

Here and there: Brazilian migrants' transnational relationships of labor and social reproduction

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Abstract

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My doctoral dissertation examines the Brazilian migration process to the metropolitan Atlanta area and the transnational relationships of labor and social reproduction that underscore this migration. To do so, I draw from cross-border ethnographic research Brazilian migrant workers in the metropolitan Atlanta area and their family members in Brazil. I focus on one particular sending community in Brazil, the city of Goiânia, where most Brazilian migrants in Georgia come from. Brazilian migrants leave middle and lower-middle class contexts in Brazil to join precarized labor markets in housecleaning and construction in the US, spurred by the “search for a better life.” In this context, I seek to understand how relationships of precarized labor, family, and care create distinct zones of convergence linking specific sending and receiving places. I draw from a Marxist-feminist framework on the dialectics of labor and social reproduction that understands workers to be contradictorily free: “free as

birds” to sell their labor force, but compelled to do it in order to reproduce themselves and their families, daily and intergenerationally. Thus, I investigate the Brazilian migration process to the metropolitan Atlanta area from individual and family backgrounds in Brazil, access to labor markets and working conditions in the US, material social reproduction conditions in the US, and family care dynamics in the US and Brazil. In doing so, I characterize the precarization of labor Brazilians face in the US, the motivations and conditions that constitute the “search for a better life,” and the dynamics of social reproduction and care between Brazil and the US that underscore the Brazilian migration process and migrants’ participation in precarized labor markets in the US. I argue that Brazilian migration to Marietta cannot be understood simply as a search for employment but rather that migrants’ decisions to leave Brazil, enter precarized labor markets in the US, and stay in Marietta are shaped by global regimes of labor and social reproduction and uneven social reproduction conditions between here and there.

Key words: Brazil, migrations, precarization, labor, social reproduction.

(...)
When an immigrant leaves
she must look back to make sure

leaving is worth it.

The sin of the immigrant is leaving
and being thankful she left.

Aline Mello, *Pillar of salt*

I went willingly: I was already well schooled in looking away, the jungle-craft of gentility. But still, I could not help thinking it was a waste of effort to lead me away. It was true, of course, that I could not see that landscape or anything like it from my own window, but its presence was palpable everywhere in our house; I had grown up with it. It was that landscape that lent the note of hysteria to my mother's voice when she drilled me for my examinations; it was to those slopes she pointed when she told me that if I didn't study hard I would end up over *there*, that the only weapon people like us had was our brains and if we didn't use them like claws to cling to what we'd got, that was where we'd end up, marooned in that landscape (...)

Amitav Ghosh, *The shadow lines*

(...)
Aceitas a chuva, a guerra, o desemprego e a injusta distribuição
porque não podes, sozinho, dinamitar a ilha de Manhattan.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *Elegia 1938*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One morning, during my 2023 stay in Atlanta, I left the house in the morning for a walk around the neighborhood. Its streets were littered with the same pink and white business card, which apparently had been distributed to every house in the neighborhood. These business cards advertised housecleaning services bearing two distinctively Brazilian women's names. They were distributed inside a small Ziplock bag which also contained a piece of a vinyl flooring plank to add some weight to it (see Figure 1). I later texted the number on the card to make sure they were, indeed, Brazilian. This business card encapsulates labor dynamics of Brazilian migrants in the metropolitan Atlanta area, where women typically work in housecleaning and men in construction labor markets, including flooring.

My doctoral dissertation examines the Brazilian migration process to the metropolitan Atlanta area and the transnational relationships of labor and social reproduction that underscore this migration. To do so, I draw from cross-border ethnographic research Brazilian migrant workers in the metropolitan Atlanta area and their family members in Brazil. I focus on one particular community of origin in Brazil, the city of Goiânia, where most Brazilian migrants in Georgia come from. Brazilian migrants leave middle and lower-middle class contexts in Brazil to join precarized labor markets in housecleaning and construction in the US, spurred by the “search for a better life.” In this context, I seek to understand how relationships of precarized labor, family, and care create distinct “zone(s) of intersocietal convergence, linking ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Waldinger 2017: 6) between specific sending and receiving places. I depart from a Marxist-feminist framework on the dialectics of labor and social reproduction that understands workers to be contradictorily free: “free as birds” (Marx 1976) to sell their labor force, but compelled to do it in order to reproduce themselves and their families, daily and intergenerationally. Thus, I investigate the Brazilian

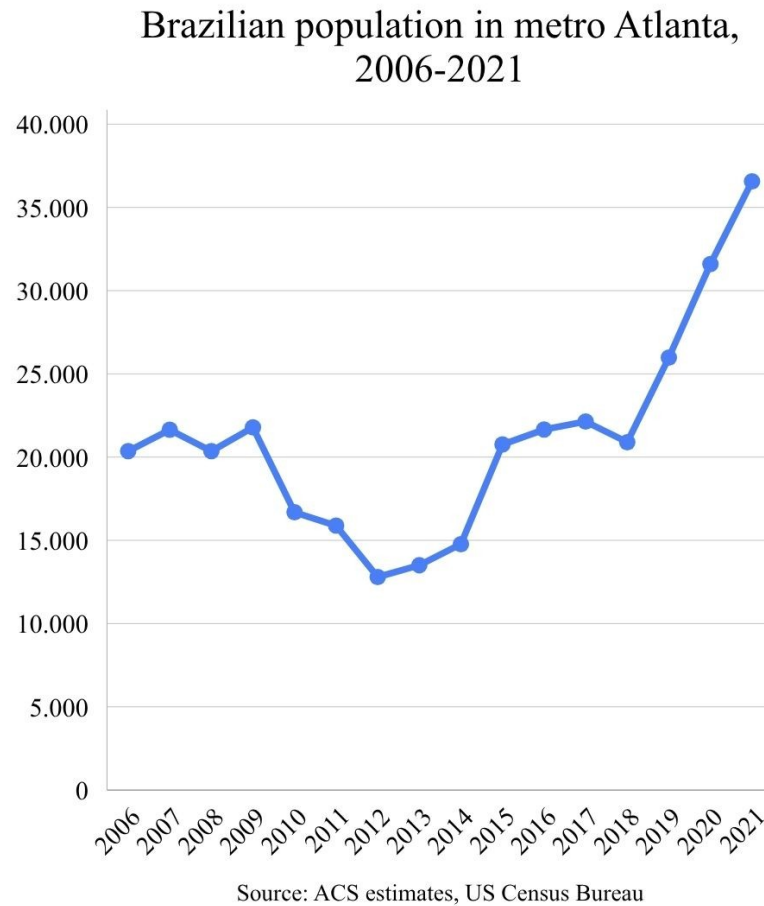
migration process to the metropolitan Atlanta area from individual and family backgrounds in Brazil, access to labor markets and working conditions in the US, material social reproduction conditions in the US, and family care dynamics in the US and Brazil. In doing so, I characterize the precarization of labor Brazilians face in the US, the motivations and conditions that constitute the “search for a better life,” and the dynamics of social reproduction and care between Brazil and the US that underscore the Brazilian migration process and migrants’ participation in precarized labor markets in the US.

Figure 1. Housecleaning business card



Photo: Clara Lemme Ribeiro (2026).

Figure 2. Brazilian Population in the metropolitan Atlanta area



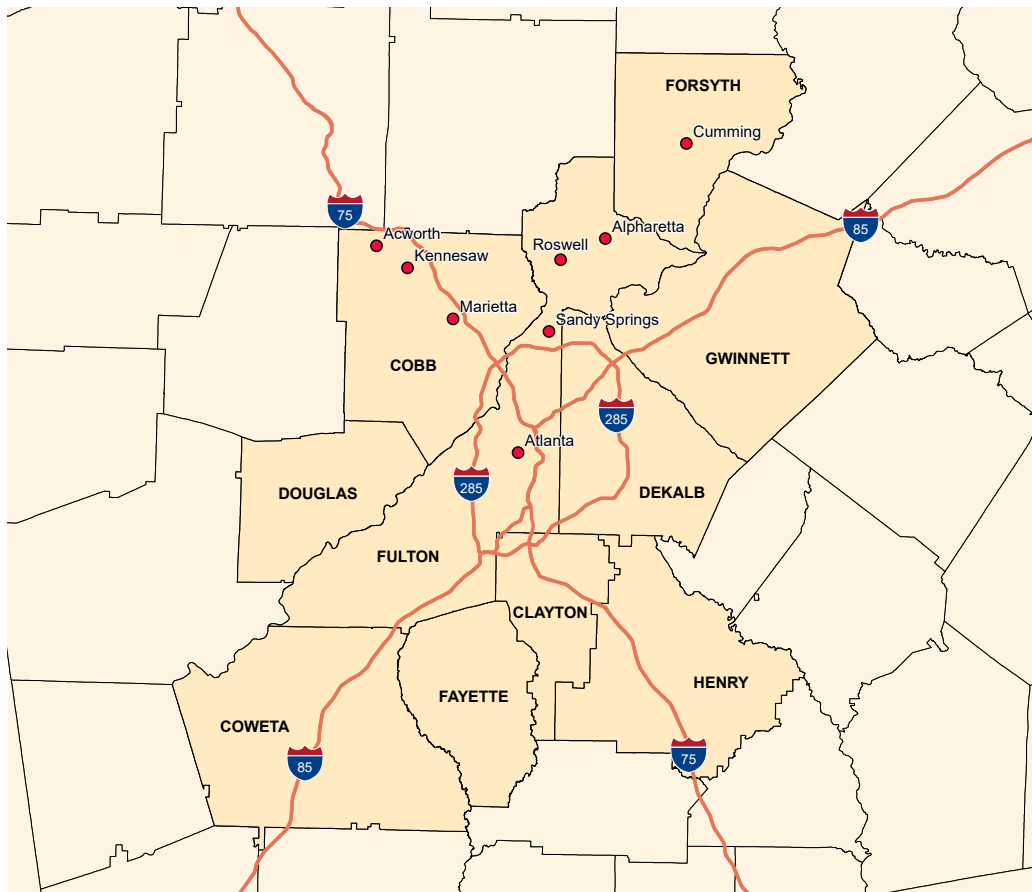
Brazilians in the metropolitan Atlanta area

In 2021, the US census estimated 36,563 Brazilians¹ in the metropolitan Atlanta area (including Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dekalb, Douglas, Gwinnett, Henry, Fayette, and Fulton counties). According to ethnographic data from my own fieldwork, while some Brazilian

¹ The Census data were calculated for me by Breon Haskett when he was a PhD student in Sociology (Demographic Methods) at the University of Washington (he graduated in 2024). Breon is currently a Demographic Research Analyst at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. Additionally, in the US Census, Brazilian is an “ancestry” category, which can be claimed by both US-born and foreign-born individuals. This number includes, therefore, Brazilians born outside of the US and US-born citizens of Brazilian ancestry.

migrants arrived in the metropolitan Atlanta area as early as the mid-1980s, it was only with the 1996 Olympics construction boom that Georgia became a significant destination for Brazilian migrants either leaving Brazil or coming from other places in the US. Over the last few years, the Brazilian community in the metropolitan Atlanta area has consistently grown, as shown in Figure 2. While they are concentrated in the city of Marietta, many Georgia-based Brazilians also live in other metropolitan Atlanta towns in the area, such as Sandy Springs, Alpharetta, Roswell, and Kennesaw (see Figure 3).²

Figure 3. The metropolitan Atlanta area and communities of destination



² Figures 3 and 4 were made by Li-An Song, currently an undergraduate student at the University of Washington.

Past research (Marcus 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2014), as well as my own fieldwork, reveals a strong connection between the Marietta-based Brazilian migrant community and the city of Goiânia. The state capital of Goiás, Goiânia is home to 1.5 million people and one of the biggest cities in the Brazilian Center-West region, where soy plantations and cattle underlie the economy. Thus, the zone of convergence established between the metropolitan Atlanta area and Goiânia connects two cross-border, non-traditional sending and receiving communities. More specifically, the Atlanta-Goiânia connection branches out from long-standing migration networks between the town of Governador Valadares, in Brazil, and the Boston metropolitan area in the US (Fusco 2001, Martes 1999, 2004, Sales 1999, S. Siqueira 2009). Based on geographic scholarship, I suggest that transnational relationships of labor and social reproduction between Georgia-based Brazilian workers and their family members in both the Marietta area and Goiânia are crucial to understanding the emergence, maintenance and growth of this particular zone of convergence. At the same time, zones of convergence between Marietta and Brazil have expanded into other Brazilian cities and, among my research participants, there was a significant diversity in terms of other communities of origin besides Goiânia, from large cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to 30-thousand-resident small countryside towns (see Figure 4).

There are, to be sure, Brazilians in Atlanta who are not working in housecleaning and construction labor markets. In my 2023 interview with the consul-general at the Brazilian consulate in Atlanta (interview 8, 9/6/23, Atlanta GA)³, he described the Brazilian community in Georgia as one divided into two groups. One is a group of Brazilian white-collar workers and executives in Brazilian companies based in Atlanta, such as poultry producer Pilgrim Pride (owned by Brazilian group JBS) and weapon manufacturer Taurus, among others.

³ I have analyzed my interview data in two ways: (i) by turning them into life stories, presented in Appendix A and (ii) by drawing specific information and quotes included throughout the dissertation - see Table 1.

According to the consul, Brazilian capital is the fifth biggest employer in Atlanta. Other of my key informants, including Presbyterian missionary Walter and Catholic priest Father Tadeu, noted that many Brazilians move to Georgia for high-ranking positions in American Atlanta-based companies as well, including Coca-Cola and Delta Airlines, or to study at renowned schools like Emory and Georgia Tech. This group does not necessarily reside close to Brazilian immigrant businesses and communities in the Marietta and they typically come from more privileged contexts in Brazil, have a work or study visa sponsored by their companies and universities, and speak English well.

Figure 4. Sending communities in Brazil



In contrast, my research focuses on the working-class Brazilians living and working in the Marietta area. Research on labor markets reveals that most Brazilian workers in the US, including those in Marietta and neighboring towns, are employed in the construction or domestic work sectors (Brinkerhoff et al. 2019; E. Siqueira and Jansen 2012). Characterized as “brown-collar jobs,” these occupations typically are labor-intensive and low-skilled, require little English proficiency, and lack labor protections (Milkman 2020). In the metropolitan Atlanta area, these migrant workers engage with specifically Brazilian labor markets, working for and with other Brazilians – typically those who are better established – that in turn shape labor and employment access practices as they mediate connections with American clients for construction and housecleaning work. In this context, Brazilian migrants report facing highly precarious working conditions, such as long workdays, lack of job security and benefits, low pay, and wage theft (Assis 2014; Tracy et al. 2014). My own fieldwork revealed further markers of precarization to be insecure employment (and consequently wages) as well as underemployment, especially for recently arrived Brazilian migrants. In both construction and housecleaning job markets, longer-term, well-established Brazilian migrants hire newcomers as their employees, known as *helpers*⁴. Brazilian employers will, for the most part, work alongside *helpers* – there are very few who assume an exclusively managerial position and excuse themselves from the manual, physically demanding labor of housecleaning and construction. Many Brazilians also work by and for themselves, but still maintain significant work connections with the Brazilian labor markets at large, occasionally hiring *helpers* or otherwise.

Meanwhile, Brazilians frequently work informally, as they either are out of status (in terms of US immigration) or rely on precarious migrant statuses, such as extended tourist

⁴ They use the English word *helper* when speaking in Portuguese (see Appendix B: Glossary). Throughout the dissertation, I italicize *helper* to highlight it as an emic term.

visas and student visas for English language courses, as revealed by my own fieldwork. While some become out of status by overstaying tourist visas, others enter through the US southern border. The dangerous and precarious journey from Brazil to Mexico, popularly known as *travessia* among Brazilian migrants, is done with the help of *atravessadores*⁵ (see Appendix B: Glossary) and paid in installments after the border is crossed. Overall, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) estimates that there were 10,000 undocumented Brazilians in Georgia in 2023, a 2% of all estimated unauthorized migrants in the state (MPI 2023). Out-of-status Brazilians are concentrated in Cobb County (5,000 estimated undocumented Brazilians, 8% of all estimated unauthorized migrants in the county) and Fulton County (2,000 estimated undocumented Brazilians, and 6% of all estimated unauthorized migrants in the county) (MPI 2023) (see Figure 4).

Some of those who enter with a tourist visa, if they are able to, attempt to avoid becoming out of status by first extending their tourist visa (from six to twelve months, total) and later changing to non-work visas. Additionally, many Brazilian families in the area are of “mixed status,” that is, with a mix of migration and citizenship status in the same family nucleus, including those who are out of status, under temporary visas, and US-born children with citizenship. It is not uncommon to find families in which one or some of the children were born in Brazil and are out of status, while the other(s) were born in the US and have US citizenship, creating a very peculiar kind of inequality between siblings. Detention and deportation have long had a place in the Brazilian migrant experience. Golash-Boza’s (2016) *Deported* draws, among other groups, from Brazilians’ experiences with forced removal from the US. Since 2025, however, Brazil has received an unprecedented number of deportation

5 Some of the literature on Brazilian migration to the United States claims the use of the word *cônsul* (consul) to refer to “coyotes” (e.g. S. Siqueira et al. 2026). In my own fieldwork, I have only seen the use of *atravessadores* or vague phrases such as “the guy who brought me” and “the man who helped me cross.”

flights from the US bringing back deported Brazilian migrants, raising concern from the Brazilian government and organized civil society groups.

However, most Brazilian migrants come from middle-class contexts in their places of origin: prior to migrating, many completed bachelor's and master's degrees, owned property (real estate, land, vehicles), and worked in higher-skilled occupations such as nurse, accountant, and engineer. Consequently, migrating to the US results in a process of deskilling, that is, engaging in a much lower-skilled job than one is qualified for. In this scenario, employment and access to US labor markets is important but not enough to explain the strong ties between the metropolitan Atlanta area and Goiânia. The Brazilian consul in Atlanta (interview 8, 9/6/23, Atlanta GA) stated that, in general, Brazilian communities in the US do not have "very poor people" and have above-average educational levels compared to the general population in both Brazil and the US. To the consul, migrants are typically at least in the "lower middle-classes" in Brazil and even those who enter the US through the south border have basic financial and cognitive resources.

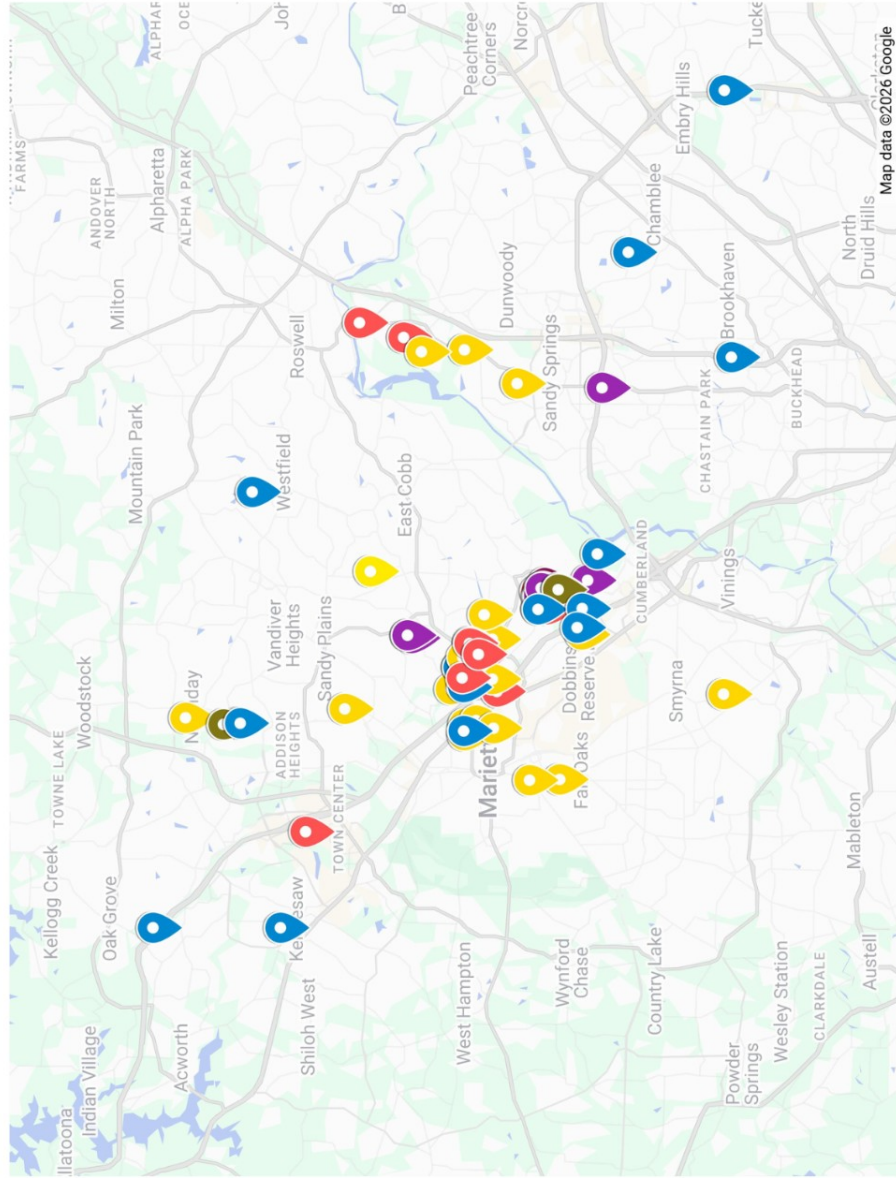
The Marietta area

Initially, Brazilian migrants in the metropolitan Atlanta area settled in Sandy Springs but, over time, the epicenter of the Brazilian community in Georgia shifted to neighboring Marietta. Currently, in Marietta and neighboring towns, there are several Brazilian grocery stores, restaurants, and other businesses, some of which focus exclusively on their community while others cater to Portuguese and English speaking patrons alike. On the east side of Marietta, on a stretch of Powers Ferry Road between Delk and Terrell Mill Roads, there is a concentration of Brazilian businesses that includes the Brazilian Bakery, Unicco Supermarket, Rio Center Nail Salon, Rio Market, Rio Steakhouse, Brazilian Market and Butcher (on

Powers Ferry Road); Minas Grill Emporium (restaurant and grocery store), Enjoy Brazilian Cuisine, Lucimar's Brazilian Beauty Salon, Delícias do Brasil (restaurant), Sabor do Brasil (restaurant) (on Delk Road); Goianão Market, Goianão Bakery, Goianão Restaurant, and the Brazil Fashion Boutique (on Terrell Mill Road). Indeed, this specific area within the town of Marietta was labeled "Little Brazil" by Cobb County officials (Adgie 2024). While the epicenter of Brazilian life in Marietta, however, Little Brazil is far removed from the city's downtown, where the presence of a significant immigrant population is hardly noticeable.

In addition to businesses, Brazilian migrant churches are very significant institutions in the Marietta-based Brazilian community. In Figure 5, I present a non-exhaustive mapping of Brazilian businesses and churches in the metropolitan Atlanta area, compiled through Google Map searches and references obtained throughout my ethnographic fieldwork in the community. I have included as many businesses and churches as I could find, but this migrant landscape is ever-changing. Businesses and churches alike are constantly opening up, closing down, and relocating. I have maintained places that I know have closed or moved in the map, and others might have done so unbeknownst to me. Keeping them in the map is a way of maintaining a "live archive" of the community and still fulfills the main goal of the map, which is to illustrate the breadth and spread of the Brazilian community in the Marietta area.

BRAZILIAN BUSINESSES IN THE MARIETTA AREA (2023-2026)



There are also residential condominiums known for housing many Brazilians and that even offer service and support in Portuguese (see Figure 6). Many Brazilian newcomers move into these condominiums right as they arrive in the area. Among other reasons, it is a convenient part of town for *helpers* to be picked up by employers when they do not have a driver's license and/or a car. In fact, many messages from *helpers* looking for work on the WhatsApp groups highlight “living close to Brazilian stores,” in reference to this particular stretch of Powers Ferry Road, as a selling point. Brazilians who live far from the Little Brazil area, in other parts of Marietta or in towns such as Kennesaw, Acworth, Alpharetta, and Roswell, are more likely to be longer term residents who have intentionally moved to other areas, looking for more affordable rent and better quality housing, after obtaining all the necessary resources to do so.

Figure 6. Signs for apartment rental in the Marietta

The sign in the middle says *falamos português* [we speak Portuguese]



Photo: Clara Lemme Ribeiro (Marietta GA, 2023)

Research questions

Labor has been well established in academic research as a key dimension of migration processes, even when migrants are confined to highly precarized labor markets in places of destination. The precarization of migrant labor in the US has been documented by geographers (Buckley et al. 2017, Parreñas et al. 2021), who reveal the importance of restrictive border policies, racialization processes, and harsh conditions in places of origin in making migrant labor cheap and malleable (De Genova 2023, Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, Walia 2021). This is certainly true for Brazilians in the US. Indeed, feminist labor scholars argue that paid work is intrinsically related to relationships of social reproduction and that intimate relations of care and family are absolutely necessary to understand labor dynamics (T. Bhattacharya 2017, Fraser 2014). Moreover, feminist geographers demonstrate that social reproduction is both a driver and an outcome of migration (Kofman and Raghuram 2015, Schwiter et al. 2018). In Brazilian migration processes, family and care have a central role. First, Brazilian workers are not, as many other migrant groups, escaping violence or poverty, but rather perceive family migration to the US as a strategy to improve their quality of life and ensure a “better future” for their children (Margolis 2013). On the other hand, Brazilian migrants maintain strong bonds with their families in Brazil and consistently exchange emotional and financial support in ways that extend far beyond remittances (Assis 2014).

In sum, I adopt a feminist approach to labor geographies that considers the everyday, intimate experiences of migrants and their families to understand why, how, and with what outcomes migrant workers engage with precarious work in the US and, in that process, establish and maintain these distinct zones of convergence between here and there. Therefore, I ask:

- (1) What are the labor conditions for Brazilian workers in the metropolitan Atlanta area? How do Brazilian migrants access and shape local labor markets in the metropolitan Atlanta area?
- (2) How do Brazilian workers in the metropolitan Atlanta area engage with social reproduction, including daily activities, material conditions, family relationships, and subjective perceptions?
- (3) What social reproduction dynamics support family members in Goiânia? How do Brazilian workers in the metropolitan Atlanta area and family members in Brazil support each other?

Brazilian migration to the US is distinctive, when compared to other Latin American migrant communities, and tells “a specifically *Brazilian geographical* narrative, not a *Latin American* one” (Marcus 2008: 3, italics in the original). This migration process, as mentioned before, stems from middle and lower-middle class backgrounds and is motivated by a “search for a better life,” rather than contexts of poverty, civil war, generalized violence, and severe economic crises. It is also not primarily motivated by remittances, as is the case with some Mexican migration that supports entire rural towns in Mexico (e.g. Kunz 2010), even though Brazilian migrants do send home remittances for specific expenses. While the US is one of the prime destinations for Brazilian emigrants, alongside Portugal and Paraguay (MRE 2024), emigration from Brazil remains a small-scale phenomenon. Once in the US, Brazilian migrants do not tend to mix with other Latin American migrant communities, on the one hand because of previous cultural distinctions and, on the other, they make a concerted effort to differentiate themselves from those they call *hispanos* (see Appendix B: Glossary).

The Brazilian community in the Marietta area is also different from other large Brazilian communities in the US, such as those in Massachusetts and Florida. Brazilian

migration to the Boston area, in particular, is strongly linked to the city of Governador Valadares, in the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil, whereas migration to Atlanta is connected to Goiânia and other cities in the state of Goiás. These two communities, as well as others, have grown through very different networks between here and there, while also being connected to each other through Brazilians who migrate from one community to another in the US. Brazilian migration to the Atlanta area follows the emergence of the so-called Nuevo South – unprecedented Latin American migration to the US south from the 2000s onwards (Guerrero 2017, Kochhar et al. 2005, Winders and Smith 2012) - that redefined ethnic, racial, labor, and social reproduction landscapes in the US southern states.

Road map of dissertation

In sum, this dissertation considers that understanding the specific ways in which Brazilian labor markets in Georgia are precarized is crucial to understand the dynamics of social reproduction between here and there, illuminating the working conditions that Brazilians are “accepting” in order to achieve “better” social reproduction conditions. In turn, social reproduction conditions are also crucial to understand why they consider life in the US to be a “better life” and why they have to “accept” these conditions of precarity in order to achieve a “better life.” Finally, it is also necessary to investigate why Brazilians feel like they cannot achieve this “better life” in Brazil.

Chapter 2 offers a literature review of scholarship on labor geographies, social reproduction, and migration studies that examines differentiated conditions of labor and social reproduction predicated on gender, race, nationality, and citizenship status in order to theorize dynamics of labor and social reproduction in migration contexts. In chapter 3, I present the

research design employed in the present study, in particular the use of life stories as a method. I also discuss the feminist methodological frameworks that animate me, and present a summary of my fieldwork and of the data collected and analyzed in this dissertation. Chapter 4 starts by describing the Brazilian migrant community in the Marietta area based on their backgrounds in Brazil, racial and ethnic identities, and migration status and strategies in the US. It also provides a history of the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, followed by an analysis of its most significant changes. In chapter 5, I examine Brazilian migrants' main motivations to migrate to the US and to Marietta in particular, as well as the contexts of emigration in relation to Brazil's recent history. Working conditions and access to labor markets in the US are discussed in chapter 6, which draws from Brazilian workers' experiences in construction and other low-skilled labor markets. Housecleaning work is examined in chapter 7, with a focus on how differentiated working conditions are construed through gender, migration and citizenship status, and de-skilling processes. In chapter 8, I present Brazilian migrants' living conditions in Marietta, with special attention to the role that Brazilian churches play in terms of social reproduction dynamics. Finally, chapter 9 discusses relationships of social reproduction here and there, focusing on family and care dynamics in Marietta and in Brazil, as well as the particular ways in which migration status shapes social reproduction relationships.

On terminology

Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area use a lot of specific, emic terms to talk about their life and work in the US. These are presented in the glossary included in Appendix B, alongside frequently used and/or hard-to-translate Portuguese words and phrases. The glossary also includes terms and acronyms related to work and immigration policies. I would

like to spotlight two particular terms so that readers are not (or at least *less*) confused. First, *helper*, as noted earlier in this chapter, is used following Brazilian migrants. They use the term in English (even when speaking Portuguese) to refer to Brazilian workers employed by other Brazilians in both construction and housecleaning. The Portuguese equivalent, *ajudante*, is used less frequently than *helper*. For that reason, I use the word *helper* throughout the dissertation, italicized to emphasize its emic character. Second, *buying and selling houses* is used to refer not to real estate, but to the practice of buying and selling houses to clean, or clients, between Brazilian housecleaners (see Appendix B: Glossary). This specifically Brazilian practice is described in detail in chapter 7 and any references to buying and selling houses in that chapter refer to it. Buying and selling real estate, when referred to in this dissertation, is distinctly indicated.

Additionally, I mostly use the term “out of status” to refer to migrants otherwise called undocumented, unauthorized, or “illegal.” First, I have critiques on the inaccuracy of each of these terms. “Illegal,” of course, has been deeply critiqued as representing the viewpoint of the state and has been the target of “no human being is illegal” campaigns. Undocumented is inaccurate given that many migrants without a visa have, indeed, documents. Unauthorized tends to obscure the fact that most migrants without a visa have, indeed, been authorized to enter the US, either through a visa which they later overstay or by border police, who encounter migrants at the border who are allowed to stay and await their deportation trials from within the US territory. Second, my research participants used both the term *sem status* [without status, out of status] and “illegal” to refer to themselves or others without a US visa. Following that, I give preference to the term out-of-status migrants, although I sometimes use the other terms mentioned here (even “illegal,” but always between quotation marks).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The key theoretical goal of this dissertation is to contribute to an “as-yet underdeveloped Marxian theory of migrant labor” (De Genova 2023: 219), taking Brazilian migrant workers’ life stories as the empirical point of departure to understand why, under what circumstances, and with what consequences do workers migrate to participate in highly precarized labor markets, such as construction and housecleaning.

Past research on Brazilian migration to the US has addressed cultural identities, integration, and migration histories through ethnographic research on Brazilian communities such as New York (Margolis 1994), Boston (Martes 1999, 2004, Sales 1999), and Los Angeles (Beserra 2003). Broadly, these studies considered the main cause of Brazilian migration to the US to be the so-called “lost decade” of economic development, the 1980-1990, characterized by hyperinflation, economic stagnation, and increased national debt. This, in turn, led Brazilians with enough resources and US connections to migrate in search of “better opportunities,” argue scholars like Margolis (2013). Previous studies also spotlight connections between Brazilians in the Boston area and the town of Governador Valadares in Minas Gerais (Fusco 2001, S. Siqueira 2009, Joseph 2015). Other work addresses relevant themes such as gendered roles and labor markets (Assis 2014, DeBiaggi 2002, Fleischer 2002), religious affiliations (Levitt 2007, Martes and C. Rodriguez 2004) and working conditions (Brinkerhoff et al. 2019, E. Siqueira et al. 2016, E. Siqueira and Jansen 2011, Tracy et al. 2014). With the exception of Marcus (2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2014) and White et al. (2010), the Marietta community received scant attention in this scholarship. Departing from these studies, I seek to analyze the Brazilian migration to and from non-traditional communities in the US and Brazil and examine the broader implications of this particular migration process to theoretical frameworks on labor and social reproduction, which have yet

to be fully addressed. I also move away from contexts of emigration in the 1980-1990 decade (which recent work continues to describe as motivations for migration, e.g. S. Siqueira et al. 2026) and investigate, instead, more recent Brazilian history in order to contextualize migration processes from the last 20 years.

I also draw from scholarship on the so-called Nuevo South/New Latino South to understand the emergence of the Marietta area as a non-traditional migrant destination in the US. In the early 21st century, new migrant destinations in the US emerged across the country, as migrants started settling in the South and the Midwest instead of traditional gateways such as New York and Los Angeles. Local contexts are crucial in immigrant integration processes, as particular local characteristics, such as the economy, labor markets, racial composition, and especially migration policies, determine migrants' access to jobs, health care, and education (S. Rodríguez and Monreal 2017). When compared with more traditional immigrant destinations in the US such as California or the Northeast, the US South presents a particular context in terms of restrictive migration policies, history of segregation, and established immigrant communities (Winders and Smith 2012). Thus, the exponential uptick on Latine (see Appendix B: Glossary) migration to Southern states between 1990 and 2000 (Kochhar et al. 2005) forged new possibilities of integration for Latine communities, including new experiences of racialization, labor market access, and transnationalism, examined by scholarship on the New Latino South (Winders and Smith 2012, S. Rodríguez 2021). Much scholarly attention was given, in particular, to the effects of a burgeoning brown population in a region marked by binary Black and white racial politics and lack of experience with incoming migration. As this scholarship contends, Latine migration to the US shows that race-making is a place-specific process, in which migrants engage with and affect a specifically Southern racial formation (Guerrero 2017, I. Rodríguez 2019), redefining regional racial

politics (Winders 2005). Meanwhile, researchers also spotlight Southern states' reaction to the new Latine population through the enactment of strict migration policies, particularly after 9/11 (Margolis 2008, Winders 2007). While scholars and journalists alike read this situation as a “Juan Crow” era, Márquez (2019) and Matos (2019) both argue that this designation is problematic, as it hides the historical continuity between of racial oppression as well as the continued presence of Latine migrants in the US South. Brazilians were not included in such analyses and, to be fair, their presence in the US South is relatively small, compared to other Latin American migrants in the area.

In this chapter, I review existing literature on labor and social reproduction in order to present the different sets of scholarship that I draw from and, in turn, contribute to. I start by exploring conceptualizations of differentiated working conditions and precarization of labor. In doing so, I argue that to understand Brazilian workers' engagement with such labor markets, it is necessary to engage with social reproduction scholarship. I then turn to theorizations of the relationship between the spheres of social reproduction and labor, and differentiated conditions of social reproduction, followed by an analysis of social reproduction in migration research. Finally, I discuss some important interventions to a Marxian theory of migrant labor offered by the reviewed literature and my own interpretation of it. In particular, I am animated by Miraftab's (2011: 394) critique of implicit arguments that maintain that “the experiences of the North are generalizable but those of the South are case studies (...).” I add to this critique that not only Global South contexts, but also marginalized contexts in Global North countries, have been made sites of empirics but not of theorizing. In what follows, I attempt to address this tension by putting marginalized contexts at the center of my own conceptualization.

Labor geographies and differentiated working conditions

Labor geographies emerged from economic geographies and geographies of work in Anglo contexts as a sub-discipline that foregrounds “the active roles of workers and workers’ organizations” rather than focusing on a structuralist approach to labor (Peck 2018: 466), also taking into account broader social and economic processes that engender debased working conditions. In an assessment of labor geographies since the 1970s, Peck (2018) highlights as main scholarship themes: processes of economic restructuring, the deregulation of labor, the reorganization of workers beyond traditional labor movements, and issues of social reproduction. Additionally, feminist geographers discuss how gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other differences recreate labor markets and spatial configurations of work (McDowell 2014, 2015, 2016). These claims build on previous research that demonstrates how gender, race, and citizenship status are tangled in the United States in particular since the Reconstruction Era, creating different conditions of labor and freedom (Glenn 2004). In particular, labor geographies addresses immigrant workers and issues of mobility and labor (Strauss 2020), arguing that such research can advance the discipline in two ways: (i) geographical scale-based analyses of migrations helps unpack processes that render migrant labor more precarious (Kelly 2012), and (ii) immigrant labor studies offers new methodological, empirical, and conceptual challenges to the discipline (Buckley et al. 2017). In what follows, I start by addressing different approaches to the question of how gender shapes uneven working conditions in feminist labor geographies and beyond. Subsequently, I engage with scholarship on racial capitalism to examine how the racialization of workers has also affected labor conditions. I also discuss scholarship that links together migration, racialization, and borders in order to show the need for combined analyses of racial capitalism

and migration processes. Then, I engage with different approaches to processes of labor precarization through which I conceptualize working conditions of Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area.

Research on women's labor within and outside of geography addresses issues of invisibilization, low wages, and work on care and domestic sectors. A feminist critique of globalization studies demonstrated the importance of gendered labor and social reproduction at the global scale, in spite of its exclusion from such debates (Nagar et al. 2002). Moreover, feminist geographies offer a reframing of the concept of work by including unwaged labor, such as domestic work, mothering, and volunteering, which opens up for analysis new sites of labor, such as the home, sweatshops, and other unregulated sites (England and Lawson 2005). Feminist contributions to labor geographies also include identifying ways in which work is gendered and discussing the spatiality and the scaling of work (England and Lawson 2005). In analyzing the future of work through a feminist lens, Reid-Musson et al. (2020) argue that transformations in labor dynamics, including automation, may deepen class, gender, and class differences.

Research on women workers located in the Global South demonstrates how gender shapes uneven labor conditions. Fernández-Kelly (1983), in her study on workers in Mexican maquiladoras, describes the impact that global processes of capital accumulation had on the local labor market, creating underpaid factory jobs for Mexican women as a basis for international capital's profits. Decades later, Wright (2006) reassessed these workers' conditions particularly through their disposability, contending that spatial circuits of global capital contribute to make a female, third world, and disposable worker that, nevertheless, "embodies a form of labor crucial for the materialization of global capitalism around the world" (Wright 2006: 3). Lawson (1999), in her research with garment-industry workers in

Ecuador, describes how men and women are differentially situated according to gendered discourses of skill, exposing a relation between place, work, and gendered identities that, in turn, reflect on place-based relations of power. More recently, Mezzadri (2017) described women's labor in India's garment industry as invisibilized, underpaid, and restricted to domestic spaces, foregrounding the feminization of work as a cost-reduction strategy. Additionally, Dutta (2019, 2020) explored everyday experiences, decision-making, agency and emotional bonds for women workers at a Nokia factory in India.

Feminist labor scholars also delved into women's work in the care sector, particularly in Global North contexts (Schwiter and Steiner 2020). Glenn (2010) argues that, in the United States, women have been coerced into performing either free or underpaid care work, for their families or employers, and as a consequence this has remained a form of “cheap labor,” particularly for poor, immigrant women of color (Glenn 2010). Duffy (2011), through an analysis of one century of United States Census data, challenges traditional narratives around care work by demonstrating that it has always been predicated on precarized conditions taken on by women of color. By studying Filipino domestic workers in Italy and the United States, Parreñas (2015) describes the pervasiveness of cheap immigrant care labor across Global North contexts, arguing that these workers occupy the role of “servants of globalization,” that is, low-waged workers in globalized capitalism. In the same vein, Chang (2016) investigates Third World women's care and reproductive labor in the United States, demonstrating the importance of that work to support households and the ways in which such responsibility is used to constrain these workers into poor working conditions. Finally, England (2017) foregrounds the home as a workplace where the workers are more vulnerable to exploitation, hence the organizing of domestic workers in North America. Black et al. (2019) argue that internet craft platforms can also make the home a precarized workspace, especially for

women, although crafting may not be seen as labor in the same way as other forms of labor performed within domestic spaces.

As scholarship on racial capitalism argues extensively, working conditions are racialized as well as gendered. Racial capitalism has been defined in multiple ways, across a wide-spanning, multi-disciplinary scholarship. It is most often associated with Black Marxism, in which Cedric Robinson (1983) explores how the emergence of the capitalist social formation builds on forms of social differentiation prevalent in Middle-Age Europe, termed “racialism.” Robinson (1983) argues that capital accumulation has depended on racial difference since the Industrial Revolution, when a racial distinction between English and Irish workers was used as a tool for increased labor exploitation. Building on Robinson, Gilmore (2018) states that, in contexts such as pre-capitalist rural England, group differentiation between people who would eventually be classified as white structured foundational hierarchies of vulnerability and premature death. Stuart Hall (2020[1980]), in turn, contends that racially-structured social formations, such as capitalism, are the result of the articulation between a mode of production (capitalism) and systems of dominance (racial oppression).

Racial differentiation, indeed, extrapolated Europe. Analyzing the intimate relationship between the continents of America, Europe, Asia, and Africa emerging from colonialism, Lowe (2015) demonstrates that the white subject of free labor was constituted based on racialized unfree labor, as British and American colonialist enterprises subjugated Indigenous, African, and Chinese labor within the United States in order to create the ideal free waged industrial era worker in both the United States and the United Kingdom (Lowe 2015). Karuka (2019) also foregrounds intercontinental relationships mediated by colonialism and imperialism that determines conditions of free and unfree labor in the project of railroad colonialism in the United States, in which Indigenous land was occupied for the construction

of railroads built by racialized unfree labor of immigrants of color, such as Chinese workers. Other scholars addressed Marx's lack of acknowledgement of the critical role that colonialism, Indigenous dispossession, African slavery, and the transatlantic slave trade played in primitive accumulation (W. Johnson 2004, Nichols 2020, Singh 2016, Smallwood 2017).

At its root, the concept of racial capitalism posits that the capitalist mode of production emerged from and with group-differentiated vulnerability and marginalization, which in turn shapes labor conditions of racialized workers. To Melamed, (2015:77) “[capital] can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups,” and race becomes, historically, the framework through which such inequalities are established. G. Bhattacharyya (2018), in turn, understands the thrust of Robinson’s analysis to be that the working class is not made homogenous but rather that contexts of racism that precede capitalism set up a process of differentiation of workers, along with other forms of identity. Thus, “racial capitalism is a way of understanding the role of racism in enabling key moments of capitalist development” and how differentiated populations are mobilized in the service of capital accumulation (G. Bhattacharyya 2018:ix). For Issar (2021), capital does not exploit an undifferentiated mass, as land and labor are shaped by racialized relations of power, while Bledsoe and Wright (2019) also point to a racialized devaluation of bodies and land. Further analyses have outlined how racial capitalism intersects with forms of premature death, incarceration, and disposability for workers of color (Gilmore 2002, 2007, McIntyre and Nast 2011). The consequence of these studies is a critique on the universality of free waged labor as the basis of capital accumulation, which was exclusively tied to white people in both colonizer and colonized

contexts, and a methodological approach to understanding how race impacts labor conditions until this day.

In the US, in particular, processes of gendering and racialization have been mobilized to favor processes of capital accumulation (Gilmore 2002, Collins 2010, Freshour 2019, 2020). As shown by research on the gendering and racialization of domestic labor markets, a variety of policies pushed women of different racialized groups into domestic work (Glenn 1992). According to Glenn (1992), these included high school education that prepared young women of color for domestic service and unemployment programs that directed women of color towards jobs in the domestic sector. Cooke (1950) traces that same racialization back to slavery, as she describes the post-Emancipation gatherings of Black women waiting for white women to come and hire them as domestic workers for the day in New York City as the “Bronx Slave Market.” Once hired, these Black workers faced an assumption from white women that they did not need to be paid and were submissive to hard work and humiliation (Cooke 1950). Furthermore, Glenn (2004) and Collins (2010) show that access to welfare policies has been historically racialized in the US. In the 1920s and 1930s, social welfare programs used racialized criteria to select their recipients. These programs operated based on the assumption that white women did not work, therefore were in need of welfare, while Black and Latina women were deemed “employable” and typically denied support, especially during times when seasonal farming jobs were available (Glenn 2004), which challenges the assumption that state-provided welfare was universally available before neoliberalism. Much later, the US welfare reform of 1996 established strict work requirements for women to access welfare, in which women – who were overwhelmingly Black and Latina – had to work in low-wage jobs while also relinquishing forms of support they were able to access prior to being enrolled in these programs (Collins 2010).

Racialization regimes have always included migration dynamics in establishing categories and hierarchies. Indeed, Cedric Robinson is quite emphatic on this point: he opens *Black Marxism* with “The historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism” (1983: 9). Racism and nationalism both emerge from Middle-Age Europe “racialism,” as part of antagonistic differentiations between peoples living in the continent that included forms of migration and slavery. In the context of an emerging capitalist social formation, bourgeoisies of particular cultural and political groups competed against each other, while relying on the armies and working classes of their own political and cultural groups for production and warfare, when necessary. Migrant and enslaved workers within these groups would encounter differentiation, vulnerabilization, and marginalization, as they would be seen as competitors to “native” emerging working classes (Robinson 1983). This creates a simultaneous process of homogenization and differentiation that will later, through religious, scientific, and political ideologies, constitute themselves as race and nationality (Omi and Winant 2015). Robinson (1983) thus identifies how race and nationality emerge as distinct but co-constitutive forms of social differentiation, deeply informed by migration processes. Robinson (1983) offers the idea that migrations were a key component in the formation of social differentiation processes in Europe, which are further redefined and expanded through colonialism and modernization. Robinson (1983) elaborates on that process more clearly – including the role of migrations in working-class social differentiation processes – in his analysis of British and Irish workers in 19th century England. Given conditions of poverty and famine in Ireland, Irish workers migrated to England to seek labor in the emerging industrial system, becoming one of its crucial elements (Robinson 1983). Meanwhile, the Irish laborer was differentiated from their British counterpart, constituting an “Irish race” that was considered inferior by both industrial

capitalists and other workers (Robinson 1983). This prompted British employers to believe that “the cheap market value of [the Irish worker’s] labor was but its most rational form,” and the Irish worker was described by E.P. Thompson as “the cheapest labor in Western Europe” (Robinson 1983: 39). To Robinson (1983:42), then, rather than being a “singular social and historical entity,” the British working class was differentiated in terms of ethnicity, nationality, and race, and the reiteration of such differences was “a critical aspect of the triumph of capitalism in the nineteenth century.” Other authors indeed counter that the foundational moment for racial capitalism was the transatlantic slave trade rather than European feudalism. Yet the key role migrations play in establishing racial regimes is widely acknowledged. In the US, racial projects that sought to crystallize it as a white nation recurred to the persecution and restriction of both racialized peoples in the country – such as Black and Indigenous – and non-European migrants.

To Omi and Winant (2015), racial projects link together structure and signification, materiality and meaning, everyday experiences and representation. If the US state has continuously designed this country as a white one, this is evident for instance in the restrictions of citizenship to “free white people” from 1790 to 1870, after which it is slowly and irregularly extended to racialized groups. R. Jones (2021), in turn, contends that immigration laws are fundamentally about racial exclusion and have been used, from the 19th century through today, to protect the fiction of the US as a white country: “For many people, passports, citizenship laws, borders, and immigration restrictions do not evoke racial exclusion in the same way that slavery and segregation do”, even though immigration laws have always acted in the interest of racial exclusion (R. Jones 2021: 10). De Genova (2023) further links together the devaluation of racialized and migrant labor through racial capitalist dynamics. To Walia (2021), immigration itself is a “race-making regime.” In this sense, the

US state uses border control – not physically constrained to border zones, but rather a complex decentralized network that spans from airports to detention centers to county jails and is under constant expansion – as a mechanism for racialized population control, labor regulation, and capitalist accumulation. Walia (2012) also parallels migration enforcement in the US to internal racialized borders excluding Black and Indigenous peoples, noting that contemporary migration control institutions derived from Black population control during and after slave trade, including racist death squads and the KKK – which held a strong anti-immigration stance as well (R. Jones 2021). When it comes to migrant workers, then, their differentiation is shaped by bordering regimes that are inherently racialized. In this sense, immigration enforcement, control, and surveillance policies have always been incorporated into the US racialized labor regime. It is worth noting, however, that US racial regimes are geographically and historically contextualized and that Latin American contexts cannot be read through this same lens (Rodríguez-Silva 2012) - in chapter 4, I offer a detailed reading of the tensions that arise from US-based and Brazilian racial regimes in the experiences of Brazilian migrant workers in the US.

Geographers and other scholars demonstrate the entanglement between bordering regimes and racialized exclusion predicated on citizenship and nationality. While the 19th century is typically considered a “free migration” period, it was mostly free for European migrants, even if they were not yet considered white (Sáenz and Douglas 2015). Jewish, Polish, and Italian migrants would be attributed a specific second racial classification after “white”, such as “hebrew” for Jewish migrants (Sáenz and Douglas 2015). However, things shifted in the first half of the 20th century, as Jewish, Polish, and Italian migrants started being construed as white: around 1940, the second racial classification was dropped and the US census ceased distinguishing between whites with foreign-born and US-born parents

(Sáenz and Douglas 2015). Meanwhile, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 severely restricted migrations and was promptly followed by other similar laws, until the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 created national quotas for immigration that highly favored European countries such as England, Germany, and Ireland (R. Jones 2021). In 1965, the Hart-Celler Act revoked the national quota policy and instated a new era of immigration into the US that changed international migration dynamics.

Later, anti-Blackness rooted violent measures employed by the US state against Cuban and Haitian asylum-seekers in the 1980s (Loyd and Mountz 2018). More recently, aggressive policies of border and immigration control have prevailed in both Republican and Democrat federal governments. While the Clinton administration's immigration law reform established many of the rules that push migrants into undocumented statuses, Obama was labelled by some as the "deporter-in-chief" given the extensive deportation regime run during his administration (Walia 2021). Meanwhile, Trump's anti-immigration platform has been fueled by an extensive eugenicist, white supremacist project focused on immigrant exclusion (Jones 2021). As Golash-Boza (2016) makes evident, the US deportation regime is racially directed and is inscribed in a broader system of racialized social control. At smaller scales, local labor regimes are shaped by the racialization of migrant workers and (dis)regulated by carceral immigration enforcement (Montange 2022). In migrants' lived experiences, racialized exclusion at the border may operate through conflated national and racial markers, such as skin tone, eye color, and hair type (Ybarra 2019). And even when permanence is allowed, asylum-seekers – themselves mostly Black and brown refugees from marginalized countries – are forced into forms of social control through objectifying narratives around "deserving" asylum (Morris 2023).

The key argument that these different scholars offer is that access to labor markets, as well as working conditions, is regulated by gender, race, nationality, and migration/citizenship status. Additionally, these are co-constitutive and interlinking in the context of labor markets, and form the backdrop to the lives of the Brazil people whose lives I attempt to capture in this dissertation.

Labor precarization processes

Labor scholars argue that precarized working conditions have been engendered by large-scale transformations in labor markets. According to Waite (2009), the concept of precarity is used by geographers in two different ways. The first one is inspired by Judith Butler's work on "precarious life" (Butler 2004) and looks at precarity as a broader condition of life itself, as it becomes more vulnerable through violence, terrorism, and war. In that sense, Ettlinger (2007) argues for an unbounded concept of precarity, one that could be extended to all times and places. The second one, advocated by Waite (2009: 416), looks at precarity as a condition specific to working experiences. Similarly, Standing (2011) puts forward a broad-ranging concept of labor precarity based on lack of work-based identity, security, and access to full citizenship that constitutes a new class, the precariat. Strauss (2018a, 2018b) claims precarious work emerged as concept that described working conditions in the post-Fordist era in the Global North, with the dismantlement of standard relationships of employment, also calling attention to critiques from feminist and critical race geographers that spotlighted the fact that "standard relationships of employment" were only a reality for some, whilst women, workers of color, and immigrants in the Global North were partially or fully excluded from these conditions. Tyner (2016) argues that a foregrounding of death

within geography would allow the discipline to grapple with contemporary problems such as precarity and precarious life, double-exploitation of laboring bodies, and truncated lives.

As a result, immigrant workers face particularly precarized labor conditions, created through global economic and social contexts (McDowell 2015) as well as migrant status and citizenship policies (Buckley et al. 2017). To Ferguson and McNally (2015), the working class is made global through transnational economic processes, such as primitive accumulation and capital flows, that force workers to relocate and enter the destination's labor market under precarious conditions, pushing migrant workers into a state of "hyper-precarity" (Lewis et al. 2015). To the authors, labor and immigration regimes create combined layers of insecurity and unfreedom that are "better conceptualized as hyper-precarious rather than 'merely' precarious" (Lewis et al. 2014: 593). Scholarship on migrant labor precarization demonstrates this process through studies on temporary labor migrations, deportation regimes, and precarious non-citizenship (Parreñas et al. 2021). Furthermore, studies on temporary migration programs demonstrate how migrants are bound to their employers as well as their workplace, while also facing insecurity and uncertainty (Reid-Musson 2017, Strauss and McGrath 2017, Walia 2021). However, it is not only temporary migrants that are subject to precarized labor conditions. Bordering policies also create a regime of labor precarization through undocumentation. Walia (2021: 132) particularly notes how border controls "manufacture spatialized difference," capitalizing on it through exploitative labor regimes predicated on precarized migration statuses. In that sense, De Genova (2002) argues that migrant "illegality" is produced not only to exclude migrants from destination countries, but most importantly to incorporate them into labor markets under vulnerable and precarious conditions. "Deportability," then, is what renders migrants a disposable labor commodity, rather than deportation itself (De Genova 2002). Golash-Boza (2016), and in turn, ties mass

deportation regimes to neoliberal reforms that intensified economic inequalities globally. Building on De Genova (2002), Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) expand this framework through the concept of multiplication of labor. Multiplication of labor means labor was intensified, diversified and heterogenized, and borders became central to understanding new divisions of labor within the contemporary globalizing world (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Therefore, not only unauthorized migrants are subjected to debased labor conditions, but so do migrants in precarious, noncitizen legal statuses (Parreñas et al. 2021). Analyzing temporary migrant workers programs in Canada, Strauss and McGrath (2017) also argue that unfreedom encompasses several practices beyond human trafficking, such as employer and location bindings, time of permanence restrictions, housing specifications, and organizing and unionizing restrictions. Based on these discussions, Reid-Musson (2017) demonstrates a particular form of unfreedom for temporary migrant farmworkers in Canada whose mobilities are constrained as a result of the labor policies to which they are subjected, while Schwiter et al. (2018) take up a similar theme regarding the constrained agency of migrant live-in caregivers.

The precarization of labor is deepened by the growth of surplus populations, which further pressures workers to participate in precarized labor markets. Marxist scholarship departing from the concept of relative surplus populations (Marx 1976) argues that renewed processes of expulsions and dispossession have contributed to the growth of populations that are surplus relative to capital's need for labor force (Sassen 2014, Li 2009, 2017). Li (2009) discusses surplus populations in the context of rural dispossession as a global process that leads to the creation of contingents of surplus populations when they are not absorbed as labor force, therefore being either be made to live – through state-sponsored politics of reproduction – or left to die – out of violence or just lack of reproduction conditions. Li (2017) also uses

the concept of surplus populations to critique development projects in the Global South that purport themselves as successful without acknowledging the creation of these surplus contingents through dispossession. Within geography, scholars have used the concept of surplus populations to think about premature death and racial capitalism in the United States (Pulido 2016, Tyner 2013). Gilmore (2007), in particular, discusses the project of prison construction in California as an articulation of four surpluses – land, capital, state capacity, and labor – to solve a crisis of over-accumulation. These surpluses, including surplus populations, are put in motion and “reincorporated” into capital accumulation through the “prison fix” (Gilmore 2007). Also thinking through the racialization of surplus, McIntyre and Nast (2011) discuss the spatialization of race in bio- and necropolises in both the Global North and the Global South. To them, hyper-exploitation processes are deeply racialized as well as the contemporary production of surplus populations (McIntyre and Nast 2011: 1466). Yates (2011) argues that capitalism speaks a logic of human disposability, that is, as a waste resulting from the production process that particularly affects racialized surplus populations. Through Mike Davis (2004), Yates proposes the idea of a permanent surplus, a population with little to no possibility of ever being exploited by capital.

Having reviewed some main academic scholarship on labor geographies, differentiated working conditions and precarization of labor, I want to offer a generative framework that pulls these multiple threads together and puts them in relation to Marxian analyses of global processes of capital accumulation. To do so, I draw on the critical theory of value (Kurz 2014, 2016, Postone 1993, Scholz 2014) and discuss its implications for migration analyses (see also Giavarotti et al. 2023). Critical approaches based on Marxian theories of value argue that precarity and superfluidity are the result of historical technical innovations since the Fordist era exempting production processes from human labor,

contradictorily reducing overall levels of surplus-value appropriation and demanding increased labor exploitation (Kurz 1992, 2019[1995], 2016, Postone 1993). Postone (1993) also remarks on the relationships of impersonal domination implied in capitalist dynamics. In other words, labor precarity, especially in jobs available to women, non-white communities, and immigrants, is a concrete, empirical expression of this crisis of accumulation that, by creating precarious workers, masks a more worrisome production of a mass of superfluous, disposable workers (Kurz 2015, Scholz 2019).

In this interpretation, instead of multiple processes of crisis and resolution that linearly and necessarily converge into capital accumulation, the capitalist mode of production and reproduction is intrinsically contradictory. As the development of productive forces inexorably expels living labor from production processes, it undermines the very fundament of capital accumulation, that is, the production of value through labor exploitation and surplus value extraction. In other words, the more the capitalist mode of production and reproduction develops itself, the more it destroys its own foundation, constituting an immanent crisis. Capital accumulation, thus, approached its historical limit with the advent of microelectronics and advanced automatization of production, in the 1970s, in which the massive substitution of labor force sharpened vertiginously, undermining actual value production. In varying degrees, labor has been automated, substituted and expelled from sectors as diverse as industry, agriculture, services, and care work. More recently, the emergence of artificial intelligence has also threatened cognitive, high-skilled work. Of course, the roof does not fall over our heads all at once. This framework does not mean to argue that people are working less: chronic unemployment, increased competition for jobs and the relative superfluidity of labor are expressions of the accumulation crisis thus interpreted but so are extended working hours for those who retain jobs, the piecing together of multiple jobs in order to make a living, and

increase pressure from employers to extend their hours of surplus labor (i.e. the hours in a working day that produce surplus value, Marx 1976: 325). In sum, the multiplication – intensification, diversification, and heterogenization – of labor that Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) describe. The implication of this framework for migration studies is that it offers an important backdrop of broad processes of capital accumulation that, in turn, affect and shape workers' living and working conditions in ways that prompt emigration from certain places and immigration into others, especially in face of increased migration enforcement, citizenship restrictions, and precarization of migrant labor.

Indeed, the precarization of labor affects the material conditions of worker reproduction in myriad ways. Marx (1976) defined the contradictory freedom of workers: while they are free to enter labor contracts, they are simultaneously free from the means of production, that is, their social reproduction is dependent upon their ability to sell their labor force. At the same time, the outcome of social reproduction is the replenishment of said labor force to continue the cycle of capital accumulation. So workers are forced to labor in order to ensure their social reproduction and, at the same time, are only able to reproduce themselves because of labor, so they can show up for work again the next day. Best (2021), coming from a value theory perspective, argues that capital accumulation logics are indifferent to workers' social reproduction conditions, as long as the necessary labor force shows up for work everyday. At the same time, it is the relationships of social reproduction that make all work possible every day.

In this section, I engaged with scholarship that demonstrates how access to labor markets and working conditions are gendered, racialized, and migrantized. I also discussed different approaches to processes of labor precarization. However, given the deleterious impacts of the precarization of labor on workers' lives, it seems contradictory that Brazilian

migrants would use participation in construction and housecleaning labor markets to achieve better living conditions. Indeed, to understand Brazilian workers' participation in precarized labor markets in the US, it is necessary to engage with scholarship on social reproduction. In the next section, I present key arguments in social reproduction theory and how feminist scholars address the dialectical relationship between the spheres of labor and social reproduction.

Social reproduction theory

For this dissertation, social reproduction is defined as “the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally” (Laslett and Brenner 1989: 382). This definition includes household activities such as cooking, cleaning, child and elder care, emotional labor, among others), state and privately sponsored activities such as health care, retirement, and social security, and the material conditions of social reproduction, such as food security, housing, consumption standards, health, and others. Feminist geographers, in particular, highlight the spatial relationship between where workers are located and where social reproduction happens; in other words, the spatial dynamics that define where labor is and where social reproduction happens, and how that impacts workers in turn. Katz (2001) notes the consequences of globalization in redefining social reproduction spatialities, connecting once distant places. Additionally, Mitchell et al. (2004) foreground a spatial, temporal, and relational blurring of work and “non-work” fueled by neoliberal policies, a blurring that imprints itself onto bodies, identities, materialities, and economies (Meehan and

Strauss 2015). Another crucial theme in terms of the geographies of social reproduction are the uneven material conditions across different regions at a variety of scales.

I start this section by engaging with earlier approaches to social reproduction, followed by the specific contributions of feminist geographers to this debate. I then discuss how conditions of social reproduction have been differentiated based on race, nationality, and migration/citizenship status, particularly in the US. I depart from G. Bhattacharyya's (2021: 50) argument that, while social differentiation in racial capitalism defines workers' conditions of social reproduction, "the degree and character of reproductive work" become a marker of difference in and of itself. The capacity for workers to replenish themselves daily and intergenerationally, as defined at the beginning of this section, is fundamentally defined by social difference – in particular, those forms of difference that appear as race, nationality, migration status. A key process within racial capitalism is, then, the racialized unevenness of social reproduction relationships, practices, and material conditions in such a way that burdens marginalized families more severely. I argue that there is a race-blindness in some of the key arguments in social reproduction theory that echoes Miraftab's (2011) critique at the beginning of this chapter. In highlighting this issue, I aim to theorize from marginalized experiences of social reproduction. Finally, I address the specific ways in which migration research engages with debates on social reproduction.

Earlier approaches to social reproduction contend that women contribute to capital accumulation in specific ways as they are responsible for producing the labor force commodity through pregnancy, birth, child raising, and domestic work (Dalla Costa and James 1972). In that sense, house- and care-work are indispensable for capital as they support the reproduction of the labor force every day and intergenerationally (Federici 2012, Vogel 1983). The last couple of decades have seen a renewed interest in social reproduction

approaches, constituting the field generally known as social reproduction theory (SRT). This scholarship revisits classic themes, such as the role of reproduction in capital accumulation and value production (Fraser 2014, Mezzadri 2019, 2021), the boundaries between production and reproduction (Winders and Smith 2019) and between work and non-work (Mitchell et al. 2004), while also suggesting a new research agenda that includes the debasing of social welfare under neoliberalism (Fraser 2017, T. Bhattacharya 2017), the financialization of social reproduction (Strauss 2023), and environmental issues (Rodríguez-Rocha 2021, Naidu 2023).

Social reproduction theory emerged from feminist readings of Marx. In Marx's work, particularly *Capital, Volume 1*, the concept of reproduction is used in a broader sense that includes the maintenance of individual and social capitalist relations, understood as simple and extended reproduction, with little to no mention of domestic labor, gendered division of labor, or women's roles beyond offering cheap labor force during the Industrial Revolution in England (Marx 1976). Engels (1942), in turn, addressed family arrangements and women's responsibility over the household in England, but without those considerations deeply permeating Marx's argument about capital production and accumulation. Dalla Costa and James (1972) critique the lack of acknowledgement in Marx's oeuvre, as well as in Marxist-based movements, of women's particular relation to capital, as they are responsible for producing the commodity of labor force through pregnancy, giving birth, child raising, and domestic work. Along with Federici (2012), Dalla Costa and James (1972) supported the international Wages for Housework campaign that articulated women's demands for paid housework as a way of halting the exploitation of women's labor within the home and to confront the inferiorization of women through domestic care. Bringing in the concept of social reproduction to discuss gendered roles performed by male breadwinners and female housewives, Laslett and Brenner (1989) define work and reproduction as two separate spheres

in bourgeois and working-class families in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, briefly addressing the fact that the ideal male-breadwinner-female-housewife model did not apply to Black and immigrant women in the same way, since they also participated in waged labor.

Feminist geographers brought the concept of social reproduction into the discipline to analyze its processes at different scales. Summarizing the ways in which geographers conceptualized the relationship between the spheres of labor and social reproduction in Anglo literature, Winders and Smith (2019) devised four dominant imaginaries that go from a stark separation between production and reproduction during the Fordist period to the collapsing of the sphere separation during processes of neoliberalization. Rodríguez-Rocha (2021), in turn, identifies in geographies of social reproduction an initial commitment to Marxist and Marxian frameworks, a turn to post-structuralist approaches (namely intersectionality and post/decolonial studies), and a contemporary concern with themes such as the financialization of social reproduction, socio-ecological reproduction, and resistance. Katz (2001) looks at the global scale, arguing that globalization changed conditions of social reproduction everywhere, even though it still happens primarily at local scales. Katz's (2001) account understands productive and reproductive spheres to be separate, yet overlapping. On the other hand, Mitchell et al. (2004) consider that this separation of spheres is conceptually inadequate to understand what they see as contemporary transformations of the capitalist world – although their empirical focus is limited to the Anglo Global North – and propose instead the concept of “life's work”, that is, the work necessary to maintain life. The strict separation between labor and social reproduction spheres, in this account, is not enough to understand articulations between work and “non-work”, as well as unwaged and non-capitalist forms of work (Mitchell et al. 2004). The authors' framing of this sphere blurring as a novelty,

however, demonstrates their over-focus on social reproduction and labor arrangements exclusively in Global North contexts, where this articulation of work and non-work became evident after welfare state policies were disrupted in the late twentieth century due to the establishment of neoliberalism as the prevalent mode of social regulation. Meehan and Strauss (2015), in particular, examine these processes as a precarization of social reproduction. However, as they do so, they look exclusively at how reproductive conditions became more unstable for white, middle-class, Global North families, without addressing racialized contexts in the Global North or Global South historical and contemporary social reproduction arrangements.

Differentiated conditions of social reproduction

Processes of racialization have shaped not only working conditions and access to labor markets, but also the relationships, practices, and material conditions of daily and intergenerational social reproduction. Regarding the role of racialization in social reproduction theory, Teeple Hopkins (2015) argues that, while scholars such as Mitchell et al. (2004) acknowledge that marginalized and subordinated women have taken most of the burden of domestic labor and social reproduction, they do not reframe their analysis of the interaction of production and reproduction spheres through the category of race. Meanwhile, Black feminist work discusses racial differentiation in home and family structures, productive and reproductive roles played by women, access to welfare programs, among other issues intimately placed within the sphere of social reproduction (cf. Hill Collins 1990, hooks 1981, among others).

For starters, Black enslaved women in the antebellum period played a crucial role as domestic workers for plantation owners, as white and Black women played different roles

within their own families (A. Davis 1971, Morgan 2004). Angela Davis (1981) specifically notes that, in that context, white women were fundamentally defined as excluded from labor and as “just” housewives, while Black enslaved women were in the same productive roles as men and did not face inferiorization in their own domestic lives. Meanwhile, enslaved women performed both the labor of reproducing the white family of the plantation owner and, with the ban on slave trade, the literal reproduction of a slave labor force through childbirth (A. Davis 1981). Further, A. Davis (1981) spotlights the fact that, while white women worked primarily as housewives, Black women in the US had been simultaneously responsible for waged labor and housework since the Reconstruction era, as reported by activists Marvel Cooke (1950) and Claudia Jones (2019[1949]). C. Jones (1949: 5) further remarks on the constitution of Black families during the Fordist period, as she notes that Black women “not only constitute the largest percentage of women heads of families, but are the main breadwinners” among Black families, dismantling the prevalence of male-breadwinner/female-housewife family models. In a way, C. Jones (1949) describes a “one-earner” family, in which Black women perform by themselves both roles of breadwinner and housewife. Married Black women also typically worked, according to C. Jones (1949), because their husbands’ wages hardly ever constituted a “family wage.”

In analyzing the legacies of slavery and segregation on social reproduction arrangements, Glenn (1992) considers forms of paid and unpaid social reproduction work, spotlighting in particular the racial division of paid reproductive labor as a way of integrating critical studies on race and gender. She demonstrates how a racial division of labor pushed women of color – Black, Chicana, Latina, and Asian women – in the United States to reproductive work in private and public settings, and argues for a simultaneous construction of said labor as gendered, racialized, and devalued (Glenn 1992). Freshour (2017)

demonstrates how the lack of welfare policies, as a crisis of social reproduction, affects Black and immigrant women in the United States and pushes them to precarized labor in industries such as poultry. In turn, Strauss (2018c) considers that racialized reproductive contexts in North America demand a reframing of social reproduction that goes beyond breadwinner and housewife roles redesigning it in terms of power and justice.

Beyond Global North contexts, Mies (1986) discusses themes such as sexual and international divisions of labor, the “housewifization” of labor, and ongoing processes of primitive accumulation, announcing what are relevant topics of feminist analysis until this day. Mies (1986) also looks at the world scale, meaning she considers Third World/Global South contexts in her analysis as much as First World/Global North ones.

As they evolved, studies on social reproduction moved beyond sexual and gender divisions of labor and built on previous research to extend the themes covered by social reproduction theory. Federici (2004) explores the European Middle Age witch hunts to demonstrate how the process of primitive accumulation was also a process of creating the division of spheres between production and reproduction, and its attribution to the respective genders. By studying reproductive arrangements in Mexico, Kunz (2010) refutes the thesis of a crisis of social reproduction caused by the state’s disinvestment in welfare policies by arguing that the crisis of social reproduction manifests itself in context-specific ways, and in each of them the state will act in particular ways as well. Fraser (2014), in turn, argues that 21st century capitalism can only be understood if “non-economic” realms unseen by Marx are incorporated into the critique of capital, and social reproduction amongst them. Fraser (2017) further adds that the dependence of capitalist economy on the non-economic realm of social reproduction, whereas it also depletes reproductive conditions, constitutes one of capital’s most prominent contradictions. T. Bhattacharya (2017) further develops this critique by

pointing out social reproduction theory's reframing of Marx through an analysis of how labor force is produced and how oppressions of gender, race, sexuality, and others are also constitutive of capital accumulation processes. Mezzadri et al. (2022) analyze recent contributions from Feminist International Political Economy to social reproduction theory, advocating for studies that, through a focus on the Global South, discuss the role of the state, connections between production and reproduction, the embodiment of exploitation, and women's agency through resistance, resilience, and endurance. In a similar vein, Raghuram (2016) argues that care practices should also be located and studied beyond the Global North. Mullings (2021) uses the concept of social reproduction to push labor geographies to look at contexts beyond waged labor in the Global North, by arguing that communities living in contexts of extreme precarity have distorted the boundaries between production and reproduction to ensure their survival.

Social reproduction and migrations

Social reproduction frameworks – in particular those which include marginalized experiences of daily and intergenerational care – are thus helpful to understand migration processes and crucial for a Marxian theory of migrant labor. On the one hand, motivations for moving abroad from migrants' perspectives frequently pertain to the sphere of social reproduction, including financially supporting their families, creating better opportunities for their children, and improving their quality of life (Bryceson 2019, Kofman and Raghuram 2015). Meanwhile, migration has a stark impact on social reproduction for migrant families, as it transforms family relationships, the distribution of care responsibilities, and the strategies laid out for achieving reproduction. Social reproduction is, then, both a driver and an outcome of migration.

Much scholarly attention is given to paid domestic labor by migrant workers in core capitalist countries, as they support changing reproductive regimes in destination societies through highly precarized labor (Chang 2016, England 2017, Kofman and Raghuram 2015, Parreñas 2015, Teeple Hopkins 2017). Much of this scholarship centers the uneven globalization of social reproduction, in which women workers from marginalized countries migrate by themselves to the US, Canada, and other core countries, in order to perform reproductive labor as nannies, elder care workers, and house cleaners while relying on women from their communities of origin to care for children and other family members through both paid and unpaid domestic care activities.

Truong (1996) discusses the increasing female international migrations in the 1990s as a result of changes in social reproduction arrangements that led women from Global South countries to perform reproductive labor in the Global North, resulting in a process of cross-national transfer of reproductive labor. In particular, Parreñas (2015) conceptualized this set of relationships as an international division of reproductive labor: wealthy women in core capitalist countries transfer their reproductive responsibilities onto migrant domestic workers who, in turn, transfer their own reproductive responsibilities in their countries of origin to local domestic workers without enough resources to migrate themselves. The international division of reproduction labor makes explicit the differentiation of social reproduction conditions at both global and local scales. At the global scale, while women's responsibility over reproduction is consistent across the board, reproductive conditions are different between white families from core countries and families from peripheral countries with migrant mothers. At the local scale, different social reproduction conditions are established between those who hire and those who perform domestic work, in both countries of origin and destination. For example, as Parreñas (2015) reports, Filipina domestic workers may go for

years without seeing their children, who also might end up living separately in their communities of origin, while their employers pick and choose the childcare activities they want to perform. Meanwhile, live-in domestic workers may have little to no free time, hindering their chances to have a life outside of work, among other uneven conditions when compared to their employers (Parreñas 2015).

In transnational approaches, prevalent in migration studies in the 1990s and 2000s (Glick-Schiller 2018), concepts such as transnational families, transnational motherhood, and global care chains can be placed within the sphere of social reproduction. Such approaches acknowledge the existence, the challenges, and the positive outcomes of extended family units living simultaneously in one or more countries (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), including a wide variety of family configurations. Research on transnational families has highlighted the role of remittances in maintaining and reproducing family members in origin communities, while also considering the relationships of care and emotional support that flow across different countries. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila (1997) spotlight the challenges in transnational motherhoods, as migrant working mothers – domestic workers or not – whose children stay in the communities of origin are able to financially support their families while also struggling with separation. The concept of global care chains builds on Parreñas but extends beyond relationships of domestic labor to include a broader appraisal of care relationships (Hochschild 2000, Yeates 2005, Pratt 2012). Similarly, it points to a social differentiation in the relationships of care at multiple scales. Considering the UK context, Dyer et al. (2011) point out that migrants' labor in the care sector provides “work-life balance” for middle-class families while their own balance is often neglected.

Further scholarship on migration studies engages directly with social reproduction theories, either looking at family relationships and care (e.g. Schwiter et al. 2018) or at a

broader concept of social reproduction. Miraftab (2011), for instance, notes a global restructuring of social reproduction, in which migration from peripheric countries becomes a strategy for both migrants and governments dealing with crises of social reproduction in communities of origin. In such a context, migrants working in high-risk, low-paid jobs in small-town US provide social reproduction support for their families who stayed in communities of origin (Miraftab 2011). Also analyzing social reproduction at a global scale, Ferguson and McNally (2015) argue that processes of dispossession and displacement create a mass of surplus workers that then migrate to core capitalist countries, offering labor force at “zero cost” given that it is reproduced elsewhere. Migrant social reproduction is then globalized as it is determined by global processes and consequently unfolds in multiple locations simultaneously (Ferguson and McNally 2015).

Looking specifically at migrants’ social reproduction in the US, geographers note how their social reproduction spatialities are extended in multiple ways, both locally and transnationally. Migrant workers in the same meatpacking plant in Illinois, from countries as different as Mexico and Togo, contribute to social reproduction in their communities of origin not only through remittances but also through emotional support networks (Miraftab 2011). In particular, Miraftab (2011: 400) notes how the extension of social reproduction spatialities – where migrants in the US are responsible for social reproduction elsewhere, “smooth[es] the accumulation of capital and ensure the supply of workers ‘willing’ and able to sell their labor power to do hazardous work at low cost.” Considering live-in migrant domestic workers, Teeple Hopkins (2017) notes how spatialities of social reproduction are expanded with migrants seeking support outside the private space of the home. For Filipina live-in care workers in Canada, home – the home of their bosses – is a reproductive space for others, not for themselves. So they expand their reproductive spatialities and relationships to community

spaces like churches (Teeple Hopkins 2017). Additionally, migrant reproductive relationships are further impacted by US migration policies, including the possibility of visiting family members in places of origin according to visa and citizenship status, decision-making around staying or leaving the country when migration policies become stricter, impact on families of origin when migrants are deported and remittances end, and the burden on families of origin when they have to support a migrant relative who is under- or unemployed (Bryceson 2019).

In particular, the racialized regime of illegality and deportability in the US (De Genova 2002, R. Jones 2021, Walia 2021) has a direct impact on migrants' reproductive conditions, especially after an expansion of immigration enforcement beyond the border and into the local scale (Coleman and Kocher 2011). These local practices of immigrant incapacitation, made frequent after 9/11, are imposed on racialized immigrant bodies and reverberate in the networks they participate in, directly and indirectly (Coleman and Kocher 2011). In this context, migrants become hyper-visible, especially in smaller communities, and consequently utilize practices of invisibilization in order to protect themselves, such as staying home more often and circulating only through spaces considered to be safe (Licona and Maldonado 2013). Ultimately, such strategies hinder networks of support and community relationships, leading to social isolation, as well as limited access to shopping, work, entertainment, and healthcare (Licona and Maldonado 2013). Additionally, as immigrants' everyday spatialities of labor and social reproduction become saturated with surveillance, policing, and control, their mobility is severely impacted as well: driving becomes a dangerous activity, fundamentally changing their lifestyle and limiting reproductive activities such as grocery shopping, church attendance, socialization, and others (Stuesse and Coleman 2014). While Stuesse and Coleman (2014) identify the impact of local immigration enforcement in the metropolitan Atlanta area, Maldonado et al (2015) find similar issues in

small-town Iowa, and Guzmán and Medeiros (2020) report on immobility among migrant farmworkers in rural areas. Some of this work also addresses limited or no access to in-state driver's licenses which in turn pushes out-of-status migrants to either driver without licenses or to employ strategies to obtain a driver's license in a state where they are allowed to. Furthermore, Mares (2019) spotlights the food insecurity faced by migrant farmworkers, increased by fear of surveillance in accessing groceries outside of farm spaces.

When migrants are indeed detained, they are dispossessed of their bodies, argue Hiemstra and Conlon (2017). Detainees are provided with inadequate supplies of food, clothing, and hygiene products, which are available for purchase on commissary at exorbitant prices, which pressure family members into sending large sums (that they cannot always afford) and push migrants into extremely low-waged work within the detention centers (Hiemstra and Conlon 2017). Regimes of detention and deportation cause further strain on the lives of migrant families in both origin and destination. Social reproduction in the destination is interrupted when a family member is detained and/or deported, as such occurrences cause significant financial and emotional losses that hinder reproductive conditions within the family, and solidarity networks become a crucial way for migrants to find support (Boyce 2021). In other families, deportation interrupts social reproduction in sending communities. R. Johnson and Woodhouse (2018) show that migrants may enter a debt-cycle in which debt is contracted for migration and deported migrants end up needing to borrow more money and re-enter the US unauthorized in order to make money to pay their initial debt in the country of origin. If land and real estate are used as collateral, social reproduction in communities of origin is thus threatened, as migrants become at risk to lose their homes or rural land to sustain their families, prompting them to go into further debt to try and enter the US again in order to earn money to repay the debt (R. Johnson and Woodhouse 2018). Engagement with

theories of social reproduction has also prompted archival work that seeks to uncover gendered strategies of labor and reproduction in historical US migrant contexts. Through research on Mexican families in the post-Second World War Bracero Program, Méndez (2021) has shown that migrants had limited access to state-provided social services, lacked access to adequate and affordable housing, and engaged in transnational family strategies in which women who stayed in origin communities while their husbands migrated had to rely on community relationships in order to support themselves and their children (Méndez 2021).

Theorizing migrant labor and social reproduction

Based on the different sets of academic scholarship reviewed so far in this chapter, in what follows I would like to present key takeaways and interventions to the project of further developing a Marxian theory of labor and social reproduction. I start by emphasizing important connections between migration and race in relation to labor and social reproduction conditions suggested by the reviewed scholarship. Subsequently, I address my own points of contentions with the arguments presented earlier, followed by a brief assessment of the concepts and arguments that help understand the migration process of Brazilians to the Marietta area.

The first point I would like to emphasize from the scholarship discussed above is the need to think about migrations alongside processes of racialization. As discussed in this chapter, this argument has been made by scholars such as DeGenova, Jones, Walia, and others. What I wish to spotlight, in particular, are the ways in which such a definition weaves together experiences of domestic migrant workers and Black domestic workers; of detained migrants and incarcerated people of color, as well as their family members on whom the

consequences of detention reverberate; of Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous women whose access to welfare programs has been limited or conditioned to precarized work; of precarized, migrant, racialized workers in farms, poultry, construction and elsewhere; of housing insecurity across migrant and racialized communities in the US. I want to emphasize not only that migration processes are part of race-making regimes and racial formations, but that the process of social differentiation of workers – be it based on race, nationality, ethnicity, citizenship, or blurred combinations of these – can be more generatively addressed as interlinked and co-constitutive, rather than as individual processes limited to particular historical, political, and economic contexts.

My suggestion is to move on from fragmented analyses to one oriented by the concept of totality, finding the threads that link together varied migration policies (the Bracero program, temporary migrant worker programs, detention and deportation), historical periods (Fordism, neoliberalism), scales, and communities. This means considering that, while migration politics and neoliberal economic dynamics reinforce a pattern of social differentiation in reproductive conditions, they are a product of the total social formation. The concept of racial capitalism points to broader patterns of social differentiation that include migrants and racialized people. As a framework, it also allows me to draw insights on social differentiation and racialization from critical race theories that have dealt with lived experiences of racialized people in the US to try and understand why migrants are undergoing similar and draw connecting lines between these diverse experiences. I further want to highlight that social differentiation creates uneven social reproduction conditions and that uneven conditions of social reproduction, in turn, constitute a critical dimension of social differentiation.

The second point I would like to emphasize from previous scholarship is that immigration control policies, enforced at the border and elsewhere, are not only about “keeping America American” – as Calvin Coolidge’s 1920s presidential campaign demanded – but they ultimately define under what conditions life is made possible (or not) for migrant workers and their families. For example, such policies are key in defining what family members migrate to the US or not, especially if considering the journey across the US South border (as opposed to other immigrating strategies such as temporary work programs or overstaying beyond visa expiration deadlines). Pushing migrants to these treacherous journeys through border enforcement is one of the many instances where immigration law draws a line on life and death. As seen above, driving-enforced migration control exacts control over when and where migrants can access basic goods through grocery shopping. Precarious labor regimes to which both documented and undocumented migrants are subjected through deportability and limited access to destination labor markets crunch the time workers have left for housework, and childcare, a burden that will typically befall women whose jobs sometimes demand even longer hours. Thus, border policies not only contour daily relationships and conditions of social reproduction in migrant families, but also the possibility of life itself, in and beyond the border. Racial capitalism, as a framework, illuminates the fact that some populations are historically constituted as disposable either by having their social reproduction precarized or entirely interrupted. These different sets of scholarship examine in detail social reproduction responsibilities across borders, explaining how global inequalities prompt migrants to live and work abroad while supporting family elsewhere, as well as the consequent impact on family configuration.

However, in disagreement with Ferguson and McNally (2015), I argue that migrant labor force does not come at “zero cost” for countries of destination because migrant workers

still reproduce themselves daily and intergenerationally, if they have family members with them in receiving communities. These workers continuously need to replenish themselves and their families daily through food, housing, healthcare, and leisure. States may enforce immigration policies to make migrant labor force come at “zero cost” but they are not necessarily successful. That migrant social reproduction is not located only in communities of origin but also in communities of destination is key to understanding why Brazilians migrate to the US in order to improve their social reproduction conditions. And, I would argue, their labor force can only come at “zero cost” for the US state if severe policies of migrant exclusion are enacted.

In contention with arguments by social reproduction theories on the crisis of social reproduction, I argue they overlook the particular experiences of migrant and racialized families. In order to understand deteriorating conditions of social reproduction, feminist scholars argue that an ongoing crisis of social reproduction was brought about by the neoliberal debasement of the welfare state. Formulated in a systematic way by Fraser (2017), yet underlying many other analyses in social reproduction theories, this argument goes like this. “Historical regimes of reproduction-cum-production” can be classified as (i) 19th-century liberalism, in which production and reproduction appeared as completely separate spheres; (ii) 20th-century Fordism, predicated on state- and corporate-provided welfare, “family wages,” and male-breadwinner/female-housewife family models; and (iii) 21st-century neoliberalism, characterized by two-earner families and externalized, privatized care work. This historical categorization, however, fails to account for racialized and migrant families’ experiences of labor and social reproduction and does not describe a “universal” constitution of these arrangements. Production and reproduction in the Fordist era were theoretically analyzed as two separate spheres, with no spatial, temporal, or social overlap

(Winders and Smith 2019). This separation in turn gave shape to the breadwinner-housewife family model, in which male workers received a “family wage,” that is, a wage that could support a (heterosexual) family unit (husband, wife, and children), while women were entirely responsible for all housework, including cooking, cleaning, caring for children, and other chores (Laslett and Brenner 1989, Fraser 2017). In the neoliberal era, on the other hand, social reproduction theory scholars identify a retreat of the welfare state, the advent of two-earner families, and a consequent privatization of social reproduction (T. Bhattacharya 2017, Fraser 2017). In this context, Mitchell et al. (2004) critique the inefficacy of the analytical separation between labor and reproduction to explain ongoing transformations in life under capitalism, suggesting instead the concept of “life’s work.” “Life’s work” summarizes the blurring of the dividing lines between work and non-work during neoliberalism that make labor and reproduction increasingly undistinguishable. The perceived stark shift in reproductive arrangements during neoliberalism is thus frequently conceptualized as a “crisis of social reproduction.”

As Freshour (2017: 1) astutely observes, however, “viewed through the framework of racial capitalism this process is not new.” Similar critiques come from researchers that foreground social reproduction arrangements in peripheric countries. Mezzadri et al. (2022) argue that the over-representation of Global North contexts in social reproduction scholarship creates theoretical and methodological limitations that can only be surpassed by extensive research in peripheric countries. Meanwhile, SRT’s foregrounding of the retreat of the welfare state does not apply in contexts where the state never played a significant role in social reproduction (Kunz 2010, Naidu 2023). As I have argued elsewhere (C. Ribeiro 2024), when the “crisis of social reproduction” concept is defined merely as the result of neoliberal

policies, as it erases racialized sections of the working class that have long faced less than ideal reproductive conditions.

Based on the crisis of labor framework conceptualized above, I subsequently discuss the specific relationship between labor precarization and the deterioration of social reproduction conditions. Labor precarization can be understood as an empirical unfoldment of the crisis of labor, as conceptualized above. This crisis of labor is also simultaneously a crisis of social reproduction, given the way labor and conditions of social reproduction are dialectically linked. In this context, workers' wages are often not able to afford the costs of social reproduction. This may occur due to un- or underemployment, to low pay, or even because wages do not necessarily cover the costs of social reproduction engendered by labor itself, such as healthcare expenses after on-the-job accidents, for example. Importantly, this process of unaffordability is not linear or absolute. It can be uneven across different areas of social reproduction, as in the case of Brazilian migrant workers who, as we shall see, affirm that upon moving to the Marietta area they can consume more but have less access to healthcare, for example. It can also vary across different people within the same communities and labor markets, due to differences in wages, access to support networks, and differentiation processes based on gender, race, and citizenship status. And it also varies over one's lifetime, as many of the life stories presented in this dissertation reveal.

This overall process shows how the unfoldment of capital's internal contradictions affects both labor and social reproduction conditions. Based on the feminist approach to critical theory of value elaborated by Roswitha Scholz (2014), and in contrast with social reproduction theories, I argue that the capitalist mode of production is not a system that constantly cannibalizes an unquenchable externality—"life"—that endlessly reconstitutes itself in the face of cannibalization. Rather, drawing on Marx's conceptualization of the

double freedom of workers, I understand capital to be simultaneously a mode of production and social reproduction, thus constituting a totality that dialectically comprehends both the sphere of value and labor and that which is not value and labor, but is nonetheless essentially constituted by capital logics. Workers, in this sense, reproduce themselves through capitalism and not outside of it.

Within this framework, even if we understand reproduction and the fleshy, messy stuff of everyday life (Katz 2001) as the hidden abode overlooked by Marx (Fraser 2014), it is not an abode that exists outside of capital, perpetually colonized or cannibalized by it but somehow always recreating a yet-to-be-colonized realm, as Fraser (e.g. 2014, 2017, 2022) and Federici (e.g. 2004, 2012) would argue. Fraser and Federici understand the dialectics of labor and social reproduction as an opposition. However, labor mobility frameworks (cf. Boechat 2019, Gaudemar 1977, Giavarotti et al. 2023, Heidemann 2004, Leite et al. 2017, Vainer 1984, among others) suggest otherwise. It indicates that capital, as a social relation, establishes relationships of production as well as reproduction. The capitalist mode of production and reproduction is founded in the very scission of these two realms as separated spheres of life, rooted in the dispossession of the means of production—a history that Federici recounts with precision in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004). Yet in doing so, capital creates a social dynamic that relies on both spheres, on their simultaneous separation and inseparability.

The contradiction between what makes life possible and what makes it impossible is therefore internal to capitalism, rather than a contradiction between capital and life-making processes external to it. The dialectic of labor and social reproduction thus acquires another layer of depth: production and reproduction are opposites, but each can only exist as the negation of the other. Neither can exist autonomously, even though they appear to do so. To believe otherwise is to believe in the fiction and the fetishism of capital.

To Kurz (2014, 2016) and Scholz (2014) alike, given capital's internal contradictions, as expressed in the crisis of labor and social reproduction, capital's totality is imploding into itself. In doing so – since workers reproduce themselves through capitalism and not outside of it – the currently-existing systems of reproduction are also collapsing, and marginalized workers are increasingly more vulnerable. One of the ways in which workers are affected is their inability to afford the costs of social reproduction or to achieve desired conditions of social reproduction. I do not mean that debased social reproduction conditions function specifically to favor capital accumulation. Rather, based on this framework, I argue that capital accumulation processes have short-circuited in such a way that, while workers depend on labor to achieve their own reproduction, wages are not sufficient to cover the costs of social reproduction—least of all for racialized, migrant, Global South workers.

Building on Kurz (2014), G. Bhattacharyya (2021) adds another layer to this overall theoretical framing by bringing up the contingents of surplus workers. Having no prospects of being incorporated into increasingly automatized productive processes, these workers are denied the material means of their own reproduction. As Giavarotti et al. (2023) argue, the global crisis of accumulation, including processes of land-grabbing, dispossession, and expulsions, exponentially expands surplus contingents of displaced and mobilized workers. As a result, they have little choice but to sell their labor power wherever possible (Gaudemar 1977, Marx 1976). At the same time, the fictionalization of capital and the increasing technification of the means of production expel more labor from productive processes (Giavarotti et al. 2023), creating a mass of workers for whom reproduction becomes an impossibility. The distinction between those who can and cannot access means of reproduction, even precariously, is also structured by racialized social differentiation. The stakes are stark: “To be rendered surplus is not to be paid less, it is to be left for dying or

dead” (G. Bhattacharyya 2023:20). Or, as Denning (2010: 79) writes, “Under capitalism, the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited.”

Now, in what ways do these arguments help me examine the specific arrangements of labor and social reproduction of Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area? First, I am interested in how categories of social differentiation – race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship – help understand Brazilian migrants’ participation in US labor markets as well as their social reproduction dynamics. On the question of differentiation, Scholz (2014) notes that forms of social disparity are increasingly fragmented in non-linear and contradictory ways. Markers of social hierarchy—such as class, gender, race or ethnicity, nationality, citizenship status, and education—are becoming more fragmented, allowing for complex combinations of privilege and oppression. In the case of migrants, as I have argued elsewhere (Delmonte and C. Ribeiro 2026), this fragmentation suggests that binaries traditionally used in migration studies—documented versus undocumented, high versus low skilled, formal versus informal, precarious versus non-precarious—should be reinterpreted as continuums. These continuums allow for combinations of privilege and marginalization that are specific and often unexpected.

For example, migration studies often frame documented, high-skilled, formal, non-precarious migration as opposed to undocumented, low-skilled, informal, precarized migration. In the case of Brazilians in the US, however, these distinctions are blurred. Migrants may enter on a visa and later become undocumented; they may exist within a continuum of precarious non-citizenship statuses; they may be highly educated yet work in low-skilled, informal, precarized labor markets. Their backgrounds in Brazil, even when relatively privileged compared to other migrants, do not necessarily place them on the more privileged side of these continuums.

Second, I conceptualize as a global regime of labor and social reproduction, the transnational unevenness of working and living conditions that is crucial to understand why people migrate. Thus, the collapse of the labor and social reproduction schema based on work, wages, and consumption is globally differentiated, and it has its own particular effects on urban middle classes in the Global South. In this context, desired social reproduction conditions can act as a motivator for migration beyond mere survival, forming what I call, in this dissertation, a “search for a better life.” This idea is inspired by Beck and Gaspar (2024) in their analysis of migration as a search for a “good enough life.” In other words, migrants move through this global regime seeking “the best situation possible,” engaging in migration as a search for improved social reproduction conditions.

Migration, therefore, is as much about social reproduction as it is about labor. This includes both care activities, often associated with women, and the material conditions of social reproduction. Social reproduction—encompassing both material conditions and idealized expectations of living and consumption standards—plays a central role in shaping transnational migration processes, influencing decisions to move, stay, or return. This also means that labor markets and social reproduction are sites of bordering. They are spaces where the border is enacted, particularly through state policies related to social programs and work permits (see Appendix B: Glossary) that define nationality, migration status, and citizenship as criteria for access. The border is both rigid and porous, and so are the bordering processes enacted through labor markets and social reproduction. These processes produce forms of conditional and differential inclusion and exclusion.

Finally, transnational dynamics of labor and social reproduction give rise to zones of convergence between here and there. In these zones, precarized labor in the United States supports the achievement or maintenance of “middle-classness” in both the United States and

Brazil. In this context, “middle-classness” is used as an emic concept to describe the living conditions that Brazilian migrants believe they can achieve for themselves and their families, even when this requires relinquishing other markers of middle-class status, such as white-collar professions or homeownership.

In sum, in this section I discussed the generative ways in which migration and racialization processes can be addressed together, as well as the specific connections between capital’s immanent crisis, labor precarization, and deteriorated social reproduction conditions. This final section concludes the present chapter, where I previously discussed main theoretical debates around differentiated working and living conditions and their implications for migration research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the methodological considerations that underscore my doctoral research. I start by outlining the main tenants of my research design, spotlighting the method of life stories, the multi-sited and multi-temporal investigation strategy, and the particularities of fieldwork with migrant communities. Subsequently, I engage with feminist critiques on objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences research. In particular, I discuss my insider-outsider positionality in relation to my community of study. I then describe in detail my field trips to the Marietta area and to Goiânia between 2023 and 2025, as well as the different data sources I draw from – interviews, field notes, online content, and US census data.

Research design

In this section, I discuss the research design I employed for my doctoral investigation. I used a life story approach in the qualitative interviews I conducted, later combined to create the narratives presented in Appendix A. I also engaged with a multi-sited and multi-temporal research design in order to address the complexity of the labor and social reproduction dynamics I sought to investigate. Finally, I describe some considerations around fieldwork with migrant communities and the strategy I employed in accessing the Brazilian community in Marietta through local migrant churches.

Life stories

The research context I present and analyze in this dissertation is, therefore, the migration process of Brazilians to the metropolitan Atlanta area. The Brazilian community in metropolitan Atlanta was my point of departure. I wanted to learn how and why a Brazilian community had settled in Marietta and surrounding towns and how that related to individual and family dynamics of labor and social reproduction in both Brazil and the US. In order to answer such questions, I needed to learn about Brazilian migrants' decisions to move to the US and the particular journeys that led them to the metropolitan Atlanta area, including their particular situation in Brazil when they decided to leave, since all of my interviewees went directly from Brazil to the US, even the very few who had lived abroad elsewhere. I also wanted to understand their work experiences in the US, and in Atlanta in particular, as well as their family dynamics in relation both to work and money and to care and social reproduction, with relatives in both the US and Brazil.

Qualitative methods are the most appropriate for dealing with this kind of data, which includes people's lived experiences, subjective perceptions, and intimate relationships. I employed a mix of semi-structured qualitative interviews, participant observation, and content analysis, to be described in detail later in this chapter. In conducting interviews, I was guided by a life story approach. Life stories have a long tradition in oral history methodologies, in which individuals' narratives of their lives through a socially significant historical and geographical context are recorded as living archives (Jackson and Russell 2010).

Conceptualizations of migration journeys have long been under debate in migration studies. In this dissertation, I do not revisit such debates, but I would still like to draw from them a few points that guide my methodological reflections and research design. There are

already substantial critiques of origin-destination binaries in migration studies, among them critiques of push-pull approaches in both their liberal and structuralist iterations (Castles and Miller 1993). Others rightfully claim that, for many, migration journeys do not linearly start at one point and end at another, and may include a sequence of displacements throughout extended periods of time, including temporary migrations, circular movements of return and re-migration, and other possibilities, and that the researcher cannot arbitrarily decide which of these movements is the most important (Mallimacci 2009). Others call attention to the journeys and experiences that happen between origin and destination. McDowell (2018) emphasizes the importance of work experiences that take place during the migration journey. Dias (2019), in turn, critiques what he calls “hydraulic metaphors” in migration studies, such as migration flows and waves, that spotlight the “leaving” and “arriving” moments of the migration journey while obscuring the experiences in between.

Taking such critiques into account, as well as my own theoretical and methodological commitments, I favor the concept of *migration process*. It is a way to simultaneously delimit a particular empirical focus of interest, such as the migration process from Brazil to the metropolitan Atlanta area, without excluding the possibility of experiences that extrapolate and yet relate to the establishment of a significant Brazilian community in specific parts of the metropolitan Atlanta area. The conceptualization of migration as a process also conciliates the individual motivations, trajectories, and experiences that led migrants and their families to choose settling in Atlanta with the broader social, economic, and political circumstances that help draw out the generalizable dynamics that result from Brazilians who, being strangers to each other, make similar decisions. Finally, the concept of migration process reminds us that it is ongoing and under constant transformation. During my fieldwork period, from 2023 to 2025, I saw significant changes to the Brazilian community in Marietta and surrounding areas

that redefine the migration process and open up new social dynamics, such as the forced or “voluntary” return⁶ of US-based migrants to Brazil in the wake of the migration policies of Donald Trump’s second presidential term. In doing so, I counter approaches to migration research that consider migrants’ experiences in the destination with little or no concern for migrants’ histories before their arrival in the context of study. Therefore, I use life stories as a method in order to capture migrants’ paths and journeys, and not merely their situation during my fieldwork period. In this way, I am emphasizing an idea of “always becoming” and resisting analyses that ultimately place migrants as static or lacking any agency. Indeed, this approach allows for a better grasp of agency, albeit under constrained circumstances.

Feminist migration and labor scholars have used this method under different names, including life stories (Dutta 2016, 2019, Lawson 2000), individual journeys (Bowstead 2017), stories-so-far (Zampoukos 2018), and oral histories (McDowell 2018), using life narratives to foreground women’s voices and particular experiences as migrants and workers. To Dutta (2016, 2019), life stories provide crucial context on why and how decisions about entering certain labor arrangements are made, revealing reasons and motivations that go beyond the wage, such as agency, care, and emotional engagements. Whereas qualitative interviews may touch upon those topics, an intentional framing through life stories is useful for illuminating key points of labor and migratory processes as everyday household relations of labor come to light (Dutta 2019). In other words, a life story approach to interviews helps reveal migration as a process that unfolds simultaneously at individual and social scales.

Brazilian migration sociologists Maria Aparecida Moraes Silva and Maria A. de Menezes underscore the importance of life narrative approaches to building oral histories of

6 I refrain from using the phrase “self-deportation” since I consider it to be one suggested by the Trump administration rather than by immigrant-rights organizations or migrants themselves. In terms of the theoretical framework I suggest here, I also believe it to be more generative to see these as “return migrations,” motivated by changing social reproduction conditions (see chapter four), even if they may fall under a “self-deportation” definition.

migration (Silva and Menezes 1999). However, by emphasizing the concept of narrative, Silva and Menezes do raise a crucial point of caution: that the life stories migrants tell are “the form and content of retelling one’s own life” (1999: 69) and thus are, consciously or unconsciously, a reflection as much of what migrants choose to share as of that which they choose to conceal. Drawing from Walter Benjamin and E.P. Thompson, Silva and Menezes (1999) consider that migrants’ narratives are told by individuals conceived in capitalist relations whose actions are embedded in overdetermined social relationships, including class, gender, race, and others, and who deal with the depersonalization, alienation, and fetishization imposed by such relationships in ways that shape how they live, act, face the world, and narrate themselves.

Most notably among those things that are silenced are lived experiences of violence and social humiliation, which may or may not be explicitly narrated in interview settings. Benjamin (1969) argues that violence easily becomes an uncommunicable experience and turns into silence. Silva and Menezes (1999), thinking through the life experiences of Brazilian temporary internal migrant workers in sugarcane plantations, consider how their narratives to family and friends back home are silent about lived forms of violence and humiliation, namely the highly unsafe and unhealthy working and living conditions they face as sugarcane harvesters. The interview moment, detached from sugarcane workers’ everyday lives, becomes a singular moment in which these conditions are narrated out loud. In my own work with Bolivian women in garment-industry sweatshops in Brazil, many would tell me about their experiences of being sexually abused, remarking that it was the first time they had ever shared the experience with someone else (cf. C. Ribeiro 2019). Veena Das (1999), on the other hand, draws from her own ethnography in Punjab to examine how violence can sometimes be narrated or silenced, calling attention to the ways in which culture, as well as

historical and geographical context, offers a framework for the silence or narration of lived violences.

I bring up these contentions to refuse a positivistic take on interviews as reality or data. As narratives, they do not express objective empirical facts, but rather a social process that simultaneously constitutes the narrator, the audience, and the lived experience. Life stories need to be interpreted as narratives shaped by the social relationships in which migrants participate at multiple scales, from their constitution as “subjected subjects” in the capitalist mode of production to individuals embedded in a particular historical, geographical, and cultural context, with conscious and unconscious agendas in the way they narrate their migration journeys.

Life stories therefore need to be interpreted as narratives shaped by the social relationships in which migrants participated at multiple scales, as both word and silence. In interviewing Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area, I was interested in migrants’ narratives of their migration journeys, work experiences, and family dynamics. In most interviews, I started with, “can you tell me a little bit about how and when you decided to move to the US,” giving participants breathing room to start their story from any point they felt inclined to. Usually, they would tell something of their lives right before their decision to migrate to the US and continue narrating subsequent events up to the point of our interview, which varied greatly, since I interviewed people who had lived in the US from anywhere between one month and more than 40 years.

Participants would focus on their work experiences in the US either because of my briefing previous to our interview or because of my prompting and probing throughout. Many would, indeed, organize the sequence of events based on their employment history. That might reflect my research interests as I describe them to participants, but also a tendency of

our society of labor to organize subjectivities around our condition as workers (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, Read 2023). Questions about family in Brazil would come after, including prompts for a brief family background, usually the parents' professions. In this way, I had enough information to contextualize migrants' narratives not only in their individual life trajectories but in a broader family trajectory as well, which is meaningful for situating their individual experiences in Brazil's recent history.

As I reflected on my interviews during and after my fieldwork trips, I noted two crucial points of silence. The first concerns the forms of everyday and slow violence (Das 1999) that I believe my research participants may have encountered, the subtle violence of marginalization and subalternization. Silva and Menezes (1999) consider one migrant's statement that he went to work in the sugarcane harvest, despite its known grueling conditions, because he could not "let [his] mother starve to death," to be a rationalization of lived violence. Brazilians often talked about their migration being "worth it" in spite of all hardships because of the improved living conditions they find in the US, with an overall positive outlook on their migration journeys even in the face of severe hardships. By engaging with literature on silenced experiences in migrant narratives, I want to suggest that this positive outlook, contrasting with much of what we know about migrant experiences in the US, comes from a particular form of silence over the slow violence they encounter as migrants. In doing so, migrants engage with their own agency in terms of how they interpret and narrate their own stories.

A second important silence I observed in my interviews is the absence of comments on marital conflict between husband and wife. Gender-based conflict, even the most banal trifles, is notably absent from my interviews, with the exception of Schaienne (interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA; and interview 50, 07/05/25, Kennesaw GA), and from informal

conversations in a variety of contexts. Many of my interviews happened with a couple together or when the whole family was present at the house, which certainly curtailed certain intimate remarks. But there were other moments, interviews or not, when I was alone with the women and still there were few comments on marital conflict, which would have been considered culturally appropriate by most Brazilians. I think this is because most of my participants are Evangelical, which includes strict expectations of marital relations. It may also be because the couple is a strong unit in an adverse context.

As Dutta (2016, 2019) points out, life stories help illuminate decision making processes around labor and care. Additionally, life stories also show decision-making to be a continuous process, in which workers are constantly negotiating and reevaluating choices around employment, migration, living conditions and social reproduction practices, within the limits of their constrained agency (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2010, Schwiter et al. 2018). In that way, some Brazilian migrants are constantly reaffirming their decision to stay in the US, while others remake decisions during critical moments of hardship, economic crises, and tightening migration policies. This constant decision-making process is evident in the stories below, and includes decisions to migrate to the US or not, move within the US, return to Brazil, stay in Brazil, return to the US, change jobs, and others. As I argue throughout the dissertation, such decisions are based on transnational social reproduction dynamics, including family relationships and perceived living conditions, which are supported by precarized labor in the US and mediated by bordering regimes and migration policies.

Therefore, based on interviews and field notes, I have written out life stories for each of my research participants, grouping couples and families who moved to the US together. In writing these life stories, I focused on the most important aspects relating to their migration journeys and family backgrounds, according to their own narratives during our interviews.

Life stories are presented in Appendix A and referred to throughout the dissertation. In employing a life story approach that privileges migrants' own narratives, I extensively draw on longer interview quotes in subsequent chapters.

Multi-sited, multi-temporal research

A multi-sited, "multi-temporal" approach is appropriate for a study of labor and social reproduction. As demonstrated in previous research, labor performed in one place often supports social reproduction in the same place and elsewhere at the same time (Schwiter et al. 2018), making these practices simultaneously local and global (Ferguson and McNally 2015), which in turn are made more readable through fieldwork conducted simultaneously in destination and origin communities (Miraftab 2011). As McDowell (2015) astutely observes, migration strategies and life narratives are a process rather than a static moment. Further yet, following Teeple Hopkins's (2017) argument on the stretching of time and space brought about in migrant social reproduction, the research design employed regards the spatial and temporal extension of the transnational networks it seeks to examine. In other words, multiple trips to fieldwork sites offer an incomparable opportunity to reflect on the similarities, differences, contrasts, and tensions across narratives about the same transnational networks of labor and social reproduction and, in particular, to investigate such networks in process.

Additionally, Mezzadri et al. (2022: 1792) argue for research on social reproduction predicated on multi-sited, long-term fieldwork, or extended case studies, as a prominent way of "mapping the complex entanglements of labor and reproductive relations, duties and responsibilities" in everyday life, particularly through a productive use of life stories as a method. Based on these arguments, my dissertation research was designed as a multi-sited project that considered communities of origin in Brazil and communities of destination in the

US, which I considered the most appropriate methodology for a proposed study of precarization of labor and social reproduction in a particular migration process.

The initial idea for this project was to compare a traditional, Boston, and a non-traditional, Los Angeles, communities of destination for Brazilians in the US. A proposal for this early research design was awarded a research grant by the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies, which later funded my 2023 fieldwork in Atlanta. In the early stages of my research, I reviewed academic literature on Brazilian migration to the US and talked to a few of the scholars I read, including C. Eduardo Siqueira (E. Siqueira and Jansen 2012, E. Siqueira et al. 2016), Maxine Margolis (1994, 2013), and Cristina Brinkerhoff (Brinkerhoff et al. 2019). I also reached out to possible field contacts, like a friend of a friend who migrated from Brazil to Los Angeles with his family when he was a teenager. Eduardo Siqueira suggested to me that the Brazilian community in Boston, with which he is very familiar, had stayed similar to what was described in earlier research, meaning there was nothing “new” to be “discovered” there. He then mentioned a few possible topics and places that would be interesting ground for new research, including this “small town in Georgia” where there was a high concentration of Brazilians. In investigating this option, I found Cassandra White’s (White et al. 2010) and Alan Marcus’s (e.g. 2009a, 2011) work, and the idea of shifting my fieldwork down south began to take shape.

The Brazilian community in the Marietta area was interesting for a number of reasons. While it was a non-traditional destination for Brazilians in the US, it had been significantly growing over the years, especially since the 2000s. It was intrinsically connected to a non-traditional community of origin in Brazil, the small town of Piracanjuba, as described by Marcus (2009a), as well as to the so-called Nuevo South, as indicated in the introduction.

That one of my committee members relocated to Atlanta in this process of figuring out my research was quite serendipitous.

My research design followed these methodological suggestions and was thus based on two different locations where the daily and intergenerational social reproduction of Brazilian migrants takes place, Marietta and Goiânia. While the original project included two fieldwork trips to both locations to account for the multi-temporal dimension of the processes under study, funding and other constraints allowed two fieldwork periods in Marietta (in 2023 and 2025) but only one in Goiânia (in 2024). However, the use of life stories, as well as the research design of “here and there,” help understand the multi-temporality of the social reproduction and labor dynamics in this context.

Doing fieldwork with migrant communities

Doing fieldwork with migrants bears its own specificities. Working with undocumented migrants requires a tactful approach that considers their safety and privacy, as well as possible mistrust toward strangers and/or being recorded. Those with non-work visas can also be at risk if they are working without authorization. Especially for those who are applying for other visas, any record of unauthorized employment could harm their chances of being approved. Even for those with permanent residency or citizenship, being in mixed-status families and communities means also caring for close relationships that may be under such conditions of unauthorized stay or employment in the US. Such conditions indeed render some migrants understandably reticent about participating in research and interviews and about being recorded.

Additionally, migrant workers may be largely spread around urban areas, busy and fatigued with their work schedules, and wary of public spaces. Not all migrant communities

have public places of encounter, so it may be challenging to find, meet, and build relationships with migrants. Bejarano et al. (2019), who conducted an ethnography with undocumented migrant workers in a sanctuary town in New Jersey, discuss how they designed their own research process around these challenges by collaborating with a local organization and hiring community members as research assistants.

Accessing urban migrant populations through community organizations is a common and effective fieldwork strategy, given that migrants may be difficult to reach and reluctant to engage with strangers. From my own previous work with Bolivian migrants in São Paulo, Brazil (see C. Ribeiro 2019, 2024), I knew that it is easier to establish relationships through organizations and institutions that migrants interact with, in order to build rapport and trust for fieldwork. In the case of Marietta-based Brazilians, church networks remain the most significant spaces in the Marietta area for Brazilians to find support.

In this area, there is a high concentration of Brazilian evangelical churches. I refer to these as Brazilian churches because, for the most part, they are founded and run by and for Brazilian migrants. Pastors are almost always Brazilian, services and prayer groups are held in Portuguese and attended mostly by Brazilian migrants, many of these are branches of Brazilian denominations and, even when they are not, they follow Brazilian religious culture and practices. However, these churches are very diverse. In Brazil, they fall under the broad umbrella of *igrejas evangélicas* (Evangelical churches), a wide-ranging term for Protestant branches of Christianity. However, these churches follow a large variety of denominations that includes mainline Protestant (Baptist and Presbyterian), Brazilian-origin denominations like Universal and Deus é Amor (God is love, literally), Assembly of God, among others, while there are also non-denominational churches. Across these different denominations, some congregations are branches of large Brazilian churches, some are branches of Brazilian

churches that exist only abroad, some are independent churches founded in the Marietta area by Brazilian migrants, and others yet are “ethnic congregations” in American churches. They also vary drastically in size, ranging from groups that meet in congregants’ homes to mega churches of over 1,000 seats. There is also one Brazilian Catholic congregation in Sandy Springs, with a Brazilian priest that offers Mass and other services in Portuguese. Brazilian migrants’ engagement with churches also varies, from occasional service attendance to those who play active leadership roles in their congregations. Overall, Brazilian churches have a crucial role in the community in terms of offering different kinds of financial, material, emotional, and spiritual support to migrants in a way that is unrivaled by any other community organization in the area.

Besides the Evangelical churches, other Brazilian community organizations in the Marietta region include the Little Brazil Foundation (LBF), the Centro de Apoio ao Brasileiro Imigrante (CABI, Brazilian Immigrant Support Center), two magazines made for the Brazilian public – *Viver Magazine* and *Cia. Brasil* -, and the Rádio Brazil Atlanta. The magazines and radio have some capillarity across the Brazilian community in the area, while LBF and CABI have yet to become a significant reference for the community at large. Indeed, the controversies behind how LBF was created and by whom, revealed in my fieldwork, illustrate the disconnect between these organizations and the Brazilian community they aim to represent and support. The Little Brazil Foundation was, in fact, a proposal from Cobb County commissioner Jerica Richardson at the end of her term (Agdie 2024). The Brazilian consul-general in Atlanta claims he was the one to suggest to Richardson that something be done to acknowledge Brazilian presence in the area. Richardson’s proposal included officially naming the Powers Ferry Road stretch Little Brazil and a \$50,000 donation from Cobb County funds to the community, prompting the creation of LBF. Andreia Guillmet (interview

5, 11/29/23, Marietta GA; see also life story 7), founder of waxing empire Brazilian Wax by Andreia, suggested this was less an attempt to support the community and more of a political play on Richardson's part to "plant a seed" among the community when Richardson ran for re-election since, to Andreia's mind, \$50,000 is too small an amount for any meaningful interventions in the community. Andreia was involved in the LBF initiative in its very beginning, in 2022, because her pastor knew commissioner Richardson and referred Andreia as a community leader. Andreia then invited her friend Dilla Campos – who bought *Viver Magazine* from Andreia years earlier – to join the enterprise, but disagreements between the two led Andreia to leave the LBF project. Dilla (interview 11, 11/28/23, video call; see also life story 10), on her part, introduced herself in our interview as the founder of LBF and did not mention Andreia nor commissioner Richardson. Dilla did, on the other hand, throw some light shade on those whom she claimed were copying her idea.

