here. And they become free, they can move on and leave this place. The trees push away bad feeling.

Up-and-outers, in contrast, while acknowledging using plants to chase away the negative energies of the living, vigorously denied using them to expel the energies of the dead. To do so would require admitting that the place was haunted to begin with. When I asked Aroldo whether the souls of prisoners haunted the premises, his response was immediate: "Only ignorant people say that," he said, "people who don't care about this place. Who don't care about development." He acknowledged that ghosts *may* have been around before the prison was demolished. After that, he assured me, "Once they built these new buildings, there was no more of that." He then changed the subject. Several other up-and-outer gardeners exhibited similar impatience with talk of ghosts. Without directly denying that ghosts existed, Luzinete emphasized the purifying effect of the original building's demolition, and that talking about ghosts was irresponsible. "You know," she said, "people who talk of those things just scare people away." Then, with a wave of her hand, she ended the discussion.

A possible explanation of this odd pattern came in a conversation with an Uber driver who had once lived in Elizete Cardoso. He spoke volubly about the ghosts that haunted the site of the old prison, regaling me with stories of moaning and groaning prisoners. I mentioned that I had found some residents close-lipped about the topic. He laughed. "Of course! They want you to buy! I talk now that I have moved away. But when I wanted to sell my place, I wouldn't say a thing. If you do, people say they won't buy, except at a very low price."

It turns out that there is a body of literature in law, management, and real estate analysis on how haunting turns buildings into *stigmatized properties*, lowering their value by up to 30–50 percent (Rosenbloom 2006; Tse & Love 2000; Valk 2006; Chapman & Ludlum 2014). In Japanese cities, haunted apartments have earned their own nomenclature: bargain hunters unafraid of ghosts may choose from among low-rent *jiko bukken* (Higgenbottom 2018). In Singapore, developers deny tales of haunting where they have razed cemeteries to make way for high-end condominiums, for "if the ghost story becomes widely known the value

of the property will almost certainly be diminished” (Comaroff 2007, 64). Indeed, it seems that such behavior has led some municipal governments, including in the US, to make the disclosure of haunting mandatory (Warner 1993). In Brazil, where buyers have no such protections, cat-and-mouse games can result, with prospective purchasers wanting to know if there are ghosts on the premises, and sellers feigning ignorance. “Talk to the real estate agent,” advises one website, “but keep your cool and be aware that, obviously, he or she is likely only to confide the truth after having sold you the property and collected the commission.”¹¹

And so it was in Elizete Cardoso: ghosts placed downward pressure on property values. Carlota, for example, could afford to purchase her apartment precisely because of the owner’s fear of ghosts. “When I first arrived,” she said, “I asked her, why do you want to sell? And she said, she heard too many things, this property was heavy, and she was afraid. And that meant I could get a good price, because she really wanted to leave.” Another resident recalled that when she was thinking of buying in Elizete Cardoso, family members tried to dissuade her. “They told me, ‘that place is so heavy!’ They said, ‘I wouldn’t live there if they gave me a house for free!’ They said, ‘There were a lot of deaths there, that is an accursed place!’”.

Certainly it is awareness of ghosts’ downward pressure on price that explains the contrast between up-and-outers and long-termers. Ardently hoping to sell their apartments on the best possible terms, the former do what they can to avoid feeding ghost rumors. Gardeners like Jorge and Carlota, in contrast, who un-self-consciously accept the image of Elizete Cardoso as inhabited by ghosts, and of themselves as using plants to keep them away from their own buildings, have no aspiration to move up and out. They think of their apartments mainly through the lens of use-value. With no intention to sell, they have little to lose by talking about the curse upon the land: indeed, their mission, as they understand it, is to do what they can to mitigate that curse. Just as they seek to chase away the *bagunçeiros* who imperil their buildings, so too they seek to chase away the disorderly ghosts who haunt them. Theirs is a duty to ensure that their own and future generations will not have to live under the shadow of the past. They want to make sure that this place, this building, this terrain, becomes and remains free of ghosts and their negative energies, for their children and children’s children. In contrast, up-and-outer gardeners, like Aroldo and Luzinete, thinking about the exchange-value of their apartments, want to ensure that ghosts will remain as little talked—and thought—about as possible.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that in a social housing project subjected to the pressures of gentrification, human-plant interactions among working-class residents are an instrument of social power, a set of tactics used to symbolize and advance intra-class-differentiated life projects.

