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# Pioneers and Entrepreneurs

Bio/Ethnographic Notes Towards an Anthropology  
of Urban Growth

*Cristina Patriota de Moura*

*Professor at the Department of Anthropology  
of the University of Brasilia*

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## Resumo

O artigo discute processos de expansão urbana através das lentes de sujeitos situados e suas narrativas autobiográficas. Os dois termos que designam atores e atividades relacionadas à expansão urbana – pioneiros e empreendedores – surgem de material etnográfico produzido em atividades de pesquisa envolvendo áreas residenciais de estabelecimento recente nas cidades de Brasília e Goiania. Ambos os termos se tornam mediadores teóricos que são usados para discutir maneiras pelas quais urbanização e formação de sujeitos participam de processos complexos de constituição recíproca.

**Palavras-chave:** Expansão urbana; subjetividade; personificação; Brasília; Goiania; pioneiros; empreendedores

## Abstract

The article discusses processes of urban growth through the lenses of situated subjects and their autobiographical narratives. The two terms which designate actors and activities related to urban growth – pioneers and entrepreneurs – rise out of ethnographic material collected through research activities involving recently established housing developments in Brasilia and Goiania. Both terms become theoretical mediators which are used to discuss ways in which urbanization and subject formation participate in complex processes of reciprocal constitution.

**Keywords:** Urban growth; subjectivity; personification; Brasília; Goiania; pioneers; entrepreneurs

# Pioneers and Entrepreneurs

## Bio/Ethnographic Notes Towards an Anthropology of Urban Growth

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“However, in a country as complex as ours, it is necessary to always desire more, discover more, innovate in our paths and seek new solutions. Only in this way will we be able to assure those who improve their lives that they can achieve even more, and prove to those who still struggle against poverty that they can, with help from government and all of society, change their position. In this way we can become, in fact, one of the world’s most developed and less unequal nations – **a country with a solid and entrepreneurial middle class**, a vibrant and modern democracy, with complete social commitment, political freedom and institutional creativity.”

(President Dilma Rousseff’s inauguration address to Congress, Jan. 1, 2011)

“And for those who doubt the possibility of achieving so much in only one mandate, I wish to remember that a little over 50 years ago, a whole city was raised in the Central Plateau, in a region where previously nothing existed. The construction of our dear Brasília is one of the most striking proofs that, with tenacity and perseverance, dreams can in fact come true. We must honor the effort and sweat of these pioneers – this brave Candango people, to whom I now render homage.”

(Inaugural address of Agnelo Queiroz, Governor of the Federal District, Jan. 1, 2011)

The purpose of this article is to reveal and establish links between processes of urban growth and personal trajectories as narrated in autobiographical accounts gathered in different times and spaces. It hypothesizes that connections arise that help understand urbanization processes by means of theoretical tools that transcend classical debates such as one that opposes urban anthropology to an anthropology of the city. This article discusses the use of

two terms, apprehended through ethnographic research, that are then used as theoretical mediators that link persons and urban formations in reciprocal constitution. In the narratives collected, “Pioneers” and “entrepreneurs” are presented as subjects linked to the establishment and continuous growth of Brasília and Goiânia, the two main metropolitan regions in Central Brazil. As locally significant symbols of urbanizing action, they also stimulate an interesting discussion involving a possible anthropology of subjectification.

Brazilian anthropology has accumulated studies about rural-urban migration, the formation of “cultural” groupings in contexts that have the multiplicity of urban worlds as interpretive background, discussions around social mobility, ideologies related to specific social classes and politically prominent issues such as identity-based social movements, movements for urban housing and citizenship rights. It has also produced studies focused on issues such as gender, generation, religion, youth values and aesthetics. In short, a vast pallet of studies is available that is related to urban issues in more or less explicit ways. The “city,” in these studies, may denote specific contexts in which given phenomena, characteristics or specific traits are found, as suggested by terms like urbanity, urbanization or even citizenship, all of which refer to modernizing social dynamics.

Cities, therefore, have been treated as contexts where social groups, cultural phenomena, political processes, ethnic, racial, professional and gender-related identities are to be found and ethnographically described, analyzed and problematized in anthropological terms. Urban settlements have also been treated as ways of life with their own characteristics, thought to generate specific life styles. Furthermore, they have been thought of as networks of networks, mosaics of worlds, political arenas, multiscalar and multidimensional assemblages, poles of attraction and expulsion and as global nodes. Finally, they have been described as phenomena with no intrinsic value, or as sources of global synergy, civilizing centers or cancerous tumors spreading disorder and violence.

In order to propose an anthropological account of urban growth, this article deals with specific cities, and persons drawn from ethnographic material. Cities are here understood as being multidimensional and multiscalar assemblages (Sassen, 2006; Roy and Ong, 2011) which, in their material dimension, occupy and territorialize spaces. In so doing, these assemblages also produce lives and meanings through which people weave their paths of life.

The two chosen categories – pioneers and entrepreneurs – will serve as mediators of thought, means of transportation from one scale to another, so as to relate the incommensurable (but not incompatible). Both stem from my anthropological plunges into specific urban universes: the “world of horizontal condominiums” in Goiânia, and the “condominium issue” in Brasília. In a sense, they may both be considered ethnographically grasped native terms.

The terms “pioneer” and “entrepreneur” allowed me, at first, to reflect upon the establishment of horizontal condominiums as directed actions, projects which become materialized from interests and will. They were terms used by specific agents interviewed for my research when talking about their personal histories, which have all led to the present condition of condominium homeowners.



