

Reconstructing and Deconstructing Neighborhoods: Horizontality, Materialities, and Struggles in the Case of *Pinheirinho do Palmares* district, Brazil

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Abstract

Based on an ethnography developed with social movements derived from the eviction process of an old popular district in the city of São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil, we analyze how an idea of neighborhood is applied to the processes of struggle and their outcomes. In 2004, a land of over 1,000,000 m², owned by a bankrupt industry, was occupied by an entire district of over 5,000 people. This “illegal” occupation had been going on for almost 8 years when a court decision ordered the land to be vacated. The case of the *Pinheirinho dos Palmares* neighborhood, as it was known, became an emblematic example of Brazilian housing policies, with its violent eviction drawing the entire country’s attention. This article deals with the struggles that the evicted residents started and that resulted, at the end of almost 5 years, in the construction of a new district by the state, based on a new housing program. We are going to analyze how concerns about organizing the new neighborhood from the old neighborhood relations were fundamental in the geographical and architectural production of the new district. The article seeks to intertwine the notions of resistance and neighborhood, responsible for the new configuration of the district.

Keywords

neighborhood, vicinage, political struggle, memory, Brazil, horizontality

Introduction

This article analyzes a complex social process: a *struggle*¹ that sought not only to attain the so-dreamed homeownership but also to rebuild an evicted neighborhood. It took place in São José dos Campos (Figure 1), a city in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, over an abandoned, 1.3-million-m² piece of land owing around R\$15 million in non-paid taxes.

What was just another empty space in the south side of the city became *Pinheirinho*, an urban occupation founded in February 2004 by a social movement and 240 families² that peaked around

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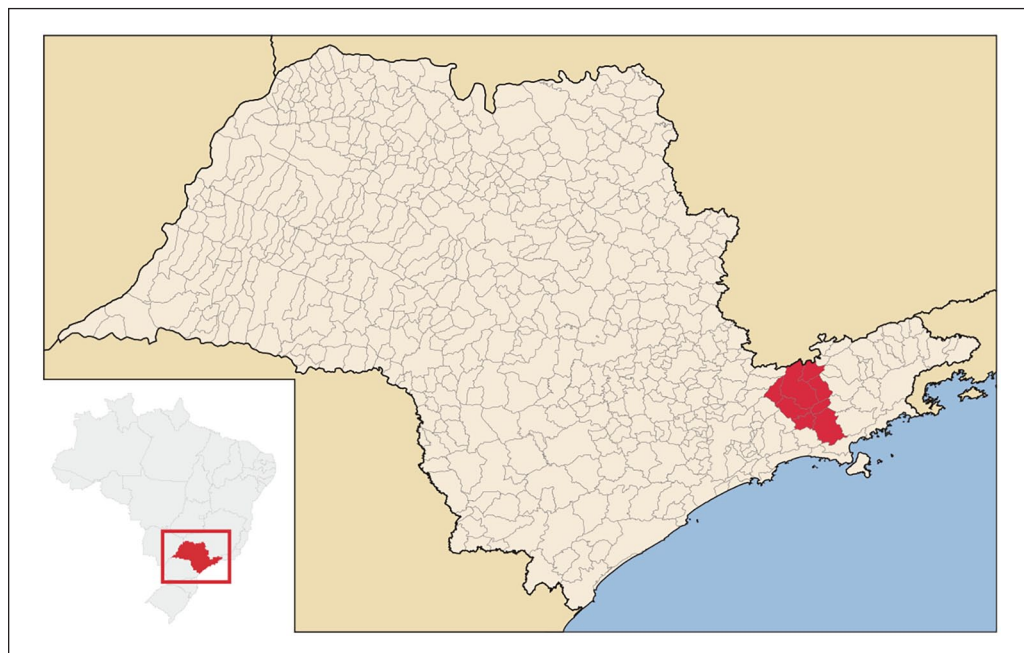


Figure 1. São José dos Campos Location. (Abreu, R. L. (2006) Location map of the municipality of São José dos Campos in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. Digital Image, Wikipedia, https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A3o_Jos%C3%A9_dos_Campos#/media/Ficheiro:SaoPaulo_Municip_SaoJosedosCampos.svg (accessed in august 2023)).

6,000 people at the moment of its eviction in January 2012. In this event, the homeownership dream became a nightmare due to police brutality: teargas bombs, rubber bullets, nightsticks, chivalry, a helicopter, and 2,000 riot-control agents were present to execute the eviction court order.

After the eviction, throughout almost 5 years, a political struggle took place for the reconstruction of the neighborhood, now at another location and under the support of political forces that aligned between the Brazilian Government (through a popular, house-financing program called “Minha Casa Minha Vida”³ [MCMV]) and the City Hall. This process resulted in the creation of the brand new *Pinheirinho dos Palmares II* district (Figure 5).

