

Home, Sweet Home: Negotiating Intimacy in Brazilian Elitist Closed Condominiums

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Abstract

This article aims to decrease the cultural invisibility of the wealthy by exploring Brazil's emergent elites and their preferred living arrangements, elitist closed condominiums (BECCs), from a micropolitical perspective. We offer insights into the motivations of this emergent elite toward elective residential segregation and aim to answer the following question: How is intimacy lived and experienced in a collective living arrangement such as BECCs? To do so, we trace the history of the elite home, from the master's house (casa grande) to contemporary closed condominiums. Following this, we discuss the features of closed condominiums as spaces of segregation, fragmentation, and social distinction, characterized by sparse public life and an internalized sociability. Finally, based on ethnographic research conducted in the mid-sized city of Londrina (state of Paraná) between 2015 and 2017, we concentrate on four members of the emergent elite who live in BECCs, addressing their collective production of subjectivity.

Resumo

Este artigo visa diminuir a invisibilidade cultural dos ricos, explorando as elites emergentes do Brasil e suas preferências por condomínios fechados elitistas (BECCs) quando se trata de moradia. Focando em uma perspectiva de análise micropolítica, o artigo analisa as motivações dessa elite emergente em relação à segregação residencial eletiva. O objetivo é responder à seguinte pergunta: Como a intimidade é vivida e experimentada em um arranjo de vida coletivo como os BECCs numa cidade brasileira de médio porte? Para isso, traçamos a história da casa da elite, desde a casa do senhor (casa grande) até os condomínios fechados contemporâneos. Em seguida, discutimos as características dos condomínios fechados como espaços de segregação, fragmentação e distinção social, caracterizados por uma vida pública esparsa e uma sociabilidade internalizada. Por fim, com base em pesquisa etnográfica realizada na cidade de médio porte de Londrina (estado do Paraná) entre 2015 e 2017, nos concentramos em quatro membros da elite emergente que vivem em BECCs.

When I go to my office, I go right to the city, because my boyfriend lives there. So, at night, when I return home, I am afraid. My home is far away from the city and the road to come here scares me. But when I am about to arrive home, I am more relaxed because it is full of guards, always patrolling. So, I am relieved. I just open the window, they look up at me to make sure everything is in order, and they open the door, because it is dangerous at night, right? But here in this region I feel calmer, safer. In the city, I don't (Gladys, 2015).¹

These are the words of Gladys, a young Afro-Brazilian woman who works as a freelance real estate entrepreneur and has lived in an elitist closed condominium (henceforward BECCs), or *condomínio fechado*, in the city of Londrina (state of Paraná) for three years. Gladys follows a trend that started in the 1970s, where luxurious enclosed housing developments have become one of the preferred housing options for the elites.

What persuades Gladys and many other Brazilians to live in BECCs? Why has this urbanistic model gained so much relevance? Offering some answers to these questions is the objective of this article. In her ground-breaking essay, "Up the Anthropologist" (1972), cultural anthropologist Laura Nader recommended that anthropologists should be just as concerned (perhaps even more concerned) about asking the question "Why are some people poor?" as the question "Why are other people so affluent?". In spite of important advances in Latin America and elsewhere (Gessaghi, 2011; Gusterson and Besteman, 2009; Low, 2004, 2008; Marcus, 1983; Pina-Cabral and De Lima, 2000; Rockwell, 2001; Shore and Nugent, 2002), the social sciences have lagged behind in the scholarship of the wealthy. This article contributes to filling the void in understanding the lives of the Latin American elites and their role in the construction of urban spaces. In doing so, we align with Gusterson's assertion that, "the cultural invisibility of the rich and powerful is as much a part of their privilege as their wealth and power" (1997, p.115). The article aims to decrease this invisibility by exploring Brazil's emergent elites and their preferred living arrangement: elitist closed condominiums. Our objectives are to offer insights into the motivations of this group toward elective residential segregation as well as to answer the question: How is

¹ This and other translations from Portuguese and French to English are our responsibility. We have use pseudonyms to refers to our interviewees.

intimacy lived and experienced in this collective living arrangement? We propose that BECCs are constructed as spaces where intimacy is tied to large and exclusive physical spaces that assure a retraction from the perceived excessive sociability of the outside world, ultimately producing their own collective subjectivity.

In previous works (Estrada Mejía 2015, 2018; Estrada Mejía and Guerrón Montero, 2016), we have discussed BECCs as heterotopias (Foucault, 1984, 2009), not only as spaces of illusion where residents believe to live interminable vacations from daily life, but also as spaces of compensation where the order in place sharply contrasts with what they perceive as the chaos beyond their fences. In this article, we tackle intimacy, an idea fiercely defended by elite condominium residents. To do so, we first discuss closed condominiums as contemporary heterotopia. Following this, we trace the history of the elite home, from the master's house to contemporary closed condominiums, and discuss segregation and intimacy. Finally, we concentrate on four members of the emergent elite who live in BECCs in the mid-size city of Londrina (Paraná) as illustrations of this group's collective production of subjectivity.

