HOUSES MADE OUT OF EYES

An ethnography of brick walls in the urban hinterland of Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract: Unlike some who argued that enclosing walls result from both negative individualism and the fear of violent crime, and jeopardize the urban way of life, our fieldwork in a poor neighborhood located in the urban hinterland of Rio de Janeiro suggests that they actually are a common way of “relating” (Carsten) to kin, neighbors and strangers. First, fences indicate that the enclosed land plot “has an owner” (*tem dono*), who is “taking responsibility” (*tomando conta*) – the true “owner” or “master” (*dono*) is not the person who is legally entitled to use his plot, but the one who publicly cares for it. Second, people build on a same plot different walls to assert their “freedom” (*liberdade*) and “privacy” (*privacidade*), two central - and identical - values of domestic and family life: nobody wants to live together with one’s own kin in the same “house” (*casa*). Thus building walls allow various families to live on a same plot, but in different houses. Third, thanks to walls and windows, people can see without being seen. Having a say about what people can look at is an important aspect of housekeeping: according to popular beliefs in the “Evil Eye” (*olho grande*), others’ envious gaze is a potential source of trouble. This work suggests that the house functions as both a socio-spatial and a moral category.

Keywords: privacy; property relations; anthropology of the house; evil eye; “auto-construction”

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.
Robert Frost, *Mending Wall*.

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall"

As well as in Robert Frost famous poem[1], Mending Walls, urban scholars don't like walls, but it doesn't stop urbanites to build them. Walls use to be seen as opposed to urban way of life, which assumes the possibility to meet people different from us (SIMMEL, 1908; PARK, 1984 [1925]). If social heterogeneity is a distinctive feature of "urbanism as a way of life", walls come to restore the kind of social homogeneity allegedly distinctive of "folk societies" (WIRTH, 1938). Moreover, since the eighties walls have been equalized with a new urban order, which combines market hegemony and militarization of public spaces, according to the now popular metaphor of the Fortress City (LOW, 2003). Indeed, under neoliberal agenda, several cities around the world have been suffering from (selective) urban decay, growing street crime, and middle class flight to suburban "enclaves". These enclaves, according to Davis, "have often become fortress cities, complete with encompassing walls, restricted entry points with guard posts, overlapping private and public police services, and even privatized roadways" (DAVIS, 1990, p. 244). Condensing the political imagery of a whole generation, Davis predicted "the brutalization of inner-city neighborhoods and the increasing South Africanization of its spatial relations. Even as the walls have come down in Eastern Europe, they are being erected all over Los Angeles" (p. 228).

"Fortified enclaves" (CALDEIRA, 2000), mainly the gated communities, turned to be an important subject matter for urban studies over the past decades. As the very expression of "gate community" suggests, its definition depends on the materiality of its borders – "The gated community," as Low said, "is a residential development surrounded by walls, fences, or earth banks covered with bushes and shrubs,

[1] The complete version of Frost poem is available online: https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/mending-wall. It was first published in 1914, in the collection of poetry *North of Boston*. Merry's article "Mending Walls and Building Fences" called my attention to this classic piece of American literature.

with a secured entrance" (LOW, 2003). In fact, as anthropologist and psychologist Low argued that "the walls and gates are visible barriers que social have and psychological as well as physical effects" (p. 12): walls not only make residents feel safer, they strengthen their sense of community, as they feel different from the people outside the walls. However, social control in those "private neighborhoods" has very little to do with community, as in these neighborhoods, "peace and social order are achieved through privacy and government regulation rather than cooperation, compromise, and informal social control. Law provides a fundamental mode of ordering" (MERRY, 1994, p. 74). Actually those places distinguish themselves by their "moral minimalism" (BAUMGARTNER, 1988; LOW, 2003).

Over the past decades, "fortified enclaves" were spreading throughout Brazil too, following increasing crime rates in the largest cities and state failure in addressing this issue[2]. For instance, Alphaville District in the Greater São Paulo covers a 30.000 population, divided into several gated communities (*condomínios fechados*), with its own police and planning regulations, making it perhaps one of the largest "private neighborhood" in the world. Calling it a "City of Walls", Brazilian anthropologist Theresa Caldeira made a frightening picture of São Paulo: "Heterogeneity is now to be taken more seriously: fragments express irreconcilable inequalities, not simple differences. In the city of walls, there is the tolerance for otherness or differences" (CALDEIRA, 2000, p. 313). Overall, she made a great contribution to the studies of "private neighborhoods" or "gated communities" when she pointed to an "aesthetics of security", which came to be very popular in all the city: walls, grids and fences became parts of a code that "encapsulates elements of security in the discourse of taste and transforms it into a symbol of status" (p. 294). Even in middle-class neighborhoods that do not look like "gated communities" or "private neighborhoods", high walls and electrified fences are common elements of residential architecture. Actually, even in slums (*favelas*) the logic of fortification has changed building practices – which, indeed, makes perfect sense since those places were the most affected by rising crime, having to live with the constant threat of armed conflict between rival gangs or between drug traffickers and police forces. By witnessing the proliferation of

[2] In Rio de Janeiro, murder rate reached a frightening level of 70 per 100.000 inhabitants in 1994 before stabilizing today around 25 per 100.000 inhabitants, well above the 10 homicides per 100.000 inhabitants, considered by WHO the limit above which homicides become a major public health issue (MISSE, 2007).

high walls throughout the *favela* where she did her fieldwork, Cavalcanti said so "the historical practice of self-construction and the consequent plasticity of the space of the favela (...) often camouflage how recent Investments in residents' private spaces are Aimed at keeping different sources of danger away from the private space of the home "(CAVALCANTI, 2007, p. 322). In other words, "favela residents' reaction to the so-called 'public security' crisis is not so different from residents of 'formal' neighborhoods, in Rio or elsewhere" (p. 325). Close to the "City of Walls", there is the "Favela of Walls".

