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**WITHIN WALLS OF URBAN ENCLOSURE:
REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN'S PROJECTS IN BRAZIL**

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EDITORIAL

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Pelo Conselho Editorial:
Lia Zanotta Machado

SUMÁRIO

Title: Within Walls of Urban Enclosure: Reflections on Women's Projects in Brazil

Abstract:

The present article was written while working as a visiting scholar at the University of California at Berkeley, in 2006. It is part of the research project presented at the Center for Latin American Studies at UC Berkeley, entitled "Suburbia in the U.S. and "Gated communities" in Brazil: a comparative perspective" and has profited from the course on "Feminist Ethnography", taught by Louise Lamphere.

The article focuses on the social situation of three working women, residents of two suburban-like gated communities in the city of Goiânia, in Central Brazil. Through a discussion of the social position of these women in a context in which work and family life are particularly interwoven, and involve both the production and maintenance of residential "communities", I analyze ways in which women's agency can be exercised within fields of possibilities, where social forces such as class and moral values are at play.

Key words: gated communities, gender, family life

Título: De Dentro dos Muros Urbanos: Reflexões sobre Projetos de Mulheres no Brasil

Resumo: O presente artigo foi escrito durante o período que estive como pesquisadora visitante no Centro de Estudos Latino Americanos da Universidade da Califórnia em Berkeley. É parte do projeto "Subúrbios nos Estados Unidos e Condomínios Fechados no Brasil: uma perspectiva comparada" e foi enriquecido pelas discussões no âmbito do curso "Etnografia Feminista", ministrado por Louise Lamphere.

O artigo examina a situação social de três mulheres trabalhadoras, residentes em dois condomínios horizontais na cidade de Goiânia. Através da análise das posições sociais dessas mulheres, em contextos em que trabalho e família estão particularmente imbricados e envolvem tanto a produção quanto a manutenção de "comunidades" residenciais, eu analiso maneiras pelas quais agenciamentos femininos podem ser exercidos dentro de campos de possibilidades onde forças como classe e valores morais estão em jogo.

Palavras-chave: condomínios fechados, gênero, família

Within Walls of Urban Enclosure: Reflections on Women's Projects in Brazil

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The present article focuses on the social situation of three working women, residents of two suburban-like gated communities in the city of Goiânia, in Central Brazil. Through a discussion of the social position of these women in a context in which work and family life are particularly interwoven, and involve both the production and maintenance of residential “communities”, I analyze ways in which women’s agency can be exercised within fields of possibilities, where social forces such as class and culture are at play.

Through an ethnographic account of my field experience as a resident of a middle-class “*condomínio horizontal*” (horizontal gated community) in the city of Goiânia, I question my own confirmation of established “truths” about gender relations in Brazil. Finally, I argue that the valuing of the nuclear family and a family-related way to go about professional activities may ironically be a successful way for certain women to become empowered in work, family and community life.

Victoria

Victoria¹ considers herself a very successful woman. Now in her early fifties, she lives in a huge, custom-designed house, in a very upscale gated community in Goiânia. In fact, she is a shareholder and the Director of Institutional Development at the major realty firm in the city, which has produced and marketed many recent gated communities and housing developments. She lives with a teenage daughter, born out of her first marriage, and her boyfriend, a “handsome man twenty years younger than me”, as she herself described him. She gladly says that she is the major breadwinner of the house and has a very straight forward, self assertive presence in business meetings and social gatherings in general. She usually wears discrete cotton clothing, without much make-up or jewelry and her wavy dark layered hair sits nicely on the olive tone of her often bare shoulders.

When I interviewed Vicky in her office at Palm-Tree Realtors, she had just come back from a resort-town in Uruguay, where her firm had been invited to implement a new development. She is very enthusiastic about her work and the way she has helped the firm adopt the “total quality”- type norms which made it gain the much-coveted certification by the International Standardization Organization. Having a B.A. in Psychology, she is also a very active member of a local Freudian psychoanalytic association, having published articles in its journal.

¹ All personal names have been changed, as well as the names of the firms and *condomínios*.