Scholars have previously noted the key role of Evangelical churches in Brazilian migrant communities beyond Georgia (Levitt 2007, Steigenga et al. 2009, Williams et al. 2009). Studies with Florida-based Brazilian migrants argue that, in the absence of public spaces for socializing and secular civil organizations, it is religious organizations that offer networks and spaces of encounter, sociability, representation, and organization, as churches support migrants in accessing information about life in the US, finding jobs and housing, processing documentation, solving non-visa legal issues, and dealing with health issues and illnesses (Alves and L Ribeiro 2002, Vásquez 2009). That sociability, and sometimes employability, is limited to church spaces bears its own complicated consequences. Non-religious people can be excluded from these spaces and networks or be pushed into them in search of community. Close contact among exclusively religious groups can also reinforce and radicalize social beliefs, including gender roles, hetero-cis-normativities, anti-abortion

stances, and political opinions. Demanding and even exploitative relationships can emerge in the context of churches due to a demand for commitment and donations, as well as through the employment networks that orbit church congregations (Vásquez 2009).

In the face of these initial challenges, I started my research in the Marietta area by contacting churches through social media and, once in Georgia, attending services and introducing myself. In particular, I worked with four Brazilian congregations in Marietta: Renascer Church, Bençãos Church, Espírito Santo Church, and Vitória Church. I chose, at first, to work with Renascer, Bençãos, and Vitória, because they were smaller, community-oriented congregations and therefore more open and accessible. I engaged with the Espírito Santo congregation later, in 2025, because the group from Bençãos with whom I was closest had left their former church and helped found this new congregation.

Bençãos Church was one of the first churches founded in the Marietta area by Brazilian migrants, in the late 1980s. It is of Presbyterian orientation and, while it currently gathers in an American Presbyterian church, it is not an ethnic congregation. I went frequently to Bençãos's services in 2023. In 2024, a certain group within the congregation, many of whom were in leadership positions, dissatisfied with its liberal leanings, left Bençãos and contacted a reformed Brazilian denomination based in Florida, the Espírito Santo Church, to start a new Marietta branch. In my 2025 fieldwork, I mainly attended Espírito Santo's services and prayer groups. Renascer Church, in turn, is an ethnic congregation from the Reborn Baptist church, founded some 15 years ago. Reborn already had a "Hispanic" congregation, and its American leaders, noting the growth of the Brazilian community in the area, decided to expand the ministry as part of its religious mission and invited a Brazilian-American pastor to lead the new congregation. Finally, Vitória Church is a branch of a large non-denominational Brazilian church, present in all Brazilian states and several countries. Marietta was the first

Vitória branch outside of Brazil and, differently from other Brazilian churches in the area, aims for a broader audience by offering a bilingual service, in Portuguese and English, and church events in Portuguese, English, and Spanish. These churches are funded mostly through the tithe offered by congregation members, with the exception of Vitória Church, which promotes a yearly fund-raising festival.

The results from my research may be skewed by this fieldwork strategy of approaching migrants through church spaces. At the same time, I frequented church spaces in my fieldwork because religious organizations play such a crucial role in the Marietta-based Brazilian community. Indeed, even when I eventually departed from the networks I established through church, I still came across Brazilians who considered themselves religious and regularly attended services. For example, in the local nail salon I visited regularly in order to chat with Brazilian workers, they were all Evangelical. Juçara, whom I met at Bençãos Church, recommended me to some of her manicure clients who did not attend Bençãos but were also Evangelical and regularly attended other churches in the area. Indeed, Paul Freston (ISER 2025), who has researched Brazilian religious dynamics for decades, specifically the expansion of neopentecostalism, suggests that the “Brazilian diaspora” is one of the most significant sites of expansion for Evangelical religion, even more so than among Brazilians residing in Brazil. That churches are so central to the community is critical information for interpreting this particular migration process.

In this section, where I presented the research design employed in this investigation, including the use of life stories as an appropriate approach to the labor and social reproduction dynamics I sought to examine, as well as the multi-sited and multi-temporal fieldwork strategy I adopted. Lastly, I showed that, given the particular constraints around fieldwork

with migrant communities, accessing the Brazilian community in the Marietta area through churches was the most viable strategy to conduct my research.

Objectivity and subjectivity

In designing, conducting, and analyzing my research on the Brazilian migration process to the Marietta area, I engage in diverse critical reflections on objectivity and subjectivity in qualitative social science research. In what follows, I draw from feminist critiques to argue against positivistic ideals of objectivity and neutrality in research processes. Instead, I adopt feminist approaches that consider research and researched subjectivities and power relationships on the field. Subsequently, I discuss how these issues played out in my own fieldwork, addressing my insider-outsider positionality in relation to my own communities of research.

Among the many contributions of feminist geographers to the discipline at large are critical epistemological approaches to methods and methodologies. According to England (2016), feminist scholars argue that “good research” enacts, rather than the positivistic ideals of neutrality and rationality derived from “hard sciences,” a sensitivity to “how values, power politics frame what we take to be ‘facts,’ how we develop a particular research approach and what research questions we ask and what we see when conducting research” (363). In that sense, Haraway (2017[1988]) suggests the concept of situated knowledge, which considers that knowledge is not an objective truth but is produced under certain conditions and contexts, which must be acknowledged. Moreover, feminist scholars, reflecting on the politics and ethics of relationships between the researcher and those they are researching, consider

participants' own perceptions of the circumstances and processes in which they are embedded as critical data (England 2016).

Haraway's concept of situated knowledge also influenced feminist geographers' understanding of positionality, that is, the embodied locations and social positions that shape how one views and acts in the world (England 2016). England (2016: 364) also adds that positionality "also refers to how we are positioned (by ourselves, by others, by particular discourses) in relation to multiple, intersectional, relational processes of difference (...) which also means we are differently positioned in hierarchies of power and privilege." Thus, feminist researchers are also concerned with how their own positionalities of power and privilege play out in the field, particularly when working with marginalized and vulnerable communities. England (1994) presents a poignant concrete example of how positionality plays out in research processes, narrating a discontinued research project on Toronto LGBTQ+ communities in which England's own positionality as a straight, white, feminist academic weaved complicated relationships of power between herself, her research assistant at the time, and the overall research project.

In backing out of a research project so constrained, England (1994) considers this to be a "failed" research. The theme of research and fieldwork failures is also addressed by Harrowell et al. (2018). They urge geography to make space for "failures" in its many iterations: in disappointing fieldwork experiences, rejected grant applications, given-up projects, and the "neoliberal failure" of contemporary academia. In the "neoliberal failure" of academia, Harrowell et al. (2018) include issues of funding as producing additional uncertainty about methods, since limited funding options and irregular timelines make it hard for PhD students to plan for long-term fieldwork that would allow for experimentation, trial and error, acquisition of fieldwork skills, collaboration, and building deep and meaningful

relationships with communities of study. Harrowell et al. (2018) also identify this neoliberalization in our refusal to talk about failure, hygienizing our conversations on fieldwork and methods to make them acceptable for advising committees, journal editors, reviewers, and grant selection committees. Travers (2009) adds to this critique of the neoliberalization of academia the never-ending search for innovation in qualitative methods as an aggressive marketing strategy in the capitalistic competition for limited research funding. Fieldwork and research failures, thus conceptualized, are more social than individual. The idea of failure brings into question the pretended objectivity of published research, which tends to narrate itself only in its successes.

“Now I’m interviewing you:” insider-outsider positionality

Furthermore, England’s “failed” research encourages further reflection on insider-outsider positionalities in relation to research communities. My own relationship to the Brazilian migrant community is in between that of an insider and an outsider. On the one hand, I am also a Brazilian immigrant living and working in the United States. With my research participants, I shared a language, cultural practices, and lived experiences in Brazil, which allowed me to get closer to them than a non-Brazilian would have. Many moments throughout my fieldwork expressed my insider status: my own sense of relief and familiarity in speaking Portuguese, in being treated according to Brazilian cultural codes, like being invited into people’s homes for the interviews and then being fed (even when I did not want to be!) on several occasions, and in sharing our shock and discomfort at certain US cultural practices.

On the other hand, I do not live in the Marietta area, I do not work in construction or housecleaning, and my visa situation, while precarious in its own way, is more secure and

stable than that of my research participants. In that way, I am closer to Brazilian students living in Atlanta separated from this community, as described in the introduction, than I am to my research participants. A key moment when this difference was expressed was when research participants, at one point, started asking me questions about my life in Brazil, my life in the US, and my future plans. Countless times, they referred to these questions as some variation of “now I’m interviewing you.” Invariably, they asked me if I planned to stay in the US or return to Brazil and, sometimes, ventured to give me career advice, usually unrelated to academia or my current course of employment and study.

This is not to say that my own job and education were not legible for the Brazilian migrants I interacted with in Marietta. Many of them had graduate degrees and, in the case of Maria Fernanda, she had started a PhD in Geology in Brazil and later obtained a bachelor’s degree in Geography (see life story 30). Indeed, my career was sometimes more legible for my research participants than for Americans. In 2025, my American roommate in Marietta could not wrap his head around the fact that I was getting a doctorate in Geography, as he had never heard of such a thing and could not fathom what geographers even do, or let me talk long enough to explain it to him. Meanwhile, when I went to the *Brazilian Wax by Andreia* branch in Little Brazil, the worker who attended me, upon learning I was Brazilian and studied geography, asked me without missing a beat: “so, what do you think about this war with Iran then?”⁷

Either way, this curiosity to learn where I was from, what I was doing, and where I was going marked the difference in migration trajectories and strategies between me and those I was interviewing. Other aspects marked my outsider positionality within this community. I did not come from the same background as my research participants, coming from a family

⁷ This happened in August 2025, during a time when newspaper headlines disclosed Donald Trump’s threats to Iran, which were eventually realized in March 2026.

that belongs to the “traditional” middle class, as discussed in chapter 5, and having had access to some of the conditions participants would say were attainable for them in Brazil, which partly shaped my own migration story to the US. I was also an outsider in terms of social, political, and religious beliefs and values. I am not, nor was I raised to be, an Evangelical, and indeed the first service I ever attended was in the context of my fieldwork for this research project. Many of my research participants are politically aligned with ultra-right politics and, in the US, tended to be Trump supporters at least until early 2025, when his migration enforcement policies did not turn solely against “criminals” but also against “hard workers” like themselves, and some continued to support Trump even after that. While I never lied about my own political beliefs, I tended to avoid the subject and deflect when migrants offered extremely conservative opinions, unless they asked my own opinion directly.

My fieldwork, and the research discussed in this dissertation, are the result of this simultaneous insider-outsider status, both in the ways that it allowed me to approach people, their narratives, and their backgrounds, and in the ways it created a distance and even a separation between myself and my community of study. However, as I mentioned earlier, this distance can have the effect of letting migrants narrate that which they would not share in their everyday relationships.

Summary of fieldwork

In order to learn about the labor conditions, social reproduction practices and transnational family relationships of working-class Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area, I conducted ethnographic, qualitative fieldwork in two sites: the metropolitan Atlanta area, in the United States, and Goiânia, in Brazil. My main goals were to learn about the history of

this particular Brazilian migrant community, in connection to Goiânia; the labor markets that Brazilians engage with in the Marietta area; perceptions of everyday life, quality of life, and social reproduction conditions in the Marietta area; and family care dynamics in both the Marietta area and in sending communities in Brazil. Therefore, in Atlanta, I focused on meeting, interviewing, and interacting with working-class Brazilian migrants living in the Marietta area, as well as people in positions of leadership in the community at large – many of whom are religious leaders – who could comment on broader dynamics of Brazilian migration to the metropolitan Atlanta area. To learn more about transnational dynamics between Atlanta and Goiânia – including family relationships of care as well as local conditions in Goiânia that prompt migration to Atlanta – I went to Goiânia in 2024, where I contacted and interviewed family members of research participants I had met in Marietta the year before. In sum, data collection for this project included three field visits to the metropolitan Atlanta area (preparation, ATL 1, ATL 2) in 2023 and 2025 and one visit to Goiânia (GYN), in 2024. In what follows, I describe each of these fieldwork stages in detail.

All names introduced in this dissertation, with the exception of specific public-facing individuals and institutions, are pseudonyms. At first, I asked research participants whether or not they wanted their real names to be included. Most were in agreement with their first name being used, although some opted for a pseudonym. I always remember my friend Carol's dissertation (Leite 2015), in which she used her interviewees' full names because they wanted their own stories to bear their names, even if it posed some level of risk for them. In Bejarano et al. (2019), undocumented migrants who worked as research assistants chose to have their full names printed as authors because they "didn't want to live in fear anymore." However, with changing migration policies in the US, I feel uncomfortable using people's first names, even if other identifying details are omitted, in order to preserve participants' privacy and

safety. My research project was approved (exempt status) by the University of Washington's Internal Review Board (IRB) in April 2024. A modification to include fieldwork in Brazil was submitted by me and subsequently approved (exempt status) in June 2024.

Preparation (late 2022-June 2023)

During my preliminary research on Brazilian communities in the US, I learned that local communities usually have Facebook and WhatsApp groups for jobs, ads, donations, and other communications. To start learning about the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, I looked up local Facebook groups, such as “Amigos Brasileiros em Marietta Ga” [Brazilian friends in Marietta GA], “Brasileiros em Marietta - GA/USA” [Brazilians in Marietta GA/USA], “Brasileiros em Marietta / Kennesaw / Roswell / Alpharetta e região !” [Brazilians in Marietta, Kennesaw, Roswell, Alpharetta, and area], “Brasileiros na Georgia” [Brazilians in Georgia], “Brasileiros em Marietta e Georgia (OFICIAL)” [Brazilians in Marietta and Georgia (official)], “Brasileiros na Georgia USA” [Brazilians in Georgia USA], “Comunidade Brasileira de Atlanta GA, OFICIAL!” [Brazilian community in Atlanta GA, official!], and the group for Rádio Brazil Atlanta. Through these groups, I found additional links to several other WhatsApp groups for Brazilians in the Marietta area. My own process of finding these groups and gaining access to them mirrors the ways WhatsApp groups gatekeep entrance to Brazilian labor markets in Marietta and demand that Brazilian migrants somehow obtain add links to WhatsApp groups in order to find jobs, as discussed in chapter 6.

Additionally, given my previous research experience in Brazil, I thought it would be easier to meet people and access the community through a community-based organization. I contacted some organizations who work with Latin American immigrants in the Atlanta area to see if they worked with Brazilians, they pointed me to a Brazilian immigration lawyer who

attended in the area. Through Facebook, I also learned about public community events, such as the Marietta Brazilian Festival and a meeting related to the Little Brazil Foundation.

On social media, the main community-based institution I was able to find in the Brazilian community in Marietta were the Brazilian churches, which resonated with previous research on Brazilian communities in the US. I used Google Maps to identify some of the churches in the area – with key words like “Brazilian church” in English and Portuguese – and then churches’ social media pages on Facebook and Instagram to learn more about them. I looked for smaller churches that seemed more community-based to contact. Eventually, I narrowed my list down to three churches: Bençãos, Renascer, and Vitória, and contacted them through social media or WhatsApp contact numbers. While I had no response from Vitória Church (although Pastor Natanael was responsive when I went there in person in December 2023), I did hear from Walter at Bençãos Church and Pastor Flávio at Renascer Church.

Based on that initial research, I conducted preliminary fieldwork in March 2023, during which I went to Brazilian businesses in the Marietta area, to service at Bençãos and Renascer churches, and did an interview with the immigration lawyer from Atlanta-based immigrant-support organization Latin American Association (LAA). During this first visit, I learned of a nail salon, right in the Little Brazil area, which was owned by a Vietnamese couple but hired almost exclusively Brazilian manicurists. I included it in my fieldwork plans given I could use nail salon visits to observe, chat with the workers, and listen to others’ conversations. In total, I did two key-informant interviews in this phase.

ATL 1 (August-December 2023)

I returned to Georgia between August-December 2023. During that period, I lived in north Atlanta and drove back and forth to Marietta. I met many research participants by

attending Benções Church services and accessing their networks. After meeting with Pastor Flávio from Renascer Church, he put me in contact with congregant Emerson, who in turn put me in contact with many other Renascer congregants – so even though I did not visit the church assiduously, I still connected with its parishioners. I also contacted Alessandra, whom I discovered browsing through Freedom University’s website. We had a long phone call, which became my first participant interview. Overall, I found most of my participants through snowball sampling starting from Benções and Renascer. In particular, I grew close to a large family group, which included Érika, Edna, Leal, Adriana, Oliveira, and others, who sometimes invited me for dinner, afternoon coffee, and other private gatherings (see Figure 8).

Once I had established a few snowball chains through both churches, I wanted to try to find other, non-church networks, so I encouraged participants to refer me to people they knew from different contexts (co-workers, family members who did not attend the same church, roommates etc.). On October 26, 2023, the Brazilian Consulate in Atlanta held the event *Mulheres Empreendedoras em Atlanta* [Entrepreneur women in Atlanta] to launch the *Guia do Empreendedorismo: Oportunidades no Sudeste dos EUA* [Entrepreneurship guide: Opportunities in the US Southeast], during which I contacted the speakers who I was able to interview later. Between my first visit to Marietta in March 2023 and this longer fieldwork period, I conducted a total of 38 interviews, eight with key informants (pastors, consul, business owners, lawyer) and 30 with participants.

Additionally, I conducted participant observation at multiple sites: local Brazilian businesses, the nail salon mentioned above, church services, and private gatherings. I visited Benções Church multiple times, with additional visits to Renascer, Vitória, and other churches. I focused on attending Benções because services at the other churches were at conflicting times and Benções was the most welcoming of all three churches I had initially

contacted. I also took notes after leaving people's homes and after significant events (e.g. when a Brazilian woman crashed into my car or when one of my contacts asked me for a Seattle address because he was coming to Washington state to get his driver's license). Mostly I recorded voice notes on my recorder as soon as possible after events and interviews and later transcribed them into written field notes.

GYN (August-September 2024)

I contacted all ATL 1 participants with family in Goiânia asking to be put in contact with them. From those who got back to me, I had the contacts of Cleiton's parents and wife, Lúcia's brother, Schaienne's father, and Juliana's and Claudinei's sisters. The latter did not respond. The other agreed to be interviewed. From snowball sampling, I also met with Cleiton's wife's mother and another of Lúcia's brothers. Cleiton's parents tried to connect me with their other relatives but they did not agree to be interviewed. As I learned, some of the participants' relatives were also returned migrants (Cleiton's parents and wife, one of Lúcia's brothers) In total, I did seven research participant interviews in Goiânia.

I had long Covid at this time so I was unable to do much of what I had planned. I had planned on visiting Piracanjuba, signaled by Alan Marcus (2009a) as well as research participants as a city where many Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area came from. I had also planned on visiting Vitória Church branches in both Goiânia and Piracanjuba for participant observation, focused on the transnational aspects of Vitória Church, and possibly to identify research participants.

During my time in Goiânia, I recorded observations, which were later transcribed as field notes.

ATL 2 (June-July 2025)

I returned to Georgia between June and July 2025, staying in Marietta this time. I tried different strategies to access participants this time around.

As I arrived in Marietta, I contacted people from Bençãos Church and was invited for Bible Study that same evening. There, I learned that a group from Bençãos – which included the people I had grown closest to – had separated from Bençãos and were founding a new branch of Espírito Santo Church, a Brazilian Presbyterian church from Florida. This group included many people I had met, interviewed, and hung out with during ATL 1. I chose not to do any formal follow-up interviews with them and instead focus on more informal, personal conversations, so I attended Esperança services and bible study assiduously. I did interviews with new people I met at Esperança, as well as a follow-up with Walter (who had also left Bençãos).

I did two other follow-up interviews with Schaianne and Juliana. I chose Schaianne because she does not attend Evangelical churches and I was looking for a different perspective. Then she mentioned Juliana, who had put me in touch with Schaianne, who was pregnant and had stopped working, so I thought it would be interesting to do a follow-up with her as well.

I also tried to follow threads I did not follow the first time around. I was very determined to get an interview from Nélío, who many said was the first person to migrate from Piracanjuba to the metropolitan Atlanta area, and who had been busy before. I was able to contact him in person but he refused to do an interview. I texted the 🇧🇷🇺🇸 *Brasileiras em ATL* [Brazilian women in Atlanta] WhatsApp group, which I had not tried to do before, which is a smaller WhatsApp group only for women, with the goal of providing support between members. The only person who responded was Natália, who never actually moved to the

Atlanta area, but visits frequently to see her son. I looked for the only Brazilian Catholic congregation in the area, as a counterpoint to the numerous Evangelical churches I worked with, and also because they had cancelled a big community event, partly because of concerns around ICE. I tried contacting administrators of Brazilian WhatsApp groups, to learn more about this very peculiar role they play in the community, but did not get any replies. I tried other pastors from other churches that I had reached out to and I tried to follow-up on the Little Brazil project, but again with no positive responses. I also reached out to a new community organization, Centro de Apoio ao Brasileiro Imigrante (CABI) [Support Center for the Brazilian Immigrant], to no avail. I also tried contacting other immigration lawyers working with the Brazilian community in Marietta, with no success. Finally, I tried to get connected with many people who were planning to return to Brazil, due to changing migration policies, that my interlocutors commented on. Unfortunately, none of them accepted doing interviews. In sum, I did three follow-up interviews, and new interviews with six research participants and one new key informant interview.

I did participant observations at Esperança Church services multiple times, at Vitória Church one time, and in private gatherings, Brazilian businesses, and public spaces in Marietta. Additionally, Adriana invited me over many times for afternoon coffee (mostly with the goal of proselytizing) as well as other intimate gatherings (lunches, dinners, 4th of July celebration etc.). I also continued to patronize the nail salon in Little Brazil, except it had been sold to a Brazilian woman and changed names.

Description of data collected and analyzed

I draw on multiple primary and secondary data sources, presented here in detail. As described in the summary of field work above, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Marietta area in 2023 and 2025 and in Goiânia in 2024. In that period, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with key informants and research participants, follow-up interviews and participant observation in a variety of settings. I have also conducted content analyses of WhatsApp groups for Brazilians in the Marietta area, *Viver Magazine* and *Cia. Brasil* magazine issues, and online materials from community organizations and churches.

Interviews

In total, I conducted 51 interviews with nine key informants and 44 research participants (see Table 1). My research participants included Brazilian migrants living and working in the Marietta area at the time of our interview and their family members in Goiânia. Key informants include an immigration lawyer who works in the community (Heloísa), the Brazilian consul-general for the Atlanta consulate, owners of Brazilian businesses in the Marietta area (Andreia, Rosana, Dilla), pastors of local Brazilian churches (Pastor Flávio, Pastor Natanael), one Presbyterian missionary (Walter), and one Catholic priest (Father Tadeu), both of whom live and work in the metropolitan Atlanta area as well. In 2025, I did three follow-up interviews, two of them with research participants (Schaienne and Juliana) and one with a key informant (Walter).

During my Atlanta fieldwork in 2023, I contacted people from Bençãos and Renascer churches. Walter, who was at Bençãos at the time (and later moved to Espírito Santo),

introduced me to Érika, who in turn facilitated contact with several congregants at Benções, many of whom are her relatives. At Renascer Church, Pastor Flávio introduced me to Emerson, his friend and sheep, who did not want to be interviewed but introduced me to several other congregants at that church. From there, I kept asking participants to introduce me to other possible interviewees within my interview criteria: being Brazilian, over 18, living in the Marietta area, working a low-skilled job. I made a few exceptions for people who had been in the Marietta community for a long time and could help illuminate some of its history, even if they had moved on from low-skilled jobs (provided they had those jobs in the past, i.e., were not part of a high-skilled migration scheme). Key-informants I identified and contacted by myself. I started another snowball through Alessandra, who taught at Freedom University at the time, and introduced me to her mother Lúcia (see Figure 7 for a snowball sampling tree and Figure 8 for a relationship map of my research participants). Usually, I would ask participants for new contacts at the end of our interview, “like your [friend, relative, whoever] who introduced you to me,” and they would mention someone they could ask or who they thought had an interesting story to tell, whom they promised to contact on my behalf. Sometimes I had to encourage them a few days later to make the connection and send me their friend’s phone number once they had consented to it. Then, I would send the same introductory WhatsApp message with general information about myself and the project, the themes of the interview, and mentioning the participant reward. From there, I would follow the lead of the person – sometimes they asked more questions, others asked if I was free to come over the same evening, others suggested future dates, some never replied, some said no (if their friend had not checked before).

In 2024, in Goiânia, I contacted all my research participants with family in the city. Of those, Schaianne, Juliana, Claudinei, Lúcia, and Cleiton responded with contacts of

different family members, and those who accepted my invitation are featured in this dissertation. I always asked if they could introduce me to other Goiânia residents with relatives in Marietta, which was not always the case. It was also surprising to me that some of the relatives I met in Goiânia had migrated to the US and returned.

In my 2025 fieldwork in Atlanta, I planned to do follow-up interviews with some of the ATL 1 participants and, upon arriving, I decided to divide my follow-up fieldwork into participant observation and informal interactions with the group from Bençãos Church that had moved to Espírito Santo Church, and focus on follow-up interviews with participants whose relatives I had met in Goiânia. I also intended to look for a few new interviews to fill in some of the gaps in my findings. As previously stated, many were unwilling to meet me in this second fieldwork period in Atlanta. Not only were people unwilling, but also I looked for more targeted interviews with specific participants (rather than a broad call) and I had less time in the area, which made it hard to reschedule with people who were busy at the time.

During ATL 1, I offered participants a \$50 reward, given in cash at the end of the interview. Even though I always let them know of the reward before our meetings, some were surprised by it. I always introduced it as a “thank you gift” [*um agradecimento, um presente*] for spending time with me. Some refused the reward (I have a hilarious interview transcript of one such instance of refusal) and others, who wanted to forgo it, were coaxed into accepting the cash by my suggestion of donating it to their respective churches. One person contacted me after the interview saying they felt bad for “taking my money” and offering to return it, but accepted it when I explained that it was not my money but “the university’s” and that it had been budgeted in my grants, as well as the general purpose of participant rewards. In GYN, I offered a R\$100 reward (approximately \$20). On my return to Atlanta in 2025, due to

severe budget constraints, I offered no participant rewards, which may have also affected participants' engagement with me.

I always had a preference for interviewing people on their own, but sometimes, I would arrive and both members of a married couple would be waiting for me together for a double interview. Other times, I started interviewing one spouse but if the other spouse was around, they would sometimes get into the conversation and it would become an unplanned double interview. This only happened with couples, and likely because most of my interviews were conducted in people's homes, as per their own suggestion. One very specific group – older women married to American men – had a preference for meeting at coffee shops rather than at their homes. However, I also interviewed many couples separately. In presenting Brazilian migrants' life stories, as well as in the list of interviews, I make clear which couples were interviewed separately or together.

Interviews typically lasted 1h-1h30 per person, the longest being a three-hour interview with Jurandir and Olinda. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, with the exception of Alessandra, who said she had just finished teaching a class in English and was not yet able to revert entirely to Portuguese, so we mixed both languages in our conversation. All interviews were recorded, with consent from the interviewee, and later transcribed by AI software Cockatoo, edited and proofread by me.

The largest set of data I analyzed for this dissertation were interview transcripts. I re-read them many times over and coded them through open-code software QualCoder. I used repeated readings of interview transcripts and coding reports from QualCoder to organize and sort through this material. Quotes presented in the dissertation were translated from Portuguese to English by me, with the original quote in Portuguese added in the footnotes.

Table 1: List of interviews

Name of interviewee	Date of interview	Place of interview	Type of interview
Preparation (March 2023)			
1. Heloísa (immigration lawyer)	03/22/23	Atlanta GA	Key informant
2. Walter (missionary and former presbyter for Bençãos Church)	03/08/23	Phone call	Key informant
ATL 1 (August-December 2023)			
3. Adriana	10/10/23	Marietta GA	Participant
4. Alessandra	09/01/23	Phone call	Participant
5. Andreia (business owner)	11/28/23	Marietta GA	Key informant
6. Brazilian Consul-general	09/06/23	Atlanta GA	Key informant
7. Bruna and Claudinei	10/26/23	Marietta GA	Participant
8. Cleiton	11/01/23	Marietta GA	Participant
9. Creusa	11/03/23	Marietta GA	Participant
10. Danilo	10/17/23	Marietta GA	Participant
11. Dilla (business owner)	11/28/23	Video call	Key informant
12. Diogo	10/21/23	Marietta GA	Participant
13. Edna	09/25/23	Marietta GA	Participant
14. Eliana	12/26/23	Video call	Participant
15. Érika	09/23/23	Marietta GA	Participant
16. Gerson	12/07/23	Marietta GA	Participant
17. Gustavo	10/30/23	Marietta GA	Participant
18. Isadora	09/25/23	Marietta GA	Participant
19. Jandira	12/09/23	Sandy Springs GA	Participant
20. Juçara	10/17/23	Marietta GA	Participant
21. Juliana	11/29/23	Marietta GA	Participant
22. Kiko	09/22/23	Marietta GA	Participant
23. Leal	10/24/23	Marietta GA	Participant
24. Linda	11/03/23	Marietta GA	Participant
25. Lúcia	09/22/23	Marietta GA	Participant
26. Luciano	09/22/23	Marietta GA	Participant
27. Ludmilla and Márcio	12/14/23	Kennesaw GA	Participant
28. Oliveira	10/23/23	Marietta GA	Participant
29. Pastor Flávio	08/23/23	Marietta GA	Key informant
30. Pastor Natanael	12/03/23	Marietta GA	Key informant
31. Rosana	11/04/23	Marietta GA	Participant
32. Santos	09/21/23	Marietta GA	Participant
33. Schaianne	12/06/23	Kennesaw GA	Participant
34. Talita	10/21/23	Marietta GA	Participant
35. Tânia	12/12/23	Marietta GA	Participant
36. Vanusa (Van)	10/30/23	Marietta GA	Participant
GYN (August-September 2024)			
37. Edilson	09/18/24	Goiânia GO	Participant
38. Fabiana	09/04/24	Goiânia GO	Participant

39. Helena	09/11/24	Goiânia GO	Participant
40. Lázaro	09/07/24	Goiânia GO	Participant
41. Olinda and Jurandir	09/04/24	Goiânia GO	Participant
42. Zé Fernandes	09/13/24	Goiânia GO	Participant
ATL 2 (June-July 2025)			
43. Débora	07/26/25	Video call	Participant
44. Father Tadeu	07/07/25	Sandy Springs GA	Key informant
45. Juliana	07/11/25	Kennesaw GA	Follow-up
46. Maria Fernanda	06/24/25	Marietta GA	Participant
47. Natália	07/10/25	Atlanta GA	Participant
48. Pedro	07/18/25	Marietta GA	Participant
49. Renata and Leandro	06/26/25	Marietta GA	Participant
50. Schaianne	07/05/25	Kennesaw GA	Follow-up
51. Walter (missionary and former presbyter for Bençãos Church)	07/18/25	Marietta GA	Follow-up

Field notes

The other large set of data I worked with were my field notes from participant observation at Brazilian businesses, events, church services, and private gatherings, from observations during interviews, and from specific, unplanned events, such as my car being hit by a Brazilian driver, a Brazilian migrant asking me for a Seattle address so he could get a WA state driver's license, and anecdotes around the *Mulheres Protagonistas* [Protagonist Women] event (described below).

Brazilian businesses where I conducted participant observation include restaurants and cafés, where I could sit and observe for some time, small markets and stores, which I would sometimes visit without the intention of fieldwork and still witness something significant or notice some interesting detail. As mentioned earlier, I also frequented a nail salon in the Little Brazil strip mall area, which first belonged to a Vietnamese couple and, in 2025, had been sold to a Brazilian woman. I would go in for a manicure and/or pedicure and chat with workers and other clients, taking notes afterwards. All workers' names have been

changed. I also went to community events like the *Mulheres empreendedoras* [Entrepreneur women] event organized by the consulate (2023) and the Marietta Brazilian Festival, organized by Vitória Church (2025). I planned on attending the *Mulheres Protagonistas* event in Marietta in 2023, which included former Brazilian First Lady Michelle Bolsonaro; Senator and former Minister of Women, Family, and Human Rights in the Jair Bolsonaro administration Pastor Damares Alves; and two Brazilian entrepreneur women from Florida, who were organizing the tour through Orlando, Pompano Beach, and Atlanta. The scheduled date in 2023 was cancelled without much justification and the event was indefinitely postponed, until it was rescheduled for February 2024. I was in Seattle and could not attend, but never received any replies to my reimbursement requests for the \$50 registration fee (thou *shall* steal after all, I guess). Days before the rescheduled event, however, Michelle Bolsonaro cancelled her participation due to the beginning of investigations and preventive arrests for the coup d'état plan that eventually landed her husband, former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, in jail. Unfortunately, the event was not broadcasted online.

In addition to these and other events, the churches I visited most often were Bençãos in 2023 and Espírito Santo in 2025, with additional visits to Renascer (2023) and Vitória (2023 and 2025) churches. I went to Sunday service at all of these churches, to Christmas celebration with Bençãos Church (2023), and to several bible study sessions with the Espírito Santo congregation (2025). I took notes on the environment, sermon contents, attendants, and other aspects, as well as on my informal chats with congregants before and after service.

Finally, I was invited to several private gatherings, like afternoon coffee, birthday parties, and meals, and I attended as many as I could. I also took notes afterwards, mostly of conversations and tidbits of information related to my research questions.

Online content

As part of my ethnographic methods, I joined as many Brazilian community WhatsApp groups as I could, all specific to the Marietta area. I joined groups whose add links were shared on Facebook or on other WhatsApp groups or were shared with me by my research participants. The wide majority of members in these groups are Brazilians and communicate almost entirely in Portuguese. Every so often, I have seen messages that were clearly written by Spanish-speakers, but making an effort to communicate in Portuguese. In total, I joined 35 groups (see Table 2), which I divided into the following themes: work (11), anything goes (6), rent and housing (4), information and news (3), sales and services (3), donations (3), women and mothers (3), and church groups (2). Work groups include messages from Brazilian employers looking to hire and Brazilian workers looking for jobs. Other groups – rent and housing, sales and services, donations – also have people advertising goods and services on offer as well as those looking for a provider to attend some specific ask.

To keep my regular WhatsApp manageable, I joined all of these groups with my Brazilian WhatsApp number. This decision led to two issues: first, my Brazilian number was discontinued for lack of use on August 1st, 2025; second, my fieldwork contacts were all on my US phone number, making it harder to check which of my contacts were in each WhatsApp group. Nonetheless, I still recognized some of my participants through their posts on these groups, usually looking for work. I was able to regain access to the groups and their message history since I joined, but I was removed from all of them when my Brazilian number was cancelled.

Between 2023 and 2025, I regularly checked groups to assess what was posted, how frequently groups were used, and how members interacted. All groups are almost entirely in Portuguese, except for occasional messages from Spanish speakers in work groups. For the

most part, group messages stay on topic according to the group's theme: *helpers* broadcast their availability, employers ask for available *helpers*, and other people advertise a variety of paid services and products, offer goods for donation, and share rental, subletting, and lease transfer offers. Only the 🇧🇷🇺🇸 *Brasileiras em ATL* [Brazilian women in Atlanta] group has more intimate conversations, in which people share personal stories, ask for help and support, and ask more directly for specific information. Most groups, even if they had lower numbers, had daily messages sent until August 1st, 2025. But when messages are almost always ads from recurring providers, that tends to mean the group is not quite relevant for the community. Groups that are numbered - eg. *MegaGrupo de Limpeza 3* [MegaGroup for Cleaning 3] - are typically one of several of the same name, created after each group is saturated in membership, according to the limits established by WhatsApp.

Other materials analyzed in this research project include housecleaning business cards, print issues of magazines *Viver Magazine* and *Cia. Brasil*, social media accounts for organization public figures in the Marietta Brazilian community, websites for organizations in the Marietta Brazilian community, the *Guia do Empreendedor* [Entrepreneur's guide] launched by the Brazilian consulate in Atlanta. Overall, I used these materials to build a broader picture of the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, main issues of concern, and conversations (if any) on labor and social reproduction practices.

Table 2: Brazilian WhatsApp groups in the Marietta area

Group title	Number of members (as of August 1 st , 2025)	Topic
TRABALHOS OFICIAL MARIETTA	902	Work (all jobs)
Parceiros Granito	350	Work (granite)
🇺🇸🔧 Cabinets - Georgia 🔧🇺🇸	514	Work (cabinets)
👤 PINTORES 🌐🇺🇸 (Marietta)	324	Work (painting)
Housecleaning na 400 e Marietta 🇺🇸	304	Work (housecleaning)

NEW FLOORING GROUP	272	Work (housecleaning)
MegaGrupo de Limpeza 3	957	Work (housecleaning)
Hiper cleaning (sem mimimi)	676	Work (housecleaning)
Hiper house cleaning 🧼	735	Work (housecleaning)
Construção 🏠cerâmica	186	Work (ceramics)
TRABALHO & INFORMAÇÕES	1024	Work (all jobs)
Marietta e Região	774	Anything goes
MegaGrupo Livre	739	Anything goes
Georgia p todos	200	Anything goes
Sandy Springs/região	315	Anything goes
TEM DE TUDO MARIETTA & CIA	304	Anything goes
Brasileiros na Georgia	34	Anything goes
ALUGUEL quarto/casa MARIETTA-ga	977	Rent and housing
MegaGrupo de Aluguel	1018	Rent and housing
Aluguel de casas, townhouse, townhomes , Apartments / Repasse / Aluguel de quartos !!! 🏠	744	Rent and housing
Marietta		
Aluguel de moradias	1001	Rent and housing
INFO E ANÚNCIOS - Geórgia	503	Information and news
1 RADIO BRAZIL ATLANTA	1012	Information and news
INFORMA TUDO MARIETTA	223	Information and news
Vendas e serviços	261	Sales and services
Faço pra Vender	228	Sales and services
ESTÉTICA, BELEZA & SAÚDE	92	Sales and services
só doações na Geórgia!	1022	Donations
Somente Doações , fazer o bem sem olhar a quem ! 🙏🇺🇸 Marietta	398	Donations
Atlanta-GA Donation Initiative	283	Donations
🇧🇷🇺🇸 Brasileiras em ATL	61	Women and mothers
Mamães unidas na Geórgia 📌💕	364	Women and mothers
Mães na América	214	Women and mothers
VITÓRIA ATLANTA	119	Church
BENÇÃOS (2023) MEMBROS	43 (as of August 7 th , 2023, when I was removed by an administrator)	Church

US Census data

Census data on Brazilian migrants in the US was put together by Breon Haskett according to prompts I provided. The data included a profile of Brazilian and Latine (Hispanic) migrants at a variety of scales (Marietta, Atlanta city, Cobb County, Fulton County, metro Atlanta, and Georgia) with variables: sex, education, residence in the previous year, employment status, occupation (also divided by sex), industry, income, healthcare coverage, poverty rate, and age groups (also divided by sex), using 2018-2022 5-Year ACS estimates. The 2018-2022 5-Year ACS estimates also based a profile of Brazilians in each US state, with the same variables as the other profiles. The data also includes a time series (2006-2022) of the same variables for Brazilians in a variety of scales, including Marietta, Atlanta city, Cobb County, Fulton County, metro Atlanta, Georgia, and the US, using 1-Year ACS estimates for every available year between 2006 and 2022. It is worth noting that estimate totals for county and city levels, including counties grouped as the metropolitan Atlanta area, may be inaccurate due to disclosure avoidance, especially after 2020. In 2020, there was a significant lower response rate, as well as a coding mistake regarding Brazilians (Passel and Krogstad 2023).

In this section, I presented the main data sources included in this research, namely interviews, field notes, online content, and US census data. Throughout this chapter, I discussed key methodological aspects of my research, my positionality in the field, my fieldwork stages, and main data sources.

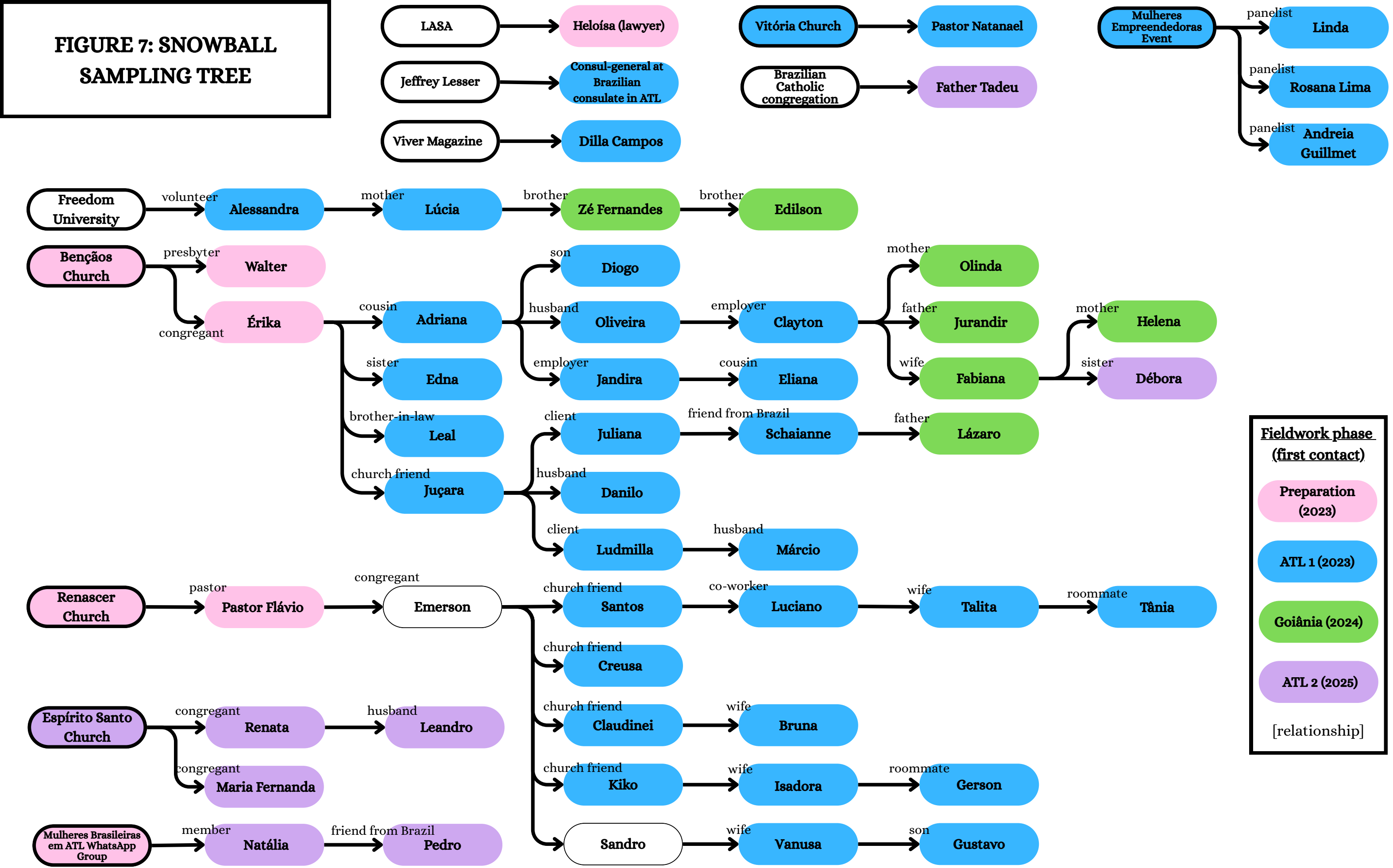


FIGURE 8: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP MAP

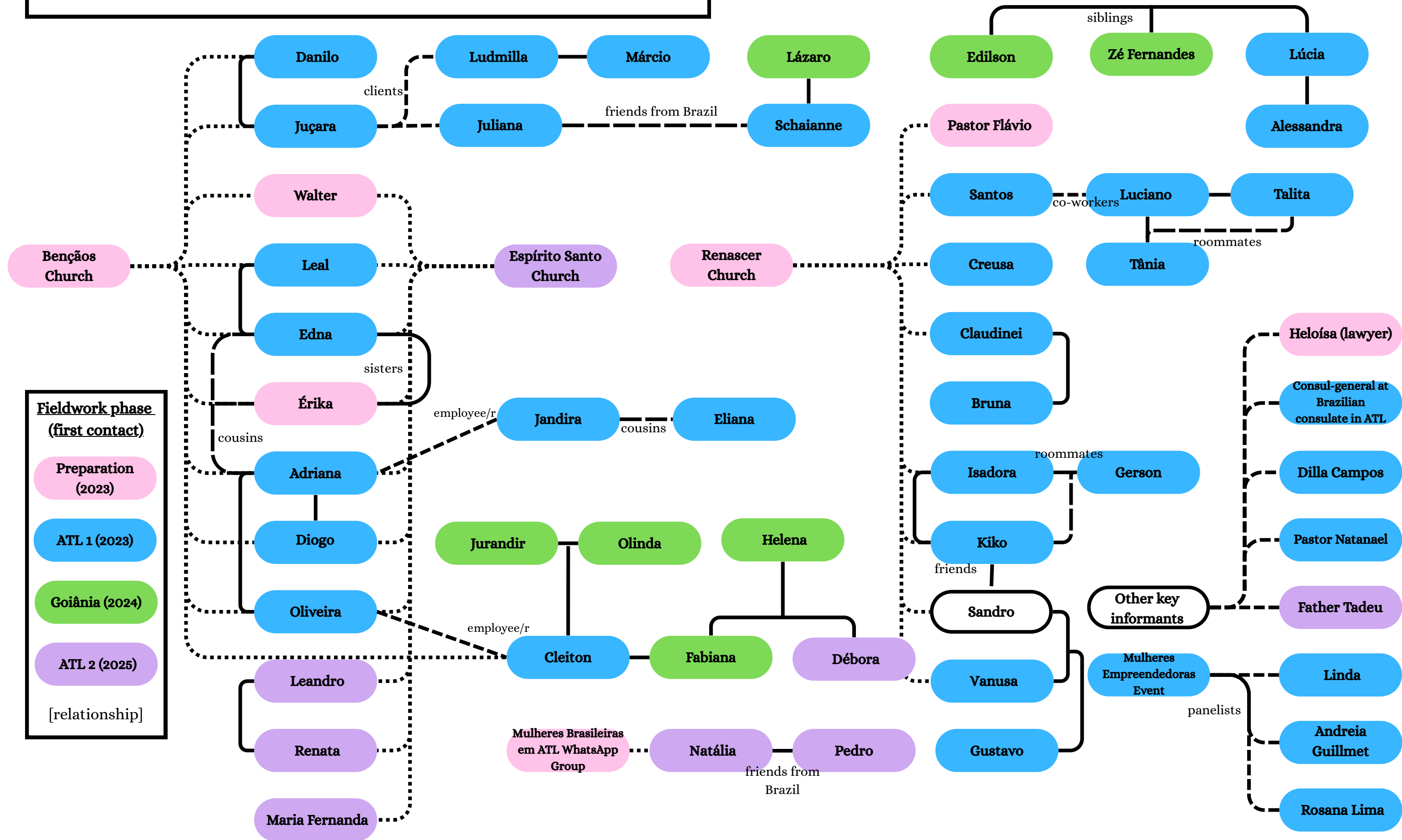
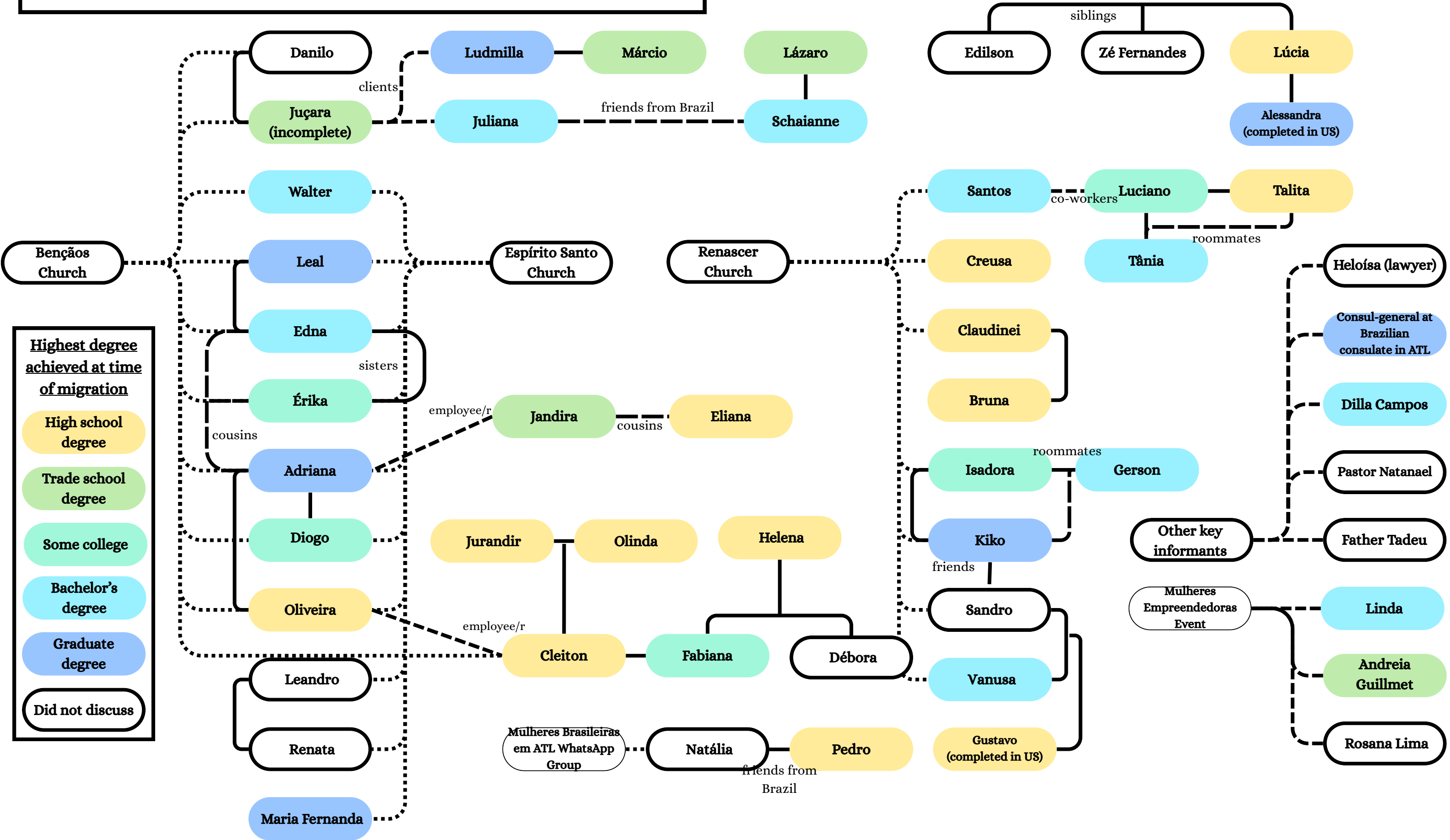


FIGURE 9: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' EDUCATION LEVELS



CHAPTER 4: BRAZILIAN COMMUNITY IN THE MARIETTA AREA

The goal of the present chapter is to contextualize basic dynamics pertaining to the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, including information on my research participants' backgrounds in Brazil and the history of the Brazilian community in Marietta. While some of this information is presented in further detail elsewhere in this dissertation, I introduce it here to introduce my community of study and its main characteristics. I start by introducing my research participants in terms of places of origin, education levels, professions in Brazil, and religious affiliation. Then, by way of presenting my research participants' racial and ethnic identities, I discuss Brazilian migrants' relationships with Hispanic and Latine categories as well as with Brazil- and US-based understandings of race. Subsequently, I present the particular strategies of entry and permanence in the US that Brazilian migrants employ.

Finally, I present a brief history of the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, based on my own fieldwork. In doing so, I demonstrate how, over time, Brazilian migration strategies have shifted from temporary, individual migration aimed at supporting a better life in Brazil to more permanent, family-based migration projects seeking a better life in the United States. Over time, Brazilian migration networks in Georgia have expanded beyond Goiás, with Marietta becoming a hub attracting migrants from across Brazil and the United States. Thus, I argue that Brazilian migration to the Marietta area fluctuates according to changes in labor markets and social reproduction conditions, including shifts in migration policy. Stricter policies can alter perceptions of life in the United States, as fear of detention or deportation becomes a central concern. These dynamics reflect changes in labor and social reproduction conditions in Marietta and elsewhere, as seen in movements from states like Florida following increased enforcement there.

Brazilians in the Marietta area

In this section, I present the Brazilian migrants I interviewed, in particular who they are and where they come from in Brazil; when and why they decide to migrate to the US; and what migration strategies they employ in order to enter and stay in the US. I start with a brief description of my research participants' backgrounds in Brazil in terms of education, work, and religion, as well as the specific moments when they decide to move to the US. Subsequently, I discuss Brazilians' racial and ethnic identities in Brazil and in the US, which requires a contextualization of the different racial and ethnic categories in each country, how Brazilians relate to racialization here and there, and how self and external racial or ethnic classifications frame their experience as migrant workers in the US.

Most of the Brazilian migrants living in the Marietta area whom I interviewed left from urban contexts in Brazil, in a variety of states (see life stories in Appendix A for more details). Many came from state capitals and, in particular, Goiânia. Of 38 research participants who lived in Marietta, 13 lived in Goiânia before moving to the US. Others lived in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte (2); Cuiabá, Mato Grosso (2); Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro (2); Salvador, Bahia (1); São Paulo, São Paulo (1); and Fortaleza, Ceará (1). Brazilian migrants also left cities in large metropolitan areas, such as São Gonçalo, Rio de Janeiro (5) and Santo André, São Paulo (2). Finally, many came from smaller towns on the coast or in the countryside, such as São Pedro da Aldeia (pop. 105,000), Rio de Janeiro (3); Ibimirim (pop. 30,000), Pernambuco (2); Cândido Sales (pop. 25,000), Bahia (2); Caldas Novas (pop. 107,000), Goiás (1); and Guaratuba (pop. 38,000), Paraná (1) (see Figure 3).

Most of my research participants, while living in Brazil, were neither among the richest nor the poorest in the country (see life stories for more details). For example, none of

them lived in favelas, poor rural communities, or other marginalized contexts. On the other hand, they talked about struggling in Brazil, or being altogether unable, to attain certain living conditions available only to “the wealthy”: purchasing certain consumer goods, traveling for leisure, affording private education and healthcare, among other things. Indeed, some of my research participants narrated having a “comfortable life” in Brazil when they decided to move to the US. Eliana, who left Brazil for Sandy Springs in 1986, had a stable job at a bank, friends, and a “reasonable life” in Goiânia before deciding to migrate, meaning a comfortable standard of living (see life story 1). Similarly, Eliana’s cousin Jandira had stable employment managing a boutique, lived near family, and had a trade degree in accounting before joining Eliana in Sandy Springs in 1988. Jurandir also highlighted his good social standing in Brazil before migrating, offering as evidence that he was able to pay rent in the Marietta area for a couple of months in advance of his move to the US in 1998 (see life story 5). Érika, who moved to Marietta in 2018, described her life in São Gonçalo, before moving to the US, as “very comfortable” (see life story 19).

As seen in Figure 9, my research participants had achieved significant education levels. A few of them obtained graduate degrees in Brazil before migrating: Leal, Ludmilla, Adriana, Maria Fernanda, and Kiko. Maria Fernanda was the only one who had a research-oriented, academic graduate degree, an MSc in Geology, while all others had professional graduate degrees, meaning further training in their specific areas of work. It is worth remarking that, among those who attended college, most went to lower-ranking private schools, frequently supported by financial aid government programs. Differently to the US, Brazil’s best universities are typically public, rather than private, institutions. Public universities can be either state or federal schools and, also unlike the US, are tuition-free. Consequently, admissions, based on a comprehensive exam, are very competitive and tend to

favor prospective students from wealthier backgrounds, who access better, and typically private, education at the middle and high school levels. To be sure, there are highly ranked private universities in Brazil as well, but many privately-owned colleges are considered to offer lower quality education and even to be merely “degree factories” for profit. As discussed in chapter 5, access to private universities was expanded during the early 2000s through government programs that offered either scholarships or low-interest student loans. Attendance at this lower rank of private universities is usually a marker of class, in that its students have enough resources to attend college but not enough to attend top-ranking public or private universities. Therefore, the fact that most Brazilian migrants I talked to were alumni of lower-ranking private universities is a marker of their specific class positionalities in Brazil. Among those who started but did not finish a bachelor’s degree, most left Brazil while still in college, meaning they quit their studies so they could migrate to the US. The only exception is Isadora, who interrupted her education because she could not afford her private college tuition.

As the life stories in Appendix A demonstrate, most of my research participants had higher-skilled, managerial, white-collar kinds of occupations. The exceptions, those who worked lower-skilled jobs in Brazil, are Diogo and Oliveira, who worked as house painters; Creusa, who worked as a sewist and as a domestic worker; Talita, who worked in street markets and as a domestic worker; and Bruna, who worked as a supermarket cashier. Others worked in healthcare (Kiko, Tânia, Ludmilla), sales (Claudinei, Danilo, Juçara), store management (Fabiana, Érika, Jandira), accounting (Adriana), government jobs (Lúcia, Luciano), banking (Eliana), administration (Gerson), logistics engineering (Leal), policing (Santos), interior design (Schaianne), education (Vanusa), and some were business owners (Jurandir, Pedro).

As a result, many had resources to finance their migration to the US. Obtaining a tourist visa to the US, which many of my research participants did as the first step of their preparation, requires financial resources for fees and for traveling to the nearest consulate. Additionally, class may be an unspoken criteria for tourist visas being approved. Creusa, for example, had a friend already living in Marietta make transfers to her bank account in Brazil and fudged documents on a plot of land she owned to make it seem as though she obtained income from it (see life story 20). The implication for consulate officers is that a “wealthier” Brazilian is less likely to use a US tourist visa as a migration strategy. If Brazilian migrants go on the *travessia*, they also need significant financial resources for a downpayment to the *atravessador* before they even leave Brazil. Luciano even mentioned that, at a certain point, he and his wife Talita thought they had lost this downpayment when the *atravessador* they were working with ceased all communication with them (see life story 27). Additionally, many sell property and personal belongings, from real estate to land to vehicles to home appliances and other items, to gather the initial funds with which they will support themselves once they arrive in the US. Subsequently, I describe these strategies in more detail. Here, I call attention to them as a further descriptor of migrants’ backgrounds and class status in Brazil before migrating.

Finally, most of my participants attended neopentecostal churches in Brazil before migrating and were brought up Evangelical or Catholic, in which case they later converted. A few of them, however, converted after migrating, like Leandro and Renata (see life story 29).

Regarding the moment when the decision to migrate to the US was made, some aspects stand out from the life stories narrated in the appendix. Some of my research participants decided to migrate after a sudden or long-lasting loss of employment. Leal, for example, was fired from his high-ranking managerial job in 2014 and was unable to find a

new job, until he and his wife Edna decided to migrate to Boston (see life story 17). Similarly, the couples Ludmilla and Márcio (see life story 8) and Vanusa and Sandro (see life story 18) moved to Marietta after long periods in which Márcio and Sandro were out of work, and even though Ludmilla and Vanusa remained employed, the families struggled to support themselves. For others, employment was stable but accompanied by a sense of underpayment and of not being able to afford certain living conditions even on a fixed income. Juliana narrated that she “could not get married” in Goiânia because she and her husband-to-be could not afford a life of their own, even with two wages (see life story 14). Among those who described their lives in Brazil as “comfortable,” there was frequently a sense of upward social mobility being unattainable. In such a context, while many were encouraged by relatives and friends living in the US, others started “dreaming” about it independently and actively searched for contacts in their networks of other Brazilians already in the US.

Brazilian racial and ethnic identities

When the Brazilian movie *Bacurau* (2019) hit the theaters in Brazil, many Brazilians were shocked by one particular scene. A group of American tourists visiting a small countryside Northeastern town sits at a table with two Brazilians. The two Brazilians try to explain to the Americans that, because they come from the south of Brazil, are light-skinned and of European ancestry, they are not like the residents of the small Northeastern town they find themselves in but rather much closer to the Americans. The Americans laugh at the suggestion, remarking on the two Brazilians’ large noses and full lips. In a derisive tone, one of them says “[you’re] more like white Mexicans.” Brazilian movie-theater audiences, used to thinking about themselves like their two co-nationals in the scene, called it an appalling reality check. For Brazilian migrants in the US, however, this scene showed nothing new.

Indeed, they are aware of the disconnect between their own racial and ethnic self-identification and the external classifications they encounter once in the US. Thus, defining the Brazilian migrant population I worked with in terms of racial and ethnic categories is a complex and thorny affair.

Brazil is not a country that divides its population in terms of ethnicity, tribes, clans, or others. The Brazilian state racial project (as conceptualized by Omi and Winant 2015) of producing a more or less unified Brazilian identity through shared language and culture (Vainer 2000) was, in that sense, successful. Crucially, this project obscures the exclusion of surviving Indigenous groups from the imagined “Brazilian people” and in large part erases the pervasive Indigenous and African influences in what is considered “Brazilian culture,” including in Brazilian Portuguese. Meanwhile, it sustains the illusion of Brazil as a “racial democracy” (Freyre 1933). Erasure and silencing of Indigenous and Black identities underscoring “myths” of “racial democracy” are prevalent across Latin America (although in geographically and historically specific ways) and, frequently, come into tension with US racial thinking through migration and other transnational exchanges (for a detailed account of this tension in Puerto Rico, see Rodríguez-Silva 2012).

In order to make sense of tensions and conflicts in the racial classifications of Brazilian migrants, scholars have extensively explored the difference between US and Brazilian racial schemas (Joseph 2015). Indeed, ideas about racial democracy in Brazil came from Gilberto Freyre’s comparison of legal segregation in the American South and what he perceived as a “racial utopia” in Brazil. Marrow (2003) argues that while the US has abided by a strict and polarized white-black binary, Brazil has developed more of a “racial continuum;” while the one-drop rule in the US excludes people from whiteness, the one-drop rule in Brazil includes people in whiteness, making them “potentially white” or at least “not

Black.” Joseph (2015:32) claims that “While the Brazilian racial schema is characterized by fluid categories and emphasis on phenotype over ancestry, the US racial schema has historically been based on rigid categories and an emphasis on ancestry and racial purity.” She also states that “Brazil earned a global reputation as a racial paradise due to its fluid racial boundaries, absence of overtly racist legislation, and social acceptance of interracial (sexual and marital) relationships. Conversely, the United States developed rigidly defined racial categories and extensive *de jure* and *de facto* racist policies aimed at separating racial groups and emphasizing (white) racial purity” (Joseph 2015: 3).

As Joseph (2015) acknowledges, interracial relationships in Brazil were encouraged by white elites as a way of “improving” the “inferior” genes and phenotypes of African and Indigenous peoples. It is worth adding that this “permissiveness” of interracial relationships was underscored by a concerted effort to attract European migrants, while limiting or forbidding the immigration of Asians, Africans, and Middle-East people to Brazil in the 19th century and by strict, and at times violent, policies of forced assimilation of European migrants into Brazilian society (Vainer 2000, Seyferth 1996, 2000, 2002).

Different dimensions come into conflict when one attempts to define Brazilian migrants in racial and ethnic terms: different racial formations in Brazil and the US; the implied colonialism in terms such as Latin American, Hispanic, and Latine that coexists alongside significant political struggles predicated on those same terms; and geographical and subjective variations of racism and white supremacy that inform how Brazilians and Americans see themselves and others, to name just a few. Most emblematic of this problem is Joseph’s (2015) own work, which researches racial identities among Brazilians who returned home to Governador Valadares after living in the US. A sense of confusion is prevalent throughout her book, even though she is trying to order the chaos of Brazilian ethnic and

racial identities in the US. Interview quotes of Brazilian returnees expressing their confusion over how they were racially perceived in the US are punctuated by Joseph's phenotypical description of each interlocutor and her own, usually differing, account of how she would racially classify them.

While my research participants self-identified as *branco/a* [white], *pardo/a*, *moreno/a* or *mulata/o*⁸ [mixed-race], *amarelo/a* [yellow], *negro/a* [Black] or even *índio/a* [Indian/Indigenous] and *brasileiro/a* [Brazilian], these identities do not neatly translate into US racial and ethnic categories attributed to Brazilian migrants once they arrive in the country. Research on Brazilian migration to the US has extensively addressed this issue. So much so that when I met with the scholar Maxine Margolis (see 1994, 2013) in preparation for my research, she said that this was one topic I should avoid since it was “overdone.” At the same time, racial and ethnic categories are important to address since they shape Brazilians' subjectivities, lived experiences, and material realities in the US. Different actors engage in racially and ethnically classifying Brazilian migrants in the US, with different purposes in mind. Multiple US government institutions demand such classifications, from forms that ask about race and ethnicity to the US census as an official instrument of classification. US society at large also participates in this process; through a variety of pre-established categories and the ways individuals attribute them to others. Brazilian and American scholars working with Brazilian migrant communities do so as well, as do Brazilian migrants themselves, with their own ambiguous and complicated relationship toward ethnic and racial identifications. Neither of these groups has homogenous views on what constitutes different racial and ethnic categories and to whom they should be attributed.

8 The category of *pardo* [mixed-race] in Brazil refers to a non-specific miscegenation between white, Black, and Indigenous resulting in mixed phenotypical features. *Moreno/a* and *mulato/a* are informal terms with similar meaning, although the latter is frequently criticized for its racist undertones.

Furthermore, as I am primarily interested in how Brazilians participate in US labor markets, racialization processes must be taken into account. As discussed in chapter 2, this includes considering scholarship on migrant labor in the US, which in turn includes thinking about the racialization of migrants in the US, and therefore also a broader analysis of racialized labor in the US. The specific case of Brazilian migrants in the US also facilitates a critique of the naturalization of racial and ethnic identities as realities, putting at stake the treatment of such diversity, rather than a critique of the constitution of racial identities and the human race as part of the historical constitution of the capitalist mode of production and reproduction. In that sense, Brazilian migrants' predicament reveals race to be, simultaneously, a fiction and a material reality (K. Fields and B. Fields 2012).

In the name of contextualizing the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, I briefly next discuss some key points of contention when it comes to interpretations of Brazilian racial and ethnic identities. I highlight the contentions between these different attempts to outline such identities, as well as my own disagreements with some scholarly interpretations of them, both as a researcher of Brazilian migration and from my own positionality as a Brazilian migrant living in the US. In what follows, I address two main areas of debate: (a) Hispanic/Latine identities; and (b) differing interpretations of what constitutes white, Black, brown subjects in Brazil and the US. Some studies have addressed these together and others have addressed them separately. I shall address them separately in order to discuss different themes in relation to each. My suggestion is to maintain a generative tension between self-identification, how Brazilian migrants identify in ethnic and racial terms, and external racial classifications, how Brazilian migrants are classified by others and how they themselves engage in racially and ethnically classifying others. The key issue at stake, then, is the tension

between how Brazilians self-identify and how different actors in US society classify them in relation to their own racial and ethnic categories.

(a) On Hispanic/Latine/Latin-American identities

I did not ask my research participants whether they did or did not identify with Hispanic and/or Latine categories in the US. My research interlocutors in the Marietta area, when referring to other Latin American migrants, typically used the word *hispanos* or Mexicans, although I am not sure whether they meant actual Mexicans or used it as a stereotypical generic term. Then, why address Hispanic and Latine ethnic categories when it comes to Brazilians in the US? Because Latin American migrants and their descendants in the US tend to be externally classified as Hispanic and/or Latine. Depending on the context, Brazilian migrants are included in or excluded from this classification, regardless of their own self-identification.

Researchers of Brazilian communities in the US, like Alan Marcus (2009), Helen Marrow (2003), and Maxine Margolis (2013), tend to argue that US society at large views Brazilians as Hispanic and/or Latines while Brazilians do not identify with such categories and indeed try to separate themselves from other Latin American migrant communities. These scholars also critique how the categories of Hispanic and Latine, when applied to Brazilians, betray an erroneous homogenization of Latin American populations. Marrow (2003) understands that US society at large sees Hispanic or Latine pan-ethnicity through three different logics: linguistic, geographic, and racial. To Marrow (2003), in including Brazilians in these ethnic categories, US natives erroneously imply that Brazilians speak Spanish, that everything south of the border is generically Hispanic, and that every Latin American person

belongs to a vague mixed, mestizo, or brown “race.” Marrow (2003) further claims that US society overlooks the nuances of Latin American societies and considers Brazilians broadly as Hispanic and/or Latine, in direct conflict with Brazilian self-identification as white. Joseph (2015) focuses on racial and ethnic identities of Brazilians who returned to Brazil after living in the US, comparing self-classifications in pre-, during, and post-migration periods, and offers a more sophisticated reading of the tension that Hispanic and/or Latine categories produce in Brazilian migrants. Through a framework of transnational racial optics, Joseph (2015) acknowledges that Brazilian migrants negotiate between US and Brazilian racial schemas, being influenced by US racial and ethnic categories while retaining their Brazilian racial identities. In what follows, I offer a few points of contention with the arguments these scholars put forward.

First, US society does not monolithically view Brazilians as Hispanic and/or Latine. The US Census officially excludes Brazilians from its definition of Hispanic/Latino, which is applicable only to those of “Spanish culture or origin,” including Mexicans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Colombians, Spaniards, and others. If a person declares themselves to be “Hispanic or Latino” but lists an ethnicity or nationality not considered as such, for example, Brazilian, Filipino, Belizean, Jamaican, Haitian, or Guyanese, they are later “back coded” as *not* Hispanic or Latino (Passel and Krogstad 2023). Joseph (2015) shares two anecdotes from her own fieldwork in Governador Valadares that are also relevant here. One is that of a Brazilian man who, while living in the US, made an effort to “look Latino.” Given his phenotype, he was frequently seen as an “Arab,” which he felt was dangerous given post-9/11 anti-Muslim xenophobia. This means that Brazilians can be seen as belonging to other pan-ethnic categories in the US. The other is that of a Brazilian woman whose American co-worker did not like her because he thought she was Colombian;

once she declared herself to be Brazilian, they got along fine, since he only disliked Hispanics. In that case, this American man clearly did not consider Brazilians to be Hispanic, and therefore deserving of racist treatment. Finally, while some scholars have noted that Brazilians remain relatively invisible to US society at large, my own understanding is that this “invisibility” is at least partly predicated on the fact that most Brazilians do not look like the stereotypical Latin American migrant who gets racially profiled as Hispanic and/or Latine in the US.

Second, some Brazilians indeed identify themselves as Hispanic and/or Latine. In Brazil, the term *latine* is largely understood as synonymous with Latin-American, and Brazilians do consider themselves to be *latines* in this sense of the word. In this context, *latine* does not bear the same ethnic and racial connotations as it does in the US. That Brazilians may self-identify as Hispanic/Latine was revealed by a mistake in the 2020 American Community Survey data editing, in which Brazilians and some other groups were inadvertently left out of the back-coding procedures, revealing 416,000 Brazilians who considered themselves to be of Hispanic and/or Latino ethnicity, which amounts to 70% of Brazilian respondents (Passel and Krogstad 2023). Before this specific back-coding procedure was implemented, 18% of Brazilians were counted as Hispanic in 1980 and 33% in 1990 (Passel and Krogstad 2023). In analyzing the data revealed in the 2020 back-coding oversight, it has to be considered that this data applies to both foreign-born and US-born people who declare Brazilian ancestry. In practice, this means that both migrants and their children are being counted, which includes children who were raised in the American school system and to whom US ethnic and racial identities may have been more familiar, including that of Hispanic and/or Latine.

On the other hand, my research participants separated themselves from *hispanos*. As an ethnic classification for Brazilians, Hispanic is indeed factually wrong, as Marrow (2003) remarks. Brazil was not colonized by Spain and its official language is not Spanish. Margolis (2013) also contends that Brazilians are more likely to identify with Hispanic and/or Latine categories in places where this may afford them some advantage, like Los Angeles and South Florida, and refuse those same identities in areas where they are seen as discriminated minorities, like Boston. Margolis (2013) underlines the relational and fluid character of identity in this context, which allows Brazilian migrants to claim and reject one or another of their possible ethnic, cultural, and geographical identities according to context, purpose, and interlocutor. On the other hand, Margolis (2013: 194) claims that Brazilians distance themselves from the “Hispanic-Latino rubric and, in doing so, give themselves a leg up in the [US] ethnic ladder.” Joseph (2015) reaffirms that idea.

What neither Margolis nor Joseph clarify is when and where this “leg up” occurs. The instances they refer to of Brazilians refusing Hispanic and/or Latine classifications are mostly in academic research, so it is hardly clear in what context this refusal occurs outside of fieldwork interviews. Of course, Brazilians may react to being called Hispanic in their direct, individual relationships, as is the case with Joseph’s (2015) interviewee who explained to her co-worker that she was not, in fact, Hispanic. Even then, however, she was being factual in explaining to her co-worker that her nationality was not Colombian, as he assumed, but Brazilian. What I am skeptical of in this argument is the idea that Brazilians are able to negotiate their racial classification with broader US society. On the contrary, Brazilians seem to be contextually characterized as Hispanic and/or Latine, or not, regardless of their input.

In her survey on how Brazilian returnees self-classified while in the US, Joseph (2015) compares and contrasts responses to two different questions about how returnees

would racially classify themselves in the US: by census categories (white, Black, Hispanic/Latino, other) and open-ended classification. In terms of census categories, 39% of Joseph's respondents chose Hispanic/Latino. In the open-ended classification, 16% used the words Hispanic and/or Latino/a to describe themselves. No one used Hispanic and/or Latino/a in their open-ended pre-migration self-classifications and only one used Latina in their open-ended racial category post-migration (for the census categories pre- and post-migration, Joseph used Brazilian census responses, which do not include any version of Hispanic and/or Latine). Joseph's (2015) survey answers seem to show, indeed, that Brazilians understand and accept the external racial classification imposed on them in the US. Brazilians also seem to continuously grapple with the structural inequalities of being racialized migrants in the US, making this "leg up" argument even more fragile. In a way, by arguing that Brazilians can negotiate their standing in the US "ethnic ladder," these authors imply that racial privilege can be negotiated individually and can even be acquired through individual self-classification, instead of explicitly conceptualizing racial or ethnic privilege as socially and structurally attributed in context. While individuals might have some context-specific wiggle room to negotiate their racial or ethnic-based social standing with other individuals, they can hardly override social and structural regimes of racial or ethnic-based inequality.

Moreover, by focusing their critique on Brazilian refusal of the Hispanic category, Margolis (2013), Joseph (2015), and others overlook how the Hispanic category is a US-centric imposition onto Brazilians and, moreover, a problematic category in and of itself. The ethnic categories of Hispanic and Latine themselves are highly contested, as is the interchangeability between both terms. To Marcus (2020), the terms Hispanic and Latino imply a Euro-American gaze and a mythic, ambiguous, and sometimes non-existent Latin-American geography. This imagined geography departs from a US-centric point of view to

include some countries while excluding others from a stereotyped imaginary of Latin America. Both terms, Hispanic and Latino, also tend to exclude Indigeneity and African-ness inherent to many contexts within Latin-America. To Marcus (2020), both of these issues converge into a racialization of Hispanic and Latino categories in such a way that creates an imagined, biologically homogeneous population that is generically stereotyped as a brown or mixed-race population. This also conflicts with Latin American and Caribbean flexible, fluid understandings of race and overrides how Latin American migrants in the United States identify themselves. While Marcus (2009, 2020) acknowledges the importance of such categories for political organizing, he considers them to be working against the political goals of the groups organizing behind them, as the Hispanic or Latino labels reinforce a stereotypical, colonially and imperialistically constructed idea of what it means to be born and raised south of the Río Grande.

My point is not to argue that Brazilians do not see themselves as hierarchically superior to other Latin American migrant populations in the US. I agree that many do, and carry their own racist assumptions about these populations. For that reason, I would also agree that Brazilians differentiate themselves from the *hispanos* and constantly reiterate that separation, even if just by mentioning the *hispanos* as a separate, different group. Brazilians indeed project their own racist stereotypes onto *hispanos*, but in a way that far exceeds their refusal of this category. Meanwhile, I believe it to be generative to maintain the tension between self-identification and external classifications of Brazilians as Hispanic and/or Latine (or not), and explore when and where this tension occurs. In what follows, I propose a similar approach to think about the tensions behind how Brazilians racially self-identify.

(b) On Brazilian racial identities

At the end of my interviews, I asked my participants about their racial identity, if I had the opportunity. They would usually react to this question with bafflement and confusion, saying things like “I don’t know” or “I never thought about that.” Santos made an exaggerated gesture of looking at his own arms and torso as if to double-check his skin tone before answering “It’s white, white, yellow, something like that [laughs].” Sometimes, I would have to coax an answer out of them by insisting: “but if you *had* to, what would you say?” And my last resource was usually to ask, “if you were answering the Brazilian census, what would you say?” Vanusa, for example, said “I don’t know how to say it, *mulata*, I don’t know. My dad was Black but my mom was white, like you. But I was born *morena*. (...) I don’t know how to say it, *café com leite* [coffee with milk] [laughs].” Edna, in turn, answered “I don’t know, is it *latina*, Indigenous? (...) Yeah, I don’t know, I’m *latina*, *morena*, Indigenous, *misturada* [mixed].” Others self-identified with more traditional categories such as white, Black, and *pardo*.

While many of my research participants expressed resistance or bafflement over being asked to racially identify themselves, they were quick to make remarks about white and Black Americans, *hispanos*, and even identified as “racism” experiences of microaggression they went through in the US. Adriana is an illustrative example of this attitude. During our interview in 2023 (interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA), she answered my question about her racial identity as “*parda*,” but claimed she “do[es]n’t think of [her]self like that,” even though she had made several comments about both white and Black Americans. On my return to Marietta in 2025, Adriana frequently invited me to her house to hang out and chat. On one of those occasions, when we were talking about my work, she said she found geography

fascinating and that, after arriving in the US, she had noticed how populations from tropical and equatorial climes are short and stocky, while natives of higher latitudes tend to be much taller. Such remarks were followed by examples of white, Black, and *hispane* populations, the latter of which she frequently called “Oompa Loompas,” in reference to the fictional workers at Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory. On that occasion, she demonstrated again that she indeed used a racial lens to make sense of the world and people’s place in it, from which it should logically follow that she should think of herself that way, too (unfortunately, I did not think to ask her then where she fit into the schema she outlined; she briefly mentioned how Brazilian Indigenous populations were are also short, using as an example an *aldeia* [Indigenous community] that her church back home helped proselytize; I was interested in hearing more about it and steered the conversation in that direction).

Previous academic research on Brazilian migration to the US found quite different attitudes, however. Scholars like Joseph (2015) and Margolis (2013) claim a trend among Brazilian migrants to self-identify as white in the US as well as in Brazil, when they return home. These authors agree, for the most part, that while Brazil and the US present “opposing” racial schemas, Brazilian migrants and returnees “claim whiteness,” to which these authors seem to imply they are not entitled, as an attempt to finagle some extra privilege for themselves. Here too there are some points of contention I would like to address. This is important not only because such racial classifications affect Brazilian migrants’ subjectivities and material realities, but also to critique the ways in which academic discourse on race in the US is predicated upon specifically American racial categories, and even the most critical scholars tend to look at other contexts through the same lens.

My first point is that racial identities in Brazil are not as fluid and negotiable as these authors tend to believe. On the contrary, I understand this argument to be a diluted version of

racial democracy ideology. Many ideas on the fluidity of Brazilian racial categories are based on the existence of a *pardo* [mixed-race] category and that (i) they can “adjust” their phenotype to look white and (ii) *pardos* and blacks in Brazil can be considered “socially white” if they have upward social mobility. As I subsequently argue, that is both untrue and a US-centric way of addressing Brazilian racial categories.

To argue in favor of (i), Joseph (2015) uses herself (a Black American woman) as an example, describing being treated better in Brazil when her hair was straightened or when she made her American accent more apparent. I suggest a different reading of this situation: it means that a person of her phenotype, in Brazil, can only be better treated if they appeal to other markers of social status. To me, her hair and accent would signal that she is not poor, rather than that she is not Black. To argue in favor of (ii), Joseph (2015) suggests that upward social mobility in Brazil comes with a social whitening. Again, I am skeptical. Upwardly mobile Blacks and *pardos* in Brazil may be treated better, but they continue to be seen as Black or *pardo*. For example, Brazilian newspapers are filled with cases of Black and *pardo* clients being mistreated at restaurants, stores, and other spaces that are racially and socially coded as white and wealthy. Another Kleber Mendonça Filho movie presents a poignant example of the fallacy of this “social whiteness.” In a blink-and-you-miss-it moment in the movie *Aquarius* (2016), a wealthy woman is very discreetly shown using a smartphone app to lighten her fiancé’s skin in a childhood picture they mean to use for their wedding video. Furthermore, it is not always easy, or even possible, to clearly separate race and class meanings, even if they appear as independent to the people who reproduce them. In that sense, when Brazilian migration scholars (e.g. Joseph 2015, Margolis 2013) claim that, in Brazil, class is more important than race as a signifier of difference, they inadvertently obscure the complex blurring of race and class in that context.

My second point of critique is that, while I tend to agree that the US racial formation favors ancestry while the Brazilian one favors phenotype, both claims need to be tempered by the acknowledgement that ancestry indeed matters in the Brazilian racial formation and phenotype indeed matters in the American one. Therefore, using a theoretical framework of differing racial formations between Brazil and the US seems to me to be problematic in a few different ways. First, I think the way scholars emphasize racial purity in the US and fluid racial identities in Brazil are diluted versions of prevailing racial ideologies in both of these countries, reinforcing those ideologies instead of laying bare the underlying racism in both of them. Second, by emphasizing the difference and not the similarities between both countries, the common denominator, white supremacy, is also overlooked. If white supremacy is acknowledged, it then reveals itself to be elastic, adaptable, and malleable into different strategies. Highlighting the differences also engages in a methodological nationalism that considers that each country developed racial schemas in isolation, which now come into contact through Brazilian migration to the US, when in fact racial and racist ideologies were constituted in the wake of colonialism as a global phenomenon. Third, I would also emphasize that, while Brazilian and US racial schemas are purported to be so radically different, their results are unnervingly similar: mass incarceration and genocide of Black and brown/*parda* youth, and social and economic disenfranchisement of Black and brown/*parda* populations in both countries.

In that sense, Gilmore (2022[2002]) offers a more generative framework in the concepts of global hierarchies of race and global racial formations, in which nationality matters for racialization as much as phenotype and ancestry. While the same person may be differently racially or ethnically categorized according to historical and geographical context, they will usually be racially read in relation to this global hierarchy. As geographers have

suggested (Bledsoe and Wright 2019, Gilmore 2022[2002], Pulido 2016), to say that spaces are racialized implies that racialized areas are subjected to organized abandonment and environmental harm. Another dimension that is especially interesting to geographers is that not only are spaces racialized, but spaces also racialize the people who are born and reside in them, in co-constitution with other markers such as phenotype and ancestry. At the global scale, nationality becomes an important racial marker. In certain contexts, regions are also racialized. In Brazil, for example, being a “Northeasterner” becomes a racialization marker in certain contexts, especially in Southeastern states. Therefore, national racial formations are not isolated, but rather relate to this global hierarchy of race.

My third point of critique is that the framework of Brazil and the US as opposing racial formations, facilitates misleading arguments when addressing the tension between the racial identities Brazilian migrants bring with them to the US and those attributed to them once they arrive. This happens when Joseph (2015) and Margolis (2013) defend the “leg up” or the “claiming whiteness” arguments. Racial privilege is addressed as something that can be individually negotiated, instead of socially and structurally attributed to people. Margolis, Joseph, and others seem more concerned with critiquing Brazilians for “clinging to whiteness” than with critiquing the tacitly imperialistic and racist ways in which whiteness is formed as a very “select” category in the US and thus denied to Brazilians by virtue of their nationality. They also seem to ignore Brazilian social and racial structures in which migrants are socialized as white. In the case of Joseph’s returnees, the author seems to hold on to a tacit expectation that returned Brazilian migrants would continue to identify as non-white after returning from the US, disregarding how they are socially and racially positioned in Brazilian society.

In sum, exploring the tension between self-identification and external classification in racial and ethnic terms seems more generative to me. For Brazilian migrants, self-identification and external classification come into tension. Brazilians do not identify as Hispanic or Latine in terms of their self-classification, but they are perceived and racialized in specific ways by US society. At the same time, Brazilians intentionally differentiate themselves from other Latin American communities, calling them *hispanos*, making racist comments about Mexicans and other groups, and so on. That Brazilians are perceived as non-white or racialized by US society is patent even in the scholarship on Brazilian migration to the US, which seems to expect Brazilians to accept Hispanic and/or Latine identities and deny the racial identities they bear in Brazil. On the other hand, Brazilian migrants indeed seem to become more aware of global racial hierarchies, in which nationality plays a key role, and of their place in it as Brazilians of certain phenotypes and ancestry. The boundaries of otherness that surround Brazilian migrants in the US may remain nameless, but they are maintained firmly in place from the outside in as much as from the inside out.

In this section, I introduced my community of study and characterized Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area as mostly coming from urban middle- and lower middle-class contexts in small and large cities Brazil, with high education levels, and higher-skilled professions back home. They are also majorly affiliated with neopentecostal denominations even before migrating. Many decided to migrate through periods of unemployment or out of a feeling that upward social mobility was unattainable. Many of my research participants did not necessarily have strong connections in the US-based communities into which they migrated, while others were part of larger migration chains. Finally, while presenting the ambiguous ways in which my research participants responded to questions about racial

identities, I sought to demonstrate main issues in scholarship on Brazilian migration to the US that discusses racial and ethnic classifications.

Visa and migration status

In what follows, I discuss the migration strategies employed by Brazilians in order to migrate to the US. Most do not have arranged employment before moving but rather count on entering local labor markets once they arrive in the US. When they have the required resources, Brazilians may apply for a tourist visa to guarantee “legal” entrance to the US. If resources are unavailable or the tourist visa is denied, then migrants will employ an *atravessador* to facilitate their crossing into the US through its southern border. After entering the US, Brazilian migrants may go undocumented, employ strategies to obtain non-work visas, or apply for work visas. Until they have a visa approved, which may indeed take years, Brazilian migrants remain in a legally precarious situation in which they are neither completely in nor out of status.

In some contexts, migrants leave their home countries with arranged employment in the places of destination. This can be the case for authorized forms of employment, like temporary migrant worker programs in the US and Canada, or for informal and even illegalized work, as is the case with Bolivian migrants in garment-industry sweatshops in Brazil, which I previously researched (see C. Ribeiro 2019, 2024). In contrast, Brazilians leave home without arranged employment in the US. As seen in the life stories narrated in Appendix A, many have friends or acquaintances who promise to help prospective migrants find employment or even directly offer them a job. However, as the life stories also show, such promises may or may not be fulfilled once Brazilians arrive in the US. Other Brazilian

migrants count on being able to find employers once they arrive through WhatsApp groups and other networks.

Migration in the US is usually thought of as a binary between documented and undocumented, but the US visa and migration system is much more intricate than this simple distinction implies. To better understand the visa and migration status strategies employed by Brazilian migrants, it is useful to divide them between strategies of entry and permanence.

In order to enter the US, most Brazilian migrants consider obtaining a tourist visa. However, obtaining a tourist visa is expensive. It requires the payment of significant fees and may also involve travel expenses to the nearest consulate, since the process is done in person. These costs are multiplied if one is applying for visas for an entire family. Additionally, the tourist visa may be denied, in which case all the money invested toward the visa is lost. Some people, such as Helena and her husband, parents to migrants Fabiana and Débora (see life stories 11 and 12), had multiple applications denied. For that reason, some of my research participants stated that, when they decided to move to the US, they also established that they would only have done so “if the [tourist] visa was approved.”

Others do not apply for a tourist visa. They consider they have little chance of being approved and fear sinking their money into the visa application only to have it denied. Without a tourist visa to guarantee “legal” entrance into the US, the other option Brazilian migrants consider is entering the US through the Mexico border. Figure 10 shows which of my research participants entered the US on a tourist visa and which crossed the US south border into the country. To go on the *travessia*, the first step is to engage the services of an *atravessador*. The fact that a migrant would have to pay someone for the *travessia* from Brazil to the US south border also seems to be implied whenever it was mentioned in my conversations with Brazilian migrants in Marietta. The contact of an *atravessador* is found

through someone's networks. Frequently, Brazilians already living in the US ask other Brazilian migrants in their networks for an *atravessador*'s contact on behalf of their friend or relative in Brazil who has decided to face the *travessia*.

The perverse contradiction here is that, while the *travessia* is typically an option for those in a lower social standing in Brazil, it is ultimately far more expensive than obtaining a tourist visa. It has the advantage of being paid in installments after one arrives in the US although, as R. Johnson and Woodhouse (2018) discuss, migrants who are not admitted into the US still have to pay their coyotes, creating a debilitating debt-cycle. Among my research participants, Bruna and Claudinei paid an *atravessador* a total of R\$100,000 (approximately \$20,000) for themselves and their teenage son (see life story 22). Similarly, Talita and Luciano owed a total of \$25,000 to their *atravessador* for themselves and their daughter, of which \$10,000 were paid in advance and the rest in \$1k monthly installments (see life story 27).

As described to me by immigration lawyer Heloísa (interview 1, 03/22/23, Atlanta GA), as well as in academic scholarship (S. Siqueira et al. 2026), Brazilians rely on a strategy named *cai-cai* (literally, fall-fall). This results from a misunderstanding of the unofficial "catch and release" policy, in which US Border Patrol "catches" unauthorized border crossers and subsequently "releases" them into the US to await their deportation hearing, as an alternative to detention. Typically, "caught and released" border crossers are those deemed "low-risk," such as children, families, and asylum-seekers (Lind 2018), but there is no federal law that guarantees that family groups will be admitted into the US instead of detained and deported. "Catch and release" is inconsistently applied at the border according to a number of factors (Lind 2018) and was officially banned in 2025 (CBP 2025). Consequently, as explained by Heloísa (interview 1, 03/22/23, Atlanta GA), many Brazilians believe that

crossing the border in a family group with a minor is a guaranteed way of being allowed into the country. According to that logic, there is a domino effect in which, if the minor “falls” into the US, so do their adult relatives. Hence, *cai-cai* [fall-fall]. This myth is perpetrated in other Latin American migrant communities as well, leading the US federal government to launch a campaign in Spanish explaining this misunderstanding (Sacchetti 2023). Heloísa also explained that many Brazilians who sought her immigration law firm believed themselves to be eligible for asylum in the US since Brazil had turned into a “communist dictatorship” with the election of Lula da Silva to the presidency in October 2022.

Upon entering the US as tourists, Brazilians may overstay their visa and remain in the country undocumented. Others will try to ensure they are able to stay in the US without going out of status. Figure 11 shows my research participants’ migration status at the time of our last interaction. The long-term goal for Brazilian migrants is to get on the green card track and eventually reach US citizenship. In that case, the first measure is typically to request a tourist visa extension. The limited period of stay on a tourist visa is six months but, if granted, an extension can guarantee up to another six months of authorized stay for non-citizens. A second extension for another six months is also possible, for a total of 18 months. However, each extension request requires the payment of hefty lawyer and visa fees. This is what Juçara and Danilo refer to when they complain that a tourist visa extension cost them “money they didn’t have,” resulting in them being nearly evicted for missing a rent payment (see life story 15).

After they have run out of allowed tourist visa extensions, Brazilian migrants then usually apply for a student visa (F-1 visa, see Appendix B: Glossary), based on several English as a Second Language courses offered in the area. However, this requires that migrants find their own sponsors to vouch for them, that is, to promise they will financially

provide for the student during the course of their studies in the US. Sponsors can be US citizens or not, but must present proof of income that attests they can support all of the student's expenses in the US, including housing, tuition, books, and other living costs since, as international students, they are not allowed to work in the US unless granted direct authorization. Values may vary according to the student's circumstances, but even a lower value in the US, such as \$20,000 a year, represents a significant amount in Brazil (approximately R\$100,000). Therefore, it may be significantly difficult for Brazilian migrants to find possible sponsors, should they want to apply for an F-1 visa. Additionally, a student visa implicates the Brazilian migrant in frequently attending English classes after long working days, as well as paying tuition fees. Érika described her struggles with attending ESL classes to maintain her F-1 visa (see life story 19) and added that all her classmates were other Brazilian housecleaners, whose main topic of conversation was visas and migration status.

Depending on their background in Brazil, migrants may apply for an EB-2 visa (see Appendix B: Glossary), aimed at high-skilled workers without a job offer in the US who have at least 10 years of previous professional experience in their field. In their application, migrants can include their dependents, such as spouses and children under 21. Such is the case of Adriana, Oliveira, and Diogo, who applied for an EB-2 on the grounds of Adriana's background as an accountant (see life story 24). Having applied for their visa, and paid \$40,000 in lawyer and visa fees, they were not entirely "out of status" but not necessarily authorized either, having not been granted documents such as work and travel permits. In 2025, they still had not had an answer to Adriana's EB-2 application. Indeed, she told me of feeling anxious about being "in limbo."

Another option Brazilian migrants have is an EB-3 visa (see Appendix B: Glossary), which is granted to US-based employers who cannot find US citizens to employ in low-

skilled positions. Brazilian local businesses, such as Rosana's *Minas Emporium* (see life story 4), may apply for EB-3 visas on behalf of their workers, although Rosana complained that most prefer to "go work in housecleaning and construction and stay illegal" than to stay at her grocery store and ultimately obtain a visa. Jandira also applies for EB-3 visas on behalf of her housecleaning workers (see life story 2). Other Brazilians employ "consulting agencies" who promise to find EB-3 positions for migrants in the areas of their preference. The one person who talked to me about their experience with such an agency asked me to completely anonymize the information, lest it affect their visa application process. They were paying a large amount of money to the consulting firm they employed and, in at least two years, they had not yet been placed in an EB-3 granting position.

Finally, some Brazilian migrants have grounds on which to apply for asylum. Schaianne (see life story 23) and Pedro (see life story 21), both victims of urban violence followed by threats in Brazil, had started their asylum applications. In doing so, Pedro and Schaianne, as well as her husband and sons, were granted work and travel permits.

Between 2023 and 2025, no one I talked to who had initiated visa processes other than tourist visa extensions had been approved. Érika was complaining of her F-1 running out and her having to reapply for it to be able to stay (see life story 19). Indeed, the Brazilians I talked to who obtained permanent residency or citizenship in the US had obtained it through marriages, real or bought (see glossary for "buying marriages"), with the exception of Edilson (see life story 9).

Out of status migrants are not legally allowed to work, although they may have a Tax ID (see Appendix B: Glossary) and are allowed to open a company; through the company they may open bank accounts. With an F-1 or in the EB-2 process, they are not allowed to have a job, and they do not have a work permit. Many in this condition avoid having bank accounts

so there is no evidence of work being performed, lest it impact the chances of their visa applications being accepted.

In sum, Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area arrive with varied but broadly similar social backgrounds: they come mostly from lower and middle-class urban contexts in Brazil, have some education and some resources, and often bring with them Evangelical religious practices or convert after migration. Their decisions to migrate frequently emerge from unemployment, underemployment, or a sense that even stable employment in Brazil does not provide access to the living conditions they desire. Their migration strategies, in turn, reveal both their resourcefulness and the structural constraints they face. They usually leave without guaranteed employment, rely on Brazilian networks once in the US, and move through a range of visa and migration status arrangements that are far more complex than a simple documented-undocumented binary suggests. At the same time, their trajectories also show how questions of race, ethnicity, nationality, and legality become central to the ways they are classified and how they identify themselves, and how they enter labor markets and pursue conditions of social reproduction in the US.

FIGURE 10: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' STRATEGIES OF ENTRY INTO THE US

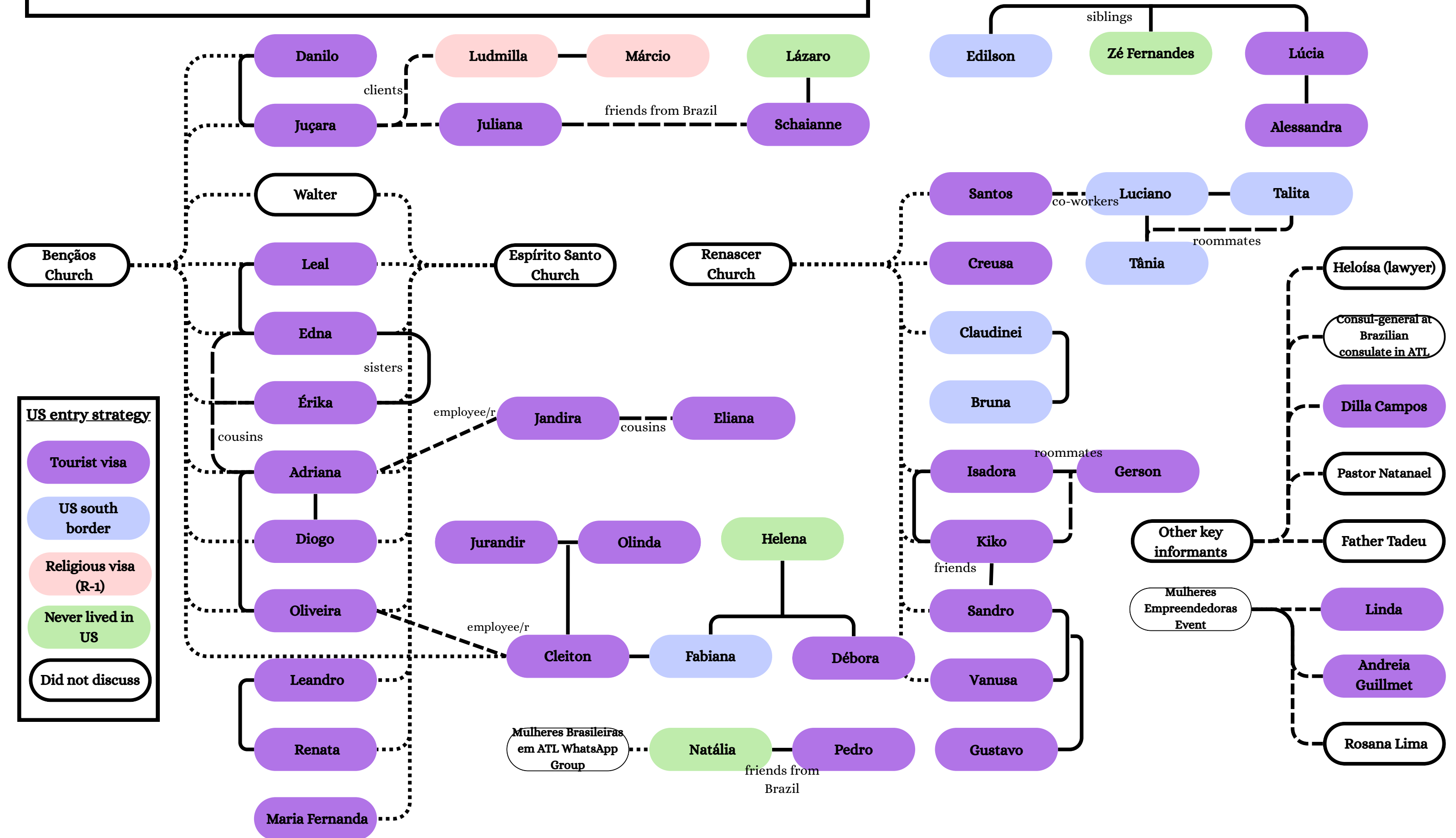
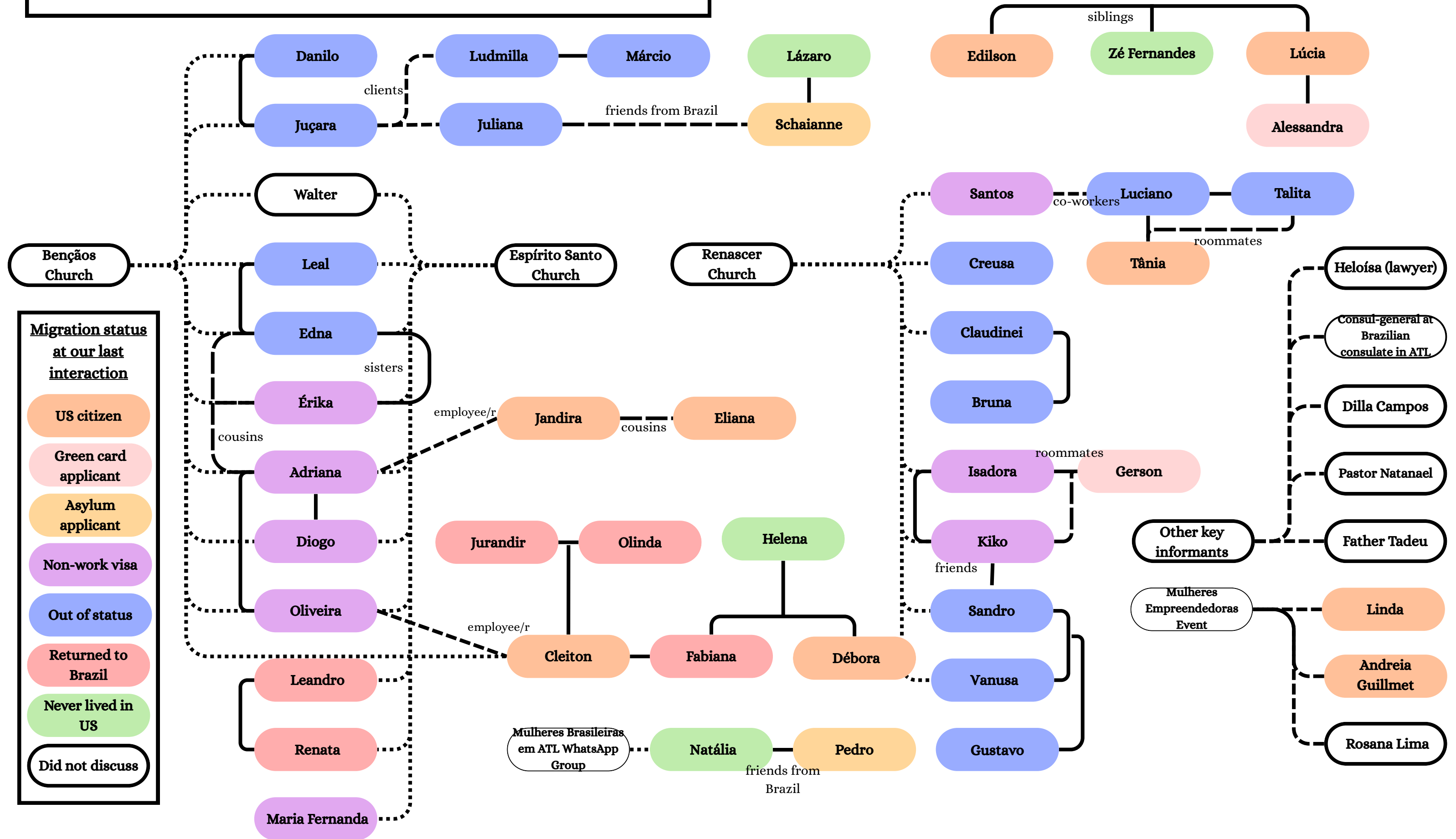


FIGURE 11: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' MIGRATION STATUS



History of the Brazilian community in the metropolitan Atlanta area

The history of the Brazilian community in the metropolitan Atlanta area that I present is based on the interviews, life stories, and field notes I collected throughout my fieldwork, although given the characteristics of migrant communities themselves, it is challenging to make generalizing statements about them. Even key informants, who are in touch with many migrants within the community, may make broad statements according to their own biases and position in the community. People also want to narrate themselves and their community in specific ways. Cleiton and Walter, for example, underscored that the “current group” of Brazilians migrating to the Atlanta area is comprised of university students, professionals in high-skilled jobs, and investing entrepreneurs. While it may be true that there is more “wealthy” migration from Brazil to the US nowadays than 20 or 30 years ago, it is also true that most Brazilian migrants in the US continue to find employment in construction and housecleaning, not all of them are highly educated, and many still enter the US through the south border. Thus, such statements about this “new profile” of Brazilian migrants tend to say more about the narrator, and how they want to portray the community they belong to, than about the Brazilian migrant community itself.

In what follows, I describe the history of the Brazilian community in Marietta as informed by my fieldwork, remarking on several points of inflection: the start of the migration process in the late 1980s, the migration boom in the wake of the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, a period of increased return migration to Brazil following increased migration enforcement and the 2008 economic crisis, followed by a renewed growth of the community in the 2010s, the Covid-19 pandemic, and a new period of sharpened migration surveillance and control since 2025. Subsequently, I spotlight some of the major changes in the community in this period, in

order to examine how labor and social reproduction dynamics have modulated the Brazilian migration process to Marietta.

Early days: 1980s and early 1990s

According to Pastor Natanael, his wife Joelma's family were among the first Brazilians to move to the area: "For example, Joelma's relatives were the first to arrive here. We've been here for 27 years [as of 2023], they've been here 40 years. Here in Atlanta, I mean. So they opened a path, right?" As I talked to Pastor Natanael in Vitória Church's canteen in 2023, Pastor Joelma approached us and the couple had the following exchange:

Natanael: From your relatives who arrived here in 1918...

Joelma: [laughs] I was just talking about one over there.

Natanael: Really? Yeah. So, Nélio is here. Nélio is here.

Joelma: Valdinha went back or not?

Natanael: Valdinha... Valdinha is over there [in Brazil]. Aunt Iracy is there too, right? Here and there, isn't it?

Joelma: Over there, yeah...

Natanael: What about Nair?

Joelma: Nair left, too.

Natanael: No.

Joelma: She did.

Natanael: No ma'am.

Joelma: Was it Zilda?

Natanael: It was Zilda who left. Nair is here.

Joelma: Ok. [to me] He keeps track better than I do.

Natanael: Yes, I know more about her family than she does.

Joelma: Yes.

Natanael: From the oldest, these are the main ones, right? Because Valdinha, she was one of them. The oldest, the oldest of them all is Aunt Iracy, right? Yes. She's over there in Piracanjuba. No, but Aunt Iracy didn't come first.

Joelma: It was her, then Valdinha.

Natanael: Oh, was it?

Joelma: Yes, then Nélio.

Natanael: Nélio then was the third to come. But Nélio, he has an auto repair shop here in Atlanta.⁹ (Interview 30, 12/03/2023, Marietta GA)

9 Natanael: Dos seus parentes que chegaram aqui em 1918...

Joelma: (risos) Estava falando de um ali agora.

Natanael: Sério? É. Então, o Nélio tá aqui. O Nélio tá aqui.

Joelma: A Valdinha voltou ou não voltou?

Natanael: A Valdinha... a Valdinha tá lá. A Tia Iracy tá lá também, né? Lá e aqui, não é?

Joelma: Tá lá. É...

Natanael: Mas a Nair?

Indeed, many migrants I talked to mentioned Pastor Nélío as the person they knew who had been in Atlanta the longest. Eliana and Jandira both cited him as someone who was already in Atlanta when they arrived in the 1980s and recommended I talk to him. Jurandir also mentioned Nélío, saying:

“So, I’m telling you, every service the pastor would go and say, ‘who just arrived from Brazil?’ and then people would talk, and it was a thing, people arriving from Piracanjuba. Piracanjuba is a small town around here close to Caldas Novas. It’s because the first Brazilian that went to Atlanta, Pastor Nélío, who’s still there [in Atlanta] today, and it was him who founded Bençãos, and he was from this small town, Piracanjuba. So these *piracanjubenses* [see Appendix B: Glossary] started going there, you know?”¹⁰ (Jurandir, interview 41, 09/04/24, Goiânia GO)

Eliana and Jandira were both part of the group that founded Bençãos Church in the early 1990s, and Jandira added that Nélío eventually became their pastor there. Eliana also explained that her friend’s aunt, the one who first wanted to go to Marietta and invited Eliana, chose the area specifically because she had met American missionaries and their children who, having returned to the US, lived in Georgia:

“[The friend’s aunt] had contacts, she was in contact with the children/sons and daughters of missionaries, children of Americans who’d been missionaries in Brazil, and they were here in Atlanta, and decided to give her that support, to receive her here. So, she had that contact here in Georgia.”¹¹ (Eliana, interview 14, 12/26/23, video call)

Joelma: A Nair foi embora também.

Natanael: Não.

Joelma: Foi.

Natanael: Não, senhora.

Joelma: Foi a Zilda?

Natanael: A Zilda que tinha ido embora. A Nair tá aqui.

Joelma: Ok. [para mim] Ele mantém mais track do que eu.

Natanael: É, eu sei mais da família dela que ela.

Joelma: É.

Natanael: Dos mais antigos. São esses os principais, né? Porque a Valdinha, foi a Valdinha, era uma delas. A antiga, mais antiga mesmo é a minha Tia Iracy, né? É. Ela tá lá em Piracanjuba. Não, mas a Tia Iracy não veio primeiro.

Joelma: Foi ela, depois Valdinha.

Natanael: Ah, foi?

Joelma: É, depois o Nélío.

Natanael: O Nélío então foi o terceiro a vir. (Entrevista 30, 03/12/2023, Marietta GA).

10 “Então, eu falando pra você, todo culto chegava lá assim, pastor falava assim... E quem chegou do Brasil, aí vinha cantando, era um tal de chegar gente de Piracanjuba, Piracanjuba é uma cidadinha que tem aqui perto de Caldas Novas. É porque o primeiro brasileiro que foi pra Atlanta, o Pastor Nilton, que tá lá até hoje, e ele que fundou a BCC, ele era dessa cidadinha, de Piracanjuba. Então foi indo esses piracanjubense pra lá, sabe?” (Jurandir, entrevista 41, 04/09/2024. Goiânia GO).

This corroborates what Marcus (2011, 2014) says about American missionaries from Georgia who had been in Goiás being the first link between these two locations. While it seems that Eliana's friend's aunt was unrelated to Nélío and Joelma's relatives, they all arrived around the same time. It is plausible that the same missionaries circulated through the Goiás countryside and encouraged different people to go, although it is also possible there were entirely different networks, as Martes (1999) suggests for the connection between Boston and Governador Valadares.

In the early days of Brazilians in Marietta, the community was small – Eliana and Jandira estimated 15 to 30 Brazilians in the area in their first years there in the late 1980s and early 1990s – and everyone knew each other. Indeed, both of them also mentioned “throwing a party” every time a new Brazilian arrived. Jandira narrated:

Jandira: Well, first of all, at the time, when I arrived, we knew all the Brazilians that... I said all of them, but most of the Brazilians that lived here in Atlanta, we knew, we got together.

Clara: Do you have an idea of how many people there were at the time?

Jandira: Oh, I imagine that maybe around 25 over the years. (...) When I arrived, maybe around 15 people. Afterwards it increased a bit. Then, through the years, of course... So, like, I think today you don't know almost anybody of the people who are here.¹² (Interview 19, 12/09/23, Sandy Springs GA)

Jandira also described how the area was significantly less urbanized in the 1980s and 1990s:

“In that time, [Sandy Springs] was very small. You can't imagine the difference here, today. This here, my area, where I live, it was all farms. Today it's all urban, all like, houses, residential communities, buildings, you know? (...) It's very different, there were only a few things, businesses, you know? (...) My town, which is the town of Roswell, it was all farms,

11 “Ela tinha contato, ela tinha um contato com filhos de missionários, filhos de americanos que tinham sido missionários no Brasil, que falavam português, e estavam aqui em Atlanta, e resolveu dar esse apoio para ela, de recebê-la aqui. Então, ela tinha esse contato aqui, aí na Georgia” (Eliana, entrevista 14, 26/12/23, chamada de vídeo).

12 Jandira: Bom, primeiro, na época, quando eu cheguei, a gente conhecia todos os brasileiros que... eu falei todos mas, a maioria dos brasileiros que moravam aqui em Atlanta a gente conhecia, a gente se reunia.

Clara: Você tem uma ideia de quantas pessoas eram nessa época?

Jandira: Ah, eu imagino que talvez umas 25 ao longo dos anos. Digamos, quando eu cheguei... Quando eu cheguei, talvez umas 15 pessoas. Depois foi aumentando um pouco. Aí, ao longo dos anos, é claro né... Então, assim, eu acho que hoje você não conhece quase ninguém das pessoas que estão aqui (...). (Entrevista 19, 09/12/23, Sandy Springs GA)

very that. (...) Here in Sandy Springs, it wasn't so rural. Farms really were in Roswell, where I live today. But here, like, it grew a lot from the time we arrived here, a lot."¹³ (Jandira, interview 19, 12/09/23, Sandy Springs GA)

Eliana also explained that, when she first arrived, there were not well defined labor markets for Brazilian migrants in the area, and she and her friends did not know what they were going to do for work once they arrived. Indeed, they looked at classified ads in the local newspaper to see what was available, which is how they first learned about live-in nanny work. With time, they learned about housecleaning and found it to be better than their nanny jobs. Possibly, other Brazilian migrants in the area likewise learned from newspaper classified ads about the demand for housecleaning and construction work, inadvertently setting up a precedent for what would become specifically Brazilian labor markets in the area.

1996 Olympics in Atlanta and 2000s

As many people I talked to reported, the Brazilian community in the Marietta area started growing more rapidly with the construction boom related to the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Eliana also mentioned someone who "brought people through Mexico" in the 1990s, not necessarily because of the Olympics but around the same time:

Eliana: And in the 90s, I think it was in the mid-90s, there was a flood of Brazilians arriving here through Mexico. I don't know if you've already interviewed someone who came through Mexico, but there was a person who brought those groups, he actually had apartments here, he rented apartments, he overcrowded these apartments with people until they were able to get apartments by themselves, but they arrived in buses, it was a lot.

Clara: And in this time that you're saying Brazilians were arriving by bus from Mexico, did it coincide with the Olympics or not?

Eliana: During the Olympics, a lot of people came through the airport, who came for the games and stayed. A lot of people who stayed in Atlanta, but from the whole world. From this time

13 "Não, mas aquela época aqui era muito pequeno. Você não imagina a diferença aqui, hoje, isso aqui. A minha área, onde eu moro, era tudo fazenda. Hoje é tudo urbano, tudo assim, casas, condomínios, prédios, sabe? (...) É muito diferente, tinha muita pouca coisa, comércio aqui, sabe? (...) A minha cidade, que era a cidade de Roswell, era tudo fazenda, bem assim. (...) Aqui em Sandy Springs não era tão fazenda. Fazenda mesmo era Roswell, onde eu moro hoje. Mas aqui, assim, aqui cresceu muito da época que a gente chegou aqui. Muito" (Jandira, entrevista 19, 09/12/23, Sandy Springs GA).

when they were coming through Mexico it was people... I don't know if the majority, but many I talked to were very simple people, I met people who didn't know how to read or write (...).¹⁴ (Interview 14, 12/26/23, video call)

As the community started to grow in the mid- to late 1990s, markers of Brazilian presence in the area started populating the suburban landscape. In 1999, Rosana opened her first café in Sandy Springs, right next to the DMV, where Brazilians would go get their driver's licenses and then stop by for coffee and typical food (see life story 4). Andreia started *Viver Magazine* in 2002 and later opened her first *Brazilian Wax by Andreia* store in 2005 (see life story 7). Cleiton remarked that, starting in 2005, there was a boom in the number of neopentecostal churches in the area. Indeed, Marcus's (2008) fieldwork in Marietta in 2006 and 2007 showed a Catholic majority among his survey respondents, even if his work spotlighted the importance of Evangelical pastors and congregations within the community. In 2007, Linda started working for Bank of America to fill their need for a Portuguese-speaking employee (see life story 13).