The primary focus of this article is to describe one aspect of this reconstruction process of the neighborhood. It is an idea of housing that depends on the notion of horizontality for the houses to be built. To explain this notion, we will describe several moments of the struggle process to rebuild the neighborhood destroyed by the police forces. The importance of horizontality is only made explicit in the process of struggle and clash with political and bureaucratic forces to define the shape of houses in the new neighborhood. As Blunt and Dowling (2006) pointed out, homes are, in itself, critical geographies: Homes are as materials as imaginative, and happen in multiple scales. Made as imaginative elements in domestic space (objects, relations, and sensations) and unmade when these dimensions are undone. The case of the *Pinheirinho* reconstruction highlights one of the fundamental aspects of these critical geographies among the poor Brazilian classes: horizontality. In contrast to what authors like Baxter (2017) call “verticality” as a life practice, we see in the struggle process for the reconstruction of the neighborhood a notion of horizontality structuring the interconnection between space, house, memory, and the political struggle itself.

As Fernandes and Gomes (2004) demonstrate, the history of urbanism in Brazil exposes the fundamental issue of urban housing, considering the lack of popular housing and public policies

for this population. In this universe, the policies of the housing of the Brazilian popular classes are the object of study of several works (Cavalcanti, 2009; Holston, 1991; Müller, 2014; Nuijten, 2013; among many others). Different levels of informality and problems with the regularization of housing are some of the main issues (Lara, 2012). Here we will deal with a radical example of informality and precariousness: Lands invaded and occupied without any control by the government, which, on the contrary, takes all measures to destroy the neighborhood built in the process.

Life, emotional life, love, relations, and social fields are also produced at the uncertainty, and the precarious uncertainty becomes, therefore, the organizational form of natural life until an event like an eviction happens. The eviction is a severance that emphasizes precariousness and exposes it to the afflicted as an aggression. This same precariousness is the political struggle engine for the reconstruction (in new terms) of what was destroyed. The place, here, is a political struggle space (Low, 2017): It was around it that actions developed.

In this article, we analyze this struggle period of almost 5 years for the reconstruction of the neighborhood. We acknowledge that it is a memory from *Pinheirinho* and its vicinage that arranges the struggle and the claims of the new form and structure of the neighborhood. Memory here appears as a field of struggle and reconstruction of certain spatialities. A specific form of *horizontality* defines the idea that *New Pinheirinho* is related to the destroyed *Pinheirinho*. We deal with memory, as Munn (2013) and Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) said, as an instrument that connects the materiality of spaces, identity, and the struggle for reconstruction. It will be shown that the vicinage relations geographically arranged the houses through an idea of horizontality. For such, we will first discuss the notions of horizontality, vicinage, and neighborhood, and then present a quick history of *Pinheirinho*, followed by the ethnographic report of the political struggle that occurred after the eviction and neighborhood destruction. Finally, we will discuss the relations between the vicinages, horizontality, and the construction of the new neighborhood.

What structures our reflection is a relation between the house materiality (and losing it) and the non-materiality of the house memory, inscribed in the vicinage relations. The struggle and the political process to configure the new houses were conducted by this non-materiality that resulted, at the end of the process, in a new materiality, expressed in the new houses and the new district's general conformation.

This article comprises this period between *Pinheirinho*'s eviction and the conclusion of *Pinheirinho dos Palmares II*, based on Barretti's (2018) fieldwork that took place between 2014 and 2016, resulting in his master's dissertation. First, he got in touch with former residents of *Pinheirinho* that founded the *Pinheirinho's Mothers and Friends Association* (AMAP), who introduced him to Marrom, the *Urban Movement of the Homeless' (MUST)* leader. At this point, Marrom invited him to attend *MUST's* assemblies, which usually occurred every 2 weeks on Saturday afternoons. The fieldwork, then, mainly consisted in following, as much as possible, the events called by the *leadership*: assemblies, visits to the construction site, joint events with the City Hall, and political manifestations (as in Figure 2). Semi-structured interviews with former residents, coordinators or not, were also part of it for a more detailed perspective of the process, which had a variety of actors: families, *Movement*, public defense institutions, the mayor, and secretaries, all of them *struggling*, in their own means, to rebuild *Pinheirinho*.

During fieldwork, Barretti ended up being taken, by the former residents, as a sort of secretary of the social movement—even though he was never one—being seen by them as someone who belonged to an intermediate place between public authorities and the Movement. This generated ambiguous situations, such as the fact that he was used by the leaders as evidence of the Movement's political strength—so significant that even the university was interested in the research—and generating legitimacy for the leaders. On the other hand, he also suffered mistrust by members of the Movement for taking notes of everything that happened (Was he a spy for the forces of the State?). For all these situations, the strategy had always been to explain the role of



Figure 2. Visit to the Model House by the Pinheirinho's Former Residents. (Barretti, F. S. (Photographer) 2017. Photo of the visit to the model house by the future residents of the Pinheirinho neighborhood).

an independent researcher. The interview excerpts transcribed here use fictitious names and were duly authorized by the interviewees.