Helena

Helena was my next-door neighbor when I first moved to Campo Alegre, a modest, middle-class *condomínio* situated right next to the famous Alto dos Lagos, where Vicky lives. She was away most of the time, and constantly cleaning the house when she was in. I remember sometimes having been a little disturbed by the fact that she repeatedly hung a washed oriental-like rug on the side wall that separated both our tracks of land, and half of it was always hanging on my side. Her seven-year old son was always roaming about the streets inside the *condomínio*, eager to play with any other child available, including my two-year-old son. Helena's younger brother, Carlos, was the actual owner of the house, but he would be out for weeks in a row before reappearing in his roaring Suzuki motorcycle. After a while, his girlfriend Ana also moved in, and Helena would sometimes complain of having to clean the house and make meals for everybody.

They were originally from Porto Alegre, the city in southern Brazil that hosts the World Social Forum (in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2005), a global event that gathers anti-hegemonic social movements from around the world. Helena's rosy sun burnt skin, blue eyes and blondish brown hair indicated that she was probably a descendant of one of the many European immigrants, mostly from Italy and Germany, who migrated to that part of Brazil starting from the end of the nineteenth century. But I never got to ask her about her origins. In fact, she was rather shy and did not talk much about herself. The occasion when I saw her talk the most was when two sons of a young couple that lived a few houses up the hill, across the street from us, were forbidden to play with her son Miguel after the three of them were caught by the security guards. They were trying to tamper with some water meters from yet unoccupied houses. The two other boys got a spanking from their father and she told the boy's mother that she was against that kind of punishment and would not apply it to Miguel. The other mother in turn said that her son had no manners or limits and that she wouldn't have her kids being beaten up because of his bad influence. Helena complained that her son was being treated with prejudice. A few weeks later she announced that she was leaving the *condomínio*, and she did.

Natasha

The first time I saw Natasha she was sitting in a chair in the veranda/garage, holding her eight-month-old baby boy and looking at the sprinkler watering her just-arrived lawn. She was wearing a silk shirt and a pearl necklace, and her high heels made her short legs appear longer than they actually were. She had her fine hair up in a bun and from my car window I thought she was probably in her late thirties. Our lawn had also just been put in and although we had not yet moved we would go water the lawn at least three times a week so that it wouldn't die out in the heat of the dry season. I set my sprinkler on and asked her if she could please turn it off after an hour. She replied that she had to go back to work but she would ask her "secretary"² to do the job.

I later got to know Natasha pretty well and had the chance to interact with her almost on a daily basis for over a year. This twenty-four year-old engineer, the oldest of four sisters, had lost her mother two years earlier, after having come to Goiânia to work in a big construction firm. She had graduated right before in her home-town of Uberaba,

² "Secretary" is a commonly used euphemism that many women in Goiânia use to talk about their maids.

a medium sized city in the “*triângulo mineiro*”, a region of the state of Minas Gerais known for its agricultural production. Her father had helped her buy her first home and her twenty-two year old husband, whom she had met in Goiânia, was finishing his degree in business administration while working as a salesman for a wireless telephone company.

Natasha, Alfredo and their son Bruno were the first residents of Campo Alegre. After a couple of months Natasha would leave her job at the big firm and become the Executive Manager of COCAAL (Condomínio Campo Alegre), the homeowner’s association started by the developers, of which the first President was Victoria. For the period of eighteen months during which I lived with my family in Campo Alegre, Natasha and Victoria were constantly present in the weekly meetings of COCAAL, and involved in many social situations of which I also participated.

Gates, globalization and gender segregation

When I first started my research on *condomínios horizontais* in Goiânia what puzzled me most was what I perceived as a total displacement. Alto dos Lagos, the first *condomínio* I saw, reminded me very much of the U.S suburban landscapes I had seen while a teenager living in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. But this wasn’t the U.S, it was Goiânia, a city in Central Brazil which I had always equated with traditional rural Brazil. After a few years of research on Goiânia and *condomínios* in general, I came to perceive the existence of multiple cultural and social layers that have always been present in the production of space in this city which was originally a modernist project inaugurated in the end of the 1930’s.

While working on my dissertation I got involved with reading a wide range of texts on urban segregation and the global spread of gated communities. Much of this literature focuses on the “fall of public spaces”, to paraphrase Richard Sennet (1974), who relates this fall to growing social inequalities in the so-called developed world, which are a consequence of the neo-liberal agenda³. Another set of books and articles focuses on the rise of urban violence in places like Brazil, Argentina or Mexico⁴. Although some of this literature, such as Caldeira’s work, comes from scholars with training in political science and social anthropology, most of the material on gated communities throughout the world has been produced from the perspective of the fields of geography and urban planning, with a strong emphasis on political economy.

