

CONSTRUCTING DEVELOPMENT:
BRASÍLIA AND THE MAKING
OF MODERN BRAZIL

By

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To my parents, Elaine and James Story

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INTRODUCTION

Days after I arrived in Brasília to conduct my dissertation research, I read an announcement in the *Correio Braziliense*, the city's main newspaper, of a mass to be celebrated the coming Friday, 12 September 2003, in honor of what would have been the one-hundredth birthday of the city's celebrated founder President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-61).¹ The mass took place at the Cruzeiro, the site of a simple wooden cross along that marks the highest point of Brasília and the location of the mass first official mass celebrated in the new capital, on 3 May 1957. The 2003 mass was coordinated by the Juscelino Kubitschek Memorial and supported by various local governmental offices. The Memorial, adjacent to the Cruzeiro, is a low-slung, simple white structure with the subterranean entrances favored by architect Oscar Niemeyer. What makes the building striking is statue of Kubitschek standing atop a tall pedestal in what appears to be a

¹ "Revivendo a primeira missa," *Correio Braziliense*, 10 Sept 2003 2003.

concrete sickle, facing eastward with his hand raised in a wave. (Figure 1)



Figure 1.

Juscelino Kubitschek Memorial. Design by Oscar Niemeyer (1983). Photo by the author, September 2003.

The Kubitschek Memorial is a well-funded institution that houses Kubitschek's mausoleum, a museum dedicated to promoting the memory of Brasília's history and its founder. It is also a good place from which to begin a tour of the city. The Memorial is located on the Monumental Axis, (Eixo Monumental) is a stretch of open space with several lanes of road on either side (not unlike the National Mall in Washington, D.C.). The basic form of Brasília is two axes that intersect at a right angle, but one of them is straight and the other curved backwards. (Figure 2) According to the plan's author, Lucio Costa, the sign of the cross was his inspiration, and that the curved form of the Residential Axis (Eixo Residencial, also known as the Highway Axis/Eixo Rodoviário)

resulted from adaptations made to the topography of the predetermined site, which was resembles a convex shape within a concave one,² or a large shallow bowl with a much smaller one inverted within it. At the apex of this this overturned small bowl are the Cruzeiro and the Memorial. Continuing westward from the Memorial along the Monumental Axis (in the direction opposite that Kubitschek's which statue faces), one will pass a military chapel and entrances to various unseen military installations before reaching the end of the Pilot Plan, as Costa's design is known, at the Estação Rodoferroviaria, the terminal for long-distance buses and erstwhile train station.

Returning to Kubitschek's Memorial and following the gaze of his statue eastward along the Monumental Axis, one can see in the distance the distinctive shape of the congressional complex, two tall blocks bookended with the dome-shaped Senate chamber and the bowl of the Chamber of Deputies. Traveling eastward along the Monumental Axis from the Cruzeiro, one passes the local governmental buildings of the Federal District and the Convention Center; on the south is the entrance to the city park named after Sara Kubitschek, wife of the former president. Next is the enormous television tower that arises from the center of the Monumental Axis, sandwiched between the two hotel sectors and just west of the intersection between the two main axes. The crossing is a multi-level structure, with cars, bus station, and subway entranc below and shopping above. This is in many respects the hub of activity envisioned by Costa, the heart of the city in many respects, if not quite the "Diversions Sector" he titled it; the

² This is the description given to me by Professor of Architecture Antônio Carlos Cabral Carpintero of the Universidade de Brasília. I owe a great debt to my studies and conversations with Carpintero, as well as to his doctoral dissertation, Antonio Carlos Cabral Carpintero, "Brasília: prática e teoria urbanística no Brasil 1956-1998" (Ph.D., Universidade de São Paulo, 1998). for my understanding of urban planning in Brasília (not to mention Brazil more broadly).

city's life is scattered throughout Brasília and its environs.³ Continuing eastward along the Monumental Axis, one passes the National Theater, its form highly suggesting an Aztec Pyramid, and the striking cathedral characterized by concrete ribs arranged vertically in a circle. Between the cathedral and the congressional complex are rows of glass-blocks housing the various ministries.