This article is based on ethnographic research conducted by Estrada Mejía in Londrina between 2015 and 2017, and subsequent analysis of this material by Estrada Mejía and Guerrón Montero.² The research is part of a larger, three-year collaborative interdisciplinary project that studied the use of social space in mid-size cities and included more than 100 interviews. The first author conducted research in three cities and interviewed 15 BECC residents. Conducting research among these elites required visiting the condominium by car, because other modes of transportation (buses, taxis, or walking) were ineffective or counterproductive; dressing formally for every interaction; and agreeing not to take pictures of condominium residents. While ethnographers are regularly engaged in a process of negotiation during fieldwork, in this case, the negotiation meant that Estrada Mejía's cultural and symbolic capital was constantly assessed (cf. Gusterson, 1997). When analyzing and disseminating our findings, the challenge has been to avoid becoming spokespersons of the elites (Latour, 2005). Similar to the work of Gessaghi with Argentinean elites, we recognize that ethnographic work among residents of BECCs grants them

² The study discussed in this article is part of a postdoctoral research project carried out at the Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) in Brazil and the Department of Anthropology of the University of Delaware (Newark, DE, United States), with financial support from São Paulo Research Foundation (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo, FAPESP), Grants # 2014/18637-8 and # 2015/25915-7.

legitimacy and cohesion by offering a vehicle for the construction of difference. Our work aims to challenge this construction by denaturalizing intimacy.

In this article, we make a clear distinction between traditional and emergent elites (Pulici, 2010, 2011). The traditional Brazilian elite is overwhelmingly white and earns over 80 times the national basic salary per month (currently at R/.1,045 or approximately 202 US dollars). Common members of this traditional elite include bankers, landowners, and ambassadors. In the early twentieth century, this elite moved from the master's house in the rural areas to urban *sobrados*, multi-story houses, or mansions, Brazilian versions of the Mediterranean palazzi (Burke, 2009). The emergent elite that we study is also predominantly white, but it has less economic social, cultural, and symbolic capital. They commonly earn up to 30 times the basic monthly salary. Members of this elite include white collar workers, public servants, and liberal professionals. They live in condominiums made up of at least 100 units, each of which spans between 300 and 2,000 square meters. Most have swimming pools, barbeque areas, saunas, and several garages. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE (2010), estimated that in 2010, there were one million homes of this kind (mostly in urban areas) out of 57 million households registered.

The Closed Condominium as Contemporary Heteretopia

Closed condominiums have been the subject of attention of anthropologists, urban planners, sociologists, geographers, and political scientists. The term 'closed condominiums' encompasses different types of walled dwellings that range from enclosed neighborhoods, proprietary urban communities, guarded communities, to themed housing developments and elite and lifestyle communities. According to Blakely and Snyder, closed condominiums are "residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatized" (1997, p.2). These dwellings tend to be low to medium residential areas with a delineated security apparatus (walls, fences, surveillance equipment) intended to prevent infiltration by non-residents (Blakely and Snyder, 1997; Roitman and Phelps, 2011).

The analysis of closed condominiums has been approached from different perspectives. Several important studies of this type of dwelling have concentrated on the development of an *ecology of fear* (Davis, 1990). In the seminal work, *City of Quartz* (1990), Davis studies the urban development of the city of Los Angeles (United States) from a Marxist perspective. Davis discusses the rise of the now normative single-family housing arrangement in residential enclaves for Anglo-Saxon populations and their accompanying physical security. For Davis, these patterns are the result of a 'socio-spatial strategy' of control, which has marked the metropolitan transition and the spread of security-obsessed urbanism. In the often-cited book *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*,

Blakely and Snyder (1997) argue that closed condominiums represent the struggle between public and private rights in the practice of community life. For the authors, closed condominiums as phenomena are quintessential manifestations of a 'new fortress mentality' plaguing the US. They distinguish between 'lifestyle', 'prestige', and 'security-zone' communities. Lifestyle communities are those where shared public space is privatized and controlled nominally and where a series of recreational and educational amenities are included (e.g. retirement or leisure communities). Prestige communities focus on the distinction that living in a gated place represents. The emphasis on these communities is on ostentation and exclusivity. Security zones are communities that surface from fear of crime and outsiders and under the rationale of safety. These zones are not the purview of the upper and middle classes and can also be found in low-income neighborhoods (cf. Judd, 1998; Vesselinov, 2008).

Following this pattern, the notion of *culture of fear* has been proposed as the main reason behind the construction of closed condominiums worldwide. With varying degrees of sophistication, authors such as Caldeira (2007), Dunker (2015), Delumeau (2012), Duby (1995), Eckert (2002; 2007), Oliven (1982), Rocha and Eckert (2013), Soares (1995), Velho (1973, 1981, 1987, 1994), and Zaluar (1994a, 1994b), have all explored the culture of fear in a broader sense, and some more specifically, as motivations for enclosed living arrangements.