At Jardim Mato Bonito – the fictitious name for the place where I did fieldwork over the past two years – a working-class real estate development (*loteamento*)[3] located in the urban hinterland of Rio de Janeiro, where people build their own houses through a process called "autoconstruction" (*autoconstrução*), I also noticed huge walls, over two meters high, erected on the edges of land plots and within them. Initially, I put those high walls on the "aesthetic of security", namely residents wish to transform their houses into truly fortresses. However, I was stuck by the fact that a vast majority of Jardim Mato Bonito residents currently praised the tranquility of their neighborhood, often contrasting this situation with the rest of the city. As in several other working-class settlements on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, there are no drug dealers walking down the street, showing up their guns in front of the people, in order to assert their power. Instead, public order is ensured by a clandestine paramilitary organization, the so-called "militia" (*milícia*), which forces all the shopkeepers to pay a weekly tax, the so-called "security tax" (*taxa de segurança*), but keeps drug dealers and petty criminals away from the neighborhood – in addition, the militia is involved in numerous other illicit activities, from operating illegal slot machines to money laundering. Although most residents would prefer the state in charge of public order, they

[3] Unlike the *favelas*, settlements like Jardim Mato Bonito did respect property laws – in the case of Jardim Mato Bonito, the original settlement project (*projeto de loteamento*), made by a private company, was even approved by the city. However, the poorest ones and the most distant from the city center suffer now from a number of serious urban deficiencies (lack of paving and basic sanitation, illegal water and energy supply), which explains why the city of Rio de Janeiro treat them as "deficient real estate developments" (*loteamentos irregulares*). Like the *favelas*, *loteamentos irregulares* represent privileged areas for public investment with social goals (*áreas de especial interesse social*). An estimated 600.000 population lives in *loteamentos irregulares* in Rio de Janeiro, approximately 10% of the total population. As the lack of public infrastructure was related to the distance from the city center and the poverty of their inhabitants, Brazilian scholars used to call these settlements "*loteamentos periféricos*", literally "peripheral real estate developments", distinguishing them from the other real estate developments which were normally incorporated to the city. The very word "*loteamento*" refers to the simple fact of subdividing a land into several residential or commercial lots.

thank the militia to maintain the neighborhood without the kind of violence that affects areas under the control of drug lords.

For sure, the logic of fortification does not need to be directly correlated to crime: many Jardim Mato Bonito residents already suffered from urban violence in the other Rio de Janeiro neighborhood where they lived before; because they cover crime in a very sensationalist way, news media have their part in infusing fear among people. Even though, as people from Jardim Mato Bonito were reporting how they build their own home, the search for greater security did not appear among the main motivation for raising huge walls. Walls actually do not serve just for ensuring protection, as the Fortress City image leads us to believe. And when walls are built to protect, this protection is not necessarily against urban crime: there are other forms of threat, which only make sense in the moral context of Brazilian working class. Far from being tied to a “moral minimalism”, I became increasingly aware building walls in Jardim Mato Bonito presupposed complex relationships between residents; building walls, they paradoxically restate the fact that they always live in relation to each other. Speaking about building high walls around home in rural Greece, Herzfeld attracted our attention to the fact that “such design features, which defy modernist planners' notions of order, require a more or less general agreement that they are socially appropriate and normal; otherwise they would backfire and be treated as evidence of anti-social attitudes” (HERZFELD, 2009, p. 153). The main purpose of this paper, therefore, is to explore, beyond the logic of fortification, theses relations implied by walls, thus making our contribution to the study of home materiality (MILLER, 2001) and autoconstruction in Brazilian working class (HOLSTON, 1993; CAVALCANTI, 2007; 2009). After all, as Frost poem once said, if “something there is que does not love a wall,” “good fences make good neighbors”: mostly saw as obstacles, walls can also serve to uphold social relationships.

Our current hypothesis here is that building walls in a *loteamento* such as Jardim Mato Bonito is rather a response to the tensions which mark the private life of Brazilian working class. As Herzfeld highlighted in the same article mentioned above “privacy is not only an ego-centered legal entitlement but also a highly public good, structured both by the physical fabric of the built environment and by the moral dispositions whereby citizens judge that fabric” (p. 157): if privacy has to be public in the

sense that it must be recognized to be effective, our material environment, mainly our homes, have to do with this apparent paradox. Walls, I intend to show, play a major role in managing this apparent paradox. Throughout the paper, we will get an insight into several dimensions of privacy in Brazilian working class: first, we will stress the rhetorical role of walls (and fences) in the social construction of "property relations" (HANN, 1998) in Jardim Mato Bonito; second, we will examine the importance of walls (and doors) in the organization of domestic and family relationships, especially in managing the tensions that arise between individuals; finally, we will show how walls (and windows) are crucial to the preservation of bodies. Property, family and body: what is at stake is a set of ideas that still characterize the modern concept of privacy (HUEBERT, 1997).

Logic and rhetoric of possession: walls and fences in the social construction of "property relations"

As many others *loteamentos periféricos*, Jardim Mato Bonito has a troubled history[4]. In the early fifties, a private company launched the development project after legally buying the land from a Norwegian farmer, in what was then the Rural Zone of Rio de Janeiro. The company was in charge of dividing the land into residential lots, along with the project approved by the city, and providing some urban equipment, a requirement it never fulfilled, letting the land covered with plants and swamps. Land plots were selling through hire purchasing, to a large range of customer categories: on the one hand, the development project fell under "proletarian housing" (*habitação proletária*) laws, so it targeted working class people, at a time marked by a general lack of affordable housing; on the other hand, the company advertised the project in order to attract wealthier buyers, announcing the project as a real estate develop-