However, many also mentioned stricter immigration enforcement brought about by 9/11, mainly changes that made it increasingly difficult to obtain documents such as social security numbers and driver's licenses, also affecting regulations around how long people could stay in the US with tourist visas (see Coleman and Kocher 2011, Margolis 2008, Winders 2007). Cleiton described the more relaxed regulations in the first years after he arrived, in 1998:

14 Eliana: E nos anos 90, acho que foi no meados de 90, que teve uma enchente de brasileiros chegando aqui pelo México. Não sei se você já entrevistou alguém que veio pelo México, mas tinha uma pessoa que trazia esses grupos, ele na verdade tinha apartamentos aqui, ele alugava apartamentos, ele enchia esses apartamentos de gente até eles conseguirem apartamento por eles mesmos, do trabalho, mas chegava assim de ônibus, era um monte.

Clara: E essa época que você falou que chegava os brasileiros de ônibus pelo México, coincidiu com a época das Olimpíadas ou não?

Eliana: Na época das Olimpíadas, vieram muita gente pelo aeroporto, que vinha para os jogos e ficaram. Muita gente que ficou em Atlanta, não só do Brasil, mas do mundo inteiro. Dessa época que estavam vindo pelo México eram pessoas... não sei se é a maioria, mas muitas que eu conheci eram pessoas muito simples, conheci pessoas que não sabiam nem ler e escrever (...). (Entrevista 14, 26/12/23, chamada de vídeo).

Cleiton: In that time, even if you arrived with a tourist visa, people would come and go back, then come back again. It was after September 11, 2008 [sic] that it stopped, right? There was the terrorist attack and they cut that. My dad indeed came, stayed here for three years and went [to Brazil] on the same visa, right? They didn't check the I-94 [see Appendix B: Glossary], oh, you stayed this many months so... There was no such thing. Today it's not like that anymore.

Clara: So even folks who overstayed their tourist visas, nothing happened.

Cleiton: There were no problems, there were no problems. It was a lot more relaxed, right? To get a visa it was easier, for everything, right? To get a document, you'd arrive here, you practically took only your passport and your I-94 and you got a driver's license. Some places issued social security numbers at the time.¹⁵ (Interview 7, 11/01/23, Marietta GA)

One of the landmark legal changes is Georgia's decision to require "lawful presence" for issuing driver's license in 2005, which became effective in 2006. In practice, many Brazilians were still able to obtain licenses until a new 2007 regulation started requiring systematic verification of migration status before issuing driver's licenses. In the following years, Georgia would also tie license expiration to the validity of immigration status or a maximum of five years. In my interviews, people did not refer specifically to each of these new regulations but rather made broader statements such as "after 2007, 2008 you couldn't get a Georgia driver's license anymore." In 2007, Cobb was the first county in Georgia to implement Section 287(g) (see Appendix B: Glossary), the federal program that authorized local law enforcement officers to perform certain immigration enforcement functions, effectively linking civil and traffic infractions to migrant detention. In 2021, Cobb County Sheriff Craig Owens cancelled the county's participation in 287(g) (Cia Brasil Magazine 2021).

Adding insult to injury, my research participants stated that the 2008 economic crisis also had a serious impact on Brazilian migrants' livelihoods in Atlanta, and many had

15 Cleiton: Também nessa época, mesmo você vindo com o visto de turista, o pessoal vinha e voltava, depois vinha de novo. Depois de 11 de setembro de 2008 que parou, né? Que deu o atentado e eles cortaram isso. Meu pai mesmo veio, ficou aqui uns três anos e foi lá com o mesmo visto, né? Não checava um I-94, ah, você ficou tantos meses e... não tinha isso. Hoje já não é assim.

Clara: Então mesmo o pessoal que excedia a validade do visto de turista, não dava nada.

Cleiton: Não tinha problema, não tinha problema. Era bem mais tranquilo, né? Pra tirar o visto era mais fácil, pra tudo, né? Pra tirar documento, você chegava aqui, você praticamente levava só o seu passaporte com o I-94 e tirava carteira de motorista. Tinha lugar que tirava Social Security na época. (Entrevista 7, 01/11/23, Marietta GA)

significantly less work – fewer construction projects or housecleaning clients – or were even completely unemployed. Ludmilla and Márcio (see life story 8), for example, lost a lot of their housecleaning clients during this period, some of whom had in turn lost their jobs. Márcio reasoned that, because so many Brazilians left at the time, it helped rebalance labor markets for those Brazilians who stayed, which ultimately benefitted them and helped them establish their own housecleaning schedule (client roster, see Appendix B: Glossary). Given this context, many consider the period around 2008 to be a watershed moment in the Marietta-based Brazilian community, in which many returned and, in turn, those who stayed were there for good. Pastor Natanael summed it up:

“When the financial crisis came, most people, like I said, the profile has changed a little, but most are in construction and housecleaning. Housecleaning is one of the first things to be let go, construction stopped completely. I remember that, at the time, we wrote down the names, we wrote 70 names of people who returned to Brazil in a really short period of time, in 2010. A lot of people returned [to Brazil], a lot of people returned.”¹⁶ (Pastor Natanael, interview 30, 12/03/23, Marietta GA)

Dilla also commented on the return migration of this period:

“Oh, 2008, 2007, end of 2007 until 2009, a lot of people left. A lot of people left. And there a lot changed, too, that perspective that people had that here [in the US] it was very easy to make money. People then started to understand that it’s not just getting here and saving money up the wazoo, you understand? That it’s not so easy.”¹⁷ (Dilla, interview 11, 11/28/23, video call)

16 “Quando veio a crise financeira, a maioria das pessoas, como eu falei, tem mudado um pouco o perfil, mas a maioria é construção e limpeza. Limpeza é uma das primeiras coisas que são descartadas, construção parou tudo. Eu lembro que na época, nós escrevemos os nomes, nós escrevemos 70 nomes de pessoas que voltaram para o Brasil. Em um período muito pequeno, em 2010. Muita gente voltou. Muita gente voltou” (Pastor Natanael, entrevista 30, 03/12/23, Marietta GA).

17 “Ah, 2008, 2007. Finalzinho 2007. Até 2009, muita gente foi embora. Muita gente foi embora. E ali, ali mudou muita coisa também. Naquela perspectiva que as pessoas tinham de... De que aqui era muito fácil ganhar dinheiro. As pessoas ali começaram a entender que não é chegar aqui e juntar dinheiro com um rodo. Entende? Que não é tão fácil” (Dilla, entrevista 11, 28/11/23, chamada de vídeo).

Figure 2 shows a steady decline in the number of Brazilians in the area between 2009-2012. However, Figure 2 also shows that the community has seen exponential growth in numbers from 2012 onwards. It is important to remember that the number of Brazilians living in the Marietta area shown in Figure 2 includes newly arrived migrants, Brazilians relocating from other US states, and US-born children of Brazilian migrants. For some, changes occurred in the last 10 or so years were very noticeable: Juliana, who arrived in Kennesaw in 2014, said that at first there were not many Brazilians in that particular area, which now has new Brazilian residents, businesses, and churches. Additionally, none of the Brazilians I talked to made any reference to the first Trump administration, from 2017 to 2020, being a time of insecurity and fear, which is also reflected in Figure 2.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic may have been a harrowing time for many, but Brazilian workers I talked to about it remembered it as a time of abundant work. Ludmilla and Márcio, who work in housecleaning together, said they made more money at home, in the weeks of complete lockdown, than they did when actually working. They were paid regularly by most of their clients, on top of the relief checks they received from the federal government. After that, they went back to work as usual, but wearing gloves and masks. Edna and Leal described how 2020 went for them:

Leal: As incredible as it sounds, the pandemic year was the year I was able to stabilize. After three and a half years of hardship, in the pandemic that I started getting a lot of jobs. (...) The year of 2020 was a year when I worked a lot, there was a lot of work, as incredible as it sounds. I think a lot of things accumulated, right?

Edna: There was a list, a list from the government saying that some essential services couldn't stop. Housecleaning and construction. So we walked around with a higher-up's declaration saying that we cleaned houses. So if the police stopped you, you'd show them that. It was... I think that was when migrants worked the most. There was so much work, there was so much work...

Leal: A lot of work.

Edna: A lot of work. Even I, I left André taking care of João, João was three. Because women were desperate asking for *helpers*. [Edna usually stays home with her sons, see life story 16]

Leal: Because no one was coming in, the country was closed down, right? Usually *helpers*, like, are people who just arrived. No one arrived, so there was no labor force. Folks were desperate [for workers], desperate.

Clara: I can imagine.

Leal: You understand? So the women who clean houses, they started having to pay *helpers* more, because *helpers* were even choosing who to work for, because there was so much work... So it was, it was on that level.¹⁸ (Interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

For people who were in Brazil and wanted to move to the US, the pandemic meant a delay in their plans. In many of the life stories presented in Appendix A, it is mentioned how migration plans were affected by the pandemic, like Creusa, Talita, Luciano, Gerson and even Tânia, who was visiting Brazil and ended up staying for four years. Others were impacted by the pandemic in Brazil in such a way that encouraged their migration, as is the case with Pedro, Bruna, and Claudinei. In October 2022, Lula da Silva won the Brazilian presidential elections against Jair Bolsonaro. Some migrants who decided to move after the elections mentioned “political issues” and “political instability” as motivations, while not directly addressing their own political opinions. At a dinner party at Érika’s in 2023, people commented with me that many Brazilians were migrating because of the change in administration. Immigration lawyer Heloísa mentioned in March 2023 that some of her clients had expected to be eligible for asylum because, with Lula da Silva’s return to office, Brazil was now “an oppressive communist country.” During my field work in 2023, there were also

18 Leal: Por incrível que pareça, no ano da pandemia, foi o ano que eu consegui me estabilizar. Depois de três anos e meio passando perrengue, na pandemia que começou a vir bastante trabalho. (...) O ano de 2020 foi um ano que eu trabalhei muito, teve muito trabalho, por incrível que pareça. Eu acho que acumulou muita coisa, né?

Edna: Teve uma lista, uma lista do governo falando que... alguns serviços essenciais, que não podiam parar. Limpeza e obra. Então a gente andava com uma declaração de um superior, né, dizendo que a gente limpava a casa. Então se a polícia parava, mostrava aquilo ali. Foi... Eu acho que foi quando o migrante mais trabalhou. Era tanto trabalho, era tanto trabalho...

Leal: Muito trabalho.

Edna: Muito trabalho. Até eu, eu deixei o Arthur tomando conta de Josué, Josué tinha 3 anos. Porque a mulherada estava desesperada pedindo helper.

Leal: Porque não chegava ninguém, o país estava fechado, né? Geralmente quem é helper, assim, é quem está chegando. Não chegava ninguém. Então não tinha mão de obra. O pessoal estava desesperado. Desesperado.

Clara: Eu imagino.

Leal: Entendeu? Então essas mulheradas que limpam casa, elas passaram a ter que pagar mais para as helpers. Porque as helpers já estavam escolhendo quem ia trabalhar, porque tinha tanto lugar para trabalhar... Então foi, foi nesse nível, aí. (Entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA)

many comments around a surge of Brazilians moving from Florida to Georgia because of increased immigrant surveillance, enforcement, and control in Florida in a variety of ways. As was the case with law changes discussed earlier, this was mentioned not by name (SB 1718, see Appendix B: Glossary) but as “Florida’s governor law,” or simply as “that governor from Florida who doesn’t like migrants,” in reference to Ron DeSantis.

During my field work in 2023, many migrants, including Kiko, Isadora, Luciano, Talita, Tânia, and Santos, had issues finding employment in Marietta. Among Brazilian migrants who arrived after the Covid-19 pandemic, those with fewer local connections seem to have struggled more to find stable employment as a fixed *helper* [*helper fixo*]. My understanding is this did not happen necessarily because of the quality of connections – how close incoming migrants were to Brazilians already living the area – but how well positioned their connections were in local labor markets. That was the case with migrants such as Oliveira and Schaianne, who were well-guided into stable employment by their connections. Another issue, much cited in 2023 by people who had lived in the US for longer, was inflation and overall living costs. In contrast, people who had arrived for the first time remarked on how “accessible” things were.

In 2025, changes in US migration policies, with increased immigration enforcement, surveillance, and control, had impacted the Brazilian community in Marietta in a myriad of ways. According to Adriana, when news of increased arrests and deportations first started, Brazilian businesses that are normally full were “deserted.” When I arrived in Marietta in June 2025, businesses in Little Brazil seemed to me to be as busy as they had been in 2023. When I mentioned my perception to Adriana, she said “yes, people get used to the fear.” Not everyone does, however, and many Brazilians living in Marietta had returned to Brazil or were planning to. I asked people I knew to recommend to me Brazilian migrants who had

decided to return. Schaianne had a friend in that situation, planning to leave before the end of the year but, according to Schaianne, this friend told her they did not want to do an interview with me because they felt it would be too emotionally heavy for them. The couple Renata and Leandro (see life story 29), who had been Bençãos Church congregants and were in the group that moved to Espírito Santo, had decided to return to Rio de Janeiro because they felt that being out of status was like living a lie and did not “glorify the Lord.” More than that, Renata explained how they felt about staying in the US out of status:

“In a country where we basically don’t have a document [see Appendix B: Glossary], so you’re not, you’re nobody. You don’t have a document, you can’t conquer things. When you have children, you think about that. We don’t think about conquering to be wealthy or to own things, but we don’t have the bare minimum of stability for our children, right? And when we don’t have the document, it makes it harder, so that makes us rethink things a little bit, you know?” (Renata, interview 49, 06/26/25, Marietta GA)¹⁹

They were friends with another couple, Luís and Bianca, who also attended Bençãos Church and had already returned to Brazil because of their migration status; however, when Renata asked Bianca if they were willing to do an interview with me, she declined. In preparation for their return to Brazil, Renata and Leandro had started selling some of their belongings in Marietta and, indeed, when I was at their home, someone stopped by to pick up a table they had sold on Facebook Marketplace. Adriana also considered see this return migration process was evident through the number of people in WhatsApp groups selling and donating their stuff. She mentioned buying things from two different Brazilians in the Marietta area who told her they were selling their things before returning to Brazil. Adriana said she felt shocked and sorry for one of them in particular, an out-of-status Brazilian woman who owned a beautiful home, cars, and had two US-born and raised teenage girls that would

¹⁹“Num país onde a gente basicamente não tem um documento, você não é, você não é alguém. Você não tem documento, então você não consegue conquistar. Você que tem filhos, você pensa nisso. A gente não pensa em conquistar pra ser rico ou ter bens, mas não tem o mínimo de estabilidade para os nossos filhos, né? E quando a gente não tem documento, a gente... Dificulta demais isso, então isso faz a gente repensar um pouquinho, sabe?” (Renata, entrevista 49, 26/06/25, Marietta GA)

be moving back to Brazil with their mother. Leandro also mentioned as evidence of migrants returning that, in car dealerships in migrant communities, they were seeing more people selling their cars than buying, and many selling because they were returning to their home countries.

Others were taking subtle measures to feel more protected: Érika, for example, told me she kept her housecleaning products and equipment in her trunk, out of sight, so it would not “call attention” to her, even though she had an F-1 visa. When I asked her how she was coping with the uncertainty, Érika replied: “Only with Jesus. He brought us and He’s the only one who can send us back.” Others yet – from out of status migrants to Brazilians with US citizenship – said they “weren’t worried at all” and that they were living life “normally.” When I asked Brazilian migrants how they felt about changes in immigration enforcement, they tended to agree with the overall idea, but disagreed with it being directed at “hard-working, law-abiding immigrants” instead of “criminals.” Adriana summarized this feeling by saying people were “disappointed” in Trump because, while they wanted him elected and agreed with “deporting all the criminals,” they never imagined they would become targets of those same policies. My overall impression was that most Brazilians in Marietta indeed agreed with the idea of strict immigration enforcement, as long as it was directed to some imaginary *other* who was *deserving* of these policies. Themselves, in contrast, were always *undeserving* of said policies, and characteristics such as hard-working, tax-paying, law-abiding, family-oriented were brought up to justify being *undeserving* of detention and deportation.

Significant changes over the decades

In the last 40 years of Brazilian migration to the metropolitan Atlanta area, there have been important changes in Brazilians' strategies of labor, social reproduction, and migration status that relate to the dynamics examined in this dissertation. Here I elaborate on three major changes raised by my fieldwork: (i) the change in plans for a "better life" in Brazil to a "better life" in the US; (ii) a shift in Brazilian migrants' profile as one from low-income, rural residents to urban, highly-educated migrants; and (iii) the emergence of the specific visa and migration status strategies discussed earlier in this chapter fueled by processes of illegalization in the US. I then discuss the continuity of labor dynamics in the Marietta community. Subsequently, I also note two other significant dynamics that my research participants usually raised: the changing migrant religious landscapes in the Marietta area and the advent of new communication technologies.

First, and more notably, there has been a change in people's strategies around migration from Brazil to the US, namely from a plan to make money for a few years, invest in Brazil and return there, to Brazilians moving to the US permanently, with the goal of making their lives abroad rather than in their home country. This included a change between migrants who left Brazil on their own, with mothers frequently having their children stay in Brazil with grandparents, to families who move together, with children of all ages, expressly with the intent of raising their children in the US. Dilla summed up this major shift in relation to the metropolitan Atlanta area's Brazilian community:

"The profile of our community changed during these 20 years. When I arrived here, back in 2003, people who came here, came in search of money to pay debts, to buy a house in Brazil, to save some money and go back to Brazil, you understand? Usually who came, came planning to stay five years at the most. And sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less, but they didn't come to stay. And the profile of this community changed. Another thing that changed too, people came by themselves most of the time. Of course I also know many families who arrived... At the same time when I arrived, entire families were coming. I came with my entire

family [husband and children]. But most people came by themselves. People came and left the family behind, because they didn't intend to stay. It was really just to work, save money, and leave. Nowadays it's different. People are looking at the United States as a place with better quality of life, a place to invest in. They bring the money to start a business, to buy a home, you understand? They want to raise their children here, they want *segurança* [see Appendix B: Glossary] and quality of life. (...) Most people who choose to immigrate to the United States today, they already come with the idea that they want to live here, raise their children here. So that was the great change in the profile of our community. The future perspective is no longer to return to Brazil, it's to stay here.”²⁰ (Dilla, interview 11, 11/28/23, video call)

The life stories presented in Appendix A indeed show this broad change in perspective, even if there are exceptions, as Dilla mentioned. My fieldwork has failed to reveal, however, incoming Brazilian migrants with enough capital to start a business or buy a home in the US. On the contrary, many of the people I talked to chose to pursue a life in the US even if they did not have the financial resources to comfortably start a life in the US. Other migrants, like Cleiton and Pastor Natanael, further confirmed this change in profile by describing a time when “new people were always arriving from Brazil.” The example they both provided was that, at church, pastors would ask “who just arrived from Brazil?” and many would raise their hands, which was hardly the case in 2023. While this may seem at odds with numbers in Figure 2, it shows that, even if new Brazilian migrants arrived every day, they left almost as frequently, too. The vertiginous increase in Brazilians in the metropolitan Atlanta area are represented in Figure 2 also had to be interpreted as more people deciding to stay and becoming longer-term residents of Marietta. Still in terms of migration

20 “O perfil da nossa comunidade mudou durante esses 20 anos. Quando eu cheguei aqui, lá em 2003, as pessoas que vinham pra cá, vinham atrás de... De dinheiro pra pagar dívidas, pra comprar uma casa no Brasil. Juntar um dinheiro e voltar pro Brasil. Entende? Normalmente quem vinha, vinha planejando ficar no máximo cinco anos. E às vezes um pouquinho mais, às vezes um pouquinho menos, mas elas não vinham pra ficar. E o perfil dessa comunidade foi mudando. Outra coisa também que mudou, as pessoas vinham sozinhas... na maioria das vezes. Claro que eu conheço também várias famílias que chegaram... na mesma época que eu cheguei vieram famílias inteiras. Eu vim com a minha família inteira. Mas a maioria das pessoas vinham sozinhas. As pessoas vinham e deixavam a família pra trás. Porque elas não tinham intenção de ficar. Era só pra trabalhar mesmo, juntar dinheiro e ir embora. Hoje em dia... é diferente. As pessoas estão olhando os Estados Unidos como um lugar com qualidade de vida melhor, um lugar pra investir. Eles trazem o dinheiro pra abrir um negócio, pra comprar uma casa, entende? Eles querem criar os filhos aqui, eles querem uma segurança e qualidade de vida. (...) E a maioria das pessoas que hoje decidem imigrar pros Estados Unidos, ela já vem com pensamento de que querem viver aqui, criar os filhos aqui. Então essa foi a grande mudança no perfil da nossa comunidade. A perspectiva de futuro não é mais voltar para o Brasil, é ficar aqui” (Dilla, entrevista 11, 28/11/23, chamada de vídeo).

strategies, Marietta seems to have gained relevance as a Brazilian community that people move into from other places in the US, especially from Massachusetts and Florida, as the life stories also show. As I elaborate in subsequent chapters, social reproduction is crucial to understand this change in migration strategy: it was spurred by a perception of Brazil as a country where social reproduction conditions will never improve, regardless of education and profession. On the other hand, the US is increasingly seen as a country where *certain* social reproduction conditions are incomparably better – even if they come at the cost of relationships of other aspects of social reproduction activities and material conditions.

Second, many also highlighted a shift in Brazilian migrants' profile as one from low-income, rural residents to urban, highly-educated migrants, as Juliana explained:

“So with that, I don’t know if I can say class, but the kind of people who’s been coming is a kind of people with more education. Because what I notice of people who came 15, 20 years ago, many people came when they were older, older like, already in their 30s, 40s, who still live here today. They were more like rural people [*gente mais matuta*], let’s put it this way, right, that were coming. Today, no. People who are coming are people who had a profession, who were engineers, lawyers, doctors, dentists, they are people who even though they had better spending power, it’s not good for them.”²¹ (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

This significant change is further expressed as the shift from the small, rural town of Piracanjuba as a major sending community in the state of Goiás to the capital Goiânia becoming a more relevant city of origin in the Marietta area. Indeed, Marcus identified Piracanjuba as a main sending community in Brazil during their field work in 2006 (Marcus 2008) and Edilson even named other small towns in Goiás where “everyone has a relative in the US,” namely Pires do Rio and Bela Vista. While I heard many references to Piracanjuba as

21 “Então com isso, não sei se eu posso dizer classe, mas o tipo de gente que tem vindo é um tipo de gente com mais formação. Porque o que eu percebo de gente que veio há 15, 20 anos atrás, muita gente vinha [incompreensível] pessoas mais velhas, mais velhas assim, já com 30, 40 anos e que mora aqui até hoje. Era gente mais matuta, digamos assim, né, que vinha. Hoje não. As pessoas que estão chegando são pessoas que tinham profissão, que eram engenheiras, advogadas, médicos, dentistas, são pessoas que mesmo tendo um poder aquisitivo melhor, não tá bom pra eles” (Juliana, entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA).

still significant in terms of a place of origin for Marietta-based Brazilians, Goiânia and other medium-sized Brazilian cities provide a significant number of migrants to the community.

On the other hand, however, while this broad change is important to note, Brazilians in the Marietta area have been a mixed community and labor force in terms of class and education levels in Brazil, as the life stories show. This mixing is limited within a certain spectrum that comprises the not the really poor and the not the really wealthy. Among my research participants, education levels range from high school to graduate degrees at any time of arrival, at least from 2000 onwards. The same is true for people's backgrounds in Brazil, including professions and economic situations. And, among the lower-income and middle-class Brazilians alike, migrating to the US seems to have shifted from a short-term strategy to a more permanent life plan. This is in contrast with previous scholarship on Brazilian migration to the US which argues that typically those of "higher" social classes migrate first and then open pathways for those in "lower" classes (Margolis 2013) - not true in the case of Brazilians in the Marietta area, which seems to have been a mixed-class community from the start, with more people from "lower class" backgrounds first and more "middle class" Brazilians migrating later. I will further elaborate on this point in chapter 5; but it is worth remarking here that this change in profile relates to social and historical processes in Brazil in the last three decades, including urbanization, expanded access to higher education, and the introduction of higher consumption standards to larger portions of the population.

A third major change that in some ways interlinks with the two previously discussed is a shift in visa and migration status strategies. At first, in the 1980s and 1990s as described above, a tourist visa may have set a limited allowed time of permanence, but overstaying did not really seem to implicate further consequences, such as not being able to reenter the US. Being out of status also did not prevent Brazilians from obtaining Georgia-issued driver's

licenses and social security numbers. Brazilians who overstayed tourist visas were not, in the way we think about nowadays, “illegal.” Processes of “illegalization” (DeGenova 2002), as defined in the literature review chapter, are part of the lived experiences of Brazilian migrants in the US and, specifically, the state of Georgia, through post-9/11 changes in migration surveillance, enforcement, and control. Jurandir and Olinda, who arrived in 1998 and overstayed a tourist visa, were not “illegal” when they arrived but were when they left, in 2010-11. In tandem with the change in migration projects from a return to Brazil to life in the US, this new context prompted people’s perspective of “not wanting to be illegal,” as (a) the emerging figure of an undocumented, illegalized migrant; and (b) a plan of permanence where migration status matters more than in a plan of return within a few years. In sum, these new policies forced Brazilian migrants to recalculate the gains and costs of staying in the US and, in turn, pursue new strategies of permanence.

In terms of labor dynamics, however, there seems to have been more continuity than change. Brazilian migrant workers in the Marietta area have, broadly speaking, been engaging with the same labor markets. In other words, housecleaning and construction continue to be the main occupation for Brazilian workers in this community. Additionally, as the migrants’ narratives show, these labor markets have remained relatively stable in terms of their internal practices and dynamics. Employment dynamics, such as the relationship between employers and *helpers* (discussed in more detail in chapters 6 and 7), must have been imagined and put into practice in the early years of the community and, since then, seem to have remained structurally stable, in spite of individual conflicts between employers and their *helpers* in both housecleaning and construction. Here, the main change participants described was an increase in *helpers*’ wages, although it remains low compared to living costs and service prices.

A specific change mentioned by housecleaners was how difficult it had become for one to buy someone else's schedule or houses (see Appendix B: Glossary), as are called the practice of buying access to one's entire client roster (the schedule) or individual clients (houses). This is discussed in more detail in chapter 7, but it shows that while, in the past, people would have sold their housecleaning client roster in order to increase the capital they could bring back to Brazil, currently they keep their clients as they plan to stay longer, or permanently, in the US. This also explains an increase in people working "on commission," that is, being hired by an employer to clean a house independently, not as *helper*. Another significant change many brought up was the emergence of GPS and Google Maps facilitating the frequent commutes of housecleaners between clients' homes.

Interviews also mentioned changes in the religious landscape of the Brazilian community in the area, in particular that the number of churches in 2023 had actually gone down in comparison to earlier times. Cleiton described it:

"But after I got here [1998], from around 2005 onwards it already started with churches, it started... [Before] you knew all churches, right? Then out of the blue more churches started showing up, more churches, more churches, and another one showed up... There was a time I played with a pastor who's a friend of ours, who had a really cool band, very good, the band, and we always went to play at some churches that invited us, always churches I hadn't even heard of."²² (Cleiton, interview 7, 11/01/23, Marietta GA)

Ludmilla, who arrived in 2000, described a similar process:

"In the beginning, when we arrived here there was only... Let's talk about churches? There were two churches. So we... folks all gathered there in those two churches, you understand? So you had more friendships, we went to church, there were parties, you knew everybody because you were always involved. After a few years, then Pastor Carlos's and Pastor Alexandre's churches became other churches. Then came so-and-so's and so-and-so's church

22 "Mas depois ali que eu cheguei aqui, ali de 2005 pra frente começou ali já da igreja, começou... você conhecia todas as igrejas, né? Aí de repente começou a aparecer mais igreja, mais igreja, mais igreja, e aparece outra. Teve uma época que eu tocava com um pastor amigo nosso, que tinha uma banda muito massa, muito boa a banda, e a gente sempre ia tocar em algumas igrejas convidadas, sempre igrejas que eu nunca tinha ouvido nem falar" (Cleiton, entrevista 7, 01/11/23, Marietta GA).

and it grew, grew, then the Catholic church, it grew, so like, folks dispersed.”²³ (Ludmilla, interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

Additionally, both Eliana and Jandira mentioned the role churches had in the community’s growth by helping and supporting incoming migrants. As Eliana explained:

“(…) back in the day the church served as social assistance and a place for socializing. So, [someone] arrived, the first thing they would do was to look for a church, because Brazilians, all relatively new [to the US], no one spoke English, so they gathered in a group and there they helped each other to find jobs and it was a place for socializing as well, because they were far away from family.”²⁴ (Eliana, interview 14, 12/26/23, video call)

Another significant change – one that had an impact on transnational dynamics and cross-border family relationships – was the advent of new communication technologies that facilitated contact between migrants in the US and relatives in Brazil. The shift from letters and expensive phone calls to WhatsApp allowed people to be constantly in contact and facilitated the circulation of care and emotional support in these relationships. These same technologies, along with online newspapers, podcasts, and social media, have changed how information about the US and Brazil circulate between these two countries.

Cross-border dynamics have thus shaped patterns of Brazilian migration to Marietta. Brazilian migration to the Marietta area fluctuates with changes in labor markets and social reproduction conditions, including shifts in migration policy. Stricter policies can alter perceptions of life in the United States, as fear of detention or deportation becomes a central concern. Over time, migration networks have expanded beyond Goiás, with Marietta becoming a hub attracting migrants from across Brazil and the United States. These dynamics

23 “No começo, quando a gente chegou aqui só tinha... Vamos falar de igreja? Tinha duas igrejas. Então a gente, o pessoal se concentrava tudo ali naquelas duas igrejas, entendeu? Então você tinha mais amizade, a gente ia na igreja, você tinha as festas, você conhecia todo mundo porque estava sempre envolvido. Depois de alguns anos, aí a igreja do pastor Carlos e do pastor Alexandre viraram outras igrejas. Aí veio igreja de não sei quem pra cá e de não sei quem pra lá, e foi aumentando, aumentando, aí a igreja católica, foi aumentando, então assim, o pessoal foi se dispersando” (Ludmilla, entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

24 “Por exemplo, a igreja antigamente servia como assistência social e lugar para socializar. Então, chegava, a primeira coisa que fazia era procurar as igrejas, porque os brasileiros, relativamente todos novos, ninguém falava inglês, então eles juntavam um grupinho e ali eles ajudavam o outro a arrumar trabalho e era um ponto pra socializar também, porque tava longe da família” (Eliana, entrevista 14, 26/12/23, video call).

reflect changes in labor and social reproduction conditions elsewhere, as seen in movements from states like Florida following increased enforcement.

In the present section, I presented how a shift in the life strategies realized through migration to the US have changed in tandem with dynamics of social reproduction in Brazil that are in tension with each other, including social and economic processes of increased urbanization, education, and consumption, and a perceived deterioration of living conditions in Brazil. I have also argued that processes of illegalization and increased migration enforcement have significantly altered strategies of migration and social reproduction in the US, as well as the overall costs of migration. The current schemas relating to entry and permanence in the US were discussed in a previous section, which highlighted the precarious legal situation of Brazilians in Marietta (even when they are not out of status), which also requires large amounts of money to be sunk into lawyer and visa fees without any guaranteed return. As a result of these precarized migration conditions, many are forced to work “under the table” and employ several strategies to hide any records of their employment. This discussion followed a characterization of the Brazilian community in Marietta in terms of their places of origin, education and careers in Brazil; their decision-making processes to migrate to the US; and their racial and ethnic identities in the US.

CHAPTER 5: WHY DO BRAZILIANS MIGRATE TO THE MARIETTA AREA?

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Brazilian migrants, coming from middle-class and lower middle-class backgrounds in Brazil, possess varying levels of education and sufficient material and cognitive resources to support their migration to the United States. Their decision to migrate is often linked to un- or underemployment in Brazil, or to a sense of “underpayment,” where even stable employment does not allow them to afford desired social reproduction conditions. As shown in the life histories in Appendix A, migration decisions may be encouraged by friends or relatives already living in the United States, or they may be “independent,” with migrants initiating the process and later seeking connections. Brazilian migrants typically do not secure employment before leaving Brazil. Instead, they rely on entering local labor markets through Brazilian community networks upon arrival. When possible, they obtain a tourist visa; otherwise, they undertake the *travessia* through Mexico. Upon arrival, migrants may become undocumented, pursue non-work visas, or apply for work visas that provide pathways to permanent residency and citizenship. Until such visas are approved, they remain in a precarious legal situation, neither fully in nor out of status. Over time, Brazilian migration strategies have shifted from temporary, individual migration aimed at supporting a better life in Brazil to more permanent, family-based migration projects seeking a better life in the United States.

A labor and social reproduction lens helps interpret these dynamics by situating migrants’ experiences within broader structural conditions. In Brazil, migrants were excluded from secure, well-paying labor markets, and the social reproduction conditions they could achieve were perceived as insufficient or stagnant. Migration to the United States is thus driven by a “search for a better life,” rather than purely by survival, even when migrants support family members in Brazil. This process is marked by a contradiction: in Brazil, as

citizens and skilled workers, migrants could not access desired social reproduction conditions; in the United States, as precarized migrant workers, they perceive these conditions as attainable. This perception is shaped by migrants' understanding of social conditions in both countries. Work in the United States is rarely praised; it is described as exhausting and demanding, yet "worth it" because it enables access to a better life. Marcus (2009b) argues that geographical imagination shapes how Brazilian migrants in the US think about their place where they are *not* located, thus spurring movements of migration and return. In contrast, I contend that Brazilians also hold on to geographical imagination *in place*, which partly informs how social reproduction conditions are perceived as positive in the US and negative in Brazil. As I discuss in chapter 8, this perception of lived experiences relating to social reproduction conditions *here and there* is also shaped by the prioritizing of certain aspects of social reproduction versus others.

The present chapter extensively draws on interview quotes to examine why Brazilians leave their communities of origin and settle in Marietta. Motivations for moving and staying in the United States include urban safety, purchasing power, quality of life (including powerful imaginings of the US as "a land of opportunity"), and religious beliefs. Based on this empirical data, I argue that in the context of Brazilian migrant workers in Marietta, motivations relate to the sphere of social reproduction, rather than that of labor. I also discussed how particular conditions in Marietta, including employment and living costs, have made it an attractive Brazilian community among others in the US. Subsequently, I elaborate on social, economic, and political processes in Brazil that facilitate such motivations taking shape among my research participants. In doing so, I present how perceived conditions of social reproduction *here and there* shape the zones of convergence between Marietta and Brazil.

Motivations to migrate

In the Brazilian migrants' life stories I narrate, I spotlight individual motivations and particular catalysts for migration decision-making. In this section, I take a more collective approach to these motivations, exploring points in common in order to draw out what they reveal about Brazilian migrants' ideas on place, everyday life, and social reproduction. Looking at Brazilians' motivations and decision-making processes is relevant for the questions I ask in this dissertation as it reveals: (i) perceptions about each place; (ii) the role of geographical imagination in the migration processes between Brazil and the US (Marcus 2009b); (iii) reasons why Brazilian migrants engage with precarized labor markets and migration statuses; and (iv) aspects of social reproduction that are considered and prioritized by Brazilian migrants. These ideas, in turn, support an understanding of how social reproduction – as care and as material conditions – supports migration processes. Subsequently, I spotlight some of the main motivations raised by my research participants to leave Brazil and move to the Marietta area: issues of urban violence in Brazil; affordability of consumer goods and purchasing power in the US; quality of public education in the US; religious motivations; and specific aspects of Marietta compared to other Brazilian migrant communities in the US.

Urban violence in Brazil

One of the main issues Brazilians tend to point out as a reason for them to leave Brazil is urban violence. In this context, the idea of urban crime includes armed robberies, car thefts, kidnappings, and home invasions, as well as the possibility of harm and even death that may result from such events. Urban violence is prevalent in narratives about Brazil, not only

among those who lived in bigger cities but also between small town residents. Márcio and Ludmilla, for example, talked about urban crimes in metro São Paulo, before they left in 2000:

Márcio: In Brazil, the only thing I was able to get was a [Volkswagen] Beetle. When I had it looking nice, that it had all the parts, I had it just the way I wanted, it was stolen. So in Brazil you can't have a watch, you can't have sneakers, because you're at risk of dying. So, go back to Brazil for what? So, no.

Ludmilla: It seems that it's getting worse, right? I don't know.²⁵ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

Adriana, in turn, talked about how the touristic beach town she lived in changed from safe to a place where she would not let her son go out on his own:

"My region didn't have any danger. Oh, did it have robberies, it did, but it wasn't like, be careful not to be robbed. There was no such thing, you understand? (...) You didn't leave the house thinking you'd be robbed, you understand? But after these UPPs [see Appendix B: Glossary], the situation is so increasingly weird that there aren't [specifically] dangerous places anymore. There's no place that you say, like, no, here there is [no crime], it's over, there is none. It generalized, it spread, you see."²⁶ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Additionally, Adriana and her family were emotionally impacted by her second cousin who was brutally tortured and murdered by "criminals" after a car accident. Adriana explained this new scenario in this town affected their lives and motivated them to decide to stay in the US rather than return:

"So that started to scare us, for example, when my son, we're Christians, my son when he went to church meetings with the boys, [she would ask] what time are you coming back? 11pm. When he left I already started to worry, he left and worries started already. So what would happen? I dropped him off, picked him up. I said, oh, a 17-year-old young man, his mom dropping him off and picking him up, that's no fun, right? For him, right? He understood that

25 Márcio: No Brasil, a única coisa que eu consegui foi um fusca. A hora que eu deixei ele bonito, que estava inteiro, deixei do jeito que eu queria, me roubaram. Então, no Brasil você não pode ter um relógio, não pode ter um tênis, porque você está arriscado a morrer. Então, voltar para o Brasil pra quê? Então, não...

Ludmilla: Parece que está piorando, né? Sei lá. (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

26 "A minha região não tinha perigo nenhum. Ah, tinha assalto, tinha, mas... Não era uma coisa assim, cuidado pra não ser assaltado. Não existia isso, entendeu? (...) Você não saía de casa pensando que ia ser assaltado, entendeu? Mas depois dessas UPPs, a situação tá tão estranha, cada vez mais, que não tem mais um local perigoso. Não tem lugar que você fale assim, não, aqui não tem, acabou. Não tem. Generalizou. Espalhou assim, ó" (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

it was caring and all the boys, we did the same thing.”²⁷ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Talita, who also used to live in a small countryside town, described how proximity to a busy interstate highway brought “crime” to her city:

“Brazil is very... everyone knows how it works. It’s a hard place, our country is very rich, but very poorly managed, it’s more bandidos [criminals, bandits] that dominate things and the area where we [lived] is very dangerous. There are many deaths due to trafficking stuff, and the city is really on the [BR-101 interstate highway], the [BR-101 interstate highway] goes through it, cuts through the middle of the town. And so everything bad, people in hiding, it all goes there. Bad people who go through the BR, they all hide there, so a lot happens.”²⁸ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Other migrants, including Schaianne and Pedro, were direct victims of violent crimes in Brazil. Schaianne was the victim of an armed robbery in front of her home. According to her, the neighborhood they lived in had always been dangerous, but after being robbed she felt even more anxious about leaving her home:

“It was always [dangerous]. At least that region there, where I lived. Goiânia was pretty dangerous, Goiânia. There were a lot of robberies, a lot of car thefts, armed robberies and they killed. Robbery in neighborhoods, right, neighborhoods like the one I lived in, you’re walking down the street and they rob you to take your phone, you with children and all, rob your groceries, it’s a lot, it’s really a lot, like. (...) And then the boys started getting scared, right, of going out on the street, I was very scared to go out on the street. Especially after I was robbed, right, an armed robbery, then I was even more scared. (...) I was taking out the trash, girl. So, like, it’s very complicated, it’s very complicated, really. Then they would threaten you, right? “You saw my face. Be careful, I’m always around here, what if I catch you,” you know? So, like, it was scary. I walked the boys to and from school, it was a few blocks from my house, and I was terrified. I left the house with nothing, so if anything happened to me or the boys there was no way of letting anyone know, because I left without my phone. I left only with the keys in my pocket, from the fear I had. And then there was fear because you knew the stories, that they went to rob someone, the person didn’t have anything, then they assaulted or killed them, because they didn’t have anything. So like, it was hell, a hell like, you know? That we lived there, in that region there where we lived.”²⁹ (Schaianne, interview 50, 07/05/25, Kennesaw GA)

27 “Então isso foi assustando a gente, por exemplo, quando o meu filho, nós somos cristãos, meu filho quando ia para reunião da igreja com os meninos, que horas você vai voltar? 11 horas. Quando ele saía já ficava preocupada, ele sair já começava a preocupação. E aí o que acontecia? Eu levava, eu buscava. Eu falei, pô, um rapaz de 17 anos, a mãe ficar levando e buscando, isso não tem graça, né? Pra ele, né? Ele entendia que era cuidado e todos os rapazes, nós fazíamos a mesma coisa (...)” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

28 “O Brasil é muito... todo mundo sabe como funciona. É um lugar difícil, nosso país é muito rico, mas muito mal administrado, bandidos mais que toma conta e a área que a gente mora é uma área muito perigosa. Tem muitas mortes de coisa de tráfico e a cidade fica bem assim na BR, a BR passa dentro, cortando o meio da cidade. E aí tudo que é de ruim, pessoas esconder, vai tudo pra lá. Gente ruim que passa ali na BR, esconde tudo lá. Então acontece muita coisa” (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

Pedro, in turn, was shot at five times during a kidnapping attempt to which he reacted – in 2025, he still had bullets in his hand and leg. He fled the scene, so his would-be kidnappers took all valuables from his car and later threatened to come after Pedro. In both cases, undergoing these experiences of violence gave them grounds for an asylum request in the US.

Purchasing power and affordability

Another issue that Brazilian migrants frequently mentioned was that, in Brazil, one cannot “grow,” “achieve,” or “conquer” things. When I asked what they meant, participants usually referred to working hard and still not being able to afford things or having to buy them in multiple installments, not having increase in wages year after year, and never-improving financial conditions. Claudinei mentioned how his wages were never enough:

“I even had a job where I worked for practically 15 years. I worked in the administrative area, I was a sales support person for several sales teams. But it’s like that, the wages are always the same, always the same, and bosses in Brazil don’t value our work. Living costs are very expensive, so you barely made enough to eat. The end of the month came and you were always

29 “Sempre foi. Pelo menos na região ali, onde eu morava ali. Goiânia era bem perigosinho, Goiânia. Tinha muito assalto, muito roubo de carro, à mão armada e eles matavam. Assalto a bairros, né, bairros assim, igual eu morava, de você tá andando na rua e ser assaltado pra roubar seu celular, você com criança e tudo mais, roubar suas compras de supermercado, é muito, muito mesmo, assim. (...) E aí os meninos foram ficando com medo, né? De sair na rua, eu com muito medo de sair na rua. Principalmente depois que eu fui assaltada, né, à mão armada, aí que eu fiquei com mais medo ainda. (...) Fui colocar lixo pra fora, menina. Então, assim, é... Bem complicado. Bem complicado mesmo. Aí te ameaçava, né? Você viu meu rosto. Cuidado que eu tô sempre por aqui. E se eu te pegar, sabe? Então, assim, dava medo. Eu buscava e levava os meninos a pé na escola. Que era alguns quarteirões da rua da minha casa. E aí eu ficava apavorada. Eu saía sem nada. Então se acontecesse alguma coisa comigo ou com os meninos, não tinha como avisar, porque eu saía sem celular. Eu saía só com a chave no meu bolso. De medo que eu tinha. Aí tinha um medo, porque você sabia de histórias, que ia assaltar alguém, a pessoa não tinha nada, e eles batiam ou matavam. Porque não tinha nada. Então assim, era um inferno. Um inferno, assim, sabe? Que a gente tava vivendo ali, naquela região ali que a gente morava ali” (Schaianne, entrevista 50, 05/07/25, Kennesaw GA).

in the red. ‘Oh, I need to buy this, oh, there’s no money left.’”³⁰ (Claudinei, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

Talita explained it further in her own words, after I asked what she considered “achieving” to be:

“To not need so much... Because in life, there’s no way, money is necessary for our life. We don’t do anything without money. (...) Even if you work a lot, but to have a good condition so you’re not struggling, the struggles we had in Brazil of sometimes not having anything to eat, sometimes not having anything to wear, not being able to go certain places, have one weekend of leisure. Because I didn’t have any leisure (...) I never went to the beach, never went to a park. So that is what I want to achieve, to be able to go and to be able to provide that for my family. A more relaxed, more tranquil life, with no debt, no struggles.”³¹ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Asked a similar question, Juliana linked being able to “grow” and “conquer things” to having quality of life:

Juliana: Our motivation was really to have the opportunity to be able to live better. You know, like, to grow, to conquer things. Because here indeed you have more opportunities. I don’t know, I think it’s more propitious for us to advance here than in Brazil. There you achieve, but in double, triple the time, right, of people who are here.

Clara: When you talk about advancing, growing, what do you mean?

Juliana: In all senses. Like, it’s having quality of life, being able to work like crazy all year but being able to take a quality trip without going into debt. It’s being able to plan today so in the future you have retirement funds. Like, ‘oh, I’m 60, I’ll stop working because I was able to organize myself better in this time.’ It’s offering a better future for our children. In this sense, like, really broad. Because I think, since I didn’t have a married life in Brazil, I think it’s a bit more grievous.³² (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

30 “Eu até que tinha um serviço que eu trabalhei praticamente 15 anos, eu trabalhava na área de... administrativa lá, eu era suporte de venda de várias equipes de venda. Mas é aquela coisa que, salário sempre é aquela mesma coisa, aquela mesma coisa, e patrão no Brasil lá não valoriza o trabalho da gente. O custo de vida é muito caro. E aí você mal fazia pra comer. Chegava no final do mês e você estava sempre no vermelho. Ah, preciso de comprar isso, ixe... não sobrou nada de dinheiro” (Claudinei, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

31 “Não precisar tanto... porque na vida não tem jeito. O dinheiro é necessário para a nossa vida. A gente não faz nada sem o dinheiro. (...) Ou nem que trabalhe bastante, mas que tenha uma boa condição para não ficar passando dificuldade, a dificuldade que a gente passava no Brasil. De, às vezes, faltar o que comer, às vezes faltar o que vestir, não poder ir a certos lugares, viver um fim de semana num lazer. Porque eu não tinha lazer, eu não conheço praia, nunca fui em praia, nunca fui no parque. E é isso que eu quero alcançar, poder ir e poder proporcionar pra minha família. Uma vida mais tranquila, mais sossegada, sem dívidas, sem dificuldades” (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

32 Juliana: Não, nossa motivação era mesmo ter a oportunidade de conseguir viver melhor. Sabe assim, de crescer, de conquistar as coisas. Porque aqui de fato tem mais oportunidades. Não sei, eu acho que é propício a gente conseguir avançar mais do que no Brasil. Lá você consegue, mas pelo dobro, triplo de tempo, né, do que quem tá aqui.

Clara: Quando você fala de avançar, de crescer, você quer dizer o quê?

Juliana: Em todos os sentidos. Tipo assim, é... ter qualidade de vida, de poder trabalhar loucamente o ano, mas conseguir fazer uma viagem de qualidade sem se endividar. É poder se planejar hoje pra no futuro você ter uma aposentadoria. Tipo assim, ah, eu tenho 60, eu vou parar de trabalhar porque eu consegui me organizar melhor

In comparing Brazil and the US, my research participants frequently described the US as having better “quality of life,” a broad term that encompasses different things for different people. Some of the frequent themes were affordability and purchasing power, access to leisure and entertainment, and quality of education and healthcare. Schaianne explained the meaning of “quality of life” for her, after I asked her to clarify:

“So, I actually think about physical well-being as well as material, as well as even emotional. Here we work a lot, but I don’t see the difference from Brazil, because in Brazil people also work a lot. Today my husband has the same working hours that he had in Brazil. However, we have... I don’t need to pay for a TV in 12 installments to be able to conquer it, because like, materially speaking, right? Talking about that first. Because we work to have comfort, right? So you can have stability, have a good car, be able to travel, go out. So, that I noticed we can achieve much more easily here. We work a lot, if you don’t work... Even the days we travelled, since I got here, I already travelled twice, I even went to the beach in the middle of the year, I’m going again at the end of the year. Over there in Brazil it was once every two, three years, because of prices, right? (...) So, like, this issue of *segurança*, right, and the quality of life of the boys, like, we have more access to parks, the structural things, right, these outings which are a lot more affordable, so this quality of life that you can have access to things more easily, right? And the school, right? The quality of the school. (...) So that to me is quality of life, you know, to be able to offer them a better future and for us to be able to access things that over there [in Brazil] we didn’t have, you know? It took us a long time to have.”³³ (Schaianne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

Brazilian migrants frequently described how “accessible” consumer goods are in the US, when compared to Brazil. The plentiful offer of donated goods is also frequently described as one of the positive aspects of life in the US. If work feels hard in the US, it is frequently compared to Brazil, where work is also hard but, in the US, at least you can afford

nesse tempo. É oferecer um futuro melhor pros filhos. Nesse sentido assim, sabe, no geralção. Porque eu acho, como eu não tive uma vida de casada no Brasil, eu acho que lá é um pouco mais sofrido, assim, sabe? Eu acho. (Entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)

³³ “Então, eu na verdade eu penso em tanto no bem-estar físico, quanto material, quanto até mesmo emocional. Aqui a gente trabalha muito, mas eu não vejo diferença do Brasil, porque no Brasil também se trabalha muito. Hoje o meu marido a carga horária dele é a mesma do Brasil. Porém, a gente tem... eu não preciso parcelar uma televisão 12 vezes pra conquistar, porque assim, em questão material, tá? Falando primeiro. Porque a gente trabalha pra gente ter conforto, né? Pra você ter uma estabilidade, ter um carro bom, poder viajar, passear. Então, isso aqui eu percebi que a gente consegue muito mais fácil. A gente trabalha muito, se você não trabalha, até os dias que a gente viajou, desde que eu cheguei aqui, eu já viajei duas vezes, inclusive fui pra praia no meio do ano, vou agora de novo no final do ano. Lá no Brasil era uma vez a cada dois, três anos por conta dos valores, né? (...) Então, assim, essa questão da segurança, né, e a qualidade de vida dos meninos, assim, poder... a gente tem mais acesso a parques, a questão estrutural, né, desses passeios, tudo, que são mais em conta, então essa qualidade de vida que você consegue ter acesso às coisas mais fácil, né? E a questão da escola, né? A qualidade da escola. (...) Então isso pra mim é qualidade de vida, sabe, poder proporcionar que eles possam ter um futuro melhor e a gente poder ter acesso a coisas que lá a gente não tinha, sabe? Demorava muito pra ter” (Schaianne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

things – like Schaianne says in the quote above. Diogo talked about affordability and financial stability in the US:

“Because compared to Brazil, we make a certain amount of money, right? Thank God I was never in need, but the purchasing power of real is a lot smaller. While here... I think there’s a lot of construction work, there’s a lot to do, things we know how to do. And all that ends up making a lot of money, working every day. And we’re able to buy a lot more things, you know. Not only buying, as though we earned to shop, but financially we can be a lot more stable. We’re able to do more family trips, for example, without spending much. So I believe that being able to earn in dollars is already helpful. And also compared, for example, to helping people there in Brazil, like I told you, we can help our family there a lot more easily, without spending much, and it ends up helping a lot.”³⁴ (Diogo, interview 12, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Talita also mentioned the affordability of things in the US::

“And so, financially speaking, Brazil is unfortunately very hard for people with no conditions. So, some people may be able to make ends meet with manual labor. And a difference here, sometimes... It’s because there [in Brazil], who’s honest, hard-working, has credit, can go into a place, buy, go to work, and pay later. I don’t know it’s really that good [laughs], but there’s this advantage that in a time of real need, you can appeal to that. Here you pay for everything upfront, but you have the money to pay at the moment, it’s more accessible.”³⁵ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Many Brazilian migrants blamed the high price of consumer goods in Brazil on taxes, like Luciano:

“A Nintendo Switch like this one over there in Brazil is around R\$4k [approximately \$800] and change. Here I bought it for \$300 [approximately R\$1,500]. (...) I’ll talk about the iPhone, that over there in Brazil you have to finance. You pay for it for I don’t know how many years... an iPhone here, no, with \$1k you buy the top one. (...) I say, in Brazil taxes are very high, you don’t know where that money goes, you don’t see it. It’s a lot of taxes, half of the products, half of what you pay in a product is taxes. Here no, at least here you pay taxes, but you know how much you’re paying in taxes. Taxes come indicated. Look, the price here is \$300, but the

34 “Porque comparado lá no Brasil, a gente ganha um certo dinheiro, né? Graças a Deus nunca passei necessidade. Mas... Mas... O poder de compra do real é muito menor. Já aqui a gente... Acho que tem muito serviço de construção, tem muitas coisas pra fazer. Coisas que a gente sabe fazer. E tudo isso acaba gerando muito dinheiro. Todo dia trabalhando. E a gente consegue comprar bem mais coisas, sabe. Não só de comprar, como se a gente ganhasse para comprar. Mas financeiramente a gente consegue estar bem mais estabilizado. Consegue fazer mais viagens em família, por exemplo, sem gastar muita coisa. Então eu acredito que poder ganhar em dólar já é uma ajuda. E também, comparado, por exemplo, a ajudar as pessoas lá no Brasil, como te falei, a gente pode ajudar a nossa família lá muito mais tranquilo, sem gastar muito. E acaba ajudando bastante” (Diogo, entrevista 12, 21/20/23, Marietta GA).

35 “E aí, financeiramente falando, o Brasil é, infelizmente, muito difícil pra quem não tem condição. Então, algumas pessoas podem se virar com um trabalho braçal. E uma diferença daqui, às vezes, é porque a gente lá, quem é honesto, trabalhador, tem crédito. Chega num lugar, pode comprar, ir trabalhar e pagar depois. Não sei se é tão bom assim [risos], mas tem essa vantagem que na hora da necessidade mesmo, pode recorrer a isso. Aqui a gente paga tudo à vista, mas tem o dinheiro pra pagar naquele momento. É mais acessível” (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

taxes here are \$20, ok, you'll pay \$320, \$20 in taxes. You know how much it is. And here you see, a first world country, the streets all look nice.”³⁶ (Luciano, interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Like Luciano, Danilo brought up “seeing the results” of paying taxes:

“(…) the purchasing power here is a little higher, for example, if I work for the daily rate of an average worker, with one day's wages you can fill up a vehicle's tank and you're still left with money in pocket, while in Brazil you can't. For example, a \$150 daily fee. For a person who makes \$150, they can fill the tank of a vehicle [in 2023] with \$60, depending on the car. In Brazil, if you work for a daily wage of R\$150, you can't fill the tank of a car. So, it's more or less the purchasing power, so here you have more purchasing power to be able to buy your appliances, give your family better quality of life. You pay taxes, but you see the results in your community in relation to what you want to enjoy, you understand?”³⁷ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

The costliness of consumer goods in Brazil has other impacts on people's life plans, such as getting married and having children. Pastor Natanael brought up the fact that rental apartments and homes come with their own appliances, as opposed to in Brazil, where one moves with their own range-oven, refrigerator, and washing machine. Indeed, Juliana and her husband could not get married in Brazil because they could not afford to furnish a house for themselves.

36 “O Nintendo Switch desse lá no Brasil é em torno de uns 4 mil e poucos reais. Aqui eu comprei por 300 dólares. (...) vou falar do iPhone, que lá no Brasil você tem que fazer um financiamento. Você paga não sei quantos anos... um iPhone aqui não, por mil dólares tu compra o top. (...) Eu falo, o Brasil, o imposto é muito alto, você não sabe pra onde vai esse dinheiro, você não vê. É muito imposto, metade dos produtos, metade do que você paga no produto é imposto. Aqui não, pelo menos, aqui você paga o imposto, mas você sabe o que você está pagando de imposto. Já vem separadinho o imposto. Ó, o valor aqui é 300 dólares, mas o imposto aqui é 20. Pronto, você vai pagar 320, o imposto aqui é 20. Você sabe quanto dá. E aqui você vê, país de primeiro mundo, as ruas tudo bonitinhas” (Luciano, entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

37 “(...) o poder aquisitivo aqui é um pouco maior, como por exemplo, se eu trabalhar em uma diária de um trabalhador normal, com uma diária você consegue encher o tanque de um veículo, ainda te sobra dinheiro no bolso, já no Brasil você não consegue. Por exemplo, uma diária de 150 dólares. Para uma pessoa que ganha 150 dólares, ela consegue encher o tanque de um veículo com 60 dólares, dependendo do carro. No Brasil, se você trabalhar por uma diária de 150 reais, você não enche um tanque de carro. Então, é mais ou menos o poder aquisitivo, então aqui você tem mais poder aquisitivo pra comprar os seus eletrodomésticos, dar uma qualidade de vida à família melhor, você paga os impostos, mas você vê os resultados na comunidade em relação ao que você deseja usufruir, entendeu?” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

Quality of public education and a “better future”

While Kiko is the only one to bring up quality of healthcare as a reason for moving to the US, quality of education at the middle and high school levels was frequently mentioned. Many compared US public schools to Brazilian private schools, in addition to praising US public schools for “accepting everybody,” regardless of visa or migration status, for example. In Brazil, city, state, and federal governments offer public education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. However, public schools at this level are generally considered to be low-quality and underfunded, with a few exceptions, such as *escolas técnicas* [a high and trade school combination]. In contrast, private schools are considered to provide better education and overall environment. There is a broad range of private education institutions, from lower-tuition neighborhood schools to traditional elite ones. For many lower middle-class families, their first priority is paying for private education for the children, as was the case of Claudinei and Bruna when they lived in Goiânia. Claudinei explained why they paid for their son Marcelo to attend a private high school:

“Some people over there in Brazil, even our own relatives, sometimes criticized that we earned little, but we paid a private school for him. And in these schools over there in Brazil, I don’t know if you had the opportunity to study in Brazil, if you go to a public school, the teacher doesn’t care if you’re learning or not. They are there to work their hours and if you want to learn, good, if you don’t, you can stay dumb. And [private schools] no, private [schools] make you work hard.”³⁸ (Claudinei, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA).

Juliana explained her thinking on this matter:

“Yeah, because public education, at least in my city [Goiânia], is horrible. So, for [her daughters] to have access to a bilingual education, over there [in Brazil] is super expensive. Like I have, we have two daughters. Imagine for two [children], it would be around R\$10k [approximately \$2k] a month, because it’s so expensive. And here it’s free, and they speak

38 “Algumas pessoas lá no Brasil, até parentes mesmo nossos, às vezes criticavam que a gente ganhava pouco, mas a gente pagava a escola particular pra ele. E nessas escolas lá no Brasil, não sei se você teve oportunidade de estudar no Brasil, se você vai na escola pública, o professor não tá nem aí se você vai aprender ou não. Ele tá ali pra cumprir a meta de horário dele e se você quiser aprender, bem, se não quiser, você pode continuar burro. E na particular não, a particular é exigida” (Claudinei, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

Portuguese and English without paying anything.”³⁹ (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Then later, speaking of Schaienne, who had just arrived in Marietta, Juliana said:

“That’s something we said to her a lot, ‘look at that, you just arrived, you enrolled your kids in school, what your sons are getting here for free, they didn’t get in a school you paid almost R\$2k [approximately \$400] a month in Brazil.’ They put the children in a special language adaptation program. The bus dropped them off at school. From the school, another special bus took them to another school where they had this program. There, they got free meals, they received all the support from the whole team, she said they received them really well, the school principal, all the school staff. She said they found a translator who works in this area of Brazilian education to help them with translation. And they have a status as tourists. What’s the country’s obligation? None, none. But like, if it’s a child, and they’re here, now they’re our priority also. They have no duty to do any of it.”⁴⁰ (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Ludmilla and Márcio, in turn, compared their experience with their son’s school during the pandemic:

Márcio: It’s a whole other reality, right? You can’t compare it. Children here, when the pandemic came, each child had a laptop that the school gave them.

Ludmilla: Yeah, to study.

Márcio: Where in Brazil would the government give each child a laptop? So, it’s...

Ludmilla: [Their son] still has it today, right, from school. When he finishes he has to give it back, right?

Márcio: Speaking of this issue of having a return, right? Here it’s expensive to pay taxes on your house, but how many percent of property taxes go to the school, to the fire department, to the police?

Ludmilla: A lot, that’s true.

Márcio: That’s why everything works, right?

Ludmilla: We didn’t know. So, it’s... at our home here it’s \$4k and change of taxes a year.

Márcio: But it goes... I think almost \$3k goes to the schools. But all schools here, the structure they have, the bus...

Ludmilla: Even inside, right, the school infrastructure is also great.⁴¹ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

39 É, porque a educação pública, pelo menos na minha cidade, é horrível. Então, para elas terem acesso ao ensino bilíngüe, lá é caríssimo. Igual eu tenho, nós temos duas filhas. Imagina para duas, ia ser uns 10 mil por mês, porque é caro pra caramba. E aqui é de graça e elas falam português e o inglês sem pagar nada.

40 “E aí é uma coisa que a gente falava muito pra ela, olha só, você acabou de chegar, você matriculou os seus filhos na escola, o que os seus filhos estão recebendo de graça aqui, eles não recebiam na escola que você pagava quase 2 mil por mês no Brasil. Eles colocaram as crianças num programa especial pra adaptação na língua. O ônibus deixava eles numa escola, na escola. Nessa escola, eles, um outro ônibus especial mandava eles pra outra escola onde tinha esse programa. Lá eles recebem alimentação gratuita, eles recebem todo o amparo de toda a equipe, ela disse que receberam eles muito bem. A diretora da escola, toda a equipe da escola, disse que eles arrumaram uma tradutora que trabalha nessa parte da educação brasileira pra ajudar eles na tradução. E eles, com o estado de turistas. Qual é a obrigação do país? Nenhuma. Nenhuma. Mas, tipo assim, se é criança, eles estão aqui, eles agora são nossa prioridade também. Eles não tinham dever nenhum de fazer nada disso” (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA).

Edna is one of the few dissenting voices in this matter:

“I also didn’t come so that my children could have all the opportunities. I think if I was in Brazil, I’d be able to give my children more education opportunities. Like, thinking of my reality there, you understand? Some people think education here is... Like, oh, you’re studying in the United States. It’s not quite like that. (...) if you go do your undergraduate studies here, even the university for me, I think, even college, I don’t see here as the best place in the world. If I could really give my son, ‘look, you want a good education, *meu filho*, do your undergrad in Brazil.’ (...) Man, André, I had to ask for a history book from Brazil for André to read. The kid doesn’t know anything, good thing he likes to read, good thing he likes history, because, I don’t know (...) I start talking to him about some things like, I say, man, that’s so weird, then I look at Brazil, I look at the schools in Brazil, and I say, oh wow. (...) So I definitely didn’t come to give my son a better education.”⁴² (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Edna also disagreed on the quality of healthcare. Her son João, who was ill as a baby (see life story 17), was treated at a Massachusetts hospital with “Harvard doctors and nurses.” She would argue with them frequently – supported by a trade school degree as a nursing technician – and considered “São Gonçalo nurses” to be better than the US doctors who treated her son.

41 Márcio: É outra realidade, né? Não dá pra comparar. As crianças aqui, chegou na pandemia, toda criança tinha um laptop que a escola deu.

Ludmilla: É, pra estudar.

Márcio: Aonde que no Brasil o governo vai dar um laptop pra cada criança? Então, é...

Ludmilla: O Mike tem até hoje, né, da escola. Na hora que acabar tem que devolver, né?

Márcio: Falando na, nessa questão de você ter o retorno, né. Aqui é caro você pagar o tax da casa, mas quantos por cento do tax da casa vai pra escola, vai para o bombeiro, vai para a polícia?

Ludmilla: Bastante. É verdade.

Márcio: Por isso que tudo funciona, né?

Ludmilla: A gente não sabia. Então é... na casa aqui é 4 mil e pouco de imposto por ano.

Márcio: Mas vai... acho que quase 3 mil vai para as escolas. Só que todas as escolas aqui, a estrutura que tem, de ônibus...

Ludmilla: Mesmo dentro, né, a infra-estrutura da escola também é ótima. (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

42 “Também não vim pra que os meus filhos pudessem ter todas as oportunidades. Eu acho que se eu estivesse no Brasil, eu conseguiria dar mais oportunidade para os meus filhos, de educação. Assim, lembrando da minha realidade lá, entendeu? Tem pessoas que pensam que aqui, a educação daqui é... Tipo, ah, você está estudando nos Estados Unidos. Não é bem assim. (...) se você for fazer uma graduação aqui, até a universidade pra mim, eu penso, até o college, não vejo aqui como o melhor lugar do mundo. Se eu pudesse realmente dar ao meu filho, olha, quer uma boa educação, meu filho, faça faculdade no Brasil (...) Cara, André, eu tive que pedir pra trazer o livro de história do Brasil pra André ler. O garoto não sabe nada, ainda bem que ele gosta de ler, ainda bem que ele gosta de história. Porque, não sei, é umas coisas meio malucas. (...) Então eu começo a conversar com ele algumas coisas assim, eu falo, gente, que coisa estranha. Que aí eu olho para o Brasil, eu olho aquelas escolas do Brasil, eu falo, caraca. (...) Então definitivamente não vim pra dar melhor estudo pro meu filho” (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

Nevertheless, ideas around a “better future” for their children, while broad, were another strong reason Brazilians gave for moving to and staying in the US. Creusa explained it this way:

Clara: And what would you say motivates you to stay here and to not return to Brazil, like, tomorrow?

Creusa: That I want the best for my girls. I think here they’ll have a better future.

Clara: What do you see, like, as the difference in this point between here and Brazil?

Creusa: Over there in Brazil there are no jobs, like, they’ll study and they won’t have... I won’t be able to pay for a good school for them, a college for them. And here even if they don’t have a degree, they will... I think they’ll be better than over there.

Clara: Better, you mean, having more jobs or making a better income?

Creusa: Making a better income, having more jobs.

Clara: I see. So you’d rather they grow up here than there?

Creusa: Yes.⁴³ (Interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Schianne also talked about her sons having a “better future” in the US even if she could not afford college for them:

“I think more about them than myself, you know, like. (...) I don’t know if I’ll be able to pay for their college, I know it’s very expensive, so one of my goals, soon put my boys to do sports, to see if they get a scholarship, or also if I can’t do it, here there’s a thing that Brazil doesn’t have, I don’t know if you’ll agree with me, but it’s the trade schools, it’s really valued. So if I pay a trade school for them, you know, to do it... They have to have a profession. Here, every profession, I could be wrong, but the little I see here, every profession is valued, it’s not only the doctor, the lawyer, you know? Like in Brazil there’s this issue of status, right? I’m a doctor, I’m a lawyer, I’m this and that, otherwise you’re worthless. Here, no. People have more... Not that it’s 100%, nothing is 100%, but it’s more valued.”⁴⁴ (Schianne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

43 Clara: E o que você diria que te motiva a continuar aqui e não voltar para o Brasil, tipo assim, amanhã?

Creusa: Que eu quero o melhor para as minhas, para as meninas. Que eu acho que aqui elas vão ter um futuro melhor.

Clara: O que você vê, assim, de diferença nessa questão entre aqui e o Brasil?

Creusa: Lá no Brasil não tem emprego, tipo assim, elas vão estudar e não vão ter... eu não vou dar conta de pagar uma escola boa pra elas, uma faculdade pra elas. E aqui mesmo que não seja uma faculdade, elas vão... eu acho que elas vão estar melhor do que lá.

Clara: Tá melhor, você diz, em questão de ter mais emprego ou ganhar melhor?

Creusa: Ganhar melhor, de ter mais emprego.

Clara: Entendi. Então você prefere que elas cresçam aqui do que crescer lá?

Creusa: Sim. (Entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA)

44 “Eu penso mais neles do que em mim, sabe assim (...) eu não sei se eu vou poder pagar a faculdade, eu sei que é muito caro, então um dos meus objetivos, logo, colocar os meus pra fazer esporte, pra ver se consegue bolsa, ou também se eu não conseguir, aqui tem uma coisa que o Brasil não tem, não sei se você vai concordar comigo, mas a questão de curso técnico, é bem valorizado. Então se pagar um curso técnico pra eles, sabe, pra fazer... eles tem que ter uma profissão. Aqui toda profissão... eu... pelo menos assim, posso estar enganada, mas o pouco que eu vejo aqui, toda profissão é valorizada, não é só o médico, o advogado, sabe? Igual no Brasil tem essa questão do status, né? Eu sou médico, sou advogado, sou isso, sou aquilo, senão você... Não vale nada, aqui não. As pessoas têm mais... Não que seja 100%, nada é 100%, mas é mais valorizado” (Schianne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

US as “the land of opportunities”

Additionally, Brazilian migrants frequently described the US as a “land of opportunity.” Opportunity was another broad, multi-faceted, and yet deeply loaded word used to compare material conditions in the US and Brazil. When asked to describe what they meant by “more opportunities,” participants frequently went back to matters of employment and work. Edna, for example, described:

“Because I understand that really, this country here, someone comes and if they’re hardworking, they have opportunities, they have a chance, they grow. It’s really the country of opportunities. It doesn’t boycott people, which is what happens in Brazil, right? You see that people who think, who study, who have the conditions to develop, they don’t stay there. It seems like they’re boycotted, expelled from their own country.”⁴⁵ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Kiko, in turn, talked about affordability and job options as “opportunities:”

Clara: And when you say opportunity, what do you mean? Is it making more money, is it growing in your profession?

Kiko: A little of each. Because compared to Brazil, a minimum wage, I see people working themselves to death. People with no education for example, leave in the morning, five in the morning to take a... That in the capital, in capitals. Five in the morning to work all day, to make minimum wage in a month, right. Today rent in Brazil, in a small town, countryside, R\$500. Light bill is absurd, water, internet. Then I imagine, my God, how do people survive? Actually, people survive by mercy, because there’s no... Here, as expensive as things are, as hard as you need to work, we have a little bit of dignity. And in purchasing power, too. Where in Brazil do you go and... ‘Oh, today I’ll buy some clothes, today I’ll go out to a restaurant.’ There’s no way, even for people who earn well. (...) And opportunities of work. Here, for example, I was working in woodwork. Oh, I’ll change jobs. I can go to window [installation], I can go to ceramics, I can look for something else, I can go to window [installation]. Here they’ll always need it. Indeed, before I left wood, I received a proposal to work as a beginner in roofing, which is the thing with roof, granite roofs. So there were opportunities, several

45 “Porque eu entendo que realmente esse país aqui, a pessoa vem e se a pessoa for uma pessoa esforçada, ela tem oportunidade. Ela tem chance. Ela cresce. É o país da oportunidade mesmo. Ela não boicota as pessoas, que é o que acontece no Brasil, né? Você vê que as pessoas que pensam, que estudam, que têm condições de desenvolver, não ficam lá. Parecem que são boicotados, expulsos do próprio país” (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

opportunities, you understand? You don't make much at first, but there are opportunities.⁴⁶
(Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Gustavo, even though he had left Brazil as a young boy, also understood that in the US there are more “opportunities” than in Brazil:

Clara: But to go back [to Brazil] to live, you wouldn't go?

Gustavo: Oh, I don't think so. Because... Like, I think, what would I do in Brazil? I think it wouldn't work well, you know? Here I think I have more opportunities, you know?

Clara: When you say opportunity, what do you mean?

Gustavo: Oh, about this online area, right? Also here I found a job a lot more easily, right, than I would have found in Brazil.

Clara: This one at Chick-Fil-A?

Gustavo: Yes. Like, I started in it when I was still in school. I can apply for any job here. I know it can go wrong, but here there are more opportunities, in my view, right.

Clara: You mean, in relation to jobs.

Gustavo: Yes. And opportunities also of... I think that if I had a future like, if I wanted to be, for example, a musician. I think here I'd have more opportunities than in Brazil. Issues of money, buying equipment, you know?⁴⁷ (Interview 17, 10/30/23, Marietta GA)

Isadora, too, explained what she understands by “opportunities:”

46 Clara: E quando você fala de oportunidade, você quer dizer o quê? É de ganhar mais dinheiro, é de evoluir na profissão?

Kiko: Um pouco de cada. Porque comparando com o Brasil, um salário mínimo, eu vejo as pessoas se matarem. Que não tem formação por exemplo, sai de manhã, cinco da manhã para pegar um... Isso na capital, em capital. Cinco da manhã para trabalhar o dia todo, para ganhar um salário mínimo no mês, certo. Hoje um aluguel no Brasil, em cidade pequena, interior, 500 reais. Vem energia que é absurdo, água, internet. Aí eu fico imaginando, meu Deus, como é que as pessoas sobrevivem? Na verdade, as pessoas sobrevivem, é pela misericórdia, porque não tem... aqui por mais que esteja caro as coisas, por mais que tem que ralar bastante, mas a gente tem um pouco de dignidade. E no poder aquisitivo também. Onde é que você no Brasil vai chegar e... Ah, hoje eu vou comprar uma roupa, hoje eu vou sair para um restaurante. Não tem. Mesmo aquelas pessoas que ganham bem. Porque automaticamente, quando se ganha melhor, quer se viver num padrão melhor. E às vezes o que ganha não é suficiente para o padrão que a gente pensa que tem que... Enfim. E oportunidade... de trabalho. Aqui, por exemplo, eu estava trabalhando na madeira. Ah, vou mudar de trabalho. Posso ir para a janela, posso ir para a cerâmica, posso procurar outra coisa, posso ir para a janela. Aqui sempre vai precisar. Inclusive, antes de sair da madeira, recebi proposta de iniciante para trabalhar com roof, que é questão do... É, do teto. Teto, de... Granito. Então teve oportunidades, várias oportunidades, entendeu? Se ganha pouco no início, mas tem oportunidade” (Entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

47 Clara: Mas voltar pra morar você não voltaria?

Gustavo: Ah, acho que não. Porque... Tipo, eu penso, o que que eu faria no Brasil? E eu acho que não ia rolar muito, sabe? Aqui eu acho que eu tenho mais oportunidade, sabe?

Clara: Quando você fala oportunidade, o que você quer dizer?

Gustavo: Ah, sobre esse... esse... rumo online, né? Também aqui eu achei um trabalho mais fácil, né? Que eu acharia no Brasil.

Clara: Esse do Chick-fil-A?

Gustavo: Uhum. Tipo, eu entrei nele quando eu tava na escola ainda. Eu posso aplicar pra qualquer trabalho aqui. Eu sei que pode dar errado, mas aqui tem mais oportunidade, pela minha visão, né.

Clara: Você diz bem nesse campo de emprego mesmo.

Gustavo: Sim. E oportunidade também de... acho que se eu tivesse um futuro assim, que eu quisesse ser, por exemplo, um músico. Eu acho que aqui teria mais oportunidade do que no Brasil. Questões de dinheiro, comprar equipamentos, sabe? (Entrevista 17, 30/10/23, Marietta GA)

Clara: And when you talk about opportunities, what opportunities do you think you have here, what do you mean by opportunities? What does that mean to you?

Isadora: That here in the United States, you may be an immigrant, but you work. Even... Like, setting aside this struggle there is today with work, like the other time [they were in Marietta], even if it's housecleaning, put you'd but there [in the WhatsApp groups], sometimes in a day three people would come talk to you, but you, 'oh no, today I'm already going with so and so, this other day I don't have work, would that work?' 'Ok, that works.' You were never out of work. And in Brazil, no. In Brazil, you have to have an education, you have to have a degree, you have to have a political sponsorship [*apadrinhamento político*]. There's no, like, even for you to work at a, like, talking about my town which is a small *interior* [see Appendix B: Glossary] town, even for you to work in a supermarket in town, you have to have connections, you have to have someone pull some strings [*um ajeitadinho de alguém*] so you can get in. It's very hard in Brazil. (...) And here there's no such thing. You don't know anybody, you get to know, 'oh, no, today I'll be your *helper*, awesome.' Then you go on making friends, getting to know people and all. But over there it's really hard.⁴⁸ (Interview 18, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Relatedly, Brazilian migrants praised meritocracy as a form of equality, not only in terms of work, but also in other areas of life. Juliana explained her thinking:

"It's that the opportunities [the US] gives you, they don't depend on your status, they don't depend on your color, your religion, independent if you have or not, who you are, you have opportunities. It's something that in our country of origin isn't quite like that. [In Brazil] if you're not someone with something to offer, then they also can't offer you anything. Here, no. Here, regardless, they want you to show results, do the job, independently of what it is, what area, if it's subemployment or not. If you do your role as a citizen, this country takes care of you like a son."⁴⁹ (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

48 c: E quando você fala de oportunidade, que você acha que tem mais oportunidade aqui, o que você quer dizer com oportunidade? O que isso significa para você?

i: Que aqui nos Estados Unidos você pode ser imigrante, mas você trabalha. Mesmo... assim, descartando essa dificuldade que está hoje de trabalho, como da outra vez, mesmo que seja na limpeza de casa, mas você colocava lá, às vezes no dia três pessoas falavam com você, mas você, ah não, hoje eu já vou com fulana, tal dia eu não vou trabalhar, pode ser? Ah, pode ser. Você nunca ficava sem trabalho. E no Brasil não. No Brasil você tem que ter uma formação, você tem que ter uma graduação, você tem que ter um apadrinhamento político. Não tem, assim, até pra você trabalhar num, assim, eu falo por minha cidade, que é uma cidade pequena de interior, até pra você trabalhar num supermercado na cidade, você tem que ter conhecimento, tem que ter um ajeitadinho de alguém pra você entrar. É muito difícil no Brasil. É complicado. Se você não tiver uma formação, uma graduação, um conhecimento, um apadrinhamento político, você não consegue nada. E aqui você não tem isso. Você não conhece ninguém. Você acaba conhecendo... Ah, não, hoje eu vou com você de helper, beleza. Aí você vai fazendo amizade, você vai conhecendo e tal. Mas lá é muito difícil.

49 É que as oportunidades que ele dá não dependem do seu status, não dependem da sua cor, da sua religião, independente se você tem ou não, quem você é, você tem oportunidade. É uma coisa que no nosso país de origem não é bem assim. Se você não é uma pessoa que tem algo para oferecer, então eles também não podem te oferecer nada. Aqui não. Aqui, independente, eles querem que você entregue o resultado, faça o serviço. Independente de qual seja, de qual área, que seja subemprego ou não. Se você cumpre com o seu papel como cidadão, esse país ele te acolhe como se você fosse um filho.

Luciano, in turn, referenced a certain famous Brazilian TV show host who was able to quickly receive a heart transplant which, in his opinion, would have been different in the US:

“Ok, here in the US you pay for healthcare, but in Brazil, people die in line waiting for some things. And people with money don’t wait in line. You have a clear example, which is now Faustão. Just the other day, the guy needed a heart and a heart showed up quick as the wind [ventando]. No, ok, no one deserves to die, ok, fine. But each person has their turn on the transplant line and so on. But you see how it is, a famous person has privileges, right? You see, that really saddens me. Here [the US] is a country that I think is a bit more equalitarian in terms of opportunity, you know? Like, as much as I’m a *helper* here, but I can make money to support myself as well as to be able to go out, buy something.”⁵⁰ (Luciano, interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Religious motivations for migration

Others yet, on top of material motivations for leaving Brazil, mentioned spiritual and religious reasons, namely that Jesus or God had “told” them to move to the US. While most research participants identified as evangélicos, this was more common among Bençãos (and later Espírito Santo) Church congregants. God and/or Jesus are, in some narratives, also responsible for visas being approved, documents being issued, and other migration-related events, including the moment of return to Brazil. Érika, in 2023, described her decision to migrate:

“In the spiritual world, the Lord told me like, you have to go. It’s your time to go, to travel there. You have to go there, with a goal in the spiritual world, you understand? So, this warning that God gave us, was what made us come.” (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Later, she said of getting her document (see Appendix B: Glossary):

50 “Beleza, aqui nos Estados Unidos você paga a saúde, mas no Brasil, pessoas morrem na fila esperando algumas coisas. E quem tem dinheiro não fica em fila. Você tem um exemplo claro, aqui agora é Faustão, agora há pouco, o cara que tá precisando de um coração, o coração apareceu assim, ventando. Não, beleza, ninguém merece morrer, tá, tudo bem. Mas cada um tem sua vez na fila de transplante, coisa e tal. Mas você vê como é que é, uma pessoa famosa tem as regalias, né? Você vê, isso me entristece muito. Aqui é um país que eu acho um pouco mais igualitário em termos de oportunidade, sabe? Tipo assim, por mais que eu sou help aqui, mas aqui eu consigo ganhar dinheiro tanto pra mim me manter, quanto pra mim poder dar um passeio, comprar alguma coisa, tipo assim...” (Luciano, entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

“In the spiritual world, the Lord told me He’ll give it to me. It’s a matter of time, His time. Our time is not His time. He doesn’t have a watch, we do. Man made the watch, not Him. He made day and night. He told me that one day He’ll give me [the document]. So, if He’ll give it to me, I can’t be anxious.” (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

In 2025, I talked to Érika about increased migration surveillance and enforcement, to which she replied that she trusted Jesus and His plan: “He brought us and only He can take us away.” Danilo narrated a similar process:

“So God gave us the answer that we could come here. Obviously, conditions weren’t favorable for us to be able to get the visas, because people always said it was really hard to get a visa. So I, in my heart, I thought, if the answer comes yes, it’s because that’s the will of God. If not, if it comes no, it’s also the will of God and I won’t keep trying. So we got them, we were able in that moment to get a [positive] answer for the visa and that’s when we decided to sell everything we had and come here to try a new life.”⁵¹ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Edna too explained in detail how she understood “the Lord’s will” in relation to her and her family moving to the US. I use a longer quote from Edna to show her thinking in depth:

“I don’t do what I want. I do exactly what the Bible instructs. (...) So we live this kind of relationship with Christ and we understood that God was telling us to leave where we were and come here. It wasn’t an easy thing, it was a very hard thing, right? But then, like I said, we understood that the Lord was doing, [He] was sending us a call. And it was really a thing of God, because my parents, especially my mom, who was very attached to me, the Lord also talked to her, so it wasn’t something just for me. He also talked to my mother-in-law, it wasn’t something just mine. Close friends who were always by my side and who also have the same faith as me also had the same understanding. And we understood that that was confirmation from the Lord. (...) That was very safe for me, maybe that’s why grappling with the issue of this change, of the purchasing power that we had over there and didn’t have here, that difference, it’s understanding that God had a purpose for everything, that really consoled me, you understand? To understand that, to live for that, so that really supported me, I said, the Lord is allowing this because He has a purpose. If He sent us here it’s because He has a purpose. If we’re living this way here, it’s because there is a purpose. (...) I’m here only in obedience to God, I don’t have anything else. I don’t, I don’t have anything else. If the Lord tells me like, leave, I’ll leave. If He tells me like, get everything and go to India, I’d go to India. I always had, Leal and I, we always had a very, a kind of missionary vein, you know? To go and do missions. I remember when the Lord told me like, you’re going, get your things

51 “Então Deus nos deu a resposta para a gente poder vir para cá. Obviamente as condições não eram favoráveis para poder conseguir obter os vistos, porque as pessoas sempre diziam que era muito difícil para conseguir o visto. Então eu, no meu coração, eu pensei, se a resposta de pedir Deus vir sim, é porque é vontade de Deus. Se não, vier não, também porque é a vontade de Deus e eu não vou ficar tentando. Então nós conseguimos, conseguimos naquele momento obter a resposta do visto e foi onde nós decidimos vender tudo que tinha e vir pra cá tentar uma nova vida” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

ready and go to the United States. I told Him, like, but what am I going to do in the United States? What do those people need me for? They don't need me for anything. If the Lord sent me to Serbia, to Ethiopia, I'd understand. But to the United States, it made no sense to me, not even to come here. I didn't want to come. I thought like, of one day being able to go over there to Africa, help people over there in Africa. I thought about that, and [going to] a place that I understood that really needed me, my help, my workforce, I never thought [about the US]. (...) I don't usually talk much about this, because people are like... 'My God, this girl is kind of psychotic, she hallucinates, she hears voices, that's not very normal.' But that's how I live. That's how I've lived since I can remember."⁵² (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Even in their roughest period, when a newborn João was undergoing severe health issues (see life story 17), Edna and Leal refrained from returning to Brazil in "obedience:"

"After João had the tracheostomy taken out, we made plans to go back all the time. We wanted to go back, but the word we had from the Lord was that it wasn't time for us to go back, it wasn't time for us to go back. And we tried to be very obedient in that, you know? And our family also supported us a lot in that way. My mom would say it to me a lot, it's not the time for you to come back."⁵³ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

52 "Eu não faço o que eu quero. Eu faço exatamente o que a Bíblia orienta. (...) Então a gente vive esse tipo de relacionamento com Cristo e a gente entendeu que Deus estava mandando a gente sair de onde a gente estava e vir pra cá. Não foi uma coisa fácil, foi uma coisa muito difícil, né? Só que aí, como eu falei, a gente entendeu que o Senhor estava fazendo, dando um chamado para a gente. E foi uma coisa muito de Deus, porque os meus pais, principalmente a minha mãe, que era muito apegada a mim, o Senhor também falou com ela, então não foi algo só pra mim. Falou também com a minha sogra, não foi algo só meu. Amigos próximos que sempre caminharam comigo e que também tem a mesma fé que eu, também tiveram o mesmo discernimento. E a gente entendeu que isso aí era a confirmação do Senhor. (...) O que pra mim foi muito seguro, talvez seja por isso que enfrentar essa questão dessa mudança, desse poder de conta que a gente tinha lá e não aqui, essa diferença, é entender que Deus tinha um propósito pra tudo, isso me consolava muito, entendeu? Entender isso, viver por isso, então isso me segurava demais, eu falei o Senhor está permitindo isso porque tem algum propósito. Se Ele nos mandou pra cá é porque ele tem algum propósito. Se a gente está vivendo dessa forma aqui, é porque tem algum propósito. (...) Eu estou aqui só em obediência a Deus, eu não tenho outra coisa. Não tenho, eu não tenho outra coisa. Se o Senhor fala pra mim assim, vai embora, eu vou embora. Se Ele fala pra mim assim, pega tudo e vai pra Índia, eu ia pra Índia. Eu sempre tive, eu e Léo, a gente sempre teve muito, uma veia meio missionária, sabe? Sair e fazer missões. Eu lembro quando o senhor falou pra mim assim, você vai, prepara suas coisas e vai para os Estados Unidos. Eu falei pra ele assim, mas o que que eu vou fazer nos Estados Unidos? Aquele povo precisa de mim pra quê? Ele precisa de mim pra nada. Se o senhor me mandasse pra Sérvia, pra Etiópia, eu ia entender. Mas pros Estados Unidos, não fazia sentido pra mim, nem vir pra cá. Eu não queria vir. Eu pensava assim, de um dia eu poder ir lá pra África, ajudar pessoas lá na África. Eu pensava nisso. Era o que eu pensava. E pra um lugar que eu entenda que realmente precisasse de mim, da minha ajuda, da minha mão de obra, nunca pensei aqui. (...) Eu não costumo nem falar muito disso, porque a pessoa fica assim... Meu Deus, essa menina é meio psicótica. Ela tem alucinação, ela ouve vozes. Não é muito normal isso aí não. Mas é assim que eu vivo. Eu vivo assim desde que eu me entendo por gente" (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

53 "Depois que o Josué tira a traqueostomia, era plano para ir embora todo o tempo, a gente querendo voltar, só que a palavra que a gente tinha do Senhor era que não é tempo de você voltar, não é tempo de você voltar. E a gente procurou ser muito obediente nisso, sabe? E a nossa família também nos apoiava muito nesse sentido. Minha mãe falava muito isso pra mim, não é tempo de você voltar" (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA)..

Jurandir, who lived in Marietta between 1998 and 2010 when he returned to Goiânia (see life story 5) while very religious himself, poked fun at those who declared to have been sent to the US by God:

“So the pastor would ask [during service], who arrived this week, then five or six would get up, blah-blah-blah. Then once in a while one would go to the front, ‘oh, I came here because God told me to’ and this and that, ‘because I’m a missionary’ and so on and so forth. So I would look at it like, ‘you’re lying, you’re such a liar, man. You’re a liar, you came here because of money, man.’ And I would think, ‘if it was for... Here they don’t need missionaries, they need missionaries in Africa, why didn’t you go to Africa then? That’s where they need it.’ Oh, they don’t fool me.”⁵⁴ (Jurandir, interview 41, 09/04/24, Goiânia GO)

Meanwhile, Jurandir helped found six churches while in the Marietta area. He explained that God “tricked” him into going to the US for the “green ones,” but that He actually wanted him to found all of these churches in the metropolitan Atlanta area: “I never fooled anyone, I would say, ‘I came here to make money.’ God tricked me, you know, because this thing with founding churches, he talked me into it”⁵⁵ (Jurandir, interview 41, 09/04/24, Goiânia GO).

Marietta as a desirable place to live

Marietta, specifically, was considered by its Brazilian residents as a desirable place to live, given the availability of work and lower living costs. Many moved from or tried out other states and returned to Marietta. The area is also considered more family friendly than other large Brazilian communities in the American South, like Orlando, Florida. Once, at the nail salon in Little Brazil, one nail worker asked me if I preferred Seattle or Atlanta. I

54 “Aí o pastor perguntava, quem chegou essa semana, daí levantava ali, 5, 6, pé-pé-pé. Aí de vez em quando um ia na frente, ah, eu vim pra cá porque Deus mandou e não sei o que, porque eu sou missionário e pá pá pá. Aí eu ficava vendo assim, você mente, você é mentiroso hein cara? Você é mentiroso, você veio pra cá foi por causa de dinheiro, cara. Aí eu pensando, se fosse pra... Aqui não tá precisando de missionário, não. Missionário tá precisando lá na África, por que que você foi pra África então? Lá que tá precisando. Ah, me engana!” (Jurandir, entrevista 41, 04/09/24, Goiânia GO).

55 “E eu nunca enganei, eu falava, eu vim pra cá foi pra ganhar dinheiro. Deus que me enganou, sabe, porque esse negócio de fundar igreja, ele me conversou” (Jurandir, entrevista 41, 04/09/24, Goiânia GO).

obviously said Atlanta, to which she made a face. She herself said she does not like Marietta much and prefers Orlando. Her colleague agreed – they both discussed how Marietta is boring, with everything closing by 9pm. One of them added that she would leave church after 9pm and had nowhere to go out for dinner. Both co-workers agreed that Orlando is a more entertaining city, where places stay open until much later. When I asked for their reasons to live in Marietta, they once again agreed that work in the area is much better, in that you have more jobs available and you earn a lot better.

Living costs in Marietta were compared to Florida, Massachusetts and California.

Leal explained how he felt about Boston:

“I liked it there a lot and still like it today. It has its struggles, the issue of temperature that it’s very cold, which is what you experience over there in Seattle. The living costs there are really high, really, really, really high. (...) And so Massachusetts is very expensive. I think Massachusetts today is only behind California and Florida, around the Miami area, which is also very expensive.”⁵⁶ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Kiko compared living costs to California, where he and Isadora tried it out for a week:

“Yes, another advantage here too, even though living costs here are high and everything, but in comparison with other states that we researched and tried to migrate to... I’ll make a simple comparison. This apartment is a 3-bedroom. This apartment here rents for \$1900. A rent like this in California, it can get to \$8k. Massachusetts too, same baseline. I have a cousin of a cousin who’s in Massachusetts. He pays \$1500 for a bedroom and in this bedroom there are six other people.”⁵⁷ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Even if Massachusetts and California are considered less affordable, Brazilians acknowledge them as states where “it’s ok to be illegal.” Differences in immigration

56 “Eu gostava muito de lá e gosto até hoje de lá. Tem as suas dificuldades, com a questão da temperatura que é muito frio, que é o que você vive lá em Seattle. O custo de vida lá é muito alto, muito, muito mesmo. (...) E aí Massachusetts é muito caro. Acho que hoje Massachusetts só perde pra... pra... Califórnia e Flórida, ali na região de Miami, que tá muito caro também” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

57 “Sim, uma vantagem daqui também, apesar que o custo de vida aqui está alto e tudo, mas em comparação a outros estados que nós pesquisamos e tentamos migrar, vou fazer uma simples comparação. Esse apartamento são 3 quartos. O aluguel desse apartamento aqui é 1.900 dólares. Um aluguel desse aqui na Califórnia, chega a ser 8 mil dólares. Massachusetts, também a mesma base. Eu tenho um primo do meu primo, que está em Massachusetts. Ele paga 1.500 dólares em um quarto e nesse quarto tem mais 6 pessoas” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

enforcement in each state, however, seemed less relevant than work and living costs – at least for those Brazilian migrants who decided to stay in Marietta.

In this section, I described the main motivations that Brazilians narrate, in their own words, to leave Brazil and move to Marietta. In Brazil, they have encountered increasing urban violence, low purchasing power, struggles at finding employment, and costly education for their children. In the United States, in turn, they find – in their own assessment – *segurança*, affordable consumer goods, high-quality public education, and seemingly endless work opportunities. Other Brazilian migrants remark on religious motivations as a strong reason for their move to the US. As I argue in later chapters, this change in living conditions is predicated in precarized labor markets and in prioritizing certain aspects of social reproduction over others.

Additionally, Brazilian migrants' circulation through different Brazilian migrant communities in the US – including those in Florida, Massachusetts, and California – shows how deciding where to live *within* the US is also modulated by labor markets and living costs, even if it comes at the expense of leaving sanctuary states with more favorable conditions for migrants. Furthermore, this circulation is also indicative of expanding Brazilian communities in the US away from traditional migrant cities – such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago – and larger Brazilian migrant communities in Massachusetts and Florida. Indeed, the existence of many other Brazilian communities in states as unexpected as Utah and Tennessee were frequently indicated in my fieldwork in Marietta.

Extensively drawing from interview quotes, I showed the specific ways in which Brazilian migrants in Marietta consider life in the US to be “better” than in Brazil: urban safety, quality of life, better future for the children, and more opportunities. Based on social reproduction scholarship described in the literature review chapter, I conceptualize these

different motivations as pertaining to the sphere of social reproduction, to the practices, ideas, relationships, and material conditions that allow workers to replenish themselves daily and intergenerationally. Even when employment is mentioned, Brazilian migrants do not focus on the job itself but rather on the living conditions it provides. The Brazilian migration process to Marietta is thus partly based on the perceptions described in this section that reiterate the importance of the dynamics of migrant social reproduction in communities of destination as well as of the global regime of labor and social reproduction. The latter concept helps explain why it is possible that Brazilian migrants choose precarized work and migration status over higher-skilled positions and citizenship status in Brazil, as well as the multiple constraints that shape such choices.

The main exception to these logics is Edna, who described living as a *madame* [rich lady] in Brazil but who moved to the US after her husband Leal was unemployed for almost two years (see life story 17). She is the only one to say that, living in the US, she is “definitely giving her sons a better life.” But religious beliefs kept her and Leal in the country, even in times of extreme hardship, and offered them crucial emotional support.

In the next section, I explore the contexts of “expulsion” that emerged in Brazil and that help better understand the motivations described in the present section, as well as the shifts in profile and strategy of Brazilian migrants described in chapter 4.

Brazilian recent history and contexts of emigration

The family histories of Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area reflect key aspects of Brazil’s recent history, including rapid urbanization and the shift from rural to urban living. Many migrants were raised in lower middle-class urban contexts and had access to some

resources prior to migration. Their families often held stable jobs or small businesses, and many migrants are the first in their families to graduate from college. Expanded access to higher education between 2003 and 2014, under Worker's Party administrations, played a key role. This included the creation of new public universities and programs supporting private education through scholarships and loans. This period also saw the emergence of the "new middle class," characterized by increased consumption but distinct from the traditional middle class in terms of race, education, and values. This shift was accompanied by changes in religious affiliation, particularly the rise of neopentecostalism.

Political and economic crises beginning in 2013, including the 2016 impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the rise of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, marked a shift toward political polarization. One outcome of these changes is that the "new middle class" was unable to sustain or advance its position through education alone. While consumption increased, broader conditions for sustained upward mobility were not maintained. Migration to the United States thus emerges as a strategy to achieve or maintain desired "middle-classness." The expansion of consumption standards and access to education both created aspirations and provided the resources necessary for migration. Transnational labor and social reproduction dynamics enable migrants to pursue these goals, with precarized labor in the United States supporting middle-class living standards across borders. In this context, "middle-classness" reflects migrants' own understanding of achievable living conditions, even when this involves sacrificing other traditional markers of status.

I start this section by introducing some of my research participants' family backgrounds in Brazil, analyzed in relation to recent historical contexts in the country. I then focus on sociological discussions on the emergence of the so-called "new middle-class" in Brazil in the 21st century.

Family stories

In this section, I present family stories and backgrounds for a few of my research participants. Not all of my interviews discussed these stories and the ones I discuss in this section are the ones I had the most information on. I spotlight the following aspects, drawing from the life stories in Appendix A: my research participants' age and generation, their parents' occupations and education levels, their own occupations and education levels in Brazil and, when appropriate, how their own children continue their family stories.

Jandira (see life story 2), who migrated to the Marietta area in 1988 and was in her late fifties in 2023, had farmers as grandparents. While I do not know whether these are also grandparents of Jandira's cousins who migrated to Marietta, including Eliana (see life story 1), it speaks of a family of rural origins, underscored by Jandira's remark that part of her family continues to be farmers. Jandira lived in Caldas Novas, which now has a little over 100,000 residents but, in her time, "only had two traffic lights." Her father had a construction company in Caldas Novas, that he "built from the ground up" and, as Jandira mentioned, she "didn't come from a wealthy family." Before migrating, she obtained a trade degree in accounting in Brazil and had a job as a boutique manager.

Jurandir, who was in his sixties in 2024 and migrated to the Marietta area in 1998 with wife Olinda, son Cleiton and daughter Valéria (see life story 5), was born in the *roça* (farm, see Appendix B: Glossary) in the Goiás state countryside and had 14 siblings. Eventually, Jurandir moved to Goiânia, where he owned a furniture factory. Neither Jurandir, Olinda, or Cleiton – who moved with his parents to Georgia immediately after finishing high school – obtained an undergraduate degree. The family has, thus, had a trajectory of rural to urban migration in Brazil followed by intergenerational migration from Brazil to the US. This family background is reflected in the number of children in each generation: Jurandir had 14

siblings, two children and two grandchildren (both from Cleiton and none from Valéria). Fabiana, Cleiton's wife, comes from a similar family background (see life stories 11 and 12 for Fabiana and her sister Débora). Fabiana and Débora's mother, Helena (68 years old in 2024), was also born and raised in the *roça* in the Goiás state countryside with her nine siblings. Helena moved to Goiânia as a young woman and held a government job for most of her life, while her husband, Fabiana and Débora's father, had a garment business in the city. Fabiana and Débora were both born and raised in Goiânia, where their parents and a third sister continue to live. Fabiana went to college in Brazil, but dropped out in her senior year to migrate to the US so she could be with Cleiton and, after living in Marietta from 2004-2011, returned to Goiânia where she is raising the couple's two daughters. Débora continues to live in Georgia, where her two children were born.

Siblings Lúcia, Edilson, and Zé Fernandes (see life story 9), all in their fifties and sixties, also grew up in the *roça* close to the city of Anápolis, in Goiás, in an eight-sibling family. Eventually, they all relocated to Goiânia and, among the eight siblings, four lived in the US but only Lúcia continues to live there. Lúcia does not have a college education and worked a government job in Brazil, but both of her daughters, Alessandra and Marta, obtained bachelor's degrees in the US.

The couple Bruna and Claudinei (45 and 50 in 2023, see life story 22) both grew up in the *roça*, Bruna in Goiás state and Claudinei in the state of Tocantins. They migrated to Marietta together, along with their teenage son Marcelo, in 2022. Claudinei moved to Goiânia to attend college as a young man, but eventually quit his studies; neither he nor Bruna have college degrees. While they still lived in Goiânia, Bruna and Claudinei paid for a private high school for Marcelo, and planned for him to go to college. Upon arriving in the US, however, the couple felt they had "misunderstood" things and, as they explained, realized they would

not be able to afford “the best universities in the world” for their son, setting aside college plans for him.

Lázaro (67 in 2024) is father to Schaianne (44 in 2023), who migrated to the Marietta area in 2022 (see life story 23). Lázaro grew up in rural Goiás with his grandparents and later moved to Goiânia to reunite with his mother. He worked in farmer’s markets for a long time and, later in life, was able to obtain a trade degree in electric and electronics. Schaianne, in turn, was able to graduate from college in Brazil with a degree in interior design.

Among those who are not from the state of Goiás is Linda (see life story 13), who was born and raised in Rio Branco, the capital city of Acre state, and was 70 years old in 2023. She was one of four siblings and both of her parents had government jobs. Her father was also a journalist and Linda was the only one of her siblings who obtained a bachelor’s degree.

Edna also described both hers and her husband’s Leal childhoods as being “very poor” (see life story 17). Both of them grew up in São Gonçalo, in the metropolitan Rio de Janeiro area, and were in their forties in 2023. Leal’s mother Cidinha, who I met in 2023 and 2025 when she was visiting Marietta, was a public school teacher in São Gonçalo (which means she had at least a bachelor’s degree). Leal, in turn, had a bachelor’s and an MBA and was working towards a second Master’s degree in theology (which he did remotely at a Brazilian university). Edna’s father is an Indigenous man born and raised in an *aldeia* [Indigenous community], and neither her father nor her mother had undergraduate degrees. However, both Edna and her sister Érika attended college and, while Edna graduated, Érika quit her studies to move to the US (see life story 19). Their cousin Adriana (41 in 2023) moved to Marietta in 2022 with husband Oliveira (57 in 2023) and son Diogo (20 in 2023, see life story 24 for all of them). Adriana also described her childhood as being “very poor,” while

she obtained bachelor's and graduate degrees in Brazil and worked as an accountant before migrating. Her husband Oliveira (see life story 24) grew up in the small beach town of São Pedro da Aldeia, in Rio de Janeiro state, and his father worked in sugarcane harvesting while his mother washed clothes for wealthier families, while he worked as a housepainter in Brazil as he did in Marietta. Diogo worked with Oliveira as a painter, while also studying accounting in college – which he quit when they moved to Marietta together in 2022. Other Brazilian migrants I interviewed described being “brought up poor,” and Andreia and Talita specifically mentioned working as children. Many of these, however, experienced an upwards social mobility over the course of their lifetimes, and none of their own children experienced the same financial struggles they did.

I would like to emphasize two trends that stand out in these family stories. First is the accelerated urbanization process that underlies these narratives, in which a generation that is now between 60 and 70 migrated from rural to urban areas, some of whom are parents of Brazilian migrants in Marietta (such as Helena and Lázaro) and others who migrated to the US themselves (such as Jurandir and Lúcia). Some who are between 40 and 50 years old also experienced this move from rural to urban, including Bruna, Claudinei, and Creusa (see life story 20).

Another trend is the expansion in access to higher education: most Brazilian migrants in their 30s and 40s obtained education levels greater than their parents had and were in the first generation in their family to achieve undergraduate and graduate degrees. However, once they move to the US, this trend does not necessarily continue. Although many did indeed have children who attended college in the US (such as Lúcia's daughters Alessandra and Marta, Ludmilla and Márcio's daughter Ashlyn – see life story 8), others thought the cost of US higher education to be prohibitive for their children, and talked about not being able to afford

it (such as Schaianne, Bruna, and Claudinei). It is also worth considering that some of the young Brazilian migrants who dismissed the idea of attending college were out of status (such as Marcelo and Gustavo, Vanusa's son – see life story 18), the exceptions being Alessandra and Marta as well as André, Edna and Leal's son, who was admitted into a local state university. In the generation of Brazilian migrants in their 40s and 50s, there are a few cases of couples with contrasting education levels, particularly with higher educated women than men. Adriana, Ludmilla, Maria Fernanda (see life story 30) and Vanusa all have graduate degrees, while their husbands Oliveira, Márcio, Henrique, and Sandro had high school and trade degrees as their highest level of education (and yet the women left high-skilled jobs in Brazil because their husbands were unemployed and/or wanted to work in the US).

This trend in education is double-layered. On the one hand, social programs in Brazil in the 2000s and 2010s expanded access to higher education. On the other hand, lower-income families many times relied on education as the main strategy for upward social mobility in Brazil. Edna refers to her shared memories with Adriana of family telling them to study so they would “be somebody:”

“What about cleaning toilets, cleaning bathrooms? Ah! I start laughing now. I remember, Adriana says that a lot, because my mom would say, ‘do you want to be stupid? Do you want to be stupid? Do you want to be ignorant like me?’ Me, ‘no.’ ‘So go study!’ Because for my mom everything was studying. ‘Go study, go study so you can be somebody in life [*ser alguém na vida*].’ (...) Poor thing, she didn’t even know what you would do after finishing the eighth grade, which was high school. So she asked people to talk to me, ‘guide her, talk to her, give her a plan of what she could do.’ (...) So I remember once I was here, tidying up houses, cleaning clients’ toilets. And I thought, ‘oh man, legend says that when you study a lot, you become somebody in life.’ I remembered her, right? She would say, ‘Do you want to clean other people’s toilets?’ So I went, ‘no!’ ‘So go study!’ I said, legend says, right, that if you study a lot, you don’t clean other people’s toilets and you become somebody in life. But that

never affected me, I never felt bad about it. But I've laughed about it a lot."⁵⁸ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Referring to those same memories Adriana, who was an accountant in Brazil and did housecleaning in Marietta, jokes: "My aunt said, my mom, my grandma, that if I studied, I wouldn't clean toilets [for a living]. So, did they lie? [laughs] Or am I in the wrong place?"⁵⁹ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA) In the next section, I take on Adriana's provocation to think about what happened with this promise of improved living conditions through higher education that many of my research participants felt had never been fulfilled.

Emergence of the "new middle class"

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, previous studies on Brazilian migration to the US have considered, as contexts of emigration, the so-called "last decade." Between 1980 and 1990, Brazil went through a severe economic crisis, characterized by hyperinflation, low GDP increase, economic stagnation, and increased national debt. However, none of my research participants or key informants with whom I discussed motivations for leaving Brazil mentioned these broader economic trends as a reason, especially given that most left the country from 2000 onwards (see Figure 12). Indeed, five of my research participants left Brazil between 1985 and 1994; five research participants and

⁵⁸"E limpar vaso, limpar banheiro? Ah! Eu começo a rir, embora. Eu lembro, a Drica fala muito isso, porque minha mãe falava assim, você quer ficar burra? Você quer ficar burra? Você quer ser ignorante igual eu? Eu, não. Então vai estudar, porque tudo pra minha mãe era estudar. Vai estudar, vai estudar pra você ser alguém na vida, (...) tadinha, ela não sabia nem o que que fazia quando terminava oitava série, que era segundo grau, então ela pedia as pessoas para conversassem comigo, orienta ela, conversa com ela, dá o plano do que ela pode fazer (...) Aí eu lembro de uma vez eu estar aqui, arrumando as casas, limpando os vasos das clientes. Aí eu pensei assim, caraca, reza a lenda que quando você estuda muito, você se torna alguém na vida. Lembrei dela, né? Se tornar alguém... Ela falou assim, você quer limpar o vaso dos outros? Aí eu, não! Então, vai estudar! Falei, reza lenda, né? Se você estudar muito, você não limpa o vaso dos outros e se torna alguém na vida. E eu sou o que agora? [risos] Mas isso nunca me deixou em crise, nunca fiquei mal com isso. Mas já ri por causa disso daí" (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

⁵⁹"Minha tia falou, minha mãe, minha avó, que se eu estudasse, eu não ia limpar vaso. Então, eles mentiram? [risos] Ou será que eu estou no lugar errado?" (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

four key informants left Brazil between 1995 and 1999. It is expected that there is a higher percentage of key informants who are longer-term migrants given they have had time to achieve leadership positions within the Brazilian community in Marietta.

The so-called “last decade” was followed by a consolidation of neoliberalism through reforms in the mid-1990s, a developmental neoliberal regime starting in 2007, and the more recent advent of an authoritarian neoliberalism in 2016 (Saad-Filho and Morais 2018, Saad-Filho 2021). While Workers’ Party president Lula da Silva first took office in 2003, Saad-Filho and Morais (2018) largely consider his first administration (2003-2006) to have been a balancing act between, on the one hand, the demands of a neoliberal system of accumulation consolidated and legitimized since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985 and, on the other, socially distributive policy. It was in Lula’s second administration period (2007-2010), starting in 2007, and the following Workers’ Party Dilma Rousseff’s first administration (2011-2014), that a developmental neoliberal regime was established in Brazil (Saad-Filho and Morais 2018).

Socially distributive policies enacted since Lula’s first administration caused a significant change in Brazilian society, namely the increase in income of millions of Brazilians who were lifted from poverty and achieved unprecedented consumption levels and access to goods and services, including higher education. The term “new middle class” as a description of this phenomenon was popularized through Brazilian economist Marcelo Neri’s book *A nova classe média: o lado brilhante da pirâmide* [The new middle class: the shining side of the pyramid] (2011). This concept has, however, been highly contested. As Costa (2022) explains, the concept of “new middle class” blurs together three different dimensions: income and wealth; use of goods, services, and hierarchical social spaces identified with the middle classes; and embodiment. In terms of income and wealth, Brazilian economists have

developed myriad variations of an income stratification system divided into five classes, named A, B, C, D, and E from highest- to lowest-income. In 2011, according to Neri (2011), “class C” had a monthly family income between R\$4,856 and R\$1,126, “class D” between R\$1,126 and R\$705, and “class E” below R\$705.⁶⁰ With an increased income, many Brazilians had unprecedented access to consumption goods, including cars and motorcycles, air travel, home appliances, industrialized foodstuffs, and others (Bartelt 2013, Costa 2022). However, many continued to be excluded from the consumption of specific goods, services and, in particular, hierarchical social spaces identified with the “traditional middle class” in Brazil. Critiques of the “new middle class” concept argue, among other things, that a monthly family income between R\$1,126 and R\$4,856 could hardly be considered to afford a “middle class” consumption standard (Bartelt 2013). This process also did not consolidate an embodiment of “middle class” identities among the “C class.”

Meanwhile, Workers’ Party presidential administrations also focused on expanding access to higher education, particularly between 2003 and 2014, launching the Programa Universidade para Todos (ProUni, University for All program, see Appendix B: Glossary) in 2005 to finance college degrees at private universities. This complemented the already existing Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil (FIES, Student Financial Aid Fund, see Appendix B: Glossary) program. Additionally, a 2007 presidential decree also launched a program to expand access to public universities by increasing capacity in existing schools and building dozens of new campuses, especially in areas in Brazil without universities. While education level increase remained below projected targets, there was a 25% increase in the number of private universities and a 27% increase in private universities in Brazil between 2003 and 2014 (Santos et al. 2023).

⁶⁰ The average currency exchange rate for 2011 was approximately \$1=R\$1.67. Considering that rate, R\$4,856 equaled \$2,907.78, R\$1,126 equaled \$674.85, and R\$705 equaled \$422.16. In May 2026 values, R\$4,856 is equivalent to \$988.78, R\$1,126 is equivalent to \$229.28, and R\$705 is equivalent to \$143.55.

My research participants' stories reflect the trajectory of the so-called "new middle class" in Brazil (Bartelt 2013): low-income working-class families that had been struck hard by the onset of neoliberalism in Brazil in the 1990s, saw an increase in their access to goods and services – including higher education – during the 2000-2010s, aspired to enter the "traditional" Brazilian middle class. Culturally, the "new middle class" has also been associated with the rise of neopentecostal churches, as well as with a political shift towards the far right (Costa 2022, Paula 2013, Pinheiro Machado and Scalco 2020). However, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the promise of upward social mobility through higher education, including increased consumption standards and quality of life went unfulfilled. I would argue that, while this upward mobility was indeed fulfilled in the first decades of the 21st century, the Brazilian political economy was not able to sustain the necessary conditions to maintain this mobility. On the other hand, it was only through the realization of this upward social mobility that Brazilian migrants raised their consumption standard expectations, having already socially ascended to a certain extent, and acquired the necessary resources to effectuate their migration projects to the United States.

In sum, I understand the contexts of emigration in Brazil to be a result of uneven conditions of social reproduction between the US and Brazil that are achievable to Brazilians of a certain class or income level. For my research participants, education and higher-skilled jobs were not enough to achieve a "traditional middle class" status in Brazil, while others felt they would never be able to improve their living conditions in Brazil. I interpret Brazilian migrants' family and individual life stories through these recent processes in Brazil: accelerated urbanization, expansion of higher education access, and raised consumption standards. Family stories discussed previously demonstrate an intergenerational upwards social mobility while the motivations for migration described in the previous section show

that, while Brazilian migrants were in many instances able to access college, they were not able to achieve the desired living consumptions and consumption standards. The shifts in profile and strategies of Brazilian migrants discussed in chapter 4 also reflect the political economy trends in Brazil presented here: from migrants of rural to of urban origin; from lower-income to higher-income migrants; from a desire for a “better life” in Brazil to a “search for a better life” in the US, given interrupted processes of intergenerational upwards mobility.