Several scholars have addressed closed condominiums as postmodern or heterotopic spaces (Harrison, 1995; Dear, 1995; Soja, 2001; Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008). Harrison distinguishes between modern and postmodern housing, and views today's closed condominiums as decentered, eclectic, hyperreal, and heterotopic (1995, p.27). For Dear, current western cities are postmodern in the sense that social reproduction, community, and public interest become secondary as traditional modes of control evaporate (1995, p.41; cf. Marcuse, 1997). Soja (2001) reviews the past thirty years of urban restructuring to propose a *postmetropolitan* transition characterized by selective deconstruction and reconstitution of the modern metropolis.

Le Guirriec (2012) states that closed condominiums are places with a sense of community, in the Weberian sense, understood as 'communalization.' For Le Guirriec, closed condominiums produce feelings of a shared common identity that derives from awareness of collective social standings in opposition to the other, 'the outside world.' Low (2001, 2004, 2008) views closed condominiums as contemporary heterotopias because their residents have the illusion of living eternal thematic vacations from daily life. She proposes that closed condominiums in the United States provide their residents with the symbolic sensation of being in a safe port or a sanctuary, free from danger and protected by closed walls. However, Low argues that closed condominiums reduce rather than increase urban

spaces, and do not diminish crime. On the contrary, they merely manufacture an illusion of security and physical protection, where locks and guards are only important for the residents' peace of mind and assurance of social status (2008, pp. 152-163). The perversion of the housing market in what Low calls a post-civil society is that it is becoming heterotopic by definition, by taking the idea of vacationing from the quotidian and abandonment of 'disorder' as *the* model (ibid, pp.152-163).

The phenomenon of closed condominiums has expanded from the US to the world, including countries as diverse as South Africa (Western, 1981; Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002; Landman, 2000), Canada, Russia (Landman, 2000), India (Falzon, 2004), and Nepal (Nelson, 2017). In Latin America, closed condominiums are known as *urbanizaciones cerradas*, *fraccionamientos cerrados*, *barrios cerrados*, or *barrios privados*. Different versions of Latin American closed condominiums have been studied in Argentina, Colombia (Roitman and Phelps, 2011), and Chile (Borsdorf et al., 2007).

Building upon understanding the macropolitical conditions that make closed condominiums possible, and in alignment with Low (2004, 2008) and Hook and Vrdoljak (2002), we interpret BECCs as contemporary heterotopias. Our focus, however, is on micropolitics. Micropolitics is an approach introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1985) that refers to the scale of one's aperture to alterity or diversity (Guattari, 1977; Guattari and Rolnik, 2011). Understanding BECCs through a micropolitical lens is not merely an abstract exercise. In a country that has one of the most drastic wealth disparities in the world (with a GINI index of 53.9 in 2018) and that has taken a dramatic turn to the right with the election of Jair Bolsonaro as its president (2019-2023) and its accompanying authoritarian policies, exploring the middle and upper classes' receptivity to diversity and its consequences for public policy is key.

Based on this approach, we view BECCs as localized utopias whose appeal rests on a specific mode of existence connected with prestige and expressed through a sense of (in)security and fear based on racial and ethnic exclusivity and class differences. Nonetheless, we believe that prestige and fear—and their consequent pursuit of security—are only two reasons that motivate the Brazilian emergent elite to aspire to live in BECCs. Using a micropolitical lens, we posit that BECCs also constitute spaces where a certain kind of intimacy, safety, and peace can be fully expressed and reified. In other words, they are spaces where new modes of existence with their own collective subjectivity are produced.

The Elite's Living Arrangements

We consider the master's house (*casa grande*) to be the archetype for Brazilian closed condominiums. This archetype has three main prototypes as urbanistic sources of origin.

The first is the garden cities that sprang up in the United Kingdom at the end of the nineteenth century, which were translated into garden-neighborhoods for the extremely wealthy in São Paulo in the early twentieth century. It is in these spaces where the traditional elites moved after leaving the rural areas, and where they continue to reside today (Tramontano and Santos, 2000).

The second prototype is the *vila operária*, or workers' village, also from the nineteenth century. The idea of well-built, hygienic, and inexpensive homes became the housing model, especially for the purpose of controlling workers' behavior. An example of a *vila operária* is Fordlândia, built in 1928 by Henry Ford in the state of Pará. The third prototype and the most powerful influence is the US suburb. One of the most famous closed condominiums is Tuxedo Park in New York; its emblematical counterpoint in Brazil is Alphaville, an enclave of almost 35,000 residents built in the 1970s in São Paulo, complete with shopping malls and offices (Tramontano and Santos, 2000).