[4] *Loteamentos* like Jardim Mato Bonito were the subject of numerous studies in Brazil over the seventies and eighties (SANTOS, 1977; BONDUKI & ROLNIK, 1979; MARICATO, 1979; KOWARIK, 1979; CHINELLI, 1980; LIMA, 1980; SANTOS, 1980; CAVALCANTI, 1980; BELOCH, 1980; CALDEIRA, 1984), mostly by sociologists. Since then, these *loteamentos* have been losing ground to the favelas in the agenda of worldwide social sciences (VALLADARES, 2002). Few ethnographies on *loteamentos* were conducted in the recent time, even less in Rio de Janeiro, where urban poverty is commonly identified with favelas (VALLADARES, 2005). By using the concept of "*loteamento periférico*", I pretend also to rescue the line of research from the seventies and eighties, which linked *loteamento* to "autoconstruction" and center-periphery relations.

ment for summer houses. Due to the lack of infrastructure, especially the lack of public transportation, and also the floods that often plagued the area, buyers with higher purchasing power simply gave up their own lands, letting tem vacant.

Over the eighties, the situation changed a lot. The company withdrew from the development, and some residents launched a campaign to force the city to take care of their settlement. Law itself turned to be more severe with real estate developers (*loteadores*) that did not meet their legal obligations. At the same time, people who did not own their home or their land plot yet, like tenants and plot owners' children, started to squat, to "invade" (*invadir*) neglected plots. As a consequence, some areas within the development became true slums (*favelas*) in the eyes of public administration. Soon other players came to take advantage of the situation and indulge in the practice of land grabbing (*grilagem*), selling land through fake estate agencies and forged documents, and eventually resorting to brutal violence, throwing squatters and legal owners out of their plots. For instance, the own militia has been grabbing land recently, "taking control" (*tomando conta*) of abandoned plots in the flooded areas of the development, where urban infrastructures are pretty scarce, then selling them to very poor families. It is worth noting that invasion can, paradoxically, ensure access to formal ownership through adverse possession (*usucapião*): since he proves continuous and peaceful occupation of the same plot for at least ten years, anyone may be declared legal owner of the plot by law courts. To prevent squatting or land grabbing, the owners who have not improved their plot yet, but are not willing to drop it, use to enclose the plot by a fence or a huge brick wall – likewise, many actual residents fenced their plots as soon as they bought them, so that the neighbors would not try to "eat" (*comer*), to grab some parts of them.

Thus, there are today two possible ways to access legal property in Jardim Mato Bonito: the first, the contractual one, when the subject assumes ownership after a duly registered transaction with former owner; the second, based on possession, when the subject assumes ownership for establishing a lasting and peaceful relationship with the land plot. Together, these two ways sometimes create a quite confusing setting, since the same plot may have been acquired contractually by someone, who got the land tenure title, and be currently occupied by another one, who has also claim on the property. Adverse possession is widely known to the locals: many squat-

ters (*invasores*) classify themselves as "*posseiros*" (settlers or landholders), a very common terminology in rural areas of Brazil, shaken by conflicts between *posseiros,* settlers, and *grileiros*, land grabbers, since the colonization. Indeed, the squatters may see themselves as the legitimate owners of the land they occupy; they may see themselves as "*donos*", masters of the land[5], as they are actually "taking care" ("*tomando conta*") of it. "*Tomar conta*" is a very popular locution in Brazilian Portuguese, which can mean many different kinds of action, mostly "taking care" ("*ela toma conta de uma criança*", "she is taking care of a child"), but also "controlling" ("*a milícia toma conta da área*", "the militia dominates the area") "watching" ("*tomar conta da área*", "watching the place"), "taking up" ("*os turistas estão tomando conta da praia*", "tourists are taking up the beach"), "being in charge" ("*ele toma conta da empresa*", "he is in charge of the company"). It sums up some important ideas about acting as a *dono*: the *dono* has to "take care", "control" and "watch" his land, or eventually empower someone, mostly a well-known neighbor, to do it for him – in this case, "*tomar conta*" will mean something like "house-sitting" ("*estou tomando conta da casa*", "I'm doing house-sitting"). The *dono*'s presence is somehow required, even if it is a "proxy presence" (DALAKOGLOU, 2010). As such, the *dono* who is not "*tomando conta*" of his land plot is said to be "vanished" (*o dono sumiu*). Thus, fencing or walling off the plot serves also to show off the *dono* is actually "*tomando conta*"; fences or walls function as "proxy presence" of the *dono*, in front of some potential squatters or even land grabbers. Conversely, a land plot without any kind of fence or wall is used to be seen by the people who live in Jardim Mato Bonito as a plot "without dono" (*sem dono*) or whose *dono* has been "vanished".

As for the *posseiros*, fencing or walling off the plot is part of the possession (*posse*), of squatting (*invadir*) the plot. While the *grileiros* (land grabbers) resort to violence, throwing the legitimate owners out of their plots, or trick potential buyers by forging documents, *posseiros* (settlers) know their ability to remain on the squatted plot depends on how they are "*tomando conta*", "taking care" of it. Of course they did not take note of all the subtleties of Brazilian property law – the possibility of "special urban adverse possession" (*usucapião especial urbana*), which reduces the time span from ten to five years, is quit unknown from my interlocutors – but they carefully

[5] As pointed out by de l'Estoile, "*dono*" is not just an economic category, a mere synonym for owner (*proprietário*), it is a political one insofar as "it refers to the possibility to act as a master in one's own house and on one's own piece of land" (DE L'ESTOILE, 1994, S68).

keep their bills and their property tax receipt (called IPTU: *Imposto Predial e Territorial Urbano*), in case they need to prove the occupation. Therefore, the squatter in general wants to show off he is committed to the land. Carlinho, an informal handyman (*biscateiro*) who has been squatting the same plot since the mid-eighties, explained to me what one needed to do to remain on a land plot, by using a very popular expression in Brazilian Portuguese: "*cair dentro*" (literally, "to fall into"). "*Cair dentro*" means to let oneself be taken by something, but on purpose, consciously, without any kind of reluctance – for instance, someone who lets himself be taken by the dance is said to be "falling into", "*cair dentro*" that dance. In the case of squatting, "*cair dentro*" implies it is not enough to call oneself the landholder, the *dono*:

> CARLINHO: You can't be staring at the land: 'this is mine', it's not how it works. Clear the ground ("*limpa o terreno*"), pay the IPTU and "*cai pra dentro*". That's what I did!" When I asked him what "*cair dentro*" means exactly, he made the following answer: "When I say '*cair dentro'*, it means you have to fence, clear the plot and start the works ("*começar a fazer obras*"). "*Cair pra dentro*". Ok? You can't just fence and forget it. You have to "*cair*", make something (…).