From a more culture-centered perspective, the material on the U.S gated communities stresses the fact that most of these places reproduce the same kind of lifestyles and expectations that were at play with the suburban boom of post WWII. These include the valuing of the nuclear family⁵, economic and ethnic homogeneity. Blakely and Snyder (1997) suggest that the spread of gated communities has to do with “white flight” from previously white suburban neighborhoods that have now become much more heterogeneous. Much of the material on other parts of the world talks about gated communities as an attempt to adopt a “globalized lifestyle” which is being

³ This is especially true in the work of Chris Webster, 2001 nad 2002, Rowland Atkinson and Sara Blandy, 2005, and, of course, Blakely and Snider, 1997.

⁴ See Caldeira, 2000, Giglia 2003, Coy and Pohlner, 2002, Swampa, 2001 and also the editions of Housing Studies and City and Society cited in the bibliography.

⁵ Even though the material on post-war suburbs also had a critique of traditional gender roles, the material on gated communities has tended to leave that aspect aside.

artificially imported⁶. This “globalized lifestyle”, it is suggested, comes from mainstream Anglo-American culture, and is being broadcast through media such as imported TV series and movies, but also direct participation of transnational networks of urban planners, corporate capital and advertising agencies.

On one hand, the master-planned upscale gated housing developments that are popping up from India to Cairo, Cape Town, Mexico City, São Paulo and Goiânia are related to a lifestyle imported from the USA. But on the other hand, it often appears as a typically “third world” characteristic that these housing developments should be gated, either because of the necessity created by growing urban violence or the “traditional” role of gates in places such as Latin America. Setha Low (2003), in a study of gated communities in the U.S., comments on her puzzlement at the existence of these enclosed neighborhoods:

“As an anthropology student specializing in Central America and the Caribbean, I soon learned that walls and gates are ubiquitous throughout Latin America. They separate the domestic domain of women from the public domains of men, providing both a physical and symbolic defense against unwanted intruders. Early North American towns and forts, such as Roanoke, Virginia, also were initially surrounded by walls and barricades for protection. But walls and gates never became an established part of North American town planning. Instead, the wide open spaces of the western frontier, the democratic New England Village green, and the fenceless landscapes of suburbia were adopted as spatial models.”

I have questioned elsewhere⁷ the ubiquity of walls in the Brazilian context and I am sure it could be questioned from other places in Latin America as well. Even though upper and middle-class homes have historically tended to be much closed to outsiders from the “street”, the *condomínios* actually invert the spatial pattern more common in upper and middle class neighborhoods: the enormous walls outside the whole development contrast with a lack of walls between houses – something which most middle and upper-class Brazilians are not used to⁸.

What I wish to address here, however, is another implication of the quote above: the radical separation of male and female domains and the spatial implications of this. But before I go on to question this statement I must first return to my own field experience.

Goiânia, Campo Alegre, and “traditional Brazilian” gender roles

In order to situate the reader in regard to my fieldwork I must give some account of my own social position. Although I often think of myself as totally Brazilian, I was brought up in a bilingual household and lived as a child and teenager in the United States. I was born in Brasília, the daughter of two career diplomats who had just unwillingly been transferred from Rio de Janeiro, after the change of our national capital. The way my mother dealt with work and family involved hiring maids and babysitters, as well as relying on friends and relatives while we were living in Brazil, and going on leave for the periods when my father was posted abroad, and we were still children and teenagers. Although she had a career and a degree in economics at a time when most middle and upper class Brazilian women had been brought up to be

⁶ See Coy and Pohlner, 2002, Kuppinger, 2004, Waldrop, 2004 and Falzon, 2004.

⁷ Moura, 2003a.

⁸ It is important to note that the same would not hold true to the lower urban classes or rural dwellers in general.

housewives, she also faced drawbacks in her career, following a kind of “mommy track”⁹.

The institutional spaces in which I was socialized always involved professional women whose opinions seemed to me to be heard as much as the men’s and although I did the fieldwork for my MA thesis attending classes in the male-dominant Rio Branco Institute, the academy that trains Brazilian diplomats, I never really felt any gender-related pressures in the field or in my professional life in general. The main reason why I moved to Goiânia was because Joaze, who had been my companion since I was finishing my BA in the University of Brasília, got a job as Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Federal University of Goiás and we were tired of living in different cities since I started my MA in Rio de Janeiro four years earlier. I had already started my PhD in Rio de Janeiro and finished the coursework. The research on gated communities in Goiânia was part of my own strategy for reconciling work and the family I wished to have. Our son Pedro was born in Goiânia in 2000 and in March 2002 the whole family moved to a house in Campo Alegre, where I could do my fieldwork in a pretty “traditional” anthropological place-based field.