RESEARCH 12: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' YEAR OF ARRIVAL IN THE US

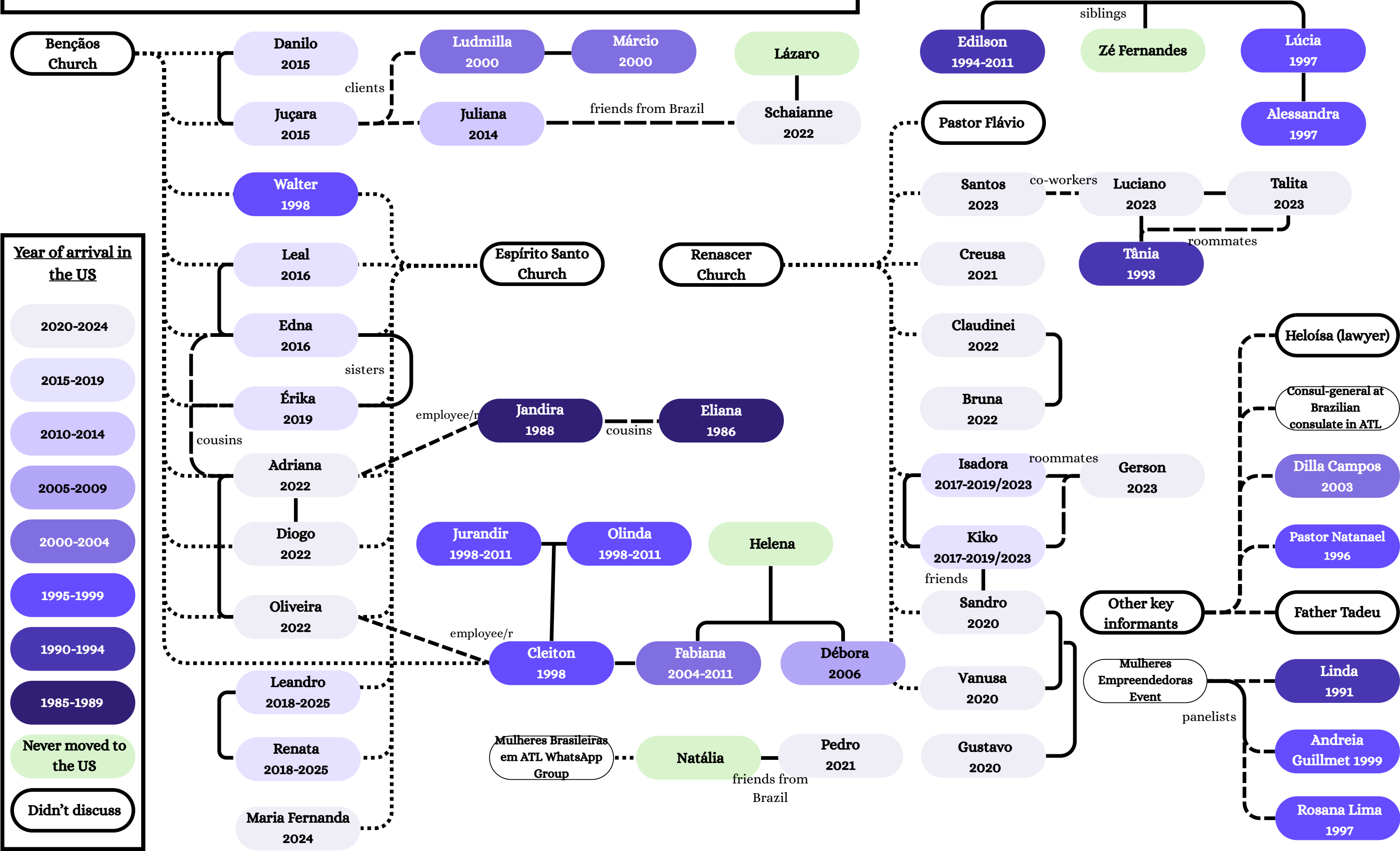
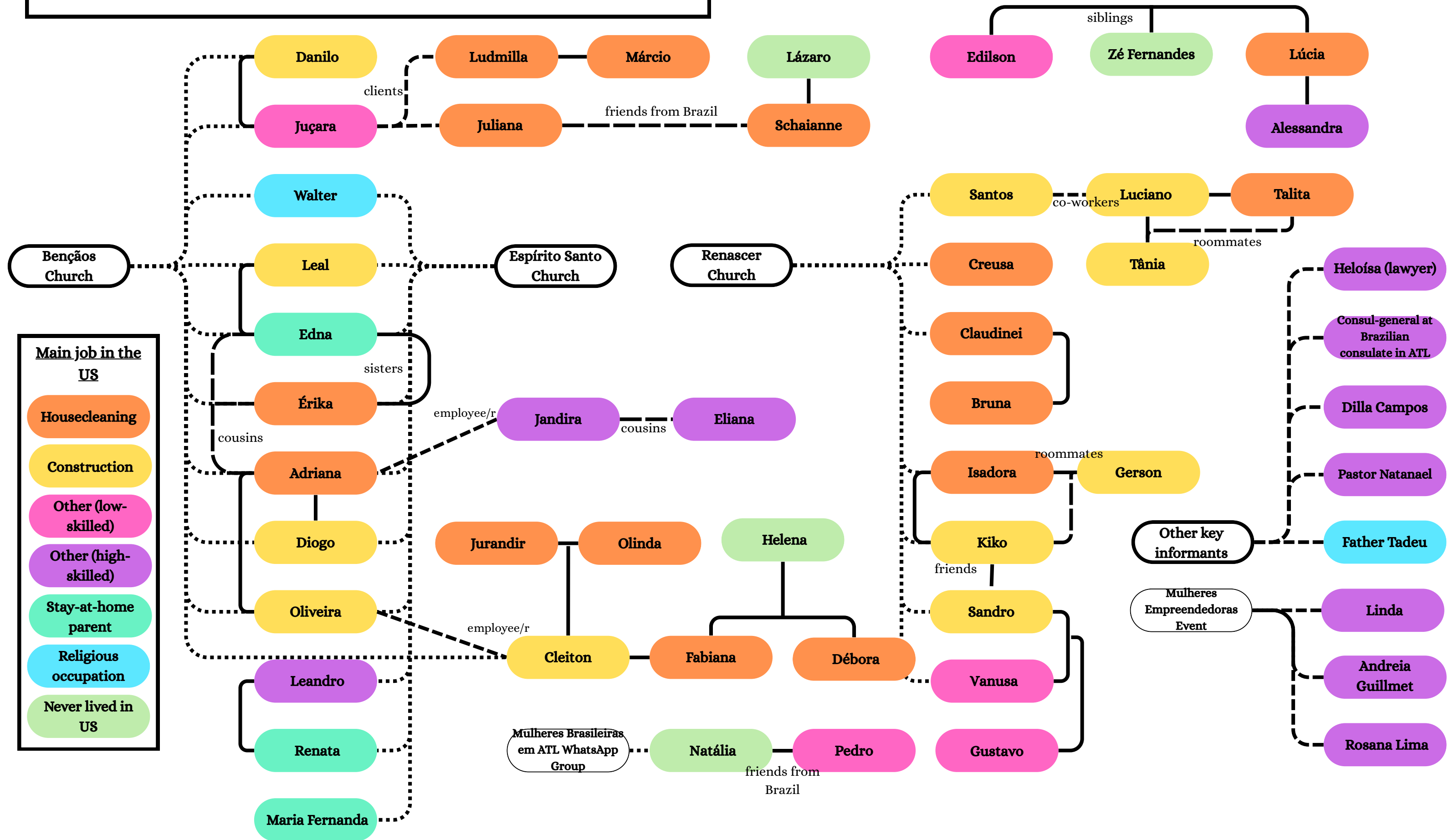


FIGURE 13: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' MAIN JOB IN THE US



CHAPTER 6: WORKING CONDITIONS AND ACCESS TO LABOR MARKETS

In chapters 6 and 7, I discuss the labor markets in which Brazilians most commonly participate in Marietta, housecleaning and construction, as well as other low-skilled occupations among research participants (including as manicurists and home-made food businesses). As discussed in the introduction, I do not discuss Brazilian migrants in the metropolitan Atlanta area that are engaged in highly-skilled occupations, except for those who are directly connected with the Marietta-based community and appear in this dissertation as key informants.

Housecleaning and construction can both be considered precarized labor markets characterized by physically demanding, risky, and unhealthy working conditions. Employment is often insecure and inconsistent, with no benefits such as sick leave, paid vacation, or health insurance. Construction and housecleaning work involve significant physical strain, leading to accidents, illness, and chronic pain. Wages are also unstable, often dependent on long hours or the exploitation of other workers' labor. Despite these conditions, Brazilian migrants frequently describe these jobs as "worth it." Such conditions have not deterred migration; rather, they have remained relatively constant, with fluctuations in job availability tied to economic cycles and migration flows. Brazilian migrants' participation in these labor markets can be understood through transnational dynamics between *here and there*. They experience global regimes of labor and social reproduction as part of a global working class (Ferguson and McNally 2015). It is in this context that Brazilians assess life in Brazil and in the US and that perceived differences between both countries, rooted in global inequalities between the Global North and Global South, make precarized work in the United States worthwhile.

Labor scholars have long addressed how workers find jobs and how employers recruit workers and, in particular, the role of social networks in facilitating or hindering access to specific labor markets. Granovetter (1983) spotlights the strong role of weak ties – acquaintances rather than close friends – in labor markets and employment strategies. England (1995) also emphasizes the role of informal networks and “word-of-mouth” referrals in both job-seeking and recruitment practices, in particular for lower-skilled jobs. Moreover, network-based recruitment and job-seeking strategies help create employment niches for certain groups of people: England (1995) shows how recruitment practices reinforce clerical work as a gendered labor market for women. Geographers have also foregrounded the particular role of spatial dynamics in migrant access to labor markets in the US. Ellis et al. (2007) argue that home-work spatial relations influence migrant employment in specific labor niches and, in particular, that the location of migrant neighborhoods shape the migrant workers’ spatial accessibility to jobs. Furthermore, employer recruitment among “ethnic” networks can offer built-in mechanisms of labor discipline, including “bounded solidarity,” “enforceable trust,” and desired worker qualities such as hard-work, dedication, and reliability (Ellis et al. 2007). Joassart-Marcelli (2014) further underscores the complexity and heterogeneity of migrant networks. In that sense, uneven urban labor markets that migrant workers participate in can be constituted through spatialized gendered networks that connect workers differently to homes, workplaces, and communities (Joassart-Marcelli 2014).

In the present chapter, I draw from Brazilian migrants’ experiences in construction labor markets and in other low-skilled occupations, supported by interview quotes and field notes, to elaborate on how Brazilians access employment in the US and under what conditions. In particular, I spotlight how precarity and insecurity are construed within labor markets and employment relationships. I start by discussing the Brazilian construction labor

market in terms of chain outsourcing, finding jobs, typical working days, wages, and benefits. Housecleaning labor markets and working conditions will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. For information on research participants' main jobs in the US, meaning their primary occupation or the one they had the longest, see Figure 13.

Labor markets and working conditions in construction

The labor markets that many Brazilian men participate in once they arrive in Marietta are generally referred to as the construction sector, but it is clustered in some specific, specialized areas: cabinets, flooring, door installation, window installation, granite, woodwork, ceramics, tiling, electric maintenance, home renovations, HVAC and, eventually, moving services. While some of these areas overlap in specific jobs – for example, woodwork and ceramics include flooring projects – these are the terms Brazilians use when referring to their jobs in construction. Labor market-specific WhatsApp groups also use this lexicon to define the particular jobs that are supposed to be offered and sought after in their messages (see Table 2). As a result, Brazilian construction workers tend to be highly specialized in one or another of the areas listed above. When talking about “work in construction” in the context of this dissertation, I mean these specific jobs that Brazilians more commonly work in. As a result, working conditions and labor market dynamics are widely varied across different specialized areas. In what follows, I will address common characteristics across sectors, as well as particularly dynamics, when appropriate.

One aspect that frequently varies across different jobs is the type of construction that Brazilians work in: residential, commercial, renovations, new buildings. Some jobs tend more towards one or another; cabinetry, for example, tends to be more residential than commercial

but varies in terms of renovations or new buildings; painting and renovations, on the other hand, are done in already-built residential or commercial buildings. Across these different types of construction, services may be commissioned by private clients or companies.

Construction workers rarely work alone, although at times they can be by themselves at the work site while executing some lighter tasks. Additionally, while some men do “women’s work” in housecleaning, I only ever heard of one woman working in construction, Tânia, who started in construction while living in New Jersey because of a man she met while bartending who decided to mentor and employ her.

In this section, based on Brazilian migrants’ description of their work in construction, I describe the practices of chain outsourcing of construction jobs (“selling jobs”), strategies Brazilians use to access construction jobs in Marietta as *helpers* and contractors. I then examine working conditions by discussing workers’ wages, typical working days, tensions between Brazilian employers and *helpers* in construction labor markets, the lack of benefits and on-the-job health risks.

Chain outsourcing, contractors, and workers

In construction, the practice of “selling jobs” takes the form of chain outsourcing. A client hires a service provider, which can be a company or a private contractor. The company has its own service providers who will execute the job who, in turn, might hire a subcontractor to do all or part of the job for them. A private contractor might execute the job themselves or, like the company, have a subcontractor do some or all of the job. Subcontractors might outsource some or all of the work to yet another worker, and whoever actually performs the job might employ one or more *helpers* to work alongside him. Here is how Danilo explains chain outsourcing in construction:

“For example, the company that’s subcontracted, it’s [subcontracted] by a... we call it a general contractor. This general contractor is the one who hires all other companies to execute a given construction project. So this guy, he has the companies that he knows in plumbing, in drywall, in painting, that are subcontracted. So does this electrical company do? They’ll take all electrical workers, [have them] register with the company, fill a registration form. They demand a certain amount of tools, like I told you, right? And a bank account so you can be paid through a bank transfer. And they’ll call you and say, ‘hey, I need an electrician or a *helper*’ or ‘I need five electricians at this place, do you want to go and join that team?’ Then later you become known by them, you understand? So sometimes you go build a school, sometimes you go build a warehouse, sometimes in the state [of Georgia], sometimes outside of the state.”⁶¹ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

In Danilo’s summary of the outsourcing chain he usually participates in, it goes (1) the client; (2) the general contractor; (3) the subcontracted electrical company; (4) the electrical company’s service provider – Danilo himself, in this case – and, possibly, (5) his *helpers*, that is, the other Brazilian migrants he employs.

As my participants’ experiences described below demonstrate, endless variations of this chain are possible and a given job can change hands several times before it gets to the person who actually executes the job, but each hand will keep a fraction of what the client pays to the general contractor – the more hands, the more is discounted from the service provider’s wages. Recently arrived Brazilians usually work as *helpers* for other Brazilians who are already better established as service providers in the local job market. While all Brazilian construction subcontractors I talked to did execute their own jobs, instead of just passing it along on commission, some were directly hired by private clients and distributed parts of the job to others, acting as a general or subcontractor and service provider at the same time. It is also worth noting that not all the people in the outsourcing chain that stand between

61 “Tem sim, por exemplo, a empresa que é subcontratada, ela é por um, a gente chama de general contract. Esse general contract é o que contrata todas as companhias para poder executar aquela determinada obra. Então esse camarada, ele tem as companhias que ele conhece na área de plumbing, na área de drywall, na área de pintura, que são subcontratado. Então o que que essa empresa elétrica faz? Ele pega todos os trabalhadores de elétrica, se cadastra na empresa dele, faz um cadastro. Eles exigem aquela quantidade de ferramenta, como eu te disse, né? E conta bancária para poder receber, através de envio bancário. E eles ligam para você, olha, estou precisando de um eletricista ou um ajudante, ou estou precisando de cinco eletricistas em tal lugar, você quer ir lá fazer parte dessa equipe? Aí depois você se torna conhecido por eles, entendeu? Aí às vezes você vai construir um colégio, vai construir um galpão. Às vezes dentro do estado, às vezes fora do estado” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

the client and the actual executor of the job are Brazilian. Once the job changes from American to Brazilian hands, however, it tends to remain among co-nationals, either as subcontractors or as *helpers*.

The more established and contentious relationship in the Brazilian construction labor market is that between *helpers* and their employers, regardless of whether they are the first, second, or third person to lay hands on that job. Following Danilo and other construction workers, I use the terms contractor and subcontractor to define those who hire and those who are hired in the labor market. In the context of this dissertation, I use both terms as relative rather than fixed labels, relating more to a specific job or position in a particular outsourcing chain than to job titles.

Chain outsourcing of construction jobs varies in several ways. Érika described how her husband, Elimar, finds work as a self-employed house painter:

“The owners that bring, right, that hire people, they get in touch with painting companies, in the case of Elimar, and outsource that job to you, who’ll paint. I’m in contact with the company, the company has work, I get in touch with [the company], it has a job, I pass this job to you, if you want you do the job, if you don’t you pass it to someone else. Then you get a commission from that person, I get a commission from you and I pay the company’s commission. Elimar was working with a group, he was the fourth: the company, one person, another person, and him, fourth party service, like that.”⁶² (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Creusa also talked about how outsourcing works for her partner, who was traveling large distances to strip down vacated 7-11 store locations: “This company, it’s three, there’s one person that passes [the job] to another, who passes to another, who brings my boyfriend

62 “Os donos que levam, né, que contratam as pessoas, eles entram em contato com empresas de pintura, no caso do Elimar, e terceirizam esse trabalho pra você, que vai pintar. Eu tenho contato com a empresa, a empresa tem trabalho, eu entro em contato com ela, ela tem um trabalho, eu passo pra você, você faz o trabalho, se você não quiser fazer, você passa pra outra pessoa. Aí você pega a comissão dessa pessoa, eu pego a sua comissão e pago a comissão da empresa. Elimar estava trabalhando com um grupo, que ele era o quarto. A empresa, uma pessoa, outra pessoa, outra pessoa e ele. Quarterizado. Desse jeito” (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

[as a *helper*], they're the third person to get the job."⁶³ (Creusa, interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA).

Others deal with shorter outsourcing chains. Leal, in cabinetry, has a business partner with whom he has worked as a service provider for different cabinet companies. Oliveira explained how it works when a contractor – like his boss Cleiton – gets a larger job and outsources parts of it. Oliveira worked as a fixed *helper* in painting and renovations for Cleiton. Cleiton mostly worked the job with him, and sometimes they divide themselves between two separate jobs. Sometimes Cleiton gets another *helper* for something specific, if there is too much work to be done. Oliveira talks a bit about the outsourcing that happens in renovations:

Oliveira: So we went there already, took our materials, [Cleiton] outsourced the framing job, because there was a lot of wood to do, there's no way we could do it all. We outsourced, not outsources, we called Ariel (...) He works really fast and really professionally. Then he does the wood part, and after that we come in with the drywall, then comes electric that [Cleiton] calls, he has an electrician that also works for him, air-conditioning, that sort of stuff. Outsourcing some stuff, because we wouldn't be able to do it all, it would be impossible, even if we knew [how to do everything].

Clara: You mean, [Cleiton] gets a large jobs and then distributes it.

Oliveira: Yes, distributes it.⁶⁴ (Interview 28, 10/23/23, Marietta GA)

Any given worker might hold different positions at the same time. As Érika described, Elimar could work the job and hire *helpers* if needed, or he might outsource that job to a fifth party, with the actual painter's wage dropping each time the job changes hands. They might work as a *helper* a few days a week and have some private clients; they may even

63 “Essa empresa, ela, são três, tem uma pessoa que passa pra outra, a outra que passa pra outra, que leva o meu namorado. [Quem leva o namorado dela] São a terceira pessoa que pega o serviço” (Creusa, entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA).

64 Oliveira: Aí a gente já teve lá, levou nossos materiais, ele terceirizou o serviço de framing, que é muita madeira que tinha pra fazer, não tem como a gente fazer tudo. A gente terceirizou, terceirizou não, a gente chamou um André, que é um rapaz que já mora aqui nos Estados Unidos há muito tempo, mas ele tem o nome de André, mas não é brasileiro, ele é [incompreensível]. E ele trabalha muito rápido e muito profissional. Aí o cara faz essa parte de madeira, depois a gente entra com dry wall, aí vem a elétrica, que ele chama, tem uma eletricista já também que faz pra ele, ar-condicionado, essas coisas assim. Dá uma terceirizada em algumas coisas, porque a gente não conseguiria fazer tudo. Seria impossível, mesmo que soubesse.

Clara: Quer dizer, ele pega um serviço grande e aí vai distribuindo.

Oliveira: Uhum, vai distribuindo. (Entrevista 28, 23/10/23, Marietta GA)

get these jobs and outsource them to someone else. At the time of our interview in 2023, Oliveira was about to complete his first year in the US. He had already started to be recommended by clients to others. He did not intend, at the time, to put his own team together or to work by himself, so he passed these jobs to others, keeping a commission:

Oliveira: I even have a few clients even without having a team. So I pass the job to other people, you understand? Who need it more than this guy I'm working for [Cleiton]. I don't pass them to him because I know he already has too much work, I give it to someone [else]. The guy who recommended me, for example [his friend who recommended him as *helper* to Cleiton in the first place]. He does some jobs and sometimes I'll go on the weekend and work like a Saturday or ask for a day off on Friday so I'll work Friday and Saturday in the job I took, but at first I'd need to be a bit more structured.

Clara: Oh, you're already taking on your own jobs?

Oliveira: I'm avoiding it, actually, I don't even want to, I'm not even looking for it. Because it shows up a lot, but I can't take them because I'm already committed to [Cleiton], right. So I tell people that I'll take the job on the condition that my friend can be with me. Because he's free, self-employed, he can go, be there all day, all week, then I just go for some help, you understand? Which is good for me, right? It raises my income when I do that.

Clara: Then it's like a job on commission, like?

Oliveira: We take the job for a price, right? Then [his friend] gets a daily rate higher than mine, we settle on an amount, a slightly higher daily fee, more so because I'm the job owner, right, although I'm not working it, then we get a good amount for me, that isn't bad for him who's working the job, we value his daily fee, nicely, and we negotiate it like that. We're about to start a job like that.⁶⁵ (Interview 28, 10/23/23, Marietta GA)

It is worth mentioning that Oliveira's case is exceptional, to be able to have his own jobs so soon after arriving. It is probably a combination of expertise, well-connected and supportive relationships in Marietta, and luck. Oliveira was a painter in Brazil already and

65 Oliveira: Eu já tenho até alguns clientes mesmo sem ter uma equipe. Aí eu passo serviço pra outras pessoas, entendeu? Que precisa mais do que esse rapaz que eu estou trabalhando. Não passo pra ele porque eu sei que ele já tá com trabalho demais, dou pra alguém. O cara que me indicou, por exemplo. Ele faz alguns serviços e às vezes eu vou no final de semana e trabalho tipo um sábado, ou peço uma liberação dele numa sexta, eu trabalho sexta e sábado no trabalho que eu peguei, mas a princípio eu precisaria me estruturar um pouco mais.

Clara: Ah, você já está pegando trabalho por conta?

Oliveira: Estou evitando, na verdade, não estou nem querendo, nem estou procurando. Porque aparece bastante, mas eu não posso pegar por causa do compromisso que eu tenho com ele, né. Então, eu falo pras pessoas, eu posso pegar condicionado a meu amigo estar comigo. Como ele é livre, trabalha por conta própria, ele pode ir, ficar lá o dia todo, a semana toda, aí eu vou só dar um socorro, entendeu? Que é bom pra mim, né? Aumenta a minha renda quando eu faço isso.

Clara: Que aí fica tipo um trabalho a comissão, assim?

Oliveira: A gente pega por um valor, né? Aí ele bota uma diária maior do que eu ganho, a gente combina o valor, uma diária maior um pouco, até porque eu sou o dono do trabalho, apesar de não estar trabalhando, aí a gente tira um valor legal pra mim, que é fica bom pra mim, que não fica ruim pra ele que tá trabalhando direto, a gente valoriza a diária dele, legal, e a gente combina assim. A gente tá pra começar um assim. (Entrevista 28, 23/10/23, Marietta GA)

needed no time to learn the job; he is very close to his wife's family living in Marietta, who helped him in finding work; and he was lucky to be paired with Cleiton from the get-go. As a result, it is even harder to place someone in overall labor market hierarchies in construction than it is in housecleaning. There is a long list of companies and employers who benefit from the same labor, comprising a very long distance between the worker and the final consumer. Additionally, it all varies according to area of specialization and type of service.

In this first part, I introduced the Brazilian construction labor markets by way of the chain outsourcing practices that are employed in that context. This allows me to contextualize labor market hierarchies between Brazilian migrants, from *helpers* to subcontractors to contractors to clients (usually not Brazilian). One implication of chain outsourcing is that jobs that reach the Brazilian community typically stay in it, gatekeeping non-Brazilian workers out of certain industries. In turn, outsourcing chains reduce the amount of money made by the subcontractor who indeed performs the job. In that way, the intermediaries in the outsourcing chain extract a specific form of *rent* from the labor performed by Brazilian construction workers, including *helpers* and subcontractors who work the job. In the next section, I examine how recently arrived Brazilian migrants get started in construction jobs and what is required for them to move up the ladder.

Getting started, learning the job, and moving up the ladder

An incoming Brazilian migrant, recently arrived in the Marietta area, will typically start working as a *helper* for Brazilian subcontractors, usually migrants who have been in the US for a longer time. Construction employers might be looking for a *helper* for a specific job for which they need more hands or for a fixed *helper*, that is, someone hired on a more permanent basis who will continue to work with the same employer job after job. These

contracts are always informal, oral agreements, which can easily be broken on each side. Without a fixed position, many Brazilian migrants will piece together short-duration jobs from different employers, sometimes going without work for several days, which also puts them in the position of being constantly looking for a job.

Starting on construction as a *helper*, one needs to learn the job. Sometimes, a worker will go as an eventual *helper* with different employers in a variety of areas of specialization. Becoming experienced in a given construction area, a requirement for higher daily rates as well as for the possibility of becoming an employer, has to do with personal aptitude and preference as much as it does with luck and timing in finding an employer willing to train and mentor an incoming *helper*, in an area with enough work available to allow one to become an employer.

Once an incoming Brazilian migrant arrives in Marietta, a close contact may give an incoming migrant a start but not be able to keep them on. Diogo, for example, started as a *helper* in cabinet installation because of his family connection with Leal (Diogo's mother and Leal's wife are cousins), but eventually had to find other employers – indeed, I saw him more than once post on WhatsApp groups looking for work. In 2025, however, he was back to working with Leal, this time as a fixed *helper*. Luciano got started in flooring work when he first arrived in Marietta, despite his training and experience as an electrician in Brazil. He started with the lowest-skilled tasks:

“So I started working, at first I started working like this, taking out construction trash, rubble, those things, pulling out nails from the floor. So I started and [the employer] saw I was dedicated, I started learning things, he already put me to do something more, like starting to assemble the wood things on the floor, the wood planks, so he would just come nailing it down, I already started doing that. Then a week passes, and the next week I was nailing, glueing too, that was my first job.”⁶⁶ (Luciano, interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA).

66 “Aí eu comecei a trabalhar, primeiro eu comecei a trabalhar assim, tirando o lixo da construção, os entulho, aquelas coisa, e tirando os pregos do chão. Aí comecei, aí ele viu que eu era empenhado, comecei a aprender as coisas, ele já me botou pra mim fazer uma coisa a mais, tipo já ir montando os negócios de madeira no piso, as madeiras já... só pra ele vir pregando, já comecei a fazer isso. Aí passa uma semana, e na outra semana já tava pregando, colando, também, esse foi o meu primeiro emprego” (Luciano, entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta

After that, Luciano found work in HVAC installation and maintenance. He was hoping to resume work as an electrician, but had yet to find an employer who could start taking him as a fixed *helper*. During the time of our interview, he had been offered a job in electrics but needed a car, which he did not have yet. When I returned to interview his wife, he already had a car and was able to drive himself to work.

Asking Kiko if WhatsApp groups indeed help in finding work, he says they do, but they come with a risk:

“[The WhatsApp groups] work, they work. There were two weeks that I got work through the groups. So I went with two different people and it was through the group, through these groups. But they work. Also, I believe... I also am reticent of the groups, right? Because unfortunately there are a lot of people who hustle you here. They take you to work, you spend all day, they [work you to death] and then disappear, don’t pay you, say they weren’t paid. So like, the group sometimes loses credibility over these things, but it works.”⁶⁷ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Before WhatsApp groups had taken over, word-of-mouth through friends and church networks was even more important for out-of-work *helpers*, as well as tear-off advertisements placed on Brazilian businesses by both workers and employers. However, networks and recommendations remain important for both *helpers* and subcontractors looking to find employers or clients. During our interview, Santos received a phone call from someone who needed a *helper*, but Santos was already working so he recommended a friend, while also trying to secure extra work for himself. After hanging up the call, Santos proceeded to text the friend’s contact and call said friend, telling him to call this potential employer.

“[on the phone] So, now there’s a friend of mine who’ll be available, he’s even from my church, the man is hard-working. If you want I’ll give you his contact. (...) I think I’ll be free on Saturday, I don’t know if you’re working Saturdays. (...) Ok, I’ll send you my friend’s

GA).

67 “Funciona, funciona. Teve duas semanas que eu consegui serviço pelos grupos. Então eu fui com duas pessoas diferentes e foi através do grupo, desses grupos. Mas funciona. Também, eu acredito... que eu tenho receio também em grupo, né? Porque infelizmente tem muita gente que dá calote aqui. Leva você pra trabalhar, passa o dia todo, te mata e depois some, não paga, diz que não recebeu. Então assim, o grupo fica, às vezes, perde a credibilidade por conta disso, mas funciona” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

contact, then you talk to him, he's from church and he's hard-working. The boy is... ok? You can trust him."⁶⁸ (Santos, interview 32, 09/21/23, Marietta GA)

Other Brazilian migrants may also prefer word-of-mouth recommendations because they mistrust WhatsApp groups. According to Leal, people who are constantly in WhatsApp groups are bad employers and bad employees:

Leal: You see people looking, 'I need a *helper*, I need a *helper*, I need a *helper*.' And same with women, you talk to Edna, to all the women who clean houses, they already know, they already say, 'look, don't go with that one,' there are women in there who are famous for being terrible schedule owners [see Appendix B: Glossary], women who treat *helpers* badly. So when you see a woman every day, 'I need a *helper* for tomorrow,' it's a sign she's awful to work [for], awful. And when you see a *helper* who's a *helper* six months, a year, that's a *helper*, I mean like, a *helper* that's not fixed, a floating *helper*, you know?

Clara: A year in the [WhatsApp groups] saying, 'I'm available.'

Leal: Yes, yes, yes. One thing is being a *helper* for the same person for two years, that's ok, you're there for a year, six months, you're with only one person. Another is you're in the group every day, available, looking for work, available. (...) [to Edna] Tell her, honey, women who post in the groups every day, like...

Edna: Hmmm, trouble, trouble.⁶⁹ (Interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Meanwhile, Brazilian construction employers also look for specific traits besides technical knowledge, given the unstable character of their labor markets. Both Leal and Cleiton used Oliveira as an example of someone who will never be out of work, because he is hard-working, responsible, and ethical. Oliveira, on the other hand, talked about many extra things he would do at a client's house, like cleaning up dusty shelves, or even just being very strict about finishing and details. According to Cleiton, he usually has to balance a team with

68 "Fala meu amigo, como o senhor está? Tudo bem, graças a Deus. Então tem, agora tem um colega meu que vai estar disponível, ele é até da minha igreja, o cabra é trabalhador. Se tu quiser eu te passo o contato dele. (...) eu acho que eu vou estar livre no sábado. Não sei se tu estás trabalhando dia de sábado. (...) Pois, tá, eu vou te passar o contato desse meu amigo aí tu fala com ele, ele é da igreja e ele é trabalhador. O menino é... Viu? Pode confiar" (Santos, entrevista 32, 21/09/23, Marietta GA).

69 Leal: Você vê gente todo dia procurando preciso de helper, preciso de helper, preciso de helper. E como nas mulheres, você conversa com a Edna e com as mulheradas que limpam casa, elas já sabem, já fala assim ó, não vai com fulana não, tem mulher ali que já é famosa já por ser péssima dona de schedule. Mulher que trata mal a mulherada, as helpers, então quando você vê uma mulher todo dia, preciso de uma helper pra amanhã, é sinal que ela é péssima de se trabalhar com ela, péssima. E quando você vê uma helper, que é helper seis meses, um ano, que é helper, assim que eu digo, não... helper sem estar fixo, helper flutuante, sabe?

Clara: Um ano no grupo falando, tô disponível.

Leal: Isso, isso, isso. Uma coisa é você ser helper de uma mesma pessoa dois anos, beleza, tá ali um ano, seis, meses, você está com uma pessoa só. Outra coisa é você estar no grupo todo dia disponível, procurando trabalho, disponível. (...) [para Edna] Fala, meu amor, mulher que bota todo dia assim no grupo de...

Edna: Iiiih, furada, furada. (Entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA)

people who drive, who speak English, and who are technically skilled – one who excels at all three is usually already employed or works for himself. In this perspective, good employees – responsible, hard-working and technically skilled – quickly become fixed *helpers* or subcontractors.

However, moving from *helper* to subcontractor has many requirements. One of them is having enough experience in a particular area of specialization, including any laws and regulations that need to be complied with. Another is the many pieces of equipment needed to execute construction jobs, in addition to a vehicle – such as a van or a pickup truck – to transport them in, alongside production materials. This complicates matters for out-of-status workers who are unable to get a driver's license in Georgia and cannot register cars under their own name. If out-of-status workers open a company, however, they can have a bank account in their company's name. Yet another important requirement is to find one or more contractors, companies and/or private clients who will hire the subcontractor as a service provider. Leal explained how this transition went for him:

“When I started working for myself, I went kind of on a wing and a prayer, I didn't have enough experience for that, you understand? I had, like, some experience, because I installed some cabinets back in Massachusetts when I was there. When I started working in general construction, a colleague there actually taught me a lot; he kickstarted me. Like, to learn a lot. So then when I got here [in Marietta], and I saw it was a heated market, a lot of Brazilians working on [cabinets]. (...) so I had some experience and then I decided to go in on a wing and a prayer. I said like, no, I'll have to go there, because I can't take this kind of relationship [*helper*-employer] with these people, like, I can't. (...) The first two months, I was still part-time, you know? I was working with [his current employer] and doing some other, some other jobs. And he asked me, ‘man, I need more time from you,’ I was with him only, like, two, three days [a week]. So I said like ‘and I need you to guarantee you'll have work for me.’ So he said like, ‘no, you can work with me that I'll keep you busy.’ When an American tells you he'll keep you busy it's keeping you fully at work Monday to Friday, you understand? And so thank God there has been work and we're well esteemed with him, thank God. Anyway, but the

transition was hard, but I saw it was essential, otherwise I'd go crazy [working as a helper]."⁷⁰ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

In order to find clients, Brazilian subcontractors rely on word-of-mouth and other strategies. Danilo had, at the time of our interview in 2023, a network of contractors who would hire him as an electrician and/or plumber to execute those specific services in larger construction projects. He also mentioned American websites in which one can register for a fee and be called for estimates directly by clients – however, doing an estimate does not guarantee getting the job and may incur in unpaid labor, if counting the hours invested in producing the estimate. In 2025, Érika was complaining of her husband Elimar being in that very situation – being called for many estimates but rarely getting actually hired, even though he is “not expensive.”

Danilo mentioned yet a third option for getting clients: being registered at large stores, like Walmart and Home Depot, who offer clients installation services. According to him, that was the best case scenario and the most profitable option, but was limited entirely to workers with a work permit:

“A friend of mine today, we were talking, he said like, ‘man, the labor market is really down,’ but Home Depot... Because he has the requirements, he has the requirements because he has a [work] permit, right, he has the requirements to apply at Home Depot and Home Depot gives him projects related to his area. It’s kinda like that, it’s a whole other thing for people who are legal. I mean, it’s a whole other thing if the guy is efficient, if he’s not efficient, it’s also not enough. We know a lot of people who can speak English fluently, who know how to do many

70 “E aí, eu... quando eu comecei a trabalhar sozinho, foi meio com a cara e a coragem, eu não tinha experiência suficiente para isso, entendeu? Eu tinha, assim, alguma experiência, porque eu montei alguns gabinetes lá em Massachusetts, quando eu estava lá, quando eu passei a trabalhar na construção geral, um camarada lá até que me ensinou bastante coisa, me deu um pontapé assim para aprender bastante coisa. E aí quando eu cheguei aqui, que eu vi que isso era aquecido, muito brasileiro que trabalha com isso. (...) então eu tinha uma experiência e aí eu decidi ir com a cara e a coragem, eu falei assim, não, eu vou ter que ir pra esse lugar, porque eu não to aguentando mais esse tipo de relacionamento com essas pessoas, assim, não dá. (...) Nos dois primeiros meses, eu estava ainda parcial, sabe? Eu estava trabalhando com ele e fazendo uns outros, outras coisas por fora. E ele perguntou para mim, cara, eu preciso de mais tempo de você, eu tava tipo dois, três dias pra ele só. Aí eu falei assim e eu preciso que você me garanta que você me dá trabalho. Aí ele falou assim, não, pode, pode trabalhar comigo que eu vou te manter busy. O americano quando te fala de manter busy é te manter cheio de trabalho de segunda a sexta, entendeu? E aí graças a Deus, tá tendo trabalho e a gente tá bem... tá bem prestigiado com ele lá, graças a Deus. Enfim, mas a transição foi difícil, mas eu via que era algo fundamental, senão eu ia surtar” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

things, but when they get to the market, they struggle and can't develop."⁷¹ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

In sum, Brazilians mostly use their own co-national networks in order to find jobs in construction, either through the WhatsApp groups or via word-of-mouth between friends, relatives, and congregation peers. In that way, jobs are kept within the Brazilian community and may make it harder for workers of other nationalities to enter Brazilian labor markets. WhatsApp groups also have a gatekeeping role, in which only those who can actually access the groups – with whom add links are shared, with some Portuguese proficiency, with a phone and an internet connection – have access to job offers. I now turn to a more detailed description of a typical working day for a close examination of working conditions.

Typical working day

A typical working day in construction depends on area of specialization, employer, and scope of projects that a given subcontractor and his *helpers* work in. Some have one single work site for an entire working day, although the sites will change when a project is completed and the team moves on to the next one. Claudinei said that, in such cases, he was able to take a 10-15 minute break for lunch, with a mostly stable working routine. Diogo also added that lunch break times depend on the work pace of the day, but on more relaxed days he can stop for up to 30 minutes. Diogo, working as a *helper* in cabinet installation, mentioned how the volume of work changes start and end times. Usually, however, the *helper's* daily rate is not higher because of a few extra hours of work:

71 “Um amigo meu hoje, nós conversando, ele falou assim, cara, deu uma queda no mercado do trabalho, mas a Home Depot, como ele tem condição, ele tem condição porque ele tem um permit, né? Ele tem condição de se fazer uma aplicação no Home Depot e Home Depot passa para ele as construções pertinentes à área dele. É mais ou menos assim, quem está legal é outra história. Quer dizer, é outra história se o camarada for eficiente, se não for eficiente, também não adianta. A gente conhece muitas pessoas que sabem falar o inglês fluente, que sabe fazer muita coisa, mas quando chega no mercado, depara com a dificuldade e não consegue se desenvolver” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

Clara: So how is your working day? How many houses do you go to?

Diogo: Usually we do only one house. It's houses in residential complexes, building new ones. So there's no one living in them, usually. But this next week, because of the amount of work, we'll have to do two houses in a day. So we arrive at 7am and leave around 5, 6pm. That's the estimate, right, so we can finish everything [when doing two houses a day]. (...) [When it's one house] we arrive, arrive a bit later, around 8am and leave between 4 and 5pm.⁷² (Interview 12, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Leal noted how the distance between one's home and the work site can also affect daily routines. In comparing his work load in the US with that he had in Brazil, he disputes the idea that Brazilian migrant workers in the US work longer hours than they did at home:

Clara: And so your work routine today, how is it? What time do you start?

Leal: Look, my work routine today, there are people who say like, 'oh my, immigrants work a looooooot in the United States.' We work today almost the same as in Brazil, in terms of hours. (...) So usually I leave home around 6:30 and 7am and around 5:30pm I'm already home. Yesterday and today it was a little atypical, because today I was working somewhere really far away, 1h40 from here [his home]. (...) it's a place called Ellijay, it's in north Georgia, right, a very remote area like, the house is kind of inside the woods, right, almost. (...) So I've been leaving home – when I left home [today] it was 6am, no, 6:15, 6:20am. And I need to pick up the other guy still, we go, tomorrow for example, I'm going to that area again, not to this far away place, not there but a little less [far], but still far, we have to stop by the factory to pick up some materials to bring with us (...) When I worked for the other company, that one I told you about where we did more houses, when it was of a certain size like, from medium to big, we could finish it, Gabriel and I, around 3pm, 4pm we were home. There are days when even working with this company, we can speed it up and finish... Some days I'm home by 3pm. So like... That never happened in Brazil, me coming home at 3pm.⁷³ (Interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

72 Clara: E aí como é que é o dia de trabalho? Vocês vão quantas casas?

Diogo: Geralmente a gente faz uma casa só. São casas de condomínios, construindo novas. Então não tem ninguém morando geralmente. Mas essa semana agora, pela quantidade de serviço, a gente vai ter que fazer duas casas por dia. Então a gente chega às sete horas de serviço mais ou menos e sai 5, 6 horas. Essa é a estimativa, né, pra gente terminar tudo [pra fazer duas casas no mesmo dia]. (...) Uma casa a gente chega, chega um pouquinho mais tarde, umas 8 horas e sai entre 4 e 5 horas. (Entrevista 12, 21/10/23, Marietta GA)

73 Clara: E aí a rotina sua de trabalho hoje, como que é? Que horas você começa?

Leal: Olha, a minha rotina de trabalho hoje, tem gente que fala assim, nossa, imigrante trabalha muuuuito nos Estados Unidos. A gente trabalha hoje quase mesmo no Brasil. Em matéria de horário. (...) Então, geralmente eu saio de casa entre 6h30 e 7h. E por volta de 5h30 da tarde eu já estou em casa. Ontem e hoje foi um pouco atípico, porque hoje eu tava estava trabalhando em um lugar muito longe, a 1h40 daqui de casa. (...) fica em um lugar chamado Ellijay, fica ao norte da Georgia, né. Uma região bem remota, assim, a casa fica meio que dentro do mato, né, quase. (...) Aí eu tenho saído de casa, quando eu saí de casa era 6 horas, não, 6 e 15, 6 e 20. Eu preciso pegar aí o outro menino ainda, a gente vai, amanhã por exemplo, vou para lá para perto lá pra perto de novo, esse lugar longe, não, não lá, mas um pouco menos, mas ainda longe, tem que passar na fábrica pra pegar alguns materiais pra levar... (...) Quando eu trabalhava pra outra companhia, que era aquela que eu te falei que eram mais casas, quando era uma casa razoável assim, de médio pra grande, a gente conseguia acabar ela, eu e o Gabriel, por volta de 3 horas da tarde, 4 horas da tarde, tava em casa. Tem dia que eu mesmo trabalhando com essa companhia aqui, a gente consegue dar um adiantinho lá e terminar... Tem dia que 3 horas da tarde eu estou em casa. Então assim... Coisa que nunca acontecia no Brasil. Eu 3 horas da tarde em casa. (Entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA)

Although Leal had some level of control over it as the subcontractor on the job, avoiding staying at work after 5 or 6pm, he also depended on the work pace set up by the company that hired him, and will not earn more money if he takes longer to finish a given job – on the contrary, he would have to pay additional days to his *helpers*. Juliana talked about how variable work times are for her husband, who works in wood floor installation:

“Yes, because it depends on the job. Sometimes he’s hired to do a job in a place this big. He’ll come home a little... on time. Sometimes he’s hired to install floors on a closet as big as this table. He’ll come home earlier, so it varies a lot, it varies a lot.”⁷⁴ (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Others might have working days in which workers have long drives between different houses. Claudinei described:

“But indeed I worked with someone in construction from house to house. Like, I worked with this boss’s husband also, in construction, installing these vinyl [floors]. It’s almost the same thing as housecleaning, that you arrive in one house, you have to rush, sometimes you’ll go to four different places, four or more different places for you to go to and one is there, the other over there, the other over there. So you just munch on something while you’re on the way, because when you’re there, actually working, you can’t, there’s no time.”⁷⁵ (Claudinei, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

Santos worked in HVAC installation and had a similar work routine, although he had an issue with constant daily rates for changing amounts of work:

“From Monday to Friday, I arrived at his home around 6:30 or 7am and then we would leave for the company, grab the installation equipment and go to the client’s house, right? Sometimes it was two or three [clients a day] and sometimes... Like, there’s a time to start, 7am at the latest, and you only come home when it’s over, right? And so many times you come home, midnight, 1am, because in the summer there’s a lot of work. (...) But now, this week for example, there were two days when there was no HVAC work and so one of these days I went to work with another colleague in flooring to cover it, because everything is very expensive here, right? And if you don’t produce, you don’t earn. And so I already identified that you need

74 “É, porque depende do serviço. Às vezes ele é contratado para fazer um serviço num espaço desse tamanho. Ele vai chegar um pouco... no horário. Às vezes ele é contratado pra colocar piso num closet do tamanho dessa mesa. Ele vai chegar mais cedo, então varia muito. Varia bastante” (Juliana, entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)..

75 “Mas eu cheguei a trabalhar também com alguém na área da construção e de uma casa pra outra. Igual... Eu trabalhei com o marido dessa patroa também, na área da construção, aí instalava esses vinil. É quase que o mesmo esquema do housecleaning. Que chega numa casa, você tem que correr, tem vezes que tem quatro lugares diferentes, quatro ou mais lugares diferentes pra você ir e é um ali, é outro ali, é outro lá, é outro pra lá. E aí, você mastiga alguma coisa nesse trajeto, que na hora que você tá ali mexendo mesmo não tem como, você não tem tempo” (Claudinei, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

to have a profession, be good at it, and open a company. So you're not depending on being a *helper* for Brazilians, because when I installed three A/Cs, I came home in the middle of the night and earned the same I do today, when we usually install only one a day. Today was an exception, I installed two and they were very far away from each other. But you don't earn anything [extra], you'll earn the same rate that day."⁷⁶ (Santos, interview 32, 09/21/23, Marietta GA)

In his assessment of the typical working day in HVAC installation, Santos touches on the crucial point of wages – and *helper*'s wages more specifically – that I discuss next.

Wages, daily rates, and take-home pay

Construction *helpers*' wages are typically based on a daily fee, decided on by the employer, based on area of specialization, experience of the worker, and labor market fluctuations. The average daily rate for beginner *helpers* in construction is \$150/day, with variations. Luciano, for example, started working in floors at a \$120 daily rate, which was raised to \$140 and then \$150 once he learned the job and gained experience. Once he was paid \$200 for a day's work and, upon counting it, thought it was wrong and called his boss to let him know; to which his employer responded that it was the right fee, because Luciano had worked so well that day. For Santos, his initial rate was \$150/day in HVAC installation and \$170/day in flooring. He complains of earning the same daily rate regardless of how many hours he worked – he says that in the summer he would get home at one in the morning some days, from HVAC maintenance, while in the fall he was doing maybe one or two clients a day,

⁷⁶ “De segunda a sexta, eu chegava na casa dele em volta de seis e meia ou sete horas e aí a gente ia para a empresa, pegava os equipamentos para instalar e ia para a casa do cliente, né? Às vezes eram dois ou três e às vezes... tipo, tem hora para pegar, no máximo 7h, e só volta quando acaba, né? E aí muitas vezes chega de meia-noite, uma hora da manhã, porque no verão tem muito serviço. O americano ele não quer ficar no calor, mas no frio ele não se incomoda muito, ele bota um agasalho que pra ele tá bom, né. Já agora, essa semana, por exemplo, teve dois dias que não teve trabalho de ar condicionado e aí um desses dias eu fui trabalhar com outro colega de piso pra poder suprir, porque tudo é muito caro aqui, né? E se você não produz, você não ganha. E aí eu já identifiquei que você tem que ter uma profissão, ser bom naquilo e abrir uma companhia. Pra não estar dependendo de ser *helper* de brasileiro, porque quando eu instalava três ar-condicionados, chegava de madrugada e eu ganhava a mesma coisa do que eu faço hoje, que geralmente agora a gente só instala um por dia. Hoje foi até a exceção, eu instalei dois. E eram bem distantes. Mas você não ganha nada, você vai ganhar o mesmo valor daquele dia” (Santos, entrevista 32, 21/09/23, Marietta GA).

all for the same pay. Oliveira, working with Cleiton, started at \$150 and was at \$220 at the time of our interview, less than a year after he started. He added that Cleiton wanted to raise his wages to \$250-300/day in fear that Silvan would leave him for another employer. Gerson talked of daily rates in the \$160-170 range, for the jobs he worked in, and suggested a fixed construction *helper* earns north of \$200/day. He also compares pay across different areas of specialization, after being in Marietta for less than two months:

Clara: Is there a difference of pay between these jobs? Are there any that pay better?

Gerson: There are. I'm still a beginner, I have a small sample size, I can't say with much precision which ones pay how much on average and all. That I can't do. But from talking to people, what they usually say is that window and door [installation] pay better, and so does granite, but they also demand the most physical effort. Because I'm a beginner, the pay is already much lower and my sample size is small, because I've been here for a month and change, so the variation in amount goes a lot with relationships of personal negotiations. (...) So I can't tell you with precision, but from the conversations I always have, window, door, and granite.⁷⁷ (Interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

Kiko also talked about his daily income in woodwork:

Clara: And when you were in woodwork, how was it?

Kiko: [The pay] was daily-based. Then there also weren't any rights. The day you worked, you earned, the day you didn't work, you also didn't earn. The routine was to leave home at 6am and there was no end time. Then they would pay the daily rate, the day.

Clara: Regardless of how many hours?

Kiko: Regardless of how many hours. The boss paid for lunch and that was it. (...) the daily rate, this is important to say, compared to before [2019], when [living costs were] cheaper than today, the *helper's* daily rate on wood hasn't changed, it practically hasn't, in four years...

Clara: What was the average, like?

Kiko: I earned \$200 a day [in 2019]. Already professionalized, already installing. I started earning \$180, after I learned how to install everything, then my boss started paying me \$200. When I came back now [2023], it pays \$250. So like... And it's that thing, you have a time to leave [for work] but not a time to come back. Like, also, the work isn't all of these hours working, hard at work. Because there's the commute, there's loading the wood... So on average you work 10 hours, actually, in fact, 10 hours of work. But not counting the other

⁷⁷ Clara: E tem diferença de pagamento entre essas áreas? Tem alguma que paga melhor?

Gerson: Tem. Eu ainda como iniciante, com pouca amostragem, eu não consigo dizer com muita definição quais que de fato pagam em média quanto e tal. Isso eu não consigo. Mas muito de conversar com as pessoas, o que geralmente dizem é que janela e porta paga o melhor e granito também. Mas também são os que exigem mais esforço físico. Como eu sou iniciante, então o pagamento já é bem menor e como a minha amostragem é baixa, porque eu estou aqui há um mês e pouco, então a variação de valor vai muito da relação de negociação pessoal. (...) Então não consigo lhe dizer com precisão, mas pelo que eu converso sempre, janela e porta e granito. (Entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA)

[hours], only in transit, arriving at work, all that.⁷⁸ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Helper's wages can be significantly below the actual living costs they have to cover, especially if they are supporting their family in the US. When Edna and Leal first arrived in Boston, she was six months pregnant and her son soon fell ill, meaning she could not work for a long time after arriving in the US (see life story 17). They had also brought their oldest son, André (born in Brazil), who was 10 at the time. She narrated their situation in Boston:

“Then they took my husband to work in general construction, right, demolition, this kind of stuff that people usually work on. And I, pregnant, stayed home. Girl, but the money [they had brought from Brazil] was running out. The money was running out because [Leal] worked, worked, worked but it wasn't enough. It wasn't.”⁷⁹ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Later, in the same interview, she added:

Clara: And you said, [Leal] was working in construction?

Edna: *Minha filha* [see Appendix B: Glossary], he did everything. ‘Do you work with wood? I do. Do you work with painting? I do. Do you install doors? Do you pick up garbage? I do.’ Everything, everything. I remember he took two jobs. He would start working early in the morning, left at 5pm, went to the other job and got home 10, 11pm. It wasn't enough, so he started working as an Uber [driver]. So he did everything. (...) So the man would do everything. And the crazy thing was that the money wasn't enough, the money wasn't enough, it didn't last. And everything we had in our house was donated, there was nothing that was

78 Clara: E quando trabalhava com a madeira como era?

Kiko: Era por dia. Aí também não tinha nenhum direito. No dia que trabalhasse, ganhava. No dia que não trabalhasse, também não ganhava. A rotina era sair de casa 6 da manhã e não tinha hora pra voltar. Aí se pagava a diária, por dia.

Clara: Independente da hora.

Kiko: Independente da hora. O patrão pagava o almoço e só isso. Lá, não, agora nesse que eu tô, é por hora. São 40 horas, né, no caso eu faço por semana e caso eu passe das 40 horas, aí eu tenho esse benefício que é o overtime. Paga 50% a mais. Mas ultimamente eu só faço as 40 horas mesmo. Que até não é vantagem pra eles pagarem o overtime, né? [risos] (...) Sim, porque assim também, a diária, e assim, é importante falar, em relação a antes, que estava mais barato que é hoje, a diária praticamente do helper da madeira não mudou. Praticamente não. Em 4 anos...

Clara: Quanto que era a média, assim?

Kiko: Eu recebia 200 dólares por dia. Já profissionalizado, já instalando. Eu comecei recebendo 180, depois que eu aprendi a instalar tudo, aí o meu patrão começou a passar a pagar 200. Quando voltei agora, paga 250 por dia. Então assim... E aquela coisa, tem hora de sair e não tem hora pra voltar. Assim também, o trabalho não é todas essas horas trabalhando, trabalhando no duro. Porque tem a... deslocamento, tem... vai carregar a madeira... Então, em média aí, trabalha 10 horas, na verdade, de fato, 10 horas trabalhado. Mas fora as outras, só no deslocamento, chegar no serviço, enfim. (Entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA)

79 “Aí já levaram meu marido pra trabalhar de serviço geral, né, demolição, essas coisas assim que normalmente onde a pessoa vai trabalhar. E eu, barriguda, fiquei em casa. [Menina], mas só que o dinheiro foi acabando. O dinheiro foi acabando. O dinheiro foi acabando porque o homem trabalhava, trabalhava, trabalhava, mas não era o suficiente. Não era” (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

ours. Even my son's underwear had been donated by other people. We couldn't afford anything. And even so, we struggle a lot to make rent and buy groceries.⁸⁰ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

This experience in Boston is behind Leal's way of thinking when he sets up his *helpers'* daily rate:

"So [if] I bring someone to work with me today, for example, who doesn't know anything, right. I can't pay them what they pay out there. Especially when it's someone with a wife, kids, right. I don't have the guts to do it. I don't have, I don't have the guts. So like, I don't worry that I won't earn more, I don't worry that I'll have less because I'm paying someone else more. I don't have that weight in my conscience, you know? And that made me suffer a lot back then, when I was the *helper*, you understand? Because I would see this lack of *hombridade* [literally manhood, meaning integrity] in people, you know? The exploitation... That's when our Brazilian folk are very criticized, they exploit the other Brazilians themselves. It's that philosophy, like, because I struggled here to have what I have, so everyone has to go through the same as I went through."⁸¹ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Subsequently, Leal explained what he meant by exploitation, thinking about his experiences as both a *helper* and an employer, working for and hiring other Brazilians. The lack of written contracts facilitates that bosses fire *helpers* at will, the abusive practice Leal narrates:

Clara: When you say exploitation, what do you consider to be exploitation?

Leal: Oh, the guy will pay you as little as he can, you understand? He'll do something I think is outrageous, for example, in my job, right, we have a schedule, now not so much, because I'm working for this company that I told you about, of customized cabinets, personalized, so not so much. But in other companies I worked [for], you register and the company sends you

80 Clara: E você falou, ele tava trabalhando com construção?

Edna: Minha filha, fazia de um tudo. Você trabalha com madeira? Trabalha. Você trabalha com pintura? Trabalha. Você põe porta a porta? Você cata lixo? Cato. Tudo, tudo. Tudo se faz, né? Eu lembro que ele pegou dois trabalhos. Ele começou a trabalhar de manhã cedinho, saía 5 horas da tarde, ia pro outro trabalho, chegava em casa 10, 11 horas da noite. Não era o suficiente, então começou a trabalhar de Uber. Então de tudo ele fazia. (...) Então, de tudo o homem fazia. E o que era muito doido é que o dinheiro não dava. O dinheiro não dava, não rendia. E tudo que a gente tinha em casa era doado, não tinha nada nosso. Até as cuecas do meu filho eram doação dos outros. A gente não tinha condição de comprar nada. Mesmo assim, a gente tinha muita dificuldade de pagar aluguel e fazer compras. (Entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA)

81 "Então eu levo alguém pra trabalhar comigo hoje, por exemplo, que não sabe nada, né... Eu não consigo pagar o que eles pagam aí fora. Principalmente quando é uma pessoa que tem mulher, filhos, né. Eu não tenho coragem de fazer isso. Não tenho, não tenho coragem. Então assim, eu não me preocupo que eu vou deixar de ganhar mais, não me preocupo que eu vou ter menos porque eu estou pagando mais pra outra pessoa. Eu não tenho essa dor na consciência, sabe? E aí isso me fez sofrer muito lá atrás, quando eu era o ajudante, entendeu? Porque eu via essa falta de hombridade das pessoas, sabe? A exploração... e aí que entra muito a crítica ao nosso povo brasileiro, eles exploram muito os outros próprios brasileiros. É aquela filosofia assim, porque eu passei por dificuldade aqui pra ter o que tem, então todo mundo tem que passar o mesmo que eu passei" (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

a schedule, two houses on Monday, one on Tuesday, one on Wednesday, in different places. And then people, for example, they work with a *helper*. Then like, on Monday it was two houses, so the person brings a *helper*. On Tuesday it's only one house, but a big house. Then on Wednesday it was a tiny house. Then the guy comes and says, 'on Wednesday I won't bring you, because the house is tiny, I can do it.' So like, I think that's outrageous, because if you have your *helper*, if you have that person you called to help you during the week, right, constantly, because it's not just that week, and only because you have a tiny house one day, you think you don't need them, wait up, that's not how it works. If you're with that person, they're useful to help you eat a sirloin steak. But the day there's only bones to gnaw on, that's only a little, then they're not useful, it's just for you? (...) So it's to serve [the employer's] need, not both of their needs, right? Even though I understand that the person is responsible for the job, it's their car, it's their tools, it's their company, it's their responsibility over the job, and the other one is helping, [the employer] will make more, naturally. But on the day that there's little work then you only care about your own needs? (...) Dang, that's outrageous, because the guy needs to work, you understand? Why? Because instead of you earning, I don't know, \$500 tomorrow because it's a tiny job, you'll have to pay [the *helper*'s] daily rate and you'll earn less? Is that how it works? You understand? That kind of thing.⁸² (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

On *helper*'s daily rates in relation to daily costs, Leal added:

"Something else about daily rates, I told you, if someone comes to work with me, I can't pay them like \$100 a day. I don't do that, I refuse to make a business out of it. Unless we're making \$200 [on the whole job], then it's \$100 for them, I give \$100 to myself, \$100 to you. That's different, that's a small job. Now a job like that, in my area, I can't do that to someone, pay them \$100 a day, on a day they worked with me. (...) I don't even do that to my son,⁸³ how

82 Clara: Quando você fala exploração, que tipo de coisa que você considera exploração?

Leal: Ah, o cara vai te pagar o mínimo que ele puder, entendeu? Ele vai fazer uma coisa que eu acho um absurdo, por exemplo, nessa área minha, né, a gente tem um schedule, agora nem tanto, como eu tô trabalhando com essa empresa que eu te falei, de gabinete customizado, personalizado, nem tanto. Mas nas outras empresas que eu trabalhei, você se cadastra lá e a empresa vai te mandando o schedule, duas casas na segunda, uma na terceira, uma na quarta, em locais diferentes. E aí as pessoas, por exemplo, elas trabalhavam com um *helper*, com ajudante. Aí tipo assim, na segunda-feira eram duas casas. Aí a pessoa levava o *helper*. Na terça-feira era uma casa só, mas uma casa grande. Aí na quarta-feira era uma casa pequenininha. Aí o cara chega assim, hoje... na quarta-feira eu não vou te levar não, porque a casa é pequenininha, eu consigo fazer. Então assim, eu acho isso um absurdo, porque se você tem o seu ajudante, se você tem aquela pessoa que você chamou pra te ajudar durante a semana, né, constantemente, porque não é só aquela semana, e só porque você tem uma casa pequenininha naquele dia, você acha que não precisa dela, pô, perai, não é assim que a coisa funciona. Se você tá com aquela pessoa ali, então ela te serve para te auxiliar para comer o filé mignon. Mas no dia que é para roer o osso lá, que é pouquinho, ela não serve, é só para você? Então na verdade você está fazendo com que a coisa gire em torno de você, entendeu? E isso para mim é egoísmo demais, né? Então, é para atender a necessidade dele, não a necessidade dos dois, né? Por mais que eu entenda que a pessoa seja a responsável pelo trabalho, o carro é dela, as ferramentas são dela, a companhia é dela, a responsabilidade do trabalho é dela e a outra está ali ajudando, ela vai ganhar mais, naturalmente. Só que no dia em que o dinheiro é pouquinho e aí você olha só a sua necessidade? Então, esse tipo de desrespeito, sabe? Então assim, amanhã você não vai não, porque amanhã eu dou conta sozinho. Poxa, que absurdo, porque o cara precisa trabalhar, entendeu. Por quê? Porque você em vez de ganhar, sei lá, 500 dólares amanhã porque o trabalho é pequenininho, você vai ter que pagar a diária dele e você vai ganhar menos? É assim que funciona? Entendeu? Esse tipo de coisa. (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA)

83 I understand Leal to mean two things by bringing up his son André here. First is that, at the time of this interview, his son was a 17-year-old high-schooler living at home with his parents - therefore, with no need for an actual income to support himself. Second is that, as Leal said, his son did the lowest-skilled tasks as a *helper*, like picking up trash and unpacking cabinets, tasks that would be worth much less than those of a *helper* who

would I do that to the head of a household [*chefe de família*]? You understand? That's so disrespectful, right? (...) But there are people who do that and I suffered in the hands of people like that, who think like that. Because it hurt me a lot, you know. It wasn't even because it was with me, that's not it, it's because I would see them doing that to everybody, you know, and then you look to your side and you see wife, kids, depending on you, that you need to bring resources for, and you have to swallow all that.”⁸⁴ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

In that vein, Luciano repeated advice he heard from his friend:

“I'll say it like a friend of mine said to me, here you can't fall in love with your boss, unfortunately, you can't go and stay [working with the same person], you understand? Why? Because like, unfortunately here it's a capitalist world, so you have to think, it's not that you value money more, but it's that you need to earn money to cover your needs. So you have to have a job, always look for a better job that's less tiring for you, let's put it like that.”⁸⁵ (Luciano, interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

In this context, construction *helpers* need a fixed employer who can provide them with as many days in a week as possible, otherwise they have to be in constant search of work in WhatsApp groups and/or in their personal networks. So in addition to the daily rate, a construction *helper's* overall income depends on how many days they actually work in any given week. At the time of our 2023 interview, Oliveira was pondering this issue in a different way, weighing being a *helper* with Cleiton against becoming Leal's partner, subcontracted by a cabinet company. Although that is not Oliveira's area of specialization, he would like to go work with Leal because they are very close and he would make a higher daily rate. Oliveira

works in the actual cabinet installation.

84 “Outra coisa em relação a valores de diária, eu falei pra você, se é uma pessoa pra ir trabalhar comigo, eu não tenho condição, condição, de pagar tipo 100 dólares pra pessoa por dia. Eu não faço isso, eu me recuso a fazer um negócio disso. A não ser que a gente vá ganhar 200, aí eu dou 100 pra eles, eu dou 100 pra mim, 100 pra você. É diferente, é um trabalho pequeno. Agora é um trabalho desse, da minha área eu não vou conseguir fazer isso com uma pessoa, pagar 100 dólares por dia pra pessoa, num dia que faz comigo. (...) Mas nem com meu filho eu faço isso, então eu vou fazer com um chefe de família? Entendeu? Isso é muita falta de respeito, né? (...) Mas tem gente que faz isso e eu sofri na mão de pessoas assim, que pensam dessa forma. Porque me machucava muito, sabe. Não era nem só... não era nem por ser comigo, não é isso, é porque eu via ele fazendo aquilo de uma forma prática com todo mundo, sabe, e aí você olha pro lado, você vê esposa, filhos, que depende de você, que você precisa, né, trazer o recurso pra dentro de casa. E você tem que engolir aquilo tudo. E olha, essa transição foi difícil. Foi bem difícil” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

85 “Só que aqui, falar igual um amigo meu falou, aqui você não pode se apaixonar pelo patrão não. Infelizmente, você não pode chegar e ficar, entendeu? Por quê? Porque, tipo, infelizmente aqui é um mundo capitalista, então você tem que pensar, não é que você vai dar mais valor ao dinheiro, mas é que você vai ter que ganhar dinheiro pra você poder suprir. Então, você tem que ter um trabalho, visar sempre um trabalho melhor que te canse menos. Bora por assim” (Luciano, entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

was reluctant, however, to leave Cleiton in a lurch – Luciano’s friend might say he had, indeed, fallen “in love with his boss”, given Oliveira’s sense of loyalty to Cleiton – but he was also concerned that, with Leal, he would not have as many secured days of work than he did with his current employer. In 2025, the issue had resolved itself with Diogo, Oliveira’s stepson, coming to work for Leal as his fixed *helper*, being praised by both Leal and Oliveira for his special skill in math and detailing. Oliveira had stopped working for Cleiton when the latter went to Brazil for a long period and stopped getting as many new projects, which led Oliveira to find new employers.

In my 2023 fieldwork, Brazilian migrants noted their struggles to find work as construction *helpers*, which directly affected their overall income. Kiko said:

Kiko: However, I believe there’s been a recession in relation from 2019 to now, work is going down a lot, it even fell in this period in 2018, 2019 from now, there was no shortage of work in wood. Actually there was a shortage of people to work. But this time we note that the market is increasingly saturated. And other areas too, because I talked with some friends, some colleagues, and work has really gone down.

Clara: But do you think it’s the amount of work that went down, or are there more people, so there’s less [work] available?

Kiko: Yes, I believe so, because like, I’m in a lot of groups, more or less 50 WhatsApp work groups. So I believe it’s a little of each. There are more people, but also work went down. So I decided to leave woodworking because it was hard, right, because I have to support myself here.⁸⁶ (Interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Luciano also struggled to find work around the same time:

“Work really, I was working, it stopped, it stopped. I was out of work for two days last week. I went crazy, I was going crazy. I said, my God, what about the bills now? And the bills... Then I was idle. (...) So I was here in agony. I said like, oh Jesus, oh Lord, give me a job, Lord, in the name of Jesus, by God, by the light that illuminates me, for everything that’s sacred.”⁸⁷ (Luciano, interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

⁸⁶ Kiko: Porém, eu acredito que houve uma recessão em relação de 2019 pra cá, o trabalho tá caindo bastante, inclusive caiu no mesmo período de 2018, 2019, desse período agora, não faltava trabalho na madeira. Na verdade, faltava gente para trabalhar. Só que dessa vez a gente percebe que o mercado está cada vez mais saturado. Na madeira em si. E outros serviços também, que eu falei com alguns amigos, alguns colegas, e realmente deu uma caída no trabalho.

Clara: Mas você acha que caiu a quantidade de serviço ou tem mais gente, aí sobra menos?

Kiko: É, eu acredito, porque assim, eu tô em vários grupos, mais ou menos 50 grupos de WhatsApp de trabalho. Então, eu acredito que um pouco de cada. Tem mais gente, porém também o trabalho deu uma caída. Aí eu decidi sair da madeira porque estava difícil, né, porque eu tenho que me sustentar aqui. (Entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA)

Luciano narrates that, as soon as he finished praying, his phone rang and it was his brother-in-law offering him work. Gerson also had difficulties finding work as a construction *helper* although, in his own assessment, he was at a disadvantage for being inexperienced, older (in his 40s), and of a smaller physical build. He described his experience in Marietta's labor markets:

Clara: Do you have an average of how many days you're able to [find] work? You said at least two...

Gerson: Look, there was a period when I worked eight business days out of ten, back to back. But it was a very atypical thing, it was a person who was moving, did not want to hire a company to move, it was not worth it for him, he paid two guys who could speak English, me and another guy, and then we did the move with this guy. And like, it paid well, but the guy made us carry even tractor parts that he had in his basement. So, going up the ramp, on grass, tree roots and... I did it. So like... Outside this period, in all other weeks I only had 2, 3 days of work, always. I could not find more than 3 also, but it was never less than 2. I'm always in that range.⁸⁸ (Interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

Fixed *helpers* may also be subject to fluctuations in the labor market. Vanusa talked about her husband Sandro's work in granite:

Vanusa: Sandro was out of work for a few weeks because a lot of people from Florida arrived here and workers were out of work because the owners, the company owners, were paying very little to those who were arriving from Florida, because in Florida the daily rates are lower than here. So, arriving from Florida, desperate for work, what happens? 'Oh, I'll only pay you \$100 today,' you understand? And they would go. And work was really bad around here, it was generalized, lack of work.

Clara: When was that?

Vanusa: That was six weeks ago, two months, around then [September 2023]. It was really hard. Sandro was out of work for two weeks, not even one day [of work]. Other weeks he was like, one day working, two out [of work], you know?

Clara: Even with people he always worked with, like.

87 "O trabalho mesmo, eu tava trabalhando, parou. Parou. Eu fiquei dois dias da semana passada sem trabalhar. Eu fiquei doido, eu já estava doido. Eu falei, Meu Deus, e agora as contas? E as contas... Aí eu estava parado. (...) Aí eu estava aqui agoniado. Eu falei assim, ô Jesus, ô Senhor, me dá um trabalho, Senhor, em nome de Jesus. Por Deus, pela luz que me ilumina, por tudo que é mais sagrado" (Luciano, entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

88 Clara: E você tem uma média de quantos dias você tá conseguindo trabalhar? Você falou que pelo menos dois...

Gerson: Olha, teve um período que eu trabalhei... oito dias úteis de dez, em sequência. Mas foi uma coisa bem atípica, foi uma pessoa física que estava fazendo uma mudança, não quis contratar uma empresa para fazer a mudança, não compensava para ele, pagou dois caras que falassem inglês, eu e mais outro, e aí a gente fez a mudança com o cara. E assim, pagou bem, mas o cara botou a gente para carregar até peça de trator que ele tinha no porão dele. Então, subindo rampa, na grama, raiz de árvore, e... foi. Então assim... Fora esse período, nas outras semanas todas eu só tive 2, 3 dias de trabalho. Sempre. Não consegui mais do que 3 também, mas nunca menos do que 2. Sempre fico nessa faixa. (Entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA)

Vanusa: Yes, yes, that's right. People from the shop would not call him, because the shop... The granite owners, who make the granite, it's called shop, right. So the shop owners were not calling [Sandro]. It was very... He went to other areas, he even went to window, he even went to flooring, and he identifies with granite the most. He said, 'oh, I want to go back to this granite soon.' And it worked out, thank God he's working with this guy now.

Clara: Afterwards it stabilized a bit or was he able to find other people to work with?

Vanusa: Another, another person. Then he went back, he's working with this guy, I think it's been a month and half, give or take.⁸⁹ (Interview 36, 10/30/23, Marietta GA)

In turn, employers – even when they are subcontracted – are not paid on a daily but on a project basis, from which the commissions paid to the outsourcing chain will be discounted, as well as the *helpers*' wages. Projects' pay is as variable as anything else when it comes to construction. The amount paid to the subcontractor is also usually not their final take-home income as costs such as materials, taxes, mandatory insurance, tools, and transportation, among others, are deducted from the total amount paid. In electrical projects, for example, Danilo explained that maintenance and repairs are more profitable than building new homes, since repairs are more difficult and involved, demanding more experience and knowledge. In cabinet installation, Leal started working for a low-cost cabinet company and he would do up to four installations in a day, earning a fixed amount per house. Later, he was subcontracted by a company that makes high-end personalized cabinets and he will work for a few days in the same project, which can cost the client more than \$100,000, paid to the company who will in turn distribute that money between costs, profits, and wages, including

⁸⁹ Vanusa: Samuel passou umas semanas sem trabalhar porque muitas pessoas da Flórida chegaram aqui e os trabalhadores ficaram sem trabalho porque os donos, os donos das companhias, estavam pagando bem pouquinho pra quem tá vindo da Flórida, porque da Flórida, a diária é menos de que aqui. Então, chegando da Flórida, desesperado por emprego, o que acontece? Ah, eu vou te pagar só 100 hoje. Entendeu? E eles iam. E ficou bem ruim de trabalho por aqui. Ficou bem geral, sem trabalho.

Clara: Quando que foi isso?

Vanusa: Isso tem umas seis semanas, uns dois meses, por aí [September 2023]. Foi bem difícil. Samuel passou duas semanas sem trabalhar. Nem um dia. Outras semanas ele passou, tipo, um dia sim, dois não, sabe?

Clara: Mesmo com o pessoal que ele trabalha sempre, assim.

Vanusa: Isso, isso, isso mesmo. O pessoal do shop não chamava, porque shop... Os donos do granito, que fabricam o granito, chama shop, né. Então os donos de shop não tavam chamando. Tava bem... Ele foi em outras áreas. Chegou a ir na janela, chegou a ir no piso, e ele se identifica mais com granito. E ele disse, ah, eu quero logo voltar pra esse granito. E deu certo, graças a Deus ele tá trabalhando com um rapaz agora.

Clara: Depois deu uma estabilizada ou ele conseguiu achar outra gente pra trabalhar?

Vanusa: Outra, outra pessoa. Aí ele voltou, tá trabalhando com esse cara, acho que já tem uns... um mês e meio, mais ou menos. (Entrevista 36, 30/10/23, Marietta GA)

Leal's. Additionally, Claudinei cited, as an example of how well construction employers are paid, a hallway renovation project at a local school in which he worked as a *helper*, which paid the Brazilian subcontractor \$15-17,000. Claudinei considered this a significant amount, even after *helpers'* wages were discounted – although Claudinei did not consider that construction materials, insurance, taxes, tools, and other costs might also have been discounted from the total amount paid to the subcontractor.

Market fluctuations also affect subcontractors if demand for their services drops. This may happen according to season or according to larger economic patterns that impact businesses, either slowing down new constructions or making private clients think twice about renovating. Leal's comments to me in the second half of 2023 show that Oliveira's concerns over not having enough work were not unfounded:

“So because at the end of last year [2022], at the end of last year, early this year [2023], things just deteriorated, the amount of work went down absurdly, because the interest rate in the US went up so much. So, each and every type of financing, be it home, car financing, the interests were sky-high. So Americans stopped buying. It was on the brink of a recession. Many economists say that the government, the current government, manipulated the press so no one would say that the US was undergoing a recession like the 2008 one. And so it was really dire at the end of last year [2022], November, December... Then January, starting January and February this year [2023], horrible, all the fat I had accumulated to afford the processes of this [visa], I burned [through] it all, the little money I had saved all went away so I could support myself, pay rent, because what I had for work, I used to do like 10 [cabinet] installations a week, I was doing two, three.”⁹⁰ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Indeed, Oliveira expressed feeling guilt over “having work every day” with Cleiton after he had been in the US only a few months while, at church, his congregation brothers

⁹⁰ “Aí como no final do ano passado, no final do ano passado, início desse ano, a coisa simplesmente degingolou, a quantidade de trabalho despencou de forma absurda, porque porque a taxa de juros nos Estados Unidos aumentou muito. Então, todo e qualquer tipo de financiamento, seja financiamento de casa, carro, estava altíssimo os juros. Então, os americanos pararam de comprar. Estava quase beirando uma recessão. Muitos economistas dizem aí que o governo, atual governo, ele manipulou a imprensa para não... pra ninguém dizer que os Estados Unidos estava vivendo uma recessão igual a de 2008. E aí a coisa ficou desesperadora no final do ano passado, novembro, dezembro... Aí janeiro, entrou janeiro e fevereiro desse ano, horrível, toda gordura que eu fiz pra bancar os processos desse, desse... queimei tudo, o dinheirinho que eu tinha guardado foi tudo embora pra me manter, pra pagar aluguel, porque eu que tava tendo de trabalho, eu fazia tipo 10 instalações por semana, eu tava fazendo 2, 3” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

who had been in Marietta much longer than him were all struggling to find work, including Leal.

In sum, wages and take-home income in construction are highly variable. Because construction *helpers* are mostly paid on a daily basis, they earn the same regardless of how many hours they work. Behind valued traits such as responsibility, ethics, and hard-working, there are implicit expectations of unpaid labor and employer loyalty. Indeed, Cleiton mentioned having had *helpers* stop working at 5 or 6pm, even if the work was not yet done, or that will try and negotiate work hours before being hired. These were described by Cleiton as being *folgados* [in this case, a mix of lazy, entitled, and opportunistic]. The narratives above also reveal the constrained agency of Brazilian *helpers* when it comes to negotiating wages and working conditions. To Leal, the only way of escaping employment relationships he considered exploitative was to become self-employed, and then an employer himself. Raising *helpers'* wages, or keeping them at work even for small jobs to make their employment more secure, is described by Leal as a matter of ethics, integrity and responsibility over someone else's livelihood. While I do not disagree, I want to call attention to the fact that responsibility over *helpers'* living conditions is seen as exclusively belonging to the Brazilian subcontractor, rather than being distributed along the outsourcing chain and clients that benefit from said labor. Brazilian subcontractors, on the other hand, while having a significantly higher take-home income, are also constrained in terms of their own negotiation with clients and the fees held back throughout outsourcing chains. Finally, both *helpers* and subcontractors can be affected by fluctuating labor markets and demand. *Helpers* without a fixed employer are more vulnerable and may, like Luciano and Kiko, be out of work for several days, which makes underemployment a severe issue. Meanwhile, subcontractors are also affected by seasonality and economic crises that lower demand for construction services. This labor insecurity that all

Brazilian construction workers are subjected to has a direct effect on income and wages and, in turn, in social reproduction conditions.

In that sense, the Brazilian subcontractor is, in many ways, also precarized and vulnerable to labor insecurity and underemployment, who needs to ensure, as much as the *helper*, an income that allows for certain social reproduction conditions for themselves and their families. Leal, for example, had significant struggles in terms of social reproduction even as a subcontractor (see life story 17). My main argument here is that a class struggle analysis of subcontractors/employers versus *helpers*/workers is not appropriate to fully encapsulate the complexity of the labor dynamics in this context and risks understating the precarity and marginalization of subcontractors at the cost of critiquing those who benefit from Brazilian subcontractor's labor and the impersonal domination (Postone 1993) implicit to capitalist dynamics.

Tension between helpers and employers and control over labor

The relationship between Brazilian employers and *helpers* is a source of constant tension. Danilo explained how he thinks about the relationship between him, as an employer, and his *helpers*:

“Sometimes work goes down, I try to prioritize [the *helpers* who have been working with him for a long time], but God has blessed [him]. Something always shows up, we share. But I’m always making them aware, ‘look, this is a cake that was made for me, that I’m sharing with you. But you can leave whenever you want, I can’t, I have to eat it till the end, that’s my responsibility, I have a name to maintain in the market. So when you give up, or when you make a mistake, I have to fix your mistake.’ So that’s the bad side, you understand? And [the clients] don’t [care], like, when a guy makes a mistake, for example, the client says, ‘I want six light fixtures here, the measurements are this and that’ and if someone drills the wrong hole in the ceiling, someone has to pay for it. The client doesn’t have to pay for it. That’s when we account for others’ mistakes. But that’s only the bad side. The good side? The good side is when you... It doesn’t matter if you make \$10, \$20, \$30 on each person who’s there working with you. A client offers you \$200 for you to do a specific job. The guy is willing to work for you for \$170, for \$180, even for \$150, [if] I don’t know how good of a professional he is. And at the end of the day he’ll do the job and give you a profit of \$20, \$30, \$50. Is that good or

bad? [laughs] Every day, at the end of a month? [laughs] (...) it's \$500 that you earned, it's \$1000 that you earned through the guy, you helped him, he helped you."⁹¹ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Cleiton also described the tensions he experienced as an employer. At the beginning of our interview in 2023, when I asked him why he thought his uncle had first decided to move to the United States, he mentioned how hard it is to be a business owner in Brazil, where you have to formalize employee relationships, pay benefits, and cannot fire an employee without "fair cause" lest you pay a hefty settlement to your former worker. Cleiton praised "US laws" (vaguely mentioned) for not demanding this attachment between employer and employee. However, later in his interview, he is critical of *helpers* who ditch him for an employer who pays higher daily rates:

"What happens? The guy works with you, works with someone else tomorrow, works with another... He comes to work with me, I pay him \$200. And Brazilians, they'll prostitute themselves very easily. If the other guy offers \$200 and breakfast, he says, 'brother, I'm not coming tomorrow, I found another job,' and then he goes with the guy, the one who offered lunch. That guy, when winter comes, he's out of work, because he did not stay with anybody. And he's there, and his friends [say to him], 'no, you're earning too little, we earn \$300 and all,' this and that, this and that. Then another subcontractor is buried in work. He's buried and all, says, 'man, if you want to come work with me, man, the boss, I talked to him, he'll pay you \$260.' So he calls me and says 'I'm not coming anymore' and goes with the [other] guy for \$260. What do I do? I'll find someone else. Usually I'll take someone who's starting (...) But what happens to the other guy, when his big job is over? He'll let go the person who arrived last, that's the guy who used to work with me. Then the guy who used to work with me comes to me and asks, 'hey, brother, I need work, do you have a lot work?' I said, 'I do man, thank God I do, man.' 'Do not you need [a worker]?' I said, 'no, man, now I have someone else in your place.' Now this guy will be in the [WhatsApp] groups looking for work."⁹² (Cleiton, interview 7, 11/01/23, Marietta GA)

91 "E às vezes o trabalho cai, eu tento priorizar eles, mas Deus tem abençoado. Sempre pinta alguma coisa, a gente divide. Só que eu tô sempre conscientizando eles, olha, isso aqui é um bolo que foi feito pra mim, que eu tô dividindo com você. Mas vocês podem sair a hora que vocês quiserem, eu não, eu tenho que comer ele até o final, que é a minha responsabilidade, eu tenho que manter o meu nome no mercado. Então quando vocês desistem, ou quando vocês erram, eu tenho que corrigir o erro de vocês. Então tem esse lado ruim da história, entendeu? E eles não, assim, quando o cara comete um erro, por exemplo, o cliente fala, eu quero 6 luzes aqui, a medida é essa, essa e essa, e se alguém fizer um furo errado no teto, alguém tem que pagar. O cliente não tem que pagar. E aí é a hora que o... a gente soma o erro dos outros. Esse é só o lado ruim da história. O lado bom? O lado bom é que quando você... Não importa se você ganha 10, 20, 30 dólares por pessoa que está ali trabalhando contigo. Um cliente te oferece 200 dólares para poder você fazer um determinado trabalho. O camarada se propõe a trabalhar contigo por 170, por 180 ou que seja por 150, não sei a qualidade dele de profissional. E no final do dia ele vai fazer o trabalho e vai te dar um lucro de 20, 30, 50 dólares. Tá bom ou tá ruim? [risos] Todos os dias, no final de um mês? [risos] Você [incompreensível] 500 dólares que você ganhou, é 1000 dólares que você ganhou através do cara, você ajudou ele, ele te ajudou" (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

Of course, in Cleiton's narrative, the worker is punished for ditching him for a higher-paying gig by being out of work soon after. While Cleiton wanted no attachments so he could fire his workers whenever he wanted, he was derisive of workers who favor better pay over employer loyalty. Cleiton further commented on this tension between what employers want and what workers want:

"Because the problem with Brazilians, with these folks who are in WhatsApp groups, he's looking for a job, not work. It's different things. Work is everywhere, there's always something that needs to be done. But Brazilians who come here, he wants to earn as much as possible working as little as possible. He does not think like, 'I'll find [an employer] who's good at work, who has a lot of jobs and I'll focus on this guy, because then I won't be idle.' Very few think like that. So the guy is desperate. Come 5pm, he picks up, man, I know of people that, at 5pm, he took off his knee pad and said like, I'll be in the van. So this guy is not coming back tomorrow. I know of cases from friends, acquaintances. The [employer] stopped by and picked up the guy for work. The guy says 'look, here's the thing, you have to pay for my lunch, I only work until 5pm and you have to pay me by the end of the day.' [The employer] said, 'you can get out of the van and leave.' He knows that guy will be trouble."⁹² (Cleiton, interview 7, 11/01/23, Marietta GA)

Right after, Cleiton acknowledged that Brazilian employers can be shady towards workers:

"Because here there are some dangerous guys, there are guys who do not pay, oh my, Lord in heaven. Then puts the guy in court... There are guys who take [workers] who are good at work and because the guy sometimes he's legal here, he says he won't pay [the worker] and says, 'if

92 "O que acontece? O cara trabalha com você, trabalha com outro amanhã, trabalha com outro... Ele vem trabalhar comigo, eu pago ele 200 dólares. E o brasileiro ele se prostitui muito fácil. Se o cara de lá ofereceu 200 dólares e o café da manhã, ele fala, brother, amanhã eu não vou mais não, já arrumei outro trabalho. Aí ele vai com o cara. Aí ele vai com o cara. Aí aqui esse outro ofereceu o almoço, ele lá. Esse cara, quando chega lá no inverno, ele não tem trabalho, porque ele não ficou com ninguém. E o que acontece? Eu tô aqui com um cara, pago ele 200, o cara tá ali há seis meses trabalhando comigo. E ele ali, aí os amigos dele, não, você tá ganhando pouco, a gente tá ganhando 300 conto e tal, não sei o que, não sei o que. Aí um outro profissional aperta de trabalho. Aí ele aperta e tal, fala, rapaz, se quiser trabalhar comigo lá, cara, o cara, eu falei com ele, ele te paga 260. Aí ele me liga e fala, não vou mais não e vai com o cara, 260. O que que eu faço? Eu pego o outro cara. Normalmente eu pego alguém que tá começando, alguém que tá... Aí eu, só que que vai acontecer com esse cara aqui, ó, na hora que ele terminar o serviço grande dele? Ele vai dispensar quem chegou por último, que é o cara que trabalhava comigo. Aí o cara que trabalhava comigo vem e pergunta, e aí brother, tô precisando de trabalho? Tem muito trabalho aí? Eu falei, tem cara, graças a Deus tem, cara. Tá precisando não? Eu falei, não, cara, agora eu já tenho outra pessoa no seu lugar. Agora esse cara vai ficar nos grupos procurando trabalho" (Cleiton, entrevista 7, 01/11/23, Marietta GA).

93 "Porque o problema do brasileiro, desses pessoal que tá em grupo do WhatsApp, ele tá procurando serviço, não trabalho. São coisas diferentes. Trabalho tem a todo lugar. Sempre tem alguma coisa que tem que ser feita. Só que o brasileiro que vem pra cá, ele quer ganhar o máximo possível com o mínimo trabalhado. Ele não pensa assim, vou pegar um cara que é bom de trabalho, que tem muito serviço e eu vou focar nesse cara. Porque aí eu não fico parado. Pouquíssimos pensam assim. Então o cara é desesperado, dá cinco horas, ele junta, rapaz, eu sei de gente que deu cinco horas, ele soltou a joelheira e falou assim, eu vou pra van. Aí esse cara não volta mais amanhã. Já cheguei de... eu sei de caso de amigos, conhecidos. O cara passou e pegou o cara para trabalhar. O cara falou ó, o seguinte, você tem que me pagar o almoço, eu trabalho só até 5 e tem que me pagar no final do dia. Ele falou, pode descer da van e ir embora" (Cleiton, entrevista 7, 01/11/23, Marietta GA).

anything happens, I'll report you to migration [authorities].’ One thing has nothing to do with the other, but [the worker] does not know, he gets scared and says, ‘oh my, I lost my day.’ (...) That’s why I do not get in the middle of those people [from the WhatsApp groups], because it’s a headache. It’s people who do not pay against people who don’t know how to work.”⁹⁴ (Cleiton, interview 7, 11/01/23, Marietta GA)

As is the case with housecleaning, discussed in the next chapter, in construction employers can exert strong control over *helpers*’ workdays. Danilo mentioned how the employer being responsible for driving *helpers* to and from work is beneficial for employers, who then get to decide how long the workday lasts:

“Bosses who offer the possibility of driving people to work in their own cars, they do that, but they do that because they benefit. They do that because through that, they control the life of that [worker]. And the person who’s... When I say control, I say it in the sense that, for example, I take two, three workers, put them in my car, take them to work, I’m in control of the time to leave. So, the worker has no way to take a taxi and go home, has no way to take a bus and go home. The time the boss says it’s done, it’s done. It’s the time he takes [the workers], even for lunch.”⁹⁵ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Overall, tensions between Brazilian construction *helpers* and employers revolve around working conditions that may or may not be negotiable. While both Danilo and Cleiton acknowledge that abusive employers exist, including those who practice wage theft, they also expect their *helpers* to comply with a certain amount of conditions, such as bringing their own food and water and not having a fixed end to the workday.

94 “Porque aqui tem uns caras perigosos, tem uns caras que não pagam, nossa, Deus do céu. Aí leva o cara na corte... Tem um cara que leva os caras bons no trabalho e porque o cara as vezes ele é legal aqui, aí ele fala que não vai pagar o cara e fala qualquer coisa eu te denuncio pra migração. Não tem nada a ver uma coisa com isso, mas o cara não sabe, ele fica com medo e fala nossa, perdi meu dia. Obrigá, e fala vou te pegar... Por isso que eu nem não entro nesse meio desse povo aí, porque é dor de cabeça. É quem não paga contra quem não sabe trabalhar” (Cleiton, entrevista 7, 01/11/23, Marietta GA).

95 “Já os patrões que dão a probabilidade de levar as pessoas para os trabalhos com os próprios carros, elas fazem isso, mas elas fazem isso porque estão se beneficiando. Elas fazem isso porque através disso, elas controlam a vida daquela pessoa. E a pessoa que está, quando eu digo controlar, eu digo no sentido de que, por exemplo, eu pego dois, três trabalhadores, coloco no meu carro, levo para trabalhar, eu que controlo a hora de voltar. Então, o trabalhador não tem como pegar o táxi e vir embora. Não tem como pegar um ônibus e vir embora. A hora que o patrão fala que acabou, acabou. É a hora que ele vai levar, até para almoçar” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

According to Danilo, ideally all construction subcontractors would have insurance for themselves and their *helpers*, but he considers it to be impracticable: “Because if you to earn enough to pay yourself and at the same time pay for insurance, then you can’t charge for the job, the price would be exorbitant, it couldn’t be.”⁹⁶ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA) Cleiton, on the other hand, mentioned paying mandatory insurance for his *helpers*.

In construction, carrying heavy materials is quite taxing on workers’ bodies and may cause aches and more severe physical issues. In 2025, in a Bible study, Leal asked for prayers for his health, having hurt his lower back at work so he had to stay home for a few days. On the occasion, Leal added that in the US, there is no Instituto Nacional de Seguridade Social (INSS, National Institute of Social Security, see Appendix B: Glossary) and workers do not have sick leave or social security to cover for sick days. That same year, Oliveira told me how he had been to Brazil for a hernia operation, which he needed after helping Elimar in a moving job. Silvan said that carrying drywall sheets constantly contributed to the hernia, which was a much heavier chore than what he had to do as a professional painter in Brazil. Gerson, who started working in construction in his 40s, talked about the physical demands of his new career:

“In all [areas he’s worked in] I’ve noticed that in all of them I’m always the person of small build and the oldest. Except for those who are very experienced, then some of those approach my age, someone else may be a bit older, maybe I do not know, but [they are] always of a bigger build [than Gerson]. So that’s why I always have used these other abilities of mine to complement and stand out, because if it’s not for that, I’ll always lose. In granite indeed, we lift rocks, like, gigantic, that even for the big guys are complicated. So, like I said, physical supplements all the time, stretching, Salonpas [pain-relief patches], a few war marks, but we keep going [laughs].”⁹⁷ (Gerson, interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

96 “Porque se você ganhar pra poder se pagar e ao mesmo tempo pagar um seguro, aí você não consegue cobrar o trabalho. O preço ficaria exorbitante, não teria condição” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

97 “Todos eles eu já percebi que em todos eles eu sou sempre a pessoa de menor porte físico e de mais idade. A não ser aqueles que já são bem experientes, que aí alguns deles se aproximam da minha idade, um outro tem um

Construction workers are also at risk for accidents on the job. Leal once fell off a ladder at work, broke his arm and was out of work for two whole months. Claudinei had a knee infection from kneeling down for flooring work, from a bacteria that comes from floor dirt. His knee swelled badly and he too could not work for two months. As I discuss in chapter 8, accidents like these prevent Brazilians from working, which directly impacts their overall income and social reproduction conditions. Construction workers are also constantly working in attics, basements, and crawl spaces. Temperatures in these areas are typically extreme. Luciano mentioned working in an attic in the summer that reached 52 Celsius (125.6 Fahrenheit). Attics are usually covered in insulation material so workers can only walk on narrow wood beams, with the risk of sticking their foot through the ceiling. Attics may also have asbestos and require a worker to wear appropriate safety equipment. Crawl spaces are also dangerous, given a worker might get stuck and left there, if they are alone at the work site. In case of illnesses as well as accidents, no one covers workers' or medical bills, putting them under severe income insecurity.

Construction also involves on-the-job accidents for which subcontractors may be held accountable. One such risk is theft accusations from private clients' homes, justified or not, that can bring trouble to Brazilian employers. Another risk is damaging the client's property, for which the subcontractor will certainly be charged. This can happen in different ways. Danilo mentioned two separate charges he was held accountable for. Once, one of his *helpers* got an extra job installing a toilet for the private client whose home they were working on, without Danilo's knowledge. The *helper* installed said toilet incorrectly, leading to a leak into the floor/ceiling between floors that eventually led to its collapse. Even though

pouco mais, talvez eu não saiba, mas é sempre de maior porte físico. Então por isso que eu tenho que usar essas minhas outras habilidades para complementar e me destacar, porque se não for isso, eu vou sempre estar perdendo. No granito mesmo, a gente ergue pedras, assim, gigantescas, que até para os caras grandes é bem complicado. Então, como eu falei, suplementação física o tempo todo, alongamento, Salonpas, algumas marquinhas aí de guerra, mas a gente vai indo [risos]" (Gerson, entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA).

Danilo was able to prove that the toilet installation was not a part of his service but something his *helper* had arranged behind his back, he was still charged with repair costs associated with the caved-in ceiling. On another occasion, one of Danilo's *helpers* proceeded to teach another worker how to drive in a client's driveway, hitting and damaging the client's car, which Danilo also had to pay for. A subcontractor's own mistake may also end up weighing on their pockets. Cleiton once forgot to include production material costs in the estimate he agreed upon with his client, meaning he had to pay for those materials himself.

However, Brazilian workers praise construction wages and consider them to be "worth it." Leal assessed construction wages in this way:

"It's what I said, I see no problem [in working in construction]. More so because here in the US there are a lot of people who work in construction here who make twice as much as people who studied at Harvard, who got a PhD from Harvard and are inside an office, so you have an idea. There are, of course, exceptions, there are people here who are really well paid, there are a lot of people who are well paid here. But different from Brazil, operational services here are really well paid, especially when it involves construction, that stuff."⁹⁸ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

While Oliveira worked as a painter in Brazil, he had remarked that his job in the US was much more physically demanding, even before his hernia. Still, when I asked Oliveira about his work plans if his wife Adriana's EB-2 visa was approved, he said he would not consider changing careers.

Clara: With a work permit, do you think about having a job that's stable, like, formal? Or would you keep, even with the work permit, keep doing this informal work?

Oliveira: Although I don't know how it would work here in the US, I think I would keep on [working in construction], because I don't know how much these companies would pay, but I imagine it would not be much. I think in construction you earn more, you have a better return. I am almost sure of it, from people I know, from what they say, the return in construction is a lot higher for us, you understand? And after you make a name for yourself and you work in a responsible way, you don't stop anymore. Recommendations are the best advertisement. I worked like that in Brazil, I believe I'll get there here in time too. Actually I already am, right?

98 "É o que eu falei, eu não vejo nenhum problema, não vejo nenhum... até porque aqui nos Estados Unidos tem muita gente que mexe com construção aqui, que ganha o dobro de gente que estudou em Harvard e fez doutorado em Harvard e tá dentro de um office, pra você ter uma ideia. Existem, lógico, as exceções, tem gente que é muito bem remunerada, tem muita gente bem remunerada aqui. Mas, o... diferentemente do Brasil, o serviço operacional aqui é muito bem remunerado, principalmente quando envolve construção, essas coisas" (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

I have this job I told you about and another about to start.”⁹⁹ (Interview 28, 10/23/23, Marietta GA)

In sum, informal labor contracts, underemployment, job insecurity, fluctuating wages, lack of benefits, and health risks all characterize the construction labor markets that Brazilians participate in as precarious. While employers have a lot more control over income and working conditions than *helpers*, they are also subjected to many of these conditions, and have their agency constrained by outsourcing chains and clients. Costs such as insurance for all workers (including the employer), for example, are not included in the final prices of construction projects, and instead any accidents or health issues are taken on individually. As a result, while there are significant health and accident risks in construction work, these jobs offer no benefits whatsoever. Earlier in this section, I presented the construction labor markets that Brazilians participate in the Marietta area. There is a strict labor division between *helpers*, the Brazilian subcontractors who employ them, and the American clients they work for. Significant tensions arise between Brazilian *helpers* and subcontractors around wages, chores, and working hours. The practice of “selling jobs,” in this case, takes the form of chain outsourcing, in which a job can pass multiple hands – each of whom keeping back a commission fee – until it reaches those who actually complete said job.

99 Clara: Ah, não, quando eu perguntei se você continuaria fazendo diária, é assim, saindo o work permit, você pensa em ter um emprego que seja fixo, assim, tipo carteira assinada? Ou continua, mesmo tendo a permit, continua nesse esquema, assim, mais informal?

Oliveira: Eu apesar de não conhecer como funcionaria aqui nos Estados Unidos, eu acho que eu continuaria assim, porque eu não sei quanto essas empresas pagariam, mas eu imagino que não seja muito. Acho que na construção você ganha mais, você tem um retorno melhor. Tenho quase certeza disso, pelas pessoas que eu converso, conheço, pelo que elas falam, o retorno na construção é bem maior pra gente, entendeu? E depois que você faz um nome e você trabalha de forma bem responsável, você não para mais. A indicação é a melhor propaganda. Eu trabalhei assim no Brasil, eu creio que vai chegar nesse tempo aqui também. Na verdade já tá chegando, né? Eu tenho esse trabalho que eu te falei e tenho um outro pra começar. (Entrevista 28, 23/10/23, Marietta GA)

Labor markets and working conditions in other jobs

Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area work in a few other jobs outside of housecleaning and construction, such as manicurists, homemade food businesses, childcare, and others. Among my research participants, some had these other jobs as a primary occupation or an income supplementing strategy. Overall, Juçara and Renata worked as manicurists; Jandira, Isadora, and Vanusa worked in childcare; Pedro worked as an Uber driver; Gustavo worked at Chick-Fil-A; Kiko worked as an oiler; and Edilson worked at a pizza restaurant in Boston (see Figure 13). In terms of secondary occupations, Adriana, Isadora, and Edna had home-made food businesses to supplement income, while Santos and Gerson did higher-skilled side jobs with interpretation, translation, and video-editing. Below, I discuss low-skilled occupations other than housecleaning and construction that I came across in fieldwork, from people I interviewed and interacted with, complemented by some of my observations in Brazilian WhatsApp groups.

Some Brazilian migrants work as manicurists, either in beauty or nail salons or by themselves. In visiting the nail salon in Little Brazil, I learned some about working conditions by chatting with manicurists during my visits. According to workers Leonor and Gláucia, the Vietnamese owners were rigid. It is worth mentioning I have heard them referred to as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean by both clients and workers. All employees were Brazilian, in addition to the owners also doing clients' nails. Once I mentioned how curious it was that the Vietnamese couple only hired Brazilians, to which another nail salon worker replied "look around" in a "the answer is obvious" tone. She was referring to the fact that the nail salon is right in the middle of Little Brazil, sandwiched between a Brazilian bakery and a small Brazilian grocery store. The Vietnamese owners even learned how to do nails in the

“Brazilian style” - cutting off cuticles, for example – to cater to local clients. During my fieldwork in 2023, Gláucia left the salon (and I was unable to follow up with her), according to Leonor, because she (a Black Brazilian woman) was targeted by the owners and even prevented from attending clients, even though Gláucia had told me previously she had no issues at all with the owners.

Salon-based work has its advantages. Some work materials are supplied by salon owners, although some are bought by workers themselves – Gláucia said that they know what products the clients prefer. Salons also provide nail workers with clients they would not access otherwise and, in the case of that particular nail salon, a strong location advantage. Salon workers may also share work with each other, for example, if a client schedules a manicure-pedicure with a specific worker who has available time for only one of such services; in sharing it with an available colleague, the first worker does not entirely miss out while the second gets a client they would not otherwise have. As Leonor told me, upon leaving the salon, Gláucia started seeing clients from her home. Leonor said Gláucia’s income became much less stable than what it was at the salon. Not being able to afford it, Gláucia had taken her daughter out of daycare.

Juçara, who I interviewed, had worked as a manicurist in Brazil. She resumed that work after moving to the US, helped by a woman she met in Florida, where she first arrived. For a long time, in Marietta, Juçara would go to clients’ homes to do their nails. Although she received invitations to rent a salon space, Jéssica never wanted to do it because she thought it would just be an extra expense, in addition to being put at risk due to her being out of status. At the time of our interview, Juçara and her husband Danilo had bought a home where she set up her own workspace, which allows her to be home with her kids while also working. Juçara was also able to make her own schedule, negotiating with clients for dates and times when

needed. She usually sees 5 to 6 women a day, taking 1h to do a manicure and 1h30 to do a manicure and pedicure. On Fridays, she schedules clients who only do manicures and sees up to ten clients. Renata, on the other hand, started working as a manicurist in Florida and attended clients from home. By the time she and her family relocated to Marietta (see life story 29), Renata was primarily a stay-at-home parent.

Many women considered home-based food businesses as an alternative to housecleaning, either as a way out of it or as an alternative for periods of scant *helper* work. Edna, who for the most part did not work outside of home, sold special cakes – for birthday parties and other celebrations. She had not turned it into a big business, being dedicated to raising her sons, working for the church, and taking care of her home, but took occasional orders. Isadora, struggling to find work, invested in a home-based bakery business, making small \$15-cakes, with flavors typical of her region in Brazil, and a few other desserts and pastries, with a focus on Brazilian clients in the Marietta area. The initial investment for the cake business was the leftover money from a state-issued check for her son, who was born in the United States. It was unclear to me what program was this, but Isadora used this money to buy foodstuffs for her specifically and, with what was left, bought large supplies of flour, sugar, and other ingredients. She usually baked for two or three days a week, making six or nine small cakes each time, and advertised them on Brazilian WhatsApp groups and on social media, offering deliveries for a \$5 fee. Her husband Kiko said he'd recently spent a Saturday making these cake deliveries with Douglas. They also bring cakes to sell at church on Sundays.

In 2025, Adriana had started a home-made meal business, which she had mentioned in 2023 was a plan of hers in terms of work. She still worked as a housecleaning *helper* a few days a week, but reserved her Monday to prepare the meals for sale. Adriana asked for orders

to be placed by Saturday at the latest, so she could make the appropriate quantity of each item in her menu, and used foodstuffs bought at supermarkets sometimes complemented by items from local food banks. Her philosophy was to offer “good, affordable Brazilian food” and, charging \$10-12 per meal, she hoped to make a profit from selling large quantities each week. Even with food bank items, however, Andreia told me she was barely breaking even and, in some cases, even losing money from spending more on production materials than what she charged from clients.

Another alternative for those struggling with scant housecleaning work, normally employed by women, is childcare. In addition to looking for work as a housecleaning *helper*, Isadora was also attempting to babysit, posting on WhatsApp groups daily that she was available. She worked for a family for a few weeks when the mother was recovering from a cesarean, caring for two children. Others set up informal daycares at their own homes, offering parents the option to drop off and pick up their children as needed. Isadora wanted to work that way, which would be convenient because then she could stay with her son all day instead of spending money on a daycare for him, but found it difficult because she did not want to upset their roommate. Brazilian WhatsApp groups are filled with offers of childcare services and informal daycares.

Working in more formal childcare is also an option. In the 1980s, Eliana, Jandira and other Brazilian migrants were able to work as live-in nannies for American families in the metropolitan Atlanta area. They saw advertisements looking for nannies in the local paper, and thought it was a good option given they would forego rent costs. Later, as they were more adapted to the US context, they decided to move into housecleaning because they could make more money that way and could leave work at the end of the shift, a common complaint among live-in care workers that feel permanently available to their employers. Jandira saw

herself working as a housekeeper more than a live-in nanny given that, in addition to childcare, she also did some tidying up, laundry, groceries, and light meal prepping. During my fieldwork, I did not meet any live-in nannies, but there was one Brazilian au-pair who attended Espírito Santo Church's celebrations.

Vanusa, in turn, worked for a formal daycare owned by a Brazilian woman and which, while initially conceived to attend the Brazilian community, had clients from a wide range of nationalities. Because Vanusa's English was not fluent, she was transferred from a class of older kids to an infant class. Vanusa usually worked a 9am to 6pm shift but eventually does overtime, as the daycare remains open from 7am to 7pm, and has a one-hour lunch break while the babies nap. She is paid hourly and earns accordingly when arriving early or staying late and has one week of paid vacation a year, but could not remember whether or not she was paid on public holidays. Her class had six babies, which is determined by Georgia regulations and the State Secretariat of Education. Because of this state oversight, daycare workers are required to have a social security number and registered fingerprints, which Vanusa was still able to get when she first started at the daycare – currently, out-of-status workers cannot obtain such documents and, consequently, cannot be employed there. Vanusa left the daycare for a while, wanting to have a try at housecleaning work, but she felt driving trips between houses were very tiring and, at \$30 a house, she would make \$60 or \$90 a day, a low wage in her opinion. Vanusa considered, however, that having one's own housecleaning schedule provides a high income, but she struggled to obtain her "own houses." According to her, Vanusa and her husband were always on the lookout for houses they could clean on Saturdays for extra income, but have yet to succeed. In comparison with housecleaning, she sees the daycare as more stable, with a known income to be earned at the end of the week and with less fluctuations in the labor market.

Other options outside of housecleaning and construction may require valid or specific driver's licenses. In 2023, during my interview with Vanusa, she mentioned that her husband Sandro had received an offer to work as truck driver, retrieving donation containers left in several points around the Atlanta metropolitan area. This would be less taxing work than construction, with more stability and better hours – however, Sandro needed a “special driver's license for heavier vehicles,” as Vanusa called it, that he had to obtain from another state, being out of status. Driving for Uber in Atlanta poses a similar problem. Given driver's license requirements in Georgia, only those with a work permit, permanent residency or citizenship can work as a ride share driver (this is not a condition in all states, given variations in US state laws, as evidenced by Brazilians who have worked as Uber drivers in other cities). Among my research participants, Pedro and Schaianne's husband Júlio were driving for Uber in the metropolitan Atlanta area, and generally preferred it in comparison to construction work. As previously mentioned, Tania was waiting to have her Uber account approved so she could start. It's worth noting that all of them had been working as *helpers* and were older, which made Uber driving more attractive than if they were housecleaning schedule owners or contractors.

Additionally, Gustavo, Vanusa and Sandro's son and 19 years-old at the time of our interview, was working at Chick-Fil-A, doing 8-hour shifts from 2-10 pm, and generally enjoyed the work, saying he was usually put on dishwashing duty because he was the fastest at it. Marcelo, Claudinei and Bruna's son, worked at Chick-Fil-A with Gustavo. His father praised his job for giving Marcelo his own money, even if Claudinei considered it to be very little money.

Others yet were able to leverage previous skills into a supplementary income. Gerson was able to speak English, did eventual translation and interpretation jobs for other Brazilians

in the Marietta area. Santos was also starting to do side jobs to supplement his income working in construction:

“So there are a few things that I already had a bit of skill in Brazil. I did video editing, audio capture to do the... synchronize. And so I’m already offering this service for some people that want it, usually it’s people who already have their work and I’m buying a professional printer because they asked me to make business cards so they can advertise their work. Then I’ll see if I’ll do that for a day when there’s nothing. I myself put together a client roster so eventually I can do something, geared towards filmmaking and graphics, put it all together to do some things with, kind of, virtual reality, right, that will be very cool, like. So I think it’s going to work out.”¹⁰⁰ (Gerson, interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

In sum, Brazilians in Marietta also work as manicurists, in childcare, and in low-skilled positions that do not require a work permit, which many do not have. In many cases, these less common occupations were a result of not finding work in housecleaning or construction, or preferring a less taxing occupation, whereas the two larger labor markets continue to be seen as “better paying” than these other jobs. In the case of manicurists and informal day care workers, these other professions facilitate coordinating paid work and caring for their own children. Those with access to a Georgia driver’s license may work as Uber drivers, which is less taxing and, in some ways, more stable than construction. Nonetheless, these are still informal and precarized occupations, for the most part, with limited to no benefits. This small variation in occupations, as well as the constant reference to housecleaning and construction labor markets as “a first choice,” show that Brazilian workers’ access to diverse labor markets in the US is quite limited and, for the most part, constrained to opportunities offered within the community. If Brazilian gatekeep certain occupations, they

100 “Aí tem algumas coisas que eu já fazia que eu tinha um pouco de aptidão no Brasil. Eu fazia edição de vídeo, captação de áudio pra fazer o... sincronizar. E aí eu já tô oferecendo esse serviço pra algumas pessoas que querem, geralmente são pessoas que já têm seu trabalho, e eu tô comprando uma impressora profissional porque eles me pediram pra fazer cartão, cartão de visita pra poder divulgar o trabalho deles. Aí eu já vou ver se faço isso para um dia que não tiver nada, eu mesmo ir fazendo a carteira de cliente para de repente fazer alguma coisa, voltada com filmmaking e com gráfica, juntando ali tudo para... para fazer algumas coisas com meio que realidade virtual, né, isso vai ser bem bacana assim. Aí eu acho que vai dar certo” (Gerson, entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA).

are also prevented from accessing many others due to their limited networks, lack of US education, lack of English skills, and migration status.

This chapter shows how church congregations and other Brazilian migrant networks organized and managed through WhatsApp groups constitute significant weak ties (Granovetter 1983) that are crucial for labor market access, as well as informal and “word-of-mouth” recruitment networks (England 1995). As shown above, access to cars and driver’s licenses reshapes this time-geography of job accessibility and conditions upward mobility within labor markets. Also illustrated in this chapter are the ways in which Brazilian networks reinforce expectations and valuing of certain qualities in workers, such as loyalty, hard work, reliability, and dedication (Ellis et al. 2007), as stated in quotes by Santos and Cleiton. WhatsApp groups also create an environment for “enforceable trust” (Ellis et al. 2007), where workers and employers alike can be denounced for unacceptable working practices, such as wage theft and “stealing” clients from other workers. In the next chapter, a clear example is presented when the possibility of “stealing” housecleaning clients from another Brazilian cleaner is discussed. Moreover, construction and other lower-skilled Brazilian workers’ experiences in Marietta show the relevance of home-work spatialities for spatial accessibility to jobs (Ellis et al. 2007) when *helpers* give preference to renting apartments around the Little Brazil area so they can more easily be picked up by their employers. In the next chapter, I discuss how differentiated working conditions are thus predicated on gender, nationality, and citizenship.

CHAPTER 7: DIFFERENTIATED WORKING CONDITIONS

In the present chapter, I discuss how working conditions of Brazilian migrants in Marietta are differentiated based on gender, on the one hand, and nationality and migration status, on the other. In doing so, I examine two intersecting layers of difference: those that exist within the Brazilian community and those between Brazilians and US-born white workers, following the discussion presented in the literature review. Within the Brazilian community, differentiated working conditions may hinge on aspects such as gender, migration status, and time in the US. Between Brazilians and US-born workers, there are aspects of racialization, nationality, and citizenship status, although many Brazilians remark that, even after obtaining US citizenship, they continue to be immigrants.

At the same time, migrants recognize their limited mobility within US labor markets due to factors such as language barriers, the devaluation of Brazilian degrees, and limited access to US education. Transnational networks play a key role in sustaining these labor markets. Brazilian migrants in Marietta facilitate migration by inviting others and maintaining community-based labor markets, often organized through platforms like WhatsApp. These networks connect migration processes across locations, as long as US labor markets continue to offer the possibility of a “better life.”

I start this chapter by discussing the Brazilian housecleaning labor market and working conditions, to explore how Brazilian workers are differentiated within the community. Subsequently, I discuss how Brazilian migrants’ access to labor markets outside of housecleaning and construction is constrained by migration status and the de-skilling, that is, the devaluation of their professional qualifications once they arrive in the US.

Labor markets and working conditions in housecleaning

Many migrants arrive in the US already expecting to work in housecleaning and, typically, in contact with another Brazilian migrant who can help them enter the labor market. Housecleaning services are performed mostly in private homes of all kinds and sizes, from “mansions” and “mini-castles” to single-bedroom apartments. There is no shortage of tales of mansions with 10 bathrooms, uncountable bedrooms, elevators, indoor movie theaters, and endless floors. A few exceptions to private home cleaning were mentioned by Taynara, a cousin of Adriana, Edna, and Érika, who cleans an office after hours, and Talita, who worked on some move-in cleanings for recently built homes.

Chores are previously negotiated upon with the client who requested the cleaning service, which can typically be as everyday cleaning, a deep cleaning, or a move in/out cleaning. Everyday cleaning usually includes bathrooms, kitchen, surfaces and floors and extra chores may be negotiated for additional pay, like cleaning the inside of a refrigerator and oven, or even doing laundry. Chores can also be a source of tension between cleaner and client, especially when the client wants extras without paying for them. Everyday cleaning may be done by one or two people and take 1-3 hours, depending on the size of the house and how dirty it is, while big houses can take 4-5 hours even in an everyday cleaning. Deep cleanings tend to take much longer and may involve larger groups of cleaners, depending on size and dirtiness as well. Another significant variation is that cleanings can be requested by clients every week, every two weeks, or once a month, affecting how each work week looks like for that particular cleaner and, also, how much work each house requires – less frequent the cleanings usually mean a higher workload per visit.

For everyday cleanings, housecleaners work either alone or in pairs. They may work in a larger group in specific situations, for example a deep cleaning in a very big house. While most Brazilian house cleaners are women, some men also do this work. In my fieldwork, in addition to hearing mentions of men who worked alone, I met several men working alongside their wives. Usually, that happened when the husband struggled to find employment in construction while the wife had plenty of housecleaning work. For the couple Claudinei and Bruna, who work together in housecleaning, Claudinei did not do so well as a *helper* in construction, so he joined his wife. Another example are Ludmilla and Márcio. Márcio's dad already lived in Marietta when they moved and worked in house cleaning, so he set it up for his son and daughter-in-law to start work in the same market. Later, Márcio tried switching to construction but could not make it work:

Clara: And coming here, you did not try, did you try working in construction?

Márcio: I did, but it did not work out. It did not work because, at the time, [Luciana] was pregnant and in construction here when you start not only you do not earn much money, they only give you small jobs. So, there was the issue that she was paying a [house cleaning] *helper* and I was working as a *helper* in construction. So, I earned little money in construction and construction, what's hard is, a day that rains you do not work.

Ludmilla: Oh yes, there were days when Marcos stayed at home and the [housecleaning] *helper* made more than him, because he stayed home and did not earn money, and I had to pay the *helper*, so...

Márcio: So it did not work out.

Ludmilla: I said, come back [to housecleaning] because otherwise there won't be enough money to pay the bills.¹⁰¹ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

One of the main labor markets in the Marietta area that Brazilian migrants participate in is housecleaning, as is common in other Brazilian communities in the US. In this section, I

101 Clara: E chegando aqui você não tentou, você chegou a tentar trabalhar na construção?

Márcio: Tentei, mas não deu certo. Não deu porque na época ela estava grávida e na construção aqui quando você começa, além de você ganhar pouco, eles só te dão um trabalhos pequenos pra fazer. Então, tinha a questão de ela estar pagando helper e eu trabalhando de helper na construção. Então, eu ganhava pouco e na construção o difícil é... o dia que chove você não trabalha.

Ludmilla: Ah é, tinha dia que o Marcos ficava em casa e a helper ganhava mais que ele. Porque ele ficava em casa e não ganhava. E eu tinha que pagar a helper. Então...

Márcio: Então não deu certo.

Ludmilla: Eu falei, você volta porque o dinheiro não vai dar pra pagar as contas. (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

draw on my research participants' words to present some of the working conditions that Brazilian migrants face in housecleaning labor markets in Marietta. I start by describing housecleaning work through the specific dynamics between *helpers* and the house cleaners who employ them as workers, including pay and wages, and the strategies they employ in order to access jobs. I then address working conditions in housecleaning labor markets in further detail, discussing the usual chores performed by cleaners and a typical working day in housecleaning, the number of houses cleaned in a day, the working hours, the rush to drive from house to house, the lack of breaks and tensions that arise between clients, cleaners, and *helpers*. Finally, I discuss Brazilian housecleaners' working conditions in terms of benefits, health issues and other risks.