Thus, clearing the ground, fencing the plot and start to build are operations through which the squatter makes a sound connection between him and his land plot, a connection that comes to define the squatter personhood. "*Cair dentro*": one literally becomes part of it. t

I would like to highlight the operations mentioned by Carlinho are remarkably visual ones, and involve the basic materiality of the own land plot – by contrast, ownership rights acquired through formal transaction are not necessarily made visible in space and are heavily dependent on a thinner materiality: paper (about the materiality of property rights in Latin America, cf. HETHERINGTON, 2009). Clearing the ground especially is an interesting way to show off one is actually "*tomando conta*" of the land plot, by not letting it covered with growing plants or submerged under the swamps, by not letting the own nature "*tomar conta*". Also fencing and walling off. In other words, fencing and walling off should also be understood through the lens of what Rose called the "rhetoric of property": "Possession as the basis of property ownership, then, seems to amount to something like yelling loudly enough to all who may be interested. The first to say, 'This is mine,' in a way that the public understands, gets the prize, and the law will help him keep it against someone else who says, 'No, it is mine.'" (ROSE, 1994, p. 16). The purpose of property, particularly possession, is not only to make things private, is also to convince certain audience (in

our case, justice courts and potential squatters) the owner is actually mastering the thing to be appropriated – "*tomando conta*".

Geopolitics of domesticity: walls, doors and gates in the organization of domestic and family life

It's very common to think of the house as a shelter, and to give walls the function to protect the inhabitants. However, the house does not only meet "basic needs" as the imagery of the shelter mays suggest, it acts as a socio-cultural category[6], whose centrality to the Brazilian working class has been widely highlighted (FREYRE, 1933; PALMEIRA, 1977; HEREDIA, 1979; HEYDE, 1980; WOORTMANN, 1982; GARCIA, 1983). The importance of the house, *casa* in Portuguese, has a lot to do with what Woortmann, reviewing studies on working class families in Brazil, called the "ideology of the nuclear family": "unlike other societies, such as some countries in West Africa and Mexico, in the Brazilian case, the extended family and its corresponding residential arrangements are negatively valued "(Woortmann, 1982, p 120). The opposition between relatives or kin (*parentes*) and family (*família*) will let the weight of this ideology – ideology in Louis Dumont's sense – quite clear. According to Brazilian working class view on the matter, a *família* encompasses a husband-wife couple, united by a tie of alliance, and their children. *Parentes*, on the other hand, are all the people related to the family by some tie of consanguinity and affinity. Popular proverb "*parente é serpente*" ("relatives are snakes") already gives us an idea of how dramatic this opposition might be, but more commonly it always echoes in singular

[6] Along with several studies that are currently being developed in Brazil (CAVALCANTI, 2007; 2009; MC CALLUM & BUSTAMANTE, 2012; MOTTA, 2014; DALMASO, 2014; HANDERSON, 2015) and France (DE L'ESTOILE, 2014), our present contribution is part of a collective effort to bring out a "new anthropology of the house", as opposed to some classic anthropologies who thought the house through the ancient category of "housing type", aiming to the plurality of housing types across the cultures (RAPOPORT, 1969). This "new anthropology of the house" gets two entries. The first one, empirical, refers to the classic studies on houses and hierarchy, houses and social class relations in Brazil (FREYRE, 1933; 1936; PALMEIRA, 1977; LOPES et al., 1979; HEREDIA, 1979; WOORTMANN, 1983; GARCIA, 1983; DAMATTA, 1985). The second one, theoretical, refers to the critique of classic structural-functionalist approaches in kinship studies, based on native definitions of kinship (GOODENOUGH, 1956; YANAGISAKO, 1979; SCHNEIDER, 1980 [1968]). Also were pretty influencing some theoretical writings that made the concept of house a powerful tool for rethinking kinship (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1984; 1991; CARSTEN & HUGH-JONES, 1995; CARSTEN, 2004). Amazing Marcellin's thesis (unfortunately unpublished) on the construction of the African-Brazilian family was the first study to get all these entries working together (MARCELLIN, 1996).

fashion in the life histories of the residents. For instance, César, a self-employed worker close to retirement, used to have a *casa* (house, home) before coming to Jardim Mato Bonito, but he left in order to not have to live close to his mother-in-law any longer. “Those living close to their relatives have a very serious problem,” he told me, “you end up living their problems and they, yours,” thereby presuming that his relatives problems were not his own.

The *casa* could therefore be seen as the space where people actually realize their ideal of the family, the ‘physical counterpart’ of the nuclear family, as Woortmann would say: through the *casa*, the father-husband and mother-wife fulfill the roles defined by the ideology of the nuclear family, with the father-husband acting as a “*pai de família*” (“father of the family”, householder) and the mother-wife as a “*dona de casa*” (“lady of the house”, housewife). Contradictory to the design of these roles it would be to get more than one *pai de família* or more than one *dona de casa* living in the same *casa*, and conversely, the general meaning of *casa* does not go along with having more than one *pai de família* or more than one *dona de casa* living in the same *casa* - temporary arrangements are always possible, and very usual, but they are always seen as temporary arrangements, awaiting people to get their own *casa*. As so many people say during my fieldwork, “*quem casa quer casa*”, “anyone who marries wants a home”. What makes the existence of a space like the *casa* so essential to the *família* is the cultural principle of *privacidade* (privacy)[7], but for Brazilian working class, achieving privacy is nothing but easy – besides, in the last country to abolish slavery, the plebeian fight for privacy gets a deep historical meaning. The specific case of Arnaldo, a 50 years old informal worker (*biscateiro*), born in Jardim Mato Bonito, will show us how much Brazilian working class values privacy, and how they usually manage to achieve it.

