



"El dinero es bueno, pero un amigo es mejor" [

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text (article)

Analítica

Based on long-term ethnographic research in state-run settlement projects on former sugarcane plantations in Northeast Brazil, this article questions the evidence of "the economy" as a privileged framework for understanding the life situation of the poor, structured by precariousness and uncertainty about the future. Exploring the polysemy of Portuguese esperar (to wait, to hope, and to expect), it analyzes the plurality of orientations to the future among former sugarcane wageworkers included as beneficiaries in land reform projects, and their strategies to mitigate uncertainty in various configurations. If radical uncertainty lies out of reach of human hands, relative uncertainty may be acted on by mobilizing people. While money is desirable, it has a transitory character; and the value of friends lies in their potential to help, especially in case of a crisis. Ethnography thus suggests moving beyond an "economic anthropology" that aims to analyze "other economies" in order to explore the fields of opportunities and frames of reference that structure life situations and the local versions of oikonomia in its original meaning of "government of the household"

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