On helpers and donas de schedule

There is a clear labor division in the Brazilian housecleaning schema between *ajudantes* or *helpers* and *donas de schedule* (schedule owners, see Appendix B: Glossary) or *donas de casa*¹⁰² (house owners, see Appendix B: Glossary). The *dona do schedule* or *dona da casa* is the housecleaner who is directly hired by the client, who keeps in touch with the client, arranges date and time, and negotiates price and chores. The *helper* is hired by the *dona de schedule* to help her with housecleaning work, usually for a fixed price per house. *Helpers* may be hired for the day or fixed *helpers*, who regularly work with the same *dona de schedule*. Following the Brazilian housecleaner vernacular, I use "client"¹⁰³ to mean the

¹⁰²That the usual Portuguese phrase for house/schedule owners is used in its female form (*dona*) instead of the general/male form (*dono*) shows how housecleaning is thought of as a female labor market.

¹⁰³In domestic worker US politics, those who hire cleaning services are called employers rather than clients. In housecleaning labor markets in Brazil, they may also be called employers or bosses [*patrão* or *patroa*]. Brazilian housecleaners in Marietta, however, referred to *donas de schedule* as bosses [*patroa*] and those who hire cleaning services as clients. I follow this distinction in order to make clear the separate roles played by those who hire housecleaning services and *donos de schedule*, while also acknowledging the complexity of these dynamics.

person who hires the housecleaning service; “house owner” or “schedule owner” to mean the housecleaner who is hired by the client, who may or may not perform the cleaning service; and I use *helper* to mean people who are hired at a fraction of the full price of the housecleaning service to help the main cleaner during a given day of work and fixed *helper* when they are in constant employ of the same cleaner. Any references to “owning houses” in this context means being the cleaner directly hired by the client, who “owns” the client’s contacts and therefore “owns the job.”

Most commonly, a schedule owner cleans her houses and brings a *helper*, fixed or not, to work with her. Another possibility is for a cleaner to do *casas a comissão* (houses on commission, see Appendix B: Glossary). In this case, the house owner does not do any of the cleaning work, but retains the contact and communications with the client, keeping up to 30% of the full price of the cleaning service. The cleaner – in this case called neither *helper* nor *dona da casa*, but usually referred to with some variation of the phrase *a comissão* (on commission) - then earns 70% of the total service price – Claudinei and Bruna mentioned knowing people who get as much as 85% per house on commission wages. In my fieldwork, I did not find anyone who employs a *helper* when cleaning on commission – if they do, the *helper*’s wage would come out of that 70%, making it an unattractive option. More usually, people clean on commission either by themselves – like Schaianne and Creusa – or as a couple who shares the 70% equally – like Bruna and Claudinei.

A variation on *casas a comissão* is working for a cleaning company. The difference between cleaning on commission or for a company is not very clear, with company work being also referred to as work on commission. However, a *casa a comissão* can be independent (the cleaner only has that one house they clean on commission, for example) and directly negotiated with the house owner while the cleaner usually makes a whole day or even

their entire week available to a company. Jandira, for example, considers herself to be a business owner rather than someone who “has houses on commission” and considers the cleaners to be company employees, rather than people she has individual agreements with. While I met many people who cleaned houses on commission, I did not meet anyone who hired people to clean their houses in this way. Juliana described her experience cleaning for a company, commenting on how much mental labor – an issue usually absent from housecleaners’ narratives – it saved her:

Juliana: I work for a company. I work by myself and I have some houses of my own.

Clara: And what’s it like with this company?

Juliana: So, many people start working on their own. I do not think, I think because it’s very comfortable for me, I do not have to think about the dynamic of arranging my schedule, getting in touch with the client, blah blah blah. I was never motivated to do that on my own. So today it’s comfortable for me to just work for someone. The person gives me [a list] all broken down where I have to go, what I have to do, I just go, do it, earn more than a *helper* and a little less than if it were all on my own, and I have found it to be more practical.

Clara: Ah, because also, in the end, you work less, right?

Juliana: No, yes.

Clara: Because clients texts this and that...

Juliana: Yes, this thing of taking care of clients, then there are annoying clients, and you have to reschedule, then you move one, then you move another, then you rack your brains, then your brains seem like they do not work right, there are so many problems, then the kids, then you have to remember this and that, then I’m like, ah, let’s leave it like this, I just get everything broken down, I just go, do it, you understand? It’s been less, I do not know, stressful, like, for me.¹⁰⁴ (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Other people “own their own schedule,” meaning they clean the houses they “own” and are directly in touch with their clients, without any external mediation, and work by

¹⁰⁴ Juliana: eu trabalho para uma companhia. Eu trabalho sozinha e eu tenho algumas casas que são minhas.

Clara: E como é que é com essa companhia?

Juliana: Então, muita gente começa a trabalhar por conta própria. Não sei, eu acho que pelo fato de ser muito cômodo pra mim, eu não tenho que ficar pensando na dinâmica de ter que ficar arrumando a agenda, entrar em contato com o cliente, nananã. Eu nunca me motivei pra eu fazer isso por conta própria. Então hoje tá confortável pra mim só trabalhar pra alguém. A pessoa me passa tudo mastigadinho pra onde eu tenho que ir, o que eu tenho que fazer, eu só vou, faço, recebo mais que helper, e um pouco menos do que se fosse tudo por minha conta. E eu tenho achado mais prático.

Clara: Ah, porque você também, no fundo, trabalha menos, né?

Juliana: Não, sim.

Clara: Porque mensagem de cliente, não sei o quê...

Juliana: É, esse negócio de ficar cuidando de cliente, aí é cliente chato, e tem que remarcar, aí você move um, você move outro, aí você quebra a cabeça, aí a cabeça parece que já não funciona direito, porque é tanta coisa, é tanto problema, e é menino, aí você tem que lembrar disso, e daquilo, aí eu, aí, vamos deixar assim, eu só recebo tudo mastigado, eu só vou, faço, entendeu? Tem sido menos, sei lá, estressante assim pra mim. (Entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)

themselves or as a couple. They might eventually hire a *helper*, if needed, or women who work by themselves might have their husbands be their *helpers* on a day they are not working or for a deep cleaning. These are hardly either/or positions in the housecleaning job market, and some Brazilians hold different positions simultaneously. Érika, for example, works in a mix of houses she owns, on commission, and as a *helper*. She sometimes brings along her sister Edna and even her husband Elimar as *helpers*. Bruna and Claudinei work for someone who hires them on commission but who also works their own schedule as a cleaner, with a *helper*. Creusa did houses on commission two days a week and worked as a *helper* the rest of the days.

The price of a given housecleaning service is negotiated between the house owner and the client. The cleaner or company being directly hired by the client usually does an interview and defines a price according to a variety of factors that boil down to how much time and effort it will take to clean that particular house. Érika described it:

“You assess it by the furniture, by the size of the house, if they have pets. Imagine two, three hairy dogs in the house. If they have kids, if they have a baby, if they have toddlers who will spread stuff out [all over the house], you will assess all that. This house of mine that I talked about, if I would price it today, it would be biweekly, every 15 days, \$140, \$150. (...) If it’s weekly it’s cheaper, because you do that house every week. So a house that would be \$100 [a week], you earn \$500 in a month. That varies. If it’s biweekly, \$150 [a week], \$300 in a month. If it’s monthly, \$180. Then they do not want to pay \$180, then you have to assess.”¹⁰⁵ (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Throughout her interview, Érika mentioned prices per house ranging from \$100 (for a weekly small house) to \$1,500 (for a deep cleaning in a mansion). Meanwhile, *helpers* and cleaners on commission do not participate in pricing decisions. Cleaners for houses on

105 “Você avalia a casa pelos móveis, pelo tamanho da casa. Se a pessoa tem bicho... Imagina dois, três cachorros peludos dentro de casa. Se a pessoa tem criança, se tem bebezinho, se tem criança pequena que espalha tudo, você vai ler por isso. Essa minha casa que eu falei, tá, se hoje eu fosse cobrar, seria quinzenal, de 15 em 15 dias. 140, 150. (...) se for semanal é mais barato, porque você vai nessa casa por semana. A que seria 100 dólares, você ganha 500 dólares por mês. Isso aí é variado. Se é quinzenal, 150, 300 dólares por mês. Se é mensal, 180. Aí, não [querem] pagar 180. Aí você tem que avaliar” (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

commission benefit from this price scale as they are paid on a percentage, which can be negotiated with the schedule owner, while *helpers* do not.

Helpers are typically paid a fixed amount per house, regardless of the amount of time and work each house demands. In my fieldwork, *helpers*' wages were mentioned to be in the \$30-50/house range. It may be raised to \$60-70 for deep cleanings and mansions. But overall, for *helpers*, to maximize earnings they need to find a *dona de schedule* with as many houses in a day as possible. If a given schedule owner does not have enough houses, they may leave to try and find a better paying position. Talita explained it:

Talita: Then I even found this guy in Woodstock, a little further away, but over there, because over there they do not have a lot of *helpers*, he had to come here [to pick her up], then I worked with him for three months, but then he has a small schedule, and then I could not stay with him, because then the earnings were low, there was not three houses everyday, sometimes there was a day or two in the week when I could not work with him and I had to find other people, so it did not work out for me to stay with him.

Clara: When you said you earned little with him, was it the amount of work?

Talita: Yes, the amount of work, because the value of house cleaning for *helpers* is usually \$40, depending on the size of the house. Some people pay \$50 or 60, but the normal price really is \$40. But it's because he did not have many houses to be able to support me.¹⁰⁶ (Interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Talita estimated making \$500-600/week as a *helper* overall, but when she worked with the schedule owner she describes above, she had to work weekends to make that much, since with him she usually did only two houses for \$40 each in a day (of course, if he paid her more per house, the number of houses would be less of an issue). Lúcia is in her 60s and, after working in housecleaning for over two decades, has limited her schedule to only a handful of long-term clients. As a result, it is hard for her to find a *helper* who is willing to do only one

106 Talita: Aí encontrei até um rapaz de Woodstock, mais longe um pouquinho, mas lá, como lá também não tem muita ajudante, ele teve que vir, aí eu trabalhei com ele três meses, e aí ele tem um schedule pequeno, e aí eu não pude mais continuar com ele, porque aí o ganho era pouco, não tinha três casas todo dia, às vezes... tinha um dia ou dois na semana que não dava pra trabalhar com ele, aí eu tinha que buscar outras pessoas, aí acabou não dando pra mim continuar com ele.

Clara: Quando você fala que com ele você ganhava pouco, era a quantidade de serviço mesmo?

Talita: É, a quantidade de serviço, porque o valor da limpeza da casa pra ajudante é geralmente 40, dependendo do tamanho das casas. Algumas pessoas pagam 50 ou 60 e o preço normal mesmo é 40. Mas é porque ele não tinha muitas casas pra poder estar suprindo para mim. (Entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA)

or two houses in a day. At the time of our interview, her sister was visiting from Brazil and working as Lúcia's *helper*:

“You know, so, she arrived, like, if I were to go and find someone else outside to help now, it would be hard, because no one wants to go to clean one or two houses. So much so that when they put it there, I think there is a Brazilian group on Facebook, you know, looking for people to work and everything. There are people who lie, even, it's good to talk about this actually, there are people who even lie and say, like, they need someone to help for... I have three houses to clean, I need a [*helper*], I need someone to help me. Then the *dona do schedule* says, like, one person or another cancelled, because sometimes actually there was only one or two, and [the schedule owner] did not want to do them by herself, because [the *helper*] does not want to go to do only one or two houses. Because to be worth their while it has to be three houses, four houses.”¹⁰⁷ (Lúcia, interview 25, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

As described by Talita and Lúcia, the number of houses cleaned on any given day varies a lot, depending on size of houses, if it is a regular or deep cleaning, how many cleaners, how far away houses are from each other, and even worker's preference, in some cases. Of course, the more houses cleaned in a day, the more one earns and there may be pressure from schedule owners to have workers clean as many houses as possible in a day to maximize earnings.

Helpers and cleaners on commission tend to have less control over their workday, the very relationship Juliana appreciates in working for a company. Bruna and Claudinei, for example, receive a list of the houses they will clean the next day from the *dona do schedule* – they have no say over how many houses or the start time in each house, meaning they have to organize chores in this allotted time to make it to the next house on time. Adriana, who in 2023 worked as *helper* without a fixed schedule owner, said she “moves according to the music,” that is, she follows the lead of the *dona do schedule* in terms of work pace, breaks,

107 “Sabe, então, ela chegou, tipo assim, se fosse pra mim, arrumar uma outra pessoa lá fora pra me ajudar agora, vai ser difícil, porque ninguém quer sair pra limpar uma ou duas casas. Tanto que quando eles colocam lá, acho que tem um grupo de brasileiros no Facebook, sabe, procurando gente pra trabalhar e tudo. Tem pessoas até que mentem, é até bom falar disso, tem pessoas até que mentem, que falam assim que tá precisando de uma pessoa pra ajudar por... Eu tenho três casas pra limpar, eu tô precisando de uma, alguém pra me ajudar. Aí a pessoa vai, aí a pessoa, a *dona do schedule* fala assim, uma ou outra pessoa cancelou, porque às vezes na verdade só tinha uma ou duas, e não queria fazer só, porque a pessoa não quer ir para fazer uma ou duas casas só. Porque para compensar tem que ser três casas, quatro casas” (Lúcia, entrevista 25, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

and even eating – if the schedule owner eats, she eats; if they do not, she does not. Creusa did four houses in a day as a *helper* (with another cleaner) and two when cleaning by herself.

Established housecleaners who own their own schedules, like Lúcia or Ludmilla and Márcio, can choose to do fewer houses a day, but that will impact their earnings and make it harder to find *helpers*, should they want to. Established housecleaners can also choose which houses are or are not worth it for them. When asked what had changed most for them in 20+ years of house cleaning, Ludmilla and Márcio remarked on their possibility of choosing which houses they work on: “today we choose our work, before the work chose us,” also saying that at one point they did a sweep of their clients and chose which ones to keep working.

Alongside the number of houses in a day, housecleaning wages depend on fluctuations in finding work. For housecleaners with an established schedule, it is usually more constant, although some variation may happen. For example, in 2025, Schaienne mentioned that she had lost a few clients, who had decided to stop services, which she attributed to rising living costs. In an informal chat with Érika and her cousin Taynara before a Espírito Santo Sunday service, I asked how work was for them. Taynara said her schedule was regular and nothing had changed. In turn, Érika mentioned that some of her clients had briefly interrupted cleanings because they were out of town on vacation, which is normal for summer. These fluctuations also affect the *helper*, if cleaners hire any.

But for *helpers* without a fixed schedule owner, or with a schedule owner that does not employ them every day of the week, there is a different kind of fluctuation. They are constantly in search of work, trying to fill as many days as possible with paid work. Kiko said of his wife Isadora, comparing with their first stay in Marietta in 2019: “(...) my wife too, she’s working as baby-sitter, like, not only as a baby-sitter, whatever [work] comes is

welcome, but there's a lot less work for women. This week she did not work a single day."¹⁰⁸ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA) Later, Isadora came into the living room and sat there with us while I was interviewing her husband. When I asked him what he thought had changed the most between the first time they lived in Marietta (between 2017 and 2019) and the present (2023), she immediately said: "Work scarcity." When I interviewed Tânia, she was roommates with Luciano and Talita. We talked about both Tânia's and Talita's struggle to find work as a housecleaning *helper* without a fixed schedule owner. Tânia considered that Brazilians moving to Georgia from Florida and Texas had saturated the local labor markets:

Clara: How is it bad? Is it hard to get [work]?

Tânia: It's hard, there's a lot of people, right? Lord in heaven! And people keep arriving. I think it's because of Florida, they say New Jersey is bad, too.

Clara: Bad for work?

Tânia: Yes. I think here it went down a lot too, because I think a lot of people came from Florida, they say Texas too, there's a lot of people. Today I didn't work, I stayed home.

Clara: On other weeks you found work every day?

Tânia: Oh, there's days when it's like this, right, Talita?

Talita: [laughs] It's true.

Tânia: It's not going so well, right?

Talita: At the moment no, things are pretty tight.

Clara: So there isn't work every single day?

Tânia: Oh, some days there is, some weeks there is not, no.

Clara: Not even once in the week?

Tânia: No, no, I mean like, one day or another that there's [no work], right? No, always, thank God, something always comes up.

Clara: Three, four days a week you have [work]?

Tânia: Oh yes, four, five. Four, five days there's work. It's one day or another that you can't find anything. Then you have to keep trying...¹⁰⁹ (Interview 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

108 "(...) minha esposa também, ela tá trabalhando como babá, assim, não só de babá, o que ela aparecer, é bem aceito, mas também caiu bastante o trabalho pra mulher. Essa semana mesmo ela não trabalhou nenhum dia" (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

109 Clara: Tá ruim como? Tá difícil de conseguir?

Tânia: Tá difícil, tem muita gente, né? Meu Deus do céu! E tá chegando gente. Que eu acho que é por causa da Flórida. Diz que em New Jersey também tá ruim.

Clara: Tá ruim de trabalho?

Tânia: Tá. Eu acho que aqui caiu bastante também, por causa que acho que é muita gente que veio da Flórida, diz que o Texas também, tem muita gente. Hoje mesmo eu não tive trabalho, fiquei em casa.

Clara: As outras semanas você estava conseguindo trabalho todo dia?

Tânia: Ah, tem dia que a gente fica assim, né, Talita?

Talita: (risos) Verdade.

Tânia: Não tá tão bão, né? A coisa, né?

Talita: No momento não, tá bem apertado aí.

Clara: Então não tem trabalho todo dia, todo dia?

Tânia: Ai, tem dia que tem, semana que não tem, não.

Clara: Nem uma vez na semana?

In this first part, I introduced the *helper*-schedule owner dynamics that are the cornerstone of Brazilian housecleaning labor markets, in Marietta and elsewhere (see eg. Fleischer 2002 about Boston). They resemble, in many ways, the construction labor markets, in which longer-term Brazilian migrants tend to employ recently arrived workers, under unstable, insecure, and precarized conditions. Brazilian housecleaning *helpers* without a fixed employer may be underemployed and have to piece together working days with different schedule owners in order to be employed for as many days as possible, with a direct impact on their overall wages. *Helpers'* wages are put into terms of how many houses they get to clean in a day or week, but hardly ever negotiated in terms of the amount paid per house. With the exception of rare periods of high work demand and low supply of workers – like the Covid-19 quarantine period discussed in Chapter 4 – housecleaning *helpers* do not negotiate per-house rates with their Brazilian employers. Meanwhile, the latter are also constrained by negotiation with clients (discussed in further detail below) and other impersonal capitalist dynamics, including their own work-pay balance.

Furthermore, I want to spotlight the gendered clustering of these labor markets, in which men work construction jobs and women do housecleaning. Men who work as cleaners usually do so with their wives and do not necessarily start out as *helpers*. Besides, the male housecleaners I talked to had been unsuccessful in construction, for different reasons, so housecleaning was not their first choice of labor market. In comparing construction and housecleaning labor markets, my research participants frequently said that construction pays

Tânia: Não. Não. Digo assim, um dia ou outro que não tem, né? Não, sempre... Graças a Deus, alguma coisa aparece.

Clara: Uns três, quatro dias por semana tem?

Tânia: Ah tem, uns quatro, cinco. Quatro, cinco dias, tem. É um dia ou outro que não acha nada. Aí tem que ficar tentando... (Entrevista 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

better, but housecleaning is more stable throughout the year, since a schedule owner tends to keep the same clients with a regular cleaning regimen.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, domestic care work has historically been delegated to racialized women in the US, usually with highly precarized conditions. Brazilian housecleaners should be included in such analysis given the similarities as well as the distinctions it bears to other contexts. On the one hand, Brazilian women are pushed into housecleaning work since that is the largest labor market available to them, unlike men, who typically have the choice between different jobs in construction as well as housecleaning. There are other domestic worker communities in the metropolitan Atlanta area – Latina and Black women, for example – who similarly work cleaning from house to house. While they are less isolated than live-in domestic workers, they are still a hard-to-organize labor force, given not only the multiple and spread-out workplaces. On the other hand, while the Brazilian housecleaner labor market is restricted to co-nationals, much like in construction, relationships between Brazilian housecleaners, *helpers* and *donas de schedule* can be one of competition, abuse (see below) and mistrust. The practices of selling and buying houses, discussed below, and of cleaning on commission, furthers this endogamy in which once a client hires a Brazilian housecleaner, their house tends to stay in the Brazilian labor market, trading hands between different co-national cleaners. Next, I describe how recently arrived Brazilian migrants get started in housecleaning, find clients, and become schedule owners.

Getting started, finding clients and “buying houses”

When incoming Brazilian migrants have existing close connections with housecleaners in Marietta, the newcomers might rely on these connections to teach them the job and help them get started as a *helper* or with their own clients. Many of the migrants I

talked to, if they arrived at times when housecleaning work was plentiful, reported arriving one day and starting work the next. They know they are coming to the US to work these jobs and ready to do them; they are also aware they need to start earning dollars as soon as possible, otherwise they will quickly have to spend whatever money they were able to bring from Brazil. Most Brazilian migrants rely on close contacts for their first jobs in Marietta, which may or may not pan out the way they hope, in which case the WhatsApp groups are the next step. In Adriana's case, she was helped by her cousins and by church friends:

Clara: How did you start working in housecleaning, like? Who was your first job with? How did you get contacts?

Adriana: So, for us... I mean for us like, for me, for my family, it has not been so hard because of the church. I found out that the church here is a door. (...) There are some women at church that work in housecleaning, already have their schedules, what do they do? They need help, *helpers*. So the first time we go as *helpers* until we can get our own houses and then take other Brazilians as *helpers*, so it's a cycle. And that's how I did it. I started with my cousin as *helper*, then I started with other girls from church. I learned, right, because you need to learn the products, you need to learn the sequence, where to start from, all that. It's not just getting there and cleaning like you clean your own house. There's a time sequence for housecleaning, right? So you learn that. So, through these girls from church, I have not been out of work. Sometimes I... And then you, when you go into the housecleaning WhatsApp groups, then there's a whole world in there, right? There's a whole world in there. You post, "oh, I need... I'm available today" and people get in touch.

Clara: Do they really work, the groups?

Adriana: They do, yes, WhatsApp groups. I think I have some four housecleaning WhatsApp groups.¹¹⁰ (Interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

110 Clara: Como que você começou o trabalho da faxina, assim? O primeiro trabalho foi com quem? Como que você montou os contatos?

Adriana: Então, pra gente... eu falo pra gente assim, pra mim, pra minha família, não tem que ficar tão difícil por conta da igreja. Eu descobri que a igreja aqui é uma porta. As pessoas vêm do Brasil já com contato de uma igreja. E aí as pessoas muitas vezes não vêm na igreja procurar Deus. Não vêm na igreja procurar salvação, perdão de pecado, nada disso, elas vêm procurar ajuda e elas encontram. Porque na igreja tem pessoas, por exemplo, que estão 30 anos aqui na Georgia, né, e aí elas te direcionam em tudo, qual visto você quer tirar, qual visto você quer fazer, ó, você tem que tirar sua carteira, vai em tal lugar, olha, você precisa fazer extensão, vai na advogada tal, ó você quer trabalhar, seja helper de fulano e aí... tem algumas mulheres na igreja que trabalham com faxina, já tem o schedule, o que que elas fazem? Elas precisam de ajuda, de helper. E aí as primeiras vezes a gente vai como helper até conseguir nossas casas e aí pegar outras brasileiras como helper, então é um ciclo. E é assim que eu consegui. Eu comecei com a minha prima como helper, depois eu comecei com outras meninas da igreja. Aprendi, né, porque você tem que aprender produtos, você precisa aprender a sequência, por onde começa, tudo isso. Não é só você chegar e limpar como você limpa sua casa. Existe um cronograma da limpeza, né? E aí você aprende isso. Então, através dessas meninas da igreja, eu não tenho ficado sem trabalho. De vez em quando eu... E aí você, quando você entra nos grupos do WhatsApp da limpeza, aí ali tem um mundo, né? Ali tem um mundo. Você coloca, ah, estou precisando... estou disponível hoje. As pessoas entram em contato.

Clara: Funciona, mesmo? Os grupos.

Adriana: Funciona, sim. Grupo do WhatsApp. Eu acho que eu tenho uns quatro grupos de WhatsApp de limpeza. (Entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Schianne also explained how much help she got in the beginning:

“So I arrived here [in Marietta], I went with Juliana, she taught me how to work but I was paid for those days, for the week. So in the first week, (...) I arrived on a Tuesday, I worked Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. And then she already introduced me, on the weekend she already introduced me to couples she’s friends with, who also worked in housecleaning, who already worked here. And we chatted, it was always easy for me to make friends, like, and I’m also not afraid to ask, to hustle for things and really ask for work. So the girls got together to help me. So given I could not keep working with Juliana, because she also works by herself, right, she does not have her own houses to work, right, she’s a service provider too, so she works on commission. And then her, ‘look, you can’t go with me.’ But then another one took me [as a *helper*], recommended me, that in my second week here. In my third week, one of them, who I became friends with, we’re still friends today. She knew a lady who owns a company and who by coincidence was looking for someone and she recommended me to that person and I work for her here until this day. And then I started working right from the beginning.”¹¹¹ (Schianne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

As mentioned before, when *helpers* start, they may struggle a lot more than Schianne and Adriana did to find stable and constant employment. Their “close contact” may turn out to be neglectful – failing to fulfill promises made while the prospective migrant was still in Brazil – or exploitative – encouraging a friend to join them in the United States and then paying below-average wages, committing wage-theft, or other forms of financial abuse. Creusa, for example, was encouraged to move to Marietta by a long-time friend, who was godmother to Creusa’s twins and wanted to put a schedule together, with Creusa as her *helper*. Creusa lived in her friend’s basement, which Creusa renovated with her own money. Eventually, the friend started complaining about the twins and said they would have to leave the house, attempting at first to convince Creusa to send her daughters back to Brazil and stay

111 “E aí, cheguei aqui, fui com a Juliana, ela foi me ensinar a trabalhar, mas eu recebi por aqueles dias, pela semana. Então a primeira semana, eu cheguei na quarta-feira, trabalhei com ela... Cheguei na terça, eu trabalhei quarta, quinta, sexta e sábado. E aí nisso, ela já me apresentou, no final da semana ela já me apresentou pra casais de amigos dela, que também já trabalhavam na limpeza, que já trabalhavam aqui. E a gente conversando, eu sempre tive muita facilidade de fazer amizade, assim, e também não tenho medo nem vergonha de pedir, correr atrás das coisas e pedir mesmo trabalho. E aí as meninas se uniram para me ajudar. Aí como eu não podia ficar trabalhando com a Jordana, porque ela também trabalha sozinha, ela também, né, ela não tem casa própria para ela trabalhar, né, ela é prestadora de serviço também. E aí ela trabalha a comissão. E aí ela, olha, não tem como você ir comigo. Mas aí uma ou outra foi me levando, foi me indicando, isso na segunda semana aqui. Na terceira semana uma delas, que a gente acabou fazendo um pouco de amizade, a gente é amiga até hoje, ela conhecia uma moça que tem uma companhia e que estava assim coincidentemente procurando alguém e ela me indicou para essa pessoa e inclusive eu trabalho para ela até hoje aqui. E aí eu já comecei a trabalhar assim de início” (Schianne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

by herself in Marietta. At the same time, Creusa's friend hired more people to work her schedule and, in doing so, lowered Creusa's pay. Creusa was able to find a new employer in the WhatsApp groups before she was able to move out of this person's basement, only a month before our interview.

Others struggle to simply find an employer, someone with a big enough workload to keep them on as *helpers*. Talita, for example, learned the job from her sister in her first days in Georgia, but was soon told she needed to find someone who could have her on a permanent basis, which she looked for in WhatsApp groups. At that time, Talita was staying in Roswell with her sister where, according to Talita, it was easier to find work as a *helper* because schedule owners who live in Roswell (see Figure C) prefer to pick someone up from the area than to drive down to Marietta to pick up a *helper*. At the same time, most recently arrived migrants live in the city of Marietta, where it is easier to rent apartments, therefore it also concentrates *helper* availability. This made it harder for Talita to find *helper* work after moving down from her sister's home in Roswell to an apartment in Marietta.

Tânia talked about her struggle to find housecleaning work as a *helper* due to being locked out of many WhatsApp groups. Right before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Tânia went to Brazil for a visit and ended up staying four years. On her return, she did not have a US phone number anymore and was not accepted into work WhatsApp groups because of having a number with the Brazilian area code. This may be because many of these WhatsApp groups become saturated with members and reach their limit, so refusing Brazilian phone numbers – presumably from people who have not left Brazil yet and therefore might be taking the place of someone actually looking for work – might be a way to keep numbers under control. Because Tânia was completely out of money - “could not afford a pound of sugar,” in her own words – she had no means to buy a US SIM card. A Brazilian T-Mobile

employee took pity on her after hearing her story and paid for her SIM card, so she could finally join the WhatsApp groups and look for work. Before WhatsApp groups had taken over, word-of-mouth through friends and church networks was even more important for out-of-work *helpers*, as well as tear-off advertisements placed on Brazilian businesses by both workers and employers. Today, networks and recommendations remain important for both *helpers* and subcontractors looking to find employers or clients.

Helpers looking to increase income and move forward in the housecleaning labor market need to fulfill certain conditions to start cleaning on commission and/or become a schedule owner. First, to go from *helper* to cleaning on commission or owning houses, a housecleaner needs to be able to drive, have a car (or access to one), and her own working materials, including a vacuum, a carpet cleaner, cleaning products and rags etc. To clean on commission, you have to know someone, like Schaienne described, or you may be able to find schedule owners looking for cleaners on commission in the WhatsApp groups. For cleaners who want their own houses, the biggest challenge is to find clients, which involves direct contact with Americans and accessing people who want housecleaning services but do not have a cleaner or a recommendation. Brazilian housecleaners might advertise, but that requires spare money to be able to invest.

This partly explains the emergence of a distinctively Brazilian housecleaning market, in which clients or “houses” are bought and sold among housecleaners. This idea of property over a client is also what justifies the on-commission cleaning arrangements. I first heard the phrase “buying houses” from Lúcia, with some surprise and confusion:

Lúcia: So I started over there [in Boston] too, I started my house schedule, I bought some houses, bought the business, bought clients...

Clara: What do you mean by buying houses?

Lúcia: So, you buy a house, you [say] ‘I’ll buy that house.’ You buy the business, practically, the clients, let’s say. We, like, there was a person who was moving away and she had some

clients, I think she had six or eight clients, houses that she cleaned, so she passed them to me, passed like, she sold them to me, right?¹¹² (Interview 25, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

What Érika described in detail – that the price of a house to clean is three times its monthly earnings – seems to be the overall standard.

Clara: So what do you do, when you start as a *helper*, to move from *helper* to... How do you say, the main person?

Érika: Clara, this world of *helpers* is crazy. (...) [Pretend] you're a schedule owner. You have 30 houses. You want to pass... there are two options. One is that you pass houses on commission, you hire me, you say, 'Érika, I have two houses, do you want to clean them for me? Ok then. You clean and I'll take 30%.' (...) I clean that house, you take 30% from what I make. If the house is \$100, \$30 is yours.

Clara: \$30 for the contact, let's say.

Érika: Yes. [I] clean two \$300 houses, \$60 are yours without you doing anything [sic]. A lot of schedule owners stop working and have 100 houses and live off that. (...) And there's the route of selling houses. You're a company owner and you sell houses. Example, you're a schedule owner and I say to you, 'Clara, do you want to sell me some houses? Ok, I'll buy them.' You sell me that house, this house is \$150 biweekly, in a month it gives you \$300, so it'll cost \$900, you pay the earnings of the house in three months. The earnings of the house in three months. You'll make \$900 in this house [selling it]. And I buy it from you and you lose contact with the client, you give me their address, phone number, everything from the client, and I start cleaning that house. My first house. I want to put my schedule together with you. You're a company owner, you have a lot of houses. I start visiting your houses, 'no, I want to have this one, I want this one,' etc. You keep buying, you put together your schedule, you understand? The [schedule owner] profits off you, *nossa* [see Appendix B: Glossary], and you keep buying houses, you put your own schedule together, and soon enough you have 50, 40 [houses], and I'll be your *helper*, someone will help you. And also, I buy the house and the client recommends me. The client recommends me, 'oh, I need a recommendation, you can recommend me to a friend, if you know someone.' [The client] goes and recommends you. I have a friend who built her entire schedule with one client. This client recommended her, put her contact in the neighborhood group, *minha filha*, she has clients coming out of her ears and even gives me

112 Lúcia: Aí eu comecei lá [em Boston] também, comecei meu schedule de casas, eu comprei umas casas, comprei o próprio negócio, comprei clientes...

Clara: O que a senhora chama de comprar casa?

Lúcia: Então... Você compra a casa, você... vou comprar aquela casa ali. Você compra o negócio, praticamente, os clientes, vamos falar. A gente, igual, tinha uma pessoa que ia mudar e ela tinha uns clientes, acho que ela tinha uns seis ou oito clientes, casas que ela limpava, aí ela passou pra mim, passou assim, me vendeu, né? (Interview 25, 22/09/23, Marietta GA)

houses on commission, sometimes I'll do houses on commission for her.¹¹³ (Interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

In some cases, people will “give” houses or even entire schedules to someone else, meaning not charging someone for the “rights” over a cleaning job. Ludmilla and Márcio, for example, “won” their schedule from an American woman they used to work for. They worked for her on commission and, after having their first child, needed to work for themselves to increase their income. Their employer then let them have all of the clients they worked with so they could keep working those houses. Other people were given housecleaning schedules by a close person who was returning home to Brazil.

Later, Érika described how this transition from one housecleaner to next takes place in such a way that clients are unaware of their “house” being bought and sold:

Clara: But then the clients...

Érika: They do not know.

Clara: They also do not choose who will clean their house. One day someone else just shows up.

113Clara: E aí como é que faz para quem começa como helper, para sair de ser helper, para virar... Como é que fala, a pessoa principal?

Érika: Minha filha, essa é uma história muito interessante, [incompreensível] você, Clara. É, você tem... Clara, é uma loucura, esse mundo de helper. Você é helper, você é dono de um schedule. Você tem 30 casas. Você quer passar... são duas opções. Você quer passar casa a comissão, você me contrata, fala, Érika, eu tenho duas casas, você quer limpar para mim? Então tá. Você limpa e eu te tiro 30%. Você limpa aquela casa, eu limpo a casa, você tira 30% do que eu ganhar. Se a casa é 100 dólares, 30 dólares é seu.

Clara: 30 pelo contato, digamos assim.

Érika: Isso. Você limpa duas casas de 300 dólares, 60 dólares é seu sem você fazer nada. Muita dona de schedule para de trabalhar e tem 100 casas e vive de isso. Outra coisa que acontece, você ganha mais se você não vai de helper, você limpa uma casa, 300 dólares, ela fica com 60 e você, 240. Você limpa duas casas no seu dia. Tem esse caminho das helpers. E tem o caminho que você vende casas. Você é dona de uma empresa e você vende a casa. Exemplo, você é dona do schedule e eu falo assim, Clara, você quer vender umas casa, tá bom, compro. Você vende aquela casa, essa casa que é 150, 150 quinzenal, no mês ela te custa 300, então ela vai custar pra você 900 dólares, você paga três meses o valor da casa. Três meses o valor da casa. Você vai ganhar nessa casa 900 dólares. E eu compro essa casa de você e você perde o contato com o cliente, me dá o endereço, o telefone, tudo do cliente. E eu começo a limpar essa casa. Minha primeira casa. Eu quero montar meu schedule com você. Você é dona da empresa, você tem várias casas. Eu começo a visitar suas casas, tal. Não, eu quero ficar com essa, quero ficar com essa, tal. Você vai comprando, você vai montando o seu schedule, entendeu? A pessoa vai lucrando em cima de você, nossa, e você vai comprando as casas, você monta o seu próprio schedule, daqui a pouco você tá com 50, 40, e eu como sua... uma helper, alguém te dá uma mão em você. E também tem... eu compro a casa e o cliente me indica. O cliente me indica, ah, eu tô precisando de indicação. Você pode me indicar algum amigo, se souber. Ela vai e te indica. Eu tenho uma amiga que construiu o schedule dela todinho com uma cliente. Essa cliente indicou, botou o contato dela no bairro, no grupo do bairro. Minha filha, ela tem cliente pra dar e vender e ainda me dá casa comissão, às vezes faço casa a comissão pra ela. (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA)

Érika: That's right. Like, that girl I go with sometimes, Nanda, when I clean houses on commission with her, she goes with me two to three times. I meet the client, I'll say what I can in English, 'look, this is Érika, she'll be cleaning your house, she also studies, she's in college, I can't clean for you anymore because I'm pressed for time but I'll always be in touch with you, but she'll be the one cleaning, is that ok? It's going to be on this day and time, the time she has available.' And I already went with her three times, the client knows me, and so it goes, Clara. (...) But there are clients who say they don't want [the new cleaner], Clara. It never happened to me, thank God. (...) But there are people who complain, 'I didn't like the person who came, I don't want them to come anymore, if you can't come, then I don't want anybody else to come.' It does, then the person loses the house, you understand? Or they fit it into their schedule, just so they won't lose that client. These houses are never...

Clara: The client doesn't...

Érika: They don't know, they don't know, Clara. Pretend you work for a client for a year, you don't want that house anymore, you want to sell it to me. Either you go there and introduce me, 'look, I can't come anymore, Érika will take my place,' this and that. They may accept or they may not accept and say 'no, I don't want [this new cleaner].' You ask them. Mine, my sister already knew them, she already went with me [when Érika was pregnant her sister Edna took over cleaning her houses]. So for them it was all beautiful, you understand, no one had any problems. But that happens, *minha filha*, it's a market, selling houses. It's a market, it's crazy. Weird, right? Different, right? I think a lot of people don't even imagine that's how it is.¹¹⁴ (Interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

This "house" market is also rife with opportunities for scheming, theft and further exploitation. One of the main issues is that there is no guarantee that a client, once they are "bought," will indeed want to keep the new housecleaner, as Érika narrated above. Lúcia described losing some of the clients she bought:

¹¹⁴Clara: Mas aí os clientes...

Érika: Não sabem.

Clara: ...não escolhem quem vai limpar a casa deles também. Porque um dia aparece outra lá.

Érika: Isso aí. Tipo assim, essa menina que eu vou com ela de vez em quando, a Nádia, quando eu vou limpar a casa com ela a comissão, ela vai duas a três vezes comigo. Eu conheço cliente, o que eu sei falar em inglês eu falo, ó, essa é a Érika, ela vai estar limpando a sua casa, ela também estuda, ela tá na faculdade, eu não vou poder mais te estar limpando porque o meu tempo tá curto mas eu vou estar sempre em contato com você, mas quem vai te estar limpando é ela, tudo bem pra você? Ah, vai ser dia tal, tal hora, o horário que ela tem disponível e eu já fui com ela três vezes. Beleza? Aí o cliente me conhece, por aí vai, Clara. [fazendo voz de bebê para o b, incompreensível] para fazer assim, ó. [fazendo voz de bebê para o b, incompreensível] Mas tem cliente que fala que não quer, Clara. Comigo nunca aconteceu, graças a Deus. Nunca aconteceu. Até umas casas dela, que eu limpo. Ninguém nunca, graças a Deus, não reclamou. Mas tem pessoas que reclamam, não gostei da pessoa que veio, eu não quero mais que venha. Se você não puder vir, eu não quero mais que venha ninguém. Tem, a pessoa perde a casa. Entendeu? Ou então encaixa no schedule, só pra não perder aquele cliente. Isso sim. Essas vendas de casa nunca é... nunca é...

Clara: O cliente não...

Érika: Não sabe. Não sabe, Clara. Faz de conta que você trabalha com cliente um ano, você não quer mais essa casa, quer vender ela pra mim. Ou você vai lá e me apresenta, ó, não vou poder estar vindo mais, a Érika vai tá atuando, tal e tal. Ela pode aceitar ou ela pode não aceitar, falar, não quero. Você pede pra eles. Os meus, a minha irmã já conhecia, minha irmã já ia comigo. Então pra eles [incompreensível] tá tudo lindo, entendeu, não teve problema com ninguém. Mas tem isso aí, minha filha, é um comércio, venda de casa. É um comércio, é uma loucura. Estranho, né? Diferente, né? Acho que muita gente não imagina que é assim. (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA)

Clara: Because when you buy the schedule, buy the house, you have no guarantee that the client will keep you?

Lúcia: There is not. Like, it depends on the person you buy from. Today people are smarter. Because it's not fair for you to pay, let's say, \$1000, \$1,500 for a client, a house and, if they do not stay with you. So today people talk and sometimes even write it down [make a written contract]. If I don't get to clean this house, they give me my money back. Because when I bought these houses [her Atlanta schedule], I lost [clients] and we hadn't talked about it. There was a client who was moving, when I bought it, and they said they didn't know, and this and that, I cleaned like two, three times or... I know I think I lost two, three clients on this purchase, you know, of clients. Like, you get other references and everything, but there's no guarantee, like, that they will keep [the new cleaner], sometimes they'll stay for one, two times and you lose [the client].

Clara: Because when you buy the client how do they know it's going to change [to a new cleaner]? Because then she doesn't choose [the cleaner]?

Lúcia: She doesn't choose, we trick her. Like, this friend of mine when I bought [houses from her], she said, but she didn't lie, she just said, 'look, I'm going to Brazil, I'll spend some time there,' because indeed they had no children, they were going to adopt. 'We're going to Brazil, we'll be there a while, to adopt and everything, and Lúcia will take my place,' you know? Oh my, but it's horrible because, especially when [the clients] are used to [a cleaner], for them to adapt to you is hard and like, I kept some clients and I had to be like, sometimes, like, do things I didn't even have to do, right? Like, make an effort, be more congenial, right? Do a job that... sometimes better than the person used to do, sometimes even some extra things, like.¹¹⁵ (Interview 25, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Another risk of buying houses, as Érika described, is for the seller to “steal back” the house they sold:

Érika: [The person who sells a house] might, for example, they went to Brazil, lived there, came back, and take his schedule back from you. You have no guarantees. That happens a lot, that happens a lot, Clara, that you buy a house and then the person [who sold it to you] comes and steals it from you, takes it from you, because you have no guarantees.

Clara: Because they already have [the client's] phone number.

115Clara: Porque quando você compra o schedule, compra a casa, você não tem nenhuma garantia que aquele cliente vai continuar com você?

Lúcia: Não tem. Assim, depende da pessoa que você compra. Hoje as pessoas estão mais espertas. Porque não é justo você pagar, vamos falar, mil dólares, mil e quinhentos dólares por um cliente, uma casa, e... se ela não ficar com você. Aí hoje as pessoas conversam e às vezes até põem no papel. Se eu não chegar a limpar essa casa, eles devolvem o meu dinheiro. Porque quando eu comprei também essas casas, eu perdi. E a gente não tinha conversado isso. Tinha uma cliente que tava mudando, quando eu comprei, e eles falaram que não sabiam, não sei o que, eu limpei tipo duas, três vezes, ou... eu sei que eu acho que eu perdi uns dois, três clientes nessa compra, sabe, de cliente. Assim, você consegue outras referências e tudo, mas não tem nenhuma garantia, assim, que vai continuar, às vezes fica uma, duas vezes e você perdeu.

Clara: Porque quando você compra a cliente como que ela fica sabendo que vai trocar? Porque aí ela não escolhe.

Lúcia: Ela não escolhe, a gente engana ela. Assim, essa minha amiga quando eu comprei, ela falou, mas ela não mentiu, ela só falou olha eu vou pro Brasil, vou passar um tempo lá porque realmente eles não tinham filhos, eles iam adotar. A gente vai pro Brasil, passar um tempo por lá, adotar e tal e a Lúcia vai ficar no meu lugar, sabe? Nossa, mas é horrível porque, principalmente quando eles estão acostumados com uma pessoa, pra eles se adaptar a você, é difícil e assim, eu fiquei... com algumas clientes e eu tive assim que ser... às vezes assim, fazer coisas que eu nem precisava fazer, né? Tipo, desdobrar, ser mais simpática, né? Fazer um trabalho que... melhor do que a pessoa fazia, às vezes até algumas coisas extras e assim. (Entrevista 25, 22/09/23, Marietta GA)

Érika: They already have everything, have the contact. Like, an example. I wanted to put my schedule together. Bia recommended Silvane to me, that's her name. 'Oh, Silvane, my friend, she has a schedule, she sells houses, don't you want [to buy]?' Ok, I had some money saved up, I didn't want to go as a *helper* anymore, as a *helper* it's very grievous. (...) Then I got in touch with [Silvane], I will [buy houses] (...) I started going with her, she started showing me her houses. Then I'd go, clean the house and all, I liked it, 'oh, I'll buy it,' I'd pay \$900, \$1100, depending on the size of the house and how many times a week, a month. Then, ok, I bought the house and all. But I noticed the clients would not recommend me [to other clients] and the houses were all in the same neighborhood. I started to think that was weird. And that things that were in one's house were in another's, like they were relatives. And she was selling me houses in that area. I said like, 'Silvane, are you getting in touch with the clients whose houses you're selling me?' She, 'I am, that's how I work.' I said, 'you sold me the house, you have no right over the house anymore. If you sell me a bed, the bed is mine, you have no right to go and lay down on the bed. It's mine, you sold it to me, you don't have to be in touch with my clients.' She, 'No, that's how I work.' Then that was it, I said like, 'so please don't get in touch with me anymore, I won't buy any more houses, don't get in touch with my clients. If I learn you're getting in touch with my clients I'll be very upset with you,' and I cut her off. So you see the cunning of this person. I'd go, clean the houses, and she asked for recommendations from my clients that she had sold to me.¹¹⁶ (Interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

"Stealing houses" is also possible for people who are working on commission and it is a risk that "house owners" take when hiring cleaners in this way. Clients from houses that Creusa cleaned on commission, for example, pay the "house owner" directly, not her, making the possibility of "stealing the house" a bit harder. She did not always have the client's phone number. Schaienne also said that, even though "stealing" houses on commission is possible,

116 Érika: E ele pode, exemplo, foi pro Brasil, morou lá, voltar e pegar o schedule dele de volta de você. Você não tem nenhuma garantia. Tem muito isso, tem muito isso, Clara. De você comprar a casa e depois a pessoa vem e rouba de você, pega de você. Porque você não tem garantia nenhuma.

Clara: Porque já tem o telefone da pessoa.

Érika: Já tem tudo, tem o contato. Igual, um exemplo. Eu queria montar o meu schedule. A Fabi me indicou a Silvane, o nome dela. Ah, a Silvane, a amiga minha, ela tem um schedule, ela vende casas, você não tem vontade? Tá bom, eu tinha um dinheirinho guardado, eu não queria ir mais como helper, como helper é muito sofrido. Claro, às vezes eu vou com a Nádia, a Nádia é maravilhosa, uma amiga minha, nossa, a gente se dá super bem no [incompreensível]. Chega a ser um dia mais alegre quando você vai com uma pessoa boa. Aí, depois entrei em contato com ela [Silvane], eu vou. Aí, ela falou assim, eu vou, não, eu quero conhecer a Silvane e tal, comecei a ir com ela, começou a me apresentar casas. Aí eu ia, limpava a casa e tal, gostava, ah, vou comprar. Pagava 900, 1.100, dependendo do volume da casa. E quantas vezes eu ia por semana, por mês. Aí, ok. Eu comprava a casa, tal. Mas eu via que os clientes não me indicavam e que as casas eram tudo da mesma redondeza. Eu comecei a achar isso estranho. E que coisas que tinha na casa de uma, tinha na casa de outra, como se fossem parentes. E ela me vendendo casas em volta ali. Eu falei assim, Silvane, você tá entrando em contato com os clientes que você está me vendendo a casa? Ela, estou, assim que eu trabalho. Eu falei, você me vendeu a casa, você não tem direito mais sobre a casa. Se você me vende uma cama, a cama é minha, você não tem direito de ir lá e deitar na cama. É minha, você me vendeu, você não tem que ter contato com os clientes. Ela não, mas é assim que eu trabalho, assim que eu faço. E aí pronto, eu falei assim, então por favor, não entra mais em contato comigo, não vou comprar mais casas, não entre em contato mais com meus clientes. Se eu souber que você está entrando em contato com os meus clientes, eu vou ficar muito chateada com você. E cortei [incompreensível]. Pra você ver a malandragem da pessoa. Eu ia lá, limpava as casas, e ela pedia indicações aos meus clientes que que ela tinha me vendido. (Entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA)

she considered it unethical and also risky, since the house owner can post the cleaners name, picture, and phone number in the WhatsApp groups, accusing them of “house theft.”

Clara: Is it possible [to “steal the house”]?

Schianne: It’s possible. There are people who’ll go [to the client] and say, do you like my work? Because, for example, there are people whose houses I clean, like today, the house I cleaned. They don’t accept [another cleaner]. Since I’ve been working in this [cleaning] company, there was one time I had stopped doing this house, and [the clients] didn’t accept it. They didn’t like it, they didn’t adapt to the other [cleaner]. And I went back to doing it, but it’s a really big house, so I usually only do that [in a day]. But then they asked me to go back. But for example, one day I leave this company, I don’t have the guts to go to [these clients], but I could, for example, right? But I don’t think it’s ethical to say, ‘oh, so if you like my work, if you prefer me, I’m leaving the company, if you want I can, I’ll clean for you for the same price.’ That happens a lot here. So, but like, right, it’s that thing, is it worth it? Because that could hurt me in the future, you understand? For example, the person from this company... Here people do that, they’ll put your picture in the [WhatsApp] group, ‘steals clients,’ they do, they do it a lot [laughs].

Clara: I’ve seen it.

Schianne: So, I can’t risk it [laughs], it’s not worth it.

Clara: Because then you can do that and get one house, but then you’re burned for other houses.

Schianne: Yes, for other houses. For example, if I need more houses on commission, who will hire me? You understand? No one. So, like, it’s really not worth it. So, we don’t usually do it [laughs].¹¹⁷ (Interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

To many who were working as *helpers* at the time of our interview, future plans around work involved finding houses to clean on commission or to buy, if they had already been able to buy a car to get to clients’ houses. However, in 2023, many said it was hard to find houses for sale. To Bruna, finding houses to buy was hard because of many Brazilian

117 Clara: É possível [roubar a casa]?

Schianne: É possível. Tem gente que chega e fala, olha, você gosta do meu trabalho? Porque tem, por exemplo, tem pessoas que eu faço a casa, igual hoje, a casa que eu fiz. Eles não aceitam colocar... Enquanto eu trabalho nessa companhia, teve uma vez que eu não estava fazendo mais essa casa, eles não aceitaram. Não gostaram, não se adaptaram com a outra pessoa. E eu voltei a fazer, só que é uma casa muito grande, então geralmente eu só faço ela. Mas aí eles pediram que eu voltasse pra lá. Mas por exemplo, se eu sair um dia da companhia eu não tenho coragem de virar pra eles, mas eu poderia, por exemplo, né? Mas eu não acho ético. Falar, ah então, se você gosta do meu trabalho, você deu preferência pra mim, eu vou sair da companhia. Se você quiser eu posso... faço pra você o mesmo preço. Isso acontece muito aqui. Aí, mas assim, né? Aí é aquele negócio, vale a pena? Porque isso pode me prejudicar lá na frente, entende? Por exemplo, a pessoa da companhia... Aqui o pessoal faz isso, joga sua foto lá no grupo, “rouba cliente”, faz, faz muito [risos].

Clara: Eu já vi.

Schianne: Então, eu não posso arriscar [risos], não vale a pena, não vale a pena.

Clara: Porque também você pode fazer isso e ganhar uma casa, mas aí você se queima para outras casas.

Schianne: É, para outras casas. Por exemplo, se eu precisar de mais casa a comissão, quem que vai me contratar? Entende? Não vai. Então, assim, não vale a pena mesmo. Então, a gente não costuma fazer não [risos]. (Entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

migrants arriving in the Marietta area looking for cleaning work. She heard that, before, *donas de schedule* were after *helpers* and could not find them but at the time, there were too many *helpers* available.

In sum, practice of “selling jobs” is also present in housecleaning labor markets, in the Brazilian-specific arrangement of selling houses and schedules. Here too there is a form of rent extracted from a sense of ownership over clients and the “right” to clean their houses, expressed not only in these practices but also on quotes such as Érika describing her conflict with Nanda, who sold her houses but stayed in touch with the clients. That same logic sustains the practice of passing houses on commission. In part, the unavailability of houses for sale that Bruna describes can be attributed to changing dynamics in the Brazilian migration process. Most of my research participants who bought or were given a schedule did so mainly from migrants who were returning to Brazil. That practice seems to have been replaced by passing houses on commission, since many Brazilian migrants stay in Marietta instead of returning to Brazil. Many also prefer to put houses on commission instead of selling them to increase their income. Overall, these multiple practices of employment create differentiated working conditions within the community, in which time in the US plays a big role in terms of where people are in labor market hierarchies. To move beyond the *helper* level, Brazilian migrants need some starting capital to obtain a driver’s license, a car, and cleaning equipment and products. This money may be accumulated in the US or brought from Brazil, in a way that carries class positionality in Brazil into the US.

Typical working day and tensions between helpers and donas de schedule

On a typical working day, cleaners leave their home, pick up their *helper* if needed, and drive from house to house doing their cleaning. The working day is very fast-paced so

that they are able to do a certain number of houses in a day and keep the appointments arranged with clients. Working days may start early in the morning, with a first cleaning at 8am and cleaners leaving home earlier to drive to it. A lot of time in the working day may be spent on driving between houses. While travel time between houses varies, I've heard of trips as long as an hour and a half each way. It's not always possible for housecleaners to arrange it so their daily routes are the most efficient, since it depends on clients' preference for certain days of the week. The number of houses cleaned in a day, as well as time spent in each house, varies according to countless factors, to be discussed later.

Cleaners typically start early in the morning but the end time of the working day varies. Many clients do not want cleaners in their homes at the end of the day, limiting the number of cleanings that can be scheduled in late afternoons and evenings. Creusa, for example, comes home between 3:30pm and 4pm when she works as a *helper* and between 4:30pm and 5pm when she works by herself. On the other hand, Taynara leaves home at 5pm to clean an office floor after hours, while Bruna and Claudinei mentioned coming home at 10pm on some days. Housecleaners with children and more control over their own schedules may set it up to finish work on time to pick them up at school or day care, like Juliana:

Clara: How many houses do you do in a day?

Juliana: Maximum two, sometimes three. But usually it's one, two.

Clara: Also because you work alone, right?

Juliana: Yes. And I still have to come home on time, right, to pick up the children, they have school. So I can't do more. And also because I do not want to.¹¹⁸ (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

During the day, housecleaners typically have no breaks other than driving time, with no designated lunch period. For food, they bring whatever they can from home: sometimes

118 Clara: Quantas casas você faz por dia?

Juliana: No máximo duas, às vezes três. Mas normal é uma, duas.

Clara: Porque você também faz sozinha, né?

Juliana: Sim. E ainda tenho que chegar a tempo de buscar, né, as crianças, tem escola. Aí não dá pra fazer mais. E também porque eu não quero. (Entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)

people have the extra time and energy to cook and bring a full meal, and sometimes they will bring a sandwich, some fruit, or a light meal. Eating may be easier for people who work in pairs if they can alternate so one eats while the other drives. This is in stark contrast with Brazil, where workers usually are allowed a one- or even two-hour lunchtime break, during which they eat a full meal, go to the bank, and run errands. Creusa described her lunch habits:

“You have to rush through it, sometimes you do not even have time for a proper lunch. When I go on commission, sometimes I do not have lunch, because I’m alone, but when I go as a *helper*, there’s time for lunch. But we have lunch inside the car, heat it up, sometimes we’ll even eat our food cold.”¹¹⁹ (Creusa, interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Bruna usually feeds her husband Claudinei while he drives: “Now, in housecleaning, lunch, I’m driving and the wife is giving me food in the mouth, you know? Luckily it’s good, right, receiving food in the mouth [laughs]”¹²⁰ (Claudinei, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA).

As in construction, there is frequent tension between *helpers* and schedule owners over working conditions beyond wages. Similarly to Cleiton, who is a construction subcontractor, Jandira, as a housecleaning company owner, thinks that some Brazilians struggle to find work in Marietta due to “not wanting to work:”

Clara: I’ve seen that people who just arrived have had a lot of trouble entering the job market. Because I think it’s so many people, so many people in [the WhatsApp] groups saying ‘I’m available,’ this and that, that some people when they do not have a strong network for recommendations, it takes them months to secure a job that it’s every day or almost every day.

Jandira: And like, the other thing that people who are in the same position as me, for example, they say that a lot of the people who are coming today, they already, like, they don’t want to work well, they want, their goal is to make money, you understand? But sometimes they forget

119 “Você tem que fazer correndo, às vezes nem dá tempo de você almoçar direito. Quando eu vou de... a comissão tem vezes que eu não almoço, porque eu sozinha, mas quando eu vou de helper, dá tempo pra almoçar. Mas a gente almoça dentro do carro, esquento, às vezes come até comida fria” (Creusa, entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA).

120 “Agora, na limpeza, o almoço, eu tô dirigindo e a esposa tá colocando a comida na minha boca, sabe? Ainda bem que é bom né, que recebe comida na boca [risos]” (Claudinei, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

that to make the money they have to work and work well, right? So, there's that also, right?¹²¹ (Interview 19, 12/09/23, Sandy Springs GA)

Employers' comments on workers who "want the money but do not want to work" refer to a conflict over *helpers*' and on-commission cleaners' workload. Other tensions come from employers' control over their *helpers*' work. In going along with *helpers*, *donas de schedule* have control over the division of tasks and overall working process. Talita described how the labor division varied across different schedule owners that she worked with:

"Sometimes, you find people who, I would not say, like, do not care, but do a good job quickly and leave. And there are people who want to stay longer, be more detailed, and end up staying longer in the house, so that also is very tiring. If you have to stay longer looking to be more detailed, it's very tiring. My work with this guy was just cleaning bathrooms and kitchen and with floors, I only vacuumed the kitchen floor. Vacuuming the carpets, vacuuming the rest of the house, dusting and mopping was all him. Then each person has a different way, sometimes I have to help vacuum the carpets, finish every floor together, so if I finish first the bathrooms or the kitchen, then I'll go and help in something else that they tell me to do."¹²² (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Creusa's experience was also one of little control over her own work. She described:

Clara: When you go as a *helper*, what part of housecleaning work do you do?

Creusa: The bathrooms and floor, kitchen.

Clara: And the other person does...?

Creusa: Dusting and vacuuming [hard floors], a bit of carpet vacuuming. We [*helpers*] get the heaviest jobs.

Clara: So there's also that, right? The person who brings a *helper* can get the best part of the job.

121 Clara: Sim, e eu vejo quem chegou agora também tendo muita dificuldade de entrar no mercado de trabalho. Porque acho que é tanta gente, e é tanta gente nesses grupos falando, tô disponível, não sei o quê, que tem algumas pessoas que quando elas não tem uma rede de indicação forte, que elas ficam meses até conseguir engrenar um trabalho que ela tenha todo dia, ou quase todo dia.

Jandira: E assim, e a outra coisa que as pessoas que estão mesmo no [incompreensível] que eu, por exemplo, eles falam que muitas pessoas que estão vindo hoje, eles já, assim, eles não querem trabalhar bem, eles querem, a finalidade deles é de ganhar dinheiro, entendeu? Mas, às vezes eles esquecem que pra ganhar o dinheiro eles tem que trabalhar e fazer o trabalho bem feito, né? Então, tem, existe isso também, né? (Entrevista 19, 09/12/23, Sandy Springs GA)

122 "Às vezes, acha pessoas que, não vou dizer assim, não se preocupam, mas faz um bom trabalho rápido e vai embora. E tem gente que quer ficar mais, detalhar mais e acaba ficando mais tempo na casa, então isso também cansa bastante. Se tiver de ficar mais tempo procurando fazer mais detalhes, cansa bastante. O meu serviço com esse rapaz era só limpar os banheiros e a cozinha e de chão, eu aspirava o chão da cozinha. Aspirar os tapetes, aspirar o restante da casa, tirar pó e passar o pano era com ele. Aí cada pessoa tem um jeito diferente, às vezes eu tenho que ajudar a aspirar os tapetes, terminar sempre junto cada piso, aí se eu terminar primeiro os banheiros ou a cozinha, aí eu já passo pra ajudar em outra coisa que eles me mandarem fazer" (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

Creusa: Yes. There's a house, that's weekly that I go with the girl. This house has ten bathrooms. Ten bathrooms. (...) A mansion, really, a mansion. I don't even count [how many bedrooms], because I rush through it, I clean the bathrooms to keep up with her. But, like, there are rooms in there that she just does a quick check. She does not dust every time, she doesn't vacuum every time. The room at least... There's a studio in there, there's, how do you say it, a cinema, that sometimes she doesn't even [clean], she just takes a look. And I have to rush with the bathrooms to keep up with her.¹²³ (Interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Talita mentioned a situation in which she considered the *dona do schedule* to be abusive in the way she divided tasks.

“So over there in Roswell [GA], I remembered that there were two people I went with, that, I'll use the popular saying, made a beast of burden out of us, you know. They want to earn the money from that house but do not want to work, do not want to do anything, leeching off the other person. Because if I bring, for example, you bring me to a house, the normal as I learned here, that my sister taught me, she told me in the beginning when I started [working] with some people, she told me how the job is divided, how the job is done. But like, regardless of the work division, if I clean the bathrooms and the kitchen, if I finish first, I will try to help you. Or if you finish first, 'look, we have to finish on time, we do not work on the hour, we work on the house, let's finish quick so we can leave.' Then you finish that job quickly so you can leave that house to go to the next. Then if the person does not do the job, just stands there on their phone, just telling you what to do, 'you've finished the bathroom so vacuum here, vacuum over there,' does not help you carry the products, you unload, you load up the car, carry the heavy stuff up and down, up the stairs, down the stairs, all on your own, and then you only earn \$40 and the person is there earning \$200 a house on your back. So that's exploitation, that's abuse. So I came across a couple of people, when the clients sometimes would gift me something, give me something, the person would take it [for themselves]

123 Clara: Quando você vai de helper, você faz que parte do trabalho da limpeza?

Creusa: Os banheiros e chão, cozinha.

Clara: E a outra pessoa faz...?

Creusa: Tira pó e o vequinho, passa um vac. A gente fica com o serviço mais pesado.

Clara: Então tem isso também, né? A pessoa que leva o helper consegue pegar a melhor parte do serviço.

Creusa: Sim. Tem uma casa que é semanal, que eu vou com a menina, ela tem dez banheiros a casa. Dez banheiros. (...) Mansão mesmo, mansão. Eu nem conto, porque eu chego na correria, vou lavar os banheiros pra acompanhar ela. Mas, tipo assim, tem sala lá que ela só dá uma conferidinha. Não é toda vez que ela tira o pó, não é toda vez que ela passa o vac. A sala pelo menos... Assim, tem estúdio lá dentro, tem, é... como é que fala... cinema, que às vezes ela nem, só dá uma olhadinha. E eu tenho que correr com os banheiros para acompanhar ela. (Entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA)

without batting an eye. That's abuse. And unfortunately I went through that."¹²⁴ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Schedule owners who do not come along may also try to exert control over work in establishing times and pace of the workday as well as specific rules. Adriana narrates that she once did a deep cleaning as a *helper* with two other cleaners take took the whole day, until 6:30pm:

"Then I was doing this deep cleaning, when it was 1:30pm, one lady who was with me said to me, like, 'I need to eat, I'll stop to eat.' And she sat down, we were in the bedroom already, she sat down and grabbed her lunch. There was chicken and something that I do not know what it was, some pasta, I do not know, some chicken with something and she started eating. So when she started eating, I thought, I'll grab my food too, right, I'll grab mine too, it's 1:30, I'm hungry. Then I started opening my bag, grabbing my food, the other said, like, 'Are you going to stop to eat? You're crazy. They [the schedule owners] do not let us stop to eat. There are cameras here, if [the client] tells on us, [the schedule owner] might argue, the schedule owner may argue with us.' Then I was in the middle of [opening] my [lunch bag] zipper, I said 'what now, do I open it, close it?' [laughs] I did not know what to do, I stood there quietly, watching the other two talk. And [the first lady] said like, 'So here's what you do, if [the schedule owner] complains, tell her to bring a robot next time, because if she brings people, they need to eat.' And then she grabbed her food, and I finished opening my zipper [laughs]. She ate, I think, in five minutes tops. It's really just the time for the food to go down. Five to ten minutes at most. I think we did not even get to 10. Then she finished eating and we went back to cleaning right away, you understand? So I was thinking at home like, 'my God, this is so weird, you have no time to eat.'"¹²⁵ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

124 "Aí lá em Roswell, eu lembrei que teve umas duas pessoas com quem eu fui que... que assim, eu vou usar o ditado popular, é, fazia a gente de burro de carga, né, quer ganhar o dinheiro daquela casa, mas não quer trabalhar, não quer fazer nada, escorando na outra pessoa. Porque se eu levo, por exemplo, você me leva pra uma casa, aí o normal que eu aprendi aqui, que minha irmã me ensinou, foi me falando, no início de algumas outras pessoas que eu passei, me falava a divisão do serviço, como era o serviço. Mas assim, independente de divisão de serviço, que eu limpe os banheiros e a cozinha, se eu termino primeiro, eu vou procurar te ajudar. Ou se você termina primeiro, olha, a gente tem que cumprir horário, a gente não trabalha por hora, trabalha por casa. Vamos terminar logo pra ir embora. Aí termina aquele serviço pra sair logo daquela casa pra ir pra próxima. Aí se a pessoa faz, não faz o serviço, fica ali mexendo no celular, fica só ali mandando. Acabou o banheiro, passa o vec aqui, no tapete, passa esse ali. Não te ajuda a levar os produtos. Você descarrega, você carrega o carro, leva o peso pra cima e pra baixo, subindo escada, descendo escada, tudo sozinha. E aí você só ganha os 40 dólares. E a pessoa tá ali ganhando 200 dólares na casa em cima de você. Então isso é exploração, é um abuso. Aí eu me deparei com umas duas pessoas, aí os donos da casa às vezes vinha me presentear, me dar alguma coisa, a pessoa tomava na cara dura. Isso é um abuso. E aí infelizmente eu passei por isso" (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

125 "E aí eu estava fazendo essa deep clean, quando foi uma hora e meia da tarde, uma moça que tava comigo me falou assim, eu preciso comer, eu vou parar para comer. E ela sentou, a gente estava no quarto já, ela sentou, pegou a marmitinha dela, tinha um frango com alguma coisa lá que não sei o que era, um macarrão, sei lá, um frango com alguma coisa e ela começou a comer. Aí quando ela começou a comer, eu pensei, vou pegar o meu lanche, né, vou pegar o meu também. Uma hora e meia, tô com fome. E aí eu comecei a abrir minha bolsinha, pegar meu lanchinho, a outra falou assim, você vai parar pra comer? Você é doida. Eles não deixam a gente parar pra comer. É... Aqui tem câmeras. Se ela dedurar a gente, fulano pode brigar... a dona do schedule, fulano pode brigar com a gente. Aí eu, no meio do feiche-eclair, falei agora, abro, fecho? [risos] Eu não sabia o que fazer, eu calada, ali, vendo as duas conversarem. E ela falou assim, então faz o seguinte, se ela reclamar, fala pra ela trazer robô da próxima vez. Porque se ela trazer gente, precisa comer sim. E aí ela pegou a comidinha dela, eu terminei

In sum, the *dona do schedule* who was not present tried to determine that the workers could not have a 10-minute break – and expected them not to eat anything – in a whole day of work. Adriana said she had days of not eating anything during the day, following the lead of whoever was taking her to work – she eats if the person taking her eats, but if they do not, she does not eat either.

Clients may also try to exert control over housecleaners' work, either with extra involved requirements on how and what to clean or with requests for cleaning tasks not included in the original negotiation without a raise in pay. Ludmilla and Márcio remarked that their Indian clients tended to be the ones who “did not want to pay,” meaning not paying for extra tasks that they would request from the cleaners. Nationality-based stereotypes notwithstanding, they provided a clear picture of how clients can exploit housecleaners. As they explained, Ludmilla and Márcio accepted this situation when they really needed clients and could not afford to lose them in spite of what they considered to be inappropriate requests:

Márcio: [Today we] can even choose who to work for, you understand? Today we choose the jobs. Back in the day, the job chose us [laughs].

Ludmilla: We would take anything, you understand?

Márcio: We would take anything, we worked, we have worked for people, at the beginning we took, we worked a lot for Indians and we can't be, we can't discriminate, but it's hard to work for immigrants like us, you understand? Because specifically in the case of Indians, they exploit and do not want to pay. (...) Compared to the clients we have today, Indians are the worst kind of people for you to do business with. (...) They want to demand a lot, but do not want to pay, you understand? So most of them we stopped doing, even though they came after us, right, because they came after us and all, you understand? But no... I think the culture is very different, you understand? Because usually they, Indians, they work in the technology sector, right? So they do not value manual labor. So it's very hard to work for them.

Ludmilla: (...) With them, like, you go clean a house, we do not move the oven, we do not move the fridge [to clean under]. And those are things that, for them, you need to do every time you go. So, and they do not want to pay more for that, you understand? So it's very heavy [work], it's very tiring. You have to move everything in the [house]. And usually, for others, you do not do that, right? Of course we move what we can move, lightweight, but imagine every time you have to move a couch, a fridge, an oven, you can't do it, right? (...)

de abrir o meu feiche-eclair. [risos] Ela comeu, acho que em uns 5 minutos no máximo. É só o tempo da comida descer. Uns cinco a dez minutos no máximo. Eu acho que a gente nem chegou a 10. E aí ela terminou de comer e a gente já voltou pra limpar. Entendeu? Então eu fiquei pensando em casa assim, meu Deus, que coisa estranha. Você não tem hora pra comer” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

Clara: And just out of curiosity, because in the case of Indians, when you say they do not want to pay, is it that they want to pay little or because they really try not to pay for your work?

Ludmilla: Little.

Márcio: No, to pay little.

Ludmilla: Very little, a very big difference. When we say they do not want to pay, they do not want to pay what you ask. It's always a negotiation, it's always a... But then in the end... And it starts like this, right? 'Oh, you do not need to clean here, you do not need to clean over there,' so you give your price. But then when you start, after a while, 'oh, clean here, clean there, clean over there,' you understand? We started a house, once, there was no furniture, I think she had just moved in, right, honey? So I said like, Marcos said to her like, gave her our price, I do not even remember how much it was. Then she said ok and we started. All of sudden, *menina do céu*, a few months later the house was full [of furniture]. Then you talk [with the client], [they] do not want to raise the price. In the end she wanted us to go to the basement with a concrete floor to sweep everything down there and we could not wear shoes, you have to leave your shoes outside, you can't wear shoes in Indians' [houses], you understand? So we... Here, sometimes [it was] cold, we had to go down to the basement barefoot to sweep it all. Then those are things that get you, you understand? Then we end up not wanting it anymore.¹²⁶ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

126Márcio: Você tem como até escolher pra quem trabalhar, entendeu? Hoje a gente escolhe o trabalho. Antigamente, o trabalho é o que escolhia a gente. [risos]

Ludmilla: Pegava qualquer coisa, entendeu?

Márcio: Pegava qualquer coisa, a gente trabalhou... já trabalhou pra gente, no começo a gente pegou... trabalhou muito pra indiano e... a gente não pode ser, não pode fazer discriminação, mas é difícil trabalhar para imigrante como nós, entendeu. Porque no caso especificamente de indiano, eles exploram e não querem pagar. Então...

Ludmilla: E acho que até hoje, né?

Márcio: Foram, comparando com os clientes que a gente tem hoje, os indianos são o pior tipo de pessoa pra você fazer business. (...) Querem exigir muito, mas não querem pagar, entendeu? Então, a maioria deles, a gente foi deixando de fazer, mesmo eles correndo atrás da gente, né? Que vieram atrás da gente, pá. Entendeu? Mas não... Eu acho que a cultura é muito diferente, entendeu? Que geralmente, eles, os indianos, eles trabalham na área de tecnologia, né? Então eles não valorizam o trabalho braçal. Então é muito difícil trabalhar pra eles.

Ludmilla: (...) Eles não é igual, você vai limpar uma casa, a gente não arrasta fogão, não arrasta geladeira. E são coisas que, pra eles, você tem que fazer toda vez que você vai. Então, e não querem pagar por mais por isso, entendeu? Então, é muito pesado, é muito puxado. Você tem que arrastar tudo do lugar. E geralmente, os outros, você não faz isso, né? Claro que a gente puxa, o que dá pra puxar, leve, mas imagina você toda vez arrastar um sofá, uma geladeira, um fogão... Não dá, né? (...)

Clara: E só uma curiosidade, porque no caso dos indianos, quando vocês falam que não querem pagar, é porque querem pagar pouco ou porque tentam realmente não pagar o serviço?

Ludmilla: Pouco.

Márcio: Não, pagar pouco.

Ludmilla: Bem pouco. Uma diferença bem grande. Quando a gente fala que não quer pagar, não quer pagar o que você pede. Sempre é uma negociação, sempre é um... Só que aí no final... E começa assim, né? Ah, não precisa limpar aqui, não precisa limpar ali, aí você dá o valor. Só que aí quando você começa, passa um tempo aí, ó, limpa aqui, limpa ali, limpa lá, entendeu? A gente começou uma casa uma vez, não tinha nem móveis. Ela tinha acabado de, acho que, mudar, né, amor. Aí eu falei assim, aí o Marcos falou assim pra ela, deu o valor tal lá, que eu nem lembro quando era. Aí ela falou ok e nós começamos a limpar. De repente, menina do céu, uns meses depois a casa já tava lotada. Aí você fala, não quer aumentar o preço. Por fim ela queria que a gente descesse pro basement que era cimento rústico para varrer tudinho lá embaixo e não pode entrar de sapato. Você tem que deixar o sapato lá fora, porque você não pode andar de sapato nos indianos. Entendeu? Então, a gente... Aqui às vezes frio, a gente tinha que descer pro basement descalço para varrer tudo aquilo lá. Aí são essas coisas que pegam, entendeu? Aí a gente acaba não querendo mais. (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

Érika talked about a different experience with a client who tried to exert control over her work. She mentioned thinking her client was in the autism spectrum, given the fact that his son is autistic and his behavior towards her:

“And I think he has some autism too. You can see that he does not... but he was on my case. He smelled the floors to check if I was using his product, followed me around inside the house. But he, [it’s been a] long time, he got used to me. Today I arrive at his house, he goes out, ‘I’m leaving, ok?’ ‘Ok, ok.’ But it was an effort, it was like that for over a year.”¹²⁷ (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

The experiences described above further show the different ways in which housecleaning labor is precarized and the tensions that arise from it. This includes the lack of breaks and lunchtime, doing heavier chores (while earning the lowest wage), fast working paces, and disputes over tasks to be completed, as well as the work instability described above. Next, I discuss other forms of precarization, including lack of benefits, health issues, and workplace risks.

Health issues, benefits (or lack thereof) and other workplace risks

A major set of concerns that the workers expressed were around their health. Housecleaners biggest complaint about the job is about how exhausting it is. Adriana and Érika, on different occasions, said they had got home from work on a particular day so tired “they could not even speak.” Adriana joked:

Adriana: It’s the physical labor that’s really hard, really hard. And then you clean a bathroom, scrub everything the right way, perfectly, the way they taught you. You finish, you go do the floor, you vacuum that entire floor, mop it, all perfect, dust everything. You still have three more houses to do that, because if you do not do three more, you do not have money. So when you finish the first [house], that you say like, ‘I’m done,’ ‘ok, now we’re going to take the car, we’ll travel another hour to another house.’ And then 15 minutes more to another, then another 20, then one hour to come back home. (...) but what weighs on me the most is the physical issue, it’s very tiring. I did two houses with Taynara, I got home, I was so tired I couldn’t even

127 “E eu acho que ele tem um autismo também. Você vê que ele não... mas ele me encheu o saco. Cheirava chão, pra ver se eu conseguia o produto dele, ia atrás de mim dentro de casa. Mas ele, muito tempo, ele se acostumou comigo. Hoje eu chego na casa dele, ele vai, sai. Tô saindo, tá? Tá bom, tá. Mas custou, ficou acho que mais de um ano” (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

say my name, it felt like my forces had been sucked out of me. And then the other day I said, I won't go to work, I'm in no condition. (...) Then what do the girls say? 'Let's go to the gym, let's get jacked, ripped, so we get there and we destroy that toilet' [we both laugh]. (...)

Clara: Yeah, I don't know how you guys pull it off.

Adriana: No, we don't pull it off! [we both laugh] Oh God. (Interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Lúcia's sister, who was working as her *helper* while visiting, could not stand the rhythm of housecleaning. Because of their relationship, Lúcia accepted breaking up three houses she did in the same day into two days, given she's not working every day anymore, in order to accommodate her sister:

"Because my sister came and it's heavy for her, because, three houses, she can't do it, she's helping me. (...) I was working three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. And if I want to travel, something, I'll travel. It doesn't impede my work. But like, that's my plan, to stop. I do not know when, I've already reduced a lot, from 3, 4, 5 houses I've done [in a day], today I do 3 at most. But with my sister here, not even that, we're only doing one or two a day. (...) Because in a week that I have three, that would be three houses on Tuesday, my sister said, 'I can't do three houses.' She said it doesn't make sense not to work on Monday and on Tuesday work and do three houses. So, because she can't endure it. But to me it makes sense because my Monday, not working, makes all the difference. But, yes, we're cleaning one house every Monday and then the rest, until Thursday, it's two houses. Only one, two houses in a day." (Lúcia, interview 25, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

However, Lúcia said that her sister has not been able to make much money working in the US, since she cannot do many houses overall. This is ok for her sister who planned on staying for just a few months and was not paying rent, since she was staying with Lúcia. Otherwise, she would not be able to support herself working at this pace. For housecleaners, the combination of exhausting work and piece-meal pay is really taxing.

A second major complaint is physical pain and soreness. Bruna complained of back and hand aches and Edna showed me her swollen finger joints, saying it was from cleaning. Ludmilla and Márcio describe the effects of 20 years of housecleaning on their bodies:

Márcio: Then, with the document, we'll look for something else to do, that's lighter, that's more profitable, because it's been too many years working, right, so the body feels it, right. Sometimes in the morning it's hard to get up. There are days when my hand does not open.

Ludmilla: My finger did not bend for I think some six months. Then they wanted to do that infiltration, but I went to a chiropractor and he did something and it started bending again. Those are things that happen to us.

Clara: Joint stuff, like?

Márcio: Yes.

Ludmilla: Back aches.

Márcio: It's a lot of repetitive work, right? So every now and then it's, one time it's the sciatic [nerve] that's bad, the other time it's the back, another time it's the arm, another time it's the hand.

Ludmilla: The foot, I have a lot of foot pain, in the sole of my foot, on the heel.

Clara: From standing up all day?

Ludmilla: Yes, the doctor said that's why. It's a pain that, like, started slowly and now during the day it already bothers me. But there is not much to be done, right? You do the exercises that the doctor told you to do, it gives some relief, but it doesn't heal. (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

Additionally, housecleaners remark on their age to signify the hardships at work and its impact on their bodies. Many do some back-of-the-envelope math on how many years of housecleaning they (and their bodies) can still withstand. Bruna says:

“But until now, here, I say, if a person wants to come to the United States to work, come young. That at the age... I'm 45 already, Claudinei is 50, like, and here is for manual [labor] really. There's no point for a person to come and say, “oh...” And the age we're in, like, it's still good, we're still pull it off, but like, I recommend young people [to migrate], that in an advanced age it's hard. Even in like construction, let's pretend, if there's someone that's Claudinei's age, 50 years-old, and a 20-year-old, then we'll take the 20-year-old, and they won't take the 50-year-old. That happens a lot here too. In housecleaning we still see a lot of older people still, it looks like it's folks who have been here for a very long time and keep going. But if a person really wants to make their life [in the US], they have to come a lot younger.” (Bruna, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

Even in the face of these many issues described above, housecleaning work, regardless of the workers' position (schedule owner, *helper* etc.), offers no benefits of any kind, no paid time off, no sick leave, and no health insurance. Claudinei and Bruna compared it to Brazil:

Claudinei: How do you say it, you always have to be healthy to work, because here it's not like Brazil, [where if] you work formally, in a year you have a 30-day vacation, then you can stay [home] 30 days and you still have an income. Here no, if you fail one day, unfortunately you lost that workday. You have to be...

Bruna: Yes, a vacation here is three days tops, a weekend. (Interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

A second major set of concerns were around their sometimes fraught relationships with the clients. In housecleaning, a big risk is to damage or break something that belongs to the client, for which the housecleaner has to pay. Once, said Ludmilla, she broke something at a client's house and they charged her triple of what the object actually cost. She and Márcio paid it on the same day and then cut this client off. Another risk related to housecleaning are accusations of theft and robbery of clients' personal objects. Ludmilla and Márcio told the story of a client they had been with for 20 years, who was a lawyer and had helped them in a small court case related to their daughter. They knew each other well, had been with her and her husband when they were married and continued cleaning for both after they got divorced. Once, this client could not find a camera in her home and accused Ludmilla of taking it. Ludmilla and Márcio stopped cleaning for her right away, but continued cleaning for her ex-husband - who then hid his watches that used to be clearly on display. Ludmilla was particularly worried because the client was, after all, a lawyer. After two months, the client tells them the camera had been with her daughter all along, who took it and did not tell her mother. The client then asked Ludmilla and Márcio to resume cleaning at her house, which they refused; they kept on cleaning for the ex-husband, whose watches reappeared in their usual place. For schedule owners with *helpers*, theft can be a significant risk in bringing someone to work that they do not know well. Lúcia once brought a *helper* who stole from several clients' homes (with other schedule owners) and eventually sold it all in another state.

Other risks in someone else's home as a workplace for housecleaners involves workers' safety when they go as a *helper* with someone they do not know. Adriana usually asks her cousins, who have been in Marietta longer, if they know the *dona de schedule* with whom she arranged to work. She narrates once going to work with someone who looked

“psychologically unbalanced,” “disturbed.” So Adriana and her cousins - Taynara, Érika, Edna - all use an app that shares their locations as a safety measure.

Still, housecleaners consider housecleaning to be a high-paying job that is “worth it,” especially once they are past the *helper* stage. The more one climbs the schedule owner ladder, the more money they make. Even working on commission, Bruna praises housecleaning income:

Bruna: [Housecleaning work] is tiring, but it’s very good.

Clara: What’s good [about it]?

Bruna: Good is the money [we both laugh].

Clara: You earn good money?

Bruna: Yes, compared to what we made in Brazil, right.

Clara: Even spending in dollars, is it worth it?

Bruna: It’s worth it. (Interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

When thinking about leaving housecleaning for a different job, Márcio pondered:

“I think that what matters most for us is the issue of wages. If you work an hourly job anywhere here, you’ll earn very little. And for us who already have a standard of work and of income, to reduce it is hard. So we have to find something that’s more profitable, because lowering the standard is hard, right.” (Márcio, interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

Linda compared housecleaning to her own current work as a real-estate agent, although she disagrees on the “worth it” part. She did work in housecleaning for a few years when she first arrived in Boston and considers it to be much more profitable than selling real-estate:

“I have clients who make a lot more in housecleaning than me. A lot more than me. But I would never trade what I do because I would make more. (...) I see that it’s really hard for people to leave housecleaning because there’s money coming in every day. I can go two, three, four months without selling a single home.” (Linda, interview 24, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Érika said something similar about *donas de schedule*, using the particular example of one whose schedule she covered for a while:

Érika: You think, she’s been here 20 years, her schedule was almost perfect. (...) Look, she made some \$600, \$700 a day, in these [mansions]. Two, three, four houses, depending on the size. One big, two small, or two big and one small, or only two big [houses in a day], you understand? She made her schedule really punctual. But they make that much money, these *donas de schedule*, they make it, that’s why they have farms in Brazil, buy or sell [green card]

weddings, they get their [green card] quickly because they buy a wedding. So it's a lot of money.

Clara: A person with a schedule [like that], just so I have an idea, how much does that up to in a month?

Érika: In a month that's not less than \$10k, \$15k. I can do the math to have an idea. But some \$15k a month. \$15 to 20k a month. If she gets a deep cleaning, that's \$1500 in a day, you understand? If she does two deep cleanings in a week, on top of the houses she has, it's a lot of money. They buy their homes [actual real-estate] here. (...) They have a good living standard. (Interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Differentiated access to labor markets

In order to examine differentiated working conditions between Brazilians and US-born white workers, following the discussion presented in the literature review chapter, I depart from their own experiences and perceptions around how migration status and their professional skills intersect with their labor market access in the US. The Brazilian migrants I met in Marietta acknowledged the lower position of the labor markets they participate in, as well as their precarization, frequently referring to them as “*subempregos*” [sub-jobs]. In their own narratives, they sometimes describe these as resulting from their migration status, which only allows them to engage in informal employment. Other Brazilian migrants mention that not knowing how to speak English harms their labor market standing in housecleaning and construction. In their view, lack of English skills also impedes their participation in higher-skilled labor markets, along with the devaluation of bachelor's and graduate degrees obtained in Brazil in US labor markets.

Migration status

How does migration status relate to Brazilians' working conditions and access to labor markets? Housecleaning, construction, and some of the additional jobs mentioned are jobs that can be performed without a work permit, either “under the table” or as independent

contractors. According to my research participants, migrants are able to open individual companies regardless of migration status. For out of status workers, this allows them to open bank accounts, hire *helpers* as service providers, and pay income taxes more accurately. The *helper* schema in both housecleaning and construction also accommodates Brazilian migrants without a work permit.

Yet, some Brazilian migrants I talked to stated they would not change careers should they ever get “the document.” While some consider housecleaning and construction as occupations they would rather avoid, others want to stay in those fields of work, but with better conditions. Many, however, linked the possibility of better working conditions to “getting the document.” Luciano described that the document would provide him with better pay:

Luciano: But with a work permit you can even have better income, you know? With the document in hand, you can even have a better income.

Clara: That’s what I was going to ask, what is the difference?

Luciano: Yes, there’s a really big difference, there’s a very big difference. For example, as a *helper*, you... Without the document, you make \$150, with the document you make \$250. \$200, \$250, so it’s a really big difference, you know?¹²⁸ (Interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Juçara explains her thinking on the relationship between migration status and employment:

Clara: And in terms of work, do you think this issue of status affects you? Or if you had it... Even with a visa, would it be the same?

Juçara: Well, I usually see here my clients who have documents, who have education, they say that regardless of them having the document, they will always be immigrants, seen as immigrants, right, inside the companies. I have clients [here] who are lawyers who say, ‘Juçara, I’m always seen as an immigrant, even though I have the document.’ But, in my area [nail work], I could expand what I do today, that I do regular nails, I could teach a class, I could leave the manual work a little bit more, if I were legalized here, right. My husband, for example, to work as an electrician, to get a license, if he had the document, if he were legal, it

¹²⁸Luciano: Porque com o permit work você consegue ter uma renda até melhor, sabe? Com o documento na mão, você consegue ter uma renda até melhor.

Clara: É isso que eu ia perguntar. Qual que é a diferença?

Luciano: É, tem uma diferença muito grande. Tem uma diferença muito grande. Por exemplo, como help, você... Sem documento, você ganha 150, com documento você ganha 250. 200, 250, então, a diferença é muito grande, sabe? (Entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta GA)

would be on another level. He would be able to go directly to the clients, he would need to go through contractors, because now he works with a contractor who has the license. He could be doing that directly.¹²⁹ (Interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Those who are not out of status still also have issues with finding employment outside of housecleaning and construction. In 2023, Adriana talked about how, being on an extended tourist visa, she could not do other jobs:

“Yeah, I can’t have a formal job, right, a contract, I can’t have a contract here. I can’t have anything that proves I have income. So we work at these kinds of jobs. For example, me as an accountant, here there are many... I know some accountants here. I could work with them, right? But I need an authorization from the government first. Because here we are not... we’re in limbo. We’re not here as students. We’re not here as students. We do not have a work or a student visa. We’re here as tourists. So, a tourist can’t work.”¹³⁰ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

In 2023, many people talked about how labor markets were saturated because of Brazilian people coming from Florida. This was in the aftermath of new legislation by the DeSantis administration in Florida (SB1718) that increased pressure on undocumented migrants. Others also mentioned that states that are best for undocumented migrants, such as California, Massachusetts, and even Washington, tend to have much higher living costs, making them less “worth it.” This suggests a complex dynamic in the Brazilian community in Georgia: it includes those that, while not willing to stay in a state of heightened persecution

129Clara: E em questão de trabalho, vocês acham que essa questão do status afeta vocês? Ou se tivesse... mesmo com visto, seria a mesma coisa?

Juçara: Bom, eu costumo ver aqui as minhas clientes que têm documentos, que são formadas, elas falam que independente de elas terem documento, elas sempre serão imigrantes, enxergadas como imigrantes, né. Dentro das empresas. Tem clientes que são advogadas, que elas falam, Jéssica, eu sempre sou vista como uma imigrante, mesmo que tendo documento. Mas, pra minha área, eu poderia aumentar mais o que eu faço hoje, que eu faço a unha normal, eu poderia dar um curso, eu poderia sair um pouco mais de questão braçal, se eu tivesse legalizada aqui, né. O meu esposo, por exemplo, pra exercer a função de eletricista, ele conseguir a licença, ele tendo documento, ele estando legal, seria outro nível. Ele conseguiria ir direto aos clientes, ele não precisa estar por contratista, que aí ele trabalha com contratista que tem licença. Ele conseguiria estar exercendo isso diretamente. (Entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA)

130“É, não posso ter um trabalho formal, né, um contrato, não posso ter um contrato aqui. Eu não posso ter nada que comprove que eu tenha uma renda. Então, a gente trabalha nesses serviços assim. Por exemplo, eu como contadora, aqui tem muito... eu conheço alguns contadores aqui. Poderia trabalhar com eles, né? Mas eu preciso de uma autorização do governo primeiro. Porque a gente aqui não tá, a gente tá no limbo. A gente não está como estudante. A gente não tem visto nem de trabalho nem de estudante. A gente tá como turista. Então, o turista está trabalhando não pode” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

like Florida, also will not immediately choose sanctuary states if they cannot afford to live in those places. Some who made the opposite choice, to stay in Massachusetts or California, for example, might have to deploy other labor strategies in order to afford living in those places. Local or state-level migration policies reorganize local migrant labor markets in this way.

For younger out-of-status migrants, getting an education may be complicated, especially access to scholarships. Alessandra went to college and still had to work in housecleaning until she had DACA (see Appendix B: Glossary). According to Alessandra, her mom Lúcia tried getting a GED but Georgia state does not allow out-of-status people to obtain a GED. This also creates a significant difference between Brazil- and US-born children of Brazilian immigrants, including those in the same family, in terms of those who can or cannot access higher education.

High-skilled workers in low-skilled jobs?

Many of the Brazilians I interviewed in Atlanta had obtained bachelor's degrees, some even had graduate degrees, in Brazil and worked in their professions at home before migrating. Few of the Brazilian workers that I talked to in the Marietta area had had jobs in construction and housecleaning in Brazil, including Talita, Luciano, Oliveira, and Creusa. Some had been able to study in Brazil but were unsuccessful in their professions in Brazil.

Therefore, many of my research participants with lower education levels remarked on how little difference it made, in the US, to have obtained any number of degrees in Brazil. Talita, for example, mentioned that she sees “people who studied” in Brazil cleaning houses in the US, just like her. Bruna made a similar comment, noting I had probably interviewed many people who studied in Brazil but, in the US, were working in housecleaning and construction just the same, due to the “lack of opportunities” in Brazil. Others yet, like

Danilo, remarked that a Brazilian migrant cannot “rely on their diploma” once they arrive in the US:

“Today, the advice I give people who want to come here (...) if you’re able to come, come willing to start over. There are opportunities for everybody, you understand? For everybody. But you have to be aware that here your college [degree from Brazil] is worthless, you understand? Worthless. It does not matter if you arrive here with a degree because a degree [from Brazil] here does not mean anything, you understand?”¹³¹ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Juliana too mentioned that Brazilians need to be aware that their former professions do not count in the US:

“But a person, they have to come here [to the US] knowing that... Unless they’re very wealthy in Brazil and they can come here and say ‘no, I won’t even need to go into...’ Because they call it *subemprego*, ‘I won’t need to work in any of those *subempregos* because I’m very rich and I can support myself.’ That’s very rare. So, you have to come knowing that your diploma, here it’s nothing, it’s nothing. You see a lot of doctors in construction, dentists, lawyers. I’ve seen a lot of people. But here they [Americans] do not want to know who you are. They want to know what you have to offer. ‘How can you serve me?’ (...) We’re friends with a couple, we hosted them, it’s going to be a year since they arrived [Schaianne and her husband Julio]. He’s a civil engineer, I think, and over there [in Goiânia] he had his own company. They decided to leave everything behind to come here. When he arrived, they were soon able to rent their apartment and all that. The fact that he’s a civil engineer does not work for him to pay his bills, he can go to a residential community and say, ‘oh, I’m a civil engineer in Brazil.’ ‘That’s your problem.’ You have to pay the bills, how are you going to make money here? Is it in your area? At first, no. (...) your profession there [in Brazil] is nothing here [in the US]. You’ll work just like everybody, at first, right?”¹³² (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

I frequently asked, during my interviews, about Brazilian higher-skilled migrants’ experience with doing lower-skilled, manual labor in the US. Many said it was no issue for

131 “Hoje o conselho que eu dou pra quem quer vir pra cá, é isso que eu falei a respeito. Se conseguir vir, venha disposto a recomeçar. Tem oportunidade pra todo mundo. Entendeu? Pra todo mundo. Mas tem que estar ciente de que aqui a sua faculdade não vale. Entendeu? Não vale. Não adianta você chegar aqui com o diploma que o diploma aqui não vai rolar. Entendeu?” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

132 “Mas a pessoa, ela deve vir ciente de que ela, a não ser que ela seja muito rica no Brasil e possa vir e falar não, eu não vou precisar entrar nem... porque eles chamam de subemprego, eu não vou precisar trabalhar em nenhum desses subempregos porque eu sou muito rico e eu consigo me bancar. É bem raro. Então, você tem que vir sabendo que o seu diploma, pra quem chega, aqui não é nada, não é nada. Você vê muito médico na construção, dentista, advogado. Já vi muita gente. Mas aqui eles não querem saber quem você é. Eles querem saber o que você tem pra oferecer. No que você pode me servir? (...) Igual, a gente tem um casal de amigos, que a gente recebeu eles, vai fazer um ano que eles estão aqui. Ele é engenheiro civil, eu acho, lá ele tinha empresa. Eles decidiram largar tudo pra vim. Quando ele chegou, eles já conseguiram alugar o apartamento deles e tudo mais. O fato dele ser engenheiro civil não funciona pra ele pagar as contas, ele pode chegar num condomínio, ah, eu sou engenheiro civil no Brasil. Problema seu. Você tem que pagar as contas, você vai conseguir como, ganhar o dinheiro aqui? É na sua área? No começo não. (...) a sua profissão lá não é nada, aqui. Você vai trabalhar, igual todo mundo trabalha, no começo, né?” (Juliana, entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA).

them, except for the physically demanding aspects of the work. Adriana muses about her transition from accountant to housecleaner:

“I quit my job [in Brazil, see life story 24] because I’m an accountant and I was working for this company for ten years already, I had a good position, right, I was already a department manager. (...) I come here [to the US], that’s not a possibility here. So where do I go? Where, I think, most Brazilian women go, right? To housecleaning. And then on my first housecleaning day, I wanted to sit on the toilet and cry, instead of cleaning it. ‘What am I doing here? My God.’ I came home all sore and then I heard the famous saying ‘Welcome to America’ [laughs]. I think that’s where the welcome is [laughs], it’s not when you arrive, the welcome is when you... Your first day of work here.”¹³³ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Later, Adriana went deeper into how she felt about this transition:

“(...) when you’re a kid, I heard it at least, right, my family saying ‘you have to study so you never have to clean anybody’s toilet, you have to study so you never have to wash anybody’s clothes.’ (...) And then, when you come [to the US], the first day you work in housecleaning it’s like the ground is opening up. I thought, ‘until when will I have to do this?’ I’m in no condition. Because it’s not just lowering your dreams or your social life, as they say, like, it’s not just lowering who you are. ‘Oh, I’m an accountant, now I’m a housecleaner.’ It’s not about that. It’s the physical labor that’s really hard, really hard. (...) Then you work with a nurse, Taynara and I, an accountant with a nurse. Then you go the other day with an accountant and a psychologist, then the other day with a business manager and an accountant. Then you start to see, like, ‘what are these people doing here, my God?’ People who studied, dreamed, and abandoned their dreams. Maybe they did not abandon their dreams, right? Maybe they abandoned their career dreams but did not abandon their dreams for their family, of living somewhere safer.”¹³⁴ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

133“Eu pedi demissão do meu trabalho, porque eu sou contadora e eu já trabalhava dez anos nessa empresa, eu tinha um cargo, assim... legal, né, já era gerente de um departamento. Sonhava assim em ter meu próprio escritório, abrir uma empresa, ou... fui convidada por eles para fazer parte, né, pra ser... Entrar no quarto societário. E a gente com esses montes de possibilidades, assim. Venho pra cá, não tem essa possibilidade aqui. E aí eu vou pra onde? Onde eu acho que a maioria das brasileiras vão, né? Pra faxina. E aí o primeiro dia de faxina, a vontade foi de sentar no vaso e chorar, ao invés de limpar. O que que eu tô fazendo aqui? Meu Deus. Eu voltei toda dolorida e aí eu ouvi a famosa frase Bem-vindo à América [risos], acho que ali que é o bem-vindo, sabe? [risos] O bem-vindo não é quando você chega de viagem, o bem-vindo é quando você... é o seu primeiro dia de trabalho aqui” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

134“(...) quando você é criança, eu ouvia pelo menos, né, a minha família falando, você tem que estudar para você nunca lavar vaso de ninguém, você tem que estudar para você não precisar lavar a roupa de ninguém. (...) E aí, quando você vem, o primeiro dia que você trabalha como faxina, parece que esse... que a sua vida, o seu chão abre. Eu pensei assim, eu vou ter que fazer isso aqui até quando? Eu não tenho condições. Porque não é só você diminuir o seu sonho ou a sua vida social, como falam, assim, não é só você diminuir quem você é. Ah, eu sou uma contadora, agora eu sou uma faxineira. Não é isso. É o trabalho físico que é muito difícil, muito difícil. (...) Aí você trabalha com uma enfermeira, eu e a Tati, contadora com enfermeira. Aí você vai no outro dia com uma contadora e uma psicóloga, aí você vai no outro dia com uma administradora e uma contadora. Aí você começa a ver assim, o que esse povo tá fazendo aqui, meu Deus? Pessoas que estudaram, sonharam e abandonaram os sonhos. Talvez não abandonaram os sonhos, né. Talvez abandonaram os sonhos da profissão mas não abandonaram os sonhos da família, de ter um lugar mais seguro” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

Leal, on the other hand, had serious issues with moving from managerial to manual, low-skilled jobs:

“[referencing previous jobs he had] they were always executive, managerial positions and all. And then when you get here [in the US], you go work in manual labor, that kind of breaks your brain. It’s like you’re being demoted, right? Because in a way that’s true, but that can’t have the emotional weight it had for me, it can’t”¹³⁵ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Gerson was a unique case in which he continued to work his office, managerial job in Brazil while also working as a construction *helper* in Marietta, sometimes simultaneously:

“Besides meetings which are arranged for a specific time, eventually there are others that happen by chance, the day demands something, some business comes up, and that’s why I’m glued to my Bluetooth earphone, right? Because I’m there carrying granite and at the same time I’m talking to someone in Brazil. People who are with me [at his US job] know I’m working, so they don’t mind. Usually, that doesn’t mean a meeting that I have to be speaking at, leading the meeting, so many times I’m able to participate silently, a participation that I’m only turning my mic on and off, right, I turn it on for 10 seconds, say what I have to say, turn it off, and spend minutes just listening. Then I also have to be as concise as possible when I speak, so they do not have to hear hammering noises or anything on the other side. (...) There was a day when I was doing three jobs simultaneously, because I was in a [construction job in Marietta], working for the Brazilian company, and besides that I was doing a translation over the phone for someone else here.”¹³⁶ (Gerson, interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

Additionally, Brazilian migrants mention the importance of English skills for their standing on Marietta labor markets. Housecleaners may have little contact with clients, and mainly through text messages. Construction work demands more English skills, especially for those who want to have their own jobs. Construction workers frequently go to Home Depot for construction tools and materials, so they have to learn the vocabulary and be able to

135 “(...) eram sempre cargos executivos, gerenciários e tal. E aí quando você chega aqui, você trabalhar no serviço braçal, aquilo te dá uma pane. É como se você estivesse sendo rebaixado, entendeu? Porque de certa forma não deixa de ser, mas aquilo não pode ter um peso emocional como teve pra mim, não pode” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

136 “Além das reuniões que são... aquelas que são planejadas no horário certo, eventualmente tem aquelas outras também que são coisas do acaso, no dia demanda alguma coisa, alguns empreendimentos surgem, é por isso que eu não desgrudo do fone bluetooth, né? Porque eu tô lá carregando granito e tô, ao mesmo tempo, tô falando com alguém no Brasil. Quem tá comigo tá sabendo que eu tô trabalhando, então a pessoa não se incomoda. Como não é... normalmente isso não significa uma reunião, e que eu tenha de estar eu falando, conduzindo a reunião, então eu consigo muitas vezes participação silenciosa, uma participação em que eu só fico acionando e ativando e desativando o microfone, né, ativo o microfone 10 segundos, falo o que eu tenho que falar, desativo e fico minutos ouvindo. Aí também eu tenho que ser o mais conciso possível nas minhas falas, né, pra não ter que ficar a pessoa ouvindo martelada do outro lado, nem nada. (...) Teve um dia que eu estava com três trabalhos simultaneamente, porque eu estava numa diária, trabalhando para a empresa brasileira e além disso eu estava fazendo tradução pelo celular para outra pessoa aqui” (Gerson, entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA).

communicate with sales people; they are also in closer communication with American clients, who have to describe exactly what services are needed and what needs to be executed.

Adriana explained how the lack of English skills prevents her husband Oliveira from climbing up the professional ladder in Marietta:

“So you end up having to work for other people, in his case, because you can’t take a job on by yourself. [Oliveira] is professional, he’s a professional painter. Sometimes, he works with someone who does not know how to paint, because they know how to speak English. They go, take on the job, and [Oliveira] executes it. (...) Because he can’t speak English, so he can’t take his own jobs, you understand? And sometimes someone says, like, ‘oh, I’d like for you to paint my house,’ but because he can’t talk, he can’t discuss, he has to pass it on to someone else, share the job.”¹³⁷ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Their son Diogo shares something similar about his own work experience in Marietta:

Diogo: I think in the majority of jobs I worked here, we need English, but there are times when, for example, some services, which are only with Americans, so if you can’t speak English, you can’t take that job. So... In construction really, right.

Clara: And you see other Brazilians with more fluent English who are able to take these...

Diogo: Yes, Brazilians who speak English, they usually do not go out of work.

Clara: And those who don’t speak English sometimes do?

Diogo: Yes, people who don’t speak English are kind of limited. Because sometimes the guy can work, he has all the experience, but he can’t go to the client and talk about the job, you understand?¹³⁸ (Interview 12, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

When I asked Isadora about where she felt English was most needed, she also connected knowing how to speak English to not going out of work:

“For you to look for work without [knowing] English here, there are only these options, nanny or... or nanny for Brazilians or housecleaner, which is also with Brazilians. Because if I had

137“‘Aí você acaba tendo que trabalhar, no caso dele, para pessoas, porque você mesmo não consegue pegar o serviço. Ele é profissional, ele é pintor profissional. Às vezes ele trabalha com uma pessoa que não sabe pintar, porque a pessoa sabe falar inglês. Vai lá, pega o serviço e ele executa. (...) Porque ele não sabe falar inglês, então ele não tem como pegar o serviço dele, entendeu? E às vezes a pessoa fala assim, ah, eu queria que você pintasse minha casa, mas como ele não sabe conversar, ele não sabe resolver, ele tem que passar para outra pessoa, dividir o serviço” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

138Diogo: Acho que na maioria dos serviços que eu fiz aqui, a gente precisa do inglês, mas tem vezes que, por exemplo, alguns serviços, que é só americano, tipo, então se você não souber falar inglês, você não consegue pegar esse serviço. Então... na área de construção mesmo, né.

Clara: E você vê outros brasileiros que tem o inglês mais fluente conseguindo pegar esses...

Diogo: Sim, brasileiros que falam inglês, eles geralmente não ficam sem serviço.

Clara: E quem não fala inglês as vezes fica?

Diogo: É, e quem não fala inglês fica muito limitado. Porque às vezes o cara sabe trabalhar, ele tem toda a experiência, só que ele não consegue chegar lá no cliente e falar do serviço, entendeu? (Diogo, entrevista 12, 21/10/23, Marietta GA)

English [skills], I'm sure it would be easier, even as a nanny, because Americans always need it, right."¹³⁹ (Isadora, interview 18, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Schaienne, specifically, mentioned missing out on a high-skilled job for not knowing how to speak English:

"A while ago, someone was looking to hire in my line of work. Oh, girl, I almost... Anyway. They needed someone to do floor pagination, but they had to speak English and have a driver's license here. The license I have, but I don't have the English. Then... Because sometimes you have to deal directly with the client, right? So it didn't work out for me."¹⁴⁰ (Schaienne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

In spite of their education credentials and professional experiences, few Brazilian migrants have succeeded in achieving higher-skilled occupations. When they do, it is usually unrelated to their career in Brazil, and they obtain a US higher-education degree or build their own businesses within the Brazilian community. At the time of our interview, Eliana was working as a hospice chaplain, Dilla as the CEO for *Viver Magazine*, Andreia as the owner and CEO of *Brazilian Wax by Andreia*, Linda as a real-estate agent, and Jandira as a housecleaning business owner. To Eliana, that's not very common: "I do not know a lot of people that were able to clean houses, study, and make a career. I do not know many people, I know some, but not many."¹⁴¹ (Eliana, interview 14, 12/26/23, video call)

In this section, I described the specific ways in which Brazilians are differentiated from the US-born labor force, as discussed in the literature review. As Brazilian migrants point out, their standing as workers in US labor markets is not the same as that of the US-born. Being out of status, or just not having a work permit, is a legal barrier for many to enter

139"E pra você procurar trabalho sem inglês aqui, só tem essas opções, de babá ou... de babá de brasileiro ou de houseclean, que é com brasileiro também. Porque se eu tivesse inglês eu tenho certeza que seria mais fácil, até pra babá, que americanos sempre precisam, né" (Isadora, entrevista 18, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

140"Esse tempo atrás tinha uma pessoa querendo me contratar na minha área. Ai, menina, eu quase... Enfim. Tava precisando de uma pessoa que fizesse paginação de piso, mas tinha que falar inglês e ter a driver aqui. A driver eu tenho, mas eu não tenho o inglês. Ai, porque às vezes você precisa lidar direto com o cliente, né? Ai não deu certo pra mim" (Schaienne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

141"Não conheço muitas pessoas que conseguiram limpar casa, estudar e fazer carreira. Não conheço muitas pessoas, conheço algumas, mas não muitas" (Eliana, entrevista 14, 26/12/23, chamada de vídeo).

non-precarized job markets. Moreover, Brazilians undergo a process of de-skilling in the US in two ways. First, in moving to a country where they do not speak the language and later struggling to learn it well, they lose basic communication skills needed even in lower-skilled labor markets. Second, even if they are considered higher-skilled workers in Brazil, they lose such standing in the US where their degrees and professional experience lose value.

In this and the previous chapter, I described the two main labor markets that Brazilians engage with in Marietta, housecleaning and construction. These are specifically Brazilian labor markets, in which only co-nationals participate, and through which circulate employment offers and practices of “selling jobs.” These specifically Brazilian labor markets simultaneously support and bind Brazilian workers in the Marietta area, gatekeeping jobs away from other communities while few succeed in entering other areas of work. Moreover, Brazilian employers may enact exploitative practices. Employers and *helpers* alike are, however, subjected to the possibility of un- or underemployment, depending on broader economic dynamics in the US, and to employment instability. As discussed previously, these labor markets reflect previous scholarship on the differentiation of labor market access and working conditions based on gender, nationality, race, and citizenship status, while also spotlighting the specific ways in which labor conditions are precarized and how Brazilian migrants struggle to access labor markets other than housecleaning and construction. In this context, the forms of rent extracted from housecleaning and construction discussed in the earlier section of this chapter, may or may not be based on migration and citizenship status differences. In the case of construction, migration status may affect access to clients, extend outsourcing chains or place someone closer to the bottom of it. Lack of English skills and financial resources to invest also favor the existence of “selling jobs” practices and extended outsourcing chains.

Overall, relationships between employers and workers are naturalized, and “exploitation” refers to instances of abuse but not the root of the working relationship in and of itself. So are processes of differential inclusion and exclusion in relation to labor markets, in which many Brazilian migrants feel that the devaluation of their education in the US should be accepted, rather than fought against or critiqued.

As mentioned through the chapter, many Brazilians consider these jobs to be worthwhile, even in the face of precarization, risks, and employment instability. In doing so, they prioritize one aspect, wages and purchasing power, over all others, including health, stability, and labor rights and benefits. The employment instability can be overlooked, and even those who struggle to find work may say that the US is a “land of opportunity” or that wages make precarized labor in the US worth it – when their own incomes are limited by unemployment. This is what I mean by a *geographical imagination in place*, in which if the US has issues of un- or underemployment, it is still a “land of opportunity,” but when moments of high unemployment happen in Brazil, it is because the country has “no opportunities.” In chapters 8 and 9, I discuss how ideas around the US as “worth it” appear in the sphere of social reproduction where, I argue, there is a similar process of privileging aspects of social reproduction over others.

CHAPTER 8: MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

A much repeated saying among Brazilians in Marietta is that “America is the land where the son cries and the mother doesn’t hear/see.”¹⁴² “Where the son cries and the mother does not see/hear” is a popular saying in Brazil, said to have originated from enslaved children who were sent to the smallest and darkest corners of mining caves, where adults could not reach – where they would literally cry with no one to hear. It generally means that one is in a situation where they will have to deal with challenges and hardships on their own, with no outside support. Brazilians in the metropolitan Atlanta area use the saying in reference to different situations they face in the United States. Fabiana, for example, mentioned it in reference to arriving in the US as a young woman and “growing up” there, having to figure things out by herself and be independent. Érika, in turn, used it quite literally when talking about working mothers who put their children in day care while they work:

“Here there’s a saying, you can even put it [in my dissertation]. Son cries and mother doesn’t hear. (...) Here this is talked about a lot, you understand? The land where the son cries and the mother does not hear. Because, the hustle, right? [They] put [the children] in a day care, [they] put [the children] in a baby sitter, and go to work. There are mothers who bring sick babies, sick children to clients’ homes. [They can] either eat or stay home with their child.”¹⁴³ (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Danilo talked about it in terms of facing difficulties while in the US, as he was narrating why he would not consider migrating alone, without his family:

“I think that when you have your family with you, you can survive anywhere in the world. (...) So when you’re doted with your family, you’re protected with your family, you’re stronger in all aspects. It does not mean I have not been through hardships here, [there were] many! It does not mean I have not cried. Yes, certainly, I got to the point of crying because

142 América é a terra onde o filho chora e mãe não vê/ouve.

143 “Aqui tem um ditado, você pode até pôr. Filho chora e mãe não ouve. (...) Aqui fala-se muito disso, entendeu? A terra que filho chora e mãe não ouve. Porque, correria, né? Bota num day care, bota na babá e vai trabalhar. Tem mãe que leva bebê doente, filho doente pra casa dos clientes. Ou come, ou fica em casa com o filho” (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

here is, like everybody says, a place where the son cries and the mother does not see.”¹⁴⁴ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Kiko, in turn, used the saying to refer to “the bad side” of the US:

“Poverty has really increased, at least what you see in downtown Atlanta. (...) I was for some half an hour over there in downtown Atlanta. I have never seen so many people on drugs, beggars like, and then people think that the United States is only beauty. Unfortunately, [they] do not know the bad side. Here is literally the land where the son, no, how does the saying go? The son cries and the mother does not see. And like, there are many bad things.”¹⁴⁵ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

The “son cries” saying and the way it is used by Brazilians to narrate their experiences and perceptions of life in the United States reveal much about social reproduction dynamics in this migrant community, including conflicts between work and family care, hardships faced without strong support networks, and perceptions on the lack of state support in different ways. The expression “the son cries and the mother does not hear” captures the lack of social reproduction support experienced by Brazilian migrants in the United States. At the same time, migrants often view improved material conditions—particularly individualized and privatized forms of social reproduction—as making migration and precarized labor “worth it.” In this sense, precarization and de-skilling in labor are effectively traded for improved living conditions.

Migrants may describe having found a “better life” in Marietta while simultaneously prioritizing certain aspects of social reproduction over others. Purchasing power, public education, and urban safety often take precedence over healthcare access, income stability, labor protections, and social relationships. This reflects a prioritization of individualized

¹⁴⁴“Eu penso que quando você tem a sua família junto com você, você consegue sobreviver em qualquer lugar do mundo. (...) Então quando você está dotado com a sua família, você está protegido com a sua família, você é mais forte em todos os aspectos. Não quer dizer que eu não tenha passado por dificuldade aqui, muita! Não quer dizer que eu não tenha chorado. Sim, com certeza eu cheguei ao ponto de chorar até porque aqui é, como diz todo mundo, um lugar onde o filho chora e a mãe não vê” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

¹⁴⁵“A miséria aumentou muito, pelo menos o que se vê no centro de Atlanta. (...) eu fiquei uma meia hora ali no centro de Atlanta. Eu nunca vi tanta gente drogada, pedintes assim, e aí as pessoas acham que Estados Unidos é só beleza. Infelizmente, não conhece a parte ruim. Aqui é literalmente a terra onde o filho, não, como é que é o ditado? O filho chora e a mãe não vê. E assim, tem muitas coisas ruins” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

consumption over collective forms of social reproduction, whether through community support networks or state programs. Even so, many migrants struggle to afford the costs of social reproduction due to unstable employment, low wages, or the health impacts of physically demanding labor. This process is uneven, with migrants able to consume more while having less access to healthcare, for example. Differences within the community are shaped by access to resources, support networks, and labor market positions. Costs may also increase due to migration-related expenses or limited access to social programs. Social reproduction thus plays a central role in migration, alongside labor. Emotional and care support from relatives in Brazil and community networks in Atlanta enable migrants to endure difficult conditions, sustaining precarized labor markets. This dynamic also involves prioritizing certain aspects of social reproduction—such as purchasing power—over others, such as healthcare, less strenuous work, or proximity to family. While Marcus (2009b) uses the concept of geographical imagination to describe migrants’ idealized perceptions of places they are not in, I argue that this geographical imagination shapes perception of lived experiences and social reproduction conditions that construct ideas of life in the US as “worth it.”

In this chapter, I start by presenting some of the material conditions of social reproduction that Brazilians encounter in the Marietta area and how they assess life in the US, revisiting some of themes discussed in chapter 5 in terms of motivations to migrate from Brazil to the US. Subsequently, I spotlight the role that Brazilian neopentecostal churches and congregations have on social reproduction conditions, as well as the limits and implications of religious organizations taking on that role.