Today separated, Arnaldo had four children, two boys and two girls. Some years ago, the youngest son got a woman from Jardim Mato Bonito pregnant, which led to her being expelled from her parents’ house. With nowhere to live, the couple remained on the land of the husband’s father, Arnaldo. When his granddaughter was born, Arnaldo decided to divide the house with his son: the large bedroom and bathroom would belong to his son, while Arnaldo would have the living room and kitchen.

[7] Acording to *Dicionário Houaiss da língua portuguesa*, the word “*privacidade*” in Portuguese comes directly from the English “privacy”, and got popular in the seventies.

He therefore walled up the door between the bedroom and living room. I asked Arnaldo whether he had walled it up because it was too 'cramped'

> ARNALDO: It wasn't cramped. It's just that there's no way, dude, living on top of each other; privacy, there's just no privacy, you know. You've got to have some privacy, right? You want to walk around your own house normally, you want to receive visitors, not have everyone mixing. I'll tell you something: *quem casa quer casa,* anyone who marries wants a house, that's what I've always told you, *quem casa quer casa.* So I told him: you can have that house, then, son.

Arnaldo didn't stop there: after he walled up the door, he opened another one in the old room, now his son's house, so the latter could enter via the *quintal* (yard). Still not satisfied, he walled up this doorway, demolished a section of the wall that surrounded the plot and made another *portão* (gate) so that his son's family would have his *entrada independente,* his own independent entrance (as the plot is located on a street corner, each gate now opens onto a different road).

Arnaldo's case reveals a series of transformations, at once symbolic and architectural, needed for the relations between his son, daughter-in-law and future grandchild to form a family, in accordance with working-class ideology. And to form a family is the same as to give the father-husband and mother-wife their privacy. These transformations basically follow the same pattern: since Arnaldo and his son could not afford a new home, they divide Arnaldo's original house into two different *casas*, walling up the doors between them, and opening a doorway through Arnaldo's son's own house. After a while, Arnaldo walled up the doorway and gave his son a private gate. Indeed, in Jardim Mato Bonito, turning doors into walls is a very common way to make new *casas*, new homes. As a direct consequence, people deeply depend on walls in order to keep privacy; reciprocally, when walls start to crumble, people are getting to lose this privacy and tensions may arise among families. In this regard, how César explained the difficult co-habitation with his *parentes* was really instructive: "*My house was separated by a wall from hers. We communicated through the wall, there was even a hole in a wall that meant I could see her living room from my own.*" To sum up, the *família* needs a space that is exclusively hers to act as a *família*, and this is one of the main reasons why people raise walls: to delimit their family space, the locus of their own privacy.

Another interesting point about Arnaldo's case lies in the way Arnaldo attached privacy to concrete aspect of domestic "government", in a Foucaultian sense

(FOUCAULT, 2008): the *casa* is the place where the father-husband and mother-wife are plenty sovereign, where they ruled themselves ("*you want to walk around your own house normally*") and those who move throughout this place ("*you want to receive visitors, not have everyone mixing*"). Hence the frequent association in the residents speeches between *privacidade* and *liberdade* or *independência*, privacy and freedom o independency. Freedom for Jardim Mato Bonito residents means the ability to behave according to one's own rules. For instance, freedom to walk around the house in underwear, freedom to change the TV channel whenever you want, freedom to raise the volume of your sound system, without causing *constrangimento*, embarrassment to anyone, neither oneself – in Portuguese, *constrangimento* means either embarrassment or restriction, also merging the experiences of physical and moral constraint. It is very common for people to move from their house just because of the *constrangimento*, the *constrangimento* of César for instance, who felt constantly spied by his relatives. For this reasons, walling off each one's entrance, so one can get access to one's own home through an *entrada independente*, is an main guarantee of *liberdade*, as the family can move throughout the house without feeling *constrangida*. It also secures family control over the people moving around the house. For instance, it is socially expected the householder and housewife do not let any man who is not "*de casa*" ("from the house") moving freely around the house, otherwise it could cast doubts on the householder's *honra* (honor). Furthermore, since they go into the "*casa dos outros*" (other's home), people perfectly acknowledge they are subject to the authority of the "*donos da casa*" (owner's authority): the good *visita*, the good guest "pede licença", asks formal permission to the *donos* when he is about to cross the doorstep. So the attachment of the residents to their *entrada independente* goes along with the need to delimit the spaces where each one is free to rule, each one get plenty sovereignty.