Goiânia and Brasília (DF). The two largest cities in Central Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

I found the “entrepreneurs” in the condominiums of Goiânia, and many modes of “pioneers” in the public debates and autobiographical narratives gathered in condominiums in Brasília. It is certainly possible, however, to find them elsewhere, as can be seen in the inaugural addresses of our new president and the governor of the Federal District.<sup>2</sup>

1 Source: <http://jatai-goias.blogspot.com/>

2 Partido dos Trabalhadores, the Brazilian Workers Party.

The first part of the article presents a few meanings and uses of the term pioneer in Brasília. I then go on to discuss the entrepreneurs found in Goiania in the following section. The third part is a theoretical reflection on the participation of cities and persons in their reciprocal crafting through processes of urban growth.

## **I – Brasília's Pioneers**

Brasília is a city of many cities. Born out of a synergy of forces and projects, this urban assemblage has as its point of departure the great development project for the Brazilian hinterland. The foundational construction of Brasília was certainly a great event, marked as a Modernist breakthrough. Even though most of the literature points to the fact that the ruptures intended by the utopian state-sponsored project were never fully accomplished, there is also consensus when identifying the importance given to innovation, not only in the initial period of construction and urban planning, but also in the motivations of different agents in the multiple times and spaces that combine to form a continuous process of expansion and complexification of urban networks.

Still today, depending on the situation, Brasília can be understood as the Plano Piloto<sup>3</sup> – a name which, once merely a technical definition, became a designation for a “place” that conveys multiple meanings and feelings to those who live in it. But Brasília may also include multiple “cities,” some formerly named “satellite cities,” others already born as “administrative regions” or “residential sectors.” In some of these localities there are inhabitants who attach themselves to urban spaces through identity labels, as well as collective memories and projects. Some names elicit stereotypes and

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3 The “Pilot Plan” was the airplane-shaped city designed by Lucio Costa and destined to be the new capital of Brazil. It contains the Monumental Axis, where the government offices and monuments stand, and the residential areas named Asa Sul (South Wing) and Asa Norte (North Wing), where most of the civil servants live. The single-family residential areas near the Plano Piloto, which were designed for the wealthier sectors of the population, are called Lago Sul (South Lake) and Lago Norte (North Lake), and are located on the opposite side of the artificial Paranoá Lake. The “satellite cities” were implemented to provide housing for the poorer sectors of the population, beginning even before the inauguration of Brasília in 1960. All these “cities” are located in the Distrito Federal - DF (Federal District), a square-shaped area cut out from the state of Goiás to become the nation’s capital. The metropolitan area of Brasília includes the entire area within the limits of the DF as well as over ten municipalities situated in the surrounding state of Goiás. The Capital of Goiás is Goiânia.

allude to specific forms of sociality and expression, such as rap – and also the *repente*<sup>4</sup> – of Ceilandia, the samba from Cruzeiro, or the organized soccer fans from Gama<sup>5</sup>. Others are referred to with stigmatized images of poverty and unruly urban growth, and still others claim to annex themselves to highly valued areas as symbols of distinction, such as the condominiums near the Lago Sul. There are also assemblages such as the lower middle-class condominiums that combine ideoscapes of order and disorder and blur distinctions between categories.

Not all these areas intend to be “cities” with clear boundaries or fixed gravitational centers, but all aspire to be “urban” in the sense of having urban dignity, moral (although rarely legal) recognition, and political participation. Being a “city” in Brasília is at the same time a moral and material condition. The geographer Aldo Paviani, for example, defines Brasília as a multi-centered metropolis that includes all urban areas located within the Federal District and adjacent areas in the state of Goiás (Paviani, 2010). The Brazilian Constitution determines that the federal capital is indivisible, and refers to it as Brasília or the Federal District. There are no municipalities within the Federal District.

“City” is, therefore, a qualitative term, with multiple meanings that overlap and are situationally emphasized. There is the monument-city, declared a global cultural heritage site by UNESCO and protected in its four scales<sup>6</sup>. But to be a city in Brasília is also to participate in constant processes of becoming. Urban growth is permanent, emergent, insurgent, but also full of mechanisms that capture and discipline: informal housing settlements, forged documents and regularization processes, “spontaneous” condominiums and large-scale housing developments.

To participate in the city is also to play a role in this creative expansion. Thus the importance of entrepreneurs and pioneers as characters who articulate urban materiality with actions, values and subjectivities, incarnated in persons who are imbricated in relationships with various dimensions of the city.

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4 A popular form of musical dialogue that is very common in the hinterland of Northeastern Brazil, where many of the workers who migrated to Brasília originally came from.

5 Ceilandia, Cruzeiro and Gama are part of the first “satellite cities” built outside the Plano Piloto, although Cruzeiro is adjacent to it.

6 Lucio Costa’s conception of Brasília was based on four scales, which he named as monumental, residential, gregarious and bucolic.

The “great construction” (Ribeiro, 2007) in Central Brazil has not ended, although the “rhythm of Brasília” of the mythical time of the “pioneer front” has been completely altered. Contradictory dynamics have taken place. The time of the pioneer has somehow become crystallized as a foundational myth of a city in constant growth. The pioneer as a character of this saga mediates and amalgamates while it simultaneously separates and marks differences.

In historiographical terms, records indicate that the categories “Candango” and “pioneer” had distinctive meanings during the first decades of Brasília. In an article written in the 1980s, Roque Laraia described the opposition between Candangos and pioneers:

To be a Candango has become a synonym of pioneer. But the stratifying tendency of our society, at some point in time, has led the elite who participated in the historical feat to disdain this name and to prefer the label of pioneer. Then, the members of this elite began to refer to themselves as the explorers, those who open the way, but who should not be mistaken for the humble masses of those who work the wood, cement and iron. (Laraia, 1996)

Holston also identified the term pioneer as a positive and heroic qualification that refers to the JK<sup>7</sup> era and points to the term “Candango” as being pejorative. More recently, in a study about the “children of the Candango,” the historian Edson Beú Luiz claims that among those he interviewed, inhabitants of Ceilandia, there were no distinctions between the terms *Candango* and pioneer (Luiz, 2007).