The congressional complex is located on the Three Powers Plaza (Praça dos Três Poderes) at the eastern terminus of the Monumental Axis, facing the Supreme Court and Planalto Palace. The Plaza opens eastward over a long stretch of wild savannah toward the lake beyond. In a surprising move, Costa located the city's (and nation's) symbolic and administrative core at the lowest point of the city in terms of altitude. Rather than denigrating the complex as one might expect, this position helps make Congress visible from a considerable distance and thus highlights the structure and contributes overall to its monumentality.

As its name suggests, the Residential Axis is dedicated principally to housing. The main unit of residence along the Residential Axis is the Superquadra, a complex of uniform apartment blocks set amid grassy lawns and separated from automobile traffic through an elaborate network of ramps and roundabouts. Between each superquadra is a small commercial district, where one finds restaurants, bookstores, etc. Although Costa envisioned these to provide for the basic needs of the residents of the surrounding apartments, these commercial districts have become specialized, with some given over almost entirely to restaurants and bars, others to bookshops. Not surprisingly, parking is

³ Use of the term "Brasília" varies. I employ it in what is the most common current usage, to refer to the Pilot Plan and its closest neighborhoods, including the Lago Sul, Lago Norte, the Sudoeste, etc., and excluding Guará, Taguatinga, Sobradinho, and the other outlying cities (formerly known as "satellite cities") within the Federal District. Today the Pilot Plan is home to just over 100,000, while the population of the Federal District as a whole approaches 2.5 million.

ever-more challenging as the population of Brasília continues to grow while its design means that all who can, drive.

All of the fantastic buildings described above, artistically daring if not appealing to all tastes, emerged from the drawing board of Oscar Niemeyer, Lucio Costa's former student, and already an internationally-renowned architect whose fame had surpassed that of his mentor. Brasília bears the indelible print of these two men, both *cariocas*, natives of Rio de Janeiro. Two other men, however, provided the "blank slate" of the "barren" site in the Planalto Central of Brazil, and the means to construct a city *ex nihilo* in less than four years to become the capital of the Estados Unidos do Brasil. Those were a pair of *mineiros*, from the state of Minas Gerais: Juscelino Kubitschek and Israel Pinheiro. These four men shaped the construction of Brasília, a project that had tremendous implications for the nation. We must bear in mind that tens of thousands of workers from throughout Brazil and other nations made the plan a reality. However, as this dissertation shows, the construction of Brasília was a decidedly top-down process. It was a monumental undertaking that required an unprecedented mobilization of resources, but a very few individuals exerted a tremendous degree of control over decisions with far-reaching implications for Brazil's future.