What unifies these three prototypes is that they were models of collective living. In Brazil, garden cities were the privilege of the wealthy, *vilas operárias* were confined to the poor, and closed condominiums the imported model for the rich. The first two were prominent in the 19th and early 20th century. The third prototype became the norm starting in the 1970s in large cities and the 1990s in mid-size cities. The model of collective living exemplified by closed condominiums was justified by a rhetoric of insecurity, governed by a mediated criminality and the naturalization of a refined surveillance device. This discourse was then appropriated and exploited by the construction and real estate industries. The model gradually replaced the dichotomy between periphery-poor and center-rich, creating other heterogeneous, fragmented, and segregated spaces. Today, BECCs have become one of the most desired housing types for emergent elites (Pulici, 2010, 2011) in metropolises (Caldeira, 2007, pp.311-361), as well as state capitals and mid-size cities (Sposito and Góes, 2013).

Intimacy in Today's Casa Grande

An import from Portugal, the term 'intimacy' did not appear in a Brazilian dictionary until the eighteenth century; its meaning was associated with the familial domain. It referred to taking care of one's own person, family, domestic affairs, and property. Upon dominating Brazil, the Portuguese empire regimented daily life through imperial laws that controlled public behavior.

By the end of the eighteenth century, these codes were internalized as "collective rights" (Del Priore, 2016, pp.13-20). They regulated life inside and outside the master's house. For the influential intellectual Gilberto Freyre (1933)—one of the main masterminds

of the theories of racial mixing and racial democracy—the social history of the *casa grande* is the story of intimacy of all Brazilians: domestic and conjugal lives under a polygamous and enslaving regime; Christianity reduced to a family religion and influenced by the superstitions of the slave house or *senzala*. Brazil's enduring belief in exceptionalism as a racial democracy was partly explained by the assumed closeness that masters and enslaved peoples experienced inside the master's house. In the eyes of Freyre, the master's house became the clearest expression of the Brazilian character and its social continuity. In the twenty-first century, intimacy is mostly associated with extreme individualism.

The house, however, remains the center of social existence that connects the public and private spheres of social life. How does the city accommodate new urbanistic impositions within an old mentality? By producing BECCs that follow the same horizontal formula of the master's house (Rolnik, 1985, pp.112-113). As such, houses are divided into three areas: the service area, the social area, and the intimate area (cf. Tramontano, 2003, p.13). The service area is generally in the back of the house and is the domestic workers' space; it is built as detached as possible from the social and intimate areas. The social area includes the front hall, the living room and the leisure area, which become the public face of the house. While during colonial times, pianos, furniture, tea china or imported silverware were displayed in the living room as essential symbols of status, today these symbols can be found in the leisure spaces: the barbeque area, the swimming pool, the jacuzzi, the TV room. Finally, the bedrooms are considered intimate spaces.

We now turn to a discussion of how this architectural formula is expressed in the construction of BECCs in Londrina as private paradises.

Inhabiting Private Paradises in Londrina

Londrina, with 486,000 inhabitants, emerged during the economic expansion of coffee production between 1889 and 1930 and was officially founded in 1934. In 1950, it became the world capital of coffee production. While there were transformations in the 1970s, the changes that concern us date to the 1990s, when there were significant modifications including the accentuation of the spatial separation between the rich and the poor, both in terms of physical distance and barriers (Sposito, 2011).

As a result of legislation authorizing the confinement of residential areas, closed condominiums appeared in the beginning of the 1990s. The first closed condominium, the Royal Golf Residence, was built in 1995. This encouraged the construction of similar dwellings in the haciendas Cafezal and Palhano. By the end of the 1990s, closed condominiums spread with the construction of the Shopping Center Catuaí, the consumption temple of the elite, which competes for limelight with the historic center. The

imaginary of the *casa grande* is tied to the rural bourgeoisie and is represented by the home of Londrina's coffee barons. This is the ideal of nobility to which BECC residents aspire, and it is partly why living in the city but as close as possible to the countryside is so appealing. Today, there are 72,000 houses in condominiums in the state of Paraná in 2020, 3,500 of them in Londrina.

In what follows, we discuss how intimacy is produced in BECCs conceived as parallel universes, dream homes, and spaces where subjectivity is molded. We center on the highly symptomatic evocations of the homes of four individuals and their families.

Felix and his refuge in Recanto do Salto

Felix Pessoa is a white social and clinical psychologist. He has been professor at a public university since 1992. He is 54 years old, single, and earns about 15 times the base salary per month. Felix has lived in the closed condominium *Recanto do Salto* for more than a decade. With his educational level, workplace, and standard of living, Felix perfectly represents the Brazilian economic and cultural emergent elite.

Recanto do Salto, located in the former hacienda Cafezal in southwestern Londrina, was built by the company M.G.R. *Empreendimentos Imobiliários* in 1997. It covers almost 247 acres and has 197 lots. Each lot has approximately 2,500 square meters, but it is common for residents to buy two or more lots. The commercial value of a property at *Recanto do Salto* fluctuates between R\$1,500,000 and R\$2,500,000. This BECC has 24-hour surveillance and monitoring, a gatehouse, motorcycle patrols, and searchlights.