Distinctions in the use of the terms are situational: *Candangos* may have initially referred to the manual workers at the construction sites of NOVACAP, as opposed to professional “pioneer” members of the bureaucratic elite who came to implement grand projects and occupy leadership positions. However, more recently, the term pioneer has come to refer to participation in the crafting and consolidation of the city, and has been used to refer to people of different socio-economic standings. The pioneer, as a category, has even gained legal status, as an honorific title or an identity that confers special rights to certain urban spaces, for the living or the dead.

In 1996, for example, the legislature of the Federal District created, if only on paper, the “city of pioneers,” which had not yet been implemented in 2011. The law that created this “city” also defined the term pioneer as a status

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7 President Juscelino Kubitchek de Oliveira, who led the construction of the new capital.



ascribed to those who began living in Brasília before 1970, and the category “filho de pioneiro” as a “first generation descendant of a pioneer, older than eighteen, born or residing in the Federal District for longer than eighteen years” (GDF, 1996). In 1999, a district decree also designated “special areas” in cemeteries for the burial of authorities, pioneers and members of the Academia Brasileira de Letras (GDF, 1999).

Such laws inscribed a “right to the city” for those defined as pioneers and their descendants, even though few practical consequences were actually felt. In fact, the rights of the dead have been fully implemented in the cemeteries, whereas those alive are still waiting for their plots of land in the promised city of pioneers. What the documents inscribe, nevertheless, is a symbolic participation<sup>8</sup> that links the city and the subjects designated as pioneers. This symbolic participation, crystallized in public documents, often contrasts with feelings of estrangement in relation to the Brasília of utopian projects and heritage sites of the Plano Piloto. Studies such as Jesse Wheeler’s about underground rock, for instance, have found feelings of distancing that display homologies among spatial, social and expressive spheres and that may be perceived in different forms of sociality in multiple musical scenes (Wheeler, 2007).

When Beú interviewed sons and daughters of Candango pioneers, he found feelings of admiration and resentment regarding Brasília, understood as being strictly the Plano Piloto. This admiration was for the great masterpiece to which their parents (mostly fathers) contributed with their sweat and even blood. The resentment was for being systematically excluded from government land distribution programs and home loans.

During the public hearings sponsored by the district legislature in 2008 to discuss the new land use master plan, pioneers and their children were often present, affirming their identities and claiming specific rights. The speech below was given by a “son of a pioneer”:

There are children and grandchildren of pioneers, which is my case. My grandfather arrived here in 1958 – in the former Free Town – where he made a living. We cared for streams so that there was no littering, and we took good care of the area so that there would be no squatting. Not only my family, but many families are in the same situation. The properties at the rear of

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8 See Leenhardt, 1979.

Candangolandia, inside the Zoo, have been legalized; those near the freeway that goes to Gama have also been legalized. And why haven't those in Nucleo Bandeirante, where there are Candango citizens, sons of pioneers, obtained this legalization? This is what I want to ask. (Emerson Santos Tavares, from Setor de Chácaras do Núcleo Bandeirante, Sept.13, 2008)

The term pioneer links persons to the city through work done when the city was first built. It also links different generations, since the “children of pioneers” emerge as possible bearers of specific rights. During the public hearings, claims were made that invoked up to three generations, and bonds expressed among families who described themselves as sharing the same situation. Terms such as “Candango citizens” and “children of Brasília” were used to establish bonds of identity and to highlight the specificity of those who would be entitled to “legitimate” rights, as opposed to squatters, “invaders,” recent immigrants or even the “powerful forces” of big business and political elites.

It is interesting to observe that the same pioneer spirit that might be attributed to an adventurous individualism, becomes, over generations, a person-binding factor. We might say that the term pioneer, while reifying persons by means of a label materialized in documents and institutions, also personifies the city as an assemblage crossed by networks of relations. However, this personification does not only produce bonds of solidarity and identification. It also produces schisms that may come to distinguish the “established” from the “outsiders” (Elias, 2000). Manual labor, sweat and blood are presented as substances that are blended into the iron and concrete of the large construction projects, and allow those who share blood through descent to also participate in the rights to the land that becomes the city.

### **I.a – Bio/ethnographic notes<sup>9</sup>**

One of the main forms of residential growth in the past two decades in Brasília has been through single-family homes in gated areas locally

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9 The notes in this section come from autobiographical narratives gathered by myself and a research team of undergraduate students from the Universidade de Brasília, as part of the project entitled “Condominiums in the Federal District and the global spread of gated communities,” funded by FAP-DF, from December 2007 to July 2010. The students are: Herika Cristina Amador Chagas, Ranna Iara Almeida, Bruno Casemiro, and Natalia Kornjesuk. I am also grateful to Paloma Maroni for her work as research assistant.

called *condomínios horizontais* or simply *condomínios* (condominiums).<sup>10</sup> While conducting research on the spread of horizontal condominiums in the DF, one of the approaches was to interview residents of different income levels. Interviews included questions about home investment decisions, construction and processes of formalizing land ownership. The main thread pursued in the interviews, however, consisted in eliciting narratives regarding the residential life courses of our narrators. One of the issues that impressed the research team in the material that they collected was the recurrence of references to acts and persons described as *pioneiros* (pioneers,). These narrators, it should be noted, were people who occupied tracts of land and built private homes in areas that have only recently been involved in a very complex process of incorporation to the “city.” Let us look at a few examples:

#### 1. The community leader of a “low income condominium”

Marcelo Negrão<sup>11</sup> proudly claims to be a “son of Brasília” and told us about his saga of passing through a succession of residences in informal settlements in the Federal District. Born in a hospital in the Plano Piloto, his first home was in the IAPI village, but his family was removed to Ceilandia<sup>12</sup> when that “invasion” (as the illegally occupied land is known) was eradicated by the government in the early 1970s. In Ceilandia, he says, there was no running water or any other kind of urban service and, as a small boy, he wandered into the surrounding savannah known as Cerrado, to be found only three days later. After getting married, in the 1980s, he built a house in an irregular rural settlement called Vicente Pires, so that he could “leave my mother-in-law’s backyard.” His home in Vicente Pires was torn down by the government and he has since lived in the Condomínio Sol Nascente (Rising Sun) and has fought for housing rights for the “sons of Brasília,” organizing several forms of resistance to government actions that intend to remove informal housing settlements.