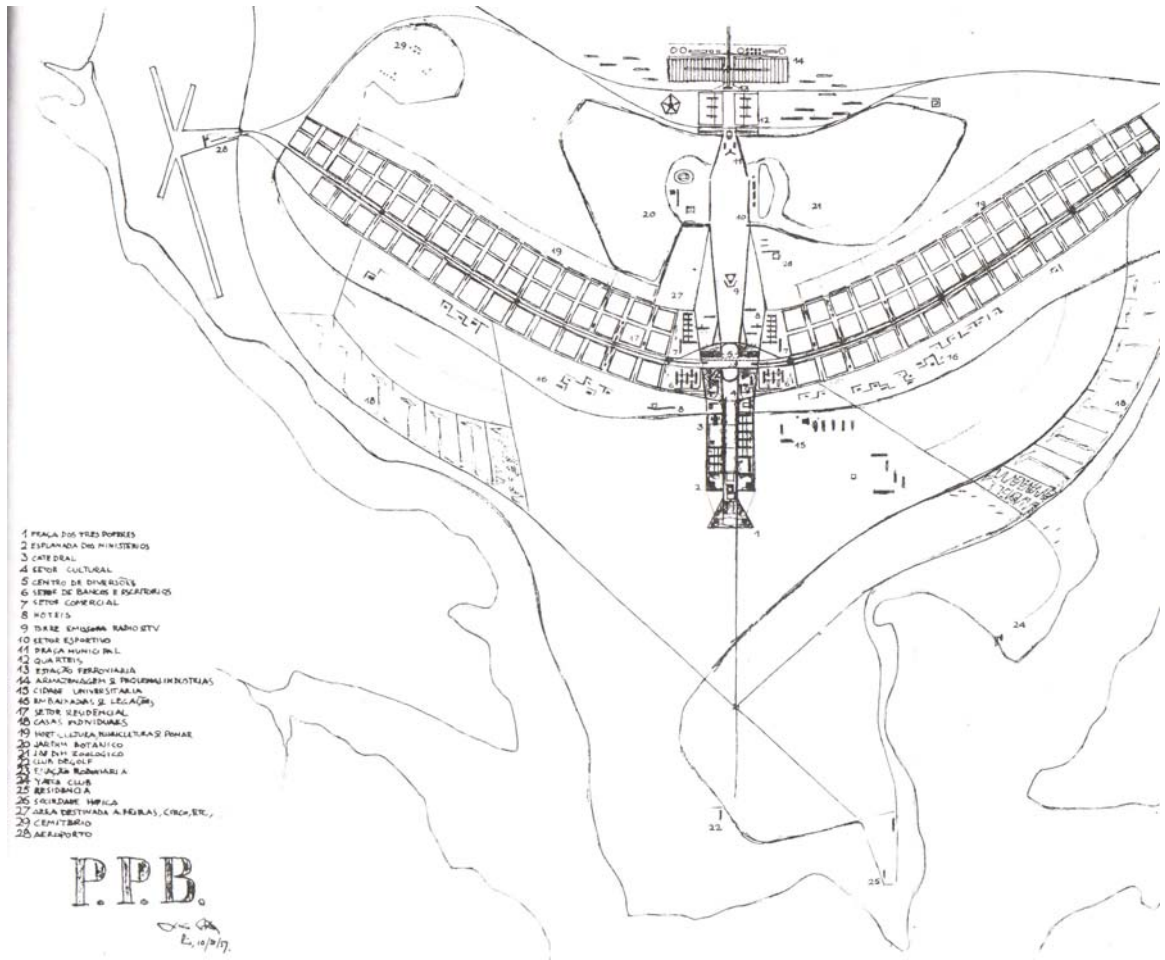


Figure 2.

Pilot Plan of Brasília by Lucio Costa, 1957. From *Relatório do Plano Piloto de Brasília* (Brasília: Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal, 1991), 33. Note: This image is oriented so that west is at the top, not north as is standard.

“*Começa o novo Brasil.*” (“The new Brazil begins.”)⁴ With this simple declaration former president Kubitschek begins his memoir of the construction of the new capital of the new capital of Brazil, *Por que construí Brasília* (*Why I Built Brasília*). When Kubitschek took the presidential oath in January 1956, the future federal district was part of the state of Goiás, occupied by several sleepy ranches, one hundred miles from the nearest paved road. While it was more than a decade later, during the military dictatorship, that the transfer of the government was completed, with Brasília Kubitschek achieved a remarkable political and engineering success during his five-year term in office (1956-61). Originally published in 1975, a quarter century later the Senate reissued Kubitschek’s memoir as one of eleven titles published in honor of the nation’s quinqucentenary.

Nearly a half century after its inauguration, the no-longer-new capital has yet to free itself of controversy, either in Brazil or abroad. Some of the points of contention remain the same, but the nature of the debate has shifted. The once-celebrated architecture has become decidedly unfashionable. The rapid deterioration of many structures highlights the many shortcuts employed in the rush to build. Architect Oscar Niemeyer’s notorious preference for aesthetic concerns over practical ones (a significant deviation from the mantra of other modernist architects, “form follows function”) made many buildings inconvenient in various respects or ill-suited to the tropical climate, with large panes of glass leaving interiors at the mercy of the intense sun characteristic of the

⁴ This is the title of the first chapter in Juscelino Kubitschek, *Por que construí Brasília*, 2nd ed., Coleção Brasil 500 anos (Brasília: Senado Federal, 2000). While a ghostwriter wrote this and Kubitschek’s other book, this nearly five-hundred-page tome offers a faithful presentation of the former president’s perspective on the construction of Brasília and is perhaps the best example of his largely successful efforts to shape his place in Brazilian historical memory.

site, in the semi-arid *cerrado*, the savannah characteristic of the Planalto Central, one-thousand feet above sea level, and just over fifteen degrees of latitude south of the Equator.