Horizontality and Vicinality

Baxter (2017, p. 2) writes about verticality as a life practice, producing a domestic environment intensively signified by the residents. In our research case, we could speak of a kind of horizontality as a life practice, since it orders their own understanding of the idea of “house.” This horizontality was constituted as a result of the human and non-human activity throughout the neighborhood’s history, to a point where it was the symbolic structure for the imagination of the neighborhood reconstruction. This horizontality as a life practice is also connected to the notion of space singularity: that is, each family unit is a house on an individual land. The idea of splitting the land in more than one house only made sense when the new houses were extensions of the original one (married sons’ and daughters’ houses, for instance). The horizontality and singularity notions are those that presided over the *struggle* and the claims to build a new neighborhood. The horizontality here is also a process of vicinage reconstruction.

As Cangelli and Vettori (2019) argue, the debate about the horizontality–verticality dialectic refers to the history of urbanization from the beginning of the 20th century with the contraposition between Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier’s proposals: The former foresaw a “horizontal” city favored by the advances of the automobile technology and, the latter, a verticalization based on technical advances in construction that could free the soil to other “natural” activities. This dialectic is still present in the contemporary debate. Verticality, as a product of capitalist accumulation, may also be a varied-segregation strategy, from the separation between the rich and the poor by the heights of elite skyscrapers (Graham & Hewitt, 2013) to the segregation of the poor in vertical buildings far away from urban centers, as seen in housing policies in Brazil (Silva & Tourinho, 2015). Graham and Hewitt oppose the analysis of verticalism—inspired by Weizman (2002)—in what they call “horizontalism,” a kind of defect from the urbanization analysts who tend to ignore the verticalization policies. This is not what we are calling “horizontality” here: For

our analysis, we treat horizontality as a desire to inhabit houses “on the ground floor,” but never in vertical buildings. Horizontality appears just like the very own way that the inhabitants of *Pinheiro* think of the experience of dwelling.

In this text, our starting point is a less generalistic debate about the verticality–horizontality opposition so we can situate it in more local forms of geography and urban architecture productions: that is, in how these dimensions matter in people’s collective lives. We discuss what Gastrow (2020, p. 113) calls “materialities of belonging,” not in a verticality context (in which the central matter was the individual repairing practices of popular building in Luanda, Angola), but rather in a horizontality context, in which the same repairing practices, combined with self-building, are crucial. We can also think of a specific “dwelling perspective,” in a way of dwelling that reflects conceptions of life, space, geography, and work (Ingold, 2021). According to Blier (1994), houses are living organisms. The point is that, for the adequate development of the houses of *Pinheiro*, an edifice would not be adequate.

This article deals with the neighboring practices from an ethnographic perspective, updating the social sciences’ already classic discussions (Ingold, 1995). Our contribution is about another type of neighborhood, given in very traumatic and exceptional situations: the case of a destroyed neighborhood, together with all the relations that it used to generate on a daily basis. We will follow the process in which the relations retained in memory will allow the political *struggle* for the district construction somewhere else. Laurier et al. (2002) tell us about neighborhood practices (neighboring) as sociomaterial practices that occur as relations in public and are concerned with a certain morality of the neighbors’ actions. This is one perspective about neighboring, but we will present another one in this article, since we do not analyze the effective neighborhood relations, but a *memory* of the relations that took place in the neighborhood and was activated in the political struggle for the district reconstruction in another urban context..

What orders the struggle process is not just the idea of neighborhood, but something more intense, which Pina-Cabral and Godoi (2014) call “vicinage.” This idea reflects the perspective that the houses are not closed entities in themselves: They are open entities that blend in and interact with other houses, following the same relations of constitution of the local kinship—thought from the mutuality concepts of Sahlins (2013) and Pina-Cabral (2013)⁴—and several other possibilities of relationships. Vicinages are relationships of closeness between people and their homes that build complex sets of relationships and homes.⁵ They start from the idea that houses are also “partible,” that is, they unfold in relationships created over time. The old neighborhood of *Pinheiro* was a complex set of vicinages, where living spaces tended to aggregate as complex units of vicinages. This aggregation occurred through varied logics: friendship, generation, kinship, materiality, and so on.

We start from a relevant principle, as demonstrated by van Eijk (2012): Districts seen as “problematic” produce good neighborhood practices just as “non-problematic” ones. The stigma in which they are subjected to does not impede them to produce consistent and relevant neighborhood relations. The marginalization suffered by neighborhoods constructed from invasions is part of a territorial stigmatization that produces race and class inequality. In the case of *Pinheiro*, keeping the same name for its reconstruction was a way to reaffirm a political struggle, but also to defy a stigmatization socially produced by the state and media coverage during the eviction.

The History of *Pinheiro*’s Transformations

Even though the name “*Pinheiro*” was created on the mentioned land,⁶ its story began with two previous occupied locations: the CDHU’s⁷ *Casinhas* (late 2003) and *Campão* (early 2004), all of them also in the south side of the city. According to Dias de Andrade (2010), who

accomplished a fieldwork in *Pinheirinho* for his master's dissertation, the reasons for the occupation of the *Casinhas* were the urgency of housing.