Arnaldo's case shows us another important point: at first sight, the "field of residential possibilities" affordable by Brazilian working class does not match with their ideals of privacy, of freedom and independence. Especially among the young father-husband and mother-wife, people lack the means to buy a ready built home. Even empty land plots are getting more and more expansive, since the city has heavily invested in public infrastructures, thus increasing land value (on the other hand, land plot supply is constantly decreasing). Anyway, many people cannot afford or does

not want to live far from their relatives, neighbors and friends, as they form cooperation networks with them. In order to build and fix their house, people used to mobilize these networks. Some daily tasks as taking care of children during working hours traditionally fall under grandparent's responsibility. For all these reasons, people used to build their home closed to their relatives', even on the same land plot: children, sons or daughters, usually built their own home on their parents' plot, upon their parent's house or at the back (*fundos*) of the plot, making residential plots in Jardim Mato Bonito look like little condominiums. In other words, *casas*, houses, only exist through what Marcellin called a "configuration of houses" (MARCELLIN, 1996; 1999; see also MOTTA, 2013), a cooperation and exchange network of houses. As Segalen said in the context of Breton nuclear families, after showing how Breton households depend on extended family networks, "nuclear is not independent" (SEGALEN, 1984). As a consequence, it seems Brazilian working class families face an important contradiction between their ideal of the domestic life, based on being *independente*, and the reality of their domestic practices, where cooperation is absolutely necessary. In fact, "configurations of houses are build upon a structure of tensions between hierarchy and autonomy, between collectivism and individualism" (MARCELLIN, 1996, p. 133). In this regard, building walls ends up being the most common way of stabilizing these "structures of tensions", of correcting the mismatch between the actual field of residential possibilities and the ideals of privacy.

Houses made out of eyes: bodies, walls and windows

Houses and bodies have a very intimate relationship. Discussing Lévi-Strauss' model of "société de maison" (house society), Carsten and Hugh-Jones brilliantly summed up the point: "The house and the body are intimately linked. The house is na extension of the person; like an extra skin, carapace or second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect. House, body and mind are in continuous interaction" (HUGH-JONES & CARSTEN, 1994, p. 2). Indeed, several studies have emphasized the role of the house as a provider of a symbolic map through which subjects from a given culture find their bearings in the world (CUNNINGHAM, 1964; BOURDIEU, 1980 [1970]; GARCIA, 1983; HUGH-JONES,

1985; HAMBERGER, 2010). For instance, the "differential valence of sexes" used to be incorporated to domestic architecture: moving around the house, the subject then learn the values associated with different gender identities. Another line of research pointed out the centrality of the house for the circulation of bodily substances, linking this circulation to kinship (MUNN, 1986; CARSTEN, 1995). Over the last sections, one bodily activity stood out, with respect to walls building: watching. Fencing their land plots, squatters and owners expose to the public gaze their intention do master their plots. Walls and fences do not only obstruct, they are also meant to be seen by potential squatters, legal owners and justice courts. What I am willing to point out here is that walls building depends on how one manages one's and other's gaze. I propose to call "economy of eyes" the relational context created by the bodily activity of looking, relation context that guides walls building.

Eyes are also the enemy of privacy, and an important function of walls is precisely to protect home from the eyes of others. Here again, the example to César's problems involving relatives is highly interesting: his mother-in-law could see his living room through the hole in the wall. By the way, there is in Portuguese a verb to describe someone who is looking inside someone else's private space, thus infringing its privacy: *devassar* – real estate developers used to advertise their houses as "indevassávéis", impenetrable to the eyes of others. The following excerpt from a conversation with Afrânio, a retired security guard, who has been living in a squatted area of Jardim Mato Bonito for 19 years, will illustrate quite well the association between privacy, walls and eyes (I started asking Afrânio why he did not fence his land plot with brick walls, unlike other residents):

> AFRÂNIO: The first thing I wanted to do when I arrived here was making the wall. But I thought other things were most in need, and I just never made it.
>
> I: But the first thing would be the wall?
>
> AFRÂNIO: First thing was the wall. You, when you will make your home, sorry to say this, if you haven't made it yet, be sure you're right if you make the wall first.
>
> I: Why?
>
> AFRÂNIO: Because you've already put a screen (*antepara*). A wall is a screen (*antepara*). Your building material happens to be delivered, no one needs to see what's getting in, and getting out, and neither what you're doing. Inside. By the time you do the job, the house is ready, no one even knows what you're doing (…).
>
> I, laughing: It's because people like to take a look at…

> AFRÂNIO, interrupting me, crying out: Hi my buddy! Here, people ask: "but come one, what are you doing here? What is it? I should see some place for me to live. What's that all about? What's that all about! (he beats hands). There is this kind of thing. Lately, people stop doing this. People thought: "What is he going to do? A warehouse?" Because they found it was too large. (…) I believe that having your wall, it's for you to get a little privacy (emphatic), right?

It is worth noting that at no time Afrânio argued safety reason to raise a wall. He was more worried about people walking down the street and watching him, whether or not they were known people. In fact, concerns about other's eyes – stranger's eyes, the gaze of relatives and neighbors) are recurring in residents speeches, and serve as a justification for various decisions related to domestic architecture. In particular, the residents pay much attention to the places where they put their windows, so they cannot see through neighbor's house: except when there is a one meter corridor separating their home from the neighbor's one, they never build windows on the sidewall. Doing so, they almost respect the existing building regulations, without ever knowing them – which is a kind of surprise in a universe where enforcement of building regulations is desperately lacking.

In addition, Afrânio's speech reveals concerns about other's eyes are not related exclusively to privacy infringement: other's eyes are also full of desires. The phrases Afrânio put in the mouth of the people who were looking at his plot imply envy (*inveja*), as if they feel jealous of the large building Afrânio was trying to construct: apparently, these people would like either to live in such a large place or to open a shop that earned them money. This association between eyes and desire, envy more specifically, is very common in the everyday life of Brazilian working class. A child looking longingly at someone else's meal will be said to be very *olhuda* (eyed), to be an *olhão*, a "big eye". Furthermore, to the envious eyes people give adverse powers: regardless of religion, the residents fear the influence of the "*olho grande*" or "*olho gordo*" ("big eye"), of the evil eye in their lives, for it is known to cause illness and bad luck – and conversely, when people suffer from some lasting disease or bad luck, they blame the evil eye for it, they blame someone's envious gaze. Next, I will come with the case of José, a 29 years old bricklayer who has been living in Jardim Mato Bonito for seven years: among all the people I met, he was the one who showed the greatest concern about the influence of the *olho grande* in his life.