My analysis highlights some of the ways that greening labor, as a class-inflected strategy to transform socio-natural environments, is connected to relative degrees of power held by some segments of the working-class to push back against the gentrifying real estate market, and of others to collaborate with that market. Deploying plants may thus be understood, under these circumstances, as a working-class tool to take control of class conditions. Here, I want to step beyond this argument and suggest that a focus on greening labor and intra-class differentiation has the potential to push anthropological scholarship in two innovative ways.

First, cultivating a sensitivity to how the forces of capital generate and preserve hierarchies of power and status *within* the three classes has the potential to enrich considerably the ethnography of human-plant interactions. Ever since Malinowski's works on Trobriand gardens (1935), anthropologists have examined how people use plants to realize aesthetic, social, and spiritual purposes, including: signifying the boundaries of descent groups (Sheridan 2016); shaping inter-household relations (Ellen & Komáromi 2013); nurturing national, imperial, and ecological identities (Myers 2015); healing the sick (Nathen 2018); symbolizing collective nightmares (Langwick 2018); and enacting counterhegemonic politics (Stoetzer 2018). Yet in literature, careful class analysis remains oddly undeveloped. In general, ethnographies of the plant-class interface limit themselves to the binary comparison of working-class with middle-class gardeners (Maurer 2017). The mission of anthropology, I suggest, is to achieve at least one more level of granularity. Archambault's (2016) study of flowers in Maputo arguably engages with how intra-class position influences the everyday socio-natural views and practices of gardeners. Still, more granularity in her understanding of class could have opened new horizons. She argues that the most avid gardeners in suburban Maputo are young, unemployed men and middle-aged female heads of households, whose love for plants allows them to experience otherwise unavailable social intimacies. In order to become more richly and densely class-analytical, I suggest, Archambault would need to investigate how such men relate to plants in ways that are different from older, employed male gardeners, and how such female household heads differ in their relations to plants from women positioned differently in terms of local hierarchies of power and status. What might such questions have revealed about how class positionality shapes human-plant intimacies?

Second, I want to suggest that paying attention to the different social projects of intra-class clusters is an important step toward a deeper overall understanding of gentrification processes throughout the world (Lees et al. 2015; Ghertner 2015). Making intra-class differentiation more visible should lead us to consider the possibility that in a wide variety of gentrifying contexts, it may be valuable to understand working-class residents not simply as passive absorbers of gentrifying pressures but also as strategic actors intricately engaged with those forces in differently positioned ways: not just as distressed subjects but as effective resisters, and, sometimes, as savvy collaborators (cf. Elinoff 2016).

There should be no mistake: the current literature on gentrification around the globe pays little attention to the differently positioned segments of the working class (Doshi 2012, 82). Consider the nearly two dozen contributions to the collection, *Global Gentrifications* (Lees et al. 2015). These represent the cutting edge of research on gentrification worldwide. Yet in every single contribution, working-class residents of gentrifying neighborhoods are portrayed in homogeneous analytical terms, either as “old-timers,” “the poor,” the “working class,” “low-income residents,” and so forth. Such terms perpetuate the analytical binary—the working class on one side, the middle class on the other—which, while useful in some cases, may also fail to capture the reality of how gentrification unfolds on an everyday basis.¹²

At bottom, paying more attention to the granularity of intra-class difference means pushing ourselves to attend to the *material dimension* of this difference. Those who engage in the refusal of gentrification—the ones who proclaim they will “never sell”—should be understood not just as heroes but also positioned within specific hierarchies of resources, and socialized into specific life projects. Not everyone can afford—or wishes—to resist and refuse. Obviously, as Scott (1976) and others have taught us, sometimes desperation does lead to resistance—but *not always*. Acts of resistance, both everyday and collective, are outcomes of not always predictable geometries of power, intra-class resources, willingness to risk, and confluences of events. Put differently, disentangling and rendering visible the complex relations between intra-class positionality—including the ability to take advantage of unevenly available resources such as temporary state endowments—is an irreducibly empirical matter. My intent here has been to take a lucid view of what makes it possible materially for some to heroically take a stand against the juggernaut, while others find themselves with few choices but to give in and give up. My sense is that applying this approach to other accounts of gentrification could lead to possibly new and valuable insights.