On February 26, 2004, the *Movement*⁸ and the families occupied the abandoned, 1.3-million-m² piece of land of Selecta S.A.—a company already bankrupt at the time—naming it *Pinheirinho*. It started with approximately 240 families and, in 2012, it had increased to around 1,750. The main reason told by the former *Pinheirinho*'s residents to join the occupation was the constant rises in the rent prices, increasingly consuming a higher proportion of the families' income. The statement "Either I worked to eat or to pay the rent" illustrates the situation. According to Forlin and Costa (2010), in 2006, 60% of the *Pinheirinho*'s families lived with less than a minimum wage (R\$350—equivalent to about \$150 at that time), and 16% of the residents survived with a monthly income lower than R\$100 (p. 147)—equivalent to about \$42.

With 250 m² plots demarcated by the *coordinators*, the tents from *Campão* mostly became brick houses in *Pinheirinho*. They also organized it into 14 *sections*, each one led by an in-charge coordinator who was responsible for organizing and mediating it in everyday life and the weekly sectorial assemblies. In these meetings, the sectorial residents and its coordinator presented and discussed demands that could be forwarded to the main assembly on Saturday afternoons. It was on these main assemblies that many pieces of information that concerned the inhabitants reached them. The most important one was the eviction request filed by the bankrupt company in August 2004, almost 6 months after the foundation of *Pinheirinho*. The strategy was not only to avoid the eviction, but also to legally turn the occupied land into a Special Zone of Social Interest, which could settle the neighborhood.

The *struggle* to suspend injunctions went on for almost 8 years. On January 21, 2012, another eviction suspension was proclaimed in assembly, and inhabitants threw a party to celebrate the victory. However, the good news didn't last long. The next day dawned with the presence of 2,000 riot-control agents ready to evict them. Even with the creation of a resistance group wielding motorcycle helmets, plastic-barrel shields, sticks, and stones, the inhabitants were displaced under rubber bullets and teargas, having their houses demolished by backhoes.⁹

Pinheirinho's *struggle* for dwelling had many fronts, and, after the eviction, it took new directions with the municipal elections in 2012. The electoral victory of Carlinhos de Almeida—Workers Party (PT)—as mayor created the possibility to build *Pinheirinho dos Palmares*, a neighborhood exclusively dedicated to the displaced families, financed by the federal social housing program "MCMV".

The Reconstruction of the *Pinheirinho* Neighborhood

The first proposal by the City Hall stated that the new neighborhood would consist of apartments, which sparked the first disagreement with *MUST* and the former inhabitants, who wanted it to be houses. Because of a history of vertical buildings destined to the low-income population (due to saving up urban areas), the first model was a set of vertical buildings. This proposal reveals the state agents' way of thinking about housing suitable to poor people (Lea & Pholeros, 2010). This disagreement happened throughout the assemblies that gathered the former inhabitants that took part in the *struggle* to rebuild the neighborhood. One reason for that was the difficulty to build houses for 1,750 families in just one place without severing the population. In other words, the former inhabitants feared that the buildings could split them and make it impossible to rebuild what we call *vicinage*. In the inhabitants' understanding, the day-to-day life and the relations between people *required a horizontal architecture* to exist.

In the case of *New Pinheirinho*, the original "vertical-neighborhood" project alienated its population in two senses: the distance to the urban center, way farther than the original neighborhood and also the fact that the loss of the horizontal houses made a way of life impossible. The results of the *struggle* altered one of these factors (the vertical architecture), but not the other (the

social exclusion regarding the urban center). In a sense, the idea was that the vertical building would impede the usual processes of self-building and continuous housing renovation. These processes taken as part of forms of life related to work, leisure, and also to the vicinage relationships.

The other reason is a central notion of house that sees apartments as too small, not only for living, but also to be used as a workplace if necessary. Many former inhabitants had an extra income source from the 250-m² lot in *Pinheirinho*, such as woodworking stations, plantings, automobile repair shops, grocery stores, and bars. The apartments, therefore, would make not only the people's relationship impossible, but, for many of them, also their way of life and livelihood. This relationship between workplace and dwelling place seems to be the key to the ways in which vicinage (and horizontality) is structured.

An example of this is the couple Cristina and Francisco. When asked about how the eviction affected their family's life, the first thing that Cristina pointed out was:

It affected us in all senses, right? Because, where I lived [in *Pinheirinho*], the land was huge, the house was big. My husband [Francisco] is a woodworker. He had his woodworking machines. When he was able to find commissions, he would do them right over there [at their house in *Pinheirinho*]. He was setting up his woodworking station and he could work there without a problem. After we got kicked out of *Pinheirinho*, we had no place to keep his machines. We did not even have a place to live. He had to get his machines out of there and had to sell them, because there was no way we could find a house or a shed to rent that would fit all the machines inside it. We had to go to the shelter. [. . .] So, there goes an income source that no longer exists. He had to sell the machines and, now, he works like this: he still manages to find a service here and there, but now he only works with manual tools [. . .]. And, as for myself, I had my free-range-chicken creation, my vegetable garden. And sometimes there were people that came by to buy chicken and so on. So, there goes another little income for me, right? All of this helped us in our house budget. And, now, we can not count on it on the financial side, right? After a while, I also had to leave my job. The boss was able to hold it for a while, due to *Pinheirinho*'s eviction, but, one way or another, I missed five days at work because there was no way to work while thinking about how I would get my stuff out of the house, right? He understood my situation a little, but he did not like it very much. All that stuff. Financially, we were practically left with nothing. (Barretti, 2018, pp. 109–110, authors' translation)¹⁰