To begin with, José does not live exactly in a house like most Jardim Mato Bonito residents, but rents a kitchenette (*quitinete*) located in a building that holds

sixteen others, the same model, each one with bathroom, bedroom and a lounge that serves as a kitchen at the same time. Each side of the building consists of eight kitchenettes, four on the first floor, four on the second. The former are made accessible by two entrances at the ends of the plot, whereas two stairs give access to the second floor kitchenettes. Each one's windows and doors open onto the hallways through which people go in and out the building. As a consequence, just walking down the hallway everyone can hear, smell and look at each one's kitchenette, although some of them get curtains. José does not like to live in that building, and even less the neighbor who lives next to him, and is yelling all the time. When I met José, he just had a daughter with his wife, a young and attractive resident of Jardim Mato Bonito. However, due to alcoholism, José used to fight a lot with his wife, and that was the reason why she had left home the day I interviewed him. José blamed people's evil eye for his alcoholism and marital problems in general:

> JOSÉ: I will be honest with you (he elevates the ton of his voice, looking very pensive), inside Jardim Mato Bonito, there are a lot of people here (he made a small pause), they keep a big eye / put the evil eye on us ("*tem olho grande na gente*"), dude. There are many big eyes / evil eyes you know ("*tem muito olho grande assim*"), you cannot build a family, you cannot have an attractive wife, and they already keep a big eye / put the evil eye on us ("*já fica de olho grande*"), they get it, they bring discord to our family ("*já dá desavança na família da gente*"), the people, you know… Especially here (he moves his head around, to embrace all the area)! Living this way, I do not even need to speak, they are already setting their prying eyes on things ("*só fica já curiando as coisas assim*"), all of them so curious ("*tudo curioso*"). (…) Here is a good place to live Thomas (trying to rectify the negative impression of the neighborhood he gave), a quiet place ("*lugar sossegado*"), about theft, about violence, about this kind of stuff, like it's more different than favelas (*comunidades*), you know, (…) but the problem here is the people who (hesitating)… the tongue is very large, the eyes are larger than the ass. Then you have no way to develop a… to develop a project ("*criar um projeto*"). Building something like that… But God, now I will meet in the heart of God but it will be for us, nothing will be against us. And I'll get it Thomas."

José went on with an anecdote about his hated neighbor.

> JOSÉ: Then you see someone cooking, "hummm", telling him his food smells good. I'm a good cook, and the people, when I'm cooking, they walk down the hall, like that (he starts acting as someone who would be looking out the window, trying to smell the; at the same time, we hear his neighbor yelling at someone). You get it? This neighbor, I don't like her (he lowers his voice, making it almost inaudible). That's what I'm saying. Then, when you get to know your neighbor, it's a shit man, you're cooking, they keep an eye on it ("*fica de olho*"). You cannot do anything. (…) That's what I'm saying. Here on Sunday, I was cooking and at any moment she was walking down the hall. Food smells good here, because it's well seasoned food, all of them keep their eye on it, with their big eye / their evil eye ("*com olho grande*") and so with their nose… You saw they are big eyes / evil eyes ("*viu que são olho grande*"), the envy because they don't know to do that. May God bless us and my family.

Interestingly, several common expressions in Portuguese, referring to the very fact of looking, without any kind of supernatural presence, get in José's speech a double meaning, since they refer constantly to the evil eye. For instance, "*ficar de olho*" here means at the same time "to keep an eye on somebody" and "to put the evil eye on somebody". It makes perfectly sense if we keep in mind that the very expressions of "*olho grande*" or "*olho gordo*", "big eye", suggest the evilness is intrinsic to the eye, since it is caused by an extension of the own organ: as the eye gets bigger, it gets evil. It is a huge difference from English or French ("mauvais oeil"), where the eye has to be meant to be evil in order to be evil. And it explains the kind of ambiguities which come all along José's speech.

In fact, you never know since when a dangerous envy inhabits people's eye: some people are frightening just by someone who is staring at them. Consequently, it is always better to protect oneself from other people's eye. The most vulnerable individuals of the family are the most likely to be caught by the evil eye. Whether or not they are known to the family, mothers and grandmothers usually do not like people staring at the family's newborn baby, even when they are being praised for how good and healthy the child looks – especially when they are being praised, because the compliments might be interpreted as envy (*inveja*). If the baby gets sick, mothers and grandmothers blame someone who recently stares at the child, making compliments. Hence, there is a general tendency to hide the baby deeply inside he stroller when the mother or grandmother is going for a walk with him. Thus, high walls, hidden windows and separated entrance are consistent solutions to reduce family exposure to the jaundiced eye of the others (strangers, neighbors or even relatives) – the actual dram of José is his inability to resort to these architectural alterations as he is renting a kitchenette.

However, not all the Jardim Mato Bonito inhabitants fence their plot by very high and completely closed walls, since the need to protect oneself from other people's gaze is balanced by the need to "keep an eye" (ficar de olho) on the outside of the house. Afrânio, who has not build his surrounding wall yet, was pretty clear about this point.

> AFRÂNIO: I have a phobia of closed thing in front of me. I want to see who's on the other side, you know. Now when you will close off your plot, better closing off, better! But I don't like closed walls (*muros fechado*). I wanna see who's coming up to me ("*quem tá pas-*

> *sando na minha frente*"). I've always had it. So, I think you should make your wall, a half-wall (*meia-parede*), and fence off (*gradear*).

The half-wall solution is not the most common one, but there is a very popular variation: the cobogó, better known as "*tijolo furado*", honeycomb brick. The cobogó is a hollow ceramic element, often used in part of the front wall to allows ventilation[8]. It can also serve to see outside the plot without being seen. Another popular solution is the terrace (*terraço*) or balcony (*varanda*) at the second floor: there, the donos can easily watch the street, without the risk of someone "taking their privacy away" ("*tirar a privacidade deles*"). César, for instance, whose front wall is partially made up by cobogó, has plans to build a "*sacadazinha*", little balcony on the second floor, in order to "tomar conta da rua", "watch the street", according to his own words. That is, if it is important to protect oneself from other people's eyes, it is also important to watch the people outside the home.