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10 A report from 2006 said there were over 600,000 people living in these places (see Patriota de Moura, 2010)

11 This is the only part of the paper in which I use the actual personal name and name of the condominium. This is because it was explicitly asked for. All other names of persons and condominiums have been changed to protect people’s privacy.

12 Ceilandia is situated southwest of the Plano Piloto and is adjacent to Taguatinga, the first satellite city. The region composed of Ceilandia, Taguatinga and Samambaia is currently the most crowded area of the DF.

## 2. The pioneer couple in constant movement

Dona Maria and Seu José fit the legal definitions of pioneers. He arrived in Brasília before the city's inauguration and she came from the same place in Pernambuco, in 1965, brought by her husband. They raised five children, not all biological offspring, and have lived in several places, beginning with a wooden shack in Nucleo Bandeirante, at the time of the great construction. They lived in different apartments in the Plano Piloto, mansions in the Lago Norte region and houses in three horizontal condominiums. Seu José explains:

"I was impatient because I came from Pernambuco. I arrived in Brasília in a horse-cart, in 1960. I left home on March 3, 1960 and arrived here on March 18. It was a long trip, with a lot of mud, and I was illiterate. I struggled. I went to work in the GTB<sup>13</sup> in the mobilization for the Ministry buildings, then I worked in the cabinet and, in 1962, I was appointed janitor in the Caixa Economica Federal (bank). And through my struggle, I managed to move to an administrative career. In 1977, I graduated in economics and I retired in 1990. I ended my career in the Caixa as a branch manager. Because of my life, that longing, I would build something and not think about it, so I owed money, but I had to educate the kids, help out. So I would do everything within my budget, but my budget would be overextended, so I would sell, buy another tract and build. And so, with this way of life, I spent twenty years in Lago Norte. I have forgotten in which and how many houses I lived.

D. Maria specifies:

"We built twelve houses in Lago Norte, three in JK, a condominium past the police station, then we built here (their current condominium). Then our financial situation did not allow us, so we currently live in this rental home."

But the couple has not stopped planning. They are currently building a house in another condominium, with an even more questionable legal standing than the one where they now live, but with great potential:

"I am in love with that place. Only 800 meters away from the main road. It will be right next to that new shopping mall, a three-minute drive from the CA apartments and a seven-minute drive from the medical center."

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13 Grupo de Trabalho de Brasília (GTB) – Brasília Work Group.

Their narratives combine horizontal and vertical motilities, trans-generational upward mobility and also strong family bonds. The houses are not portrayed as stabilizing shelters, but mainly as means of developing and raising persons who emerge with the city and are always amalgamated in their relationships.

My whole problem was that I arrived in Brasília and brought my family. My brother has three daughters, so I brought him over and got him a job. And he had three daughters, so what he earned was not enough. I found him a house and paid him an allowance until he got settled. I also helped the other brothers a lot, bought them land up in the Northeast. So I didn't just take care of myself. I think I have played out my role on Earth.

### 3. The upwardly mobile daughter of a Candango

Luci begins telling her story: *"I was born in Brasília in 1965 and my father was one of the Candangos."* She regrets not having received any advantages due to being a daughter of a Candango. She even registered for special programs, along with her mother and sister, but was never included. Her path has been one of growing self-assertion and upward mobility through work, education, marriage and residential movement. While she resents not owning more valuable pieces of land in the city her father helped build, she makes a point to mark her difference in relation to the label of Candanga. It is possible to perceive, however, a romanticized vision of her childhood and a faith in Brasília's Utopia.

So Brasília has always had housing problems, and if you look at it, one thing is very upsetting, because I am a Brasiliense – I am not a Candanga! Candangos, you know, are those people who came to work in the construction – I am Brasiliense and I saw a beautiful city in Guará... We had a low little wall around the house, a sidewalk in front, a mango tree, mangoes and grass in our front yard. We played on the lawn. Not today! What happens? The guy pulled his gates to the edge of the street, there is only a sidewalk where you can hardly pass. I saw this whole idea of a utopia about Brasília becoming a city with its cute satellite cities, all neat and tidy, with pretty little white houses. Today I see a violent Guará, an Águas Claras that resembles the center of São Paulo, and I see that here in the condominiums, it is no different: it is all disordered, a mess, a horrible thing in which we do not see any quality of life.

She justifies her choice to live in an upper-middle class condominium by claiming that it is impossible to buy anything in the Plano Piloto and resents the high investments she has already made in building and remodeling her house. Like the pioneer couple cited above, she has not yet stopped dreaming and planning.

“So we have an estate with low retail value, we are getting older and need more plans. In a few days maybe I will no longer be able to live in a house and so I will have to live in an apartment because of security, right? So what do I think? I do not think about buying a four-bedroom apartment, like this house, over in Asa Norte. It’s not even possible, if I sell this house, I will not be able to afford that. And I spent much more than people who bought four-bedroom apartments there, you see? So I now think of buying a two-bedroom property downtown, so I can have a little piece of land over there. Because what is happening to Brasilia? Terrible real estate speculation!”