Even the political forces that backed the movement, therefore, thought that the vertical architecture was suitable for *Pinheirinho*'s population. But the former residents refused this perspective by standing up for another construction type as expressions of their own conceptions of house. Cristina expressed this perspective in an interview held in 2014:

And then they offered us small buildings, small apartments. We stood up against it saying that we did not want apartments. We did not live in apartments [in *Pinheirinho*]. We lived in houses! Therefore, it was not fair. Like the meeting we had with the Mayor Carlinhos, the last meeting we had with him. We told him "Carlinhos, do you think it is fair? Over there, we had houses, we bred small animals, we had a backyard. If you were in our shoes, would you like to live in an apartment this size?" (Barretti, 2018, p. 93, authors' translation)

The imagination of the future district also created friction with the political parties that supported the movement: they were not able to understand the claims for a horizontal-house neighborhood as *legitimate*. An assembly with the purpose of voting for either apartments or houses illustrates the split, since it indirectly became a poll to decide which group would represent the former inhabitants before the state from then on. The horizontal-house option won, and the *Movement (MUST)* became the only *Pinheirinho*'s group to represent the former inhabitants before the City Hall.

The *struggle*, however, was not over. The mayor made a second proposal, in which he accepted it to be houses, but they all had to be semi-detached. Again, neither the *Movement* nor the former inhabitants agreed with it, demanding detached houses for each family, just as it was in *Pinheirinho*. The idea of splitting the land with another house seemed as absurd to the former inhabitants as to live in apartments. The fact is that it was exactly the land exclusivity that allowed them the free circulation of the people that engaged in the vicinage's relations: parties, informal meetings, gatherings with friends, spaces for social interactions, and small, collective works. All of this would become much harder if the houses were not physically independent.

The City Hall gave in and found an area on the southeast side of the city, farther from downtown. The neighborhood structure would consist of small independent lots and two sections split by a street: *Pinheirinho dos Palmares I* and *II*. In March 2014, President Dilma Rousseff (PT) attended an event in São José dos Campos to sign the permission to build the 1,461 houses in *Pinheirinho dos Palmares II*. At that time, it was expected to be concluded and delivered by September 2015, even though it only happened on December 22, 2016. *Pinheirinho dos Palmares I*, on the other hand, would benefit 239 families, but its order of service was never signed.

The process to rebuild *Pinheirinho*'s neighborhood took many fronts then. While the families themselves or the State Public Defense solved some of the obstacles, the *Movement struggled* to solve the others, acting as a mediator group between *Pinheirinho*'s families and state instances, mainly the City Hall.

The 1,461 houses were completely designated in September 2016, with the construction still ongoing with a year of delay already. As the deadline was being pushed since September 2015, the *Movement* and some families protested on a few occasions until the one that happened on December 14, 2016, when they camped in front of the City Hall demanding the delivery of the houses, since they were pretty much done. On the second day of camping, they signed a commitment term to grant the families the house keys before concluding the remaining infrastructure constructions (For a street view of the new neighborhood, see Figure 3). It was almost 9 P.M. when they arrived back at the camp announcing the date for delivering the keys: December 22, 2016, exactly 1 month from completing 5 years since *Pinheirinho*'s eviction. Firecrackers were fired and the former residents burst into tears when they realized that the dream of home ownership was finally right around the corner. A week later, the families received the keys to their new houses and started moving in: Some of them were able to spend Christmas under their own roof.

Reimagining *Pinheirinho*

As we saw in Blunt (2008), houses are critical geographies of memory: They exist beyond materiality itself. This is the case of *Pinheirinho*: Homes were undone, destroyed, and much of what was inside them as objects was also lost. What remained was the relations between the people inside the homes and the vicinage relations. It is from these last elements that the new houses and the new neighborhood were rebuilt. However, the reconstruction was also a remake of the houses from scratch, since part of what they were was destroyed with the eviction. We wrote, here, about this intermediate period between the destruction of a neighborhood and the construction of another, in which the *struggle* is the practice that is left to reactivate the relations that were drastically erased with the old neighborhood. The *struggle* process is also the production of a new district, a memory in action, a memory that produces a new reality.