However, one should not conclude the "economy of eyes" is always based on antagonistic relationships: the jaundiced eyes or the watching eyes. In many occasions, we may need other people's eyes. Looking at the massive concrete walls surrounding his neighbor's land plot – they were actually among the highest walls I have ever seen in Jardim Mato Bonito – Paolo, a carpenter who has been living there for six years, told me:

> PAOLO: I don't see the charm of that huge wall (*paredão*) there.
>
> I: Like you said, the problem is you can't see anything…
>
> PAOLO: Through the house style here, you see who's who. It looks like a prison! (…) I never asked her why she did it there and what she thought to do. Because sometimes you think you're doing something to protect yourself, but you're putting yourself at risk, you know. Because, as we were speaking about, someone coming in by night, how are you gonna know there is someone there? No one's gonna notice any movement, it's all closed off! Isn't it? There is no vision.

So, other people's gaze, especially neighbor's gaze, may help when one need it – after all, as a Jardim Mato Bonito resident told me once, "the neighbor is the closest kin", if you are in danger, the first people who can help you are your neighbors, since your relatives may be living farer. Part of José's front wall, for example, was once

[8] According to Christiano Borba, the *cobogó* was born in Recife, Pernambuco, at the beginning of the twentieth century. It seems to derive from the *muxarabis* (mashrabiya) and *gelosias*, typical elements of the Arabic architecture, which allowed the occupants inside the building, especially the women, to see outside without being seen. After being brought in by Portuguese settlers, muxarabis and gelosias turned to be typical of residential architecture in Rio de Janeiro, until their prohibition in 1809 Cf. http://cobogodepernambuco.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Pesquisa-Cobogo-de-Pernambuco.pdf

destroyed by the garbage truck, while he was working. Soon, the neighbor wrote down the driver's name and phone number, and called José. José told me: "*I was working but since we are very communicative people, everyone watches everything* ("todo mundo vigia tudo")*, go help, because as you're helping people, I'm gonna help you.*" Thus, having neighbors watching the place where one lives is also a kind of insurance against anything that could happen when you are not at home. As a consequence, one actually has to build walls that hide enough to "not losing one's privacy", a true "screen" (*antepara*) as Afrânio put it, but that also filter out some information about what is happening inside your house.

From the Fortress City to the City of Eyes

In Frost poem, the speaker seems to complain about the mere existence of a wall between him and his old-fashioned neighbor. It has even been said John F. Kennedy quoted the poem's first line, "something there is that doesn't love a wall", when he inspected the Berlin Wall. On one hand, Frost's speaker makes the point pretty clear in saying:

> There where it is we do not need the wall:
> He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
> My apple trees will never get across
> And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

On the other hand, all the poem demonstrate that mending walls is a very solid way to build relationship with one's neighbor: each year in Spring, the speaker and his neighbor meet at the wall, and work together in order to fix the damages caused by frost and hunters. They even have to perform some very ancient ritual. Thus, in the very act of mending, at the same time walls segregate and reunite. In my point of view, Frost poem deals with some deep issues regarding privacy, among other ones: walls stand out for privacy, and to keep up privacy, you need at the same time to build enduring relationships – with your neighbors, for instance. I would argue most of the anthropologists share the speaker's point of view: walls prevent people from genuinely communicating with each other. In anthropology too, "something there is that doesn't love a wall", maybe the same that motivated Frost poem: some kind of romantic impulse (DUARTE, 2004).

In this paper, I have examined the importance of walls to the construction of privacy, in the case of a Brazilian working class settlement where “autoconstruction” (HOLSTON, 1991) prevails. One may argue there are three essential dimensions to privacy: ownership, family and body. Walls (and fences) have to do with ownership not only because they help in demarcating the plots, but also because they inaugurate a continuous relationship between those who want to “*tomar conta*” of the plots, and the land plot itself – “*cair dentro*”, as Carlinho said. Walls (and fences) show off this relationship, so it could be acknowledged by certain audience (neighbors, squatters or justice courts). Thus, they act as parts of a “rhetoric of property” (ROSE, 1994). Second, walls (and doors) establish the areas where each *família* exercises its authority. In the case of “little condominiums”, they accommodate the sociocultural principle of *independência* or *liberdade,* intrinsic to the “domestic government”, to the “oikonomia” (DE L’ESTOILE, 2014), with the need for cooperation (*colaboração*) and help (*ajuda*). Third, walls (and windows) reflect the importance eyes have on people’s life: full of desires and powers, they may adversely affect people’s bodies and the unity of their families, so eyes must be kept under control. Thus, walls (and windows) serve to manage the movements of people’s eyes, defining who can see, how and where, and forming what I have called an “economy of eyes”. In general, building walls has a lot to do with showing and hiding, with seeing without being seen.

I must admit even in Jardim Mato Bonito, where everything is so “quiet” (*tranquilo*) according to its own inhabitants, walls are being used as fortifications too, with people raising walls to protect themselves from the surrounding violence of the all city. As the population in Jardim Mato Bonito has been growing fast in recent years, older residents began to fear for their safety, blaming newcomers (“*as pessoas de fora*”, “the people from outside”) for crimes that may happen in the neighborhood, like robbery or burglary (violent crimes committed by the militia are not really considered as forms of violence) – nonetheless, I never met someone who actually suffered from those alleged crime. In fact, it is sometimes quit hard to distinguish between the several motivations for building walls, between fear of urban crime and the construction of privacy. In my opinion, the complication of the relations involved in building walls highlight how important the study of domestic materialities is for places where “autoconstruction” prevails. In the very act of building their own plot, people are dealing with different issues that expose the different values we attach to our material worlds.

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