Although gender was not one of my main concerns, gender-related issues kept coming up throughout my fieldnotes. These issues can be thought of in three different aspects. First, as comments coming from men in conversation that treated issues of women’s morality, mainly questioning women who lived alone or were out of the house often. Second, in my own somewhat frustrated attempt to interact with certain male neighbors only to find out that they pretty much ignored me and wished to talk only to my husband. Finally, a few issues regarding male domestic violence came up in my field notes. From this material, I thought I had pretty much confirmed a few stereotypes about the “*machismo*” of men from Goiás, which I myself had internalized from experiences in upper middle class college-educated circles in more cosmopolitan cities in Brazil, like Rio de Janeiro and Brasília.

As to the first set of notes about men’s attitudes towards women, I quote a few passages:

1. “Mr Hilarino (a man in his seventies who was having a house built in Alto dos Lagos) explained to me that he owned an apartment building near the university. He explained that he would rather rent the apartments to women because single men damaged the apartments a lot and the women took better care of them, even though they may have questionable morals and habits. But “we don’t interfere with their lives”, he told me, clearly trying to dissociate himself and his wife from the women at stake” (notes from after a meeting in Alto dos Lagos)
2. “*My father owned a snack bar. Toninho would stay at the cashier, on a little stool, he was about nine. Pedro was still little but later he would also work as a cashier. My father didn’t like my sister to work there. He thought women weren’t supposed to work in snack bars, there were too many men going by, he was very jealous, so she never worked. I never worked there but I was always hanging out*” (Interview with Victoria)
3. “There is a couple with three children, a nine-year-old boy from the woman’s previous marriage and a couple of twins. They have the largest track of land in the *condomínio* and another house they bought as an

⁹ Here it is possible to pick up on the discussions of Hochschild (2000) regarding the “time-bind” and “second shift” and also Bookmann’s (2004) discussion of the “mommy track” and Ortners’s (2003) of the “girl track”.

investment. He drives an RV one could buy about three smaller cars with but his wife, who's a housewife, doesn't have a car and depends on him for everything. I asked if her older son lived with them and she said yes but that he spent a lot of time with his father and sometimes wouldn't come back home because there was nobody to pick him up. The husband said the boy should go less to his father's house, and the woman said "If you leave the car with me I'll pick him up every day" The husband's response was a comment directed at another man present – "if we let them these women will be out walking about all day", and the other man agreed." (notes from after a meeting in Campo Alegre)

On the one hand, all three passages talk about men's attitudes toward women. And the idea that men will make efforts to protect women in "their" family (wives, daughters or sisters) from "other" men is very much in tune with Setha Low's comment about the domestic sphere of women and the male public domain in Latin America. It also blends in well with a whole set of literature on honor and shame in Mediterranean societies which has been appropriated by Brazilian scholars to talk about gender hierarchies. There is also a well-established tradition in Brazilian social thought that goes back to Gilberto Freyre's 1930's work on the patriarchal family, which has been appropriated mainly by Roberto DaMatta (1981)¹⁰, but also criticized by scholars who see more diversity in family arrangements and modern individualizing tendencies in many urban middle class settings, such as Correa (1982), Figueira and Velho (1981). But what is also present in these passages is the fact that women will "hang out" at the snack bar, be out of the house driving around and tending to their own needs, and live on their own and go to college.

Still, my own biased point of view made me feel the "machismo" in the field much more than recognize women's agency. This in part has to do with a "culturalist" perspective, but it also has to do with my own "gender shock" in the field. And here I go on to the second type of field material, regarding my own experiences as a participant in the social processes going on in Campo Alegre. One thing that I found difficult dealing with while living in Campo Alegre and participating in the meetings of the homeowner's association was that although I was the one doing research and my husband wasn't the least bit interested in issues concerning the *condomínio*, other male homeowners would always ask to talk to him and treat me as if I were invisible. In retrospect, this is very interesting field material, but while in the field it felt like a drawback in my research. It is interesting to compare this experience to Matthew Gutman's (1996) experience in Mexico City, where the fact that he was with his wife and baby daughter gained him access to a whole set of relationships, especially with women, that he hardly could have had otherwise. On the other hand, Dorine Kondo (1990) felt the need to draw herself away from "going native" and occupying a daughter-like position in a Japanese family. In my case, the fact that I had a two-year-old son, and for a year a thirteen-year-old niece living with us, did gain me access to networks within the neighborhood, but somehow I felt that this wasn't the "real" work and that the formal relationships that were building up regarding the "government" of the *condomínio* and economic relations between homeowners, builders and realtors were the real stuff I should be having access to.