When talking about Planalto Village, where she spent her early years, she says:

It was like this: the village was made of wooden houses, very pretty and neat. There was a tiny porch on the house, I remember. There was a boysenberry tree in front. The village was really cute. The village was utopian. But the roads were not paved. When we first went to see the house in Guar, I was three years old, I remember it well, because when we were children everything was shiny and they had just finished building the houses so there were no fences. There was our next-door neighbor, Dona Maria, who had made a little wire fence and planted a chayote vine.

Luci’s narrative, however, is riddled with class references. She explains that her father managed to finish paying for the first house they owned, as she maps out the socio-spatial differentiations in the grown-up city:

He managed to pay for the house all the way through. At the end, he retired and the house was paid for. But they were homes actually destined for the lower middle class, right? Nothing special. Because in Brasilia... The middle-middle class and upper middle were in Asa Sul, Asa Norte, and you know that the South and North wings are divided by class: in the four-hundred super-blocks you find the middle-middle. In the three hundreds middle-middle and

in between – one hundreds and two-hundreds – is the upper middle class. And Lago Norte and Lago Sul was for adventurers. My father got tired of being given tracts in Lago Norte and saying “I don’t want to live in that swamp, it’s full of toads!” I swear! And nowadays you see Lago Norte and Sul... millionaires.

#### 4. Pioneers of a different sort

The Grand View and Solar Agora condominiums are situated in the region known as Great Colorado, in the northeastern side of the Federal District, between Asa Norte and Sobradinho. The entire area was zoned as a rural region until the 1980s and there are legal disagreements between the federal patrimony service (which is responsible for federal property) and the heirs of the Paranoazinho Farm, which stood in the area before most of the Federal District land was disappropriated in the 1950s. The heirs claim that a large portion of the region is private property, which was not paid for by the government, before the construction of Brasília. There are also environmental issues involving the area, which is located near Brasília’s national park and the Cafuringa nature preserve.

Mr. Vintage is member of the administration of Grand View, where he has resided since 1989. He is also the son of a pioneer, although he is originally from Paraná.

We had problems with the cold weather over there. We took care of a coffee farm and there was a lot of frost, so we would lose the coffee and suffer. By that time, my father heard that Brasília was being built. Around 1959, 1960, we came to Brasília. My father worked in the construction of Brasília. He was also one of the pioneers who built Brasília. So we received a tract in Sobradinho and moved to Sobradinho. And my parents still live there on the same land they were given.

Mr. Vintage says that he saw the development of Sobradinho: from wooden shacks to plastered homes, from dust to asphalt. Once more, the savannah appear as a theme. Like Mr. Negrão, Dona Maria, Seu José and Luci, he was one of the first inhabitants of his condominium. It is interesting that he uses the term pioneer when referring to the early inhabitants of Grand View, in a narrative that evokes elements also present in narratives of the Great Construction of Brasília. At first, the term is used to refer to construction workers in the condominium, but he promptly removes that label from the

workers. He begins by talking about the animals that existed in the area before “urbanization.”

And many were hunted down and killed by the pioneers. Not by the pioneers, but by the workers who came here to build this condominium. It was intense, in the beginning, from 1995-96 until 2004, construction here was intense. There were many workers building these houses that are here today. The condominium is almost complete now. There are only around 10-12 tracts left to build on. But most of it has already been built and have people living on it. So we presently have a large flux of inhabitants, around 3,000 people living in 727 houses. Even more than that, if we count around 3.4 persons per house. Some have even more people. We also have a very large flux of maids.

The first use of the term pioneer, however, was only a slip. It is how he labels the first settlers who contributed to the establishment and consolidation of their condominium:

When we got here it was still quite isolated, so there were few neighbors. We were far apart. The contact we had was when there was a specific need. We would rely on each other, such as electricity problems. When we first got here, people started arriving, so electricity had not yet been fully set up. So only a few people had light, electricity. So people, when in need: “Hey, I need electricity over there to begin construction, can you help me out?” So we would concede and from then on we would establish contact. At other times, it would be something related to helping out with looking after a tract, for example. A person would go out and ask, “can you watch after my tract?” Then that person would come talk to us. The condominium was not yet formed, there were only a few people. Water was also scarce. So we had this relationship with those pioneer neighbors. Still, today we know these pioneer neighbors. They are few. Most have already moved, gone away. They are few, but we know those that are still here. So it was hard. Transportation was also hard, to get here.

Clara and Pedro, on the other hand, tell the story of building their home in Solar Agora with great emotion. Herika Chagas, a member of the research team explains:

The houses are materialized memories. In Clara’s and Pedro’s speech we clearly see how much the experience of having actively participated in the construction of their home has marked the course of their lives. In order to consolidate



the project dreamed of by the couple within the nuclear family unit, it was necessary to “get their hands dirty,” actually build the house. In these narratives, we can perceive an intense feeling of inscription, that is, an amalgam linking person-house/persons-home/family-home. In Pedro’s case, family union was achieved through the hardships encountered.

Chagas presents this statement from Pedro in her report:

We managed slowly, building, putting up the walls, with a lot of help, work... I became a mason, my children are also masons, and my wife as well. And slowly we raised the house and today we have the patrimony that we own, which is not much – in the eyes of others – but it is a big deal for us!

And Ana comments:

It united the family because we struggled a lot to build (the house). Our small children would help out handing us bricks, stirring the clay, the cement.

## **II – Goiânia, enterprises and entrepreneurs**

The research in the Federal District was preceded by my Ph.D. thesis, in which I discussed what I called at the time “urban islands” – fenced-in residential areas with single-family homes – considering the ethnographic case of the city of Goiânia, located approximately 200 km from Brasília. The horizontal condominiums I found in Goiânia between 1999 and 2003 were defined, in the first place, as real estate investments, that were widely announced and eagerly consumed by growing portions of the upper and middle classes. They were, among other things, announced as “the most modern type of home,” where you could live safely with your family, with top quality services and guaranteed social status.