Recanto do Salto is the last condominium before the rural area adjacent to the State Park Mata dos Godoy, a significant ecological reserve of 690 hectares. This BECC is about eleven kilometers from downtown and 6 kilometers from the Shopping Center Catuaí. The condominium was sold as "an option for green living", as the opportunity to have the ultimate country house that "everyone wants", and yet only about ten minutes away from Londrina's historic center. The slogan of this condominium is significant: "In contrast with traditional condominiums where nature is fabricated, here we just make it more beautiful" (Folha de Londrina, 28/10/2011).

Felix moved to *Recanto do Salto* because part of his life project was to have a refuge. Felix defends a Bachelardian view of the home, that is, the house as a symbol of the dreams of his childhood (Bachelard, 1961). As he asserts: "My childhood fantasy and object of desire

is to have a [. . .] space to retreat from everyday life marked by socialization, which is the case of the university.”³

The segmentation of Felix’s house is unusual because it does not follow the common pattern we outlined previously:

This space [referring to the back of the house adjacent to the garden] has openings to the outside to allow the passage of light and air and it is connected with the kitchen. If you think about it, this corresponds to 70 percent of the house. Therefore, there is only space for two small rooms. One is my bedroom and the other a place for “entertainment.” This is where I have a desktop, where I check my email, but not even every day.⁴

Felix’s refuge is located away from the entrance, neighbors and communal areas. His property is located over a small hill and it has 5,000 square meters, out of which almost 80 percent constitute an enormous garden with fruit and ornamental trees. It has a small garage for one vehicle.

Felix’s house was designed by an architect and a landscape artist. The house itself is relatively small compared with the other houses in this BECC because he prioritizes the forest and his garden. In fact, Felix’ garden and fruit trees are his great treasures. The garden has a rectangular design composed of two squares with a circle in its interior. This edge of the garden is its most iconic part because it evokes the idea of the edge of a forest, an expressive legacy of Felix’ childhood. Occasionally, Felix takes care of his garden on his own, but the bulk of the work is performed by a gardener.

The terrace, a kind of watchtower for Felix, is behind the house. It has a hammock, a round table, a portable radio and a few wooden chairs. There he spends time on his own in silence, lost in the beauty of his property. During the visits of Estrada Mejía, Felix invited him to take long walks on the garden and the forest that surrounds the condominium. It was there where most of the conversations took place.

Who lives in this refuge? This is how Felix responded to this question:

I would say that the person who lives here, that is me, struggled throughout his life to acquire a portion of singularity, an existence that could be at least minimally

³ Interview with the first author, Londrina, 2015

⁴ Interview with the first author, Londrina, 2015

modulated, not molded, but *modulated* in function of desire. I have a history that is different from the average; by that I mean that I do not have an established family. However, soon my experience will not be unique because the people who do not build a relation of cohabitation is growing. This is a very difficult problem for ecology and urban geography because if we had to build a house for each human being, all our problems would multiply (emphasis added).⁵

With the exception of his gardener, Felix does not hire workers permanently. He cleans his own house, and, in fact, he planned the house so it would be easy to organize. On very rare occasions he has had to call a *diarista* (a person responsible for cleaning a house for a daily fee). Although he likes to cook, especially on the weekends, he only uses one gas cylinder per year because he eats out during the week. He visits his girlfriend's house regularly, and on the weekends if she is not in town, he enjoys his solitude, cleaning the minuscule weeds, combating any plague that might attack his precious trees, reading the newspaper, or listening to the radio.

In BECCs, it is very rare for interactions with neighbors to take place inside people's homes. Relationships are fleeting and occur in the streets of the condominium or in pre-assigned spaces. Sometimes Felix has visitors, but they do not enter his home. Sometimes children from the neighborhood come to ask him for fruit. He adds,

I would describe my interactions with neighbors as rarefied sociability. It exists but [...] it does not have much density. My interactions are reduced to about ten persons in the condominium [...] We talk occasionally; at times, the neighbors come to bring me the jelly or marmalade they made out of the fruit I gave them. That is basically it.⁶

Jerome and the ideal house in Recanto do Pitanguá

Jerome Süskind is a physiotherapist, doctor in biomedical engineering, and a prosperous businessperson in the health sector. He has a post doctorate degree in neuroscience and is the director of and instructor at a renowned institute for integral health in Londrina. He lives in the condominium *Recanto do Pitanguá*. Jerome is the son of a prominent geographer who was one of the founders of the São Paulo State University in the 1950s.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Jerome exudes self-esteem and calmness, what Gessaghi (2011, p.22) calls “social assurance”: a way of being in the world that characterizes the elite. Phenotypically, he looks Asian (his mother was of Japanese origin and his father white). He is 51 years old. Jerome lives with his wife (also a physiotherapist) and two daughters aged thirteen and seventeen. They study at an elite high school that follows an American curriculum. The family has lived in BECCs for almost twenty years.