To top it off, I started hearing rumors about restrained women and domestic violence in the *condomínio*. Here are some passages from my notes:

¹⁰ See Machado, 2001 for a good review of the more established literature on Brazilian family arrangements.

1. Yuri (head of the security firm) said that 90% of the problems are caused by people from within the *condomínio*. He told a story of a nudist that would smoke marihuana inside a *condomínio*. He also talked about a resident from Alto dos Lagos who had a heart attack, pressed a panic button and was saved on time. He said it was necessary, for example, to know what to do when a husband was beating his wife. One of the homeowners commented, “help him out” (notes from a meeting in Campo Alegre)
2. Marinalva, who cleans my house, told me about an interesting conversation she had with her new boyfriend, who works as a security guard in the *condomínio*. She was saying to him that she thought the houses would look a lot better if they had walls in front of them, and he answered “That’s not allowed. This is a *condomínio fechado* (enclosed condominium). Everything has to be visible so that we can see if there’s any husband beating his wife” (field notes)
3. Two women who did housecleaning work in the *condomínio* were walking to the bus stop on the highway outside at around 4 pm. When they were 600 meters away from the main gates they were attacked by a young man who stole their purses. They said he would have tried to rape them if they hadn’t kicked him and hit him with their bags. The man escaped, the women pressed charges at the nearest police station but the man and their belongings were not found.

During the time we were living in Campo Alegre there was one reported incidence of domestic fighting which may have led to male aggression, but this was not confirmed. The security guards were called in by the president of the homeowners association but a knock on the door supposedly ended the quarreling. People did talk a lot more often about children being “corrected” with spankings by their fathers or other family members such as uncles who were the only male adult in a household. What can be gathered from my field notes, though, is that husbands that beat up their wives are very much a part of men’s imaginaries and discourses, and that this practice has an ambiguous tone. In contemporary urban Brazil there has been much public talk about this kind of violence and the institutionalization of special women’s police stations (*delegacia da mulher*) and hotlines. What some contemporary studies indicate is that, especially among the lower classes, there tend to be different values within couples, Lia Machado (2002) reports on her research interviewing men and women involved in cases brought to the *delegacia da mulher*:

“To the men, in the name of honor and of the function of provider, they can control, monitor and punish their companions. They allow themselves, because they provide for the family, to control their right to come and go, keep them from getting paid work, inspect their sexual organs to guarantee that there has been no betrayal and “hit” if they are jealous or if they feel they’re not getting the proper attention. However, even if they are aware and even refer to the illegitimacy of violence, in recognition of the companion’s rights, the legitimacy of the value of “honor” prevails, and the legitimacy of the power derived from their function as breadwinner. Thus they consider their behavior justified, minimizing the recognition of the individual rights of their companions.

For the women, the traditional marriage contract, even if it supposes differentiated duties, does not imply unequal powers between men and women. Their narratives tell about expectations of a companion who, in the sphere of

sociability between spouses and in the division of powers within the conjugal society are referred to and thought of as equal. The violent act, the control of mobility, the control of access to work and education are in no way legitimated as natural rights. Those powers do not pertain to men, because men and women are thought of as equal.” (Machado, 2002:22)

Of course, it is important to bear in mind that the material that Machado presents comes from couples in which violent acts had already occurred to the point of achieving police headquarters and this is not the case – to the extent that I know of – with any of the couples I came across in Campo Alegre. What I wish to argue, however, is that, in accordance with Machado’s material, I do think there were very different views coming from men and women, but what happened in many cases with the families I worked with was that the men were not the only breadwinners and could not “legitimately” claim their power over women.

It is interesting that my experiences of “gender shock” happened while listening to men and not women and while listening to those men talk about women made me refer to a whole set of ideas about a society totally controlled by males, the lives of the three women in the beginning of this article show quite a different story. And these women are not as exceptional as they may seem.