Both in Goiânia and in Brasília, we can clearly notice a defined process of urban expansion made up of sets of single-family homes that are similar to U.S. suburbs and, more recently, similar to what are called *gated communities* (Patriota de Moura, 2003, 2007, 2010). The specific shapes of these assemblages, however, present marked differences, as well as their meanings at different levels. Regarding the topic of this article, I point to the fact that, in Brasília, the term “pioneer” emerges as a mediator that enables the crafting of subjectivities and also fosters the symbolic and material production of the

city. In Goiânia, however, the term the study most frequently found used by inhabitants of the condominium was “entrepreneur.”

The fact that the condominiums studied in Brasília were all informal subdivisions with different degrees of irregularity/illegality, and that those who could be considered “entrepreneurs” hide behind multiple filters to avoid being identified as criminals, certainly contributes to the lack of this term in the speeches of those that were interviewed. On the other hand, as we shall see, the entrepreneurs that I encountered in Goiânia operate on several levels, while the need to have a pioneering spirit does not participate in the symbolic framework mobilized by the subjects that build their houses and contribute to the growth of the urban area of that city. The fact that Goiânia is a city with a strong services sector and with an emerging economy, driven by private agribusiness companies in Goiás State, is certainly a contribution to the emergence and comprehensiveness of such categories. Brasília, on the other hand, is a metropolis with a strong public sector, which is the leading employer of its middle and upper strata.

During my participation in several activities in horizontal condominiums in Goiânia, the term “enterprise” was repeatedly used to describe the spaces that were built, while I quite often noticed conflicts between the “residents” and the so called “entrepreneur” groups. The “residents” of the condominiums where I concentrated my observation activities related to the “entrepreneurs” in an ambiguous way. In a first approximation, the two categories were opposed as if one group was formed by the producers and, the second, by the consumers of goods and services related to the condominiums. But, as time went by, the categories started to overlap in different ways: the entrepreneurs that produced condominiums were also residents in them, while the residents, consumers of houses and tracts of land, very often became partners, associates or specialized service suppliers, through enterprises such as equipment or security businesses, architectural offices or gardening and landscaping firms.

## **II a – Intertwined lives: houses and generations**

Florestal Real Estate, for example, is a family business. Cláudio and his four siblings are partners. He and his younger brother are company directors, his wife is commercial director, their sister Ruth is human resources director. The other sister is the owner of an important architecture firm in Goiânia

and a partner in Florestal Real Estate, her ex-husband is owner, along with his brother, of the construction company that was responsible for the implementation of the construction of the Campo Alegre condominium. Their daughter, an architecture student, was responsible for the decoration of the model house at the condominium. They like to call themselves and each other entrepreneurs. Cláudio and his brother and two sisters were also the first residents of Alto dos Lagos. Clara, the architect, designed the five houses that were occupied by the family members. In addition to the homes of the four siblings there was also the parents' home. The mother died before construction was completed and her house went to Ruth, who tells about the process:

Cláudio is the administrator, right? He is the director of this enterprise. So we... of course if you are part of an enterprise, you believe in it, right? So, he has always been very enthusiastic, in love, really passionate. So, we started to go there, right? In the beginning, I started to go there to picnic. I have always liked to picnic. I had many picnics there in Alto (...) while it was still a farm, right? So, fine, then we started that business of choosing a tract of land. Then, Luciana, my daughter, she started to have fun because it starts becoming that game... Alto is going to be beautiful... it is going to be this or that, it's out in the wild, the things that we like, right? Then I said, look, you know what, I'm going (to build a house there). I had something to do with Florestal, I had credit with them. All of us, the brothers and sisters, we all had credit with the company. The company always, until then, owed us, but we had never drawn the money, we had never distributed the profits. So...

Ruth's speech is revealing in several ways. First, it shows that Alto dos Lagos did not emerge simply as an enterprise or company in the economic/rational sense of the term, but as a project (Velho, 1994) involving partners, brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents. This project, which involved the whole family, articulates several aspects of the lives of those involved with it, such as drawing money from the business, on the one hand, designing architectural projects, on the other, or even moving to a new home or changing everyday life in a very radical way.

Ruth's narrative about the course her family took allows us to see an interesting articulation between the individualizing "entrepreneurial spirit," that allows for upward social mobility and entrepreneurial success in a practical city life, but, at the same time, the return and re-articulation of family

bonds, through partnerships, cooperation and a grand common project: Alto dos Lagos. The project in Alto, therefore, is not just a real estate investment that allows the company to earn more capital. Alto is, in a certain way, a means of bringing the family back together and charging the firm for what it owed them, since, “the company always, until then, owed us.” Regarding the houses in which she has lived along her life, for example, Ruth speaks of the first house that belonged to the family and compares it to the present home:

This first house (in a poor neighborhood) was next to the technical high school. There was a street that had a name, and its name was “Street.” Street was the name we gave it. Everyone that lived there called it “the street.”

That is where we bought our first house, which was when my father received an inheritance from his mother, who had died... a cottage. So, he sold this small cottage and got his first house. Until then, he had had a shack for a house.

So we had this house that was bought this way, right? After my mother repeated many times... I heard this story all the time: “I want my own house, I want my own house...” This is why my sister became an architect, you know? And my brothers became real estate brokers. And I ended up in the middle of the story too, so I also became a real estate broker. That’s what had to happen, from hearing this story about having a house, so many times. So, that was the house. A simple house. A very simple house. Almost a shack. Later it was rebuilt. It is the house that never leaves my memories, until today. Cristina, this house... it was a very simple house, almost a shack, you know? But it was the house I loved.