Recanto do Pitanguá is located in the hacienda Palhano. This condominium is smaller than *Recanto do Salto*, with 24,000 square meters and 59 houses. It is located 1.5 kilometers from the Shopping Center Catuaí. In contrast with other condominiums, *Recanto do Pitanguá* was not initially projected to be a condominium, and the lack of planning caused problems of urbanization and appropriation of public areas, which were not addressed by the local authorities.

In Jerome’s house, the furniture, walls, and ornaments were conceived to create the impression of a *clean*⁷ environment. The house looks like the typical Brazilian “architect house”: glittering, aseptic, and completely white and grey with stainless steel appliances. One of the corridors in the house has pictures of the family on their trips to Europe, particularly France. During his first interview, Jerome enjoyed the opportunity to boast about his linguistic abilities, speaking fluid French to the ethnographer. He noted that he lived in France for several years in the 1970s, and that he continued to travel there for work and pleasure. He also spoke in English, noting that speaking this language was essential for his profession and business. Of all the people interviewed by the first author, Jerome looked the most formal in terms of appearance and demeanor during interviews; he was also one of the wealthiest.

Our research indicates that there is a directly proportional relation between intimacy and physical space among BECC residents. That is, with greater availability of space and square meters, there is a higher sense of intimacy. Jerome’s views are commonplace among BECC residents interviewed:

The house we had before this one had one living room, five bathrooms, a place for barbeques, a room for the maid, a kitchen and three rooms. It had a garage for two cars. The space was very small, 360 meters [...] We did not have much privacy because 360 meters is a tight space [...] I was very upset at the lack of privacy. Here, I do not have any complaints about this condominium. It has the ideal size.

⁷ In Brazil, this expression means simple, without excessive ornaments and with pastel or light colors.

The house is larger, more comfortable, more secure, and the plot of land is double the size of the previous one.⁸

The preoccupation with intimacy, translated into square meters, reveals both the process of social ascension and consolidation of the emergent elite, as well as their desire to conquer more economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. That is why moving to a bigger and better condominium, with people belonging to a higher social class, is crucial. “We wanted a larger place and closer to the shopping center, closer to civilization [...] And obviously, the neighbors here have a higher socio-economic and cultural level.”⁹

Jerome’s ideal house is quite different from Felix’s, although both place great value in owning large lots. On the one hand, for Felix, it represents his relationship with the countryside, the forest and retreating from what he perceives as intense sociability in the professional realm. This motivated him to construct a refuge, simple and without pretensions in architectural terms. On the other hand, for Jerome, having larger spaces means having more intimacy, which can be accessed through clearly delimited and isolated spaces inside the house, without sacrificing sociability with the selected few. Unlike Felix, Jerome is highly sociable and likes to entertain colleagues, friends and relatives.

In sum, for Jerome living in *Recanto do Pitanguá* in comparison with the rest of the city represents peace: “There is no contamination and it is so safe here. And because it is a closed condominium, we never have a problem. I would sum it up as follows: security, freedom, lack of contamination and protection”.¹⁰

Gladys’ Dream House in a Parallel Universe, the Royal Forest Residence & Resort

The company Teixeira & Holzmann received approval to build the Royal Forest Residence & Resort in 2003. This BECC is located in the hacienda Palhano, less than five kilometers from the Shopping Centre Catuaí. It has more than 224,000 square meters and 250 houses. It has a native forest of more than 72,000 square meters. Lots are generally between 300 and 360m². Special characteristics of this BECC include its social club and a system of “clusters” for every 35 houses that have centers equipped with a game field, a playground, and a barbeque area. Their purpose is to provide residents with more privacy while also encouraging better neighborly relations.

⁸ Interview with the first author, Londrina, 2015.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

As stated in the beginning of this article, Gladys Silva is an Afro-Brazilian woman in her twenties who works as a freelance real estate entrepreneur and has lived in this BECC for three years. Gladys studied business administration. She moved to a BECC when her family became more affluent due to successful real estate dealings. She lives there with her mother, her stepfather, and her sister.