Back to Victoria, Helena and Natasha

Of the three characters from the beginning of this article, maybe Helena was the one most affected by the “traditional” gendered morality. But she also resisted being told how to treat her son and the fact that she ended up leaving the *condomínio* makes me wonder if that might actually be a liberating move and that she will find a more appropriate place where she can better deal with raising a child and making a living. Like a large portion of the population in Goiânia, Helena was a vendor in the famous “hippie market”, which is a clothes market that attracts thousands of people from different parts of the country, who buy the cheap clothes produced in home-based factories and sell them at higher prices elsewhere. Sometimes she would travel herself to sell clothes in Brasília, and would have to leave Miguel with a lady in the city who she hardly knew. Living in Campo Alegre was an attempt at having a community where Miguel could be safe and happy, but the fact that he was cut off from relations with other children made things unbearable.

If the honor/shame, gender segregation and patriarchy perspectives don’t account for women’s lives and values, (even if they account for the men’s narratives) there was one theme that I did find appealed to many men and women in Campo Alegre, and in slightly different ways also in the upscale Alto dos Lagos. This was the ideal of the happy nuclear family. Sherry Ortner (2003), when talking about the class projects of the (mostly Jewish) families of the people she graduated from high school with, talks about how the “normalization” of the American family was a national project in the 1950’s, associated with middle-classing upward mobility and also suburbanization. Many of the people who bought homes in Campo Alegre were in a pretty precarious class situation, some of them recently coming up from a working-class background. Living in a *condomínio* was a status index which had to be carefully controlled and, as with Sherry Ortner’s interviewees, talking about children and morality may be a way of avoiding the “class” issue. The fact was that Helena was visibly in a lower class condition than other homeowners in Campo Alegre and if they did not set boundaries maybe they would be

identified with her and lose their sense of participating in a middle class environment with functional families.

But unlike the white middle-class families in white U.S 1950's suburbia, most of the households in Campo Alegre had two working parents, and quite a few women had more years of education and earned better salaries than their companions, as was the case with Natasha and her husband. The fact that Natasha had more money than Helena, however, allowed her to pay a "secretary" (maid), which most middle-class Brazilian women do. Alfredo did spend a lot of time with their son Bruno, and later also with Carlos, who was born in 2003. He even bought two-year-old Bruno an electric car in which he drove around the *condomínio*. Although the "secretaries" have kept many Brazilian men from having to share in the housework, it is very common to see middle-class men taking care of babies and children, even if they have to "correct" them once in a while.

Victoria, on the other hand, may be said to "have it all" and be completely above male dominance. On the other hand, she made a curious entry into the world of real estate firms. She gave up a tenure-track position at a respected university and gave up on a research project about street children in urban Brazil to become Toninho's sister at the family firm. As she told me in an interview:

Toninho invited me to do public relations at Palm Springs and I would do these workshops and people really liked them. This was before we started calling my work "human development". But I wouldn't say I was a psychologist from a university or they'd be intimidated. I'd just say I was Toninho's sister, and then everybody would feel fine.

One important difference between Natasha and Victoria is that although Victoria is the head of her household, the move to Alto dos Lagos was not an individual project but a project of her whole extended family. The four siblings own four different houses at the same *condomínio* and have managed to become neighbors. Victoria lives in the house that was originally built for her mother, with whom she had a very close relationship and helped her raise her daughter Valeria. But Vicky's mother died shortly before the house was finished and never got to live in Alto dos Lagos, which is also at the peak of this particular family's project for social mobility. Victoria's father, who is still alive, did not get to live in the house near his children, and lives in another gated community also owned by the family. This is because he has another family, with another woman, and Victoria and her brothers and sisters find that unacceptable.

Natasha, even having a "secretary", also relies on her mother in law to help take care of the children. Actually, Alfredo's parents were moving into another house at Campo Alegre right before we left the *condomínio* to go live in an apartment in a more central part of Goiânia because, among other reasons, it was very difficult for us to live so far away from work at the university and the schools and day-care centers where we had to take Pedro and Iza every day.

All four of us, along with other middle-class women, mothers, and professionals living in Campo Alegre and other *condomínios* were struggling with ways of balancing work and family and were being more or less successful at it. Some of our tactics were "liberating", as would be desirable according to more individualistic values, others were more in tune with "traditional" gender roles. The important point seems to be... While my initial "gender shock" made me notice tradition and male dominance, closer looks allowed me to perceive different levels of agency, combined in particular assemblages which characterize multiple, unique trajectories, including my own way of coping with

gendered relationships in the field, which included domestic life as part of a nuclear family.

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