It was a house at the end of the land... if we were at my home you could see, there in Alto dos Lagos. Because I always say: Listen, this is the same house as the one there, on Street 62. Except that now it is a beautiful, fancy house, because the other one was... but it is the same house, look. My architect sister laughs when I say this, but...

Ruth associates her home in Alto dos Lagos to her memories of a previous time, when her mother was still alive and the whole family lived in the same house. She also shows something about the upward mobility of a family of entrepreneurs, starting with her father, who sold coffee in the market. She presents the family’s history, starting at a “shack” on a “street,” in a low income neighborhood, to reach a “beautiful and fancy” house in Alto dos Lagos and the condominium itself as an enterprise that is home to all the brothers

and sisters. The idea to form a real estate company came from Cláudio, when he was 19, and dropped out of the economics department at the university and started the business with money from the sale of his father's land. Clara got a bachelor's degree in architecture and married an engineer. João Marcos graduated as a veterinarian and moved to southern Pará State, where his father had moved earlier, to sell farm land. Ruth also got married, graduated in psychology and worked as a professor in the School of Education of the Federal University at Goiás. When the company started to grow, the brothers and sisters began to gather again, around the older brother, Cláudio.

I say, "Clara, it is in your unconscious, our house there, look, everyone... because even my mother, she was still alive, she designed what she wanted to (...) and I think it is very similar, you know? So, my house was like this: It was built at the end of the tract, it had a room like this, on this side that was my mother's and my father's room; then, there was a small living room in the middle, and there was a room here, look, large like this, which was separated by an arch. The boys were here on this side, Cláudio and João and I and Clara in the other room and my cousin who lived with us...this cousin lived with us for many years. Then, there was a kitchen, a bathroom that later was rebuilt... you know, those simple bathrooms with floors made of cement mixed with red dye... I remember it this way... I was nine when we moved there. I left when I was fifteen. And there was a yard and a patio in the back, not too good, where there was a sink for washing clothes. Later the house was rebuilt, and that is when the bathroom became a nice small bathroom, covered by tiles. Then the patio in the back became a nice patio, where my mother built an extra room, so they rebuilt the service area... and there was a big garden in front, you know? There was a small entrance which was long, a garage on one side, a very nice coconut tree like this, an olive tree... have you ever seen an olive tree? But it didn't have olives. An olive tree. My mother always liked this plant very much, so she... the grass there, the flowers and all... so, this house, I still dream of it. Which makes me sure that it is not the beautiful or ugly house that is there, that's not the point. I once even suggested the idea of a campaign we did. It was like this "build your home, because we make it feasible for you." Because what really matters, you know, is not, let's say, is not the architecture. It is not this. It is something that is beyond this. And now I see this very clearly, because here we deal with all sorts of clients (...) because everyone will... regardless of how much it costs, right?... The expectations that a person has in relation to real estate is very interesting.

Ruth's speech, full of emotion, expresses her feelings towards the two houses that she refers to, also suggesting a psychological interpretation of the professional choices of the family members. It is also interesting that she uses her experiences and reflections to stimulate other peoples' desires, by means of her "campaign." This is the moment when the resident, with lots of childhood dreams, becomes an entrepreneur.

Just like Ruth and her relatives, many of the "entrepreneurs" I encountered also earned their living from their real estate investments. They also become residents, blurring the lines between their private and professional lives. The narrative of Ruth's family is interesting because it allows us to see the combinations of family and individual elements, traditional and "modern," personal and professional. On the one hand, the predominance of terms such as entrepreneur and enterprise focuses on the increase in value of work and productivity related to the "capitalist spirit" so well described and analyzed by Max Weber (Weber, 1905). But this capitalist spirit, with all its tendencies to universalization and individualization of subjects, acquires specific characteristics in different situations. (Dumont, 1985; Simmel, 1971).

The history of the family of entrepreneurs that we have described here demonstrates a strong positive evaluation of work as a means for upward mobility. On the other hand, we can also see interesting relations between different types of values. If the drive for capital accumulation and enterprise are displayed as values related to a world that tends toward capitalist homogeneity, they are always related to other values that are related to feelings of family solidarity. It is not that enterprise, money and work can only make sense as sources of livelihood, but rather, that at some level it is conceived that there must be a degree of reciprocity between spheres that follow different types of logic.<sup>14</sup>

When Ruth says, for example, that the company "owed us," she means the members of a sibling group who, individually, work for the company. When speaking about the construction of the houses, however, she mentions a distribution of resources the family group used to gather the means to build a single house at the time, within an hierarchical order where there was an order of precedence based on age and generation. The practice of "gathering several sources of money," on the other hand, is also successfully used in the business world, along with the practice of partnerships in companies.

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14 See Thevenot, 2002.

These companies, which, following the criteria that lead to homogeneity according to standards of the International Standardization Organization (ISO), also refer to practices of cooperation that were already in use “much earlier than when it all became fashionable.” Finally, the house’s worth is not only based on a strictly financial regime. The process that Ruth describes, involving the memory of the first family house and the construction of a “beautiful and fancy” version of that same house, points out another aspect of this world of horizontal condominiums, where family houses are spheres of materialization of different values, anxieties and feelings.

### **III – Personified cities/urbanized persons**

Terms such as person and city refer to important discussions in Anthropology and Urban Studies. One of the classical issues in Anthropology has been the construction of the person. Since the classical “homo duplex” postulated by Durkheim and the sociological observation made by Mauss that the notion of the Self is a (sociological) category of the human spirit, we have searched for a variety of perceptions, conceptions, expressions, moral, legal and cosmological standards in the semantic field in which terms like person, character personality, subject, individual, individualism, and, more recently, “dividual”, fragments, “perspectives” and personifications participate. Beyond Durkheimian sociologisms and various methodological individualisms attributed to points of view of Germanic tradition, the term “person” is still a category with mediation potential, but also provides molecular lines of flight that may possibly evade the epistemological traps supported by the dichotomy between part and whole.