For Gladys, her home in a BECC is like a parallel universe: “Sometimes it is raining, the world is about to end in the city, and here the sun shines, it is beautiful [...] One day when it was raining, I discovered the door to this parallel universe. [Like with *The Lord of the Rings*] here is the side of the Elfs [Lindon] and there [outside the gates] is Mordor”.¹¹

While social interactions at BECCs are sparse, Gladys socializes with her neighbors even less than the average resident. Except for one friend, her circle is exclusively composed of family members. One of the reasons for this is the evident racial asymmetry found in BECCs. In line with wealth distribution in Brazil (Rocha, 2017), the majority of BECC residents are white. Thus, Gladys is a distinct minority among the predominantly white emergent elite in Londrina. Another reason, related to the first, is that her social and cultural capital do not match those of most residents. In the following comment, Gladys uses the euphemism “despise” to refer to the racial discrimination she has experienced in her neighborhood:

I only have one friend here, my previous neighbor. My mother used to visit her and drink *cachaças*, and sometimes we would invite her to do the same. She is my only friend because she is just like us, relaxed and careless. She is a humble person who worked all her life and from nothing, she built her own wealth. Just like my mother. Most of the people here—I am not going to generalize because I do not know everyone—think they are important and that they have the right to despise their neighbors or their workers.¹²

Meanwhile, it seems unavoidable for Gladys to design the house of her dreams, her *opera prima*, based on simulations chiseled in the image of the Brazilian elite. Gladys is the only one of the four people we feature in this article who did not hire an architect to build her house:

¹¹ Interview with the first author, Londrina, 2015.

¹² Interview with the first author, Londrina, 2015.

I designed this entire house; the house of our dreams. It needed to be built exactly as I wanted it, with a classic style. My dream was to have a highly noticeable open staircase. I wanted a large living room because we like to party, and we like comfort. Here, we can have parties and we can watch TV lying down as we like. The house has great ventilation; we do not like houses where it seems one is imprisoned. I do not like apartments. I like a house full of windows, glass, doors, so when you open all the doors and windows it is almost cold because it receives so much air. Our home has a wonderful leisure area with a barbeque, an oven for pizzas and a jacuzzi.¹³

Living in the Ideal House in the Royal Park Residence & Resort

Royal Park Residence & Resort was built in 2002 by Teixeira & Holzmann. With more than 300,000 square meters and 181 lots, each with an average area of 700 square meters, this condominium is part of the general trend of thematic condominiums that started at the end of the 1970s following the Royal Golf Residence model. This condominium has a large artificial lake used for fishing and leisure. There is also a boulevard and a clubhouse with a heated swimming pool and a sauna. There are areas to cook gourmet meals and organize events for 60 people. Like the previously described condominiums, this one is located in the southwestern part of Londrina in the hacienda Palhano, about 5 kilometers from the Shopping Centre Catuaí. It is promoted as one of the most successful property development projects in recent decades; their lots were sold in less than 30 days.

Retired university professor André Souza is an agronomist and geographer who has lived in this BECC with his family for about a decade. He studied for a postdoctoral degree in France. He is a 58-year-old white man. André's wife is also a geography professor in the same institution where he worked. Their combined salary is about R/. 25,000 per month.

André has coordinated research projects that study closed condominiums in Londrina. André had an ideal house in mind, and, paradoxically, he stumbled upon it while conducting research *about* closed condominiums. At that point, André did not have enough funds to build his house without resorting to credit, so he waited until he had enough money to add to an inheritance.

André and his wife hired an architect to design their house based on the family's lifestyle. André wanted a house that would break a linear design with different inclination

¹³ Ibid.

levels throughout. Here is his ideal house: a large master bedroom, a shared bedroom for his two daughters, a studio where the couple could work. André did not spare on finishing touches. For instance, he was eager to have a mixer tap in the bathrooms. This is a common feature in Europe or the United States, but highly capricious in Brazil; André was adamant to emulate what he perceived as a European feature in his home.

During visits, the first author needed to provide identification at the entrance and was escorted by a motorized guard. André usually received Estrada Mejía at the house's leisure area, closed to the jacuzzi. The conversations were often interrupted by André's wife's offer of a Nespresso coffee.

Like all the houses visited during fieldwork, André's ideal house has two floors. The house has pastel colors like all "architect houses" sold by the mass media: modern, luminous, *clean*. In fact, André's and Jerome's houses are quite similar in design. In the upper floor, there is a balcony with four entrance points. André noted that the family was eager to have a balcony, but that they seldom use it. The house has many curves to break straight lines; ladders and inclined planes were built with the same purpose. There is also a huge glass wall that separates the kitchen from the living room and the winter garden: "We have several living rooms but we mostly use the TV room [...] We asked our architect to design the house so when you open the main door, you can see all the way to the end of the house [. . .] Our idea was that everything would show expansion."¹⁴ The space inside André's condominium becomes ideal because it allows residents to dodge the intense weight of life outside the walls, incessantly accompanied by an effervescent multitude that upsets the condominium residents. This is expressed in the possibility to create one's existence away from the noise of the city:

University life has a great advantage. You organize your days according to your needs. Sometimes this is because the university itself does not give you great comfort. For instance, I always organized my courses here at home, because I had more access to bibliographic materials, my own computer, the quietness of my studio, in opposition to the space at the university, which I shared with other people in a laboratory. Thus, my mornings were always at home (Londrina, 2017).

André's closest friends at the condominium are four couples who are university professors. André feels that there is socio-economic proximity with fellow university

¹⁴ Interview with the first author, Londrina, 2015.

professors, while there is a great breach with other neighbors, with whom he does not feel any connection. “Out of 170 houses, we have limited relations with about five families” (2015, Londrina).