Social reproduction conditions in Marietta

The following section presents Brazilian migrants' social reproduction conditions in Marietta in terms of food security, housing, access to healthcare and education, and automobility. I then address how Brazilian migrants see living costs in Marietta, including increased inflation for the last few years. Finally, I draw from interview quotes to examine how Brazilian workers assess their social reproduction conditions after migrating to the US.

Material conditions and access to services

A major theme in the analysis of the material conditions of social reproduction is food security, understood here as access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. As discussed in chapter 6 and 7, work shifts are set up in such a way that may prevent Brazilian migrant workers from accessing food to eat during working hours. The compromising of social reproduction activities, especially cooking hearty meals to bring to work, in the face of demanding work schedules, also disrupts food security among Brazilian migrants. This is, for many, a stark departure from what they experienced in Brazil.

Another departure is the use of food banks in the United States by many who, in Brazil, would never consider seeking food donations. In 2025, I spent a few hours at a food bank I would hear Adriana talking about back in 2023. I had arranged with Presbyterian missionary, Walter, to do a follow-up interview while waiting in line for the food distribution. He ended up being held back and arrived much later at the church parking lot where the food bank is. While waiting, I chatted with some of the people arriving and, soon after, with Adriana, who had just arrived from housecleaning with the *dona de schedule* she was working with that day, and then Natália and Pedro. At this food bank, one waits in line for a randomly

distributed number, and then waits until food distribution starts at a given time. Arriving early is a condition for making sure you are able to get a number before they run out. All announcements made by food bank workers are made in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, although very few of those in line seemed to have English as a first language. Once food distribution starts, one enters a separate room where the foodstuffs are laid out and takes whatever food they want to bring home. Walter, based on age and disability, typically gets one of the first few numbers, separated for those cases. While waiting for Walter to pick up his food, I stayed outside chatting with Adriana. I did not go into the foodstuffs room and traded my numbered ticket with a friend of Adriana's who had a number towards the end of the line. I left that ticket with them in case someone arrived and needed it. Meanwhile, I left with Walter (before Adriana had even got into the room) in his car to go pick up the pastor who was coming to Atlanta that weekend to celebrate service at Espírito Santo church.

I describe the process of getting groceries at this particular food bank because I was surprised by how many hours it takes between arriving early enough to make sure you get a number and actually leaving with the food you are able to get (in contrast to other food banks I had been to before). Adriana and Walter both remarked also that the variety, quantity, and quality of what is offered varies a lot, so one has no guarantees they will leave with a given amount of food. Later on, when I remarked to Adriana that I was surprised by how long it took, she replied, "It's better than staying home doing nothing," and noting too that she sometimes used some of the groceries from the food bank for her pre-made meal business.

The popularity of this food bank, especially when contrasted with the busy schedules of Brazilian migrants in Marietta, is a counterpoint to arguments around "in the US you work hard but you can buy things." It is worth noting, however, that Brazilian migrants talk about some foodstuffs being more affordable in the US than in Brazil, like shrimp, salmon, meat,

and others. Creusa described the difference in nutrition standards she was able to achieve in the US and those she had in Brazil:

Creusa: One thing that I like here is that we live well. Like, we do not lack anything, food is good, like, we eat like people in the middle class, wealthy, in Brazil, like, the food...

Clara: What kind of things?

Creusa: I think food is very cheap.

Clara: But when you say like, you eat like a middle class person in Brazil, what kind of food are you talking about?

Creusa: Because over there in Brazil, like, [we] would eat some rice, an egg, sometimes [we] didn't have meat to eat. And here we do, there's fruit, there it was not... It's very expensive over there, fruit. It wasn't everyday that we could have it at home.

Clara: And here you can eat [these things]?

Creusa: We eat a little better.¹⁴⁶ (Interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Access to adequate and safe housing is another major theme in material conditions of social reproduction, and one that many Brazilian migrants struggle with. The main challenge Brazilian migrants face when it comes to housing are renting requirements like documents, security deposits, and guarantees, in addition to being approved for rent without a credit score, paying rent without a bank account and, above all, high rent prices.

Many incoming Brazilian migrants find people who host them for a month or more when they first arrive in Marietta, regardless of if they are coming from Brazil or other parts of the US. In some cases, this situation works out really well – like Adriana, Oliveira, and Diogo staying with Edna and Leal when they first arrived, or for Danilo and Juçara, who stayed with someone they “barely knew” [*mal conheciam*]. In other cases, however, this hosting can turn out to be a form of exploitation. Creusa was encouraged to migrate to the US

146Creusa: Uma coisa assim que eu gosto daqui, porque a gente vive bem. Tipo assim, não falta, a comida assim, é boa, tipo assim, a gente come como se fosse uma pessoa lá no Brasil, classe média, rica, tipo assim, a comida...

Clara: Que tipo de coisas?

Creusa: Eu acho muito barata a alimentação.

Clara: Mas quando você fala assim, come que nem uma pessoa de classe média no Brasil, que tipo de comida que você tá falando?

Creusa: Porque lá no Brasil, tipo assim, comia um arrozinho, um ovo, às vezes não tinha a carne pra comer. E aqui a gente come, tem... fruta, lá não era... é muito caro lá, fruta. Não é todos os dias que a gente tinha em casa.

Clara: E aqui dá pra comer?

Creusa: A gente come melhorzinho um pouco. (Entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA)

by a long-term friend, who offered to host her and her twin daughters. Creusa lived in this friend's basement with her twins and ended up spending \$10,000 in renovations, only to be asked to leave the house with no reimbursement for this investment. As a result, Creusa struggled to move out, lacking the funds for the security deposit required from renters:

Creusa: So I went to the basement and there was nothing. So I built it, I renovated everything in the basement, working with [this friend, as her *helper*]. She, 'No, you'll stay here for as long as you want to stay here, you can stay.' And my girls were making trouble at school, rebellious! And so it wasn't working out anymore, 'your girls are making too much trouble, it will hurt me,' because it would hurt her, because [she] was illegal. (...) Then she bought a marriage and said I couldn't stay there anymore, because it would hurt her, anytime someone from [the twins'] school could show up there and it would hurt [her]. So she asked me to leave. (...) So I went looking for a place to live, but I couldn't rent. (...) So I stayed, I stayed there until I could rent a place for myself. But I've done four applications, it's not easy to do.

Clara: What do you think made it so hard for you? (...)

Creusa: Because I do not have, I did not have enough income. My income had to be at a certain amount, it had to be at X amount.

Clara: When they ask for three times the price of rent, that kind of stuff, right?

Creusa: Yes, three times the price of rent, and I could not make it. My boyfriend came from Brazil to help me out (...) And I stayed like that for three more months still, putting up with the humiliation, because I could not rent. I did three applications and it was denied. Until one day a friend of mine saw someone subletting a furnished apartment. So I went and called him, so he went and offered me to buy the furniture, pay every week, and front \$2k and then pay rent, which is \$2k here. It's rough but...¹⁴⁷ (Interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Other Brazilian migrants start by renting a room that may be shared by the entire family. Usually, they rent from other Brazilians, who may act as landlords for incoming migrants. Danilo and Juçara, for example, lived for six months in a room with their oldest son

147Clara: Porque você morava na casa dessa sua amiga, que te chamou pra vir?

Creusa: Sim. Aí eles compraram a casa e a gente foi pra outra casa. Aí eu fui pra um basement e não tinha nada. Aí eu construí, arrumei tudo no basement, trabalhando com ela. Ela, não, você vai ficar aqui até que quando você quiser ficar, pode ficar. E minhas meninas dando trabalho na escola, rebelde! E aí já não tava dando mais certo. Suas meninas tão dando trabalho demais, vai me prejudicar aqui, porque ia prejudicar ela, porque estava ilegal. (...) Aí ela comprou um casamento e falou que não dava para eu ficar lá mais porque ia prejudicar ela. Qualquer hora podia aparecer algum pessoal da escola lá e ia prejudicar. Aí eu fui e ela me pediu para sair de lá. (...) Aí eu fui procurar um lugar pra morar. Só que não tava conseguindo alugar. (...) Aí eu fiquei, fui ficando lá até eu conseguir alugar um lugar pra mim. Mas já fiz umas quatro aplicações, não é fácil fazer.

Clara: O que você acha que estava dificultando tanto conseguir? (...)

Creusa: Porque eu não tenho... não tinha renda o suficiente. Minha renda tinha que dar um valor lá... tinha que dar um valor X.

Clara: Quando pede assim que seja três vezes o valor do aluguel, essas coisas, né?

Creusa: Isso, três vezes o valor do aluguel. E eu não conseguia. Aí meu namorado veio do Brasil para me ajudar (...) E assim eu fiquei 3 meses ainda, aguentando humilhação, porque eu não conseguia alugar. Fiz três aplicações e foi negado. Até que um dia, a minha, uma amiga minha foi e viu que tinha alguém repassando o apartamento com os móveis. Aí eu fui, liguei pra ele, aí ele foi e ofereceu pra mim comprar os móveis, pagar por semana, e dar o... dois mil de entrada e aí pagar o aluguel, que aqui é dois mil. É puxado, mas... (Entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA)

and, once she was born, with their infant daughter. Renting a room may come with other challenges, such as strict rules about using the kitchen or common areas, or even sudden rent price changes. Isadora mentioned a room that she and Kiko rented in 2018-2019 from a couple who would not let them use the kitchen to prepare any meals. Later, while Isadora was in Brazil spending time with her family, Kiko was asked to leave this couple's house after helping them move on the promise that he could continue to rent from them. Kiko then rented another room from a Brazilian landlady, living by himself for \$1,000 a month. Once Isadora returned to Marietta and started working as a housecleaning *helper*, their landlady decided rent would be \$1,000 each, totaling \$2,000 a month. Isadora said that was extortion and refused to pay, prompting the landlady to threaten to call the police. Isadora replied that the landlady could call the police all she wanted, because Isadora and Kiko had valid tourist visas, while their landlady was out-of-status, having entered the US through Mexico. Fortunately, another roommate at this house lent them his car. They left the house immediately and slept in a gas station, remaining unhoused for a couple of days, until a friend of Kiko's offered them to stay at his apartment.

When trying to get out of renting rooms like this, Brazilian migrants struggle with putting together all the documents and required funds for renting an apartment on their own. Sometimes, they are able to do that by getting help from friends or even by having someone else rent an apartment in their name. Kiko talked about needing a friend's help to be able to rent an apartment in 2023:

"Oh yes, there's something else too, a hardship that... when we came back this time, to rent an apartment, because you need a tax ID, you need this, you need a bank account, we didn't have it. And my friend rented this apartment for us in his name. So like, it's really rare for someone to do that, but it came up thanks to God and he rented the apartment, put the light bill in his name, gas, not the car, the car we financed in our name, in [Isadora's] name (...) And

that's a real struggle, when people arrive here, to do."¹⁴⁸ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Danilo also described how he and Juçara faced many of the struggles described above when they first arrived in Marietta, staying at first with a friend for 30 days, then living for six months in one rented bedroom as a family of four, one of them a newborn. Later, they were able to rent their first apartment with the help of other friends in the area. Danilo mentions, later, that while some Brazilians are "financially prepared" to move, he and Juçara migrated with \$4,000, all of which they had spent while still living in Florida.

"She hosted us for 30 days so we could get to know Georgia. [She] hosted us for 30 days, which was enough for us to get acquainted and be able to rent our room and stay... We stayed for six months, if I'm not mistaken, in a rented room. And after six months we were able to rent our first apartment (...) [Their friend Bento], even though he did not know us [at the time], he gave us \$600 to provide us with our desire to rent an apartment. Our [church] sister Nilda, she donated to us, you understand, a part of that money. And a contractor that today I pass him work when he needs it, he gave me a proof of income letter, even though he did not know me, he was getting to know me still. So, those were people that were able to give me a push at that time when I needed it, because it was suffocating, staying six months in one room, with a pregnant woman and a small baby and everything in there, it's a different reality. For someone who's used to having their own home in Brazil, to have everything... Then you get here and you have to go through this reality and it's really hard."¹⁴⁹ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

And while renting one's own apartment gives Brazilian migrants more security than relying on other living arrangements, it may still be too expensive and migrants will in turn

148 "Ah sim, outra coisa também, uma dificuldade que... quando voltamos agora, para alugar apartamento, porque precisa de tax ID, precisa disso, precisa de conta no banco, nós não tínhamos. E meu amigo alugou esse apartamento pra gente, no nome dele. Então assim, é muito raro alguém fazer isso, mas apareceu graças a Deus e ele alugou o apartamento, ligou a energia no nome dele, o gás, o carro não, o carro financiou, a gente financiou no nosso nome, no nome dela, (...) E isso é uma grande dificuldade, quando as pessoas chegam aqui, pra fazer" (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

149 "Nos deu um acolhimento de 30 dias, que foi o suficiente para a gente conhecer e poder alugar nosso quarto e ficar... ficamos por seis meses, se eu não me engano, dentro de um quarto alugado. E depois de seis meses, que a gente conseguiu alugar nosso primeiro apartamento (...) [O amigo deles, Bento] mesmo sem conhecer a gente, ele nos se deu 600 dólares para poder cumprimentar a gente com o desejo de alugar um apartamento. A nossa irmã Nubia, ela nos doou, entendeu, uma parte desse dinheiro. E um contratista que hoje eu passo serviço pra ele quando ele precisa, ele me deu a carta de comprovação de renda sem mesmo eu... me conhecer. Estava me conhecendo ainda. Então, que são pessoas que conseguiram dar um empurrão naquele momento que eu precisava, porque é sufocante, você ficar seis meses dentro de um quarto, com uma mulher grávida e neném pequeno e tudo ali, é outra realidade. Pra quem está acostumado a ter sua casa no Brasil, ter tudo... Aí chega aqui e você tem que passar por essa realidade e é difícil pra caramba" (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

rent spare rooms. Kiko and Isadora, in 2023, rented one of their rooms, first someone else, then Gerson. In addition to security deposits and high rent prices, Gerson also talks about “hidden costs” in renting an apartment in the US, costs that are not included in rent prices and usually are not talked about by Brazilians when narrating life in the US (especially in YouTube channels dedicated to content for prospective migrants):

“I did not understand how to rent an apartment here. And then when I arrived here, I started to see that there are many different ways, but there in Brazil I always imagined it was a little cheaper, the price would be lower. I see here that no, there’s lots of things, hidden costs that we do not discover by watching YouTube, right. Expenses with utilities, gas, light, water and all that are different because we’re used to Brazil. The ways of renting, too, are different and all, the subletting thing, there are many options, but in general there are several hidden costs here and there.”¹⁵⁰ (Gerson, interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

While much is said about schedule owners who make a lot of money and buy their own homes to live in, only a handful of the Brazilian migrants I talked to had been able to afford to buy their own homes, even after several years in the US. For migrants without a social security number, buying a home can be more expensive, since they are usually ineligible for several financing options. Juçara and Danilo were able to buy their own home only after a new financing program came out that required only a Tax ID, according to Juçara:

“So we qualified to buy homes only with 20% [of downpayment] with tax ID, right, and that was a lot of money, right, because houses are really expensive, and we did not qualify for anything, there were no other programs. Then last year, I went to do my taxes, our taxes, then the girl who works with us, our accountant, said ‘Look, I think there’s something for you’ and, not to talk too much about our Christian aspect, right, but we have our faith so everything is based on faith. (...) The Lord told us, I’ll give you a house in [four months]. (...) That’s when I went to the accountant, she said, ‘Juçara, before we send [the taxes], call this person here because I think something came out.’ So I called and the girl said there was a home buying plan that I think was, at the time she said a 5 or 6% downpayment. I said, ok, that’s better, right? (...) So we applied, thanks to God we got it, and we bought our home with a 5% downpayment.”¹⁵¹ (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

150“Eu não entendia como é que conseguia alugar imóvel aqui. E aí quando cheguei aqui comecei a ver que há diversas formas diferentes, mas lá no Brasil eu sempre imaginei que fosse um pouco mais barato, o custo ia ser menor. Eu vejo aqui que não, aqui tem bastante coisa, custos ocultos que a gente não vai descobrir vendo pelo YouTube, né. As despesas com serviços, gás, energia, água e tudo mais são diferentes porque a gente está acostumado no Brasil. As formas também de aluguel, né, são diferentes e tal, o negócio de repasse de apartamento, são várias opções, mas no geral tem vários custos ocultos aqui e ali” (Gerson, entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA).

151“Aí a gente qualificava pra comprar casas só com 20% com o tax ID, né, e era muito dinheiro, né, porque as casas caríssimas, e a gente não qualificava pra nenhum, não tinha nenhum outro programa. Aí quando foi ano

Additionally, access to social services such as healthcare and education is quite uneven, depending on the service, migration status, branch of government in the case of state provided services, and other factors. In terms of access to healthcare, most Brazilian migrants I talked to were uninsured and paid out-of-pocket for any expenses with medical exams and doctor consultations. According to my research participants, children with US citizenship, however, can access healthcare through “the government,” which creates a particular kind of unevenness between family members born in Brazil and in the US. When Isadora had her son Douglas in Marietta, for example, the bill for childbirth came split in two, one for her and one for Douglas. Douglas’s half was immediately covered by the state on the grounds of his citizenship. Isadora’s half was eventually covered by a hospital program through which large companies fund uninsured persons’ healthcare bills (probably in exchange for tax deductions).

At the same time, crowdfunding campaigns for cancer treatments, other expensive and/or long-term treatments frequently circulate in WhatsApp and Facebook groups, as well as Instagram accounts of Brazilian churches in the area. Juçara mentioned how the community “rises up” in the case of health emergencies:

“But we find a solution, we do not get like, ‘oh, I’m sick, I do not know what to do,’ like I’m telling you, if an emergency comes up, the community, it, it’s its thing. It’ll rise up, if you want to do a raffle, if you want to do anything towards paying for an emergency surgery, the community will help you with that.”¹⁵² (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

passado, eu fui fazer minhas taxas, as nossas taxas e aí a menina que nos atende, nossa contadora, falou, olha, eu acho que tem alguma coisa pra vocês e nisso, não colocando tanto a questão nossa cristã, né, mas a gente tem a nossa fé então é tudo baseado na fé. (...) O Senhor falou pra gente, vou dar a casa de vocês em quatro anos. Em quatro meses. (...) Aí quando eu fui na contadora, ela falou, Jéssica, antes da gente mandar, liga pra essa pessoa aqui porque eu acho que saiu alguma coisa. Aí eu liguei e a menina falou que tinha um plano de compra de casa, que eu acho que era, na época ela falou, 5 ou 6% de entrada. Eu falei, opa, já melhora, né? (...) Aí a gente aplicou, graças a Deus a gente conseguiu, e a gente comprou a nossa casa com 5% de entrada e completou um ano agora em junho, que a gente comprou aqui” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

152“Mas a gente tem solução, a gente não fica assim, ah, tô com uma doença, não sei o que fazer, igual tô te falando, se surgir uma emergência, a comunidade, ela, já é dela. Ela vai se levantar, se você quiser fazer uma rifa, se você quiser fazer alguma coisa em prol de pagar uma cirurgia de emergência, a comunidade te ajuda nisso” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

While English skills are a challenge for healthcare, many migrants frequent Brazilian doctors in the Marietta area and, in some cases, hospitals have interpreters available.

In contrast to healthcare, education is praised for being accessible to all, even children who are out-of-status or on tourist visas, usually with the comment that “the government has no obligation to educate them.” Juliana talks about how welcoming the school system is for immigrant children:

“But yes, in the schools even, like, there’s a Brazilian woman who works for Cobb County to help people who are arriving. (...) But she works precisely with interpreting for people who just arrived. Then I, ‘wow, they hire a Brazilian just to help people who are arriving,’ people who oftentimes are out of status here. Like, you’re out of status, but that’s ok, we welcome you anyway.”¹⁵³ (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Many also praise the quality of the US school system, talking about it as being at the level of private schools in Brazil. Public schools in Brazil are frequently regarded as being of very low quality. One of the few who disagree with this comparison is Edna, who thinks that US public education is abysmal, as discussed in chapter 5. Juçara explained the comparison between public education in the US and private education in Brazil:

“A public school here would be a school you’d have to pay for your son to study at [in Brazil]. Like, Danilo [Jr.] studies at a public school here, right? For him to have all that system, in Rio de Janeiro, the school where he studies here [in Marietta] that is public, would be a school I’d have to pay for in Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro. (...) The structure of a public school here is that of a private school there, you understand?”¹⁵⁴ (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Something that Brazilians need to adapt to in the US, however, is the idea of “living in a good school district” and thinking of housing in terms of their children’s education.

153“Mas é, nas escolas mesmo, igual, tem uma brasileira que trabalha no condado de Cobb para ajudar quem chega. Mas ela trabalha justamente traduzindo para quem chega. Aí eu, gente, eles contrataram uma brasileira só para ajudar pessoas que estão chegando, pessoas que muitas vezes estão sem status aqui. Tipo assim, você está sem status, mas tudo bem, a gente te acolhe mesmo assim” (Juliana, entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA).

154“Uma escola pública daqui seria uma escola que você pagaria para o seu filho ter um estudo. Tipo o Daniel estuda numa escola pública aqui, certo? Pra ele ter todo esse sistema aqui, no Rio de Janeiro, a escola que ele estuda aqui, que é pública, seria uma escola que eu teria que pagar no Brasil, no Rio de Janeiro. (...) A estrutura de uma escola pública daqui é uma estrutura de uma escola particular lá. Entendeu?” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

Moving to a different neighborhood can cause both positive and negative changes in that regard. Edna, for example, kept their old address (where her cousins now live) at her sons' schools, because schools in her new neighborhood are not as good. In Creusa's case, in the first school her twins went to, while they still lived with her friend, there were only white Americans. That impacted the girls, who would likely be considered Black by US racial standards, who started saying they wanted to be blond and have blue eyes. Upon moving into this new apartment, the twins became much happier at their new, more diverse school, where there are lots of other Brazilian kids.

While many talk about not having time to rest or to take vacation days, the affordability of travel and leisure is praised as part of the good living conditions in the US. Claudinei talks about never seeing the ocean while living in Brazil because he could never afford a trip to the beach. Living in Georgia, they were able to visit Panama City and wanted to go to Destin (both in the Florida panhandle) "as soon as [Florida's governor DeSantis] stops being silly." Schaienne also makes this comparison between travel prices in Brazil and in the US to compare quality of life in both countries.

In the context of transportation structures in the Marietta area, a car is necessary not only for work but for basic social reproduction needs, such as grocery shopping, taking children to daycare, and going to doctor's appointments. Scholarship on the effects of US migration policies that linked issuing driver's licenses to migration status has highlighted how it impacts migrants' mobility in urban areas, which oftentimes have less than adequate public transit infrastructures. Such policies have significant impact in work as well as in social reproduction. Additionally, not all Brazilian migrants arrive with enough money to immediately buy a car and struggle in the meantime.

Talita described her experience with not having a car impacting both their overall family income and basic social reproduction needs, like buying drinking water:

“And so, to change the subject, we got a car, my sister and my brother-in-law brought it, ‘There you have it, I bought it and you have eight months to work and pay me back.’ And to make things easier, because [she] saw [Lucas, Taís’s husband] was missing out on work, it was hard, rent is expensive for me alone. So they brought to our door a car in a good state, well maintained. And now it’s... we can go to the store whenever we want, pick up things, there’s water, before we would order water on Uber Eats and it was a struggle for [drivers] to find the apartment, sometimes groceries were even returned, really hard. So a car is not a luxury, it’s a necessity, there is no way around it. Even though things are really close that we could walk to them, in that heat that we had, we would go [on foot] and it was only us, to say it like Lucas, only us with grocery bags walking up and down, crossing highways [laughs]. (...) Everyone would look at us, the asphalt was hot, hot, hot.”¹⁵⁵ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Similar to rent security deposits, not having enough initial money to buy a car when arriving in the US also creates unequal conditions between recently arrived Brazilian migrants. Talita explained:

“I did not have anything to sell to be ready when I got here. That was another struggle we had to overcome, right? That those who come, whatever way they’re coming, there has to be some preparation. You have to at least have some money, some capital that will be enough for you to buy a car or rent an apartment. At least one of the two. You need enough money for that. Because I arrived only with the clothes on my back. (...) We stayed longer than we should have at my sister’s house because of that. And they’ve helped us a lot, because even though she’s my sister, but I did not know her husband, we were not in touch (...) So hosting us, putting their name on the apartment, helping with a credit card, helping out with bills, at first, so we can start to walk on our own two feet. So we still depend on them for these things, because of documentation, and I believe that a lot of people come and depend on other people who are not related. I do not believe it, I know it because people have told me, people themselves have told me that they come, stay in friends’ homes, many times they do not even know them, they come through third parties and then they stay and start their life afterwards. But then some are prepared with money, have the money at least to buy a car, so they do not have to wait for that person.”¹⁵⁶ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

155“E aí, aí já mudando de assunto, o carro a gente conseguiu, minha irmã e meu cunhado trouxeram, tó aqui, comprei e vocês vão ter oito meses pra poder trabalhar e me pagar aí. E pra agilizar aí, porque viu que ele tava ficando sem trabalho, tava difícil, aluguel é caro, aí pra mim sozinha, aí trouxeram aqui na porta pra gente um carro bonzinho, bem conservado. E agora tá... a gente vai no mercado a hora que quer, buscar lá, tem água, antes a gente pedia água no Uber Eats e tinha aquela dificuldade pra achar o apartamento, às vezes até voltava a mercadoria, bem difícil. Então, o carro não é luxo, é uma necessidade, não adianta. Mesmo que aqui as coisas tudo pertinho, que a gente poderia ir de pé, naquele calorção que estava fazendo, a gente ia e só a gente, falando igual Lucas, só a gente com sacola passando pra cima e pra baixo, atravessando as rodovias [risos]. (...) O povo tudo olhando. Aí a gente ia nessa luta aí, no asfalto quente, quente, quente” (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

156“Eu não tinha nada o que vender para estar preparado para chegar aqui. E uma outra dificuldade que a gente teve que superar, né? Que quem vier, seja da maneira que estiver vindo, tem que ter uma preparação. Tem que ter pelo menos um dinheiro, um capital que vai dar pra você comprar um carro ou alugar um apartamento. Pelo

The dependence on cars in order to access jobs and social reproduction necessities, such as groceries, is a common trait of US suburban landscapes like the Marietta area. The issue of migrants' automobility and immobility, due to not having access to driver's licenses or having their migrations status checked when stopped at the road, has been extensively addressed in migration research (Guzmán and Medeiros 2020, Licona and Maldonado 2013, Maldonado et al 2015, Stuesse and Coleman 2014), as discussed in the literature review. The financial resources required to buy a safe and reliable car, which many Brazilian migrants do not have upon arriving, are an additional factor to migrant immobility in this context.

Brazilian migrants' assessment of the US as a country where goods are accessible also comes from the amount of donations they access, from furniture to clothes to home appliances. There are many WhatsApp groups for donations in which Brazilians participate and housecleaners also receive a lot of donations from clients. However, given their own background in Brazil, many would not have sought or accepted donations while still living in the country in the same way they do after arriving in the US.

Living costs and the cost of living

Apart from these initial costs, Brazilians have to grapple with significant living expenses in Marietta. Accounts of things being affordable are as common as those of things

menos um dos dois. Tem que ter um dinheiro suficiente pra isso. Porque eu cheguei apenas com a roupa do corpo. (...) A gente ficou mais tempo do que deveria na casa da minha irmã por conta disso. E eles têm ajudado muito, porque mesmo sendo minha irmã, mas eu não conhecia o marido dela, a gente não tinha contato (...) Então, receber a gente, dar o nome deles pra apartamento, ajudar com cartão, ajudar com conta, a princípio, pra gente poder começar a andar com nossas próprias pernas. Então, a gente ainda depende deles pra essas coisas, por conta da documentação, e eu acredito que muita gente vem e fica dependendo de outras pessoas que não é parente. Acredito não, eu sei porque já me contaram, as próprias pessoas já me contaram, que vem, vai ficar na casa de amigos, muitas vezes até nem conhece, vem por intermédio de terceiros e terceiros e aí fica e começa a vida depois. Mas aí alguns tem o preparo do dinheiro, tem o dinheiro pelo menos para comprar o carro, pra não ficar esperando pela aquela pessoa" (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

being expensive, though the latter is more common among those who arrived earlier in the US. Diogo, Adriana's son, talks about everything in the US being affordable, except for rent:

Clara: You mention that here you earn dollars and all, but what's it like to earn in dollars and also spend in dollars? Do you think it's worth it?

Diogo: Yeah, that's true. Yes, I think it's worth it because... But, the issue of rent, it's very expensive, right, in dollars. But there are other things, for example, clothing, things for the home, car stuff, it's very cheap. I think the purchasing power of the dollar is really good. But that's it, I think it's been worth it.

Clara: You mean, compared to Brazil?

Diogo: I think the only thing that compared with Brazil [is cheaper] is rent, right? Which is very expensive [in Marietta]. Usually here in Marietta, especially, small homes, \$2k in rent.¹⁵⁷ (Interview 12, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Érika, who had to return to work when her son was four months old because she and her husband could not live on one wage, complained in 2023 of her many expenses: rent, internet, phone bill, car insurance, immigration lawyer fees, and English school tuition. Among these, lawyer fees and tuition are high expenses that go towards maintaining her and her husband's status. In other words, immigration costs consume much of Brazilian migrants' wages if they are trying to avoid becoming out of status. Lawyer costs may consume much of migrants' wages. They sacrifice other expenses to be able to afford the immigration lawyers and visa processes. One time, in 2023, when I stopped by Isadora's for a pineapple cake I had ordered, we talked about how much they were spending on lawyer fees to first extend their tourist visa and later apply for a student visa, the same as Érika did, and eventually apply for an EB-2 visa for Kiko. Isadora and her husband had considered not renting their spare room, but they could not afford to give up on the extra income. Kiko's wages, according to Isadora, were enough for their regular expenses, but not enough for lawyer fees, so they really needed

¹⁵⁷Clara: E você comentou dessa coisa de conseguir ganhar em dólar e tal, mas como é que é ganhar em dólar e gastar em dólar também? Você acha que isso compensa?

Diogo: É, é verdade. Sim, acho que compensa sim, porque... Mas, a questão do aluguel, é muito caro né, em dólar. Mas tem coisas, por exemplo, roupa, coisas para casa, coisas com carro, são muito baratos. Acho que o poder de compra do dólar é muito bom. Mas é isso, acho que tem valido a pena.

Clara: Quer dizer, comparado com o Brasil?

Diogo: Acho que a única coisa que comparado com o Brasil seria o aluguel da casa, né? Que é muito caro. Geralmente aqui em Marietta, então, as casinhas pequenas, 2 mil dólares de aluguel. (Entrevista 12, 21/10/23, Marietta GA)

a second income – even though she was struggling to find work as a housecleaning *helper*. Adriana talked about not buying a car in order to afford lawyer fees for their tourist visa extension and later EB-2 application:

Adriana: (...) I think it'll be around \$40k [for herself, her husband, and her son].

Clara: *Reais* or dollars?

Adriana: Thousand dollars [laughs]. Thousand dollars, yes. If it was *real*, it would be nice. But it'll be around that. We pay an installment every month, we put up a downpayment and we pay an installment every month. So, we can't afford today to buy a car yet, right? We were able to rent the house here with Taynara, right? Our roommate over there, who's my cousin too, but has been helping us with that.¹⁵⁸ (Interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Besides lawyer fees, those who enter the US through Mexico oftentimes have to pay *atravessadores* in installments as well, like Talita and Luciano, who compromise on sending money to family:

Clara: So now your big expenses are, you're paying for the *travessia*, you've already paid for the lawyer.

Talita: There's still a portion missing [to the lawyer], because I paid Lucianos's part, not mine yet.

Clara: So you have the *travessia*, the lawyer, home expenses, and the money you send back to [your] family [in Brazil].

Talita: And we're not even sending, like, an amount every month. When we can and when things get tight over there, we have to figure it out and send it. But we do not have that monthly amount that we can send yet. It has to be here, things here first, prioritize them.¹⁵⁹ (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Brazilians who had been in the US longer, especially before the Covid-19 pandemic, remarked on inflation and rising living costs. Tânia compared living costs in 2023 to when she first arrived in the US, in the 1990s:

¹⁵⁸Adriana: Olha, eu acho que tudo (...) a gente vai ficar em torno de 40 mil.

Clara: Reais ou dólares?

Adriana: Mil dólares. [risos] Mil dólares, é. Se fosse real, estaria bom. Mas vai ficar em torno disso. A gente paga uma parcela todo mês. Demos uma entrada, a gente paga uma parcela todo mês. Então, a gente não tem condições hoje de comprar um carro ainda, né? A gente conseguiu alugar a casa aqui com a Taynara, né? Roommate ali, que é minha prima também, mas tem ajudado a gente nisso. (Entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

¹⁵⁹Clara: Então agora de gasto grande que vocês têm, vocês estão pagando a *travessia*, o advogado já tá pago.

Talita: Ainda falta uma parte, porque eu paguei a parte de Lucas, aí falta a minha.

Clara: Então vocês tem a *travessia*, o advogado, as contas de casa e o dinheiro que manda pra família.

Talita: E a gente ainda nem tá mandando assim todo mês um valor. Quando dá e dá um apertãozinho lá, tem que dar um jeito e mandar. Mas a gente não tem essa quantia mensal para estar mandando ainda. Tem que ser aqui, essas coisas aqui primeiro, dar prioridade. (Entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA)

“But here is not like it was back in the day, here this country really went down in terms of work, wages, everything. Back in the day I think it was a lot better. The inflation went up. Because back in the day you would take 50 [dollars], go to the grocery store, you would bring back a full cart. Today you bring two bags. I went there just now, I bought two heads of garlic, bread yeast, a small bag of sugar, some pork ribs, a [head of] cabbage, 25 [dollars]. And before, oh my. Before, you would take, like, 50 dollars... Gas was, it was less than a dollar, right? I think it was 89 cents, 90. Today it’s 3-something.”¹⁶⁰ (Tânia, interview 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

When I asked Kiko to compare what had changed from when they left Marietta for Brazil in 2019 to when they returned in 2023, he said:

“The price of things, rent, especially rent went up outrageously. Car insurance. Car financing interests. (...) For example, when we were here before, gas, the gallon of gas was \$1.97, \$2 at most. It was \$1.50. Today it’s twice that, it’s \$3 and change. (...) I filled up close to where I work for \$3.19. So I said, ok, today I saved here in relation to last week, \$8. But many things went up. Also I believe it’s the post-pandemic too, right? Like I told you, this recession, I do not know what’s going on, high interests everywhere, too, so...”¹⁶¹ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

A major conflict when it comes to living costs is not necessarily the expenses themselves, but having constant expenses alongside a fluctuating workload and, consequently, an unstable income. This complaint appears in contradiction to views of the US as the “land of opportunity” or a place where “there’s work for everybody” and “if you work hard you’re able to achieve what you want.” Leal gave an example of this conflict: “Because we know what a struggle it is to be here without work, because here is the land of opportunity, but the

¹⁶⁰“Só que aqui não tá como antigamente, aqui esse país decaiu bastante em questão de trabalho, salário, tudo. Antigamente eu acho que era bem melhor. A inflação que aumentou. Porque antigamente você pegava 50 [dólares], você ia no mercado, você trazia um carrinho cheio. Hoje você traz duas sacolas. Eu fui ali agora, comprei duas cabeças de alho, fermento pra pão, um pacotinho de açúcar, uma costela de porco, um repolho, 25. A gente... E antes, nossa... Antes, você pegava assim, nossa, 50 dólares... A gasolina já era... Era menos que um dólar, né? Eu acho que era 89 centavos, 90.... Hoje, tá três e pouco” (Tânia, entrevista 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA).

¹⁶¹“Preço das coisas. Aluguel. Principalmente o aluguel subiu absurdamente. Seguro do carro. Juros de financiamento de carro. (...) É. É, basicamente isso. Mas mudou muito, muito, muito. Por exemplo, quando estávamos aqui, a gasolina, aqui o galão da gasolina era 1,97, 2 dólares no máximo. Era 1,50. Hoje está o dobro. Está 3 e sei lá. (...) Eu abasteci pertinho de onde eu trabalho, 3,19. Ai eu falei ó, hoje eu economizei aqui em relação a semana passada, 8 dólares. Mas aumentou muita coisa. Também eu acredito que uma pós pandemia também, né? Como eu te falei, essa recessão, não sei o que que tá acontecendo. Juros tudo alto, também, então...” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

bills come hard. They come and they come hard”¹⁶² (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA).

Gerson was waiting for his wife and children to follow him to the US. At the time of our interview, Gerson’s family had his wages from his Brazilian job, his US wages from construction work and other odd jobs, and his wife’s wages in Brazil. Once she moved to Georgia., they would lose her income, right at the time of the seasonal downturn of construction work, which Gerson referred to as “surviving the winter.” Not only does he refer to the conflict between constant living costs vs. fluctuating workload (and therefore income), but to the conflict between labor and physical health that characterizes Brazilians’ experiences in housecleaning and construction jobs, as discussed in chapters 6 and 7:

“That’s why I say, survive the winter. Get through the winter, the market returns to the average that folks tell me have always been, a demand that a guy has work every day [to offer], then my struggle will become another one, it’ll be how I’ll recover physically from working five days in a row [laughs]. Yeah, but that’s the problem I’m willing to... It’s better than the kids going without anything.”¹⁶³ (Gerson, interview 16, 12/07/23, Marietta GA)

Brazilian migrants talk about several moments through their time in the US when wages are not enough to cover living costs. This can happen when labor markets take an expected or unexpected downturn, or even when a worker is incapacitated to work due to an accident or illness. Leal talks about some of these moments (see also life story 17):

“And so, anyway, that really messed with my head, in addition to two major financial squeezes that we went through here. All my economies I brought [from Brazil to US] and soon they were over because of currency differences. In four, five months it all went away. In four, five months I already came to depend on what I could produce here, you understand? And then it was really hard. It was a big motivation in coming here from Massachusetts. It would not add

162“Porque a gente sabe a dificuldade que é tá aqui sem trabalhar, porque aqui é a terra da oportunidade, mas as contas chegam com força. Chegam e chegam com força” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

163“É por isso que eu digo, sobreviver ao inverno. Passar o inverno, o mercado voltar aos padrões que o pessoal me fala que sempre foram, de demanda de o cara conseguir ter diária todo dia, aí a minha dificuldade vai passar a ser outra, vai ser como é que eu vou me recuperar fisicamente com a frequência de cinco dias seguidos de trabalho [risos]. Bem, mas esse é o problema que eu estou disposto a... Melhor isso do que faltar dinheiro aí pra meninada” (Gerson, entrevista 16, 07/12/23, Marietta GA).

up, every month there was something pending.”¹⁶⁴ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Tânia estimated how much one needs to make to “live more or less comfortably” in Marietta, an amount she was not able to earn as a *helper* at that moment:

Tânia: I think for you to live more or less comfortably here it’s \$200 a day.

Clara: That you need to earn.

Tânia: Yes.

Clara: Is that \$4k in a month?

Tânia: I think it is.

Clara: At least, like.

Tânia: At least, I think.

Clara: And have you been able to earn that much?

Tânia: Oh, I have not, right? Hm, hm, hm. No way, I do not earn that. Some people earn that, right? The bosses earn that, right? But those of us who work as *helpers* do not. We give thanks when we make \$120 a day.

Clara: And so, to live well, comfortably what is it, like, that you...?

Tânia: To be able to pay rent, a light bill, a water bill, support yourself, right. Tough, because it’s very expensive, light bills, rent.

Clara: Rent you mean for a home for yourself, a nice home.

Tânia: Yes, yes. I think so.

Clara: And that for people who are by themselves, who do not have children, right.

Tânia: Yes, exactly. Because it’s also complicated for people with young children. I know that the girls who went to work with me, one of them had twins, she earned \$120, had to pay \$50 for a babysitter, which means, there was \$70 left.¹⁶⁵ (Tânia, interview 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

164“E aí, enfim, aquilo mexeu muito com a minha cabeça, somado a dois grandes apertos financeiros que a gente viu aqui. Todas as minhas economias eu trouxe e já acabaram por conta da diferença de moeda. Em 5... Em 4, 5 meses foi tudo embora. Em 4, 5 meses eu estava passando a depender do que eu podia produzir daqui, entendeu? E aí foi muito difícil. Foi um grande motivador para eu poder vir de Massachusetts para cá. A conta não estava fechando. Todo mês tinha sempre algo pendente” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

165Tânia: Eu acho que pra você ter uma vida mais ou menos confortável aqui é uns 200 dólares por dia.

Clara: Que tem que ganhar.

Tânia: É.

Clara: Isso por mês dá 4 mil? 4 mil dólares?

Tânia: Acho que é.

Clara: Um mínimo, assim.

Tânia: No mínimo, eu acho.

Clara: E tá dando pra ganhar isso?

Tânia: Ah, não dá, né? Hm, hm, hm. De jeito nenhum. Eu não ganho. Tem gente que ganha, né? As patroas ganham, né? Mas a gente que trabalha de helper não ganha. Dá graça quando ganha 120 por dia.

Clara: E aí, uma vida boa, confortável, é o quê, assim, o que que você...?

Tânia: Conseguir pagar um aluguel, luz, água, se manter, né. Difícil, que tá muito caro luz, aluguel.

Clara: Aluguel, assim, pra uma casa que seja só sua, uma casa bacana.

Tânia: Uhum, é. Eu acho.

Clara: Isso pra quem está sozinho, né, que não tem ainda filho.

Tânia: É, exato. Porque também é complicado quem tem criança pequena. Eu sei que as meninas que iam trabalhar comigo, tinha uma que tinha gêmeos, ia pra ganhar 120, tinha que pagar 50 pra babysitter. Quer dizer, sobrava 70. (Entrevista 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

As ubiquitous as “America is the land where the son cries and the mother does not see” is another saying: “America is not for old people.” This is frequently said in terms of labor, given that older workers struggle to keep up with the physical demands of both housecleaning and construction jobs. Additionally, it refers to lack of access to social security and retirement funds. Migrants without a social security number do not have access to social security pension when they are older. Those with a social security number might also have fewer years of paying taxes in the US which affects their benefits later on. On the other hand, with so many budget constraints, it may be a struggle to afford a private pension plan. Very few Brazilians talked about having retirement plans of any sort and, when I asked, usually replied with “I’ll keep working for as long as I can.” Many also return to Brazil in order to retire, like Jurandir and Olinda, but return migration may be a costly alternative – especially for those who have out-of-status children who will not be able to visit them once they leave the US.

How do Brazilians assess the social reproduction conditions they have after migrating to the US?

I have considered all conditions discussed above as part of social reproduction dynamics based on my theoretical conceptualization of social reproduction, from family dynamics to material living conditions in the US. Brazilian migrants themselves do not necessarily assess their lives in the US on these same criteria. Instead, they tend to compare consumption standards, quality of life and urban violence between Brazil and the Marietta area. Overall, many consider life in the US to be better than in Brazil. Claudinei, for example, highlights possibilities of consumption. I use a long quote to express in minute detail how purchasing power and consumption justify migration from Brazil to the United States:

Clara: When you say [here it's] better than Brazil, what's better here than over there?

Claudinei: How do you say it, our income, our income, the financial aspect, the financial aspect really. Not only financial, to tell you the truth, when we were in Brazil, so you have an idea, my son, depending on the month we went to the supermarket to shop, that sometimes it was tight, [Claudinei's son Marcelo would say], 'dad, can I have this here?' 'Oh, that you can't, if we take this it will be short for this other thing.' I'll cite an example for you, Nutella. How many times did that boy there, we would go to the supermarket, a small thing of Nutella, really tiny like, he wanted to buy it so he could try it because he'd never had it. 'Dad, I wanted to buy it.' But you look at it, almost R\$50 you'll give for one of those tiny jars of Nutella and then you'll be short on something else you need to buy. Here you go to the supermarket over there, you buy two big jars of Nutella there... you can even have a stomach ache. How [they] say it, here you work a lot, but the money you make, you have more purchasing power here, with things. There in Brazil we did not have it. We worked a lot over there [in Brazil] too, but on our wages we did not have purchasing power. We could not buy, how [they] say it, good clothes, good shoes. But here, no. My son is, how do you say it, doing an internship there at Chick-Fil-A, works... goes to school, the time he comes home, he goes to Chick-Fil-A, he works five hours, at the end of two weeks, he gets his little income. 'Dad, I'm thinking of buying some sneakers I wanted to.' 'Buy it.' There in Brazil, where was the possibility of doing that? Only citing an example for you, people who make minimum wage in Brazil, which is practically the majority, in our case, we do not have a degree or anything, we do not have higher education in anything. It's minimum wage, those who make minimum wage and half are... they can thank God. Then do you have the courage to go and spend, for example, R\$1,000 [approximately \$200] on some sneakers, making minimum wage, where would you do that? You go there and you buy it in 24, 36 installments. Here, no. You take like, \$100, \$150 [approximately R\$500, R\$750] you go over there and you buy one of the best sneakers, his dream purchases that he had there [in Brazil] and he's realizing them [here].¹⁶⁶ (Interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

Schianne also talked about being able to afford things in the US she could not afford

in Brazil, as well as of the "quality of life" she finds in Marietta:

166 Clara: Quando você fala melhor do que no Brasil, o que que tá melhor aqui do que tava lá?

Claudinei: Como se diz, a nossa renda, a nossa renda, a parte financeira, a parte financeira mesmo. Não só financeira, pra te falar a verdade, quando nós estávamos no Brasil, pra você ter uma ideia, o meu filho, dependendo do mês que ia no supermercado fazer compra, que às vezes estava arroxado, pai, eu posso levar isso aqui? Opa, isso não pode não, se levar isso aí vai fazer falta naquilo ali. Vou citar um exemplo pra você, Nutella. Quantas vezes que esse caboclo aí, a gente ia no supermercado, um pacotinho de Nutella, pequenininho lá assim, ele querendo comprar pra experimentar porque nunca tinha comido. Pai, eu queria comprar. Mas você olha, quase 50 reais você vai dá num potinho de Nutella daquele, lá, e aí vai fazer falta numa outra coisa que você tem que comprar. Aqui você vai no supermercado ali, você compra dois potão de Nutella lá que... pode até dar dor de barriga. Como se diz, aqui você trabalha muito, porém o dinheiro que você ganha, você tem mais poder de compra aqui, com as coisas. Lá no Brasil a gente não tinha. Trabalhávamos muito também, só que no nosso salário nós não tínhamos poder de compra. Não conseguia comprar, como se diz, uma roupa boa, um calçado bom. Agora, aqui não. O meu filho está, como se diz, fazendo estágio ali no Chick-Fil-A, trabalha... vai para a escola, a hora que ele chega, ele vai pro Chick-Fil-A, ele trabalha cinco horas, chega no final da quinzena, ganha o saláriozinho dele. Pai, eu estou pensando em comprar um tênis que eu tinha vontade. Compra. Lá no Brasil, aonde que tinha condição de fazer isso? Só citando um exemplo para você, quem ganha salário mínimo no Brasil, que é praticamente a maioria, no nosso caso, não somos formado em nada, não temos curso superior em nada. É salário mínimo, quem ganha seu salário mínimo e meio, tá... pode agradecer a Deus. Aí você tem coragem de pegar e dar, por exemplo, mil reais num tênis, ganhando salário mínimo, aonde que você faz isso? Você vai lá e compra num carnê em 24, 36 vezes pra você pagar. Aqui não. Você pega aí, 100 dólares, 150 dólares, você vai ali e compra um dos melhores tênis, o sonho de consumo que ele tinha lá e ele tá realizando. (Entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA)

“So I’m like, my dad would love to live here, I really wanted my brother to come here too to live, because of the quality of life, this quality of you being able to [say], “oh, I’ll go to a park, I’ll go...” In Brazil, you do not have that, you know? Everything is very expensive, any little outing [*passeiozinho*] you do in Brazil, for a family like mine, it wouldn’t be less than R\$300 [approximately \$60]. I’m talking about going on a silly [besta] outing, you understand? Here it’s everybody, you’re able to, you work a lot, but you’re able to achieve things, you’re able to have access, everybody has access, the Americans as well as us, there’s no difference. As long as you work, you have the money, you can have whatever you want. Most things I have here [at her home], although, ok, it’s donations, but most, the coffee maker, everything... In Brazil I never had a coffee maker. That blender that I just bought, from Ninja, there in Brazil, it’s about R\$2000 [approximately \$400]. I paid \$50 [approximately R\$250] for it. So like, you know, it’s really hard.”¹⁶⁷ (Schaienne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

Tânia also linked quality of life and consumption together when assessing life in the US:

Clara: What’s good [about the US]?

Tânia: Good? The quality of life is much better, right? For us here than... Although people with money in Brazil too, right. What’s missing there [in Brazil] is money. Here too, if you do not have [money], it’s also the same thing. There’s no place... For people with money, anywhere is good. What’s missing is money.

Clara: Anywhere. But you think here you can live better with less money? Or is it easier to have the money you need to live well?

Tânia: I think it’s easier. Yes, because here you work and buy stuff if... In Brazil you have to divide it [into credit installments] as far as the eye can see, right? Buying things there [in Brazil] is not easy.¹⁶⁸ (Interview 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

In turn, Juçara talked about her concerns with her son being undocumented but overall considers there are good reasons for them to stay in the US:

“But my concern today is more because of Danilo [Jr.], who’s 12, that I do not know how it’s going to be for him to go to college here, if he’s going to have opportunities, I know that even

167“Então fica assim, aí eu ando por aqui, eu fico assim, gente meu pai ia amar, eu vou muito em jardim aqui, essas coisas, parque, então eu fico assim, meu pai ia amar morar aqui, eu queria muito que meu irmão viesse também morar, por questão de qualidade de vida, dessa qualidade de você poder, aí, eu vou pra um parque, eu vou... No Brasil, você não tem isso, sabe? É tudo muito caro, qualquer passeiozinho que você vai fazer no Brasil, para uma família igual a minha, não ficava menos de 300 reais. Eu estou falando de você fazer um passeio besta, entende? Aqui é todo mundo, você consegue, você trabalha muito, mas você consegue conquistar as coisas, você consegue ter acesso, todo mundo tem acesso, tanto os americanos quanto a gente, não tem diferença. Desde que você trabalhe, você tem o dinheiro, você pode ter o que você quiser. A maioria das coisas que eu tenho aqui, apesar, tá, é doação, mas a maioria, cafeteira, tudo... no Brasil eu nunca tive uma cafeteira. Aquele liquidificador eu comprei agora, da Ninja, lá no Brasil, ele é uns dois mil reais. Eu paguei 50 dólares nele. Então assim, sabe, é muito difícil” (Schaienne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

168Clara: O que é bom?

Tânia: Bom? A qualidade de vida é bem melhor, né? Pra gente aqui. Do que... Apesar que quem tem dinheiro no Brasil também, né. O que falta lá é dinheiro. Aqui também, se não tiver, também é a mesma coisa. Não tem lugar. Quem tem dinheiro, em qualquer lugar é bom. O que falta é dinheiro.

Clara: Em qualquer lugar. Mas você acha que aqui dá pra viver melhor com menos dinheiro? Ou é mais fácil ter o dinheiro que precisa pra viver bem?

Tânia: Eu acho que é mais fácil. É, porque aqui você trabalha e compra o negócio se... No Brasil você tem que dividir a perder de vista, né? Comprar as coisas lá não é fácil. (Entrevista 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

he turns 16, when he could get a driver's license, I know he'll have to go through the same process as us, of having to go to another state, right? So, like, it's situations that we pay the price, because I know that if we return to Brazil today, we won't have the same, not only financial stability, the quality of life that we have here, that we work, hustle, but you have a return, want it or not, right? You see your children studying in a public school that in Brazil would be private. (...) So, like, it's not only that here you buy whatever you want, you eat whatever you want, but it's because of the quality of life too, right?"¹⁶⁹ (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Others, however, do not have the same assessment that life in the US is better. Some say they "traded six of one for half a dozen of the other." Adriana said so in her 2023 interview:

"Sometimes, Clara, it seems like I traded six of one for half a dozen of the other, you know? [laughs] I say like, if I came here... because many people come here with an American dream, of getting rich, having a good car, having a good house, having a label [designer clothes]. No, my family did not come here because of that. I do not like label clothes, I do not care about cars... Good, I mean like, to show off. Good car... because I do not even know, I don't understand anything of mechanics, so I want a good car, right? But I did not come because of that, or to be rich, on the contrary, right. (...) On the contrary, like, we had a more comfortable life over there [in Brazil] than here, right? Due to the fact I'd been working for 10 years and we had... I had my car, my husband had his, you understand? We had a life, like, a little better than what we've had here. And sometimes I'm like, oh my, I'm trading six of one for half a dozen of the other. I'm far away from family, I'm in housecleaning, I'm paying for these documents [the visa process] that I can't even have a car."¹⁷⁰ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Pastor Flávio from Renascer Church talked about how Brazilian migrants only understand the give and take involved in living in the US once they are already here:

169 "Mas a minha preocupação hoje é mais pelo Danilo, que tem 12 anos, que eu não sei como que vai ser pra ele conseguir fazer uma faculdade aqui, se ele vai ter oportunidades, eu sei que quando ele completar seus 16 anos, que ele poderia tirar uma carteira, eu sei que ele vai ter que passar pelo mesmo processo da gente, de ter que ir em outro estado, entendeu? Então, assim, são situações que a gente paga o preço, porque eu sei que se a gente voltar pro Brasil hoje, a gente não vai ter a mesma, não só a estabilidade financeira, é a qualidade de vida que a gente tem aqui, a gente trabalha, corre atrás, mas você tem um retorno, querendo ou não, né? Você vê seus filhos estudando numa escola pública, que no Brasil seria particular. (...) Então, assim, não é só porque aqui você compra o que você quer, você come o que você quer, mas é pela qualidade de vida também, né?" (Juçara, 17/10/23, Marietta GA)

170 Às vezes, Clara, parece que eu troquei seis por meia dúzia, sabe? [risos] Eu falo assim, se eu vim pra cá... porque muitas pessoas vêm pra cá com um sonho americano, de ser rica, de ter carro bom, de ter casa boa, de ter roupa nova, de ter etiqueta. Não, minha família não veio pra cá por causa disso. Não gosto de roupa com etiqueta, não me importo com carro... bom, que eu digo, assim, pra mostrar. Carro bom... porque eu nem sei, não entendo nada de mecânica, então eu quero um carro bom, né? Mas não vim por causa disso, nem pra ser rica, pelo contrário, né. (...) Pelo contrário, assim, nós tínhamos uma vida mais confortável lá do que aqui, né? Pelo fato de eu já trabalhar há 10 anos e a gente tinha... eu tinha meu carro, meu marido o dele, entendeu? Então a gente tinha uma vida assim, um pouquinho melhor do que a gente tá tendo aqui. E às vezes eu fico assim, gente, eu tô trocando seis por meia dúzia. Eu tô longe da família, tô na faxina, tô pagando esses documentos que nem um carro eu posso ter.

“Then [a friend] says, man, here it’s like this and that, come here, all that. (...) Then the guy asks, ‘but how much do you make, more or less, on average in a day?’ The guy does the math in real, multiplies by 5, right? He’s impressed, says, wow, right? Like... But only being here for you to [see] how it actually is. So, people who weigh things out and are able to measure the correct amounts, they really, they go into crisis. They say like, it don’t think coming here was worth it. Many say that. But now, returning, I don’t know if it’s worth it either, right?”¹⁷¹ (Pastor Flávio, interview 29, 08/23/23, Marietta GA)

Brazilian migrants acknowledge that social reproduction conditions in the US depend on money, more so than in Brazil, where they can count on extended support networks. In that sense, Brazilian migrants frequently refer to the US being a “capitalist country.” While most migrants talk about being unaffected by moving from higher-skilled professions in Brazil to low-skilled jobs, financial insecurity in the US – the “if you do not work you do not make money, but the bills remain the same” predicament – is more frequently an issue.

Part of this predicament too is that it’s harder to rely on relatives for any financial support, given conversion rates between the Brazilian Real and the US dollar. Leal explained how this predicament makes the US “scary:”

“So like, a thing I learned here. I dreaded, Clara, renting [instead of owning his own home]. Dreaded it. When I married, one of my biggest fears was to live on rent. (...) And then, seven years I’ve been paying rent to live, I’m here. So, it’s one of the things you learn to adjust yourself, to adapt yourself. And that’s life, there’s no way around it. But America is scary for us because of that. Because there’s rent, there are bills, it’s... It has its benefits, but it has its sides... pros and cons, like anything in life, right.”¹⁷² (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

Luciano also talked about the need for money:

“It’s because money, like, I don’t... Man, without money you don’t do anything, man. ‘Oh, you need to value money.’ Money isn’t everything, right. Money isn’t everything, but without

171 *Aí ele fala, cara, tá assim, assim, assim, vem pra cá, tal. E... é isso. É mais nessa promessa mesmo. E o cara, mas quanto ganha assim, mais ou menos, em média por dia? O cara faz a conta em real, que multiplica por 5, né? O olho dele se enche, fala, uau, né? Tipo... Mas só estando aqui pra você ver de fato. Então, quem coloca na balança mesmo e consegue medir os valores corretos, eles realmente, eles ficam em crise. Fala assim, eu acho que não compensou ter vindo. Muitos falam isso. Mas agora voltar, também não sei se compensa, né?*

172 *“Então assim, uma coisa que eu aprendi aqui. Eu tinha pavor, Clara, de viver de aluguel. Pavor. Quando eu me casei, um dos meus maiores medos era viver de aluguel. (...) E aí, sete anos que eu pago aluguel pra viver, tô aqui. Então, é umas coisas que você vai aprendendo a se ajustar, a se adaptar. E é a vida, não tem jeito. Mas a América ela nos dá medo por causa disso. Porque é o aluguel que tem, é a conta, é... tem os seus benefícios, mas tem os seus lados... ônus e bônus, como qualquer coisa na vida, né”* (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

money you're also nothing. You don't do anything, it's not that you're nothing, it's because you can't do anything. (...) Especially here, because healthcare here isn't cheap, healthcare isn't cheap, for everything here you need to have money. Do you make good money? You do, if you hustle for it, but if you don't have money here you don't do anything, you get into a tight spot [*passa perrengue*]. So much so that my mom [in Brazil] even said, like, 'oh my son, I'll send you a little money,' I said like, 'mom, don't even send it, don't even send it. It's better if I send it from here to there than from there to here, because it doesn't go far.' R\$100, \$20 here."¹⁷³ (Luciano, interview 26, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Kiko also mentioned not being able to ask people for help as one does in Brazil, because in the US "time is money:"

"People here, there are people who've lived here 20 years, that met, that I know actually, that make a lot of money already, a lot of money indeed, but [without speaking] English they depend on others for everything. And here is a country where you can't depend on others, because time is money. Capitalist country. So, I can't occupy, as much as it's a friend, a close person, I can't occupy, take a day from that person to help me out. Because, they help me one day, they're taking a day of their own. So that's why I figured it out, to get the driver's license, to renew Douglas's insurance, all that."¹⁷⁴ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

In contrasting all aspects included in my definition of social reproduction (activities, practices, relationships, and material conditions for reproducing workers daily and intergenerationally) and the way Brazilians understand and assess life in Marietta, some aspects of social reproduction are favored over others. Notably, purchasing power and access to consumption goods is valued above most things, as well as quality of life, broadly defined, which may include safety, access to good education, access to leisure, and other aspects cited

173"É porque o dinheiro, tipo assim, eu não... Pô, mas sem o dinheiro você não faz nada, pô, ah que você tem que dar valor ao dinheiro. Dinheiro não é tudo, certo. Dinheiro não é tudo, mas sem o dinheiro também você não é nada. Você não faz nada, não é que você não é nada, é porque você não consegue fazer nada. (...) principalmente aqui, que saúde aqui não é barata, saúde não é barata, tudo aqui você tem que ter dinheiro, você ganha bem, ganha, se você correr atrás, mas se você não tem o dinheiro aqui você não faz nada, você passa perrengue, é tanto que minha mãe ainda falou assim, ô meu filho, vou mandar um dinheirinho aí pra você, eu falei assim, mãe, nem manda, nem manda aí. Melhor eu mandar daqui pra aí do que daí pra cá, porque não vinga. R\$100, vinte dólar aqui" (Luciano, entrevista 26, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

174"As pessoas aqui, tem pessoas que moram há 20 anos, que eu já conheci, que eu conheço, na verdade, que ganham muito dinheiro já, muito dinheiro mesmo, mas o inglês tem que depender dos outros pra tudo. E aqui é um país que a gente não pode depender dos outros, porque tempo é dinheiro. País capitalista. Então, eu não posso ocupar, por mais que seja amigo, uma pessoa próxima, não posso ocupar, tirar um dia de uma pessoa pra me ajudar. Porque, ela me ajudando um dia, ela tá tirando um dia dela. Então, por isso eu me viro. É, pra tirar drive, pra renovar o seguro mesmo de Douglas, enfim" (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

in the quotes above. On the other hand, other aspects, such as access to healthcare, financial stability, personal relationships, support networks, have less weight in such assessments.

Sometimes, perceptions about social reproduction conditions are conflicting and contradictory, both in terms of whether they are more or less significant and whether they are “good” or “bad” in the US in comparison with Brazil. A most interesting example is how Claudinei and Bruna think about their son Marcelo’s education. They talk about making sure he had a good education in Brazil, paying for a good private school, so Marcelo “does not end up like us.” Then they talk about higher education in the US not being as acceptable as what they thought it would be and that achieving higher education is actually futile in terms of good living conditions. Bruna said:

“I think like this, a good future for my son, who’s studying. I say to him, ‘you have to study, so you don’t end up like your father and me,’ we always give him advice. So I think about him. I don’t know what God is preparing for him here, but like, I think of a future [for Marcelo] in which he doesn’t work so much like we do, hustling like we do. So I always talk to him, study, if an opportunity comes, embrace it.”¹⁷⁵ (Bruna, interview 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA)

Subsequently, Claudinei explained that education in the US was not like they thought it would be:

“We, when we live there [in Brazil], we, as they say, do not know anything about what happens here. ‘We’re leaving to go there [the US], because we’re going to give opportunities to our son. Our son will study at the best schools, will graduate and everything.’ Once you get here you face the reality that it’s not really like that. Here to have a child graduate you need to be a millionaire, you need to have a lot of money otherwise you can’t do it. But work, it doesn’t mean he can’t do some course here too, an online course, something. And in the future, when he’s able to make his life here, he might even be able to get a document, maybe he gets to work for a big company, a company that gets the document and if one day he wants to go to college

¹⁷⁵“Eu penso assim, um futuro bom pro meu filho, que tá estudando, eu falo pra ele, você tem que estudar, pra você não ficar igual eu e seu pai, a gente sempre aconselha ele. Então eu penso nele. Eu não sei o que que Deus prepara pra ele aqui, mas assim, eu penso um futuro que não trabalha tanto igual nós, ralando igual nós. Aí eu passo muito pra ele, estudar, se a oportunidade chegar, abraçar” (Bruna, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

and go back to Brazil, he'll have the support to do that.”¹⁷⁶ (Claudinei, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

Later, however, Claudinei talked about how futile it is to achieve higher education in Brazil. His example is his nephew who, being a recent architecture graduate, makes very little money in his first job:

“Because what’s the use of going to college there in Brazil, then there’s no market for you to work in, nor an adequate income. You see, my nephew graduated... Marcelo is at Chick-Fil-A here, how do you say it, his first job, the job most... how do you say, it’s what came up, it’s what he has for today, it’s that. If you put it... He works Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Monday and Thursday are his days off. He works from 5pm to 11pm, or sometimes until midnight. If you look at his wages, it’s just a little, it’s... But when you convert it to *reais* over there, it’s better than my nephew who majored in architecture and urbanism. He went to college for how many years to be making only...?”¹⁷⁷ (Claudinei, interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

The one major aspect of social reproduction that Brazilians consider to be worse in the US compared to Brazil are the social relationships they have in the Marietta area. In general, Brazilian migrants felt friendships were more superficial in the US than in Brazil, where bonds go much deeper. Many described feeling lonelier and having a social life limited to immediate family and church congregations, as opposed to Brazil, where they had many friends, frequently went out, and had weekend barbecues. According to my research

176“‘A gente, quando a gente mora lá, a gente, como se diz, não sabe nada do que acontece aqui. Nós vamos embora para lá, porque vamos embora de oportunidade para o nosso filho. Nosso filho vai estudar em uma das melhores escolas, vai formar e tudo mais. Na hora que a gente chega e se depara com a realidade que não é bem assim. Aqui para você formar um filho você tem que ser milionário, tem que ter muito dinheiro que senão você não consegue. Mas, trabalho, não quer dizer que ele não pode fazer um curso também, um curso online, alguma coisa. E futuramente, a hora que ele conseguir fazer a vida dele aqui, quem sabe que às vezes até conseguir documento, de repente consegue trabalhar em uma empresa grande, numa empresa que consegue documento e se um dia quiser fazer faculdade e for embora para o Brasil, vai ter suporte para isso” (Claudinei, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

177“‘Porque o que adianta ele fazer um curso lá no Brasil, depois não tem campo pra você trabalhar, nem remuneração adequada. Pra você ver, o meu sobrinho que formou... o Marcos, tá aqui no Chick-Fil-A, como se diz, o primeiro serviço dele, o servicinho mais... como se diz, é o que apareceu, é o que tem pra hoje, é isso aí. Se você for colocar no... e ele trabalha terça, quarta, sexta e sábado. Segunda e quinta ele é... folga. Ele trabalha das 17h às 23h, ou às vezes até meia noite. Se você for ver o salário, que é pouquinho, é... Mas a hora que você transforma em reais lá, é melhor do que o meu sobrinho que é formado em arquitetura e urbanismo. Fez a faculdade quantos anos lá pra tá ganhando...?” (Claudinei, entrevista 6, 26/10/23, Marietta GA).

participants, Brazilian migrants become more closed off in the US, and extenuating schedules with long working hours also makes it difficult for them to find the time to socialize.

In this section, I examined how Brazilian migrants assess their living conditions in the Marietta area, which I conceptualize as social reproduction. The main aspects considered as positive are purchasing power, understood by some as “quality of life,” which may also include other aspects such as financial stability and quality of public education. Drawing from the experiences and perceptions examined in this section, I argue that hidden or unexpected costs in the US makes financial planning more difficult for prospective Brazilian migrants, but also reconfigures the way people think about the costs of social reproduction. I also want to point out that, in the US, Brazilian migrants accept social reproduction conditions they would not have accepted in Brazil. For example, while many were home-owners in Brazil before migrating, they accept not only becoming renters in the US but even sharing a single room between parents and children, or having roommates, which likely they would not have in Brazil. The same goes for accessing food banks, working jobs without lunch breaks, and relying on donations from WhatsApp groups and church networks, as I discuss below. However, the overall perception among my research participants is that in the US you may struggle but, at a certain point, you reach “the other side,” whereas in Brazil you just keep on struggling.

Furthermore, when I asked my research participants to compare life in Brazil to Marietta, they usually brought up positive aspects of life in the US and left out other dimensions of social reproduction, such as access to healthcare, housing struggles, health issues from work and on-the-job accidents, proximity to family and friends, retirement plans, and even migration and citizenship status. It is in this way, I argue, that Brazilians prioritize certain aspects of social reproduction over others when they assess their conditions in

Marietta as a “better life” and “worth it.” For the most part, in these assessments of life in Brazil versus in the US, Brazilians express prioritizing individualization and privatization of social reproduction – being able to “afford things” - is privileged over ideas about collectivized social reproduction, such as state-sponsored social programs and networks of care. I do not mean that social reproduction is more commodified in the US than it is in Brazil, or necessarily more individualized rather than collectivized in Brazil, but rather that it is commodified and individualized in different ways.

I also mean that Brazilian migrants’ desires in terms of living conditions relate more to being able to individually and privately access goods and services than to broader socialized living conditions or even a demand for the possibility of collectivized care. Juçara’s quote about her son Danilo Jr. is particularly significant. She sees him having a “better life” in the US than he would have in Brazil, even though she acknowledges the challenges that Danilo Jr. faces as an out-of-status young migrant growing up in the US. This particular quote illustrates, on the one hand, how Brazilians perceive differences in social reproduction conditions between *here and there*. On the other, it expresses how individualized access to goods and services is prioritized over broader living conditions, in this case, related to migration status. While Juçara and her family have a higher and more stable purchasing power (“you buy what you want, you eat what you want”), she also understands that her son will not have access to a Georgia state driver’s license and maybe not even to a college education, and this overall trade-off is considered by her (and many others) as a “better life.” However, as I have argued elsewhere in this dissertation, increased immigration enforcement redefines this understanding, where socialized living conditions, when they include a higher risk of detention and deportation, tilt the scale against life in the US in spite of perceived

better material social reproduction conditions. This also means that these priorities are not absolute but rather flexible and context-specific.

In the next section, I discuss the role of Brazilian migrant churches in the Marietta area in social reproduction dynamics, including support provided to incoming migrants, support throughout medical emergencies, emotional and spiritual jobs, and employment networks.

Brazilian churches' role in migrant social reproduction dynamics

While much has been said about the role of networks in migration processes, many Brazilians move to the US with no more than weak connections and, sometimes, with no connections at all. They also prescind from strong networks to move around between different communities in the US until settling, usually looking for places with better work options and lower living costs. Therefore, for incoming migrants to the Marietta area, church congregations constitute a landing spot that offers support in a variety of ways.

Scholars have previously noted the key role of Evangelical churches in Brazilian migrant communities (Levitt 2007, Steigenga et al. 2009, Williams et al. 2009). Studies with Florida-based Brazilian migrants argue that, in the absence of public spaces for socializing and secular civil organizations, religious organizations offer networks and spaces of encounter, sociability, representation, and organization, as churches support migrants in accessing information about life in the US, find jobs and housing, process documentation, solve non-visa legal issues, and deal with health issues and illnesses (Alves and L Ribeiro 2002, Vázquez 2009). Research results also signal, however, that demanding and even exploitative relationships can emerge due to a demand for commitment and donations, as well

as through the employment networks that orbit church congregations (Vásquez 2009). Additionally, Evangelical churches favor "ethnic entrepreneurship" as they constitute strong solidarity networks (Martes 2004, Martes and Rodríguez 2004).

Even though Edna and her husband Leal, who attended Bençãos Church and later Espírito Santo Church, were active church-goers in Brazil, they were surprised about the role of churches in Brazilian migrant communities in the US, both in the Boston area – where they first arrived – and in Marietta:

"So, when we arrived [in Boston], the church that [our friends] attended gave us a lot of assistance also, which is something else that happens a lot to the immigrant. The immigrant, they tend to go looking for a church – the smart immigrant, who already figured it out – they go looking for a church because they know that there, even if they do not stay there, even if they're not even Christian, there they make contacts. Work contacts, there they find out how to figure out health insurance, how to enroll your kid in school, what school to enroll the kid in, there they learn everything, so, they make their contacts there. So that's what we did."¹⁷⁸ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Adriana, who arrived in Marietta from Brazil in December 2022 with her husband and 20-year-old son, all three of them Bençãos and later Espírito Santo Church congregants, says:

"To my family, it has not been hard because of the church. I found out that the church here is a door. People come from Brazil with a church's contact. And then many times people do not go to church to look for God, [they] don't go to look for salvation, forgiveness of sins, none of that, they go to look for help and they find it. Because at the church there are people that, for example, have been here in Georgia for 30 years. And then they direct you in everything, what visa to get, what visa to apply for, 'hey, you have to get a driver's license, go there, look, you need to extend your visa, go to this lawyer, hey, you want to work, be this person's *helper*.'"¹⁷⁹ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

¹⁷⁸"Então quando a gente chegou, a igreja que eles congregavam nos deu muita assistência também, que é outra coisa que acontece muito no imigrante. O imigrante, ele tende a procurar logo uma igreja, o imigrante esperto, que já pegou a manha, ele vai logo pra uma igreja, porque ele sabe que ali, mesmo que ele não fique ali, mesmo que ele não seja nem cristão, ali ele faz os contatos. Contatos de trabalho, ali ele descobre como que vê questões de plano de saúde, como é que bota filho na escola, em qual escola que bota, ali que ele vai aprendendo tudo. Então, vai fazendo contatos ali, aí foi o que a gente fez" (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

¹⁷⁹"(...) pra minha família, não tem que ficado tão difícil por conta da igreja. Eu descobri que a igreja aqui é uma porta. As pessoas vêm do Brasil já com contato de uma igreja. E aí as pessoas muitas vezes não vêm na igreja procurar Deus. Não vêm na igreja procurar salvação, perdão de pecado, nada disso, elas vêm procurar ajuda e elas encontram. Porque na igreja tem pessoas, por exemplo, que estão 30 anos aqui na Georgia, né, e aí elas te direcionam em tudo, qual visto você quer tirar, qual visto você quer fazer, ó, você tem que tirar sua carteira, vai em tal lugar, olha, você precisa fazer extensão, vai na advogada tal, ó você quer trabalhar, seja helper de fulano" (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

At the end of 2023, Benções Church was preparing to receive two Brazilian families moving from Orlando to Marietta. As I left Adriana's house after our interview, she pointed to furniture and boxes piled by the entrance, saying they were to be donated to one of the incoming families. Earlier she had described:

Adriana: We feel our way through things here, it's hard. That's where the church helps, because the church guides these people. It's a community they find, right? (...) We're receiving a family from Orlando on the 17th (...).

Clara: By we, do you mean the church or your household?

Adriana: The church. We rented a house, we are already getting furniture, the family is even coming with a baby.

Clara: Did they contact the church from Orlando?

Adriana: Yes, they go on the internet, find the church, contact them, and the church... ourselves, we find a house, furnish it, even though the furniture is all different colors, we furnish it, find jobs. (...) They arrive here and they have a family [the church] waiting for them, right? So much easier. (...) So the church has been [a magnet], a parachute, a safe harbor, right? For people coming from Brazil or from any of the other states also, right?¹⁸⁰ (Interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Indeed, it was even announced at the church's Sunday service that a "new family just arrived from Florida." While I was in Marietta in 2023, regularly attending service at Benções Church, two families arrived from Florida. One was Renata and Leandro and the other was Luís and Bianca. About Luís and Bianca, Leal said:

"We have a guy that just came from Florida, Sunday he was there at the church, Luís, and he is flabbergasted, right? Oh my, wow, you're doing so much for me, one got the bed, the other got I don't know what, the other got [me] a job, the other... and that's how it goes, right?"¹⁸¹ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

¹⁸⁰Adriana: A gente anda muito aqui assim no tato, é difícil. E aí que a igreja ajuda, porque a igreja direciona essas pessoas. É uma comunidade que a pessoa acha, né? (...) A gente vai receber uma família de Orlando dia 17 (...)

Clara: A gente, você diz a igreja ou vocês da casa?

Adriana: A igreja, a igreja. Alugamos uma casa, já estamos conseguindo móveis, a família vem com o bebê ainda.

Clara: Eles contataram lá de Orlando...

Adriana: É, eles vão na internet, acham a igreja, faz contato e a igreja arruma... nós mesmo, a gente arruma a casa, mobília a casa, mesmo com o móvel tudo colorido, a gente mobília, arruma emprego. (...) É, a pessoa já chega com uma família esperando, né? Muito mais fácil. (...) Então a igreja tem sido um para-raio, um para-queda, um porto seguro, né? Pra quem vem do Brasil ou quem vem de qualquer um dos outros estados também, né? (Entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

¹⁸¹"Eu tô com um menino que veio da Florida agora, domingo ele tava lá na igreja, o Lucas, e ele tá assim abismado assim, né? Nossa, que, poxa, que vocês tão fazendo por mim, nossa que um arruma a cama, outro arruma não sei o que, outro arruma trabalho, outro arruma aí e vai embora, né?" (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

Eventually, I interviewed Renata and Leandro in 2025, as a family who was planning to return to Brazil, which they did a few months later. At that point Luís and Bianca had returned to Brazil, Renata tried to put me in contact with them but they declined the interview.

Moreover, as mentioned in the narratives above, Brazilian churches significantly provide migrants with employment networks. “If you want to find a job, go to church” was a saying I frequently heard during my fieldwork. Santos, a Renascer Church congregant, narrated not being able to find jobs through the WhatsApp groups, but immediately getting his first job after asking around at Renascer. Even my phone number was mistakenly given as the contact for a woman who could offer housecleaning jobs by Walter, when he was still at Bençãos Church, to Rose, an incoming migrant looking for work. Even though I let Rose know a few times she was contacting the wrong person, she still kept calling me for several months looking for work. Additionally, Pastor Natanael mentioned that his dream for Vitória Church is to have a job center, where they can train and support incoming migrants who are learning the construction trade and facilitate contact between clients and workers. Adriana also says she first started in housecleaning work by going as a *helper* with congregation sisters. Juçara too had help from congregation sisters when she started working in Marietta as a manicurist:

“Here in Marietta it was very practical because, like I said, people are more receptive [compared to Florida]. Because there were folks from church and we were staying as a favor [*morando de favor*] for practically a month in the house of a family from the same church, so she would recommend me, put me in a few [WhatsApp] groups, talked and then I started going to some people to do [their nails], then others started, like, going there, she conceded a time when I could do nails over there [at the house] too. Then later we moved from her house and moved into a room that was also from a girl from the church, then there [at this house] she also let me see clients a bit”¹⁸² (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

182“‘Aqui em Marietta foi muito prático, porque igual eu te falei, aqui o povo é mais receptivo. Como tinha o pessoal da igreja e a gente foi morando de favor praticamente um mês na casa de uma família da mesma igreja, então ela me indicava, me colocou em alguns grupos, falava e aí eu comecei ir até algumas pessoas para fazer, aí outras foram, tipo, indo até lá, ela cedeu um tempo para eu poder fazer uma unha lá também. Aí depois a gente mudou da casa dela e foi morar num quarto que também era de uma menina que era lá da igreja, aí lá ela também deixava eu atender um pouco” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

Meanwhile, there is much discourse about Brazilian migrants who go to church “just to get help” and then do not stay at church or are not even Christian. During a dinner party at Érika’s, Tati mentioned seeing a text in a WhatsApp group saying “go to church that they’ll help you with everything, then you just stop going,” which was followed by collective frustrated groans. Kiko too mentions this issue:

“I’ve heard comments, actually, from Brazilians, actually they mentioned it to me this time now, ‘oh, go to this church that they’ll help you.’ I didn’t think that was ok, because like, I’ll only go to church to get help. I don’t go to church to seek help, I go to church to find Christ, which is the most important thing.”¹⁸³ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

His wife Isadora makes a similar reproach:

“People are really nice [at church], very welcoming, which is something that a lot of people take advantage of, there are people who already come with an intention about the church, right? ‘Oh no, I’ll go to this church because there they’ll help me,’ because I always said, ‘oh, I think that’s so ugly,’ because church should be such a... Like, it’s true that today there are churches which are a business, but the church should be such a sacred thing and people use it. ‘Oh no, I’ll only go there [to church] if I have to go to church because they’ll give me furniture, they’ll help me, if I’m in need they’ll give me money, they’ll give me a basic food basket,’ and that’s so ugly. We, we arrived, we knew about that side already, that churches help out a lot, but we refused it. ‘No, we do not want that.’ If we go to a church, we go on good faith, because we want to go there, but not to take advantage of them, no way.”¹⁸⁴ (Isadora, interview 18, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

On the other hand, in their first period in the US, Kiko and Isadora indeed struggled with things the church could have helped with. Andreia says the church was helping these incoming families with finding an apartment, getting furniture, and even finding employment, which sums up much of the struggles that Kiko and Isadora found in the US. Indeed, in 2018-

183“Já ouvi comentários, na verdade, de brasileiros, na verdade comentaram comigo agora, essa vez, ah, vai em tal igreja que eles vão ajudar. Eu não achei muito legal, porque assim, eu só vou pra igreja pra receber ajuda. Eu não estou indo para a igreja para receber ajuda. Estou indo para buscar Cristo, que é o mais importante” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

184“As pessoas são bem agradáveis, bem receptivas, que é uma coisa que tem muita gente que abusa disso, tem gente que já vem com intenção de igreja, né? Ah não, eu vou pra tal igreja porque lá eles vão ajudar, porque eu sempre disse, ah, eu acho tão feio isso, porque a igreja deveria ser uma coisa tão... Assim, certo que hoje tem a igreja que é comércio, mas a igreja deveria ser uma coisa tão sagrada e o povo usa isso. Ah, não, eu só vou pra lá se for pra ir pra igreja porque eles vão me dar móveis, porque eles vão me ajudar, se eu passar necessidade eles vão me dar dinheiro, vão me dar uma cesta básica e é tão feio isso. Quando a gente chegou, a gente já sabia desse lado, que as igrejas ajudam muito, mas a gente se recusou. Não, a gente não quer isso não. Se for pra gente ir pra uma igreja, a gente vai de bom coração, porque a gente quer ir pra lá, mas pra se aproveitar deles, não. Em lugar nenhum” (Isadora, entrevista 18, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

2019, when Isadora was pregnant with Douglas, it was a pastor friend of theirs that helped Kiko and Isadora find someone else to rent a room from. Brazilian migrants also acknowledge that some congregants keep going to church, even if they're not religious, because they know that they will find help there in case of an emergency. Edna, speaking of one specific couple who attended service at Bençãos, said: "They're not even Christian, but they keep going to church because they know that, if things get sticky, they can count on the church." Chatting with her and Leal at their house, we also talked a lot about how churches are the only community organization for Brazilians in the Marietta area and how many attend church even if they are not religious.

Church congregations also provide crucial financial and emotional support during medical emergencies. Pastor Natanael, from Vitória Church, mentions they constantly organize crowdfunding campaigns to finance surgeries and health treatments, and congregations offer a large pool of possible contributors for this kind of fundraising. In another case, a member from Pastor Natanael's congregation had one of their children diagnosed with leukemia so, according to the pastor, the congregation organized rotating hospital visits and held that year's Thanksgiving celebration in the patient's room, offering strong emotional support for this family. During the Covid-19 pandemic, church networks were also key in supporting Brazilian migrants with limited support networks in the area.

Edna and Leal described it:

Edna: When there was Covid... a bunch of people got it at the end of the year, did not they, honey?

Leal: Yes.

Edna: A bunch of people got it. And a lot of people there had everything to die [of Covid], how do you say it? At risk groups? Girl, but when someone got Covid, it was such a big mobilization, of medicine, of attention, of food, of pharmacy...

Leal: Bringing food to their door.

Edna: Yes. We [the congregation] didn't have anyone who needed to go to the hospital [because of Covid].¹⁸⁵ (Interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

¹⁸⁵Edna: Quando tava covid... uma galera pegou o final do ano, não foi, amor?

Leal: Foi.

Leal also mentioned support given to pregnant women, particularly with bringing food for a few weeks after childbirth: “When a woman is pregnant, when the woman has a kid, for two weeks all the women [from the congregation] will bring her food each day.”¹⁸⁶ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA) In an informal conversation during afternoon coffee, Adriana, Érika, and Taynara planned logistics for taking care of two Espírito Santo Church members, Maria Fernanda and Alice, who were due in the same week, already anticipating it being a heavy workload. They discussed that each day someone should cook for both women, but were concerned about the distance between their homes. Érika was even considering hosting Alice, who lives the furthest away, in her own home in order to make things easier, while also thinking over logistics to drop off both her son and Alice’s daughter at their respective schools.

Additionally, as Brazilians rarely have jobs that offer any kind of paid medical leave, even if they are injured at work, medical emergencies that prevent migrants from working are also critical moments for congregation support. One summer, right before the start of high season for construction workers, Leal broke his arm falling from a ladder on the job and could not work for three months, being thus unable to provide for his family. According to both him and Edna, not only would their congregation organize fundraising campaigns, but they would also find cash-stuffed envelopes in their mail box as anonymous donations, which they knew “came from church people.”

Edna also talked about support received from the church community with childcare during a medical emergency while still in Boston. When her youngest son was born, he had a

Edna: Uma galera pegou. E muita gente ali tinha tudo que estava pra morrer, como é que se fala? Grupo de risco? Menina, mas quando um pegava covid, era uma mobilização tão grande, de remédio, de atenção, de comida, de farmácia...

Leal: Levar comida na porta.

Edna: É... A gente não teve ninguém que precisasse ir pro hospital. (Entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

¹⁸⁶“Quando uma mulher é grávida, quando a mulher tem filho, lá, fica duas semanas a mulherada, cada um leva comida para ela num dia” (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

serious health issue and was in the hospital for weeks. Edna stayed with the baby at the hospital while Leal was working all day to support them. She remembers other church members bringing her food at the hospital, particularly during Thanksgiving. During this time, they also received significant financial donations from the congregations they frequented, when Leal's wages were not enough to cover rent, groceries, and other bills. Meanwhile, their oldest son, André, who was 10 at the time, was cared for by church congregations:

“André was in [other] people's hands. I did not even know who would pick André up from school. (...) We went to another church, more Presbyterian, more traditional, and during the day [we went] to this other church, more pentecostal. Girl, the churches were all mobilized. (...) During this time, [André] was free range [*solto*], girl, he would sleep in someone's house, then sleep in someone else's house, someone else would pick him up. They made a schedule at the church, who was picking André up, one day it was one person, then another, then another, and on days when no one was available, there was a girl [from the church] who called people to see who could pick André up.”¹⁸⁷ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Churches also provide Brazilian migrants with much needed emotional and spiritual support. Pastors usually offer counseling, particularly marital and familiar; church leaders in Marietta often told me that many families are “deteriorated” in the migration process. Further support comes from religious affiliation and service attendance. Maria Fernanda is a Espírito Santo member who, back in Brazil, had started a PhD in Geology that she was not able to finish due to mental health issues. Upon learning I was pursuing a PhD myself, Maria Fernanda summed up religion-backed emotional support in the following way: “Thank God you're coming here [to church]. If I had found Jesus when I was still doing my PhD, I'm sure I would have finished it.” Additionally, my questions about how people were holding up given hardened migration policies in 2025 were usually met with proclamations of faith in God's will and protection.

¹⁸⁷“André ficou na mão das pessoas. Eu não sabia nem quem ia buscar André na escola. (...) Aí a gente ia numa outra igreja mais presbiteriana, mais tradicional e a gente ia nessa de dia mais pentecostal. Minha filha, foi uma mobilização das igrejas. (...) E nesse período ele ficou solto, minha filha, dormia na casa de um, dormia na casa de outro, um ia buscar e fizeram uma escala lá na igreja, quem ia buscar André, e um ia, outro ia, outro ia, e tinha dia que não tinha quem fosse, a menina ficava ligando pra ver quem ia buscar André” (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA)”

This support often comes in direct ways, through counseling and conversation from pastors or longer-term migrants. Edna, for example, does a lot of this counseling:

“I’m also very involved at church. So there are a lot of things I do at church, right? There are lots of things like, call this lady, call that lady, have a coffee with another one, have a chat with so-and-so. So there’s also a routine in giving this assistance for some people there at church, you understand? Give support to some people, invite them to come over [to her house], have a chat. It’s very... Especially for people who are just arriving, it’s kind of a crazy thing coming here [to US], you understand? Our minds... Until the person comes, that’s when I started to realize, sometimes the person arrives in flesh but the mind doesn’t follow. Until the person is definitely here, we give a... we follow up, you understand? We keep chatting.”¹⁸⁸ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Creusa also talked about the support she got during a depressive period from her church’s pastor:

“So I met this girl and I wanted to find a church where they had children so my girls would adapt more. So I started going to this Renascer. But it was only on Sunday morning and because I was working, it was really tough. I started working on Sunday mornings. I wasn’t able to bring them. And the psychologist [that the twins were seeing] was only available on Sunday and I couldn’t bring them [to church], because of the psychologist. I was doing really bad so the girl from the other church invited me to go to this other church. I was really bad, with depression. So over there, the pastor supported me, embraced me, took care of me, of the girls, so I’m there.”¹⁸⁹ (Creusa, interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Another offer of emotional and spiritual support are collective prayers for work, health, and documents (visas). For example, Leal and Oliveira both mentioned, in their 2023 interviews, about the job market for Brazilians being so dire at one point that Benções Church had collective prayers for the market to heat back up. The support provided by the Brazilian churches in the Marietta area I worked with is taken on voluntarily by leaders, which may

188“E eu também sou muito envolvida na igreja. Então tem muita coisa que eu faço na igreja, né? Tem muita coisa tipo assim, ligar pra fulana, ligar pra ciclana, tomar café com beltrana, conversar com não sei quem. Então também tem uma rotina dessa de dar assistência para algumas pessoas ali na igreja, entendeu? Dar um suporte para algumas pessoas, chamar para vir aqui em casa, conversar. É muito... principalmente para quem está chegando agora, é uma coisa meio maluca vir para cá, entendeu? A cabeça da gente... até a pessoa vir, que aí eu comecei a perceber, a pessoa vem de corpo, mas a cabeça não vem. Até a pessoa vir definitivamente, a gente vai dando um... vai acompanhando, entendeu? Vai conversando” (Edna, entrevista 3, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

189“Ái eu conheci essa menina e eu queria procurar uma igreja onde tivesse crianças para minhas meninas se adaptarem mais. Ái passei a ir nessa da Roswell. Ái era só no domingo de manhã e como eu estava trabalhando, estava muito puxado, eu comecei a trabalhar no domingo de manhã. Não estava dando para mim levar elas. E a psicóloga também só tinha vaga no domingo e não tinha jeito de eu levar elas, por causa da psicóloga. Eu estava muito ruim e a menina da outra igreja me convidou para ir para essa outra igreja. Eu estava muito ruim, com depressão. Ái lá a pastora me apoiou, me abraçou, cuidou de mim, das meninas, e aí eu tô lá” (Creusa, entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA).

include deacons, presbyters, and pastors, as well as committed members. As Adriana described for Bençãos Church:

Clara: When you say that the church helps, who do you mean? Is it the pastor or...?

Adriana: No, it's not even the pastor who has these contacts. It's a secretary who takes the calls or the texts or the internet or email. Then this person forwards it to the leaders, they say, hey, there's this family from Orlando who contacted us. In the next meeting they'll let us know. The whole church knows, they already put it in the [WhatsApp] group, actually, from the church, right? Guys, there's a family coming from Orlando, does anyone have a job, anyone have a bed, anyone have a crib... By church I mean the body, really, right? The church, not even the leaders, the whole church gets into it.¹⁹⁰ (Interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

For many Brazilian migrants, especially those without family or close relationships in Marietta prior to migrating, the church is where they establish friendships and build social networks. Claudinei and Bruna talk about their experience:

Claudinei: [Something important] that happened to us here was discovering this church that we go to today [Renascer] and, how do you say, being in a group of people that today we consider to be friends.

Bruna: It was really good indeed. (...) It was really important because here we're alone, you do not know anybody. It's very important for you to know people, so... There's also that, right? The lonely side, right? This job, you go in, you close the door. So it's really good [when] you meet people.

Claudinei: We made new friends, really good people.

Clara: And that, more through church, really?

Claudinei: Yes.

Bruna: Yes. (...)

Claudinei: Actually, many of the outings [*passeios*] we did this year, it was through this church group. With Eduardo, with the others.

Clara: You organize a group and go together.

Claudinei: Yes, we go camping...

Clara: Cool.

¹⁹⁰Clara: Quando fala igreja ajuda, quem que é? É o pastor ou é...?

Adriana: Não, o pastor, não é nem o pastor que fica com esses contatos, né? É um secretário lá que atende as ligações ou mensagem ou internet ou e-mail. Aí essa pessoa passa para os líderes, eles falam ó, tem uma família de Orlando que fez contato, beleza. Próxima reunião eles já passam pra gente. Toda igreja sabe disso, já botaram no grupo, na verdade, da igreja, né? Gente, tem uma família de Orlando que tá vindo, alguém tem emprego, alguém tem cama, alguém tem berço e a igreja que eu falo é o corpo mesmo, né? A igreja, não é nem a liderança não, a igreja toda se mobiliza. (Entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Claudinei: Next year, we're organizing a group to go to the beach.¹⁹¹ (Interview 6, 10/26/23, Marietta GA)

Kiko also talks about finding friends at church:

"Felipe, because when we were here last time, Pastor Felipe, like... He won us over with small gestures, we miss home a lot, our family, so like, he was a person who was there to support us, not with money, because that ends up not being important, not with anything, but with small gestures of attention, of... So, he became our friend like that. (...) He invited me, 'let's go to the church where I'm going now [Renascer]' and everything. So I ended up, I really identified with the church there, the people are a lot like family, a lot of communion."¹⁹² (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Regardless of their affiliation with Brazilian religious practices and denominations, these churches take up different roles as migrant churches in the US. In other words, the multiple forms of support described above are not repeating a specific religious practice in Brazil, but rather adapting to the context and needs of their congregations. To Pastor Natanael, the church fulfills the role of an extended family that migrants miss outside of Brazil: "many people do not have family here, so that's the role of the church." And as Leal remarked:

"In Brazil, it's really hard to see, for example, a pastor, even when they're an excellent person, a pastor dedicated to finding a job for one of their sheep, you know? Why? Because in our mindset over there, we're in our own country, so you should hustle, right? (...) Here, when you arrive here, the whole church looks for opportunities for you, including the pastor, (...)

191 Claudinei: Importante que aconteceu com a gente aqui foi nós descobrimos essa igreja que a gente frequenta hoje e, como se diz, está num grupo de pessoas que hoje a gente tem como amigo.

Bruna: Foi muito bom mesmo. (...) Foi muito importante porque aqui a gente fica só. Você não conhecer ninguém. É muito importante você conhecer as pessoas, então... Tem isso também, né? O lado solitário, né? Esse serviço, você entrou, fechou a porta. Então é muito bom você conhecer pessoas.

Claudinei: Fizemos novos amigos, pessoas muito boas.

Clara: E isso, mais pela igreja mesmo?

Claudinei: Isso.

Bruna: Sim. (...)

Claudinei: Inclusive, muitos dos passeios que nós fizemos esse ano, tipo assim, foi através do grupinho da igreja. Com o Emerson, os outros lá.

Clara: Que organiza uma turma e vai junto.

Claudinei: Isso, vamos acampar...

Clara: Bacana.

Claudinei: O ano que vem estamos programando para ir na na praia, uma galera.

192 "Felipe, porque quando estive aqui da outra vez, o Pastor Felipe assim... Ele nos ganhou com gestos pequenos, porque assim, a saudade de casa é grande, de ter família, então assim, ele foi uma pessoa que estava ali para nos amparar, não com dinheiro, que isso acaba não sendo importante, não com nada, mas com pequenos gestos de atenção, de... Enfim, ele virou nosso amigo assim. (...) Ele me convidou, bora lá na igreja que eu estou frequentando agora e tudo. Eu falei, vou, vou sim. Aí acabei, me identifiquei muito com a igreja lá, as pessoas também é muito família, muito comunhão" (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

[they'll say] 'I have a brother who needs work, can you help?'"¹⁹³ (Leal, interview 23, 10/24/23, Marietta GA)

As mentioned before, church congregations have been key in providing emotional and spiritual support for migrants affected by changes in migration policies in 2025. Nonetheless, many Brazilian churches in the Marietta area have cancelled large community events, which in turn hinders their fundraising efforts and financial sustainability throughout the year. Furthermore, Brazilian church support is not enough to keep migrants in Marietta and Brazilians have increasingly decided to leave Marietta and return home, even those who have built strong support networks within their congregations. A poignant case is the two Brazilian families moving from Orlando and welcomed to Marietta by the Benções congregation in late 2023. One of the couples, Luís and Bianca, returned to Brazil in early 2025, scared of being detained and having their kids – who are American citizens – forced into the foster system. The other family, Leandro and Renata, were still living in Marietta as of July 2025 but planning to return to Brazil soon, having already applied for the children's passports and started to sell their furniture (see life story 29). To them, it was not the fear or anxiety prompting them to leave, but rather the feeling that being undocumented is akin to "living a lie" which, in turn, goes against the Bible's teachings.

Limits and implications of Brazilian churches' role in migrant social reproduction

Brazilian migrants in Marietta have specific social reproduction needs, including emotional and childcare support during health emergencies, financial aid during critical

¹⁹³"Lá no Brasil, é muito difícil você ver, por exemplo, um pastor, por mais que ele seja uma excelente pessoa, ele dedicado a arrumar um emprego para uma ovelha sua. Entendeu? Por que? Porque na cabeça nossa lá, nós estamos no nosso país, então cada um que corra atrás, né (...) Aqui, quando você chega aqui, a igreja toda corre atrás de oportunidades pra você, inclusive o pastor, (...) tô com um irmão aqui que tá precisando de trabalho, você me ajuda aí e tal" (Leal, entrevista 23, 24/10/23, Marietta GA).

moments, reliable information for life in Georgia, spiritual and emotional counseling, and help finding housing and employment. These struggles, in turn, are sharpened in the unfolding of the immanent crisis of capital accumulation, whose impacts affect workers unevenly. Racialized differentiation is constitutive of the capitalist mode of production and reproduction and accentuated in its historical development and, in the US, it has taken shape, in part, as the exclusion of migrants from certain circuits of social reproduction. In this context, migrants and migrant organizations develop their own strategies and practices in order to support themselves and their communities, as in the case of Brazilian churches in Marietta. In other words, that Brazilian churches take up the role of fulfilling such needs mirrors migrants' reproductive struggles in the communities where they settle.

By offering the support needed by Brazilian families to reproduce themselves daily and intergenerationally, Brazilian churches and congregations "make precarity work" in filling the gaps left by inadequate wages, lack of job protections, lack of state-provided social services for migrants and their families. Brazilian churches also offer employment networks that depend on, and inevitably reproduce, precarized work. Alves (2009) uses the concept of an "immigrant regime of production," which describes the social and cultural arrangements that sustain certain relationships of production or, in other words, a cluster of networks that enable both practices of dominance and resistance among migrants. He argues, then, that while religious networks facilitate migrants' entry into the job market, they do so in vulnerable ways, reinforcing low wages and unsafe, unhealthy working conditions (Alves 2009). Alves's (2009) interpretation indeed draws near the concept of social reproduction as he considers the role of churches in reproducing the Brazilian labor force in specific ways: "Despite the conflictive and often exploitative character of this regime of production, it allows

Brazilian immigrants to survive and even thrive through the tactical use of their own resources” (142).

In other words, while Brazilian workers in Marietta turn to employment in housecleaning and construction in order to earn wages that support their family’s and their own daily and intergenerational reproduction, by virtue of their highly precarized working conditions, the forms of employment they access in the US do not provide enough resources – financial and otherwise – to support reproduction. It may be complicated to immediately guarantee housing, and limited funds do not allow for expensive solutions such as hotel stays; it may be complicated to find employment that supports the family and, even when there is work, the work does not always cover all needs; and, additionally, it may be complicated to ensure all the other things needed for reproduction, including child care, emotional support etc. In order to maintain themselves and their families cared for – avoiding unhousing, food insecurity, severe illness, lack of childcare etc. – these workers become significantly dependent on the forms of support offered by churches. At the same time, by guaranteeing migrants’ reproduction, churches also ensure they are ready to work again the next day and that migration to the US remains a viable and desirable option for Brazilians – in other words, ensuring the replenishment of a migrant labor force in the US. That churches’ reproductive practices support precarized labor markets does not mean, however, that this labor feeds into circuits of actual capital accumulation.

In the context of Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area, social reproduction is either commodified or dependent on networks of care. When wages gained by Brazilian migrants in construction and housecleaning are not enough to cover reproductive needs, church networks provide strong relationships of care. In the migrant labor markets that Brazilians participate in, jobs are precarious – many people do not have work everyday, there are high and low work

seasons, wages are not constant, there are no safety nets for emergencies. Leal talked about different moments in which he had to spend all his savings because he could not work, either due to health issues or a halt in construction projects. Indeed, the social reproduction struggles of Brazilian migrants is summarized in the oft-repeated saying: “America is the land where the child cries and the mother does not see.” Indeed, while still in Brazil, these workers could often rely on workers’ rights and state-provided social services, or on extended family networks. In Marietta, migrants then have to find these safety networks for themselves – and, as described above, that is where the church comes in. In relying on other Brazilian migrants, these social reproduction networks increase the load for congregants, in terms of their time, energy, and money, either as they offer support in specific ways or as volunteers and tithers at the church. Additionally, church networks of support tend to reproduce gendered dynamics: while women will do the cooking, cleaning, and caring, men take on leadership and organizing positions at the church and will also help with hauling and moving furniture.

However, Brazilian church networks do not cover all social reproduction needs. For Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area, caring for children who are not old enough for school is one of the biggest challenges. Most couples end up concluding that daycare costs almost as much (sometimes more) than what the wife makes as a housecleaner, especially if she is still a *helper*. As a result, many women stay home to take care of their children, some of them setting up informal daycare centers in their own home to supplement family income. Many Brazilian families also recur to food banks in the Marietta area in order to offset high grocery prices. Information on when and where the best food drives take place does circulate through church networks, with many congregants attending them together. However, Pastor Natanael mentioned that their attempt at food distribution through Vitória Church during the Covid-19 pandemic utterly failed, among Brazilians at least. According to him, only one or two

Brazilian families picked up food donations, while the rest was claimed by other Latin-American migrants and even some American families: “I knew of [Brazilian] people who were struggling, who needed those donations, but who would not come to pick it up because of shame, they were embarrassed.” (Pastor Natanael, interview 30, 12/03/23, Marietta GA).

Furthermore, the fulfillment of social reproduction needs through congregation networks is not unconditional, as Brazilian churches are, in many ways, normative and hierarchical environments that demand specific commitments from congregation members. While help for incoming migrants may be given more openly, with “no questions asked,” other forms of support are only given to active, committed church members – like the different instances where Leal and Edna, enthusiastic congregants from the beginning, were overwhelmingly supported by the churches they attended. Edna, speaking of one specific couple who attended service at Bençãos, said: “They’re not even Christian, but they keep going to church because they know that, if things get sticky, they can count on the church.” Indeed, there is much criticism of migrants who go to church “just to get help” and, once they are set, stop attending church altogether. Pastor Flavio from Renascer Church was highly critical of such cases and, at a dinner party, Teresa said, annoyed: “The other day I heard someone say to someone else ‘just go to a church and they’ll help you, after that you just stop going,’” which elicited upset groaning from her fellow Bençãos Church congregants. Within the churches, there is much discourse around members being more committed. On one occasion, when Leal delivered a sermon at Bençãos Church, he preached on the American “chicken and pig” fable, which says the chicken is involved in breakfast by providing the eggs, but the pig is committed to the meal because it has to die to provide the bacon.

Nonetheless, being a committed congregation member comes with its own set of expectations. Sermons and preaching frequently and emphatically exhort members to

contribute with the tithe, as many churches depend entirely on members' donations to afford rent or mortgage, service and other events expenses, and other various costs. There is also an expectation for members to comply with religious values and practices, which may vary from church to church but generally include not drinking alcohol, using a specific religious vocabulary and acting in specific ways during service. Sometimes, comments during service set up additional expectations on behaviors and even emotional responses. Brazilian churches also usually defend strict gender roles as part of the Bible's teachings, specifically that men should be the providers and women should be homemakers. Renata says that joining the church fixed her marital conflicts, because before it was a marriage "between a sexist man [machista] and a feminist" and now they are both aligned in their respective roles in the family. Prevalent homophobia in church communities also alienates queer migrants and excludes them from the support networks that congregations offer.

In Brazil, the Evangelical churches to which many Brazilian churches in the Marietta area are affiliated have aligned with ultra-right politics. In fact, conservative Brazilian politicians have visited the Marietta community, like Congressman Pastor Marco Feliciano and Senator and former Jair Bolsonaro Minister Pastor Damares Alves. The church communities I worked with have a right-leaning political and ideological homogeneity, with frequent comments in individual conversations as well as public speeches (in sermons, for example) that assumed an agreement with conservative politics. In fact, many Brazilian migrants hoped/wished for a Trump victory in the 2024 election, feeling more aligned with his politics than with those of Democrat candidates and even supporting Trump's migration policies, as long as they were enacted only upon "criminals." Leandro, from Espírito Santo Church, mentioned a Kamala Harris's rally in which someone in the audience shouted "Bless Jesus" and she responded "I think you're in the wrong rally," apparently prompting gleeful

laughter from the crowd; to him, this was reason enough to dismiss Harris as a candidate he could relate to and root for.

In this chapter, I presented Brazilian migrants' social reproduction conditions in the Marietta area in two different ways: by discussing specific aspects, such as food security, housing, and purchasing power and, subsequently, by addressing the crucial role that Brazilian churches have in terms of social reproduction. In that way, I emphasize the contradictory character of what Brazilian migrants consider to be a "better life" in the US in which they face several significant social reproduction struggles while, at the same time, assessing they have more "quality of life" in Marietta than they had in Brazil. As I argued, I understand this to be a non-linear process where certain aspects of social reproduction conditions are favored over others, but that can change according to shifting contexts.

CHAPTER 9: RELATIONSHIPS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION HERE AND THERE

In this chapter, I start by addressing the Brazilian migrants' family dynamics in Marietta, including what family members migrate to the US, who is responsible for homework and childcare, and with what implications. Subsequently, I discuss social reproduction dynamics between Brazil and Marietta, spotlighting what relatives stay in Brazil, and how migrants in Marietta and family members in Brazil care for each other. Finally, I address how migration and citizenship status shape social reproduction dynamics for Brazilian migrants.

Family dynamics in Marietta

In the present section, I examine family dynamics among Brazilian migrants in Marietta, considering who migrates, who is responsible for housework and childcare, and with what implications. Overall, Brazilians tend to migrate with their families, including spouses and children, while women remain responsible for domestic and family care in their own homes.

Who migrates?

Once, when attending service at Bençãos Church in 2023, I made a note on the number of children present during church events. Many churches – including Bençãos – have a Sunday school program for children and a separate room for them to stay in while their parents are at the service. The soundscape of church, before and after service, is dominated by high-pitched screams and running noises, the universal sounds of children. Looking around

the church that day, I saw for the most part adults of 30+ years of age, a handful of teenagers, and only three elderly persons. Migrants' ages and the composition of migrating families says much about the labor and social reproduction dynamics implied in the migration process. It speaks of a community of people who migrate not as young adults hoping to start life in the United States, but older adults whose living and working conditions in Brazil did not turn out the way they expected. It is also not a community with elders since, as Brazilian migrants frequently say, "America is not for the old." After service, I found out that two of the three elderly persons were relatives visiting from Brazil.

Most people I talked to had migrated to the United States with a spouse and their young children, if they had any. Many couples have (more) children after they arrive in the US. Ideas around having young children stay in Brazil while their parents migrate seem to have changed over time. Linda, Tânia, and Andreia were single parents when they decided to migrate to the US in the 1990s, and had sons stay in Brazil with grandparents. People who migrated more recently say they never considered leaving their children in Brazil, not even single women, who struggle the most to conciliate paid work and child care. The one woman I met in this situation was Gláucia, one of the nail salon workers. When I said to her "It's great that you were able to bring your daughter with you," Gláucia responded that she only moved to the US because of her daughter and would not have migrated without her, because she wanted to give her daughter "more opportunities." Another was Creusa, who brought her two 10 year old twins, while her 23-year-old daughter stayed in Brazil. She never considered leaving her youngest daughters in Brazil and says that, had they stayed, she would not have "endured it." Even when Creusa's host, who's godmother to the twins, suggested they be "sent back" while Creusa stayed in the US to work, she never even considered it. As discussed previously, migrants with children typically want them to grow up in the US and enjoy the

“opportunities” the country offers and have a “better future” When children are born in the US, parents think of them as American; they’ll say that “the US is their country,” even if their children grow up in Brazil, like Douglas, Isadora and Kiko’s son.

Rarely does a Brazilian migrant encourage elderly parents to migrate with them. Older migrants with family in the United States, more frequently than not, migrated when young and stayed, although many return when they approach retirement. As a result, it is rare to see Brazilian families with three generations living in the US. This is significant to questions around social reproduction networks because it reduces family-based networks of support that migrants have access to in the US, especially when it comes to child care. There are exceptions, of course. Danilo has an older daughter who moved to Marietta with her husband, and he has a granddaughter living in the area. Linda also has grandchildren from her son, who moved to the US as an adult.

Some Brazilian migrants in Marietta also have siblings or cousins living in the US, but they usually do not all migrate together. In some cases, siblings and cousins migrate to the US at different times and through different connections, not necessarily because of their relatives already living there. Débora and Fabiana, for example, are sisters who moved to the US through entirely different connections, although in both cases it was their partners who already lived in the US. However, Débora chose to settle in the Marietta area to be close to Fabiana, who already lived there.

In other cases, the sibling or cousin already in the US encourages relatives in Brazil to migrate. That was the case of Edna encouraging first her sister Érika, then her cousins Taynara and Adriana (see Figure 8). It was also the case of Talita being encouraged by her sister who lived in Roswell. Even in those cases, however, it is not necessarily a goal for Brazilian migrants to “bring the rest of the family” to the US beyond spouse and young

children. There is not an intentional strategy of sending out some family pioneers who will then facilitate migration for the rest. In this sense, migration is seen more as a more individual or couple-based strategy than one that involves the entire extended family. While having family in the US does not necessarily influence migration, and many decide to move without having those strong connections, it certainly makes it easier in terms of adaptation and support necessary to start a life in the country.

Many people also talk about families “falling apart” once they arrive in the US, especially in terms of couples divorcing. In many cases, this was attributed to the wife making good money in housecleaning, becoming financially independent, and then “kicking her husband to the curb” [*dá um pé na bunda do marido*]. Others talk about the need for a family to be “structured” in order to endure the pressures of life in the United States, like Juçara:

“I think it’s important that people who come here with their life, at least their family life, structured. Because if it’s not structured, it usually gets worse. It either improves for good, or it gets worse. And we saw a lot of that, right? We hosted people here that in less than five months were separated.”¹⁹⁴ (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Migration family dynamics shape social reproduction needs and practices in contexts of origin and destination, including housework, childcare, eldercare, remittances, living costs and material conditions in the US and Brazil.

“Don’t mind the mess:” Housework

House and care work are largely seen as women’s responsibility and they do most of it. Many times, during my interviews, women were doing house- and care work while talking to me or while I interviewed their husbands. When I interviewed Érika, for example, she was

¹⁹⁴“(…) acho importante pessoas que vêm pra cá com sua vida, pelo menos, familiar, estruturada. Porque se ela não estiver estruturada, a tendência é de piorar. Ou melhora de uma vez, ou piora. E a gente viu muito isso, né? A gente recebeu pessoas aqui que em menos de 5 meses estavam separados” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

cooking her son's food when I arrived, cooked and fed him while we talked, and interrupted our interview a few times to call her husband, cousin, and friend to see who could watch Bruno while she got her nails done with Juçara. The day I interviewed Leal, he arrived much later than what we had arranged, because of traffic. While I waited, Edna helped her son João with his homework, cooked and served dinner for both him and André, and then served Leal and I dinner while we were doing the interview. Only once did I see a man doing housework while doing interviews at peoples' homes. When I interviewed Talita, Luciano was cleaning their bathroom.

Husbands' participation in housework and childcare is sometimes referred to as "help." For example, Juçara said "Danilo helps me a lot" when talking about childcare. About her husband Elimar, Érika said "Poor thing, sometimes he sets the table" when she arrives too tired from work. Vanusa talked about her husband Sandro being "understanding" of her not wanting to cook when tired from work:

"When I get home, dead tired, right? I want to make a really special dinner but I can't [laughs]. Thank God my husband is very understanding, I try to have as much ready as possible, for example, the meals for him to bring to work, I try to have them on Sunday so [we] have the meals for the week, or I'll make a [large] amount of meat, I do not know, stuff he needs to take [to work] I'll have it ready so he can take it for lunch. And when I get home, [he'll] make an egg, [he'll] make a [sandwich], if there's meat and rice, he'll eat [that]."¹⁹⁵ (Vanusa, interview 36, 10/30/23, Marietta GA)

Schaienne, in turn, spoke about her frustration at having a husband who does not do "her" chores, but teaching her sons (aged 11 and 13 in 2023) to "help:"

"My boys, they help me a lot. Oh, I teach them to help, I teach them alright [laughs], I teach them to do [housework] because for them in the first place, right, so that one day, my husband, he's more lazy [*folgado*], all came from how he was raised, right, and I imagine, people in Heaven, if my daughters-in-law complain of me the way I complain about my husband, I'll be so embarrassed. (...) So I tell them, look, a mother is not her sons' maid and a wife is not her

¹⁹⁵"Quando eu chego em casa, morta de cansada, né? Quero preparar uma janta bem especial mas eu não consigo [risos]. Graças a Deus, meu marido é muito compreensivo, eu já tento deixar o máximo de coisa pronta, por exemplo, as marmitas pra ele dar levar pro trabalho dele, eu já tento deixar no domingo pra ter as marmitas na semana, ou então já faço uma quantidade de carne. Sei lá, as coisas que ele precisa levar eu já deixo tudo pronto pra ele levar pro almoço. E quando eu chego em casa, faz um ovo, faz um pão, se tiver carne com arroz, ele come" (Vanusa, entrevista 36, 30/10/23, Marietta GA).

husband's maid. So who lives in a house is who cares for it, so let's go."¹⁹⁶ (Schaianne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

Of course, others talk of housework being more balanced between husband and wife. That is how Juliana describes the arrangement between her and her husband, although Juliana does not work some days in the week to "do housewife stuff" while the balance of other chores hinges on her husband's work schedule:

Juliana: On a day I don't work, [I have] countless things to do, groceries, tidy up the house, housewife stuff, washing, putting things away. (...) Then the day, like I say, goes by really fast, you did laundry, put it away, the day is over. [You] pick one [of her daughters] up, come back home, pick the other up, make dinner, bathe them, go back to sleep and start over again. On days I work I'll leave the oldest at the bus stop, go to work, I work, work, work, basically I leave her at the bus stop, work, pick up the youngest, then pick up the oldest, come back home, dinner, shower, sleep, all that on an endless loop, in a non-stop loop. (...)

Clara: And so, does your husband also participate in caring for the girls, cleaning the house, or does he stay more at his job...?

Juliana: Because his work demands more hours and all, he... There's no rule like, I'll make the food and you'll do the dishes. Because there are days when he is not even home in time for dinner. But he's the one who drops off my youngest... my oldest, at the bus stop. Sometimes when he comes home earlier he'll make dinner. If I'm busy and it's bath time, he'll bathe [the girls]. So, always like that, you know? Like, getting organized to make the routine work. Then sometimes he's really tired, he doesn't do anything. Then sometimes it's me [who's] really tired. Sometimes it's me [who's] really tired so I say, oh, you figure it out with them, order some food. It's like that, there is not a rule, it's what works that day, right. Sometimes it's 100% me, sometimes 90% him, sometimes 50% me, 50% him.¹⁹⁷ (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

196 "Mas os meus meninos, eles me ajudam muito. Ai, eu ensino a ajudar, menina, eu ensino mesmo [risos], eu ensino eles a fazerem porque pra eles, primeiro lugar, né, pra que um dia o meu marido ele é mais folgado, veio tudo de criação, né, e eu fico imaginando, gente do céu, se as minhas noras ficar reclamando de mim igual reclamo do meu marido eu vou ficar numa vergonha. (...) Ai eu falo pra eles, mãe não é empregada de filho e mulher não é empregada de marido. Então, quem mora na casa é quem cuida dela, então bora" (Schaianne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

197 Juliana: O dia que eu não trabalho, Ns coisas pra fazer, supermercado, arrumar casa, coisas de dona de casa, lavar, guardar. (...) Ai o dia, como eu disse, passa muito rápido, você lavou roupa, guardou roupa, acabou o dia. Busca uma, depois volta e busca outra, fazer janta, dar banho, voltar a dormir e começar de novo. No dia de trabalho eu deixo a mais velha no ponto, vou trabalhar, trabalho, trabalho, trabalho, trabalho, basicamente deixo ela no ponto, trabalho, busco a mais nova, depois busco a mais velha, volto pra casa, janta, banho, dormir, tudo isso num looping eterno, num looping sem parar. (...)