Beyond the discussions formulated by urban-policy producers and "city imagineers," we focus on local forms of imagination of the same cities and how they operate the production of common struggles (in the sense provided by Stengers, 2015). People, like the former *Pinheirinho*'s inhabitants, imagine and desire their own cities, with their consolidated geographies, from years of life experience: It is this experience that conducts the struggle for rebuilding the neighborhood and is based on their own notions of urban geography. In this sense, "horizontality" is, here, a



Figure 3. View of One of the Streets in the New Neighborhood. (Barretti, F. S. (Photographer) 2017. Photo of one of the new Neighborhood's Streets).

concept built in these collectives. The term in Portuguese that articulates this idea is the word “*térrea*,” as in “*casas térreas*.” It means, literally, “the one that has its own soil as pavement.” If what defines “verticality” can be understood as “mediators in the Latourian sense” (Gastrow, 2020, p. 94)—that is, something that generates new relations and possibilities instead of static objects—for *Pinheirinho*’s residents, verticality was the end of a life form, which depended on the horizontality combined with exclusivity of the lot. This horizontality is the agent of its own relations, social networks, vicinage, and livelihood.

This local idea of “horizontal” brings implications on an urban scale: It leads to other soil uses and also in a rejection to a verticalized model of urbanization, originally thought as having priority in popular housing policies in Brazil. From these particular notions of life forms, in which the house is a fundamental vicinage element, the political struggle starts to question the assumptions regarding the urbanization models applied “to the poor” in Brazil. If verticalization as an urban policy answers to the demographic pressures and the questions regarding soil use, in the example we explored, verticality means the impossibility of a life form. The case of *New Pinheirinho* assumes a critique to the very own idea of “urban planning,” since it simply did not consider the “lived-life spaces,” or the “self-built urban geography of the inhabitants” as relevant to the project production.

All these characteristics of vicinage demanded a “horizontal” house on an individual lot, where it was possible to plant, build, have barbecues, and so on. The vicinage between *Pinheirinho*’s inhabitants consisted of relationship settings that involved commensality, the exchange of planted foodstuffs, mutual support, help in self-building processes, and a social-encounter circuit at their own houses (especially barbecues). To the inhabitants, those were the “good relations” that would activate a memory of the life experiences in *Pinheirinho*.

As Cristina said in an interview that took place on May 21, 2014:

There, we planted potatoes, manioc, cabbage . . . I had my lettuce, my cilantro, you know? Would I like to eat some manioc? I just had to go in the backyard and pull out a manioc stalk. It would yield

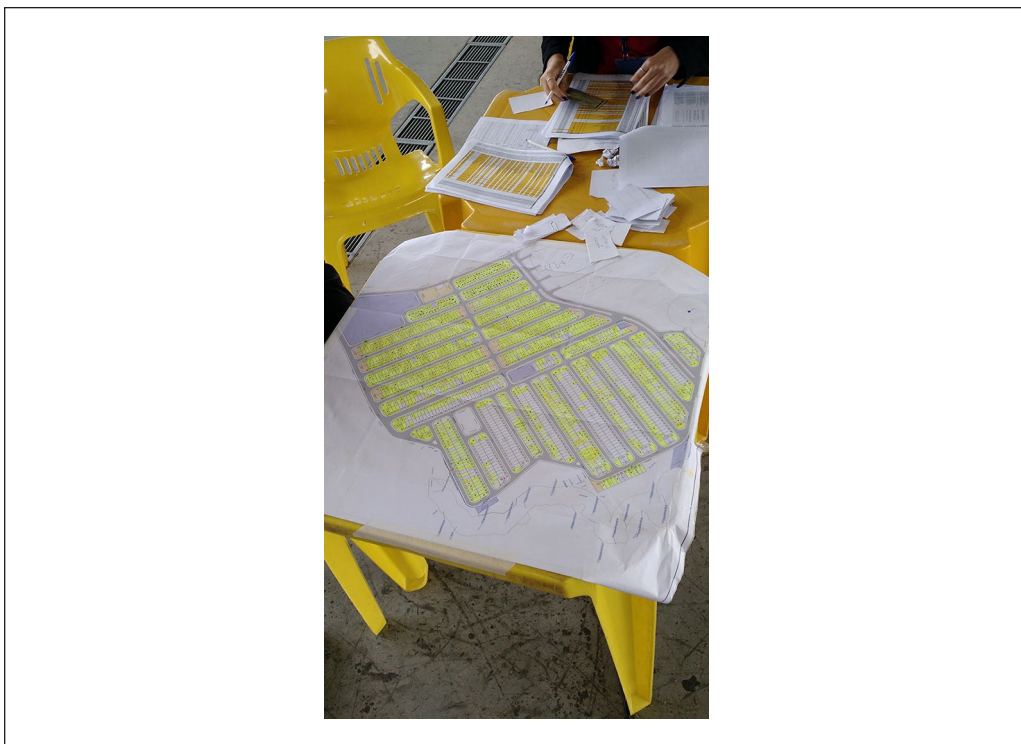


Figure 4. Blueprint of Pinheirinho dos Palmares on the Day the Houses Were Distributed to Future Residents. (Barretti, F. S. (Photographer) 2018. Photo of the blueprint of Pinheirinho dos Palmares on the Day the houses were distributed to future residents).

two, three, four, five kilos of manioc. I would pull it out, share between me, my son and even my neighbor. Every time I pulled some out, I shared. Sometimes, I would pull out for my sister because we couldn't handle all of it by ourselves. (Author 1, p. 94)