Conclusions: Negotiating Intimacy

According to Dunker (2015), the growing subjectivity called ‘condominium life’ characterizes a contemporary unit of insertion of the malaises of capitalism, Brazilian style. Like their counterparts in the United States, closed condominiums in Brazil openly reject public life, focusing on life inside the walls. Contrary to their counterparts in the United States and despite being spaces of exclusive access of the elites, they commonly cohabitate with *favelas* (low-and middle-income urban neighborhoods historically neglected by the Brazilian state) and self-constructed homes, particularly in the metropolises and state capitals where socio-spatial fragmentation is fully consolidated (Estrada Mejía, 2015). Rich and not-so-rich Brazilian families in large cities are increasingly “confined” to smaller houses and apartments (Tramontano, 2003).

The pattern of closed proximity of closed condominiums and *favelas* may not be the norm in mid-size cities today, but the trend points to a movement from segregation to social fragmentation. In mid-size cities, even the most distant BECCs are found within only six to ten kilometers from the city’s downtown, and just minutes away from elite shopping centers. This proximity produces fears and prejudices based not only on class differences but also on ideas of racial and ethnic exclusivity. We have indicated that one way in which intimacy is expressed in BECCs is to have limited sociability with other residents. While restricted sociability is not exclusive to BECCs, it is exacerbated within this living arrangement. This is particularly compelling for Brazil, which is characterized precisely by the opposite phenomenon: a fluid sociability, as noted by long-time BECC residents Félix and André. Gladys, who resides in a BECC conceived in terms of clusters to foster social interaction, lives in fact in a parallel universe. She asserts that she enjoys both the sociability and chaos of Mordor and the silence and restricted interactions of Lindon. Gladys is willing to modulate her behavior to adjust to life at the Royal Forest. But in reality, Gladys is unable to connect with her neighbors even in the scarce spaces where some interactions occur (e.g., collective spaces such as gyms and barbeque areas) because of her racial ascription and differing cultural and symbolic capital. In a study about racial disparity among the affluent, Rocha (2017) notes that wealthy Afro-Brazilians are more susceptible to prejudice than Afro-Brazilians in subaltern positions because the latter are assumed to be in their “natural position” while the former generate surprise and rejection (p. 192). Although Gladys is only in the early stages of her adjustment to the mode of existence of condominiums, it is

uncertain whether she will be fully welcomed and integrated into it. It remains to be seen whether she will be like Jerome, who is in the last phase of his process of subjectivity now that his children have been born in and are growing up in BECCs.

The mode of existence produced in BECCs has a series of values: presentism, security, disassociation with the public sphere. Our research suggests that another value is collective intimacy. Illouz (2007) asserts that, starting in the 1990s, the public sphere worldwide has been distinctively transformed into “a field of exposition of private life, emotions, and intimacy” (p.226). Yet at BECCs, the fantasy of intimacy becomes a shared culture. It has to do with the creation of a heterotopia of illusion: the illusion of breathing clean air or inhabiting spaces that cannot be found in the city, such as forests. It has to do with the heterotopia of compensation: retrieving peace, silence, comfort, calmness, isolation, and especially, distance from poverty. It also has to do with *constructing intimacy*, understood as having access to larger spaces and exclusive recreational areas. It is conceived as having retracted sociability and being “protected” from the outside by walls and sophisticated security. This security becomes naturalized to the degree where intimacy is connected with the assurance that everyone who enters these spaces has been “cleared” and will be properly directed to the entrance where they belong, be that the “service entrance” or the “social entrance” (Rolnik, 1985). The children who reside in BECCs can play freely in their streets because of the assumed safety warranted by walls, expensive private security, and speed bumps.¹⁵

Now more than ever people’s intimate lives are modelled after and modulated by “extimacy.” That is, in the twenty-first century intimacy is constructed by relocating elements of that which is most intimate to a person in the public sphere for scrutiny and validation, as expressed, for instance, through social media (cf. Tisseron, 2011).¹⁶ At BECCs, however, the assumption that larger spaces and exclusive recreational areas guarantee intimacy was recurrent in our research, both from an architectural point of view as evidenced in the segmentation of the house and from the point of view of subjectivity.

Residents of BECCs produce themselves in opposition to life outside the walls—chaotic, noisy, dominated by criminality, and where expansive neighborliness reigns. They detach themselves from the lower socio-economic classes as part of their own production of social distinction. BECCs as collective living spaces of the elite generate a kind of subjectivity

¹⁵ Interestingly, one reason for living in a BECC is that its residents can afford expensive private security by sharing costs as part of the condominium fee.

¹⁶ The term extimacy is attributed to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

which values retracted sociability, silence, and lack of connections. They are an integral part of the mosaic where asymmetry and stereotypes continue to modulate behaviors in a society marked by abysmal inequalities.

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