Clara: E aí o seu marido participa também desses cuidados das meninas, faxina, ou ele fica mais no trabalho...?

Juliana: Como o trabalho dele exige mais carga horária e tal, ele... Não tem uma regra assim, eu vou fazer a comida e você vai lavar a louça. Porque tem dias que ele não chega nem pra janta. Mas ele que deixa a minha mais nova... a minha mais velha no ponto de ônibus. Às vezes quando ele chega mais cedo ele faz a janta. Se eu tô ocupada, é hora do banho, ele dá o banho. Ai, sempre assim, sabe? Tipo assim, se organizando pra fazer a rotina funcionar. Ai às vezes ele tá muito cansado, ele não faz nada. Ai às vezes sou eu muito cansada. Às vezes sou eu muito cansada e eu falo ai, se vira aí com elas, pede uma comida. É assim, não tem muita regra, não. É o que funciona no dia, né. Às vezes sou 100 por cento eu, às vezes noventa ele. Às vezes cinquenta eu, cinquenta ele. (Entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)

In getting home tired from work, Brazilian migrants, both men and women, do not prioritize housework chores. The usual greeting, when you visit someone's home in Brazil, is "do not mind the mess" [*não repara na bagunça*], even when the house is sparkling clean. In Marietta, while "don't mind the mess" was still a frequent greeting it was, more often than in Brazil, true. Ludmilla mentioned a box of Christmas lights in her home's entrance hallway, apologizing for not having put them away. She then said:

Ludmilla: Oh, Jesus. We work so much, it's a rush, you know, Clara? So when you come home, you say, ok, I'll go [do some chore]. But then you do not go, because you're so tired. So I didn't put [the Christmas lights in the attic].

Clara: You want to do anything but keep working, right?

Ludmilla: Oh, I'm tired, right? Because we've been here for 23 years already.¹⁹⁸ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

Caring for children and managing childcare

While wages, and therefore labor, are necessary for social reproduction, work also conflicts with many social reproduction activities, usually in ways that reinforce patriarchal gender roles. As seen above, work conflicts with activities like cooking and cleaning the home. It also conflicts with childcare in specific ways. In the context of the Brazilian community in the Marietta area, while women's jobs are seen as proper work, women's paid work is also seen as interchangeable with childcare and social reproduction in a way that men's work is not. Childcare and staying home with the children is generally considered women's responsibility.

No one wants to leave their children alone at home, of course, but Georgia state laws stipulate how long a child is allowed to be alone at home based on their age. This becomes a social reproduction math exercise in which parents need to make sure they are home with

¹⁹⁸Ludmilla: Ai, Jesus. A gente trabalha tanto, é uma correria, sabe, Clara? Que quando você chega, fala vai, eu vou lá. Mas aí você não vai, porque você tá tão cansada. Aí, não coloquei.

Clara: Quer fazer tudo menos, continuar trabalhando, né?

Ludmilla: Ah, eu tô cansada, né? Porque a gente tá aqui há 23 anos já. (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

their children at a certain amount of time, coordinating their own schedules with their children's. Schaianne explains how she handled it with her youngest:

“It’s a state law, a state law. Like, the youngest who is about to arrive. He just turned 11. He can’t be alone here [at her home] under any circumstance. He has to have an adult with him from the time he arrives. So I have to work at a time that coincides, that at least like, at most 30 minutes after he comes home, I come home, you understand? So, in that I made a cellphone available to him, he can get out of the bus on his own, everything that made it easier for me, so he gets out, comes by himself, gets in the apartment, I put a lock on the door. Usually he comes home, I’m coming home, you understand? I get home right after, but if his older brother is [home], he can stay with his older brother for up to around two hours, by themselves, right?”¹⁹⁹ (Schaianne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

It is a bigger challenge with children who are not old enough to be in school or even during summer vacations. Daycare and nannies are very expensive and, usually, ask that a baby or child be in their care for at least three days a week. Isadora, for example, said in 2023 that daycare for her son Douglas cost \$170 for only one day and \$200 for all five days of the week. The high cost of daycare is compared to the woman’s wages, based on the assumption that she could stay home to watch the kids. Another way of thinking about this is that even the wages women make in their jobs are interchangeable with daycare payments, while their husbands’ money is meant only for other expenses. In this case, the math usually revolves around the question: How much does daycare cost when compared to how much a woman makes? In many cases, the couple decides it is better for them to forego the woman’s wage and have her stay home than for the woman to work and pay for daycare.

199“É lei do estado, do estado. Igual, o mais novo que tá chegando. Ele fez 11 agora. Ele não pode de forma nenhuma ficar sozinho aqui. Ele tem que ter um adulto em casa a hora que ele chega. Então, eu tenho que trabalhar num horário que coincida, que pelo menos assim, no máximo 30 minutos depois que ele chega, eu tô chegando. Entende? Então, nisso aí eu disponibilizei um celular pra ele, ele pode descer sozinho do ônibus, tudo que facilitou pra mim, que antes ele não podia, ele ficava de... é, é, after school, agora eu já, ele já pode descer, então ele desce, vem sozinho, entra pro apartamento, eu coloquei trava na porta. Geralmente ele chega, eu tô chegando, entendeu? Eu chego logo em seguida, mas se o irmão mais velho estiver, ele pode ficar junto com o irmão mais velho até mais ou menos duas horas, sozinhos, né?” (Schaianne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

Isadora says of day care prices: “How is it that, if I do not even make \$40 a day, I can pay \$170?” Juçara said of working as a manicure from home in terms of being able to care for her own children:

“And I did not see myself leaving the kids so I could go out to work, my problem was not work, right? Like I say, if I have to clean houses, I’ll go, my problem was the children, so it’s like I would go to work for someone else to take care of my children, because I would not make money, two children? You’ll do houses to pay for a nanny or daycare, so it kind of did not make sense.”²⁰⁰ (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Tânia described how this is also true for her son and his American wife:

“But that’s what happened with my daughter-in-law. My son told me like... I would say, ‘Audrey has to work,’ she’s American, right. So, ‘Audrey has to work.’ And he said, ‘what for?’ It’s better if she stays home taking care of the children. Because babysitters are expensive too, right. It’s better for her to stay there taking care of the children than to pay a babysitter, not knowing how the children are being cared for. And it’s true, right.”²⁰¹ (Tânia, interview 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA)

In other cases, however, the wages made by the mother, even after daycare payments, are necessary for a couple to be able to make ends meet. Érika talked about her experience:

“Like, when Bruno was born, I stayed home, Clara. I stayed home until I saw that it was very hard for me and Elimar with only him working. When Bruno was five months old, I went to work. Four months, he was turning five, I went to work. He stayed with a [babysitter, Sil] (...) But it did not work every day, so for her it was not worth it, they’re very cold. So one fine day she said to me like, ‘Érika, he’s coming too little, I can’t stay with him. Because I need children who come every day,’ and I would take him once, twice a week. So I was really sad about it, you know? (...) But if they have to send [the child] away, they do, *minha filha*. And he was sick, he had not been for a week, and when he’s sick, *minha filha*, I’ll cancel everything and stay with him. Because the priority is to take care of him, right? So she let me know, she said she would not stay with him anymore. (...) But it was hard, the fact that I had to stop working to stay with him. But it’s very... A lot of mothers do not do that. They will [take their children], like, either to a daycare or to a babysitter, because of the need to work, you understand, Clara?”²⁰² (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

200“E eu não me via deixando as crianças pra eu sair pra trabalhar, o meu problema não era o trabalho, né? Igual eu falo, se eu tiver que limpar casa, eu vou, o meu problema era as crianças, então meio que eu ia trabalhar pra alguém cuidar dos meus filhos, porque eu não ia render, duas crianças? Você fazer casa para pagar babá ou pagar daycare, então meio que não fazia sentido” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

201“Mas foi o que aconteceu com a minha nora. Meu filho falou assim... Eu dizia, a Audrey tem que trabalhar, ela é americana, né. Aí, a Audrey tem que trabalhar. E ele falou, pra quê? Melhor ela ficar dentro de casa cuidando dos filhos, que babysitter é cara também. Melhor ela ficar aí cuidando dos filhos do que ficar pagando babysitter e não saber como que as crianças estão sendo cuidadas. E é verdade, né” (Tânia, entrevista 35, 12/12/23, Marietta GA).

202“Assim, o Bruno, quando ele nasceu, eu fiquei em casa, Clara. Fiquei em casa até eu ver que estava muito difícil pra mim e pro Elimar só ele trabalhando. Aí Bruno tinha cinco meses, eu fui trabalhar. Quatro meses, ele estava fazendo cinco, fui trabalhar. Ele ficou com a amiga da Juçara, essa que me ligou, a Sil. Foi uma bênção

Later, chatting with Érika at Benções Church's Christmas dinner, I asked her if they wanted to have another child. She said having a baby in the United States is really hard, because to take care of a baby, she had to stop working with no maternity license or security. Érika said that, in her case, it was a choice between working or having a child, because she could not do both at the same time, which made her not want to have another child.

Some housecleaners are able to bring kids to work with them. Once Edna told me about taking her oldest son André to clean houses with her when he was a child and having him do small chores. He overheard this comment and joked "and this work is unpaid, you know!" Ludmilla and Márcio raised their kids "in clients' homes" until they were 18 months old, while Ludmilla was still breastfeeding. They attribute being able to do that to having great clients who allowed them to bring their children to work, which not only was a nuisance, to a certain extent, but also made cleanings take twice as long. This was only possible because they worked together as a couple. They described it:

Ludmilla: I was pregnant and I said to him, 'Márcio, when the baby is born, *helpers* won't want to go with me because I'll bring the baby,' you understand? So, you won't believe this, I would stay for how many hours? A house that we'd do in two hours, we'd take four. Because I'd have to stop to breastfeed, change diapers, when they grew a little there was feeding time, you understand? And when they started getting bigger, so they wouldn't fiddle with everything, what did we do? While Márcio did his part, I would carry the children, doing what I could while carrying them. Right here, see [gestures how she would carry her babies], Ashlyn right here, dusting, so they wouldn't make a mess at clients' houses. Then, when Márcio was done, he would take Ashlyn and I'd finish the job. So what took two [hours] became four. (...)

na vida dele, a Sil. Mas eu não trabalhava todo dia, então pra ela não compensava, eles são muito frios. Aí um belo dia ela falou pra mim assim, Érika, ele tá vindo pouco tempo, eu não vou poder ficar com ele. Porque eu preciso de crianças que venham todos os dias, e eu ia uma vez, duas vezes na semana com ele. Aí eu fiquei muito triste com isso, sabe? (...) Mas se tiver que dispensar, dispensa, minha filha. E ele tava doente, ele não tinha ido uma semana, e quando fica doente, minha filha, eu cancelo tudo e fico com ele. Porque a prioridade é tomar conta dele, né? Aí ela avisou, falou que não ia ficar mais com ele. (...) Mas foi difícil o fato de ter que parar de trabalhar pra ficar com ele. Mas é muito... mas muita mãe não faz isso. Eles [incompreensível] assim, tipo, ou pro day care ou pra babá, pela necessidade de trabalhar, entendeu, Clara?" (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

Márcio: There was a house once that put [Ashlyn] in the swimming pool. We were working and she was in the swimming pool with the client. Oh, we would look [at Ashlyn], she was so happy.²⁰³ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

When I asked them about the relationship between housecleaning work and childcare, they considered that housecleaning was helpful in managing childcare, because of their clients being understanding:

Clara: Do you think that in this struggle to reconcile work and childcare, housecleaning work helped or hindered in balancing these two things?

Ludmilla: I think it helped, right?

Márcio: It helped because we had really good clients, you know? (...)

Ludmilla: They never complained, do you believe it? Even today [the clients] ask about [the children], [the clients] are happy when [the children] graduate, like Ashlyn graduated high school and [the clients] gave her gifts because she graduated, you understand? So, like, I think that housecleaning in that regard was good, because I was able to bring [the children], you understand?²⁰⁴ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

Those who work and pay for childcare also encounter their own sorts of struggles in their family relationships. Adriana, the judgmental tone notwithstanding, described this conflict:

“[People say] ‘I came here because of my children, to give my children a better life.’ Then you go to the children’s room, there are all the toys you can imagine, and good ones, that in Brazil they would never have. But [the children] do not have their mother, don’t have their father. Then you see, the children can choose whatever food they want, but they don’t have a Saturday with their dad, with their mom, never played with their mom, never sat down and played. [The

203Ludmilla: Depois eu fiquei grávida de novo. Quando ele tentou na madeirinha. Ele ia lá pro centro de Atlanta pra ganhar 50 dólares por dia. 50 dólares. A helper ganhava mais que ele. Eu grávida e eu falei pra ele, Marcos, a hora que o neném nascer, as helper não vão querer me ajudar porque eu levo a criança. Entendeu? Então, você não acredita. Eu ficava quantas horas? Uma casa que a gente fazia em duas horas, a gente levava quatro. Porque eu tinha que parar pra amamentar, trocar a fralda, quando cresceu um pouquinho era hora da papinha, você entendeu? E quando eles começaram a ficar maiorzinho, pra não ficar mexendo em tudo, o que a gente fazia? Enquanto o Marcos fazia a parte dele, eu ficava com as crianças no colo, brincando, fazendo o que dava pra fazer com eles no colo. Aqui assim, ó, a Ashlyn aqui ó, tirando pó, pra não ficar mexendo na casa dos clientes. (...)

Márcio: Teve uma casa uma vez que colocaram ela na piscina. A gente trabalhando e ela na piscina junto com o cliente. Ih, a gente olhava, ela com uma felicidade. (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

204Clara: Vocês acham que nessa dificuldade de conciliar trabalho com cuidados das crianças pequenas, o trabalho da limpeza ajudou ou atrapalhou a conseguir conciliar essas duas coisas?

Ludmilla: Acho que ajudou, né?

Márcio: Ajudou porque a gente teve clientes muito bons, sabe? (...)

Ludmilla: Nunca reclamaram, você acredita? Até hoje perguntam deles, ficam contentes quando eles se formam, igual a Ashlyn se formou no high school, deram presente pra ela porque se formou, entendeu? Então, assim, eu acho que a limpeza nesse ponto foi bom, porque eu podia levar, entendeu? (Entrevista 27, 14/12/23, Kennesaw GA)

children] have five, six Lego boxes but never had their parents presence playing, putting Legos together. And then I keep thinking like, my God, what do you mean you came to give your children a better life? What better life is this? Is it clothes, food, and toys? Is that what a child needs? I was a very poor child. (...) And I didn't have toys, I could not choose the food, but I remember spending a Sunday with my dad and my mom, us playing, we would go to the beach, you know, I remember like, I have very good memories of my childhood, right. (...) I believe that these children, if they could choose for themselves, I don't know if they would choose toys, clothes, a good car with leather inside, you know, or if they'd prefer a family. I see that, you know? I see that a lot, abandoned children. There are children here, Brazilians that I'm talking about, right, that they leave school, where stay until 3pm already, and go straight to a nanny. The nanny goes to the school, picks the kid up, and takes them home, then they stay with the nanny. And while we work, the mother comment, right, on what their children say. 'Mom, how many houses today? Is it a big house, mom? What time are you coming home?' Oh my. Then they comment, 'Oh, today there was this thing at my kid's school and I can't go. Oh, today there was this things at my kid's school and I forgot. Oh today there was this and that ...,' for example, lunch at the school. School keeps coming up with this stuff, right? And I keep meditating, like, my God, did they really come here to give their children a good life? If it was me, I'd rather not have anything to eat."²⁰⁵ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Danilo similarly talked about this:

Danilo: Another thing we see here is the issue of parents that come with children and put them in a daycare, right? (...) [They] abandon the child at the daycare, the child... The child stays in absence of their parents until the end of the day. They only raise the child in... Those are things that happen here too, if you're not prepared for it, it's really hard.

Clara: Because folks work all day, right?

Danilo: They work all day. And in my case, we had the advantage of Juçara being a manicure, she made her clientele inside home. But parents here, they sacrifice their children. And [sacrifice them] hard really, it's no joke, they sacrifice them hard. If [parents] are not willing

205“E eu não sei o que as outras fazem com esses questionamentos, mas tipo assim... Eu vim para cá por causa dos meus filhos. Para dar uma condição melhor ao meu filho. Aí você chega no quarto das crianças, tem todos os brinquedos que você possa imaginar. E bons, que no Brasil ela nunca teria. Mas não tem a mãe, não tem o pai. Aí você vê, as crianças podem escolher a comida que quer. Mas não tem um sábado com o pai, com a mãe. Nunca brincou com a mãe, nunca sentou e brincou. Tem cinco, seis caixas de Lego, mas nunca teve a presença dos pais brincando, montando com Lego. E aí eu fico pensando assim, meu Deus, como assim veio dar uma condição melhor pro filho? Que condição melhor é essa? Será que é roupa, comida e brinquedo? Será que é isso que uma criança precisa? Eu fui uma criança muito pobre. (...) E não tinha brinquedo, não tinha comida pra escolher, mas eu me lembro de passar um domingo com meu pai e minha mãe, a gente brincar, a gente ir pra praia, sabe, me lembro assim, tenho muitas lembranças boas da minha infância, né. (...) Eu acredito que essas crianças, se elas pudessem escolher por si mesma, eu não sei se elas escolheriam brinquedo, roupa, um carro bom, de couro por dentro, sabe, ou prefeririam uma família. Eu vejo isso, sabe? Vejo muito isso, as crianças abandonadas. Tem crianças aqui, brasileiras que eu tô falando, né, que elas saem do colégio, que já ficam até as três, e vão pra outra babá. A babá vai no colégio, pega a criança e leva pra casa dela. E aí ela já fica com outra babá. E enquanto a gente trabalha, as mães comentam, né, as falas dos filhos. Mãe, tem quantas casas hoje? Tem o trecho. E a casa é grande, mãe? Que hora você vai chegar? Poxa. Aí comentam. Ah, hoje teve isso na escola do meu filho e não posso ir. Ah, hoje teve isso na escola do meu filho e eu esqueci. Ah, hoje teve isso e isso e isso... por exemplo, almoço na escola. A escola fica inventando essas coisas, né? E aí eu fico assim, meditando, meu Deus, será que elas vieram pra cá dar uma condição boa com o filho mesmo? Se fosse eu, eu preferia não ter o que comer” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

to balance that out, they earn money, but lose the family.²⁰⁶ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Vanusa, as a daycare worker, also talks about how this conflict – as well as the judgment of mothers who “abandon their kids in daycare” - and how it comes up at her job:

“Then [the mothers] say, oh, today I have one house, today I have three houses, today I’ll come late, I’m far away. It’s very hard. But we have to understand the other person’s side, too. Sometimes I say, my God, how can they leave a little baby like this with me? But then I say, oh my God, [the mother] needs me, she needs my service. So, that’s what I’m here for, right? That’s the way to think. A lot of times it’s like working with children at home. There are people who are friends of mine who say, oh, I’m a nanny, but I get so angry with mothers that go to the store and do not rush to pick up their son. But, you’re serving her, you’re with her son to earn your money, isn’t it? So, you set a time, if [the mother] arrives within that time, she’s not wrong, you understand? That’s how I think. Sometimes we want to complain, oh my God, this kid is still here, the mother won’t come, she’s working and she’s paying me for it, isn’t it?”²⁰⁷ (Vanusa, interview 36, 10/30/23, Marietta GA)

Underlying the conflict between work and childcare is the issue of many Brazilian migrants in Marietta not having family or other support networks that can help with childcare.

Juliana explained:

“But, oh my, there are days when I close my eyes and ‘my God, I want to disappear. I wanted, you know, my God, what do I do for my mind to stop thinking a bit?’ Because we’re here, only my husband and I, we do not have help, like, oh, there’s a grandpa to pick up from school, oh, watch this kid a bit on the weekend so I can rest my mind and sleep in a little. So it’s always that dynamic, balancing thousands of plates to be able to figure this out, figure that out. (...) I see a lot of, like, acquaintances, right, that have children, right, that live in Brazil, that leave the children with the grandparents on the weekend, that are able to take some time alone with their husbands, this and that, complaining, ‘oh, I’m exhausted, I’m tired, I’m overwhelmed,’”

206Danilo: Outra coisa também que a gente vê aqui é a questão dos pais que vem com os filhos e botam as crianças na creche, né? Larga aqui. (...) Larga a criança na creche, a criança... a criança fica na ausência dos pais até o final do dia. Só vem e cria criança no... Isso são coisas também que acontecem muito aqui, se não tiver preparado pra isso, é bem difícil.

Clara: Porque o pessoal trabalha o dia inteiro, né?

Danilo: Trabalha o dia inteiro. E no meu caso, a gente tivemos a vantagem da Jéssica ser manicure, ela criar a clientela dela dentro de casa. Mas... Mas os pais aqui, eles sacrificam os filhos. E pesado mesmo, não é brincadeira não, sacrifica pesado. Se eles não estiverem dispostos a equilibrar isso aí, eles ganham dinheiro, mas perdem a família. (Entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA)

207“Ái falam, ah, hoje eu tenho uma casa, eu tenho três casas, hoje eu vou chegar tarde, eu tô longe. É bem difícil. Mas a gente tem que entender o outro lado da pessoa também. Às vezes eu digo, meu Deus, como deixa um bebêzinho desse comigo. Mas eu digo, ai meu Deus, ela precisa de mim. Ela precisa do meu serviço. Então, eu tô aqui pra isso, né? Tem que pensar por aí. Muitas vezes, é igual a trabalhar com criança em casa. Tem pessoas amigas minhas que diz assim, ah, eu sou babá, mas eu tenho tanta raiva das mães que vão pras lojas e... e não vai logo buscar seu filho. Mas, vocês tá servindo ela... você está com o filho dela pra ganhar o seu dinheiro, não é? Então, vocês estipula um horário, se ela chegou dentro do horário, ela não tá errada, não. Tá entendendo? Eu penso assim. Às vezes a gente quer reclamar, ai meu Deus, o menino ainda tá aqui, a mãe não chega, ela tá trabalhando e ela tá me pagando por isso, não é?” (Vanusa, entrevista 36, 30/10/23, Marietta GA).

then I'm like, oh my, if she who has the least bit of help is like that, imagine us, who do not have anybody. Because children are tiring, children overwhelm our minds."²⁰⁸ (Juliana, interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Edna and Leal's situation in Boston was also one in which the absence of support networks was overwhelming (see life story 17). When João was born, Leal was working double or even triple shifts. Edna's cousin Adriana, still living in Brazil at the time, was able to come and visit for two weeks, but no other relatives had the passports and visa to visit at the time. So after Adriana left, Edna had no support networks to help her post-pregnancy.

"The people who'd give me assistance, no way I'd bother them, how could I be like, 'oh, I need someone to make me some food.' Although they did bring [food], at first, you understand? There's this mobilization network, they bring clothes, they bring food. But there comes a time when you say, 'man, I have to stand on my own two feet, I can't be dependent on others.'"²⁰⁹ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

Afterwards, João was admitted at the hospital and managing childcare for their oldest son André was a struggle. Edna: "I said, 'Lord in Heaven,' and my husband would say, like, 'do not worry, André is under my responsibility.' 'Yours? You're working, where's the kid?' [laughs]"²¹⁰ (Edna, interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA) At the time, it was church networks who made sure André was cared for, even people who Edna and Leal did not personally know.

Even with children in school or daycare, women's schedules are organized around the children's, like coming home from work earlier to stay with kids after school, like

208 "Mas, nossa, tem dias que eu fecho aqui o olho e, meu Deus, eu queria sumir. Eu queria, sabe assim, meu Deus, como que faz para a minha cabeça parar de pensar um pouco. Porque como a gente aqui é só eu e meu marido, a gente não tem ajuda, tipo assim, aí, tem um avô pra buscar numa escola, aí, fica com esse menino um pouco no fim de semana para eu conseguir descansar a cabeça e conseguir dormir mais tarde. Então é sempre aquela dinâmica, equilibrando milhares de pratos pra conseguir resolver isso, resolver aquilo. (...) Eu vejo muito assim, conhecidas, né, que tem filhos, né, que moram no Brasil, que deixa os filhos no fim de semana com os avós, que consegue tirar um tempo sozinha com o marido, não não não, reclamando, ah eu tô exausta, tô cansada, tô sobrecarregada, aí eu, nossa, se ela que tem o mínimo de ajuda tá assim, imagina a gente que não tem ninguém. Porque criança cansa. Criança sobrecarrega a cabeça da gente" (Juliana, entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA).

209 "Primeiro, as pessoas que me davam essa assistência, eu não tinha como importuná-las. Como é que eu ia ficar assim, ah, eu tô precisando de alguém pra fazer uma comida. Embora, no início, eles levassem, entendeu? Tem essa rede de mobilização, leva roupa, leva comida. Mas tem uma hora que você fala assim, cara, eu tenho que andar com minhas pernas, não vou ficar dependente dos outros" (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

210 "Eu falei, meu Deus do céu, e meu marido só falava assim, não se preocupa, André está na minha responsabilidade. Na tua? Tu tá trabalhando, cadê o garoto?" (Edna, entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

Schianne, or even trying to work from home, like Juçara. In other cases, work schedules are reorganized to allow for childcare when children are ill or have a doctor's appointment, like Érika described. She also described how she would manage things the following week and how challenging it is for Brazilian migrants to make it all work out:

“Only on Thursday I'll be able to take a break, because I have a pediatrician [appointment]. I figure it out, cancel [housecleanings], move it forward, 'I can't.' When I say I have [an appointment with] Bruno's pediatrician, then they... I send them pictures of [Bruno]. Oh, *minha filha*, and when it's an elderly client then... (...) Imagine people who have two, three children, Clara, immigrants in this country. (...) What about single mothers? Here it's almost... Oh my, I see it as almost impossible. I think I see it based on myself, right? Based on my tiredness, my hustling. With Elimar it's already such a hustle, imagine. I met a lady who, I even worked with her, a wonderful person, who's a single mother here, without a car, without knowing how to drive. Her life is unreal when she stops to tell you about it, it's like, crazy.”²¹¹ (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

How does responsibility for (unpaid) housework and child care affect women?

Women's responsibility over their own (unpaid) housework and children can significantly add to tiredness and fatigue from paid work. As Juliana said, “children are tiring, children overwhelm our minds.” As described in many of the quotes in this chapter, women come home from paid work with still a long list of household chores to get through, in a way that men are not expected to fulfill. Women also tend to stay home more, especially those who do not perform paid work outside the home. Even more so when they do not drive and/or do not have a car available to them. Maria Fernanda, for example, stayed home all day with her one-year-old Amanda, without a car. Renata, too, mostly stayed home with her children during the day. Her husband Leandro, however, worked from home. Overall, responsibility

211 “Quinta-feira que eu vou conseguir parar. Porque eu tenho pediatra. Eu dou meu jeito. Cancelo, jogo pra frente. Não posso. Quando eu falo que eu tenho pediatra do Bruno, aí elas... Eu mando foto pra elas dele. Ai, minha filha, e quando é cliente mais idoso então... (...) Imagina quem tem dois, três filhos, Clara. Imigrante nesse país. (...) E quem é mãe solteira? Aqui, é quase que... Nossa, eu vejo quase que impossível. Acho que eu vejo por mim, né? Pelo meu cansaço, pela minha correria. Com o Elimar já é uma correria, imagina. Eu conheci uma moça que, trabalhei até com ela, gente finíssima, que é mãe solteira aqui, sem carro, sem saber dirigir. A vida dela é fora do normal quando ela para pra te contar. É assim, uma loucura” (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

over their own housework and childcare may have women doing less paid work than their husbands. This can have positive implications – given the toll of paid housecleaning work – but it also means it can take longer for women to build their own business and may prevent them from having financial autonomy from their husbands.

One of the consequences of women being more tired, staying at home more, and doing less paid work outside the home is an impact on their ability to learn English. Generally speaking, they interact less with Americans in housecleaning work, giving them fewer opportunities to practice English when compared with men in construction work. Very few of the women I talked to actually had an opportunity to practice English in their jobs. Érika, who's in an English school for her F-1 visa four hours a day, says that between being tired from work and from the mental labor required for housekeeping, she has little energy left for learning English:

“So I leave [home], work, clean, sometimes I clean two houses, I come home at 4:30, 5pm. I take a shower, I bathe [Bruno], because I stop by the nanny. Bathe him, organize what I need to organize, like, really. Elimar comes home in a rush. Sometimes, Elimar arrives, we only meet on the stairs, and [Bruno] is here. And I go to [English] school. When I come home from school I check on what I need to organize, if there's food for [Bruno] for the next day, if there is not, pack the baby bag, pack his bag, how can I study? (...) Elimar I only see at night, only at night. (...) After 10pm. And when I'm really tired, I call him, 'honey, I'm going straight to bed, I'll shower and go to bed, I won't be able to stand it.’”²¹² (Érika, interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Women also become more isolated, if they stay home all day and interact primarily with their children and husband. Maria Fernanda, for example, tended to only see other adults at church on Sundays. Sometimes, she would go with a friend from church to doctor's appointments, but her husband was about to start driving her. In not learning English and not

²¹²“Aí, saio daqui, trabalho, limpo, às vezes eu limpo duas casas, chego em 4 e meia, 5 horas. Tomo banho, dou banho nele, que eu já passo na babá. Dou banho nele, organizo o que eu tenho que organizar, assim, muito correndo. Elimar chega desesperado. Às vezes, Elimar chega, a gente só se encontra na escada. E ele aqui. E eu vou para a escola. Quando eu chego da escola, que eu vou ver o que eu tenho que organizar, se tem comida para ele, para o dia seguinte, se não tem, arrumo bolsa, arrumo a bolsa dele, como que eu vou estudar? (...) Elimar eu só vejo a noite. Só a noite. (...) Depois das 10 da noite. E quando eu tô muito cansada eu já ligo, amor, eu vou direto pra cama. Vou tomar banho e vou pra cama, não vou aguentar” (Érika, entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA).

having a separate income, women may also struggle to build autonomy and, as a result, become more dependent on their husbands as a migrant than they would have been in Brazil.

In this section, I explored the common family dynamics among my research participants in Marietta. The shift from temporary to permanent migration strategies, from individual to family migrations, depends on Brazilian women's responsibility over their own housework or childcare. Women's paid work is, in many cases, seen as interchangeable with childcare and the only job Brazilian migrants consider "dropping" when deciding on family care strategies. Even though Brazilian women's paid housecleaning work is considered proper work, in contrast to what Mies (1986) identified as "housewifization," it is still seen as a secondary or complementary income when compared with men's work. Furthermore, responsibility over social reproduction continues to be seen as pertaining to women, even if both partners are employed. On the other hand, the demands of precarized work in the US create a care deficit for Brazilian children whose parents do not adjust their schedules to have more time with the children, either because they have little to no control over their own schedules or because they need to work longer hours in order to increase their income.

Social reproduction dynamics between Marietta and Brazil

While Brazilian migrants frequently migrate to the US with their young children, there are specific cases when the children stay in Brazil. Most commonly, when parents are divorced and the father migrates to the US, the child stays with their mother in Brazil. Elderly parents also tend to stay in Brazil and most migrants do not want them to go live in Marietta, but "only to visit." In the present section, I describe these dynamics in more detail, further

examining what practices of care are exchanged between here and there and with what implications to cross-border dynamics of social reproduction.

Who stays in Brazil?

In some cases, young children do stay in Brazil while their parents are in the US, some for long periods of time. In Gerson's case, he has an older son from a previous marriage who has US citizenship. Wanting his younger kids to have the same access to the US, Gerson applied for permanent residency based on his son's US citizenship. Due to specific timelines of this process, he moved first, while his wife stayed in Brazil with their two daughters for a few months. His wife is a healthcare professional with long shifts, while he worked an office job from home so, according to Gerson he covered most childcare while he was in Brazil. Now, she "is having that experience for the first time, of doing what she was used to having the father do [childcare]." They were, however, planning on Gerson's wife and children moving to the US soon.

Cleiton's is an extreme case on how migration regimes and border control can impact family relationships and social reproduction dynamics. Cleiton and his wife Fabiana had their first daughter in the US. While she was going through her second pregnancy, Flavia was stopped by the police for a broken tail light. Because she was out of status, they were scared of her being detained and deported, so Flavia decided to return to Brazil with their youngest daughter, while Cleiton stayed in the US so he could work and support his family. They were separated for seven years, until Cleiton was able to get a green card by buying a marriage.²¹³ In 2023, Cleiton said he would be able to bring his wife and daughters back to the US next

²¹³This is according to Adriana. I had interviewed Cleiton, his parents, and Fabiana, when Adriana mentioned, in 2025, his green card marriage. I said to her then "No one ever told me that's how he got his document!" to which she replied with an incredulous face: "And how else do you think he could get it?"

year. In 2024, I visited Fabiana in Goiânia and she was not even close to being allowed back into the States. In 2025, Oliveira told me he had stopped working with Cleiton due to his spending so much time in Brazil with his family.

Isadora and Kiko came back to the US with their son Douglas but without their foster daughter, whom they've raised for years. Because they have yet to legally adopt her, she stayed in Brazil when they returned to Marietta in 2023, but Isadora and Kiko planned to make the adoption official and eventually bring their daughter to the US. Kiko described their wishes:

“And she, we practically raised her, she grew up with us, in our house. So, who reared her, it was us. And we want to give, what we want to give Douglas, to her as well. And over there where we live [their hometown in Brazil], there are no opportunities. The drug presence increased a lot, a lot, a lot, outrageously. (...) And so, we want to bring her. She'll probably come with my mother-in-law in January. And later, when [she] returns [to Brazil], we'll talk to her mom and grandmother, with everyone, so they can give us her custody. The father is already in agreement to give us her custody. But the mom still has some resistance, the grandma too, but deep down she knows that they can't offer a future like we can and think about. I don't know the future, but today our intention is to give her a better future.”²¹⁴ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Isadora explained later what some of the opportunities are that are lacking in their hometown:

“So, I have this big dream of bringing her here, because our region there does not have much to offer, there's no education, no ballet, no gymnastics, which is all she dreams of doing. We are always talking to the family to know if they support in giving her this opportunity, if she can't endure it, she'll go back.”²¹⁵ (Isadora, interview 18, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

214“E ela, nós praticamente criamos, cresceu com a gente, dentro de casa. Então, quem educou fomos nós. E nós queremos dar o que queremos dar pra Davi, dar pra ela também. E lá onde nós moramos, não tem oportunidade. O índice de droga aumentou muito, muito, muito absurdamente. (...) Aí assim, nós queremos trazer ela. Ela vai tentar o visto aqui agora e depois, pra passear primeiro, né? Ela vem com minha sogra provavelmente em janeiro, os médicos liberaram só pra vir em janeiro. E... depois quando voltar vamos... estamos conversando com a mãe e com a avó, com todo mundo pra passar a guarda. O pai já é de acordo em passar a guarda pra gente. Mas a mãe ainda quer aquela resistência, a avó também, mas no fundo ela sabe que eles não podem oferecer um futuro como a gente quer e pensa. Não sei o dia de amanhã, mas hoje a nossa intenção é dar um futuro melhor pra ela” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

215“Então, eu tenho muito sonho em trazê-la para cá, porque a nossa região lá não tem muito o que oferecer, não tem educação, não tem balé, não tem ginástica, que é tudo que ela sonha em fazer. A gente sempre conversa com a família pra saber se eles apoiam em dar essa oportunidade, se ela não aguentar, ela volta” (Isadora, entrevista 18, 25/09/23, Marietta GA).

Many Brazilian men with young children from previous marriages had their children stay in Brazil with their mothers. They typically send alimony back home, which is a legal obligation anyway, in addition to talking frequently on the phone. In 2025, Pedro mentioned his seven-year-old son living with his ex-wife in Brazil. Luciano has two sons in Brazil, living in different cities in Brazil, who were fifteen and nine in 2023. Part of his motivation for moving to the US, he said, was to be able to pay for private education for his sons in Brazil. Danilo has three daughters from a previous marriage, one of whom moved to the US with her husband a few years after Danilo and Juçara. The other two remain in Brazil.

Santos's situation was a bit more complicated, considering he was under death threats when he left Brazil:

“And then when the doors closed, God gets one out in such a way, right? Because my life was at risk. Then I [thought], man, if I go, I'll be away from my son. So my son lives [in a different state in Brazil], so I'd go see him once a month. So it's better to see [him], I don't know, every six months, once a year, than for him to lose his father, right? (...) Right, my ex, she had a good conscience, she said that since I couldn't see my son more frequently, to talk to my sister, because I have a sister, to go and pick him up, so he won't be far from family. So once a month that I used to pick up my son, I ask for my sister to go, I help, right, I give them some money so they can go out, have fun. (...) My son, he's only five years old, but I thought about [him] doing high school [in the US], right? Because I always – I came from a needy family and I always wanted to do an exchange program, I thought it was awesome, but I couldn't do it, I had to work, I always studied and worked. I always studied and worked. So I thought of bringing my son to learn a new language, a new culture, but I think the decision to stay, to live, I think it's really up to him, right? When the timing is favorable. What I have to do is create opportunities, and then he'll decide.”²¹⁶ (Santos, interview 32, 09/21/23, Marietta GA)

Brazilian women, on the other hand, mostly bring their young children from previous marriages with them to the US, with their current spouse. However, the women's adult

216“E aí quando as portas fechou, Deus tira a pessoa de um jeito, né? Que eu tava correndo risco de vida. Aí eu fiz, pô, se eu for, vou ficar longe do meu filho. Aí meu filho mora em Pernambuco, então eu ia ver ele uma vez por mês. Então é melhor ver uma vez, sei lá, a cada semestre, uma vez por ano, do que ele perder o pai, né? (...) Pronto, a minha ex, ela teve uma consciência bacana, disse que já que não pode ver o seu filho com mais frequência, mas fale com sua irmã, que eu tenho uma irmã, para pegar ele, para não se distanciar da família. Aí uma vez por mês que eu pegava meu filho, eu peço para minha irmã ir, eu ajudo né, dou uma verba pra eles poderem passear, se divertirem (...) O meu filho, ele só tem 5 anos, mas eu pensei em fazer um high school, né? Porque eu sempre, eu vim de uma família carente e eu sempre queria fazer um intercâmbio, achava aquilo ali o máximo, mas não tinha condição, tinha que trabalhar, eu sempre estudei e trabalhei. Sempre estudei e trabalhei. E aí eu pensei em trazer meu filho para aprender um novo idioma, uma nova cultura, mas eu acho que a decisão de ficar, de morar, eu acho que cabe a ele mesmo, sabe? Quando for um momento propício. O que eu tenho que fazer é gerar oportunidade. E aí ele é que vai decidir” (Santos, entrevista 32, 21/09/23, Marietta GA).

children may stay in Brazil, unless they also want to move to the US. Diogo, for example, moved to Marietta with his mother Adriana and his stepfather Oliveira as a 20-year-old. Creusa, in turn, has an older daughter in her 20s who stayed in Brazil.

Most Brazilian migrants, when I asked about relatives who had stayed in Brazil, mentioned older parents. Indeed, unless the parents were the ones who decided to migrate in the first place, it's rare for adult Brazilians to have parents living in the US. Most say they would not like for their parents to live in the US, because they have their lives in Brazil: homes, friends and family, jobs or social security.

Clara: And would you like for someone to move here? Would you like for [your parents] to come here?

Juliana: I would like that, I would like it very much. But then I think, ok, I'd like for them to come so we can be together, for my daughters to be in touch, but what would they do here to survive? Would they have to be in this routine that we face? I do not want that! Because over there [in Brazil] they are settled. It would be selfish of me to want them to come for us, while they're doing well there. Because it wouldn't be possible, for example, for them to come and maintain their lives over there going so it would support them here, without them having to face what's available for them to work [in the US]. So it ends up that no, I want them to stay there.²¹⁷ (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Instead, many have parents who visit every so often, or whom the migrants in Marietta would like to come visit. Edna and Érika's father, for example, who I met in Marietta in 2023 and 2025, visits Marietta quite frequently, but his daughters do not think he could obtain a visa that allowed him to permanently stay in the US, in addition to other relatives in Brazil who do not want him to leave. That, however, depends on whether or not older parents are able to obtain a tourist visa, in addition to them or their relatives in the US being able to afford airfare and having a spare room in which to host visiting family. Many of the migrants I

217Clara: E você tem vontade de que alguém venha morar aqui? Gostaria que eles viessem para cá?

Juliana: Eu gostaria. Eu gostaria muito. Mas aí eu penso, tá, eu gostaria que eles viessem para a gente estar juntos, para as minhas filhas terem contato, mas o que eles fariam aqui para eles sobreviverem? Eles teriam que ficar nessa rotina que a gente encara? Não quero! Porque a vida deles lá está feita. Seria egoísmo meu querer que eles viessem por nós, sendo que lá eles estão bem. Porque não seria possível, por exemplo, eles virem e manter a vida deles lá rodando pra que gere um sustento pra eles aqui, sem eles terem que encarar o que tem disponível pra eles trabalharem. Então, acaba é que não. Quero que eles fiquem lá. (Entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)

interviewed talked about their parents having their tourist visas denied. Kiko's mom, for example, had her US tourist visa denied twice.

Brazilian migrants usually mentioned, when asked, if they wanted any relatives to come live in the US, younger relatives – siblings, nephews and nieces, young cousins – for the “opportunities.” Having family in the US can also allow a Brazilian person with a visa to frequently travel between the US and Brazil, working in the US for periods of time, without needing to obtain a working visa or stay in the US unauthorized. Such is the case of Lúcia's sister, who was working with her as a *helper* in 2023.

Some migrants also have family who lived in the US but returned to Brazil at one point. Cleiton's parents, uncles, and aunts, for example, lived in the Marietta area for many years before deciding to return to Goiânia, with few remaining in the US besides himself and his sister. Fabiana too returned to Goiânia, leaving behind her husband Cleiton and her sister Débora in the US. Lúcia has siblings who lived in Boston when she moved there, and are now back in Brazil:

“When I came [to the US], my younger brother was over there in Boston already. He lived I think... I do not know if he stayed 16 years, I think that... And at the time I was [in Boston], my older brother came too. He lived eight years here [in the US]. Then later another brother came too, who stayed I think four or five years. He stayed in Boston. And now my sister came, right, it's been a few months also. (...) Then my younger brother, who lived here [in the US] already, he's a citizen. He became a citizen so he could leave. So he went back, got married, and then I'm trying to convince him to come back. (...) I also don't want, my, that no one in my family goes through what I went through here without documents. It's... like, you know? It was not easy. And I think before it was even more... I do not know if it was worse or better, I don't know, but it was like, really hard, you know? Her, my sister, she already said, ‘oh, I won't become illegal.’ Yes... She'll probably go back and forth, you know? Instead of staying here, not allowed to leave.”²¹⁸ (Lúcia, interview 25, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

218“Quando eu vim, meu irmão mais novo já estava lá em Boston. Ele morou acho que... não sei se ele ficou 16 anos, eu acho que... E na época que eu estava, meu irmão mais velho veio também. Ele morou 8 anos aqui. Depois veio também um outro irmão, que ficou acho que 4 ou 5 anos. Ele ficou em Boston. Então todos eles moraram em Boston. E agora minha irmã veio, né, também tem alguns meses. (...) Aí meu irmão mais novo, que já morou aqui, ele é cidadão. Ele se tornou cidadão pra poder ir embora. Aí ele voltou, casou, aí eu estou tentando convencê-lo a voltar. Só que ele já arrumou a cidadania das crianças, que ele tem um casal, e está esperando os documentos da esposa para eles virem legais, ficar aqui e não ter, não passar... Eu também não quero que os meus... que ninguém da minha família passe o que eu passei aqui sem documento. É... assim, sabe? Não foi fácil. E acho que antes ainda era mais... não sei se era pior ou melhor, não sei, mas assim foi muito difícil, sabe? Ela, minha irmã, ela já falou ah, não vou ficar ilegal. É... provavelmente ela vai ficar indo e voltando, sabe? Do que ficar aqui sem poder sair” (Lúcia, entrevista 25, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

As a result of migration regimes and border policies, what Lúcia calls “staying here, not allowed to leave,” many Brazilian migrants have not seen their families since leaving Brazil, because their relatives are unable or unwilling to travel to the US to visit. Gustavo, Vanusa and Sandro, for example, never had any family from Brazil come visit them. Once a cousin tried to get a tourist visa, which was denied. Juçara has not seen her mother since she left Brazil and her mother, in turn, has not met her granddaughter Silmara or seen Danilo Jr. since he was a toddler. Ludmilla talked about being separated from her parents, who visited a few times but now cannot travel due to health issues:

Ludmilla: Yes, my parents are in Brazil, right? They came [to the US] two or three times.

Márcio: Her dad came twice and her mom came three times.

Ludmilla: But it took, I think, ten years, right?

Márcio: Ten.

Ludmilla: For them to come. They tried the visa and did not get it. I have an aunt who lives in New York, she's a citizen, so when they got the visa, they came to visit, as though they were going to visit my aunt, so they the visa, so they arrived in New York, my mom, and then Márcio went to pick her up. Then they came here, my mom stayed here with us a month, right. And later came back and my dad came with my mom together and stayed two months, then they came again. But then the other year, when they were supposed to come in July, my dad said no, I'm not going in July, I'll go in December to spend Christmas. But then he had a stroke. So since then they have not come anymore. (...) So it's been 10 years that I have not seen my parents. They can't come, I can't go, you understand?²¹⁹ (Interview 27, 12/14/23, Kennesaw GA)

²¹⁹Ludmilla: Ficaram. É, meus pais estão no Brasil, né? Vieram duas ou três vezes.

Márcio: O pai dela veio duas e a mãe veio três.

Ludmilla: Mas demorou, acho que dez anos, né?

Márcio: Dez.

Ludmilla: Pra eles virem. Eles tentaram o visto e não conseguiram. Eu tenho uma tia que morava em Nova York, ela é cidadã, então quando eles conseguiram o visto, eles vieram pra visitar, como se fossem visitar a minha tia, aí eles conseguiram o visto, aí desceram em Nova York, minha mãe, e depois o Marcos foi lá buscá-la. Aí vieram pra cá, minha mãe ficou aqui, com a gente, um mês, né. E depois voltou e no outro ano meu pai já veio com a minha mãe junto. E ficaram dois meses, depois vieram de novo. Só que aí no outro ano, quando era pra eles virem em julho, meu pai falou não, eu não vou em julho, eu vou em dezembro pra passar o Natal. Só que aí ele teve um AVC. Aí de lá pra cá eles não vieram mais. (...) Então são 10 anos que eu não vejo mais, não vi mais, meus pais. Eles não podem vir, eu não posso ir, entendeu.

What are the social reproduction and care dynamics between relatives in Marietta and in Brazil?

Before technological advances in communication, Brazilian migrants relied mostly on long-distance phone calls to stay in touch with family back in Brazil. They would either buy pre-paid cards to be used at public phones or call from their own landlines, which was very expensive. Eliana says that, sometimes, the phone bill would come as high as \$1000 and their landline would be cut every so often when they could not afford it. New communication technologies, including Skype, Zoom, and WhatsApp, have reshaped how social reproduction and care circulate across borders, especially forms of emotional connection and support. When Alessandra talked about her relationships to family in Brazil, she mentioned how much of a difference new technologies made in terms of emotional connection between relatives in Brazil and in the US. She also considered that, if they had their documents, they would have gone back to visit family in Brazil every year, underscoring the impact of migration regimes in transnational family relationships.

For all Brazilian migrants, regardless of status, some of the main ways of caring for relatives in Brazil are sending money and facilitating/organizing/managing care work for them. Additionally, Brazilian migrants who are allowed to travel (or rather, cannot get back into the US once they leave) pay frequent visits to relatives in Brazil.

For Brazilian migrants, sending remittances is not the main motivation or purpose for migration, which can be common in other migrant communities in the US. Hardly ever do Brazilian migrants have relatives in Brazil who depend entirely on their remittances from the US to survive. However, they send some money home when necessary and/or possible. This money goes mostly towards elderly parents' healthcare (care work, health insurance, medications) or other specific needs, such as house renovations and maintenance, home

appliances etc. Danilo mentioned the financial help him and Juçara offered to both of their mothers in Brazil:

“For example, my mom during the time when she was sick, my wife and I, we were able to help how we could help, which was with money. And what we could do, we did, but then came the time [of her passing], right, so we accepted the situation. Then in terms of my mother-in-law (...) we were able to realize dreams, dreams that she had not achieved before. Can I, honey, cite here what was done? [Juçara says yes] Ok. For example, we were able to renovate her house, which had never been renovated, to give her a bit more peace. My wife is my mother-in-law’s youngest. And the opportunity we have today, not only that we had [in the past] to help but also of helping today is paying for her health insurance, which are important things for people of advanced age.”²²⁰ (Danilo, interview 10, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

Lúcia talked about supporting a brother with diabetes:

“Actually I was never one to send a lot [of money to Brazil]. Like, I helped my dad, a little, it was not much, only when he got sick, sometimes like, in his life, I helped him. I went a long time without sending [any money]. But now, now yes, I don’t send anymore because I have an apartment there [in Brazil] that’s rented. Instead of sending [money], I use that money there. (...) my brother was going through some hardship and all, and I had money there, lent him for his [diabetes] treatment, lent him to buy a car. So these days I lent for something else, you know? So I told my brother, look, today I do not have anything, I think there must be some R\$400, R\$500 [approximately \$80, \$100] there [in Brazil]. But like, from here I don’t send [money] because I say no, I can’t anymore like, still send from here to there, no. But like, if it’s necessary I still send, you know? But I was never one to like, to keep sending money like that. Only really in the case of illness, stuff like that.”²²¹ (Lúcia, interview 25, 09/22/23)

Schianne talked, in 2023, about her father having an illness in his lungs, in addition to diabetes and gastric reflux. He was not able to get treatment through Brazil’s public health system, so she wanted to be able to pay for his health insurance in the future. At the time of

220“Por exemplo, a minha mãe durante o período que ela esteve doente, eu e minha esposa nós conseguimos ajudar como podia ajudar, que era com dinheiro. E o que a gente pôde fazer, a gente fez, mas aí chegou a hora, né, então a gente aceita a situação. Já em questão a minha sogra (...) a gente conseguiu realizar sonhos, sonhos que antes ela não tinha conseguido. Posso, amor, citar aqui o que foi feito? [Juçara responde que sim] Tá. Por exemplo, a gente conseguiu reformar a casa dela, que nunca tinha sido reformada. A dar um pouco mais de paz. A minha esposa é a filha caçula da minha sogra. E a oportunidade que a gente tem hoje, não só teve de ajudar como, hoje, de estar ajudando é pagar o seguro-saúde, que são coisas importantes pra pessoa quando está com idade avançada” (Danilo, entrevista 10, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

221“Aliás, nunca fui de mandar muito. Assim, ajudava o meu pai, pouco, não era muito, só quando ele ficava doente, algumas vezes assim, na vida dele eu ajudei. Eu fiquei muito tempo sem mandar. Mas agora, agora sim, eu não mando mais porque eu tenho um apartamento lá alugado. Ao invés de mandar, eu uso esse dinheiro lá. (...) meu irmão tava passando dificuldade e tudo, e eu tava com dinheiro lá, emprestei pra ele fazer tratamento, emprestei pra comprar um carro. Aí esses dias emprestei pra outra coisa, sabe? Aí eu falei pro meu irmão, olha, hoje eu não tenho nada, acho que deve ter uns 400, 500 reais lá. Mas assim, aí eu não mando daqui porque eu falo, não, eu já não posso assim, ainda mandar daqui pra lá, não. Mas assim, se precisar ainda mando, sabe? Mas eu nunca fui assim, de ficar mandando tanto dinheiro assim. Só mesmo caso de doença, de coisa assim” (Lúcia, entrevista 25, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

our interview, she sent a little money for exams and medication when needed. Talita also talked about her parents being in ill health and the public health system in her home town not being entirely reliable:

“It’s really hard, it’s really hard to be away from them, I miss them immensely and I do not... my mind, sometimes, kind of glitches, because I needed to come, I needed to come because of the financial issue, a life change and it was a choice that we had to make. You either stay there with the family, getting over hardships every day, or you do not see them for a while, and overcome hardships from here [laughs]. But being able to send some help, right, that from here we can send them some financial help, to cover something, some medication, doing some exams, because there it’s no... it’s all through SUS [Brazil’s public health system], sometimes you get it, it’s a long wait time, but you get it. And there are exams, there are things that there’s no way, need to be paid for. So, because [her father’s] age is advanced, my dad already had a stroke, he needs more attention, my mom now has diabetes, is doing diabetes treatment, she’s on a lot of medication, for sleep, for pressure, cholesterol, anxiety, for memory, so it’s a very big expense and the medication is really expensive, so they need this support, which I could not give while I was here.”²²² (Talita, interview 34, 10/21/23, Marietta GA)

Some of the Brazilian migrants I talked to mentioned sending money as a way of making up for care they are not able to provide from far away. Usually elderly parents who stay behind are not entirely dependent on the person who left for their overall care, as well as financially. Many are in good health, have other adult children and other relatives who can care for them. In some cases, what Brazilian migrants do is to pay for a care worker – either a family member or a professional – to stay with parents that need more systematic care. Adriana talked, in 2023, about her mother being young and only needing money for things she “wants but does not need,” and having brothers in Brazil who assist their mother in whatever is necessary. Adriana says that, for her mother, it’s only “having coffee and gifts.” Her in-

²²²“É muito difícil, é muito difícil ficar longe deles, eu sinto uma saudade imensa e eu não... minha cabeça, às vezes, fica meio bugada, porque precisava vir, precisava vir pela questão financeira, a mudança de vida e foi uma escolha que a gente teve que fazer. Ou fica lá junto com a família, superando a cada dia as dificuldades, ou fica um tempo sem vê-los e superando as dificuldades daqui [risos], mas que, podendo mandar uma ajuda, né, que aqui a gente pode mandar uma ajuda pra eles financeira, pra suprir alguma coisa, uma medicação, fazer o exame, porque lá não... é tudo pelo SUS, às vezes consegue, tem um tempo longo, mas consegue. E tem exames, tem coisas que não tem jeito, precisa ser pago. Então, como a idade dele já está avançada, meu pai já teve AVC, ele precisa de uma atenção maior, minha mãe agora está com diabetes, está fazendo tratamento de diabetes, ela toma muita medicação, remédio pra dormir, pra pressão, colesterol, ansiedade, pra memória, então é um gasto muito grande e a medicação é muito cara, então precisa desse auxílio, que eu não conseguia dar estando lá” (Talita, entrevista 34, 21/10/23, Marietta GA).

laws, Oliveira's parents, however, are in their 80s and need more assistance, but they live with Oliveira's sister, who cares for them full-time. Adriana says of caring for her in-laws:

"So, for example, if my sister-in-law wants to buy anything, I say to her, 'no, you don't need to go out and work, we will give it to you. If you do our role,' right, which would be taking care of [Oliveira's parents], 'we have to do, we have to support you somehow, right.' And so my husband, I think two months ago, was able to renovate my sister-in-law's house, something that she needed. This month we bought my mother-in-law a bed that she needed. So, like, we try to go covering things, right, as much as possible in what they need. We're looking into the possibility of paying someone to stay home [with Oliveira's parents], because they do not want it, right? (...) But, if we find someone to stay there with them, in their house, we'll pay, we'll take [responsibility for] that. So we're like, joyful to be able to cooperate, right?"²²³ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Oliveira talked a bit more about how care for his parents is divided with his two siblings in Brazil:

Oliveira: I think that being here I can cooperate with my family. (...) my sister works very little so she can, although they're in good health, but to be able to care for them, to assist them more closely. Since I need to work full-time, so does my brother, it would be more viable for her. And we cooperate with her in whatever is possible. (...) Because [my sister] works in housecleaning [in Brazil] she works, basically like, once a week or every two weeks. (...) She's helped a lot with that, staying there caring for them. I even tell my brother already, right? I can help out financially a little bit. And my brother, in a personal aspect. And my brother in house maintenance, because there's always a problem, right? Now, a while ago a pipe burst, the water tank broke, had a hole. There were a lot of repairs. And my brother works in construction. So he like, brings in one thing, I bring in another. The obligation to take care of the parents is ours. It's not just my sister's, not just mine, not just his. And we divide it like that. Now that's more in evidence. Me, when I was there [in Brazil], I did this maintenance part, I was very present. Today I can't be very present. So it's left to my brother to do it.

Clara: And how do you help your sister in Brazil?

Oliveira: My sister is a person who spends very little, right? And more so because my mom is retired, and so is my dad, they end up cooperating with her too, right? They do not earn much on social security, but we send some [financial] help when we can, when they need, actually,

223 "Então, por exemplo, se minha cunhada quer comprar algo, eu falo para ela, não, você não precisa sair para trabalhar, a gente vai te dar isso. Se você faz o nosso papel, né, que seria cuidar deles, a gente tem que fazer, suprir você de alguma forma, né. E aí, meu marido, acho que dois meses atrás, conseguiu reformar a casa da minha cunhada, alguma coisa lá que ela precisava. Esse mês a gente comprou uma cama pra minha sogra que ela precisava. Então, assim, a gente tenta ir suprindo, né, da medida do possível, que eles precisam. A gente tá vendo a possibilidade de pagar alguém pra ficar em casa, porque eles não querem, né? (...) Mas, se a gente conseguir uma pessoa pra ficar com eles, lá na casa, a gente vai pagar, a gente vai assumir isso. Então, a gente tem, assim, alegria em poder cooperar, né?" (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

right? Send her some amount, cooperate with her in some amount of things she needs.²²⁴
(Interview 28, 10/23/23, Marietta GA)

Brazilian migrants (women) who leave young children in Brazil also have to figure out care, since they do not usually stay with their fathers in Brazil. Linda talked about her son staying with her mother, while she could not return to Brazil for four years. Fabiana, caring for her two daughters while Cleiton works in the US, mostly stays home with money he sends from the US.

When Brazilian migrants leave home, however, social reproduction and care deficits are also created there, especially in terms of the emotional and personal support they offer to their family relationships. Unlike remittances, this type of deficit is immeasurable. Linda, for example, talked about the difficulties her son had over being “left behind” when she moved to the US. Linda’s son now lives in Georgia with his wife and young daughter. But Linda talks about how her leaving Brazil, even if her son was cared for, created a care deficit as a feeling of abandonment, as she describes it:

Clara: How was it for you [that he] stayed, you coming [to the US] without him?

Linda: Super hard, because, teenager, right? He gave a lot of trouble. I think he had that feeling of abandonment, right? That I also had, my parents separated, that abandonment feeling.

Clara: Back in the day also there wasn’t so much technology to be always in touch, right.

224Oliveira: Eu penso que eu estando aqui eu consigo cooperar com a minha família. Meus pais são aposentados, são separados, mas são aposentados, os dois. Eu tenho um irmão e uma irmã que trabalham em família. Meu irmão mora com minha mãe, na verdade. Minha irmã trabalha pouco, porque meus pais já tem 80 e 83. Minha mãe 80 e meu pai 83. E minha irmã trabalha muito pouquinho para poder, apesar deles terem uma boa saúde, mas para poder cuidar deles, dar uma assistência mais de perto. Já que eu preciso trabalhar o tempo integral, meu irmão também, seria mais viável para ela. E a gente coopera com ela no que for possível. Para ela também não ficar numa situação complicada, né? Porque ela também tem a vida dela. (...) Como ela trabalha com faxina, ela trabalha... basicamente, assim... uma vez na semana ou de 15 em 15 dias. (...) Ela tem me ajudado muito com isso. Ficando lá cuidando deles. Eu até falo pro meu irmão, né? Eu consigo ajudar um pouquinho financeiramente. E... Meu irmão, no... No âmbito pessoal. E meu irmão na manutenção da casa, que sempre tem um problema, né? Agora há pouco tempo estourou o cano d’água, a caixa d’água quebrou, furou. Teve um monte de consertos. E meu irmão trabalha nessa área de construção. Então, ele assim, um entra com uma coisa, outro entra com outra. A obrigação do cuidado dos pais são as nossas. Não é só da minha irmã, não é só minha, não é só dele. E a gente divide assim. Agora isso ficou mais em evidência. Eu, quando eu estava lá, fazia essa parte de manutenção, era muito presente. Hoje não consigo ser muito presente. Aí sobrou pro meu irmão fazer isso.

Clara: E como vocês ajudam sua irmã lá no Brasil?

Oliveira: Minha irmã é uma pessoa que gasta muito pouco, né? E até por minha mãe ser aposentada, e meu pai também, eles acabam cooperando com ela também, né? Eles não ganham muito de aposentadoria, mas a gente manda uma ajuda quando pode, quando ele precisam, na verdade, né? Manda algum valor pra ela, cooperar com ela em algum valor de coisas que ela precisa. (Entrevista 28, 23/10/23, Marietta GA)

Linda: Exactly. So, we... I tried to give as much as possible, I stayed four years without being able to leave him, but as soon as I got the document I started coming and going, every year I'd go and all, and I started his [green card] process immediately, but it took seven years his process, because then he was of legal age. (...) He says to me today, 'oh mom, I understand everything you did.'²²⁵ (Interview 24, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Oliveira also talked about the emotional impact of his migration on his mother.

Again, as described above, she's well cared for and, still, there's an emotional deficit from Oliveira being away. Oliveira says:

"If I had my parents here, I'd be a lot more at peace. I'm at peace, but I'd be more, right? (...) The ratio, based on their age, is that they do not have that many years to live like, right. And that, sometimes, weighs a little on me, not being by their side at this time. I wanted to enjoy their old age together, you understand? (...) But the important thing is we're always talking, very frequently, I do a video call, I see that she's doing well, I see her smile, happy. The other day she called me, I think she was going to cry, my sister took [the phone] away [laughs], so I would not see, because [his sister] must have thought, 'this will affect him there [in the US], his day,' right. It's upsetting, of course, right, but I realize my mom was about to cry. So she asked me if I was going to leave [the US to go back to Brazil], someone told her I was not leaving anymore. My mom said, 'it's not true.' I said, 'it's not true.' But because I don't even know. So I can't say something that I do not know. So when [his mother's] voice choked, my sister, bam, took away the phone. I even though it was funny."²²⁶ (Oliveira, interview 28, 10/23/23, Marietta GA)

Brazilian migrants also acknowledge how moving curtails the emotional support they can offer their relatives in Brazil. Adriana described the care she understands she's not providing to her family:

225Clara: Linda, e você comentou um pouco do seu filho. Como é que foi pra você ter ficado, você ter vindo sem ele?

Linda: Super difícil, porque adolescente, né? E deu bastante trabalho. Eu acho que ele tinha aquele sentimento de abandono, né? Que eu também tive. Meus pais separaram. Esse sentimento de abandono.

Clara: Naquela época também não tinha tanta tecnologia pra falar sempre, né.

Linda: Exato. Então, a gente... eu procurei dar o máximo possível, eu fiquei quatro anos sem poder sair daqui, mas assim que eu consegui documento já comecei a ir e vir, todo ano eu ia e tal, e dei entrada no processo dele imediatamente, mas durou sete anos o processo dele, porque aí ele já era de maior. (...) Ele fala pra mim hoje, ah mãe, eu entendo tudo que você fez. (Entrevista 24, 03/11/23, Marietta GA)

226"Se eu estivesse com meus pais aqui, eu estaria muito mais em paz. Estou em paz. Mas eu estaria mais, né? (...) a proporção, pela idade deles, é que eles não têm tantos anos de vida mais assim, né. E isso, às vezes, quando eu paro para pensar, me pesa um pouco. Não tá do lado deles nesse momento. Eu queria desfrutar mais da velhice deles junto, entendeu? Mas eu creio que é um propósito de Deus a gente tá aqui. Talvez... Talvez seja isso mesmo, sabe, que eu esteja precisando desgarrar um pouco. Ou pra eu não sofrer ou pra minha mãe não sofrer. [incompreensível] Mas o importante é que a gente se [incompreensível], se fala sempre, com bastante frequência, eu faço chamada de vídeo, vejo que ela está bem, vejo ela sorrindo, feliz, esses dias ela me ligou, eu acho que ela ia chorar, minha irmã tirou [risos], para eu não ver, porque ela deve ter pensado, vai afetar ele lá, o dia dele, né, compromete, lógico, né, mas eu percebi que minha mãe ia chorar. Aí ela perguntou se eu ia embora, alguém falou para ela que eu não ia mais embora. Minha mãe disse, não é verdade. Eu disse, não é verdade. Mas é porque eu nem sei. Então eu não posso falar uma coisa que eu não sei. Aí quando ela engasgou a voz, minha irmã, pum, tirou o telefone. Achei até engraçado" (Oliveira, entrevista 28, 23/10/23, Marietta GA).

“I feel a little selfish, you know? Because I get like... I come here [to the US] because here is a place, apparently right, safer and I have more, like, freedom and even [better] conditions for my son. But on the other hand, I’m not worried about what my mom is suffering, what my mother-in-law suffers, you understand? It’s like I’m benefitting one person and don’t care about the suffering of others, right? So, I’m in this... we’re in this seesaw. And then, what helps us is the fact that we call these people and they say, ‘no, you stay there, don’t come back. Do not come back, stay there.’ Of course, I’m sad, I miss them, but we talk on the phone, ‘don’t come back.’ So, that weight on the heart goes away, you understand? But it’s something that now and then knocks on our door, right? This... ‘My God, what am I doing here? I have a family, I have people who need me,’ not just financially, it’s very easy for me to just send some money for my mother-in-law, my mom. But it’s not just that. I understand that they need care, they need attention, right? And we can’t do that from far away. And so we, like, try, right? We do what we can here, but it’s not easy being here. It’s not easy. I feel very divided, I feel very divided. My family is big, I just gained a grandnephew that I haven’t even met. So I look at the photos, right... And like, each time... I think it feels like I’m getting more and more distant from family, right. We get used to it.”²²⁷ (Adriana, interview 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA)

Many Brazilian migrants miss out on births in their families while they are in the US and unable to visit Brazil, with the result that they do not get to meet newborn family members. Adriana, for example, mentioned her newborn grandnephew. Danilo has two granddaughters in Brazil he has never met in person because, being undocumented, he cannot leave the US. That also means his daughters in Brazil have one less grandparent to help out with their children. Similarly, Brazilian migrants cannot always be present when a close relative is nearing the end of their life or after they pass away. Vanusa, for example, lost her mother while living in Marietta. Before she left, her mother had asked that they only leave for the US after she had passed away. Vanusa narrates:

227“Eu me sinto um pouco egoísta, sabe? Porque eu fico assim... Eu venho pra cá porque aqui é um lugar aparentemente, né, mais seguro e tenho mais, assim, liberdade e até mesmo condições para o meu filho. Mas em contrapartida, eu não estou preocupada com o que minha mãe está sofrendo, com o que minha sogra sofre, entendeu? É como se eu beneficiava uma pessoa e não se preocupasse com o sofrimento das outras, né? Então, fico nesse... a gente fica nessa gangorra. E aí, o que ajuda a gente é o fato da gente ligar pra essas pessoas e eles falarem não, vocês fiquem aí, não voltem. Não volta. Fica aí. Claro, eu tô triste, eu tô com saudade, mas a gente se fala pelo telefone, não volta. Então, aquele peso do coração passa, entende? Mas é algo que bate de vez em quando na porta, né? Essa... Meu Deus, o que que eu tô fazendo aqui? Eu tenho uma família, tenho pessoas que precisam de mim, não só financeiramente, é muito fácil eu pegar e mandar um dinheiro para minha sogra, para minha mãe. Mas não é só isso. Eu entendo que eles precisam de cuidado, precisam de atenção, né? E a gente não consegue fazer isso longe. E aí a gente, assim, tenta, né? Fazer o que a gente pode aqui, mas não é fácil estar aqui. Não é fácil. Eu fico muito dividida. Fico muito dividida. Minha família é grande, eu ganhei agora um sobrinho neto que eu nem conheci. Aí eu fico vendo as fotos, né. E... e assim, cada vez... acho que parece que eu vou ficando cada vez mais distante da família, né. A gente vai se acostumando” (Adriana, entrevista 3, 10/10/23, Marietta GA).

“So I’d say, ‘mom, you’re seeing that I’m working a lot and that Sandro needs to work to give me some tranquility too.’ And she said, ‘daughter, let me die for you to go,’ she said like. And I said, ‘no, mom, I won’t be selfish to that point, of waiting for you to die, mom, go, mom, when will you die so I can go?’ Do you understand? So I reached this conclusion, that I couldn’t wait. And four years went by and my mom passed away last year. Like, I was tranquil, because I didn’t feel guilty, right? She understood and every day I had a video call with her, to tell her I was fine, that I missed her, it was really important for me and for her, you know? And time went by, she went, she started losing her strength, she lost her speech. And I said, ‘oh my, how hard it is to lose my mom.’ It was very tough losing my mom from far away, without knowing, without being able to go there. It was very hard for me. (...) It was very hard. But I... When she passed away, I said, ‘alright, now Brazil, there’s nothing for me anymore.’”²²⁸ (Vanusa, interview 36, 10/30/23, Marietta GA)

Other Brazilian migrants talked about not wanting to become out of status so they are able to visit their parents in Brazil. Kiko talked about that:

“People say, ‘oh no, wait, when he’s 21 Douglas will pass the document to you.’ I said, ‘I won’t wait 21 years trapped.’ Because I have a dad in Brazil, I still have my mom, [his wife Isadora] still has her mom, more so that her mom has a visa, she comes... actually, whenever she wants, right? And like, when we went back [to Brazil] the other time, within a month, [Isadora] lost her dad. And in a year, she lost her grandma. So like, God wanted us to go back [to Brazil] so she wouldn’t be... blame herself for the rest of her life here. So, everything happened just like God wanted.”²²⁹ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Schianne said the same thing in relation to her father:

“I tell him a lot for him to come here, but my dad is very... How do you say it? Accommodated in his life already, you know? For him, I don’t know, I’m terrified of not seeing him. That’s why I really try to stay here legally, so I can go back to Brazil and see him, because I’m very attached to him. And he... I don’t know if he’ll come, you know? I don’t know if he’ll come.”²³⁰ (Schianne, interview 33, 12/06/23, Kennesaw GA)

228“Então eu dizia mãe, a senhora tá vendo que eu estou trabalhando muito e Samuel tá precisando trabalhar para me dar uma tranquilidade também. E ela disse, me filha deixa eu morrer para você ir, ela falou assim. E eu disse, não mãe, eu não vou ser egoísta a esse ponto, de esperar a senhora morrer, mãe, vá, mãe, a senhora vai morrer quando pra eu ir? Tá entendendo? Então eu cheguei a essa conclusão, que eu não podia esperar. E passaram quatro anos e minha mãe faleceu o ano passado. Assim, eu fiquei tranquila, porque eu não me senti culpada, né? Ela entendeu e com ela todo dia eu fazia ligação de chamada de vídeo, vídeo chamada, pra ela, para dizer que eu estava bem, que eu tava com saudade, foi muito importante para mim pra ela, sabe? E o tempo foi passando, ela foi, ela foi perdendo as forças, ela foi perdendo a fala. E eu disse, nossa como é difícil perder minha mãe. Foi muito duro perder minha mãe longe, sem saber, sem poder ir lá. Foi muito difícil para mim. (...) Foi muito difícil. Mas, eu... Quando ela faleceu, eu digo, pronto, agora o Brasil, não tenho mais” (Vanusa, entrevista 36, 30/10/23, Marietta GA).

229“Aí falam, ah não, espera com 21 anos, Douglas passa o documento pra você. Eu falei, eu vou esperar 21 anos, preso, não. Porque eu tenho um pai no Brasil, tenho minha mãe ainda, ela tem a mãe dela, ainda mais a mãe dela tem visto, ela vem... na verdade quando quer, né? E, assim, quando voltamos da outra vez, com um mês, ela perdeu o pai. E com um ano, perdeu a avó. Então assim, Deus quis que a gente voltasse também pra ela não ficar... se culpar o resto da vida aqui. Então, foi tudo aconteceu como Deus quis” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

230“Eu falo muito pra ele vir aqui, mas meu pai é muito... Como que fala? Ele tem a... muito acomodado já na vida dele, sabe? Pra ele... eu não sei... eu morro de medo de não ver ele. Por isso que eu tento muito ficar aqui

How do relatives in Brazil support migrants?

On the other hand, Brazilian relatives support migrants by offering them emotional support, either by visiting when possible or by talking on the phone. Many Brazilian migrants talk of their relatives in Brazil being supportive, like Adriana's relatives who tell her they should not go back to Brazil and encourage them to stay in the US. Both Schaienne and her father Lázaro talked about how much he supports her in her struggles in the US.

Sometimes, however, Brazilian migrants will keep their plight secret from their families in Brazil, "so they won't worry." This also creates a kind of care deficit among Brazilian migrants, who are cut off from emotional support they would have had from their families otherwise. Creusa talked about avoiding calls with her relatives in Brazil so they would not realize she was depressed:

Creusa: Because I had depression too, I didn't want to show it to them. I wouldn't tell them what was happening here.

Clara: So they wouldn't worry too?

Creusa: So they wouldn't worry, that's right.²³¹ (Interview 9, 11/03/23, Marietta GA)

Edna described a similar situation when they first arrived in Boston and João was in the hospital:

Edna: Lord in heaven, it was very hard, because then they were in Brazil. And I would pass them information for them, right, and I was over there in Boston, right, trying to filter out information, because I too would not just say everything straight up. Oh, it was very dramatic, it was very dramatic.

Clara: And they were worried too, right?

Edna: No, my sister told me later, right. Girl, my mom almost died, my mom almost lost it, my dad, my God, folks would only cry, Cidinha... Cidinha is my mother-in-law [Leal's mother], just cried, so-and-so just cried, because first they had an idea that I did not say everything, right? All the information. And they kept thinking about the drama of Leal not being able to stop working, how could he stop working? He either worked for us to eat, there are no benefits in that sense, right?²³² (Interview 13, 09/25/23, Marietta GA)

de forma legal, pra eu poder voltar no Brasil e ver ele. Porque eu sou muito apegada a ele. E ele... não sei se ele vem, sabe? Eu não sei se ele vem" (Schaienne, entrevista 33, 06/12/23, Kennesaw GA).

231 Creusa: Como eu tava com depressão também, eu não queria mostrar pra eles. Não falava o que estava acontecendo aqui.

Clara: Para não preocupar também?

Creusa: Para não preocupar, isso mesmo. (Entrevista 9, 03/11/23, Marietta GA)

232 Edna: Meu Deus do céu, foi muito difícil, porque aí eles estavam no Brasil. E eu ficava passando as informações pra eles, né, e eu lá em Boston, né, tentando filtrar as informações, porque eu também não mandava tudo na lata. Aí, foi muito dramático, foi muito dramático.

In this section, I examined under what specific circumstances Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area have children who stayed in Brazil, including family dynamics shaped by migration policies and gendered roles. Subsequently, I described why elderly parents frequently stay in Brazil and how those dynamics may also be affected by visa and migration policies, particularly when undocumented Brazilian migrants cannot leave the US and elderly parents cannot get a tourist visa to go visit them. I then explored social reproduction and care dynamics between Marietta and Brazil, including remittances, organizing care for elderly relatives, and emotional support between here and there.

Based on this and the previous section, I argue that Brazilian migration to the Marietta area creates care deficits both here and there and burdens family members (and women disproportionately) in both places. In Marietta, parents may not be available to their children most of the time and have limited to no family care networks to support childcare – such as grandparents that can watch the children for a weekend, as Juliana describes. Brazilian workers in Marietta also feel the care deficits of not having extended family around and solid social relationships, and tend to seek that support in church congregations. In Brazil, elderly parents of Brazilian migrants in the US may feel emotional distress over their adult children living far away. Brazilian migrants may send money for specific expenses, but cannot offer the care and emotional support they did when they lived in Brazil. However, in many ways, relatives in Brazil provide significant emotional support to migrants in the US and, in doing so, support precarized labor by ensuring that Brazilian workers can continue to show up for work every day.

Clara: E eles também preocupados, né?

Edna: Não, a minha irmã que me conta depois, né. Menina, minha mãe quase morreu, minha mãe quase surtou, meu pai, meu Deus, o povo só chorava, Cidinha... Cidinha é minha sogra, só chorava, o outro só chorava, porque primeiro eles tinham noção que eu não passava tudo, né? Todas as informações. E ficavam pensando no drama que Léo não podia deixar de trabalhar, como é que ele ia deixar de trabalhar? Ou ele trabalha pra gente comer, não tem nenhum tipo de benefício nesse sentido, né? (Entrevista 13, 25/09/23, Marietta GA)

Migration status and social reproduction

In this section, I draw from my research participants' experiences to spotlight the particular ways in which migration and citizenship status intersect with dynamics of social reproduction. DeGenova (2002) understands the illegalization of migrants in the US to be a strategy for regulating US labor force supply and wages. However, illegalization also has an impact in social reproduction and care dynamics for migrants in the US.

Lúcia talked about how being out of status impacted social reproduction conditions for herself and her daughters:

Clara: And you mentioned this issue of the document. Where did you feel most impact in this issue of having or not having papers here?

Lúcia: First in my daughters' lives, right? Because they do not... They finished high school, their lives almost came to a halt. Not for me, like, but... A lot of things they did not achieve, right? Both of them. Marta too [Alessandra's sister], but like... It didn't come to a complete halt, but they had to go through a lot to achieve what they achieved. And like, when it started, you know, it really hurt and came like, you know, the hardships. Because until then it was just the desire to go to Brazil, right? This desire to go, see my family, niblings that were born, my siblings, dad who died, my sister, like, but when we got to the time for the girls to go to college, get a job that was not housecleaning, in an office, at a company, everything started getting really like, you know, to hurt a lot more than it did before, you know. Not to mention the imprisonment, I felt trapped, could not go anywhere, right, leave the country, because like, of course I could travel here and everything, but like, being away from my family, not being able to see them, was the worst. And the girls do not have the future they could have had if they had the document. (...) So like, we keep trying to trick them [US authorities] or to get around it, but it was horrible, both for me [personally], and for me too as a mother, to see the girls go through the same, because they did not have a driver's license, and did not have how to get it, where to get it, and we had the priorities, you know, of doing it or not. And like, after that comes, right, comes homesickness, the desire to see your family, anyway, it's a lot of things, I don't know which one is worse.²³³ (Interview 25, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

233Clara: E a senhora mencionou essa questão do documento. Onde que a senhora sentiu mais impacto dessa questão de ter ou não ter o papel aqui?

Lúcia: Primeiro na vida das minhas filhas, né? Porque elas não... Terminou high school, quase que parou a vida delas. Não pra mim, assim, mas... Muita coisa ela não conseguiu, né? As duas. Mara também, mas assim... Não pararam elas completamente, mas elas tiveram que passar por muita coisa pra chegar onde elas chegaram. E assim, quando começou, sabe, realmente doeu e veio assim, sabe, a dificuldade. Porque até então era só vontade de ir no Brasil, né? Essa vontade de ir, ver minha família, sobrinhos que nasciam, meus irmãos, pai que morreu, minha irmã, assim, mas quando chegou nessa época das meninas irem para a escola, conseguir um trabalho sem ser de limpeza, num escritório, numa companhia, tudo começou a realmente ficar, sabe, doer muito mais do que já era, sabe. E sem falar na prisão, eu me sentia presa, não podia ir a lugar nenhum, né, sair do país, porque assim, lógico que eu podia viajar aqui e tudo, mas assim, ficar longe da minha família, não poder ver, foi o pior. E as meninas não tem o futuro que elas poderiam ter tido se elas tivessem o documento. (...) Então assim, a gente fica tentando enganar eles, ou passar assim por cima, mas foi horrível, tanto pra mim e pra mim também, como mãe, ver as meninas passarem pelo mesmo, porque elas não tinham carteira, e não tinha como tirar, onde tirar, e a gente tinha as prioridades, sabe, de fazer isso ou não. E assim, depois vem, né, depois vem a saudade, a vontade de ver sua família, enfim, são várias coisas, eu não sei qual que é a pior. (Entrevista 25, 22/09/23,

Additionally, migration and citizenship status also regulate access to state-provided social services in the US, many of which have migration and citizenship status as their eligibility criteria. This makes state-provided social services not only a site of inequality but of border enforcement. This inequality is created within mixed-status families, generating different opportunities and social reproduction conditions between parents, children, and siblings. That also divided Brazilians – US- and foreign-born – into “deserving” and “undeserving” subjects of care from the point of view of the state.

Most notably, that is the case of healthcare. In Georgia, public health insurance is only available to US citizens. Non-US citizens are ineligible, regardless of their migration status. This is different from other states, like Massachusetts, where according to Brazilians out-of-status migrants who had lived there said they had the same access to healthcare as authorized migrants and US permanent residents and citizens. In 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill made eligibility of authorized migrants for Medicare even more limited. Isadora describes this differentiation between her and Kiko and their son Douglas:

“Because here is a country where you can’t get sick. Not for my son, up until he’s 19 he has his insurance, right, that the government gives [him]. But for us it’s very hard. We can’t even think about having a toothache, because healthcare here is expensive.”²³⁴ (Kiko, interview 22, 09/22/23, Marietta GA)

Basic education is accessible to all regardless of status in Georgia, but at higher levels it also increasingly becomes a “space” of border enforcement. Lúcia described this, as quoted earlier in this chapter, talking about her daughters’ struggles once they graduated high school. Indeed, Alessandra talked about having so much anxiety over college applications, given her ineligibility for any sort of financial aid, that she developed an eating disorder during that time. Eventually, she was accepted into a college in Atlanta and commuted back

Marietta GA)

234“Porque aqui é um país onde você não pode adoecer. Pra meu filho não. Até 19 anos ele tem o plano dele, né? Que o governo dá. Mas pra gente é muito difícil. A gente não pode nem pensar em sentir uma dor de dente. Porque a saúde aqui é cara” (Kiko, entrevista 22, 22/09/23, Marietta GA).

and forth from Marietta, where she lived with Lúcia. Alessandra took the bus to college because, being undocumented, she did not have a driver's license. What could have been a 30-minute drive became an hours-long commute and impacted her relationships in college, because she could not hang out after classes lest she missed the last bus home.

Social security and retirement pensions from the US government are only available for those who can obtain a social security number. Non-citizens on tourist visas, without a work authorization, or out-of-status cannot obtain a social security number. Before the early 2000s, although non-citizens under these categories were already ineligible for SSNs (see Appendix B: Glossary), there were many exceptions and cracks that allowed them to obtain one. That is the case of Ludmilla and Márcio, for example, who contribute to social security and expect to access its retirement pension in the future. Between 2002-2004, a series of legislative reforms restricted access to SSNs and tightened verification of immigration documents, making migration and citizenship status increasingly significant in obtaining SSNs and any attached benefits.

Even other social services, like Covid relief payments or child support checks, become forms of border enforcement in this way, also dividing "deserving" from "non-deserving" subjects of social care. Érika talks about her son Bruno as having the same rights "as any blue blooded American," which by extension means he accesses rights his parents do not, racist remark about Mexicans aside:

Érika: Clara, let me tell you. Here, I'll tell you about [this] country in relation to children. They'll give free health insurance for children until they're 18, if I'm not mistaken until they're 18, their public right.

Clara: Is it Medicare²³⁵?

Érika: Medicare. And if you're not able not even to pay for milk and for diapers to put on your kid, they'll give it to you. There's an application that you do, I forgot the name of the place. You go there and you pick up a check, you buy everything for your baby. They give that too.

235 It might actually have been a different healthcare plan. I found that Brazilian migrants frequently did not know the correct names or inner workings of certain programs they had access to, which provides a glimpse into another layer of differential inclusion and exclusion of migrants who cannot speak English and do not have full access to information.

Cool, right? For Bruno I didn't get it, I was scared because of our visa application. But they say it doesn't influence anything [in the visa application], that it's not our right, it's their right. But they give you that...

Clara: Their, you mean the children's?

Érika: The children's, they have the right.

Clara: Like, it would be in [Bruno's] name, not yours.

Érika: All for him, not for me. If the baby isn't breastfeeding, they give you milk, they give a check, you go to the grocery store and buy everything for him. And the cashier already knows, interesting, right? How everything is very connected, right? You can only buy [things for the baby].

Clara: It's a specific thing, you can't buy whatever you want.

Érika: No, no.

Clara: You can't get the check and buy something else, it has to be milk, diapers.

Érika: There's a check that the government gives children, you can buy fruit. But that they do I think it's annually. Because [Bruno] received it, but I think it had the wrong address. All the kids receive it, this check, annually. I don't know, I think it's \$450 or \$400, Clara. That's why Mexicans have so many children, because of the money, to have this check, I think it's monthly. Bruno received it once, but it was not because of that. I think it was his right, during Covid times. They gave him a check. (...)

Clara: Yes, because if your kid is born here, the kid is a citizen, so...

Érika: They're a citizen, *minha filha*, they have all the rights just like any blue-blooded American, you understand? But they give it to you indeed, they take care of your kid.²³⁶ (Interview 15, 09/23/23, Marietta GA)

Accessing social services in any way may expose undocumented migrants and make them vulnerable. Schools, for example, even if accessible to out-of-status children, may be

236Érika: Clara, deixa eu te falar. Aqui, vou te falar sobre o país em relação a filhos. Eles te dão plano de saúde grátis pra criança até 18 anos, se eu não me engano até 18 anos, seu direito público.

Clara: É o Medicare?

Érika: Medicare. E se você não tem condições nem de pagar o leite e botar fralda na criança, eles te dão. Tem uma aplicação que você faz, esqueci o nome do lugar. Você vai lá e busca o cheque, compra de tudo pro seu bebê. Eles dão também. Maneiro, né? O Bê eu não peguei, fiquei com medo por causa da aplicação do nosso visto. Mas diz que isso não influencia nada, que não é um direito nosso, é um direito deles. Mas eles te dão essa...

Clara: Deles, você diz das crianças?

Érika: Das crianças, eles tem direito.

Clara: Tipo, seria no nome dele, não no seu.

Érika: Tudo pra ele, não pra mim. Se o bebê não pegou no peito, eles dão um leite, eles dão um cheque, você vai lá no mercado e compra, tudo pra ele. E o caixa já sabe, interessante, né? Como que é, tudo muito ligado, né? Só pode comprar pra ele.

Clara: É uma coisa específica. Você não pode comprar o que você quiser.

Érika: Não, não.

Clara: Não pode pegar o cheque e usar pra comprar outra coisa. Tem que ser leite, fralda.

Érika: Existe o cheque que o governo dá pras crianças. Você pode comprar fruta. Mas isso eles fazem, acho que é anualmente. Porque ele recebeu, mas acho que foi com endereço errado. Todas as crianças recebem. Esse cheque, anual. Não sei, acho que 450 ou 400, Clara. Por isso que os mexicanos tem muito filho. Por causa do dinheiro, pra ter esse cheque, acho que é mensal. O Bruno recebeu uma vez, mas não foi por causa disso não. Acho que era direito dele, na época do Covid. Deram um cheque pra ele. (...)

Clara: É porque se o filho nasce aqui, o filho é cidadão, então...

Érika: É cidadão, minha filha, tem todos os direitos como qualquer um sangue azul americano, entendeu? Mas eles te dão sim, cuidam do seu filho. (Entrevista 15, 23/09/23, Marietta GA)

sites of exposure and border enforcement, where children may be scared of having their status (or lack thereof) discovered by teachers or schoolmates. Paying for healthcare is also a moment of “exposure” for undocumented migrants. Juçara mentioned being slightly suspicious of her health insurance in relation to their migration status, although in a very indirect way:

“So, thanks to God we’re kind of healthy, but this year we got insurance that even now I do not know the origin exactly, but I believe it’s not something that would, like, give us trouble, because I believe they would not be this crazy, right. But there’s insurance for immigrants, we pay it, for me, for Danilo Jr., for Danilo, Silmara has Medicare that I apply for and we pay it.”²³⁷ (Juçara, interview 20, 10/17/23, Marietta GA)

In sum, migration and citizenship status can affect Brazilian migrants’ social reproduction dynamics in a variety of ways. Among them is “feeling trapped” and not being able to leave the US and go see family in Brazil, while visa policies might make it hard or even impossible for relatives in Brazil to go visit Marietta. Migrants also face processes of differentiated exclusion based on their status for accessing state-provided social services, including healthcare, higher education, social security pensions, and Covid relief payments. This specific status-based exclusion from social services creates another layer of differentiated social reproduction conditions and, as discussed in the literature review, constitutes such services as a bordering site, made to include some and exclude others.

Brazilian migrants’ precarious migration and citizenship status also reconfigures temporalities and spatialities of social reproduction. Teeple Hopkins (2017), based on the experiences of Filipina live-in care workers in Montréal, defines migrant social reproduction as a process of stretching of time and space. Teeple Hopkins (2017) understands this stretching of time as an extension of working time by employers under a “you’re family”

²³⁷“Então, graças a Deus a gente é meio que sadio, mas esse ano a gente fez um plano que até agora eu não sei exato a origem, mas eu acredito que não seja algo que nos dê problema, porque eu acredito que eles não iam ser tão loucos assim, né. Mas tem um plano pra quem é imigrante, a gente paga, pra mim, pro Danilinho, pro Danilo, a Silmara tem o Medicare que eu faço aplicação e a gente paga” (Juçara, entrevista 20, 17/10/23, Marietta GA).

discourse, attempting to turn labor into social reproduction. The stretching of space, for Teeple Hopkins (2017), is the extension of spaces of social reproduction from the home to outside sites, such as churches, since for live-in care workers home becomes their workplace. In the case of Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area, relational perceptions of space and time of social reproduction seem to be of compressed temporalities and expanded spatialities.

Due to their busy schedules, including times of production and reproduction, many Brazilian migrants say the time goes by faster in the US. Juliana explained, in 2023, how she feels about the pace of life in the US:

Juliana: The feeling I have is that here the time seems to go by faster. I do not know, I feel it goes faster, the time passes faster. The day starts and ends and you stop to look, it's already the end of the year, it's already starting [a new year], it's already the middle of the year, it's almost over already. I have that feeling.

Clara: That's something a lot of people say, that the pace here is very accelerated.

Juliana: This friend of mine [Schaianne], I used to tell her, I said, 'look, I don't know how it is there [in Brazil], but when you get here, afterwards you'll tell me if this is just my feeling, but I'm almost sure that it seems like the time here is more accelerated.' Then the other she was telling me, 'Juliana, it's real, the time here goes by much faster.' I don't know. She arrived, it seems like it was yesterday, it's going to be a year now already, next week, that she's been here. Oh my, it's surreal, it's surreal how fast it goes.²³⁸ (Interview 21, 11/29/23, Marietta GA)

Most Brazilian migrants also think about the future more in a short-term than in a longer-term way. There's a struggle to make plans for the future given uncertainty and financial instability resulting from migration status and ever-changing labor markets. Long-term future plans, such as retirement, may also be made difficult for migrants that are sometimes unable to save up any money after bills. Gerson mentioned how little he heard other Brazilians in Marietta talk about long-term future plans, such as retirement. For many,

238Juliana: A sensação que eu tenho é que aqui parece que o tempo é mais corrido. Não sei, eu sinto que é mais corrido, o tempo passa mais rápido. O dia começa e acaba e você já vê, você já está no fim do ano, já está começando, já está no meio do ano, já está acabando. Eu tenho essa impressão.

Clara: É uma coisa que muita gente fala, que o ritmo aqui é muito mais acelerado.

Juliana: Essa minha amiga, eu falava pra ela, eu falava ó, eu não sei como é aí, mas quando você chegar aqui, depois você vai me falar se é essa a impressão minha, mas eu tenho quase a certeza de que parece que aqui o tempo é mais acelerado. Aí, esses dias ela tava me falando, Jordana, é real, o tempo aqui passa muito mais rápido. Não sei. Ela chegou, parece que foi ontem, já vai fazer um ano agora, semana que vem, que ela tá aqui. Gente, é surreal, é surreal o quão passa rápido. (Entrevista 21, 29/11/23, Marietta GA)

their plans are summed up as “As long as I’m able to, I’ll keep working,” with little elaboration after that. Brazilian migrants in situations like Adriana’s, for example, who in 2025 was still waiting for movement on her and her family’s EB-2 visa application, are in a state of uncertainty that prevents any sort of long-term planning. Others face so much financial instability that getting to a place where money can be set aside for retirement or other longer-term plans seems almost impossible. Consider Leal’s case, for example, who talked of three different times during his stay in the US when his savings were consumed in periods of low wage or low work. Others yet may have more pressing monetary social reproduction demands – supporting family in the US, supporting family in Brazil, paying for visa applications and immigration lawyers – that longer-term plans are financially unfeasible.

Teeple Hopkins (2017) considers the spatial stretching of social reproduction from the home to the church. With Brazilian migrants, too, social reproduction is stretched into the church – not because home is not a space of care, as in the case of Teeple Hopkins’s live-in workers, but because networks of support are expanded from close and extended family into church congregations. The expansion of social reproduction spatialities among Brazilian migrants is, in this way, simultaneously physical, in terms of physical spaces outside of the home, and institutional, in terms of new institutions taking up more space in social reproduction support networks. Expanded too are sites of social reproduction struggle and differentiation, such as healthcare, social security, and state-provided financial assistance, in which migration and citizenship status become obstacles for access for Brazilian migrants, regardless of tax payments.

In this chapter, I examined Brazilian migrants’ relationships of social reproduction between here and there. In this analysis, I showed how women’s paid work continues to be seen as interchangeable with domestic and family care, with important consequences for

women's independence and professional growth – which, in this case, is crucial to access less taxing working conditions, as discussed in chapter 7. I have also shown how changing migration dynamics have reconfigured cross-border social reproduction, particularly from Brazilian migrants having their children stay in Brazil and arranging care for them through grandparents to Brazilians migrating with spouses and children and having to care for elderly parents who stay in Brazil. In this sense, from the viewpoint of Brazilian migrants in the Marietta area, their parents have shifted from *givers* to *receivers* of care. Between here and there, moreover, there is an exchange of emotional support as well as care deficits in both places, caused by distance from family and the impact of precarized labor conditions on care dynamics. Finally, I discussed the myriad ways in which migration and citizenship status shape social reproduction dynamics, including relatives in Brazil and the US being unable to see each other, limited access to state-provided social services, and particular temporalities and spatialities of social reproduction.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

A common sort of meme that circulates in Brazil, in daily conversations and on the internet, says “Brazilians should be studied,” usually in reference to questionable inventions, precarious creative enterprises, dubious attempts at social media fame, and just a general sense of the absurdity of the Brazilian mind, much like the mythical (although very real) figure of the “Florida man.” My brother, the wise-ass, once said to me: “Everyone says Brazilians should be studied, but you actually went ahead and did it.” Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian writer, perhaps said it better and more poetically, and also with more emphasis on the political implications. In his acceptance speech of the 1982 Nobel Prize for his novel *Cien años de soledad*, García Márquez says: “Poets and hobos, musicians and prophets, warriors and rascals, all of us creatures of that absurd reality have had to ask very little of our imaginations, because the biggest challenge for us has been the insufficiency of conventional resources to make our lives believable.”²³⁹ In other words, Latin American realities are, in and of themselves, fantastical realism. Fantastical too are the migration stories narrated throughout this dissertation.

In the present dissertation, I examined the Brazilian migration process to Marietta through transnational dynamics of labor and social reproduction. As stated in the introduction, I argue that examining the specific ways in which Brazilian labor markets in Georgia are precarized is crucial to understand the dynamics of social reproduction between here and there by illuminating the working conditions that Brazilians are “accepting” in order to achieve “better” social reproduction conditions. In turn, social reproduction conditions are also crucial to understand why they consider life in the US to be a “better life” and why they have to

²³⁹“Poetas y mendigos, músicos y profetas, guerreros y malandrines, todas las criaturas de aquella realidad desaforada hemos tenido que pedirle muy poco a la imaginación, porque el desafío mayor para nosotros ha sido la insuficiencia de los recursos convencionales para hacer creíble nuestra vida.”

“accept” these conditions of precarity in order to achieve a “better life.” Finally, it is also necessary to investigate why Brazilians feel like they cannot achieve this “better life” in Brazil. In short, I argue that Brazilian migration to Marietta cannot be understood simply as a search for employment but rather that migrants’ decisions to leave Brazil, enter precarized labor markets in the US, and stay in Marietta are shaped by uneven social reproduction conditions between here and there.

Drawing from geographical scholarship on labor, racial capitalism, and social reproduction, I situate Brazilian migrants within larger transnational processes through which workers from the Global South enter labor markets in the Global North under precarious and legally vulnerable conditions. These conditions are produced through neoliberal dynamics of capital accumulation, bordering regimes, citizenship policies, illegality, deportability, and racialized labor hierarchies. In that sense, I argue that migrant workers’ labor conditions must be analyzed alongside their conditions of social reproduction, since their ability to sustain themselves and their families daily and intergenerationally is unevenly shaped by gender, race, nationality, class, and migration status.

A central theoretical contribution of the dissertation is to connect labor precarization to social reproduction. I understand that Brazilian migrants’ participation in low-paid, physically demanding, unstable, and informal labor markets need to be analyzed in its intimate connection to the living conditions that work makes possible. Many Brazilian migrants hold undergraduate and graduate degrees from Brazil, yet they engage in what they themselves call *subempregos*, or “sub-jobs,” in the US. They do so not because they view these jobs as desirable in themselves, but because these jobs are understood as providing access to urban safety, increased purchasing power, better quality public education, and “opportunities” that they believe are unavailable or increasingly unattainable in Brazil.

In chapter 4, I presented my research participants' background in terms of their places of origin, education levels and professions in Brazil, religious affiliations, racial and ethnic identities, and migration and visa strategies. Most participants come from urban "lower-middle class" or "middle class" contexts in Brazil, many have relatively high education levels and held higher-skilled occupations before migrating. They are often affiliated with Evangelical or neopentecostal churches, both before migrating and after arriving in the United States. Brazilian migrants employ several strategies to enter and remain in the United States. Some obtain tourist visas and enter legally, even if they later overstay or seek other forms of status. Others, especially when a visa is denied or resources are insufficient, rely on *atravessadores* to cross through the southern border. After arriving, migrants may become undocumented, pursue non-work visas, apply for work visas, or move through long and uncertain legal processes. I stress that migration status cannot be reduced to a documented-undocumented binary. Many migrants are in legally precarious positions in which they are neither fully authorized nor completely outside legal processes. They may spend large sums on lawyers and visa fees without any guarantee of success.

The history of Brazilian migration to Marietta is presented as a process shaped by changing labor markets, social reproduction conditions, migration policies, and community networks. Brazilian migration to the metropolitan Atlanta area began in the late 1980s and expanded significantly after the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and the associated construction boom. Later moments include increased enforcement after 2001, the 2008 economic crisis, return migration to Brazil, renewed growth in the 2010s, the Covid-19 pandemic, and intensified migration surveillance and control since 2025. Over time, Marietta became a hub for Brazilian migrants not only from the state of Goiás, but from many parts of Brazil and from other Brazilian communities across the United States. I also identified three major changes in the

Brazilian community over time. First, migration projects shifted from temporary and individual migration aimed at improving life in Brazil to more permanent and family-based migration aimed at building a better life in the United States. Earlier migrants often imagined working temporarily in the United States, saving money, and returning to Brazil. More recent migrants increasingly move with spouses and children or later reunite their families in the United States. Second, the profile of migrants changed from more rural and lower-income migrants to more urban, educated, and professionally trained migrants. Third, migration strategies became more complex as US processes of illegalization and enforcement intensified.

A key argument I put forward in chapter 5 is that Brazilian migrants' decisions are shaped by a comparison between social reproduction conditions "here" and "there." In Brazil, migrants may have citizenship, education, and professional experience, but feel unable to access the living conditions they desire. In the United States, they may experience legal precarity, de-skilling, physically demanding labor, and exclusion from public services, but still perceive certain social reproduction conditions as better. This produces a contradiction: Brazilian migrants may lose professional status and labor rights while they perceive gains in purchasing power, urban safety, quality of public education, in sum, "quality of life" and "opportunities." I use the idea of *geographical imagination in place* to explain this process, in which Brazilian migrants' lived experiences in the US are interpreted through geographical imagination of the US as a land of opportunity, even when they face unemployment, underemployment, and legal precarity. Conversely, Brazil is interpreted as a country with no "opportunities," unachievable upwards social mobility, and deteriorated social conditions. On the other hand, I argue it was only through actual upwards social mobility processes in Brazil in the last three decades that Brazilian migrants raised their consumption standard

expectations, having already socially ascended to certain extent, and acquired the necessary resources to effectuate their migration projects to the US.

In chapters 6 and 7, I turn to the labor markets in which Brazilian migrants most commonly work: construction and housecleaning. These are described as precarized labor markets marked by informality, underemployment, physical strain, unstable income, lack of benefits, and health risks. Yet migrants often describe them as “worth it” because they provide access to specific social reproduction conditions. These labor markets are also specifically Brazilian in important ways. Jobs circulate through co-national networks, WhatsApp groups, and church contacts. These networks help migrants find work, but they also constrain them within a narrow set of occupations.

Construction is one major labor market for Brazilian men in Marietta. Newly arrived migrants often begin as *helpers* for Brazilian subcontractors who have been in the United States longer. *Helpers* may work for a fixed employer or piece together jobs from different employers. Contracts are informal and oral, and work can be inconsistent. Workers may go several days without employment, especially if they lack a fixed position. Wages are often paid daily, meaning that workers may earn the same amount regardless of how many hours they work. Long days, unpaid extra time, lack of breaks, and expectations of loyalty are common. Housecleaning is the other major labor market and is strongly feminized. Men who clean often do so with their wives or after construction proves unavailable or unsuitable. Housecleaning is described as more stable than construction because schedule owners often have regular clients, but it is also physically exhausting, rushed, and precarious. Brazilian housecleaners may clean several houses in one day, drive quickly between locations, skip breaks or lunch, and perform heavy chores under time pressure. The housecleaning labor market is organized through relationships between *helpers* and *donas de schedule*, or schedule

owners. *Helpers* may work for different schedule owners and may struggle with underemployment if they cannot secure enough days. *Schedule* owners are also constrained by their relationships with clients and by the need to maintain income. In sum, I argue that these Brazilian labor markets are shaped by gender, nationality, race, and citizenship status. Within the Brazilian community, workers are differentiated by gender, time in the US, migration status, access to capital, networks, and English language skills. Between Brazilians and US-born white workers, differentiation is shaped by nationality, racialization, citizenship, English proficiency, and differential recognition of degrees obtained in Brazil and in the US. Brazilian migrants may gatekeep certain jobs from non-Brazilians through co-national networks, but they are simultaneously excluded from many other labor markets.

In chapters 8, I examine social reproduction conditions in Marietta more directly. Brazilian migrants often identify purchasing power as one of the strongest advantages of life in the US, and some equate this purchasing power with “quality of life.” They also value public education, especially for children, and often perceive US schools as better than Brazilian public schools and less financially burdensome than private education in Brazil. However, I argue that this positive assessment depends on selectively prioritizing some dimensions of social reproduction over others. Migrants often minimize or leave out limited healthcare access, housing insecurity, lack of labor protections, work-related health issues, workplace accidents, loneliness, loss of family networks, retirement insecurity, and insecure migration status. As I contend, Brazilian migrants often privilege individualized and privatized access to goods and services over collectivized forms of social reproduction. The goal becomes being able to “afford things” privately, rather than demanding broader socialized care, state support, labor rights, or public welfare. This does not mean that social reproduction is simply commodified in the US and collectivized in Brazil. Rather, it is

commodified and individualized differently in each place. Yet, these priorities can change: increased immigration enforcement can make detention and deportation risks so significant that they alter the balance of how Brazilian migrants evaluate life in the US and cause processes of return migration.

Brazilian neopentecostal churches in the Marietta area play a central role in social reproduction. They provide spiritual, emotional, practical, and sometimes material support. Churches help newcomers find jobs, housing, donations, information, and community connections. They offer emotional support during hardship, medical emergencies, unemployment, and family crises. However, this support is limited and also has significant implications, such as reinforcing ultra-right politics.

Finally, in chapter 9, I examine Brazilian migrants' social reproduction relationship in Marietta and in Brazil. Brazilian migration to Marietta has increasingly become family-based, with spouses and children migrating together. However, gendered divisions of care persist as women remain primarily responsible for housework and childcare, regardless of also performing paid work. Indeed, women's paid work is often treated as more flexible, secondary, and interchangeable with childcare. This, in turn, affects women's financial independence, professional development, and ability to move into less physically demanding occupations. Precarized labor also creates care deficits for children in Marietta. Parents may work long hours, lack control over schedules, or need to maximize income. As a result, they may have limited time with their children. Without extended family nearby, especially grandparents, childcare becomes harder. Therefore, the shift from individual to family migration in this context depends on women's domestic and care work, even when their paid labor is crucial to household income.

In terms of cross-border social reproduction, some children remain in Brazil, especially when parents are divorced and fathers migrate alone, as do elderly parents, and Brazilian migrants often prefer that they visit rather than permanently relocate to the US. Migration policies shape these dynamics in many ways, as undocumented migrants may not be able to leave the United States, and relatives in Brazil may be denied visas to visit. Meanwhile, Brazilian migrants send remittances for specific expenses, organize care for elderly relatives, and maintain emotional ties across borders. Yet they cannot provide the same daily care they once did in Brazil. Elderly parents may suffer emotionally from having adult children far away and, at the same time, relatives in Brazil provide emotional support to migrants in the United States. This support helps migrants endure difficult work and continue participating in precarized labor markets. The Brazilian migration process to Marietta thus creates care deficits both here and there, with women disproportionately burdened in both places. Migration and citizenship status also directly shape social reproduction dynamics of Brazilian migrants, affecting access to healthcare, higher education, driver's licenses, social security, retirement pensions, and other public social programs. In that way, social services become bordering sites of differential inclusion and exclusion.

My overall argument is that Brazilian migration to Marietta is produced through the interaction of precarized labor and uneven social reproduction. Brazilian migrants engage with exhausting, informal, unstable, and low-skilled work because they perceive it as allowing access to what they consider to be a "better life." But this "better life" is contradictory: it often depends on precarized migration status, family separation, gendered care burdens, care deficits here and there, and exclusion from public services. In that sense, Brazilian migrants prioritize some aspects of social reproduction, especially purchasing power, urban safety, and children's education, while downplaying others, such as access to healthcare, family

proximity, and care networks. The present dissertation therefore contributes to migration studies by showing that migrants' labor choices cannot be understood apart from social reproduction, while also offering a key intervention to social reproduction theories by centering racialized, migrant, and transnational experiences. It also complicates simple narratives of exploitation by showing how Brazilian employers and workers may both be precarized, though unequally, within broader structures of illegalization and impersonal domination.

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Appendix A: Brazilian migrants' life stories

The life stories presented below have been ordered according to the year of arrival in Marietta, even if the research participant had been in the US for longer. This strategy helps situate when and under what circumstances does Marietta become an attractive option within the US for Brazilians residing not only in Brazil but also in other US migrant communities, and underscores the spatiality component of decision-making. All ages indicated below correspond to the age of participants at the time of our first interview. For relationships between participants and their names, see Figure 7 and Figure 8. All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms, except for a few public-facing key informants and institutions.

1. Eliana (arrived in Marietta 1986)

Eliana, in her early fifties, was introduced to me by her cousin, Jandira, whom I had asked to point me in the direction of people who had arrived in the Marietta area before her. Eliana was living in another US state by the time we talked through a video call, but was one of the first Brazilian migrants to move to the Marietta area.

In Brazil, in 1986, Eliana was 24, lived in Goiânia, had a job at a bank, and was preparing to apply for college, living what she described as a “reasonable life” [*vida razoável*]. At the time, Eliana had a roommate whose aunt, of about the same age as them, was about to move to Atlanta and invited them to come along. This aunt was moving to Atlanta because she was in touch with American missionaries who had been to Brazil and spoke Portuguese, and they lived in Georgia. Eliana’s roommate was brokenhearted over the end of a long-term relationship and said to Eliana “I’ll only go if you go.” She agreed, thinking she would go for a year, learn English, and go back to her life in Goiânia. Eliana soon got a tourist visa and left for the US.

Upon arriving in the Atlanta area, Eliana knew only her roommate and the aunt, with whom she rented an apartment in Sandy Springs. Unlike Brazilians who migrate today, neither of them had any previous idea of what labor markets they could work in, so they looked for ads in local newspapers. They saw many families looking for live-in nannies, which they decided was a good idea because they would not have to pay rent. Eliana remembers that, at the time, rent was very expensive for them and they would spend more than \$1000 a month on international calls to Brazil, and frequently had their landline cut off for not paying the phone bill.

Eliana lived with her first nanny family, in Marietta, for one year. Her former roommate and the aunt went to work with other families in Alpharetta, another city in the area (see Figure 3). When Eliana's tourist visa expired, she changed it to a student visa to study English. At the time, she would take the children to school, go to her English classes, and pick the children up on her way back, watching them until the end of the day. After finishing this English course, Eliana wanted to study something else but there was a schedule conflict with the family she worked with at the time, so she changed jobs to work for a different family, also in Marietta. After two years in the US, in 1988, Eliana "brought" her cousin Jandira and her two sisters, who all went to work as live-in nannies as well.

Eventually, they decided together they wanted to change from nannying to housecleaning. Eliana could not recall exactly where the idea came from, but suspected it had been her sister's idea, who had issues with the family she worked for and wanted to do something else. They had also learned, at that point, that housecleaning offered better pay than nannying and they could go home after work, instead of "being stuck with the family" [*ficar presa com a família*]. They would post ads on local newspapers with their phone number and clients would call them requesting housecleaning services. Eliana stayed in the

Marietta area for another ten years, working in housecleaning, “earning and spending” [*ganhando e gastando*]. During that time, in the early 1990s, Eliana, with some of her relatives and other Brazilian migrants, co-founded the first Brazilian church in the area, which eventually became Bençãos Church. At first, they were a non-denominational church, but joined the Presbyterian denomination in 1996.

Around 1997 or 1998, Eliana had an “existential crisis,” in her words, realizing she did not want to keep living that way, “earning and spending,” but she also did not want to go back to Brazil, since she had not saved any money and had lost touch with local labor markets in Goiânia. According to Eliana, that’s when she decided to get another student visa and start college in Georgia. She later got a master’s degree and became a chaplain. In the meantime, Eliana got married and obtained her citizenship through her first husband, who was not American-born but had U.S. citizenship.

At the time of our interview, in 2023, Eliana was living in another state with her second husband and continued to work as a chaplain there. Some of her siblings who had moved to the US later returned to Brazil and others stayed in the Marietta area, including one of the two sisters who first moved with her, who has been a housecleaner in the area for over 30 years.

2. Jandira (arrived in Marietta area 1988)

I met Jandira, in her late fifties, through Adriana, who suggested her as “a very interesting person” for me to talk to, given how long Jandira has lived in the Marietta area. This was perhaps one of the most amusing aspects of my fieldwork, to see what stories people considered “interesting” when considering who among their networks they could suggest for me to interview next. Unlike most people I interviewed, who asked to be interviewed in their

homes, Jandira preferred to meet in a Starbucks in Sandy Springs that was close to her home in Roswell, other cities in the Marietta area (see Figure 3).

Jandira is from Caldas Novas, in the state of Goiás, a small tourist town known for its hot springs. As she narrated, Jandira's family was not wealthy: her father owned a construction company that he built from the ground up, while her mother stayed home. Her grandparents had been farmers and some of her family in Brazil still are, as well. Before moving to the US, Jandira had finished a trade degree in accounting and managed a boutique in Caldas Novas.

When Jandira arrived in the Marietta area in 1988, she was accompanied by one of Eliana's sisters. Jandira's intention was, at first, to stay in the US for a year to learn English and return to Brazil and apply for a bachelor's degree in accounting. With time, she "realized [she] would stick around," in her words. In describing her decision to stay in the US, Jandira said it was primarily financial, meaning not only that she made more money than in Brazil, but the feeling of *segurança*, described as being able to count on hard work as a means of achieving financial goals. Brazil, on the other hand in opposition, was characterized as a corruption-plagued, financially unstable country, where things can change radically from one government to another. Jandira mentioned, as additional reasons, having family conflicts back in Brazil and "falling in love" with the Marietta area.

While Jandira moved to Georgia with a live-in nanny job lined up, she entered the country on a tourist visa. This particular employment situation was suggested by Eliana, who had been asked for recommendations of nannies for other families. Jandira worked for the family during the day and went to English classes in the evenings. Talking about her first years in the area, Jandira says that they would throw a party for any newly arrived Brazilian, because there were so few of them – she estimates around 25 Brazilians lived in the area at

the time. This small group also convened for religious services and eventually co-founded the first Brazilian church in Marietta, the same one mentioned by Eliana.

When Jandira's cousins wanted to leave nannyng and move in together, she went with them, and kept working in care services, doing babysitting, housecleaning, catering, and waitressing for private parties, until she took up a housekeeping job in which she stayed for several years. During this period, she continued to study, and took up other courses upon finishing her English classes. In 1999, Jandira left her housekeeping job to open a housecleaning company, making the decision to stay in the US permanently. While Jandira had done some housecleaning before, her goal with the company was to be an administrator rather than a housecleaner, which eventually a large client roster allowed her to achieve. Jandira married an American man with whom she has two children who were, when we talked, in high school and the other one in college. In 1999, Jandira also "brought" one of her sisters who, in 2023, continued to live in the area and work as a housecleaner. She also has a brother who had moved to Georgia more recently and was working in construction with tile installation. Jandira also has other siblings who stayed in Caldas Novas and still lived there at the time of our interview.

3. Pastor Natanael (arrived in Marietta area 1996)

Pastor Natanael, 49, and his wife, Pastor Joelma, lead Vitória Church, in Marietta. I was interested in this particular church because they hold, every year, a large community festival on their grounds. I went to Sunday service in December 2023 and, at the end of it, approached Pastor Natanael and introduced myself. He promptly invited me to stay and have lunch with him, which is served in the church's canteen every week. Our conversation

focused more on the church, its history, and its role in the community than on Natanael's own migration story. I mention him here to contextualize his trajectory in relation to others.

Natanael and Joelma arrived in the area in 1996 from Goiânia. According to them, when Joelma joined us for a few minutes of chat, her family was one of the very first to move to Atlanta from Goiás. Vitória Church is a branch of a large Brazilian non-denominational church that started in Goiânia in 1997, founded by a well-known pastor in Brazilian neopentecostal communities, whom Natanael knew since before he moved to the US. In 2001, Natanael and his wife founded the first Vitória Church outside of Goiânia, around the same time another branch was also opened in São Paulo. According to Pastor Natanael, as of 2023, there were 1200 Vitória Church branches in several countries - including Brazil, US, Canada, Mexico, Peru, and Germany - plus 600 or 700 associated churches. In addition to his pastorate, Natanael owns a construction company and mentioned managing a granite company around the time when they first started Vitória Church in Marietta. At the time of our talk in 2023, most of Joelma's family who had first moved to Marietta had returned to Brazil, and she had few relatives left in the area.