Despite criticisms, many of them unquestionably valid, Brasília functions. Not only as the seat of the federal government, but as home to more than two million people. Though by no means free of the stark inequalities that characterize contemporary Brazilian society, residents of the Federal District are generally wealthier, better educated, and healthier than their compatriots in other regions. (Figure 3) Many *brasilienses*⁵ would not choose to live elsewhere. The area surrounding Brasília has seen remarkable growth and development over the past decades. While many Brazilians continue to speak derisively of the new capital, none can deny that the project succeeded in achieving its two principal goals: to transfer the capital from Rio de Janeiro and to effect economic growth in the interior. However, Brasília's promoters promised much more than economic development or transfer of the political capital: they claimed that the city promised nothing less than a revolution, a battle against backwardness which would bring about the promised land of "modernity" and "development". To what extent did the new capital mark the birth of a "new Brazil"? To answer this question one needs first to understand the extent to which Brasília marked a rupture with the past and its role in shaping subsequent national development.

⁵ Term for denizens of the Federal District.

O MAPA DA RIQUEZA

Percentual das famílias ricas em relação ao total de famílias em 2000

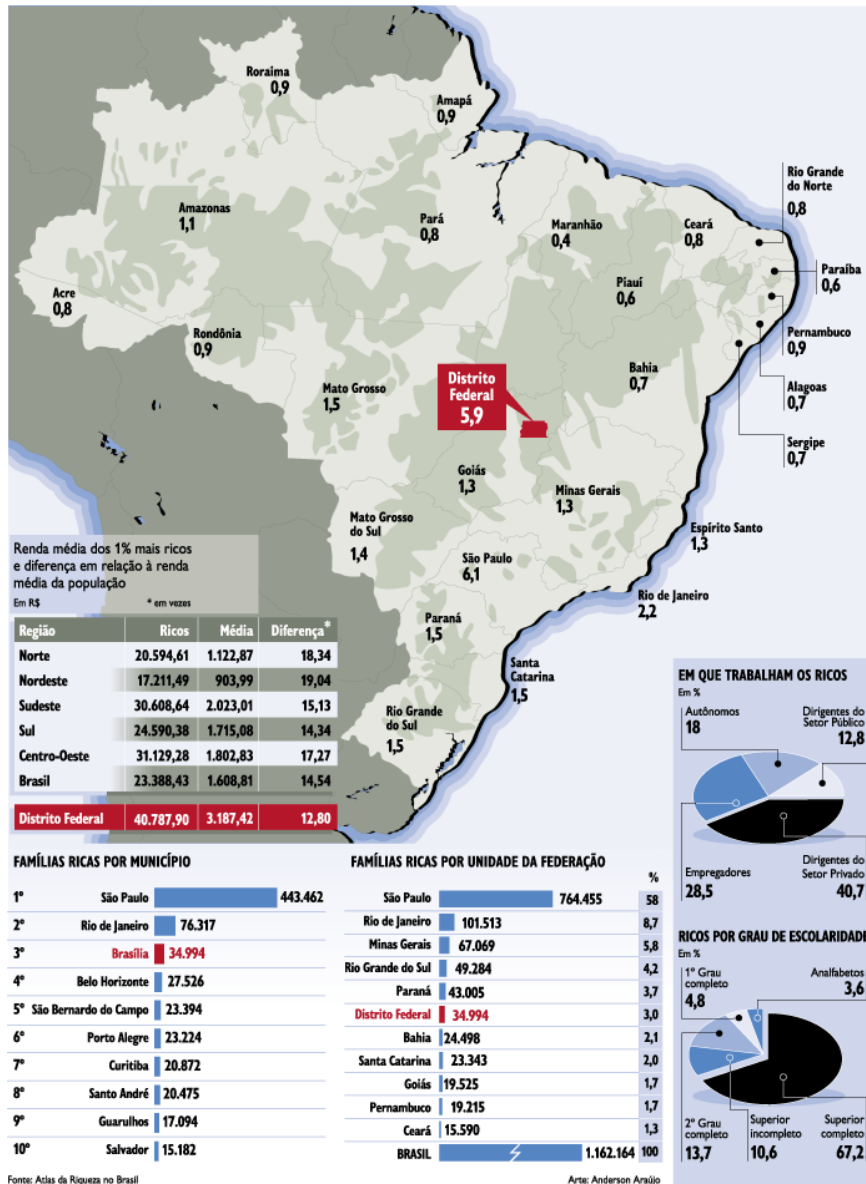


Figure 3.

Map indicating the distribution of wealth in Brazil by state, numbers representing percentage of wealthy families in relation to total families, according to the 2000 census. Source: Correio Braziliense 2 April 2004.

Brasília was a projection of the future, a manifestation of the dreams and aspirations of the men and women who planned and built it. The city's design made clear what the future held: modernity. The future, embodied in Brasília's orderliness, and the

contemporary disorder that characterized the nation's other urban centers, were clearly at odds. The planners of the new capital intended it to be *sui generis*, not a model for the remaking of the nation's existing cities.⁶ Instead, the concerns of its planners were far more grandiose. Brasília was a showcase of modernist architecture and planning, the most complete example of such design ever implemented, solidifying Brazil's place as a leading producer of the aesthetic. The planners of the new capital were concerned with much larger questions than traffic flow and affordable housing. By building Brasília they were making a statement about the nation's present and proposing to fundamentally alter its future. This dissertation is concerned with understanding the ideas and intentions behind Brasília and how contemporaries reacted to and debated those ideas and intentions. By virtue of its design and the rhetoric employed by its planners, the new capital was to render in physical form the nebulous and contentious idea of modernity. It put forth a particular definition of modernity, a vision of the future, which contemporaries heatedly debated in the press. The discussions about Brasília's construction provide unique insight into how Brazilians in the late 1950s understood modernity, and how they reformulated their views on the nation, national identity, and Brazil's future.