The struggle for the reconstruction of *Pinheirinho* (now *Pinheirinho dos Palmares II* or *New Pinheirinho*) is centered on this open conglomerate of houses. It is the vicinage that conducts the struggle, the reconstitution of a set of dense relations that was disjointed in just 1 day, through the eviction. The vicinage as a process permeated by the circulation among homes is a fact observed in many contexts, according to Pina-Cabral and Godoi (2014) and Pina-Cabral (2014), although it is also ethnographically analyzed (with different names) in many Brazilian contexts (Marcelin, 1999; Márquez, 2014; Matos Viegas, 2007). The history of *Pinheirinho* and its transformation into *Pinheirinho dos Palmares* are another of those cases, where it is precisely the memories of the vicinage relations that conduct the struggle and the guidelines of formation and home at the new neighborhood.

At the same time, we could add another dimension to these vicinage relations inside the neighborhoods: the anti-vicinage relations. The same way that the houses assemble themselves in connection to other houses, houses assemble closing themselves to others: There are people and groups of people who want to avoid each other. In the life of *Pinheirinho* or any other popular Brazilian neighborhoods, as the houses blend in the vicinages, they also separate from each other in a radical way. In the reconstruction of *Pinheirinho*, the anti-vicinages were as important as the vicinages: Many houses were chosen so people could be far away from others (Figure 4).



Figure 5. Aerial View of the New Neighborhood. (Google Earth. Aerial view of the Pinheirinho dos Palmares. Digital Image. Printscreen taken in august 2020).

Categories like “*Pinheirinho*” tend to homogenize a group, but certain events momentarily suspend this uniformity. One of them happened in January 2016, when the moment to discuss where each family would live in the new neighborhood came through a poll between two options: to replicate the *Pinheirinho*’s old *sections* (keeping, as much as possible, the same neighbors) or to redistribute it randomly. The second option was chosen at that time, but, in the assembly on May 14, 2016, the families could choose between keeping the same *section* they lived in *Pinheirinho*¹¹ or changing it to another one. The draw would be performed by the *leadership* based on this new arrangement (Figure 5).

Both alternatives were evenly chosen by future residents. The reasons for their decisions were justified by different perspectives. One of them stressed the good relationship with the neighbors, opting, then, to stay close to them or near relatives that also lived in *Pinheirinho*. In other words, the criterion for choosing houses was the vicinage. On the other hand, some said that they would like to change it to avoid their former neighbors. There is, here, an emphasis on the anti-vicinage. Other perspectives considered both the geography and the location of future public services in *Pinheirinho dos Palmares II*. The center of the new neighborhood is quite higher than its surroundings, inducing some to choose *blocks* that would not make them go uphill. Picking *blocks* that were far from where they assumed would be noisy also showed up in the conversations with the former inhabitants. The *struggle* to rebuild the neighborhood, therefore, had actions not only to regroup *Pinheirinho*, but also to rearrange it in a different way, although always taking in consideration the effects of the vicinage from the former neighborhood.

In addition, the new neighborhood also carried the tension and conflicts from the old neighborhood. While choosing the location for their new houses, a mere reproduction of *Pinheirinho* was impossible, since the effects of an anti-vicinage (also the memory of its relationships) took place. New neighboring sets were organized, now with an attempt to structure the material proximity from the vicinages, generating “akin” house clusters. But, also, the district’s new materiality imposed transformations, and many opted for houses thinking about its geography, possibilities regarding the best spots to build a small business, through ideas of “peacefulness” and “noise,” and the urban transportation lines.

The house selection in the new district, after the decisions and disputes about its forms and structures, was another significant moment to understand the vicinages and neighboring relations. While many *struggled* to keep close to friends and relatives of those who composed the relationship network of the vicinage, others simultaneously *struggled* to avoid staying close to specific former neighbors. That is, the more impersonal relations from the neighborhood, in its most negative aspects—those that showed the conflicted relation between some people that lived near each other—were also an important factor in choosing the houses in the new neighborhood.

During the first assembly in which the former residents were able to pick their future blocks in *Pinheirinho dos Palmares*, Barretti (2018) was talking to the people in the queues, trying to understand their reasons to choose a specific one. While he was talking to a family that chose to remain in the same block because they had a good relationship with their neighbors, the man who was standing next in line joined us by saying the exact opposite: He was in that queue to avoid his old neighbors. He said that the sector he lived in used to have too many parties and would constantly play loud music when he was trying to get some rest. Although he did not bring up any kind of direct argument with them, it was still the main reason he was picking a different block, even though he could not know how different it would be.

The process of choosing houses was almost as a geographical adjustment of the complex vicinage relations: These are not connected only by the dwelling proximity. At the same time, it is possible to have a neighbor that represents an anti-vicinage. The new neighborhood was an opportunity to spatially rearrange the proximity and avoidance relations: The vicinages and anti-vicinages tended to spatially organize in terms of proximity and distance inside the new district.