4. Rosana (arrived in Marietta area 1997)

Rosana, in her fifties, owns a Brazilian restaurant and grocery store in the Little Brazil area, Minas Emporium and Grill. I met her at the *Mulheres Empreendedoras* [Entrepreneur women] event organized by the Brazilian consulate in Atlanta for the launch of the *Guia do Empreendedor* [Entrepreneur's guide]. Rosana spoke a little about her migration story at the event and then in more detail during our conversation.

She moved from São Paulo to Georgia in 1997 with her family because her husband, who worked for Coca-Cola Company in Brazil, had been transferred to the Atlanta office.

From the start, Rosana was looking for business opportunities and noticed all kinds of services that, compared to Brazil, were missing in the area. First, she did waxing in her home's bathroom, then had a manicure attending clients in her living room. Eventually, she went to a travel agency in the Marietta area for flight tickets (it was the 1990s after all), owned by a Brazilian man, and noticed he offered all kinds of services: plane tickets, remittances, Brazilian products, and other things. At the time, that was the one place offering services in Portuguese in the area and was a hotspot for the Brazilian community. Rosana became a business partner at this agency and went after all kinds of requests made by Brazilian migrants: VHS tapes of Brazilian television programs, prepaid international calling cards, and printing out driving directions from MapQuest for housecleaners and construction workers. Soon, she also started offering dish satellite installations that would allow transmission of Brazilian TV – according to Rosana, demand was so high, she would buy 20-30 new antennas and have them all installed within 2 or 3 days. The Brazilian consulate in Atlanta would sometimes ask her how many antennas she had installed by way of a Brazilian head count. At one point, she broke up the business partnership and opened an independent business, while her husband continued to work for Coca-Cola. Rosana continued to offer all kinds of services demanded by the community, mentioning the lack of other business to attend to this demand. She came to manage several different small shops, an English school, a space for rental business rooms, a restaurant, a dealership, reaching 15 different businesses in the area, until her husband quit his Coca-Cola job to come help manage all these ventures, many of them focused on remittance services. Before 9/11, which Rosana considers a turning point in the community at large and in remittance businesses specifically, they had the third remittance business in volume in all the US. After that, new regulations around remittances as

well as the emergence of other money transfer options considerably reduced the remittance business.

That shift led Rosana and her husband to sell most of their business and keep the one grocery store and restaurant combo they have now. While they are originally from São Paulo, the business is named after the state of Minas Gerais because it was originally founded by a *mineiro* (see Appendix B: Glossary) in 1999, after Rosana had first arrived in the area.

5. Olinda, Jurandir, and Cleiton (arrived in Marietta area 1998)

I was introduced to Cleiton, 43, through Oliveira, who was working for him at the time. Adriana, knowing Cleiton's story, suggested him as a "very interesting" person for me to interview. After interviewing Cleiton in his home in 2023, I got in touch with him in 2024 asking for family contacts in Goiânia. He introduced me to his parents, Jurandir and Olinda, who are both in their sixties and received me in their home in Brazil for a long conversation. Cleiton also put me in contact with his wife, Fabiana, who in 2024 lived in Goiânia but had been in Marietta from 2004 to 2011. Her own story is described separately, according to the timeline supporting my presentation of life stories in this chapter.

As Jurandir told me, he comes from a rural family of 15 siblings, of which 9, himself included, were still alive in 2024. Before moving to the US, he and Olinda lived in Goiânia with Cleiton and their daughter Valéria, and owned a furniture factory. In 1998, some of Jurandir's siblings already lived in the Marietta area and eight families from their church in Goiânia had left for Atlanta. However, according to Olinda, moving to the US had never been a plan for them, so much so that when Jurandir suggested it, she thought it was a joke. Olinda only realized her husband was serious when he started the procedures to obtain the family's passports. From the start, Jurandir was adamant they would only go if they could obtain

tourist visas for all of them - the couple and their two children, who were 17 and 16 at the time.

Jurandir's siblings had always encouraged him to move to the US. As he narrated, people in Goiânia were shocked that he wanted to leave, since the family lived a good life. Indeed, according to Jurandir, he was able to pay two or three months of rent in Sandy Springs in advance of their move, in an effort to secure an apartment his brother had just moved out of, and he was also able to buy a car as soon as they arrived. Cleiton, on the other hand, said his father's business was not doing really well at the time they decided to leave. Cleiton explained that, being so young, he did not understand much at the time, but that the company "couldn't make it" [não conseguia virar]. To Cleiton, in Brazil, "half the year you're paying taxes and the other half you're paying your employees."

According to Olinda, their plan was to stay in the US for five to seven years so they could make money and return. Jurandir explained that, in his mind, he would make more money in the US in that period than he would in Brazil in 15 years. Even though the currency exchange rate was low in 1998 compared to today, Jurandir used the example that if you cleaned 3 houses for \$80 each, you could make \$240 in a day's work. At the time, that was the equivalent to 2 minimum monthly wages in Brazil, creating a strong financial motivation for them to leave. Olinda added that, in the US, you work hard but you are able to buy whatever you want and shop as much as you want.

Olinda and Jurandir had a guaranteed job in the Marietta area when they arrived. Jurandir had helped a man he knew in Goiânia obtain a US visa by registering him as an employee at his factory. This man, in turn, offered them a housecleaning job when they decided to move. The couple started working in housecleaning a week after they arrived and, with time, put together their own schedule. Cleiton, who was 18 by then, started working in

construction through contacts from his cousin, and went through a couple of employers until he bought a car and started making pizza deliveries. After a while, Cleiton moved back into construction because “delivery isn’t a profession,” while in construction he could move up and eventually become his own boss. He also mentioned that his mindset changed at one point, from “being in the rat race” of earning and spending to seeking financial education, saving, and investing. At the time of our chat in 2023, he had been a subcontractor in construction for a few years, taking on projects and hiring his own employees, like Oliveira. Valéria, as her parents told me, went to high school when she arrived in Marietta and had been working in housecleaning for many years, including cleaning for some clients for 10 to 15 years.

Immediately upon arrival, the family also started attending Bençãos Church, where Jurandir’s brother already congregated. Over time, Jurandir and Olinda participated in other churches in the area. Cleiton continued to attend Bençãos in 2023 and, although we did not meet there, he remembered seeing me at service in Bençãos. Jurandir and Olinda also narrated when they got their own satellite dishes to watch Brazilian television in Atlanta, most likely from Rosana.

While the family entered on tourist visas, they became out of status while living in the US. When they arrived, according to Cleiton, you could overstay a tourist visa without much consequence, and they were even able to obtain social security numbers. Cleiton said Jurandir was even able to visit Brazil and return to the US even though he had overstayed his tourist visa, before I-94s were checked to control and punish overstaying. For Cleiton, the tightening of immigration surveillance and control had a strong personal impact beyond his own migration status. In 2004, Fabiana - his high school sweetheart with whom Cleiton had gotten back in touch with through Facebook - moved to the Marietta area to be with him,

entering the US through the south border. With time, they married and had their first daughter. When Fabiana was pregnant for a second time, as described in further detail below, she was stopped by the police for a broken taillight. Fearing deportation, Fabiana decided to return to Goiânia in 2011, accompanied by her first daughter and Olinda. Jurandir had returned the year before, in 2010. Cleiton and Fabiana's second daughter was thus born in Brazil and the couple did not meet for several years, until Cleiton was able to *buy a marriage* and acquire a green card. They had decided Cleiton would stay in the US to keep working, earning enough money to support himself in Marietta and his family in Goiânia. Cleiton finished high school in Brazil and does not have a bachelor's degree, and he felt that he would not be able to earn a good enough living for his family if he went back to Brazil with them. Given these difficulties, Cleiton met his second daughter in person for the first time when she was seven years old, when he was able to visit Brazil for the first time since he had left. When we talked in 2023, Cleiton had invested in Brazil, building a small apartment building for rental that Fabiana managed, and wanted to keep his business going in Marietta while staying in Brazil for longer periods of time.

Jurandir and Olinda made investments in Brazil while in the Marietta area, buying some land and cattle and, later, three house properties – one in which they live and two others they rent for income. They decided to move back to Brazil because they felt they did not have the health and energy to keep up with the work pace in the US, and they were tired after having worked so hard for so long. Valéria had planned to return to Brazil with her parents but ultimately decided to stay in Marietta, and in 2024 shared a house with her brother Cleiton.

6. Walter (arrived in Marietta area 1998)

I contacted Bençãos Church on Facebook in preparation for my first visit to Marietta, in March 2023, and Walter was the person who responded. In his 50s, and known also as Walt, he is a Presbyterian urban missionary, whose mission consists in supporting Brazilian migrants living abroad. Once in Marietta, I went to a Bençãos Church service where I met Walter in person for the first time.

Walter arrived in the Atlanta area during the Olympic games in 1996 to work as an event organizer supporting youth from a Christian network who were volunteering in the Olympics. In 1998, Walt took a sabbatical and decided on the Marietta area because of the group he had met there in 1996, which included Eliana, Jandira, and the 20-person group that gathered at what was Bençãos Church at the time. By the end of 1998, Bençãos had officially joined the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA). At first, Walt thought he would continue with his event organizing work for Christian organizations. But in two to three years, he realized that the Brazilian community in the Marietta area needed emotional and spiritual support. Part of him thought he would not be able to do counseling because he is single and many of the issues that he saw in the migrant community had to do with couple and family dynamics. As a missionary, Walt felt he was being called to do this spiritual counseling work in the Marietta area. Because his work is entirely voluntary, Walt started cooking Brazilian home-made meals for sale, which he would bring to the first Brazilian shops in the area, and lived off this business for his first ten years in Georgia.

In 2023, Walt continued to do emotional and spiritual counseling for Brazilian migrants in the area, in addition to his work as a Presbyter for Bençãos Church. He also rents several rooms in his apartment in Sandy Springs for Brazilian single men. In 2025, Walt was part of the group who had moved into Espírito Santo Church and did a lot of the behind-the-

scenes work of planting the new church. The day we had our follow-up interview in 2025 (interview 51, 07/18/25, Atlanta area GA), we made a plan to talk while Walter waited his turn at a food bank in the Marietta area (discussed in chapter 8). He was late to our meeting because he went to deliver a home-made treat to Henrique, Maria Fernanda's husband (see life story 29), who had a pregnant craving for that particular dish. Walt went through the food bank line as fast as he could and we ended up doing our interview in the car as he drove from Marietta to the Atlanta airport to pick up the pastor coming from Florida to celebrate service at Espírito Santo Church that weekend.

7. Andreia (arrived in Marietta area 2000)

I met Andreia, 49, at the *Mulheres Empreendedoras* [Entrepreneur women] event in the Brazilian consulate in 2023. She is the owner and CEO of waxing chain, *Brazilian Wax by Andreia*, with branches in five southern states. Andreia received me for an interview in the Brazilian Wax by Andreia's main office in Marietta.

Before moving to the US, Andreia lived in Goiânia. As she narrated, she comes from a poor family. Additionally, her father had left and her mother was raising her five children by herself. Given the family's hardship, Andreia started working at age 12 in a bakery, where she was "exploited," in her own words, making very little money. She worked there, however, because she could bring leftover bread back home for her family and their neighbors. After a few months, a woman opened a waxing salon next to the bakery and hired Andreia, who was then 13. She learned to wax, started doing it professionally and "fell in love with waxing." By age 14, she had become manager of the waxing salon.

Andreia first learned of Atlanta because of the 1996 Olympics. She wanted to move to the US then, but her daughter was three at the time and the father did not let Andreia take

her, so she decided to stay. At the time, she waxed in a beauty salon in Goiânia and had studied for trade degrees in business management and accounting, and wanted to move to the US for a “change of life” and to provide a better life for her daughter. In 2000, motivated by “the new millennium,” Andreia decided to go to Atlanta without her daughter, who stayed with Andreia’s mother in Goiânia. Andreia moved to the metropolitan Atlanta area by herself and entered the US on a tourist visa. She did not know anybody in the Marietta area but stayed with a friend of a friend at first. At the time, the area now known as Little Brazil - the intersection of Delk and Powers Ferry roads - was becoming the Brazilian community hotspot, where Rosana’s small business was located at the time.

Andreia did not want to work in housecleaning, so she started waxing in a salon that paid her \$150 a week. To be clear, the waxing services Andreia offered included legs, armpits, brow and mustache, and bikini wax, in addition to what is known to in the US as Brazilian waxing, that is, the removal of all pubic and anal hair. While working at this salon, her rent was \$300 a month, so she used \$150 for expenses and sent the other \$150 back home to Brazil. Andreia explained that this budget was so stringent that she would eat pizza crusts for lunch to save money. She had roommates who worked in pizza delivery and would bring back leftover pizzas, and Andreia would collect all uneaten crusts and bring them to work as lunch the next day.

In order to increase her income, Andreia started waxing at client’s homes as well as her own, advertising in Brazilian stores and restaurants. She also married an American man, which allowed her to obtain a green card. In 2002, her husband helped her found *Viver Magazine*, designed as a coupon book at first. She would exchange advertisements in *Viver Magazine* for the now-extinct Brazilian airline TAM for plane tickets to Brazil. At the time, Andreia would travel back and forth from Brazil to purchase materials to make her own wax,

which she then prepared on her own stove. *Viver Magazine* started getting attention in the Brazilian community and people would ask Andreia to include articles in Portuguese and cover community events, such as birthday parties and other celebrations. Andreia then hired Dilla Campos as a columnist in 2003 and, in 2010, Andreia wanted to focus on her waxing business, so she sold the magazine to Dilla, who is now intrinsically associated with *Viver*.

In trying to rent store space to open her first waxing salon, in 2005, Andreia had no business plan, credit, or saved capital for a security deposit. The landlord decided to rent to her anyway, allowing her to open the first Brazilian Wax by Andreia branch. As she explained, the name came from translating what she did on Google - depilação brasileira [Brazilian wax] - with her name - by Andreia. At the time, she did not realize what the specific meaning of Brazilian waxing was in the US. Andreia wanted to reach an American clientele from the start, but struggled with cultural notions around the meaning of Brazilian waxing and cultural behaviors around waxing. She thus attributes her success to having “changed the mindset” of American women on waxing and hair removal.

But according to her, the first salon was so successful she’d opened a second one in less than a year. Her business continued to expand even though she had issues, such as being falsely accused of offering “happy endings,” that is, intimate massages to male clients. As of 2023, Brazilian Wax by Andreia had 38 stores and employed 300+ workers across five states (Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina).

8. Ludmilla and Márcio (arrived in Marietta area 2000)

Juçara, a manicurist and congregant at Bençãos Church, introduced me to several of her clients in 2023 so I could invite them for interviews. Ludmilla was one of them. She received me in her home in Kennesaw, in the Marietta area (see Figure 3), alongside her

husband Márcio. Their son and daughter, respectively a high school and a college student, were also in the living room, watching TV while we talked. Both of them were in their early 50s.

Before moving to the US, Ludmilla and Márcio lived in Santo André, a neighboring city to São Paulo that is part of the region known as the great ABC (so named after the towns of Santo André, São Bernardo and São Caetano), an important industrial center (where current Brazilian President Lula da Silva worked as a metallurgist and was a union leader in the historic 1978-1980 strikes). Throughout our interview, there was a running joke that Márcio had had all kinds of jobs and knew “how to do everything.” His professional and educational history certainly reflect that. He is trained and has worked as a car mechanic, data processor, electrician, and moldmaker. Back in the late 1990s, Márcio was employed as a moldmaker in a local factory but was fired and struggled to find new employment. When he did, he was demoted to a machine operator. Ludmilla, in turn, has a bachelor’s and graduate degrees in speech therapy. Upon graduating, she tried to set up her own practice but was not making as much money as she expected. Ludmilla said that, had she stayed in Santo André, maybe she would have started to make real money in a few years, but they could not wait because of Márcio’s employment situation.

Márcio’s father lived in Atlanta already: he had been in Atlanta to visit and met a pastor who invited him to stay to be a musician in the church band. Márcio’s father moved to the US on his own, at first, returned to Brazil, and then went back to the US with Márcio’s mother and two of his brothers. Márcio and Ludmilla followed a year later, with strong encouragement from Márcio’s family. Their main motivation to move to the Marietta area was financial and their family connections facilitated the move. While in Márcio’s mind they were moving to stay, Ludmilla was more hesitant and had the idea of returning to Brazil if things

“didn’t work out” [se não desse certo]. Indeed, she kept her speech therapist license for eight years after arriving in Marietta.

Because of Márcio’s father connections, they entered the US in 2000 on a religious visa (likely an R-1, see Appendix B: Glossary), which they overstayed, becoming out of status. They moved to Marietta, where Márcio’s family was, and started working in housecleaning for his father. Through him, Ludmilla and Márcio learned of an American woman who had a large housecleaning schedule and was looking for cleaners to work it. They went to work for her, and she was able to get them a donated car from someone in her church. Working for her on commission, Márcio and Ludmilla did not make much: an average of \$50 a house for the both of them, or \$25 each. When they got pregnant with their first child, in 2003, they told their American employer they needed to set up their own schedule to increase their income. Since their arrival, Ludmilla and Márcio had been living with his father and, with the baby, they wanted a home of their own. Their employer gave them her schedule (see Appendix B: Glossary), letting them work with those clients on their own – some of them remained clients of the couple when we talked in 2023. From then on, they found new clients through recommendations. Márcio explained that one of the biggest changes for them in over 20 years of housecleaning was being able to choose the job, whereas before, “the job chose us.” In 2004, they were able to buy the home in which they still lived, and moved into it in 2005.

Given his previous training and experience, Márcio tried to move from housecleaning to construction but “it never worked out.” Márcio struggled to go from owning his own housecleaning schedule to being a construction *helper*, earning a much lower income. Also, it was not working for them to have Ludmilla pay a housecleaning *helper* more than Márcio was making as a construction *helper*. Ludmilla added that, right when he was trying to

move into construction a second time, in 2008, she fell pregnant with their second child. Not only would Márcio need to cover for her in the later stages of her pregnancy, but also Ludmilla would bring the baby to work with her, so she could breastfeed and care for him, making it harder for them to keep a housecleaning *helper*. As Ludmilla described, they raised their children “in clients’ homes,” taking each of them on housecleaning shifts for a year and half after their birth. After that, Márcio let go of any plans to shift to the construction industry full-time, although he may take on an occasional construction job from his housecleaning clients.

They have always been involved in local churches. At first, the couple attended what they described as one of the two Brazilian churches that existed at the time. These were not the same churches mentioned earlier by Eliana and Jandira, as there were both Assembly of God churches. But then new churches started and the people they knew dispersed, and they also wanted an American church to practice their English. Márcio plays several instruments and had a band that played for several churches’ services.

Márcio’s father now lives in Birmingham, Alabama, and had been working as an Uber driver for 4 or 5 years, as of 2023. Ludmilla and Márcio continued to work as housecleaners and were waiting for their daughter Ashlyn to turn 21 so they could apply for a green card. Ashlyn attended a state university in the area and their son Matt was still in high school.

9. Lúcia and Alessandra (arrived in Marietta area 2000)

Lúcia, 60, and Alessandra, 33, are mother and daughter. I first knew of Alessandra through her poetry and as a Freedom University volunteer, while she was doing an MFA in a Mid-West university. I interviewed her in 2023 and she then introduced me to her mother,

Lúcia, who still lives in Marietta and to whom I talked soon afterwards. When I was in Goiânia, in 2024, Lúcia put me in contact with one of her brothers, Zé Fernandes, who then introduced me to their other brother, Edilson, 54, who lived in Boston for 17 years. Of Lúcia's family, only her two daughters remain in the US, while all other relatives live in Brazil.

According to Edilson, he and his siblings grew up in a rural area [na roça], around the city of Anápolis, which is right next to Goiânia. Their mother died when they were young. They are a total of eight siblings, including Edilson, Lúcia, and Zé Fernandes. Four of them have lived in the US at some point, but only Lúcia went to the Marietta area. Her brothers all lived in Boston and entered the US through its southern border. Edilson was the first of the siblings to move to Boston, in 1994. He had friends from Goiânia living there who invited him to go, and even though he did not have any saved money, his friends offered to lend him money that he could repay once he arrived in the US. At the time he was 24 and single and was motivated by "the financial question." Because Edilson did not think he would get a US visa, stating that at the time "it was almost impossible," he decided to do the *travessia*.

Lúcia and her husband lived in Goiânia with their two daughters before moving to the US. According to Alessandra, neither of her parents achieved a high school degree, and only her mother finished middle school. In Brazil, before migrating to the US, her father worked in sales while Lúcia had a government job as a dentist assistant in the public healthcare system. Lúcia and her first husband lived with their two daughters in Goiânia and decided to move to Boston in 1997. One of Lúcia's brothers had returned from England and said that he planned to move to Boston, where Edilson was. Alessandra said her mother did not want to go and prayed they would not get their tourist visas, but when they were approved Lúcia concluded it was "God's will." Initially, their plan was to live in the US for a few years, make money, and return to Brazil, so much so that instead of quitting her government job,

Lúcia asked for a “five year leave” so she could return to the same appointment upon moving back. Lúcia also mentioned that, with her husband, they considered leaving their daughters in Brazil since it would make things easier and cheaper in the US, but eventually decided to bring them. Lúcia reasoned they did not want to be separated from their daughters, did not have family to leave them with, and considered it would be a good experience for them as well. Alessandra also mentioned her parents were involved in “helping to build a church” in Boston, which further encouraged their move.

Zé Fernandes, in turn, explained his siblings’ motivations by saying, “it was because of the circumstances, that you know well, of Brazil.” When I asked him to explain, he listed president administrations since the 1990s, saying “this one was bad, this other one was a little better, this other was a chicken flight,” low and short-lasting. Later, he related economic instability in Brazil to corrupt governments, independent of political orientation. His siblings invited Zé Fernandes to go, too, but at the time he was already married with two small children, and felt it was too risky a move. He also did not want to go by himself and leave his family in Brazil. He also said he stayed “with the expectation of things getting better,” which never actually happened.

Lúcia and her family entered the US in 1997 on tourist visas that they soon overstayed, becoming out of status. In Boston, they knew Lúcia’s brothers and a couple connected to the church. Lúcia’s husband immediately started work and their daughters went to school, but Lúcia was very depressed and stayed home. She did not work for the first two months, until a Brazilian neighbor started taking Lúcia for housecleaning and she eventually built a good schedule. Her husband helped her with her housecleaning job and worked in pizza delivery with Edilson in the evenings. Alessandra mentions that, while her mother

wanted to return to Brazil, her father wanted to stay in the US, to which Lúcia acquiesced because she was “an obedient wife.”

The family spent three years in Boston, until 2000. According to Lúcia, her husband decided to move to Atlanta because he had gotten very close to a Brazilian pastor who had moved to Georgia and Lúcia, being depressed, went with it. At the time, they knew this and another couple from church in the Marietta area. Alessandra mentioned they were supposed to help this pastor, who had “strong cult leader vibes” - and was later arrested for pedophilia -, build yet another church, this time in the Marietta area. She also added that her father’s boss in Boston offered to start the process for a work visa for him – the same deal that got Edilson his green card - and her father decided to move to Atlanta anyway, believing another such opportunity would come by. Edilson explained his visa offer was a result of a “Bill Clinton law” that came out in 2001, that allowed an American employer to sponsor a visa for any out of status employee. Likely, Edilson was referring to a LIFE Act extension of section 245(i) (see Appendix B: Glossary). By 2005, Edilson had his green card and returned to Brazil for the first time in 11 years. However, 9/11 happened soon after Alessandra’s father declined his own offer in favor of moving to Georgia. After the attack, immigration laws changed in such a way that made it much more difficult for the family to change their migration status. The family first moved to Sandy Springs, then later to Alpharetta (see Figure 3), and finally to Marietta, where Lúcia now lives.

Lúcia talked of their first years in Georgia as really difficult ones, including working as a housecleaner during the day and at a Publix deli in the evenings, until she was able to buy her own housecleaning schedule (see Appendix B: Glossary). Some of the clients Lúcia still works for were from this schedule she first bought. Meanwhile, her husband worked delivering car parts for a dealership. In 2007, Lúcia and her husband separated, and he went

back to Brazil, while she stayed in Georgia with their daughters. In 2014, Lúcia married an American man she met through an online dating site, which allowed her to apply for permanent residency for herself and, once approved, for Alessandra and her sister as well, on the grounds of a hardship waiver. At the time of our interview in 2023, Lúcia lived in Marietta with her second husband and continued to work as a housecleaner, although with a much smaller schedule than before.

For Alessandra, more severe challenges came when she started applying for college, given that most financial aid is restricted to permanent residents and citizens. She was able to attend a private liberal arts school in Atlanta, but suffered for not having a driver's license and having to commute on very limited public transit. Upon graduating, Alessandra went back to helping her mother in housecleaning, because she could not work elsewhere being out of status. After DACA (see Appendix B: Glossary) came out in 2012, Alessandra was able to obtain a work authorization and got a job at a Christian magazine, where she still worked during the 2016 presidential elections. The political climate at her office quickly deteriorated, along with Alessandra's mental health. Such a context prompted Alessandra to start writing poetry and, eventually, pursue an MFA in creative writing. In the last few times we spoke, her visa process was finally close to approval – after years in waiting - and she had returned to the Atlanta area.

Edilson returned from Boston to Goiânia in 2011. He had been feeling alone and depressed in Boston, after his siblings had returned to Brazil and Lúcia had moved to Atlanta. This move was hard on both of them, for Edilson and Lúcia both mentioned feeling alone without each other in their own interviews. Edilson's siblings in Brazil encouraged him to return, seeing he was emotionally distressed. Back in Goiânia, Edilson married and had two children, to whom he passed his US citizenship. Edilson mentioned frequent visits to

Marietta, where he usually finds work in construction with a contractor he knows in the area. Edilson jokingly bragged that, in the last time he'd been in the Marietta area before our interview, he had painted the stairs of the Chick-Fil-A owner's home. At the time of our interview, he was considering moving back to the US with his wife and children, but said he kept going back and forth on this decision, feeling like it was "51-49" between going and not going. Being 54, Edilson stated that work in the US is hard for someone his age and that he knew that in the US he would be in a constant hustle. In contrast, in Goiânia he has his siblings and his freedom, since he invested money he earned in the US in real estate and, at the time, lived off rent income, having plenty of time to spend with his children. His wife too would have to work, if they moved to the US, and they would not have as much time with the children as they did in Goiânia. Zé Fernandes, who stayed in Brazil, worked in hardware sales in 2024. When their father was still alive, he helped take care of him in Goiânia, while his siblings in the US paid for all of their father's health treatments. He also talked about missing his siblings in the US, that when some relative passed away they could not visit, and about the pain of having a "divided family."

10. Dilla (arrived in Marietta area 2003)

I first heard of Dilla, in her 40s, for her organizing role in the first Little Brazil meeting, during my preliminary fieldwork. She is the owner and CEO of *Viver Magazine*, which she bought from Andreia Guillmet in 2010, and president of the Little Brazil Foundation. In 2023, I contacted her through *Viver Magazine's* WhatsApp number and we scheduled an interview online. When I mentioned my interest in her life story, she suggested I listen to her YouTube interviews instead, saying she was tired of telling it over and over. The life story below is from her YouTube interviews as well as our conversation. I mention her

here to contextualize her trajectory in relation to others and the history of the Brazilian community in Marietta.

In Brazil, Dilla lived in the state of Goiás in different towns, but was living in Goiânia before leaving for Atlanta. She had a dairy business that went bankrupt and, even though she had the opportunity to set it up in a different state in Brazil, she decided to move to the US instead, encouraged by friends who already lived in the Marietta area. Dilla moved in 2003 with her family, her husband and two sons who were 5 and 8 at the time, seeking a better quality of life. She explained that she never thought of returning or leaving her sons behind and that, from the beginning, her intention was to make a life in the US.

Upon arriving in Georgia, her first job was in a restaurant in the Sandy Springs area (see Figure 3) and, being a musician, she soon started playing Brazilian music for tips. In 2003, she started collaborating with *Viver Magazine*, writing a column on Brazilian music and culture. In 2004, a friend of hers offered her a job cleaning houses on commission for \$40 a house. Dilla started working in housecleaning on her days off from the restaurant until eventually she filled her entire week and set up her own schedule. In one of her YouTube interviews, she mentions the challenges in housecleaning before there was GPS, noting she would go to the Brazilian stores, including Rosana's *Minas Emporium*, to have directions printed. Any mistakes in following driving instructions – or even unexpected changes, like road construction - could derail or even impede an entire day's work. Dilla also narrates distributing advertisements to people's mailboxes, remembering one time when, having just distributed her business cards through an entire residential community, she got a call from an angry resident telling her to collect them all back, all under pouring rain. In 2010, when Andreia's waxing business was starting to grow, she offered *Viver Magazine* for Dilla to buy, making her the new owner and CEO of the magazine ever since.

11. Fabiana (arrived in Marietta area 2004)

I met Fabiana, 44, in Goiânia, in 2024. I was introduced to her by her husband Cleiton and she later introduced me to her mother, Helena, 68, whom I talked to a few days later. In 2025, I talked to her sister, Débora, who was living in Cumming GA at the time, and whose story is described in further detail below.

Fabiana and Débora's parents were born in the Goiás *interior*. Helena is from Rio Verde, in Goiás, and one of nine siblings. Her father was a farm manager for the same farm for 26 years, until the owner died. Helena and her siblings lived in the city so they could go to school, while her mother and father stayed in the farm, but her father often brought them back to the farm to work. As Helena narrated, she eventually grew tired of moving back and forth and moved to Goiânia on her own. Fabiana and her sister were born and grew up in Goiânia. They also have another sister who never lived in the US. Helena had a job in a multinational mining company in Goiânia for six months, back in the 1970s. She had an American boss who wanted to bring her back with him, but her dad said no. I mention this because it offers another glimpse of the possible transnational connections between Goiânia and the US. After that, she had a government office job. Fabiana and Débora's father, in turn, was a traveling sales man until he opened a garment business and store, where Fabiana worked as a manager before moving to the US.

Fabiana and Cleiton dated in high school until he moved to Atlanta with his family. Years later, in 2004, they reconnected on social media, and Fabiana then decided to leave for Marietta to be with him. At that time, she was 24 and in the last year of college, studying marketing and advertising [publicidade e propaganda] and working in her family's garment business. As Helena narrated, she pleaded with her daughter to wait, finish college, and obtain a tourist visa, but Fabiana was adamant that she needed to go as soon as possible - Fabiana,

Débora, and Helena all describe her decision to leave as a “crazy” thing. And so Fabiana contacted an *atravessador*, took a plane to Mexico City and, from there, it took two weeks for her to reach the border, where crossed into California through Tijuana/San Diego. A man in her *travessia* group, who happened to have the same last name as her, pretended to be her husband to protect her during the journey. They crossed together through the desert and were detained at the border. Fabiana cannot remember for how long she was jailed, but thought it was for about a week. All of their *travessia* group had been detained and moved somewhere else to be deported, and only Fabiana and her “husband” were released into the US. The police officer who took them to a local train station explained they had 30 days in the US in which they had to go and present themselves at court. Jurandir then found some people he knew through church to host Fabiana and her “husband” for a night before they took their plane to Atlanta.

Helena talked about her daughter’s decision to leave as a really hard time for her. Her own mother had just had a stroke and she strongly disagreed with her daughter’s decision to go “illegally.” During the time Fabiana was in Mexico and later when she was detained, Helena could not communicate with her daughter. According to Helena, Fabiana and her *travessia* “husband” were only released from detention because Cleiton was able to pay for their bail. Soon after arriving in Marietta, Fabiana started working as a housecleaning *helper* until some people she knew moved back to Brazil gave her their schedule, about a year and a half after she had arrived in Georgia. Débora moved to the Marietta area soon after that and Fabiana shared her housecleaning schedule with her sister.

In 2011, Fabiana was pregnant with her second daughter. Being out of status, she had a driver’s license from Washington state instead of Georgia. One day, she was driving to work and was stopped by a police officer because of a broken taillight. The office asked her about

her out-of-state license and told her she was past the time for getting a Georgia license, issuing her a fine and thus putting her under obligation for a court date. The lawyer they consulted then mentioned the possibility of her being arrested at court and subsequently deported. Scared of this possibility, Fabiana decided to return to Brazil. With her husband, they decided Cleiton would stay in the US to work and send money back to Brazil. They could not see him working in Goiânia because he had left as a young man, did not know the local labor market, and had his construction business going in Marietta. At the time, they did not have money saved up and, according to Fabiana, were not prepared to move back to Brazil.

Returning to Brazil was tough for her, as she had to move back in with her parents, after having had her own home. Fabiana also narrated having a culture shock in moving back to Brazil. Fabiana's plan was to work, but at the same time she did not want anybody else watching her daughters. She said she tried to work on some things that "didn't work out" in Goiânia and eventually they were able to build some studios for rent, which she managed at the time of our chat. It took Cleiton seven and a half years to be able to obtain a travel permit and go visit her in Brazil for the first time, in 2018. In turn, Fabiana was never able to get a US tourist visa. As Fabiana explained, this period apart was very hard for both of them. Cleiton was alone in Marietta (his parents had already returned) and Fabiana was raising their two daughters on her own. Helena said she does not even like to remember how much Fabiana suffered through this period, but also mentioned how hard it was for Cleiton to stay in Marietta on his own. Even with Cleiton being able to travel back and forth, Helena mentioned Fabiana's difficulty in raising two daughters by herself. Fabiana explained that once Cleiton had obtained his green card, he started the process to obtain US citizenship, which would include their youngest daughter, born in Brazil. Their oldest was born in the US and has US

citizenship already. She was still unsure how things would go for her in terms of being authorized to enter the US again. As of 2024, Fabiana's parents were 73 and 68. Her father continued to work, making garments for her sister Débora's spa business in Goiânia, in addition to driving for Uber. Helena had a social security income from her Brazilian government job and made homemade cookies for sale. Helena and her husband have never been able to go to the US to visit because their tourist visa applications were never approved. Helena wished Fabiana could go back to the US with her daughters, as she believed it would be better for them to grow up there, where education is better.

12. Débora (arrived in Marietta area 2006)

Débora, 41, is Fabiana's sister. Since both Fabiana and Helena had mentioned Débora in their interviews, I asked them for Débora's contact. While we planned to meet at her home in Cumming (see Figure B), she had some scheduling issues and asked to do the interview through a video call, also trying to save me a long drive to Cumming. What is particularly interesting about this story is the contrast between Fabiana and Débora's migration stories: while Fabiana entered the US through the south border and later returned due to immigration enforcement, Débora married a Brazilian man who had a green card and eventually obtained US citizenship.

Débora's husband Rafael is a second cousin on her mother's side. He moved to the US in 1986 and obtained a green card, but declined to get US citizenship at the time because he would have had to revoke his Brazilian citizenship in order to do it. While Rafael was visiting family in Goiânia, he and Débora got reacquainted, fell in love and, in 2003, decided to marry. In contrast to her sister Fabiana, Débora was terrified of "doing anything illegal" and decided she would only move to the US if she got a visa. It took three years for Débora to

obtain a tourist visa to the US, during which time Rafael travelled back and forth between the US and Goiânia. According to Débora, they never thought about Rafael moving to Brazil, because he had moved to the US when he was 18 and would not have had a career in his home country, and Débora also considered she would have more “opportunities” in the US.

In 2006, after obtaining a tourist visa, Débora moved to the Marietta area to be near her sister Fabiana, who was already there. Rafael lived in Arkansas at the time but, as a truck driver, did not mind moving to Georgia. As Débora explained, he had not obtained US citizenship yet because he owed a significant amount to the IRS and had to pay it off before applying for citizenship, so both of their incomes went mostly towards paying this debt, at first. After a few months, an American couple Débora had met at church offered to be her sponsor for an F-1 visa for studying English. While Débora could have applied for a green card through her marriage with Rafael, they decided against it because “the process could take years.” With Rafael as a US citizen, instead, Débora’s own citizenship application was accepted within months.

As soon as she arrived in the Marietta area, Débora started working as a housecleaner with Fabiana. They built a schedule together and worked as a pair for the six years they were both in Georgia, before Fabiana returned to Goiânia. Cleiton also helped them find new clients by recommending their services to his private construction clients. Débora continues to work as a housecleaner in the Atlanta area and she still has clients from when she first arrived, who were Fabiana’s clients first. She declined a job offer for an office job in the US considering she would make less money and be obligated to have a rigid working schedule, instead of the “independence” that housecleaning gives her. At one point, Débora had so many housecleaning clients she tried to start passing houses on commission, but thought it was “too much of a headache” to manage cleaners and clients. In 2025, most of Débora’s houses were

in the same residential community where she lives, so she was able to build herself a very convenient schedule. She also does light housekeeping for two specific clients that take up her Mondays and Tuesdays. Additionally, Débora and Rafael own a trucking company through which Rafael does his truck driving work and manages other drivers as well. They also own a wellness spa in Goiânia, which she sees as their “retirement plan.”

When I asked Débora about her opinion on Trump politics, Débora was emphatic: “I was a Trump voter and I still am.” She said she does not agree with all of his policies and all that he posts on Twitter and other social media. In terms of immigration, she disagreed with deporting tax-paying, hard-working, family-oriented migrants, but thought that course of action was justified in the case of those who “came to do [wrong].” Débora also considered Trump’s policies were economically positive and his first term was when Rafael’s trucking company was most profitable. However, even though she had felt the negative effects of Trump’s economic policies in 2025, she believed there were “for the better” and would pay off in the future.

Débora and Rafael have two US-born sons, of 15 and 9 years of age, living with them in Cumming. While Fabiana has returned to the US, Débora has her in-law’s living in Georgia, Rafael’s mother and brother.

13. Linda (arrived in Marietta area 2007)

Linda, 70, was a panelist at the *Mulheres Empreendedoras* [Entrepreneur women] event at the consulate in 2023, where we met. She agreed to doing an interview and we met at the Brazilian Bakery, in Little Brazil, for a three-hour long conversation. While we sat at the bakery, she greeted and briefly chatted with many people there, in addition to receiving many calls on her phone.

She was born in Rio Branco, capital of the state of Acre, in the Brazilian Amazon region, into a family of four siblings. According to Linda, on her father's side everyone "worked for the government." On her mother's side, Linda has a Portuguese grandfather and a Bolivian Indigenous grandmother. Linda's father worked for the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE, Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics, see Appendix B: Glossary) and also edited and printed his own newspaper. Her mother had a government job in the Instituto Nacional de Seguridade Social (INSS, National Institute of Social Security, see Appendix B: Glossary) from which, according to Linda, she was forcibly retired at age 50 for "being too old."

Linda went to Cuiabá, in the state of Mato Grosso, for college, and majored in language and literature. She is the only one of her siblings with a bachelor's degree. While in Brazil, Linda lived in different cities and states and had a variety of jobs. She was also a single parent to her son. Given her mother's history, when Linda was fired from a job in her late 30s, she felt it was because of her age and that, in Brazil, you cannot get a job once you are past a certain age. She also felt that, in Brazil, no man accepted to marry a woman who was a single parent.

Linda moved to the US in 1986 by herself and said she "would [have done] anything not to become illegal." At the time, her son was a teenager and stayed in Brazil with her mother. Upon arriving, Linda worked in housecleaning, saying she would dress well, all in white, and make sure she had a "good appearance" when she went cleaning. Linda married an Italian-American man three years after she arrived. It took her four years to be able to go back to Brazil to visit her son. As soon as she was able, she started traveling home frequently and initiated the process for her son's green card. With time, Linda became a real estate agent. She wanted to change professions but thought that attending college in the US would be too

expensive. Her husband had a real estate certificate, and knew there was demand from the Brazilian community in Boston for an agent who spoke Portuguese. So Linda got the real estate certificate, one of if not the first Brazilian real estate agents in Boston, and worked together with her husband. The couple, however, was hit hard by the 2008 crisis, which started affecting their business in 2005, according to Linda.

They moved together from Boston to Georgia in 2007. Linda's husband always said he wanted to leave Boston because of the cold. The 2008 crisis was their opportunity to move because business was slow and, as Linda reasoned, it is harder to move when things are going well. They tried Florida first, but did not like it. She had clients from Boston who had moved to the Marietta area who invited them to go visit and see if they liked it. The couple had enough money saved up so they were okay with taking their time to find a new place to live. Upon arriving in Marietta, Linda was hired by the Bank of America branch because they needed someone who could speak Portuguese, where she worked until 2014.

In Marietta, in 2023, she had many Brazilian and Mexican clients, mostly working in housecleaning and construction, as she specialized in first-time home-buyers. She also considered herself to be semi-retired at that point. Before her mother passed away, Linda wanted for her to move to the US, but her mother did not want to, as she thought Boston was too cold, also she had a good life in Brazil, with community and neighborhood friends. Her son now lives with his wife and children in Marietta. He went to the US by himself at first, did not like it and returned to Brazil. Eventually, he got married in Brazil and moved back to the US with his wife, in 2019. Their daughter, Linda's granddaughter, was born in 2021.

14. Juliana (arrived in Marietta area 2014)

Juliana, 32, was another manicure client of Juçara's, who introduced us and facilitated the connection. Juliana wanted to save me a trip to Kennesaw (see Figure 3), where she lived, so she suggested we meet in Marietta after her manicure appointment with Juçara. We met at the Brazilian Bakery for coffee and conversation. I contacted Juliana in 2024 and she tried putting me in touch with her sister, but she was too busy to meet with me while I was in Goiânia. In 2025, I met with Juliana again, while she was pregnant with her third child and had stopped working.

At the time we talked, Juliana's parents lived in Goiânia. Her mother was working a government job and her father owned a company that installs tents and awnings. Her husband's parents were both retired. Before moving to the US in 2014 at age 23, Juliana lived in Goiânia. She had just majored in marketing and advertisement [publicidade e propaganda], an area that she did not like. Juliana worked as a receptionist in an advertising agency, but did not have a career in Brazil because she left right after graduating. Her then boyfriend, now her husband, worked for a loan agency and did not like his job either. In his free time, he played video games with a Brazilian man who lived in the Marietta area. They had never met in person, but he encouraged Juliana's husband to move to the US. The couple wanted to get married but did not make enough money to have their own home and, at the time, they both lived with their respective parents in Goiânia. As Juliana explained, they wanted to move to the US not because of "purchasing power," but because of quality of life and opportunities, since in Brazil it takes much longer to "advance." When I asked her what she meant by "advancing," she listed: having quality of life, being able to go on a good vacation trip after working hard all year, saving for retirement.

Juliana estimated it took three months between deciding and actually moving to the US. They got married and left for the US within five or six days. The couple went directly to Kennesaw to stay with her husband's video game friend. They stayed with him for a month, until they were able to rent their own apartment in Marietta. The video game friend took her husband to work with him in wood flooring and his wife took Juliana to work with her in housecleaning. In 2023, they both continued to work in these areas. In 2025, Juliana's husband continued to work in wood flooring, while she had quit housecleaning due to her pregnancy. She intended to stay home with the baby rather than going back to work immediately. In the US, they had two daughters, who were 5 and 7 in 2023, and with time they moved from the Marietta apartment to a town house and from there to a house in Kennesaw, where they continued to live in 2025. Juliana did not talk about her migration status and I did not press her. In my experience, people talked about it quite freely when they felt comfortable doing so. From our conversation, I understood they had entered on a tourist visa and overstayed it.

15. Juçara and Danilo (arrived in Marietta area 2015)

I knew Juçara, 31, and Danilo, 53, from Bençãos Church, but it was Érika who suggested them as research participants, because she thought it would be “really interesting” for me to interview someone who “was illegal.” On the day I interviewed Érika, she left soon afterwards to go get her nails done with Juçara and thus facilitated our connection. Juçara was also one of the singers in the Bençãos Church band, alongside Elimar, Érika's husband. I interviewed Juçara and Danilo at their place in the evening. I talked to Juçara first and, once we finished talking, she went to make dinner while I talked with Danilo. After I got to know

them, we always chatted for a while when I attended Benções Church and, in particular, I enjoyed talking with their 7-year-old, Silmara, who took a liking to me.

Before moving to the US, Juçara and Danilo lived in São Gonçalo, a neighboring town to Rio de Janeiro. Juçara finished high school and afterwards started an associate's degree in teaching, but quit studying when she got pregnant with Danilo Jr., the couple's first child. When they were first married, Danilo was unemployed and occasionally worked as a motorcycle taxi. They started a business selling sausages to restaurants and later expanded into peeled garlic. At first, they peeled garlic by hand, until they found a machine that could do it for them and sold a house Danilo owned so they could afford it. Juçara had never thought of moving to the US. It was her husband, Danilo, who first suggested it. He had lived in Portugal for some time and knew people in Florida, who encouraged him to move. Danilo said he thought about moving to the US since 2001, but then 9/11 happened and it was much more difficult. Danilo mentioned, as his motivations, urban violence in Rio de Janeiro, as well as being able to "conquer things" in the US, referring to higher purchasing power than in Brazil. Danilo also said that the decision to go was based on God, and that they considered God wanted them to move to the US. By chance, they met a lady in São Gonçalo who had lived in Florida and whose daughter was still there, in Port St. Lucie. That, and certainty in God's will, ignited the plan to move to the US. They decided they would try applying for a tourist visa and "see what happened," but from the start their intention was to stay in the US on a permanent basis. They never considered moving without Danilo Jr., who was four at the time. Juçara also said they never invested in Brazil because they do not consider the possibility of returning.

In 2015, Juçara, Danilo, and Danilo Jr. entered the US on tourist visas and went to Port St. Lucie in Florida to stay with the daughter of the lady they had met in São Gonçalo. At

the time, Juçara was 23, Danilo was in his 40s, and Danilo Jr. was four. Before leaving, they sold everything they could in Brazil, which amounted to \$4,000. Danilo later understood that it was a very small amount of money to move to the US with, and described many struggles from not having that initial capital for buying a car, renting an apartment, and other necessities. In 2023, he considered he “couldn’t pay one month’s expenses with \$4k.” Three days after they arrived in Florida, Juçara found out she was pregnant with Silmara. She had already worked as a manicure in Brazil and, being pregnant, thought that was a better job option for her than housecleaning. In Florida, they joined the Assembly of God church, which they knew from Brazil. They first went to Marietta because of an Assembly of God event, two or three months after they had arrived. Things were not going so well for them in Florida, so a couple from church hosted them at their Marietta home for 30 days so they could get to know Georgia and decide if they wanted to stay or not. The couple liked Marietta and decided to stay, so Silmara was born in Georgia.

Juçara talked about how little information they had when they first arrived in Florida. While still within the first six months of their tourist visa, they had an offer from a pastor who said he could help them obtain a “religious visa,” but they would have to get an extension on their tourist visa first. Juçara said they used “the only money [they] had,” got the extension, but then the pastor never applied for this “religious visa” for them. Juçara remembered how that broken promise really derailed their life for a while, as they were almost evicted due to not paying their rent because all their money went into the visa extension process. “If we were going to become illegal anyway,” said Juçara, the money that went into the tourist visa extension would have been better spent elsewhere.

Moving to Marietta, Juçara continued to work as a manicurist until she was nine months pregnant. Through the church, Juçara says it was quite easy to build a client roster.

Danilo went to work in construction with people from church. However, when they decided to start attending a different church, Danilo got in trouble at work, because he had only worked with people from the church they'd just left. Danilo then went to work in demolition with *hispanos*. Working in demolition helped Danilo understand the construction business in the US and eventually move to working as an electrician and plumber, which was what he wanted to do. He had a first opportunity to fix the work of another electrician for a Brazilian client, and from there he started getting recommendations and working in this area, in which he continued to work in 2023.

When Silmara was one, they moved back to Florida. But then Danilo started getting work in Georgia and drove back and forth, while Juçara stayed in Florida with their children. So they decided to move back to Marietta, but hauling was a lot more expensive from Florida to Georgia than what they had paid to bring their things. So Danilo spent months slowly moving their things from Florida back to Georgia. Juçara said they expected they would have to start from zero again, professionally speaking, but it was not so: her husband had the work connections he had built and Juçara's clients went back to her once she returned to Marietta. The couple joined Bençãos Church in 2020 and were able to buy a home in 2022.

Both Juçara and Danilo have family in Brazil, especially in São Gonçalo. Juçara has her mother and siblings. Danilo has siblings and niblings, two daughters from a previous marriage and two granddaughters. Another of his daughters, Juçara's stepdaughter, moved to Marietta with her husband and so Danilo has two granddaughters in Georgia. Juçara says she would not move back today because of urban violence in the São Gonçalo area.

16. Isadora and Kiko (lived in Marietta area 2017-2019; moved back in 2023)

I was introduced to Kiko in 2023 by Emerson from Renascer Church. I met his wife Isadora and son Douglas when I first went to their apartment for our interview. I went back to interview Isadora and then a few more times in 2023 to pick up cakes and desserts I ordered from her. As described in detail below, Kiko and Isadora lived in the Marietta area for two years, between 2017 and 2019, when they had their son Douglas, and returned to Brazil. In 2023, when I met them, they had just returned to Georgia with the goal of staying permanently. In 2025, I texted Isadora to check up on her and she told me she was pregnant and they had moved to a house in Marietta.

Kiko is from the state of Bahia, in northeastern Brazil, and Isadora is from Ibimirim, a small town in the Pernambuco *interior*. They met after Kiko relocated to Isadora's hometown for a job. Isadora's mother worked as a public school teacher and has bachelor's and graduate degrees. In 2023, Isadora's mother was about to retire on government social security. Isadora finished high school and Kiko has a degree in nursing. In 2017, Kiko and Isadora were already married. She was unemployed and he had just been fired from his job at the time. So they decided to try for a tourist visa to the US and, once approved, prepared to move.

They moved to Massachusetts at first, in 2017, but they did not like it there. They did not know anyone in the Boston area, but Kiko had contact with people who hired him for demolition work as soon as he arrived. Meanwhile, Isadora tried but struggled to find housecleaning work. A friend of Isadora's mother, who lived in the Marietta area, suggested they move there, stating there was work and it was a good place to live, so they relocated to Georgia. Once there, Kiko found work in the wood area of construction (wood floors, sideboards, shiplap etc.). In that period, he was able to learn the trade and make installations

by himself, working for a Brazilian subcontractor. Isadora worked in housecleaning as a *helper* and says that she “had work every day.” At first, they rented a room from a Brazilian couple from the state of Paraná. Isadora was feeling depressed and went back to Brazil for a month, where she spent time with her father, who was ill and passed away soon after she returned to Marietta. While Isadora was away, the Paraná couple had Kiko help them move to a house and then kicked him out, so he rented another room, this time from a *goiana* landlord. When Isadora returned, this landlord tried to extort them, asking for double the rent. They left immediately and a co-worker of Kiko’s offered them a bedroom in his house.

Isadora wanted to go back to Brazil, because did not like the US and felt lonely and missed her family. But they found out she was pregnant with Douglas and they stayed so their son could be born in the US. When Isadora was pregnant, they wanted to try California, based on another friend’s invitation. Once they got there, this friend rented them one of his sons’ bedroom and suggested to Kiko that he drive for Uber using his account. Isadora was strongly against it and they immediately returned to Marietta. However, their friend who rented them a room had found another roommate, so they had to find somewhere else to live. Kiko was able to return to his job in the wood area of construction because he did not tell his boss he was leaving for California, only that he wanted to take a week off. The pastor at the church they congregated in at the time helped them find another room to rent, this time from a couple who happened to be from the same area in Brazil as Isadora and Kiko. They lived there until Douglas was born and returned to Brazil soon after, in 2019. Between 2017 and 2019, they were able to get two extensions on their tourist visas. They had applied for a student visa, but returned to Brazil before getting a reply. Once they got there, they had the visa approval, but it was not possible to go back.

They moved back to Isadora's hometown of Ibimirim and Kiko took up a job as nursing coordinator at a local hospital. He was on leave for the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 but had to go back into the hospital in 2021, when he coordinated a Covid response center. Being in a small town administration, however, brought serious pressure onto Kiko, who was being accused of stealing public funds. In 2023, they decided to return to Marietta because of these issues in Kiko's job and "the financial question." Kiko added that, even though they made good money, it "still was little." They also wanted their son to have better opportunities, being a US citizen, and have access to better healthcare and education, even if Isadora and Kiko themselves do not have access to healthcare in the US. Kiko also feels it's better for Douglas to grow up in the US because there's less urban violence and he can learn English and other languages.

In 2023, Isadora and Kiko also talked about their foster daughter that stayed in Brazil, who they wanted to come live in the US with them, although they had not legally adopted her yet. She also had health issues that needed to be stabilized for her to be able to go live with them in Marietta. They want to give her the same opportunities they want to give Douglas. Their main complaints, having returned to the US, were about inflation rates and not having much work available. This time around, they started attending Renascer Church on the invitation of a pastor they knew from their first time.

Kiko tried to go back to working in the wood area of construction, the specific construction industry he'd worked in before, but there was not much work available. He was able to find a job as oiler through his friend of his mother-in-law's, who still lived in Marietta and owned a company with her American husband. Isadora was having a hard time finding work in 2023. She was trying to find work as a housecleaning *helper* and as a nanny, but had not been able to find stable employment. She was also making cakes and desserts for sale to

supplement income. They entered the US on a tourist visa, again, and planned to apply for an F-1 visa for Isadora to study English. Kiko's plan was to validate his nursing degree in the US and try to get an EB-1 or EB-2 visa to work as a nurse. Both of them mentioned several times they did not want to "become illegal" under any circumstance.

17. Edna and Leal (arrived in Marietta area 2018)

I first met Edna and Leal at a party in her sister Érika's home, soon after I'd arrived in Marietta in August 2023. Afterwards, I met them frequently at Bençãos Church services. I interviewed both of them at their house on separate occasions. For Edna's interview, we talked on their back porch, since her father-in-law (who was visiting) and oldest son André were watching a Brazilian soccer game on TV. While we chatted, her youngest, João, interrupted us a few times. For Leal's interview, he was very late coming home from work. I arrived before him, so while I waited, I hung out with Edna in her kitchen while she made and served dinner to both her sons (a *Brazilian* dinner: rice, beans, chicken stew, chicken gizzards, mashed potatoes, salad, *farofa*), and helped João with his homework. Once Leal arrived, she also served dinner for us - I do not know if I can remember the last time I had been served dinner without helping out. It must be nice to be a man. After serving us dinner, Edna started baking a cake for her informal business of made-to-order cakes and was around for much of Leal's interview.

In 2025, they were involved in planting the Espírito Santo Church in Atlanta. I met them frequently then too and went to several church and private events at their home. Edna also invited me over for dinner and made chicken gizzards especially for me, because I had told her how much I love them.

Edna and Leal are from São Gonçalo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Leal's mother, who I met when she was visiting Marietta in 2025, is a public school teacher in São Gonçalo. Adriana, Edna's cousin, said of Edna's father, "he's an Indian, really Indian, from the *aldeia* [Indigenous community]." Edna has a trade degree in nursing [técnico de enfermagem] and a bachelor's degree in psychology. In turn, Leal has an engineer's degree, an MBA, and was doing an online Master's in Divinity through a Brazilian university in 2023.

When they lived in Brazil, Leal worked in logistics and managed a supplies department. However, he lost his job in 2014 and seriously struggled to find another one. At the time, there was a serious economic and political crisis in Brazil. Leal estimated that, after being laid off, he made between 1500 to 2000 work contacts in a year and a half, between applying for jobs, reaching out to people, and uploading his résumé to job platforms, and was only invited for two interviews. He started feeling desperate and began thinking about moving to the US. Edna narrated it differently: briefly mentioning her husband's unemployment, Edna explained that she understood that God wanted them to go to the US. To Edna, her life in São Gonçalo was perfect, where she stayed home, was active in their church, and lived near their family. She described her good life in São Gonçalo as "I was a *madame* [rich lady], I did not buy one dress, I bought three." But God spoke not only to them but to other people in their family, like Leal's mother Cidinha. A congregant from their church in Brazil had a nephew in Boston, so they got in touch with him. In their explanation of what made them decide to move to the US, Leal mentioned God and Edna mentioned Leal's unemployment, but each of them focused on a very different aspect of their motivations in their respective narratives. Leal had already been in Boston for an English course, so before they moved permanently the couple went to Boston for a week so that Edna could see it.

Edna and Leal moved to Boston in 2016 with their son André, who was 10 years old at the time, and entered the US on a tourist visa. Edna was six months pregnant with their second son, João. Edna stated they had a “considerable” amount of money after selling everything they had in Brazil, two land properties, a car, and a motorcycle, although they kept their house. Upon arriving in Boston, Leal went to work in construction, while Edna stayed home pregnant. Edna also attended two churches, one during the day and another in the evening. In describing their first months in Boston, Edna narrated that even though Leal worked multiple jobs, their money was quickly running out, including the small capital they brought from Brazil. After João was born, Edna’s cousin Adriana visited for 15 days, since Érika could not get a visa at the time. João had a serious health issue and was in hospital for several months after he was born. That was a really challenging time for Edna and Leal, with Leal working hard on multiple jobs all day long, Edna staying with João in the hospital all day, and their older son André was being cared for by other people, whom they hardly knew. Both congregations that Edna attended were mobilized to help them and watch André. Even though Leal worked hard, they still struggled to make rent and frequently received cash and other donations from their church networks. João continued to have further health issues and eventually had a tracheostomy to help him breathe. Edna and Leal did not trust anyone else to stay with him and so Edna did not work, except when her mother visited and stayed with João herself.

During this period, said Edna, they considered returning to Brazil quite often, but they stayed in the US because they were sure God wanted them to. So they started looking for places where living costs were cheaper. They knew a couple who had moved from Boston to Georgia who told them how things were over there, and they decided they would give it a try. The couple moved to the Marietta area in 2018, less than two years after João was born. As

Edna narrated, they had had so little money in Boston that Leal borrowed money in Brazil to finance their move down south. After their move to Marietta, their life became more stable and they were able to make ends meet more easily. Ahead of moving to Georgia, Edna contacted Bençãos Church, who said they would be welcome in the congregation.

In Marietta, Leal went to work in construction and, with time, went from *helper* to self-employed in cabinetry and found stable employment as a subcontractor for an American company. In 2023, as Edna told me, she did some work in housecleaning and baked cakes for sale, but mostly she took care of the home, her sons, and volunteered for the church. She said her and Leal never went into “this work craze” of trying to make as much money as possible, and that her only motivation to stay in the US is “obedience to God.” Still, Leal thought frequently about returning to Brazil, struggled to accept being in the US, and planned his life in Brazil but not in the US. To Leal, his motivation for staying in the US during this period was the fear of returning and things getting worse, feeling scared of urban violence and unemployment. He also continued to believe in God’s purpose for them in the US. Still, he constantly applied for jobs in Brazil and, at one point, it even seemed like a position would work out for him and they got ready to return, but it eventually fell through. He said his mind started to change in 2020, through many conversations with his wife, and with Érika and her husband Elimar, and later Adriana, Oliveira, and Diogo moving to Marietta as well.

In Boston, when Edna and Leal first arrived, people told them there was “no problem” in “becoming illegal,” since in Massachusetts undocumented migrants have the same rights as US citizens. They trusted what they heard and did not look for any ways to keep their migration status. Only in Marietta, through Bençãos Church people, did they learn of options they could have pursued in order to “stay legal.” In 2023, both Edna and Leal mentioned being uncomfortable with being out of status, feeling like they were “hurting” the

country and feeling imprisoned [preso] for not being allowed to travel outside the US - not so much because they were afraid of detention or deportation. They continued to hope that some law change will allow them to get their document. Edna even joked that, at first, they could get the document when João was 16, then it was 18, then it was 21, and maybe they would be able to get it when João turned 30. In 2020, they had strong expectations over a proposed law allowing out of status migrant essential workers, which was almost sanctioned but ultimately overturned. Leal's parents and siblings continue to live in São Gonçalo, and his parents and sister visit Marietta frequently. Edna's mother passed away after she'd moved to the US, while her father also continues to live in São Gonçalo and visits the family often.

18. Vanusa and Gustavo (arrived in Marietta area 2018)

I was introduced to Vanusa's husband, Sandro, in his 50s, through Kiko. They had met when Kiko and Isadora first lived in Marietta. In 2023, Sandro was working in granite, frequently out of state, and we struggled to find a time to chat. So he suggested I interview his wife Vanusa, 47, and his son Gustavo, 18. The evening I went to their place to interview mother and son, Vanusa asked for me to stay until Sandro got home from work so we could meet in person, which was after 10pm. A few days later, he contacted me with a request. Vanusa mentioned he had been offered a new job, for which he needed a new driver's license. Being out of status, however, he could only get it from WA state. Knowing I lived in Seattle, Sandro asked if I could help him find someone with an address in the area that he could use for his driver's license and who would mail him the license once it arrived. He knew someone who offered this "service," but charged \$2,000 for it. I did not have a WA state address at the time and none of my Seattle friends felt comfortable using their own address; I told Sandro as

much and he replied all was well and that he had found someone who charged \$800 for their WA state address.

Vanusa – Van to her friends – lived in Natal, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Norte with her husband and son before the family moved together to the US. Van has a bachelor's degree in Education. Sandro started business school but did not finish. Van's father was in the Brazilian military. As she narrated, he always told her that she did not need to worry because, when he died, his military pension would go to his wife and, after her passing, to his five daughters. Van and Sandro met at a Baptist church in Natal, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, in 1998 and married in 2000. They had always had a shared dream of moving to the US. They first tried for a US tourist visa right after they married, but it was denied. They continued their life in Brazil, had their son, and bought a house. She worked as an elementary private school teacher and Sandro as a supermarket supplier, delivering products to a variety of grocery stores.

Around 2017, Sandro had a bad turn at work and started struggling to find employment. Van supported the family on her own, also making cakes and desserts for sale to increase their income. Her parents also helped them with money and groceries. This situation seriously impacted Van's health, who became depressed and had alopecia. That's when they "started dreaming about the US again," saved money, and applied for a tourist visa again. Van said she was dumbstruck that it was actually approved this time around. While Gustavo was still young, they never considered moving without him. Gustavo said that he was too young at the time and did not understand much why his parents wanted to leave, but knew it was because of work, being able to support the family, "that stuff." In preparation to moving to the US, the couple sold everything they had so they could bring money with them, at least \$5,000.

The family moved to the US in 2018, when Gustavo was 13. They had friends in Florida and South Carolina and considered both states, but another friend from Brazil invited them to Marietta, saying it was good and there was work. At first, they stayed with this friend for two months. This same friend told them that going for a tourist visa extension or a student visa was too much pain for little gain, that they would be fine going out of status, so they did. Van started working as a housecleaning *helper*, until a friend suggested she tried applying for a job at a Brazilian daycare, where she started in 2021. Van continued to work there in 2023. For a while, she decided to go back into housecleaning, thinking she'd be able to earn more, but after six months decided to return to the daycare.

Gustavo went to school as soon as he arrived, had recently graduated high school when we talked, and was working at a local Chick-Fil-A branch. He started there when still in high school and had been there for a year. He had no plans of going to college, but wanted to do “online stuff” for work, including online sales, investing, and “maybe a YouTube channel.” Gustavo had no intention of going into his father’s line of work in construction. He would love to be able to go back to Brazil to visit his family there, but would not want to live there, because in the US he “has more opportunities.” When asked about what these opportunities were, he mentioned the “online sector” and how easy it was for him to find his Chick-Fil-A job, which he imagines would have been much harder in Brazil. They had been going to Renascer for three years. Van was a singer and Sandro a bassist in the church band.

Van’s father had passed away before she left and her mother passed when Van was already in the US. Gustavo remembered his many uncles, aunts, and cousins in Brazil, although he barely stayed in touch with them.

19. Érika (arrived in Marietta area 2019)

Walter introduced me to Érika, 40, the first time I was at Bençãos Church, in March 2023. When I returned in August that same year, I texted Érika, who invited me to a dinner party at her home. There, I was introduced to her husband Elimar, her sister Edna, Leal, her cousins Adriana and Taynara, and other family and friends. That evening, she also sent me add links for several Brazilian WhatsApp groups in the Marietta area. I returned to her apartment one Saturday morning, when her husband Elimar was out and she was taking care of their son Bruno, affectionately called Bê. As we talked, she made his lunch, fed him, organized childcare for him for the afternoon, and got him packed up and ready to leave. Additionally, we always chatted when I went to Bençãos Church.

In 2025, when I let Érika know I was back in Marietta, she invited me over for Biblical study at her place. That is when I learned that a group of people had left Bençãos Church and were now planting a new church, Espírito Santo, affiliated with a Brazilian church from Florida. We met pretty regularly then as well at church events as well as private gatherings.

Before moving to the US, Érika and her husband Elimar lived together in São Gonçalo (Rio de Janeiro). She mentioned her family is from João Pessoa, the capital of the state of Paraíba. Érika had been working for a fashion company for 10 years, had a stable job with good benefits, was going to college, and had a very comfortable life. She also lived close to family, saying she has a big family in Brazil, including 15 uncles and aunts and 40 first cousins. Érika had been to the US three times to visit Edna and Leal and “fell in love” with the US, citing as reasons that the asphalt is good, the city is clean, and things are easy to buy. In her last short visit, she brought Elimar, who also “fell in love.” So they planned and moved to Marietta within a year. As Érika explained, “in the material world,” she wanted to “run

away from Brazil,” from “the chaos of São Gonçalo:” too many people, urban violence, drug trafficking. In “the spiritual world,” the Lord told her it was her time to go. Érika says she wanted “a better life” and a “better future for her children.”

Érika and Elimar sold everything they had in São Gonçalo and moved to Marietta in 2019. They entered with the tourist visas they already had. Eventually, Érika changed to a student visa for an English class. Érika immediately started working as a housecleaning *helper* with a congregation sister from Bençãos Church, which she joined upon arriving. In 2023, in addition to working all day and volunteering with the church, Érika went to English classes for four hours in the evenings. Her dream was to be able to quit working and stay home with Bruno. Elimar also started working as soon as they arrived, with house painting. He had the same employer for four years until he was able to become self-employed and take his own painting jobs. They had their son Bruno in the US in 2021. In 2025, Érika told me she was working fewer days in the week and spending more time with Bruno at home. Their EB-3 process was still pending and she was frustrated at having to renew her student visa, which meant she would have to find a new sponsor, pay new fees, and find a new school.

20. Creusa (arrived in Marietta area 2021)

I was introduced to Creusa, who was in her forties, by Emerson from Renascer Church. It took a while for us to be able to set up an interview, which later I understood had to do with the hardship she was facing, as described below. We met at her place, right after she’d finished a housecleaning shift.

Creusa is from the Goiás countryside and lived in Goiânia before moving to Marietta. She has three daughters: a 23 year-old and 11 year-old twins, as of 2023. The twins’ father passed away and she was raising them by herself. Creusa first moved to Goiânia on her

own to work as a live-in domestic worker. As she narrated, when her oldest daughter was 5 years old, Creusa was living with her parents, her daughter, and two nephews in Goiânia. Her father had a stroke and he could not work anymore, so he felt depressed and killed her mother and two nephews. After that, her father passed away, too. Eventually, all of Creusa's siblings moved from the countryside to Goiânia, except for one sister.

Before deciding to move to the US, Creusa worked as a seamstress and also had a stall in a garment street market. She was encouraged to move to Marietta by a friend from Brazil, who is godmother to the twins and had moved to Georgia years before. This friend had invited her before, but the Covid-19 pandemic happened and it was difficult to come to the US for a while. As Creusa explained, this friend had had cancer and, after she recovered, wanted to put together her own housecleaning schedule, so she encouraged Creusa to move to Marietta and work for her. Creusa had some land in Goiânia with nothing on it, so she changed its documents to say there were apartments for rent on this piece of land to facilitate her visa approval. This friend who had invited Creusa also made money transfers to her bank account in Brazil, so it would seem as though Creusa had more money, which would also strengthen her visa case. Creusa never considered moving without the twins. Her 23- year-old stayed in Brazil with her husband, but has been able to visit Creusa and her sisters in the US once.

Creusa was able to get a tourist visa for herself and her girls, and they moved together to Marietta in 2021. They went to live with this friend of Creusa's, for whom she also worked for a year and a half. Creusa and the twins lived in this friend's basement, which Creusa helped renovate, paying around \$10,000 on construction materials and appliances. The twins did not adapt well and had troubles at school. At school, they only studied with white Americans and would come home saying they wanted to be white and blond with blue eyes,

which they never had before – Creusa and her daughters have dark skin and black, curly hair. The twins also struggled to adjust to English. Additionally, their godmother constantly chastised them at home. Creusa thought it all contributed to them acting out and being “rebellious.” Creusa’s friend “was illegal” so at first she thought that, with the girls giving so much trouble at school, someone would come and visit the house. Thus, the friend thought it was risky having them there and started telling Creusa they needed to move out. In the meantime, the friend invited another couple from Brazil to move to Marietta and work for her, which caused Creusa’s income to drop significantly, because her work was now divided by three. Then, Creusa’s friend bought a marriage to obtain her document and again said the girls could make trouble for her. At first she suggested to Creusa that she send t the girls back to Brazil and stay there working, but when Creusa refused, she again asked them to move out. Creusa’s friend even called Creusa’s sister in Brazil to demand she go to the US to “pick up the girls and bring them back,” because they could not live at her house anymore. Creusa refused and told me never considered sending the girls back to Brazil. Creusa also decided to stop working for this friend when she was asked to leave, and had been cleaning houses with other people for about four months when we met.

This entire situation had Creusa depressive, and she was always crying. Creusa says she could not go back to Brazil because she had sold everything and spent all her money to move to the US. In this time, Creusa’s boyfriend arrived from Brazil and moved into the basement with her and the twins. It took him a while to be able to move because he could not get a tourist visa and had to go on the *travessia* and enter through the US southern border. He found work in construction, but was frequently traveling out of state for his job. Creusa really struggled to find a place to live and continued staying at this friend’s basement for another three months, “being humiliated,” trying to rent an apartment. At last she was able to find her

own place, just a month before our interview. When Creusa moved, the twins started attending another school, where they have a lot more Brazilian colleagues and where they had been able to make friends.

Creusa's plans, as of 2023, were to stay for "around five years" and return to Brazil, although she did not think her girls would want to go back by then and she would need to have some job prospects in Brazil to return, as well. When we talked, Creusa was not attending Renascer anymore because she could not attend service on Sunday mornings, so she moved to another church where service times suited her schedule better. Creusa also mentioned that the pastor at this new church, a woman, had welcomed and given a lot of support to her and the twins.

21. Pedro (arrived in Marietta area 2021)

Since my fieldwork preparation in early 2023, I have been in the  *Brasileiras em ATL* [Brazilian women in Atlanta] WhatsApp group. In 2025, I texted the WhatsApp group inviting people to be interviewed. Natália, in her sixties, was the only one who responded. Her son went to college in the US and settled in Atlanta, so she visits frequently but never actually moved to the US. For that reason, I have not included her life story, but her interview is interesting nonetheless as it counters many of the narratives and imaginaries around life in the US, as Natália described the many reasons why she would never want to live in the country. Additionally, she introduced me to Pedro, 65, a friend of hers from Brazil who loved living in Marietta. The day I had arranged with Pedro to meet him in his home in the evening, I went to a church food bank well-known among the Brazilian community in the area. By chance, I met Natália and Pedro there. Later that evening, I met Pedro at his apartment, and by way of a greeting he mentioned how upset he was that Jair Bolsonaro was put on an ankle monitor.

Pedro said he dreamed of living in the US since he was 16. He finished high school and did not go to college, but “took many courses.” He’s from São Paulo City and lived in Jundiaí, in São Paulo state’s *interior*. He has a 7 year-old son, Enzo, who continued to live in Brazil with his mother. In Brazil, Pedro had a construction company that worked exclusively with silicone installation for over 25 years. He worked with an American silicone company and, when Chinese silicone entered the Brazilian market, around 2004 or 2005, his company took a first hit. In 2021, he had a severe health issue and went through surgery. When he went back to work, his clients had hired other companies, claiming his “teams” were not working properly without his supervision. With these contracts cancelled, Pedro had to sell his company and assets in order to be able to pay his employees for the work they had done. Additionally, he had separated from his ex-wife, Enzo’s mother. That’s when he decided he would give the US a try.

Pedro loved “America” and had no desire to go back to Brazil. Sees the US as a country with freedom of speech, as opposed to Brazil, where “you could get arrested” for going against the government [sic], where living conditions are better, in Brazil if you do well you survive, in the US if you do well, you live. He mentioned the food bank we had met at, mentioned other donations, how wonderful they are compared to donations you get in Brazil even though, given his social standing in Brazil, I suspect he would not have sought or accepted donations while living there.

Pedro arrived in Miami in 2021, on a tourist visa he already had, encouraged by a Brazilian friend who promised to help him, but the man “didn’t even pick [him] up at the airport.” Not knowing what to do, Pedro went to a hostel in Fort Lauderdale. His brother-in-law in Brazil then put him in touch with a couple in Marietta who said they could host him and help him out if he wanted to go to Georgia. Arriving in the Marietta area, Pedro went to

work in construction, but it was hard on him because of his age and because he had never done much manual labor before. Soon, someone mentioned to him a carwash with Brazilian owners in the Atlanta airport where Pedro could find a job and he started working there. However, his employers there were “abusive” and “exploitative,” frequently practicing wage theft.

Meanwhile, Pedro got an extension on his tourist visa and soon afterwards applied for asylum, on the grounds of an attempted kidnapping he suffered in São Paulo in which he was shot five times. Within six months of his asylum application, he got a work permit and a social security number, and was able to get a Georgia state driver’s license, which substituted the New Jersey one he got previously. So he quit the carwash and started driving for Uber and Lyft. His next step was to upgrade to a new car so he could start driving as an Uber Black. His asylum case was set to be judged in 2029. He said he could not visit Brazil because the argument of his asylum case is that he is at life risk in Brazil from his would-be kidnappers. Pedro sent child support back to his son in Brazil, but had not seen him in person since he left in 2021. He planned to bring his son to live with him in the US when his son turned 10, so Enzo could have “more opportunities for work and studies.”

22. Bruna and Claudinei (arrived in Marietta area 2022)

I was introduced to Claudinei, 50, by Emerson from Renascer Church in 2023. I arranged an interview with him at his apartment and, upon arriving, his wife Bruna, 45, joined us too, so I ended up interviewing them together. After we were done, we had supper together with their son Marcelo, 16.

Bruna’s and Claudinei’s parents were rural workers. Bruna is from the Goiás countryside. Born in the *roça* [farm], where her father grew pineapples, she was one of six

siblings. Her mother passed away a year before they left for the US. Claudinei is from Goiás and his family moved around through different states, always working in farms and agriculture. Claudinei lived in the city with an aunt so he could study. He tried to go to college in Goiânia, but had to work, so gave up studying. Before moving to the US, Bruna and Claudinei lived in Goiânia with Marcelo. Bruna had been working in her sister's grocery store, after working as a seamstress for years. In turn, Claudinei had been working in the same sales company for 15 years, where had an administrative job. Even though they both worked, Claudinei said they could never make ends meet at the end of the month. They paid for a private school for their son but other than that could never save any money. The couple had friends from Brazil living in Marietta who always encouraged them to move, until they decided to go in 2022, when they felt Brazil's "situation wasn't very good." Their motivation to move to Marietta was mainly financial. As Claudinei explained, their income in Brazil was low while living costs were high, the wages they had did not allow them to make any plans. They also wanted to give their son "a better life," and Bruna said they moved thinking more of him than themselves. In Brazil, they would not be able to afford a good university for him. The family applied for a tourist visa that was denied, but their friend in Marietta who encouraged them to go on the *travessia*. They got an *atravessador's* contact from this friend, who had done the *travessia* with them. It cost R\$100,000 (approximately \$20,000) for the three of them.

They took a plane to São Paulo, then to Mexico City, then to the north of Mexico. From there, they went on a bus to the border, where they were extorted by Mexican police. At last, the coyote left them on the Mexican border at night by themselves and told them to just walk, across the desert, into the US. They were able to cross through Tijuana/San Diego. They were detained at the border for two days and then the police released them into the US. Bruna

started working in housecleaning the day after she arrived. Claudinei started in construction with a friend. Being older, he said employers had less patience to teach him the job. He was struggling to find stable employment, and sometimes would go for a week without work. So he went to work in housecleaning with his wife, which pays less but is more stable, meaning there is work everyday. In 2023, Bruna and Claudinei were working together on commission, for the same person they did when they first arrived. They planned to continue to work in housecleaning, but wanted to have their own schedule and work for themselves. Marcelo was in high school and working part-time at Chick-Fil-A, coincidentally with Gustavo. His parents said he adjusted really well at school and was already speaking fluent English.

Bruna has her father and four siblings who stayed in Brazil. One of her sisters tried a tourist visa to go visit, but it was denied. Claudinei's mother, sister, and nephew live in Goiânia. In 2024, he suggested I try to interview his sister, and I contacted her but she never replied.

23. Schaianne (arrived in Marietta area 2022)

In 2023, Juliana introduced me to Schaianne, 44, when I asked her to recommend other people I could interview. They know each other from Goiânia, because their husbands are friends. Schaianne had me over at her place in the afternoon, as she waited for her youngest to arrive from school and set up a café da tarde for him and us. She was watching a Korean TV show when I arrived, telling me later it is the thing she does to relax and “take her mind off things.” While we were talking, her youngest son arrived, saying he'd just won a school award as “best student of the month.” In 2024, she put me in touch with her father Lázaro, 67, when I asked for family contacts in Goiânia. In 2025, I did a follow-up interview

with Schaianne on a weekend. She was watching a Korean TV show episode, while her husband went to play soccer and later have a barbecue with their two sons.

Lázaro, Schaianne's father, had grandparents who farmed in Corumbá, in the Brazil-Bolivia border, where he grew up. They also made homemade sweets for sale. His mother had gone to Goiânia to try and find work, in the time when the national capital Brasília was first being built in the late 1950s. His grandfather wanted him to become a Catholic priest, but his grandmother passed away, so they moved to Goiânia to live with Lázaro's mother. According to Schaianne, Lázaro worked in farmer's markets for many years. When Schaianne was grown up, he got a trade degree in electrics and electronics and then worked for the same construction company for 20 years. He also had his own company, which he passed on to his son when he retired.

Before moving to the Marietta area, Schaianne lived in Goiânia with her husband and their two sons. Her husband is a civil engineer by training while Schaianne has a degree in interior design and had started working in the area. Schaianne worked in the administrative area for a private university in Goiânia but once she had her sons, she wanted to stay home with them, so she started baking cakes for sale from her home. During this time, her husband was still in college, going to a private school on the Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil (FIES, Student Financial Aid Fund, see Appendix B: Glossary) financial aid program, so Schaianne supported their household by herself for five years. Schaianne and her husband have a Brazilian friend who had been living in North Carolina since 2000. He always encouraged them to move to the US but Schaianne said she had always been scared of moving with two young sons and, being attached to her family in Brazil, did not want to leave them. In turn, her husband always dreamed of living in the US.

But in 2022, “things were getting really hard in Brazil,” due to “political issues” and “work issues.” Her husband worked for an engineering company but made very little, and they were saving up to buy a house but during the pandemic her husband was unemployed so they had to spend all their savings. He tried opening his own company but he “couldn’t make it” because there are “no incentives” in Brazil for entrepreneurship. Lázaro said that the labor market for engineers in Goiânia was really bad at the time, as he saw it in the company he worked for as well. At that point, thinking about her sons, their education and their opportunities, Schaianne was willing to try the US. They decided to go to Marietta because of Juliana and her husband. When we talked in 2023, she considered the quality of life to be better in Marietta than in Goiânia, where can afford things, and there is less urban violence. They never considered having their boys stay in Brazil without them, as they always wanted to move together as a family. When Schaianne was still scared of going to the US, their friends in the US suggested her husband go by himself first, but they never wanted that. Lázaro was very supportive of their decision to move to the US and told me he wanted them to stay there and not return to Brazil. To him, Brazil has “judicial insecurity” in that laws are not followed, many injustices, urban violence. He reasoned that his grandsons could get better education and opportunities in the US than they would in Brazil.

The family moved to Marietta in 2022, when their sons were 12 and 10, entering with tourist visas. They stayed in Florida for a couple of days when they arrived and quickly went to Marietta. Schaianne started working with Juliana as a housecleaning *helper* the day after she arrived in Marietta. Since then, she made other work connections and continued to work in housecleaning on commission. Her husband went to work in construction at first, in wood. In 2024, Lázaro mentioned his son-in-law was working in fireplace maintenance. Her sons started attending school as soon as they arrived. The oldest adapted quickly, but the

youngest wanted to return to Brazil for the first few months, even telling his mom he would “go to public school in Brazil” and to which she replied, “son, you have no idea what that’s like.” Once, her youngest had a “terrorism [preparedness] training” at his school and was scared and anxious after that. So much so that he lied to his teacher that he was on controlled medication, which caused a huge misunderstanding for Schaianne. When I talked to Schaianne in 2023, they were on their tourist visa extension and wanted to apply for an F-1 for her husband to study English, but were struggling to find a sponsor. Her husband wanted to apply for a EB-2 visa once they got the student visa. In 2025, however, they had applied for asylum based on a violent home robbery Schaianne suffered in Brazil. As asylum applicants they received a work permit and social security number. Schaianne’s husband started driving for Uber, like Pedro, while Schaianne continued to work in housecleaning.

In Brazil, Schaianne has her father, siblings, and a goddaughter that she is very close to. She wants some of relatives to move to the US like she did, but they are reticent.

24. Adriana, Oliveira, and Diogo (arrived in Marietta area 2022)

I first met Adriana, 41, visiting Bençãos Church in March 2023, when she was introduced to me by Érika as a cousin who “had just moved” to Marietta. But it was only later that we had a chance to talk and get to know each other. Through Adriana, I met her husband Oliveira, 57, and her son Diogo, 20, who moved to Marietta with her, who I also interviewed. During my fieldwork, I met the three of them at church, first at Bençãos Church and, later, Espírito Santo. Adriana also frequently invited me over for coffee and lunch, especially in my 2025 visit to the Atlanta area, when we would chat and spend more time together.

Before moving to the US, Adriana, Oliveira, and Diogo lived together in São Pedro da Aldeia, a small beach town in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Adriana mentioned, in our

informal chats, having had a “very poor childhood.” She lived in São Gonçalo as a child and moved to Cabo Frio, also on the Rio de Janeiro coast, when she was still young. Oliveira’s father worked in sugarcane harvesting until he was able to open a barbershop where he still worked in 2023. Meanwhile, Oliveira’s mother had worked washing clothes for wealthy families and as a housecleaner. Diogo remembered very little about his family’s history on either side. In São Pedro da Aldeia, Adriana was working in an accounting firm, managing her own department. She has bachelor’s and graduate degrees in accounting and management. Oliveira worked as a house painter and has a high school degree. Diogo was working as a painter with his stepfather so he could pay for his undergraduate studies in accounting.

They had not planned to move to the US. They had visited Edna and Leal a few times before and went to Marietta in December 2022 for another visit. While Adriana described it as a 30-day family visit, Diogo and Oliveira both mentioned that they had a “work opportunity” to make some money, pay off debts, and improve their financial situation in Brazil, and planned a three- to four-month stay in the US. Meanwhile, they also frequently attended Bençãos church. Either way, after being in Marietta for a while, they decided to stay until the end of the allowed period for a tourist visa, a total of six months. By the time they had been in the US for five months, Oliveira and Diogo told Adriana they wanted to stay permanently.

In their decision to stay, Oliveira and Diogo both mentioned the financial aspects of staying in the US, especially since they were in touch with people from Brazil that told them their labor market had taken a downturn since they had left for Georgia. They also mentioned how having good work opportunities open to them since their arrival in Marietta were a big motivator for their decision to stay. Oliveira, in particular, was strongly encouraged by Cleiton – who wanted to keep him as an employee - to stay in the US. In financial terms, Oliveira also believed he would be better able to help his parents and siblings being in the US.

Having family already living in Marietta – in particular Edna, Leal, André, and João – also figured among their prime reasons in deciding to stay. Additionally, Oliveira mentioned being able to cooperate with Bençãos church in establishing a discipleship ministry, an experience the three of them had from their congregation back in Brazil. Adriana and Oliveira both reasoned that Brazil was not doing well “politically speaking,” in an indirect reference to Worker’s Party Lula da Silva being elected president in 2022, and considered that Brazil had increased in “instability” and crime since they had left. Adriana, in particular, noted how issues of urban violence had been exacerbated in their town and that she had grown to be in constant fear of robberies, not letting her son come home by himself late at night and advising him not to wear “good clothes and shoes” when out at night. She had also been heavily impacted by her cousin’s son being brutally tortured and murdered in 2020 after a car accident that involved “criminals.”

Arriving in Marietta, Adriana, Oliveira, and Diogo stayed with Edna, Leal, and their two sons in a three-bedroom house close to the Little Brazil area in Marietta. Oliveira immediately started work with Cleiton as his *helper* and Diogo with Leal, in cabinetry, and later with a different employer. Adriana, at first, kept her accounting job in Brazil and worked remotely, quitting when they at last decided to stay permanently. In Marietta, she started work as a housecleaning *helper* with women from church or from WhatsApp groups. According to Oliveira, they were able to raise enough money to pay off the debts they had in Brazil in two or three months in the US.

Once they decided to stay in the US, they sold or donated what they had in Brazil, including their house, cars, homewares, clothing, and other personal items. In our 2023 interview, however, Oliveira mentioned they still own another house and some land back home. Their other measure was to first request a tourist extension, which allowed them to stay

in the country for another six months, and later to apply for an EB-1 and EB-2 visa for Adriana, extendable to Oliveira and Diogo, based on her qualifications as an accountant. Adriana and Oliveira repeatedly noted that they “don’t want to be illegal” [*ficar ilegal*] under any circumstance. If their visa is ultimately denied and they run out of options to “stay legal,” Adriana and Oliveira plan to return. While Diogo did not mention this possibility, his mother doubted he would want to return to Brazil.

In 2025, however, their visa was still in process, which Adriana described as being in a “limbo.” This feeling of ambiguity is due to both the uncertainty of not knowing if they will stay or go back and to Adriana’s considering that their “neither legal nor illegal,” not out of status, but not on a visa either. Adriana continued to work as a housecleaning *helper*, but also had started selling Brazilian home-made meals, a food business she had mentioned wanting to start in 2023. Oliveira kept working in construction, although for a different employer, while Diogo stayed in cabinetry and had become a fixed *helper* for Leal. Besides Adriana’s cousins living in the Marietta area, they still have a lot of family living in Brazil, including Adriana’s mother, Diogo’s family on his father’s side, and Oliveira’s parents, his adult daughters from a previous marriage, and a grandson.

25. Tânia (arrived in Marietta area 2023)

I met Tânia, 61, in 2023 through Talita and Luciano, whose story is described below. Talita had mentioned her before and, when I interviewed, Tânia was their roommate. Tânia moved to the US in 1993, but moved to Marietta only in 2023. She is the only woman I met who had worked in construction. Tânia also had 20 pets in her home in Brazil and talked a lot about them and how much she missed them.

Tânia is from the state of Paraná, from the small town of Guaratuba. Her parents were from Ponta Grossa, also in Paraná and her mother was a nurse. Before moving to the US in 1993, Tânia was a nurse in Brazil and she had two children, but struggled to support them on her “starvation wage” [salário de fome]. A friend from her hometown invited her to go to New Jersey. She tried a US visa but it was denied, so she went on the *travessia*. Tânia wanted to move to the US for the money, to seek a better life, and to give opportunities to her children. She moved on her own to New Jersey on her own, while her children stayed in Brazil with her mother. Tânia did not consider bringing her boys with her at first, thinking she would only stay for six months. She also said it was very hard being away from her children and she spent a long time on the phone with them. Indeed, she remembered spending \$1,500 on her phone bill one month.

Tânia moved to the US in 1993, entering through the US south border. Her hometown friend arranged everything and she was in a group with another Brazilian woman who had lived in the US before and could speak English well. Tânia remembered little of the journey she took some 30 years before our interview, but could remember she took a plane to some place close to the US border, from where she crossed into Texas. She also remembered hiding under trains from helicopters from border patrol. Her first job in New Jersey was in bartending, which her hometown friend helped her get. From bartending, Tânia went into construction, when a man she knew from the restaurant asked her to do housecleaning for him and then started teaching her construction. Tânia remembered him fondly, saying he was “a father to [her]”. She also worked in other things in the US, including housecleaning, driving, landscaping, “everything,” always seeking whatever paid best. In a few years, she got married and was able to get her documentation and later pass it to her son. He moved to the US in November 1998, when he was 17. In 2023, he was 44 (according to Tânia, although the math

does not work), lived in Florida where he worked as a truck driver, was married and had four children. The other of her sons had passed away.

Tânia proudly mentioned building an 88-room hotel in New Jersey. She went to Brazil right after working on this project for what should be a short visit. Then the Covid-19 pandemic happened and she ended up staying in Brazil for four years. She also could not find people to look after her pets at home. When Tânia returned to the US in 2022, she had only planned on staying one month. She went back to New Jersey, counting on her husband having money, since he was able to buy her plane ticket, but her husband had “lost everything.” I did not understand the story very well, and I am not sure if she wanted to tell me very much about it. Her husband had a gas company and something went wrong. From there, he lost his car and money. Tânia also complained that he had been offered work in Michigan that he refused, because he did not want to “lower his standards.” She said she was then so poor, she could not buy “a kilo of sugar.”

So she went to Florida to meet her son, but Hurricane Ian had just happened and Tânia could not find work in Florida. She had a sister in Marietta who suggested she moved there to work in housecleaning. At the time when we talked, Tânia’s sister had married and left Marietta for Florida, while Tânia was working as a housecleaning *helper*. However, the job market was bad and she could not find work everyday. She had tried working in delivery in Atlanta, but was paid \$12 an hour plus tips, which barely covered gas and car maintenance. Tânia said that, if her former boss had not died, she would still be on the same professional level that she was before. At the time of our interview, she was waiting for her accounts to be approved so she could drive for Uber and Lyft, and hoped she could get started the following week. Once Tânia could try out Uber, she would decide if she wanted to stay in Marietta or go

back to Florida or New Jersey. She did not like the Brazilian community in Marietta and blamed it on *goianos* (see Appendix B: Glossary), who are a “bad race” [ô racinha, viu].

In 2023, Tânia’s mother was 83 and was helping out with Tânia’s pets back in Brazil. Tânia also went to church in Marietta, sometimes Baptist, sometimes Assembly of God.

26. Santos (arrived in Marietta area 2023)

I was introduced to Santos, 40, by Emerson from Renascer Church, in 2023, and met him for an interview in his apartment in Marietta.

Santos is from Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, but lived in the capital of Ceará state, Fortaleza. He had been a prison/corrections officer in Brazil, where he was politically persecuted for being right-wing in a left-wing state, especially after he published a book in which he “exposed” what he knew about the prison system (not in an abolitionist way, more in a “criminals are not punished hard enough” kind of way). In Brazil, he had fought with the government and organized crime, and had received death threats from gang members. Santos wanted to leave Brazil so he could stay alive, as he thought it was better for his son to have a living dad far away than no dad at all. His son was five at the time. Santos had been to the US before and liked it. He had considered Massachusetts, but thought it would be too cold, and he had a friend in Marietta who told him it was a good place to live and promised he would find work for Santos. In Brazil, Santos had a girlfriend who was also a corrections officer, and she did not want to move to the US with him, so they broke up.

At the time of our interview, Santos had been in the US for three months. The friend who encouraged him soon disappeared and did not help him at all. At least, Santos had rented a bedroom already and did not depend on this man for housing. When Santos went to Renascer Church, he met Antonio (also named as a friend by Claudinei) who recommended

Santos to his boss in HVAC maintenance. Santos started working in this field area and so far had been successful. Santos entered on the tourist visa he already had and planned to apply for asylum based on the death threats he had received as a correctional officer in Brazil. He would like for his son to move to the US for high school, to learn English.

27. Talita and Luciano (arrived in Marietta area 2023)

Santos introduced me to Luciano, 35, in 2023 as someone that it would be “very interesting” to talk to because he was arrested at the border and detained. Through Luciano I met his wife, Talita, 34, whom I interviewed later. I saw them again when I went to interview Tânia, who was their roommate at the time.

Luciano is from Vitória da Conquista, in the state of Bahia, and has two sons who stayed in Brazil. He has a trade degree in electrics and electronics and, before moving to the US, was in the fourth year of civil engineering undergrad. In Brazil, he worked as an electrician for the municipality of Cândido Sales, also in the state of Bahia. Talita is also from Vitória da Conquista and lived in Cândido Sales with Luciano and her daughter, who was 12 when they decided to leave for the US. Talita’s father is from the Minas Gerais countryside; he did not study and started working really young, including in sugarcane harvest, factories, and as a security guard. Her mother also did not study. Talita started working at age 12, selling garments in street markets with her mother, and continued to work with her mother in selling clothes door to door and at markets until she married, then she went to work in housecleaning. Talita herself does not have any degrees. Before leaving, Talita worked as a housecleaner in Brazil. She described Cândido Sales as a town that “lives off municipality and retirement,” meaning people either work for the municipality or are on retirement pensions. Talita had a

sister living in Roswell who invited them to move to Georgia and, in 2022, they decided to go.

Their main motivation was financial. Both Luciano and Talita said, on separate occasions, that in Brazil you work hard but you cannot afford things. Luciano wanted to have better income so he could afford a better education for his sons in Brazil. Talita also wanted her daughter to study and have “opportunities,” and wanted to be able to take care of her parents. They thought about applying for a tourist visa, but they could not risk it being denied. Talita explained it as being one or the other, because they would not be able to afford the *travessia* if they paid for the tourist visa process. The couple wanted to try moving to the US in 2020, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, had to wait until 2022. When it was time, Talita’s sister found a coyote for them, asking other Brazilians in the Marietta area for contacts. It cost them \$25,000 for Luciano, Talita, and their daughter. Talita’s sister lent them a \$10,000 downpayment. Luciano said they considered having their daughter stay in Brazil with one of her grandparents, because they were going on the *travessia* rather than on a tourist visa. Luciano said the coyote gave them a lot of confidence saying the journey would be safe, so they trusted him and decided to bring their daughter. Talita, on the other hand, said she never entertained leaving her daughter in Brazil, and thought it would have been unfair on both her daughter and her mother, who would have taken care of her.

At the airport in Brazil they were introduced to another family who would be a part of their group. They traveled by plane to El Salvador and, from there, started on ground transport. Their journey was long, with many stops and challenges, uncomfortable and precarious lodging and transportation, and both of them recalled several occasions when they were scared for their safety and health in different ways. In total, it took around 30 days to get to the border and, in their entire journey, they were accompanied by the other Brazilian family

they had met at the airport. After three weeks, they reached the US south border at Ciudad Juárez. They were instructed to run, cross a river (I assume the Río Grande) and surrender to border patrol, which they did.

Once in the hands of the border patrol, Luciano was separated from his wife and daughter. He clarified that he and Talita are not legally married, and reasoned that was why they were separated. Luciano was taken to a detention facility in El Paso - popularly known among Brazilians as *geleira* [glacier], in reference to ICE - where conditions were terrible, including overcrowding and poor quality food. He met his Brazilian *travessia* fellow in this facility, who had also been separated from his family. Luciano said that, among the 180 detainees sharing a cell, only three were Brazilian. After five days, Luciano was shackled at the hands and the feet and flown to the Winn Correctional Center in Louisiana. At the border, Talita and their daughter were sent into a different facility where they were also detained for five days - she did not know where this facility was located in the US, only that it was close to the border. From there they spent a night at a church hostel and, the next day, they got on a plane to Atlanta, where they met with Talita's sister and were hosted by her. Once in Roswell, Talita was able to contact family in Brazil.

Luciano was detained in Winn for about three months. When he arrived at Winn, he was finally able to contact family and called his mother in Brazil – the only number he remembered - and his mother got in touch with Talita, a day after she had arrived in Roswell. While Luciano was at Winn, calls were \$6 for 20 minutes. Luciano also described his time in Winn in detail, remembering anecdotes, people, and precarious conditions. As soon as Talita arrived in Roswell, she started working as a housecleaning *helper*, at first with her sister and later by looking for employers in the WhatsApp groups. The first money Talita made was to pay for an immigration lawyer for Luciano. Luciano was released without a lawyer's

intervention just as Talita had been able to secure one for him. Luciano could not explain why he was released from a legal point of view, but he attributed it to his faith in God and the prayer group that he organized and participated in while detained. From Winn, Luciano went to Atlanta to meet his family and stayed with Talita and their daughter at his sister-in-law's in Roswell.

Talita had been housecleaning with a Brazilian lady, whose husband then hired Luciano to work as his *helper* in flooring. After that, Luciano found another employer, in HVAC maintenance, which he prefers because it's closer to his electrician expertise. But Luciano was still struggling to find stable, fixed employment. He dreamed of being able to work as an electrician in the US. The family stayed with Talita's sister for four months. They rented an apartment in their brother-in-law's name and had roommates since so they could afford rent. Talita's sister and her husband also bought them a car so Luciano could find work more easily, which they were to pay in installments. They were slowly paying the coyote in installments for the \$15,000 they still owed.

Luciano said he wanted to build his life in the US, but return to Brazil later. Overall, while he would not recommend going on the *travessia* for anybody, he thought it had been "worth it." Talita said they needed to stay in the US at least until they were able to pay for all the expenses they had in getting there, so they could at least break even. In Brazil, Luciano has his mother and two sons, who live in different cities with each of their mothers. Talita, in turn, has her parents, who were 69 and 61 as of 2023, two siblings, and other relatives.

28. Gerson (arrived in Marietta area 2023)

Gerson, 42, had been in the US for a month when we talked in 2023. I was introduced to him by Isadora, as he was living with her and Kiko as their roommate. Gerson

had a wife and two children, who were still in Brazil, but planning to move to the US within the next couple of months.

Gerson is from the state of Bahia, born in Cachoeira and raised in the capital, Salvador. He has a degree in business administration and had been working as a project manager for most of his career. His oldest son, from a previous marriage, was 20. Gerson's son acquired US citizenship through his stepfather and had been living in the country for a long time. As a result, Gerson could apply for a green card through his son before the son turned 21. Gerson wanted to move to the US so his youngest children, who were 4 and 2 at the time of our interview, could have access to the same education and quality of life that he had seen his oldest enjoy growing up in the US. In terms of education, Gerson emphasized the "diverse experiences" that US schools offer their students such as sports and arts, compared to Brazil, where there's a strong focus on academics but not other kinds of activities. As for quality of life, Gerson described that, in the US, one can extract more from each "monetary unit" they earn, compared to Brazil, and therefore there is more economic freedom. His 20 year-old son, at the time of our interview, was in the US Air Force and finishing his undergraduate studies.

Gerson had planned to move to the US much earlier. He had a job in Brazil but had an agreement with the company that he had been able to have money from his Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço (FGTS, Support Fund based on Time of Employment, a fee that is discounted from formal employee's salaries each month but that they can claim when their employment comes to an end), which he would use to support himself through his first years in the US. Gerson then invested most of that money on a tourism company, had a job lined up in the US, and got his tourist visa in February 2020. Then the Covid-19 pandemic started and he took a financial hit with his investments and had to spend what money he had left to

support himself and his family while unemployed. He then wanted to wait longer to move to the US, so he could revamp his savings. Ultimately, Gerson was pushed to go earlier than intended, when he found out that he needed to be in the US before his son turned 21. If not, he would have to wait for the permanent residency process from Brazil without being allowed to visit the US in the meantime, which could take years. So he decided to move even if he felt he was not financially prepared, by which he meant having enough money saved up to support himself and his family during their first months in the US.

This situation rushed Gerson and his wife's plans to migrate. He went first and his wife stayed in Brazil with their two kids, but they were about to join him in the US in a month or two. Gerson had started working in construction as a *helper*, but was aware that, being older and of smaller physique, he was at constant disadvantage in construction jobs. He had worked in door and window installations, as well as granite. He was trying to leverage his English and other skills into other jobs, offering in WhatsApp groups his services as an interpreter and driver, among other things. He also kept his job in Brazil, which he worked remotely even on days when he was also working in construction, doing both jobs at once.

29. Renata and Leandro (arrived in Marietta area 2024)

Renata and Leandro moved to Marietta from Florida at the beginning of 2024. They had contacted Bençãos Church since before moving and even visited Georgia a few times before deciding. They were present at the Bençãos Christmas dinner in December 2023 and had moved to the Espírito Santo Church congregation in 2025, when we actually met and spent some time together. I went to their house one afternoon in 2025 to talk to Renata but Leandro, who was around the living room, ended up joining our conversation. At the time, they already considered moving back to Brazil, which they did before the end of the year

(according to Renata's account on Instagram). In Brazil, Renata and Leandro lived in Rio de Janeiro. He had a white-collar, managerial job at a construction company while Renata worked in human resources.

Leandro said he always had the “dream” of moving to the US, but always thought it was impossible. Until one day a friend of his told him about a YouTube channel where [Luis Miranda](#)²⁴⁰, a Brazilian man, taught other Brazilians how to move to the US – from filling out visa applications to what to tell immigration officers when entering the country – and even offered an investment program. Based on this guidance, Leandro and Renata moved to Florida with two young children, without knowing anybody in the US, and entered the country on tourist visas in 2018. They went to Miami on the YouTuber's suggestion that Brazilians can enter the US there saying they are going to Disney World, even if they are planning to stay. They were not Evangelical before moving to the US, but in Miami one of the first Brazilians they became friends with was and, through her, Renata and Leandro ended up converting.

As Leandro explained, he thought he would arrive and immediately become “a rich person” since he thought of the US as “the land of opportunity.” They talked to an English school about enrolling as students so they could get F-1 visas and even paid their fees, but when their tourist visa was about to expire, Renata went to the school and was surprised to find out none of their documents were on file, according to the school staff. At that point, nothing could be done about their migration status, so they became “undocumented.” They were able to receive back the money they had paid to the school through the bank after much effort. They also invested \$2,500 with Luiz Miranda, only to find out he was embezzling that money, and according to Leandro he was one of the few people who was able to receive their money back, because they went to the same church as this man's secretary in Miami.

240 After making a career out of telling Brazilians to leave Brazil because life in the US is so much better, Luiz Miranda was elected federal congressman in Brazil through a right-wing party.

Leandro had planned from Brazil to work for a shipping company that send goods from the US to Brazil in an “informal” way, to avoid paying Brazilian tariffs. Once Leandro understood that to be against the Bible, in the first stages of his conversion, he decided not to go through with this job, even though he and Renata had structured their entire migration project around it. Renata started doing manicures from home for a living and Leandro tried work in construction but it did not work out, so he started driving for Lyft which was “less complicated back then.” Their income, however, was very low. Indeed, Leandro narrated that he would buy party-size chip bags on “buy one get one” deals and eat half a bag for lunch each day. He remembered one occasion when he had five dollars in his wallet. Renata gave that money to their daughter so she could buy snacks at school. Upon finding out about it, Leandro felt desperate, because he was counting on that money to fill the gas tank in his car.

After a year, Leandro’s driver account on Lyft was cancelled and he had to find other employment. A friend from church got him a job as a car salesman at a dealership in Miami. Eventually, he moved up in the dealership until he started working in more managerial, specialized positions, dealing with financing plans and other tasks. Eventually he was fired from the dealership for refusing to work Sundays (because that is the day of the Lord) and felt desperate, not having any savings. But soon he was hired by an American bank that focused on the type financing plans he worked on at the dealership. The bank was aware Leandro was an out-of-status migrant, even though that is unusual in that particular area of work. Leandro was laid off during the Covid-19 pandemic and they started struggling financially once more and, being out of status, neither he nor Renata received any relief checks during that period. Leandro was eventually re-hired at the bank and, eventually, he left the bank to be a partner at a dealership. The partnership did not work out and Leandro later became a car buyer for a dealership. During all this time, Renata continued to do manicures from home, until around

the time when Leandro broke up the partnership, when she was pregnant with their third child. When Leandro broke off the partnership, she was very concerned about their income and considered going back to work (even though she was about to give birth) but they “trusted the Lord” and Leandro soon found the car buyer job where he had been for four years at the time of our interview. After that, Renata settled as a stay-at-home parent for their three children.

They decided to move to Marietta because of living costs – according to Leandro, he did the math and Georgia was 51% cheaper. Because he worked remotely, they could keep the same income but cut expenses in half. At the time of our interview, they were planning on moving back to Brazil. It is interesting that they talked about it as something they were just “considering” while during our interview someone came to pick up a table they had sold, already anticipating their return. While Renata mentioned the instability they felt in terms of their children growing up as out-of-status migrants in the US, Leandro was emphatic in saying it was because “the Lord told [them] it was [their] time.” According to Leandro, if the Lord told them to stay, they would just have to buy everything back.

30. Maria Fernanda (arrived in Marietta area 2024)

I met Maria Fernanda, 37, in 2025 at Espírito Santo Church. Chatting with André, Edna and Leal’s oldest son, he mentioned a congregant that had studied geography and I, of course, wanted to meet them immediately. I introduced myself to Maria Fernanda the first opportunity I got. A few days later, I met her at her place for our interview. She was pregnant and, at the time, stayed home with her 1 year-old daughter, while her husband Henrique went to work.

Before moving to the US, Maria Fernanda lived in Cuiabá, in the state of Mato Grosso, with her husband and their daughter. Maria Fernanda has a bachelor’s and an MA

degree in Geology. When she was 24, she started a PhD program but, according to Maria Fernanda, she was too young and did not really understand academia. The end of her serious relationship at the time and depression all contributed for her to quit the PhD program. She needed to work, so she got another undergraduate degree in Geography and started teaching at the middle and high school levels in 2009. She was still teaching when they decided to move to the US. In turn, Henrique owned a barber salon in Cuiabá. As Maria Fernanda narrated, her husband Henrique had been dreaming of moving to the US since he was 18. When they first met, he already told her he dreamed of moving to the US. Maria Fernanda did not consider it and never wanted to move. They had been together for 10 years and Henrique still brought it up. He wanted to move to the US because he thought it offered more opportunities and better purchasing power. One day, he decided to start the process of obtaining passports and the tourist visa and Maria Fernanda at last agreed to try.

They arrived in Florida in November 2024, entering the US on a tourist visa. The couple went to Florida because someone who worked with Henrique at his barber salon in Brazil lived there. They stayed with his family at first and Henrique went to work as a barber with this friend of his. Maria Fernanda stayed at his family's home with their daughter. She tried combining it with babysitting for others but it did not work out. Within a few months, Henrique realized that the barber shop was not what his friend had promised. He remembered he knew another Brazilian barber who was in Georgia. Henrique got in touch with this other barber, who owns a salon in downtown Marietta. He confirmed to Henrique that he was earning too little and invited them to Marietta, offering Henrique a job. They still wanted to try it out in Florida, where they already were, but things also got more difficult with the family they were staying with. Encouraged by Henrique's friend in Marietta, they moved there. They stayed at an Airbnb at first but soon rented their own home. At the time of my

interview with Maria Fernanda, Henrique continued to work in the same salon. Maria Fernanda was pregnant and had not worked since she arrived in the US and mostly stayed home with her daughter. She planned on staying home until the children were older, in school, and reasoned that her husband earned enough that they were financially stable with only his income. They still were on a tourist visa but Henrique's employer at the salon promised him an EB-1. Before, they still needed the tourist extension and change to a student visa.

Appendix B: Glossary

Term	Meaning
Terms in Portuguese and Brazilian acronyms	
gendered and plural nouns in Portuguese	Nouns in Portuguese are always gendered. Feminine nouns usually end in -a and masculine nouns usually end in -o; the masculine is also used as a general gender. Plural forms typically end in -s and can also be gendered; feminine plural usually ends in -as and masculine plural usually ends in -os, also used as a general plural (i.e. including feminine and masculine nouns).
gender neutral terminations	Previous attempts at gender neutral language have used @ (as a mix of -a and -o) and x (instead of -a or -o), although they were used only in writing since they are unpronounceable in Portuguese. Currently, the preferred gender neutral termination for nouns and adjectives is -e in both speaking and writing.
latin@/latinx/latine	See above. I consider both latin@ and latinx to be outdated, not to mention the fact that “latinx” can be pronounced in English but not in Spanish or Portuguese. For those reasons, I use the term “latine” in the dissertation.
goiano	People from the state of Goiás, in Brazil.
mineiro	People from the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil.
piracanjubense	People from the town of Piracanjuba, Goiás in Brazil.
minha filha	Literally my daughter, used in conversation as vocative.
hispano	Literally Hispanic, typically used to refer to the person (eg. I work with a <i>hispano</i>) rather than the ethnicity (eg. he is <i>hispano</i>).
segurança	A mix of safety, security, and stability
interior	Literally interior, refers to areas in a state that are distant to the state capital or other big cities. Not a synonym to rural, but can intersect (<i>interior</i> includes rural and small urban areas).
roça	Literally farm, may refer to rural environments (eg. I grew up in the <i>roça</i>) or a specific area where crops are grown (eg. there is a <i>roça</i> behind my house).
nossa	Literally our/ours, a contraction of Our Lady from Catholic lore, used as an interjection.
UPPs	Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (Pacifying Police Unit, sic). Law enforcement and “social services” program, implemented in <i>favelas</i> by the Rio de Janeiro state government. The goal was to “reclaim territories” dominated by drug trafficking cartels. Unsurprisingly, it did not work.
FIES	Fundo de Financiamento ao Estudante do Ensino Superior (Financial Aid Fund for Higher Education Students). Created in 1999 by the Brazilian federal government, it provides financial loans at low interests for low-income students to attend private universities.
ProUni	Programa Universidade para Todos (Program University for All). Created in 2005 by the Brazilian federal government, it offers scholarships for low-income students to attend private universities.
INSS	Instituto Nacional de Segurança Social (National Institute of Social Security). Brazilian federal agency that manages retirement pensions (based on age, “incapacity for work,” disability etc.) and other social

	security benefits.
IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics). Brazilian federal agency responsible for the Brazilian census, official maps, and others.

Work-related terms

schedule	The term in English is used by Brazilian migrants when speaking Portuguese. In that context, it refers specifically to the roster of housecleaning clients of a given cleaner.
dono/a de schedule helper	Literally schedule owner, it refers to Brazilian housecleaners who have their own schedule and employ others to work for them as cleaners. The term in English is used by Brazilian migrants when speaking Portuguese. In that context, it refers specifically to Brazilian workers hired by other Brazilians in housecleaning and construction labor markets. Occasionally the term <i>ajudante</i> , meaning helper in Portuguese, is also used.
house	Brazilian migrants use the equivalent term in Portuguese, <i>casa</i> . In the context of Brazilian housecleaning labor markets in the US, house refers to a housecleaning client.
to buy and sell houses	Brazilian migrants use the equivalent term in Portuguese, <i>vender casa</i> (sell a house) or <i>comprar casa</i> (buy a house). In the context of Brazilian housecleaning labor markets in the US, buying and selling houses refers to the practice of buying and selling housecleaning clients, that is, their contact information and the “right” to clean their house.
to buy, sell, or give a schedule	Brazilian migrants use the equivalent verbs in Portuguese (<i>comprar, vender, dar</i>) and the term schedule in English when speaking Portuguese. In the context of Brazilian housecleaning labor markets in the US, buying and selling a schedule means buying or selling all the houses in a given schedule, that is, one’s entire housecleaning client roster. Giving a schedule means passing on one’s entire schedule to someone else free of charge.
casas a comissão	Literally houses on commission, refers to houses in which a schedule owner has someone else clean for one of their clients for a commission of 15-30% of the total cost of the cleaning service.

Immigration-related terms

o documento	Literally the document, it does not refer to one document in particular but to having a legal right of permanence in the US. When referring to a specific document (visa, green card, US citizenship), Brazilian migrants use the appropriate specific term.
atravessador	Literally crosser, it refers to the person who arranges one’s journey from Brazil to Mexico (by a combination of different modes of transportation, from planes to cars to trucks to boats) with the goal of entering the US through its south border. Same as <i>coyote</i> .
travessia	Literally crossing or journey, it refers to the journey one takes to enter the US through its south border. To say “I came on the <i>travessia</i> ” is a way of saying “I entered through the US south border.”
to buy a marriage	Brazilian migrants use the equivalent term in Portuguese, <i>comprar casamento</i> . It refers to the practice in which a non-US citizen pays to get

	married to a US citizen so they can obtain US citizenship themselves. Same as a green card wedding.
I-94	AKA Arrival-Departure Record Card. Form issued by US Customs and Border Protection, it keeps track of dates of arrival and departure of non-US citizens into/from the US.
F-1 visa	AKA student visa, it can be applied for through a variety of educational institutions, including universities and English as Second Language (ESL) schools. It can be extended to spouses and dependents. F-1 visa holders have severe restrictions as to where and how much they can work. If an F-1 visa applicant cannot provide proof of income at an amount sufficient to cover their expenses (and their family's, if applicable) during the entire time they will be in the US, they are required to have a sponsor who can. In order to be an F-1 sponsor, one has to provide proof of income for the entire amount equivalent to the student's (and their family's, if applicable) living expenses for the entire period of stay in the US. It does not offer a pathway to permanent residency in the US.
EB-2 visa	Employment-based immigration visa, second preference. Visa category for high-skilled applicants who are "advanced degree professionals" or can prove "exceptional ability" in their professions. While the EB-2 visa requires a job offer, a waiver can be granted if the applicant's profession is of "national interest" to the US. It offers a pathway to permanent residency in the US.
EB-3 visa	Employment-based immigration visa, third preference. Visa category for low-skilled applicants who fit the categories of "skilled worker," "professional," or "unskilled worker" with a permanent, full-time job offer in the US. It offers a pathway to permanent residency in the US.
R-1 visa	A visa category for "nonimmigrant religious workers" with temporary religious job offers in the US. The period of stay is limited to five years, renewable for up to five years. It does not offer a pathway to permanent residency in the US.
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. A highly-contested federal program for out-of-status migrants who arrived in the US as children and fit eligibility criteria. It provides work permits (see below) and travel authorizations, but it does not offer a pathway to permanent residency in the US.
Work permit	AKA Employment Authorization Document. A form issued by US Citizenship and Immigration Services that proves a non-US citizen is authorized to work in the US. May be requested by employers for "over-the-table" jobs. Some visa categories include work permits, some allow for work permits under specific circumstances/for specific jobs, and some do not offer work permits. Visa applicants typically are not granted work permits even if the visa category for which they applied grants them a work permit when approved. Asylum applicants, however, receive work permits as soon as they apply for asylum, before their application is judged.
Tax ID, ITIN, SSN	Tax ID is an umbrella term that includes different types of tax identification numbers. ITIN is an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number that can be requested by anybody regardless of immigration

	status. It can be used for paying taxes but it does not grant access to any social security programs. Brazilian migrants usually refer to ITIN as the “tax ID.” SSN is a Social Security Number that can be obtained by migrants in the US if they have a valid work permit or a green card.
287(g) program	Program launched by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that allows state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to identify, detain, and deport out-of-status migrants. It allowed local police forces to ask for proof of immigration status from randomly selected individuals stopped for minor traffic offenses and others.
SB1718	Senate Bill 1718 passed in 2023 in the state of Florida. It prohibits agencies from issuing any documents for out-of-status migrants; invalidates out-of-state driver’s licenses issued by states who allow driver’s licenses for out-of-status migrants; requires hospitals to collect immigration information from patients; fines employers who employ out-of-status migrants.
LIFE Act extension of section 245(i)	Section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended by the Legal Immigration Family Equity (LIFE) Act and LIFE Act Amendments of 2000. It allowed individuals who met the eligibility criteria to apply for permanent residency in the US regardless of manner of entry into the US, previous unauthorized employment in the US, and failure to maintain “lawful” status since entry into the US.