But there is, as it were, a more radioactive risk I have taken in this article. In designating a category of the working class up-and-outer, and by attributing to this category the motives of savvy collaborators, some readers may wonder whether I am engaged in the classic error of blaming the structural victim, locating agency within a segment of the working class, mistakenly shifting responsibility for their conditions away from larger structures of power (e.g., real estate agents, the state, investor capital in the local urban center) and back to them.

My response is similar to my comment above about the conditions of refusal. This is, I propose, an irreducibly empirical matter. The last thing I wish to suggest is a one-size-fits-all model of gentrification, as if all such processes required savvy collaborators among the working class. If the exploding literature on gentrification teaches us anything, it is that the processes through which working-class residents come to be displaced by middle-class ones unfold in mind-bogglingly diverse ways. At least some of those ways may be better understood, I suggest, if we shed the taboo

of seeing some of the displaced as being complicit in their own displacement. There, I said it. In the case under review here, that complicity is sustained by a materiality that includes a significant state-endowed cushion combined with the advantages that accrue to households with predictable incomes, good health, and fewer unproductive mouths to feed. What I propose is that looking at such positionalities when examining accounts of gentrification elsewhere could bear new fruit.

Notes

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²There is a sizable literature in geography on the role of green-spaces in gentrification (e.g., Certomà & Tornaghi 2018). Still, this literature also embraces the “big three” approach to class analysis, thereby missing crucial variations within the working class.

³This is a pseudonym.

⁴It was quite easy to find Elizete Cardoso apartments advertised on legitimate real estate websites with come-on lines that highlighted location. This made it possible for the acting superintendent, in concert with the real estate company that oversaw the collection of fees, to raise them to what the market could bear. An arrangement between the super and the local drug trafficking organization paid the latter a percentage of monthly fees in exchange for protection and safety inside the condominium. Thus, *contratos de gaveta* sustained a rough sense of predictability for all involved actors, and the government looked the other way as long as revenues kept coming in.

⁵As much as I would have liked to satisfy my own craving for averages, both the small size of my sample and the number of factors that contributed to the key features of each cluster made finding cluster-specific averages impractical.

⁶Inspired by scholarship on the racialization of plants (Andrews 2017), I remained attentive to this domain as well. Yet I found the linkages between plants and “race” undeveloped in this context. The gardeners self-identified across the spectrum of ethno-racial categories, and I found no pattern in how such identities inflected views or practices around gardening.

⁷“Zona Sul”—“South Zone”—refers to the high-income area of the city of Rio de Janeiro, close to the city’s best beaches.

⁸Some readers may wonder whether the long-term/up-and-outer contrast may correspond roughly to the different blocs of working-class support for Haddad or Bolsonaro in the 2018 election. While it has been pointed out that Bolsonaro tapped into deep-seated longings among some working-class Brazilians to set themselves apart

from the disorderly rabble (Cesarino 2019), such research remains preliminary.

⁹Von Hellermann reports from Tanzania that the “importance of fruit trees in the creation of a beautiful home is evident not only in the central role given to the planting of fruit trees in accounts of setting up a new home, it is also apparent in the sense of pleasure and approval informants express when visiting a compound containing many fruit trees, and in the pride with which farmers showed us their fruit trees, invariably showering us with generous presents of fruit” (Von Hellermann 2016, 376).

¹⁰Belief in the presence of negative energies emanating from the souls of dead prisoners did not map neatly onto religious affiliation.

¹¹<https://www.megacurioso.com.br/misterios/39979-vai-se-mudar-e-quer-saber-se-a-nova-casa-e-assombrada-confira-estas-dicas.htm>

¹²There is also a need to develop a richer account of the multiple positionalities of gentrifiers themselves (Brown-Saraceno 2009). The downward raiders of Elizete Cardoso will become more researchable once we get to the ten-year mark (2024), when sales will be legal and middle-class buyers will no longer scurry away from inquisitive anthropologists.

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