We can say that there is a difference in the intensity of the neighboring relations (as those also analyzed by Laurier et al., 2002) and those vicinage relations inside a specific neighborhood. The most important factor in the neighboring relations is precisely the one of avoidance, which we could also call anti-vicinage. These avoidance relationships are stronger than the usual distance relationships related to the idea of neighborhood (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999). At least in Portuguese-speaking contexts, they seem to operate as a more marked system of avoidance and even structural rivalry (Márquez, 2014; Pina-Cabral, 1991).

Conclusion

We saw that practices of vicinage arranged all the perspectives of the former *Pinheirinho*’s inhabitants throughout its reconstruction *struggle*, also having in mind a specific way of dwelling: one that implicates horizontality and individual possession of an individual lot, with the possibility to transform the house into a business, besides allowing the necessary privacy to the everyday life of the vicinage relations and all the in-home movements that it allows.

Simultaneously, it is evident that these relations are dynamic and, between the former *Pinheirinho* and new life in *Pinheirinho dos Palmares II*, almost 5 years passed. Even the relation of the families that were formed through the *struggle* in the many assemblies and public manifestations also produced new relations and new friction. The *struggle* process also produced new vicinages that modulated those recalled from the old neighborhood. The *struggle* is also,

therefore, part of the new neighborhood's geography and the new relations that were built through the almost 5-year period in between.

On the other hand, the same geography produced new choices, many of them in contradiction to the vicinages of the old neighborhood. Some families made a "geographical" choice rather than a "relational" one: Some opted to live in the lower ground to avoid the hills and also having in mind urban mobility. Others thought of living in the main avenue, predicting possibilities to start a business at their own houses.

However, even the cases of "geographical displacement" related to the vicinage relational logic connect, in a complex way, to each other in *Pinheirinho's* memory: As the houses were chosen in phases due to the order on the lists set by the City Hall (which was also influenced by how fast each family managed to gather the necessary documents), many "non-relational" choices were followed by relational ones. When a family was going to pick a house, it also produced reallocation and new choices (sometimes to stay closer, sometimes to stay away). Therefore, all the vicinage logic shuffles itself in complex terms with *New Pinheirinho's* geography.

The central question revolves around how the materiality of the old neighborhood, destroyed by police forces, serves as a symbolic guide to the reconstruction of the new one: The political disputes with governmental bodies are based on the idea that the new neighborhood should respect certain material configurations of the destroyed district (especially its horizontality). We have a memory from the materiality of the urban organization in the old neighborhood as well as a memory of the houses themselves as a structure of political *struggle*. The former residents' argument is that some of the way of life and the idea of life experience in the destroyed neighborhood should be rebuilt in the new neighborhood, and this reconstruction would occur mainly by a similar reconstruction of the lost materiality.

We demonstrated, in this article, that the definition of a suitable house to live, from the former resident's perspective, is the set of relations that backs it up, expressed on the concept of vicinage. In addition, to hold up these relations, it is required that the house must be horizontal, on an individual lot. The memory from the old life (the non-materiality) that drove the former residents' *struggle* was organized around these two specific axes: horizontality and house singularity on the lot. They hold up a way of life. The state, however, wanted to build vertical models of dwelling, seen as adequate for *Pinheirinho's* families. After giving in the verticality perspective, the state offered semi-detached houses (saving on land), readily denied by *Pinheirinho's* families in the *movement's* assemblies. In the end, the *struggle* achieved the imposition of its way of imagining the materiality of the houses, modulated by the life experience in the old *Pinheirinho*.

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Notes

1. Words in italic refer to terms and categories employed by the interlocutors.
2. The term “families” is used here to describe those who lived in *Pinheirinho* but were not members of the social movement’s coordinators group.
3. About this housing program, see Kopper (2016).
4. The concept of mutuality is, precisely, a perspective about a kinship that assumes that it exists when people are part of each other through dense relations that may or may not be blood related. In this sense, dense relations, as the vicinage ones, can also be seen as kinship.
5. The concept of vicinage is different from that of the neighborhood, such as the one found in Birenbaum-Carmeli (1999). There are denser and less dense relationships within a neighborhood context, and vicinage is a concept that seeks to understand the circulation circuits in those dense units. The intense movement of people through the houses that constitute a vicinage forms an aggregate of stable and similar relationships, often mixed with kinship relationships. This concept is related to concerns about kinship in Southern Africa.
6. The name “*Pinheirinho*” (*small pine tree*) comes from the pine-like trees on the sidewalk at its main entrance.
7. Companhia de Desenvolvimento Habitacional Urbano—Urban Housing Development Company.
8. We are going to refer to the social movement’s coordinators group as “*MUST*” (Urban Movement of the Homeless), “*Movement*,” “*leadership*,” and “*coordinators*” from now on.
9. Images of *Pinheirinho*’s eviction can be seen at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-16716788> (accessed on February 17, 2020).
10. Interview with Cristina and Francisco on April 30, 2014, more than 2 years after the eviction.
11. In this case, it would be necessary to have a “translation,” by the *Movement*, from *Pinheirinho*’s former sections to the new blocks in *Pinheirinho dos Palmares*.

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