Persons, as we are taught by the classics, are made up of relationships. They live, behave, perceive and have an effect upon one another. Some of them perceive themselves as bio-psychological individuals with a volitional center that has subjective depth. Others use various images to describe themselves and their ways of life that participate in universes where will is not restricted to human beings and profound centers are irrelevant images.

Some cultures, as we are told by Marilyn Strathern (1999), tend to operate through processes of personification. However, it is not a matter of a simple projection that attributes human characteristics to non-human entities. Leenhardt, as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, told us that the

mythical thought of the Canaque was not based on anthropomorphism but on cosmomorphism: everything *participated* in the Cosmos and, therefore, shared qualities (Leenhardt, 1979). Studies in Melanesia say that the elements in the Cosmos are combined and recombined in a holographic, kaleidoscopic way, constituting persons who are neither individuals, nor are opposed to societies, but obviate socialities, and establish and carry out relationships (Wagner, 1991, Strathern, 1999). Persons, therefore, beyond relating to each other, are themselves made up of relationships and, at a more abstract level, are the relationships themselves articulated into effects and visible images. Personification, then, consists of a way to describe life in terms of relations and reciprocal effects of elements that are recombined in multiple scales.

Earlier authors such as Weber, and later Dumont, on the other hand, using different theoretical perspectives, analyzed the development of individualism in Western modernity. Individualism, with strong religious forces, would be the dominant ideology in Western society, based on the attribution of value to the autonomy of the individual, in constitutive tension with society.

Simmel and his intellectual descendents highlighted the diversity of possible individualistic configurations, but stressed the action of the forms of sociation (including sociability) on the development of individuality, and therefore of personality. Urban life, as a specific sociological configuration, produces forces that are capable of impelling the exacerbation of individuality. Each individual, however, is conceived by Simmel as composed of multiple relationships on different levels, partially relating to parts of other individuals – also persons, in the sense of being the product of the accumulation of relationships, though conceived to bear a certain depth and a center of will that struggles to develop an integrated personality.

In Simmel's formulation, the city is an objective configuration that allows and even causes certain subjective possibilities, such as a blasé attitude, but also the search for liberty and the full development of singular personalities. Simmel's dialectics operates with oppositions such as individual/society, objective/subjective, form/contents, but also postulates the interrelationship and interdependence between the poles that have been postulated.

The use of typical characters to think about urbanization processes and its effects on complex societies is not new: we recall Simmel's *Stranger*, Nels Anderson's *Hobo* (Anderson, 1999), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's *sower and tiller* (Holanda, 2006).



Would the two terms I identify here – pioneers and entrepreneurs – be just another instance of typologies that sociological constructions have repeatedly postulated with the heuristic function of understanding “objective” social forms? It would be possible, in fact, to think of Brasília as a city of pioneers, these being the “subjects” who inhabit the urban “object.” Even if subject and object could constitute one another, in dialectical relationships, this is not the perspective I am looking for.

The dimension that interests me most, when I invoke categories such as entrepreneurs and pioneers, is not only of human types that inhabit cities. Nor of a symbol that encompasses total notions about “cities.” I do not dismiss these possibilities of constructions, nor their heuristic value. Nevertheless, I am more interested in the mediating capacity of the categories and the flexibility of their usages. The cement and bricks relate the members of Clara and Pedro’s family. Spouses, children, brothers and sisters communicate and gather together with, and through, these “objects,” that relate human persons and houses, lands, constructions and cities. The pioneering spirit, as an action that transforms savannah, mud and dust into a “city”, allows for the perception of the city as an assemblage of relationships.

The materiality that reified the Brasília of monuments and super-blocks, producing, but also separating the Candango pioneers from the city they built, is related to the pioneering spirit that we have found in condominiums that have other forms. If the great construction of the city was nourished by the blood, sweat, faith and ambition of the first generation of Candango pioneers, it also offered symbolic and material ammunition to justify the demands of their children and to shape the subjectivities related to the city as action and movement.

Therefore, the urban expression is also a way through which persons and city (cities) participate in each other’s making, even though this might not necessarily involve clear distinctions between part and whole, agency and context, cause and effect.

Duarte (2008), in a study about low income families in Rio de Janeiro, demonstrated how gender, sibling and inter-generational relations configured family networks as moral beings, in which the relationship between different domestic arrangements and a reference to a family house is a central factor that relates spouses, sibling groups and generations.

The mobile families and changing domestic groups shown here have their residences as materialities that relate people, but these houses are not necessarily permanent shelters or fixed references to which it is possible to return periodically and gather the extended family. The pioneer and entrepreneurial spirits, as value-ideas, point to a constant movement, like the city, in permanent expansion. Through home construction and land occupation, different pioneers and entrepreneurs also become citizens and part of the city itself. By urbanizing new land, even if through questionable processes involving occupations of land without legal deeds and risky infringements of environmental laws, they urbanize themselves, becoming elements that produce long-lasting effects upon Brasília and Goiânia. Perhaps these reflections can contribute to the understanding of other processes of urban growth and subject/making/personification.

Urbanization as a key anthropological concern can be traced back at least to the 1950s ethnographies of the African Copper Belt. More recently, authors like James Ferguson (1999) have challenged theories that postulate a one-way development from rural livelihoods to urbanized lifestyles. Cities do not only grow and urban dwellers do not only become cosmopolitan urbanites. There are complex processes that can lead to multiple directions. Nevertheless, for over fifty years Central Brazil has experienced a process of accelerated urban growth and suburban sprawl, with an increase of single-family homes and a growing, extremely heterogeneous, home-owning “middle class.” Comparable processes have been identified in other parts of the world as, for example, shown in China (Zhang, 2010). Perhaps some of the points raised in this article will contribute to a larger debate.

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