The new capital's construction occurred while Brazil was undergoing significant changes. During the 1950s the nation's population became predominantly urban, marking an important shift in what had been for centuries an overwhelmingly agrarian

⁶ Some scholars have argued that a principal motivation behind Brasília was to provide a new model for urban planning. See, for example, James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). While the new capital did exert an influence on subsequent urban planning, my analysis shows that this was not the intention of Brasília's planners.

society. At the same time, mass media transformed the national culture, allowing for the rapid dissemination of images and ideas to both urban and rural Brazilians. By the middle of the century the media played a powerful role in shaping notions of national identity. It was also a time of great optimism, a rare moment of democracy.

Brasília became synonymous with the concepts of “modernity” and “development”, the long-elusive goals that had been the obsession of Brazil’s governing class for more than a century. Building a new capital *ex nihilo* in such a remote location was a monumental undertaking that required an unprecedented mobilization of human and material resources. While the project was intensely controversial, its advocates succeeded in swiftly and decisively in attracting popular support for the undertaking. Analysis of public debates reveals that Brasília’s critics almost immediately accepted the new capital in theory, choosing to focus their criticism on the manner in which the Kubitschek government and Novacap⁷ implemented the plan. The idea of Brasília—or, more precisely, the promise of a better future it embodied—appealed enormously to the majority of Brazilians, it also prompted fears about how Brazil would become modern.

Engaging in a theoretical or comparative discussion of modernity is beyond the scope of this study. There is an extensive literature dedicated to describing modernity in various regional contexts and much disagreement about how precisely to define the term. Marshall Berman provides a useful description a of modernity as,

a mode of vital experience—experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils—that is shared by men and women all over the world today.... To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth,

⁷ Novacap is the acronym for the Comissão Planejadora da Nova Capital do Brasil, the Planning Commission of the New Capital of Brazil. Congress passed law no. 2874 on 19 September 1956, approving initial funding of Cr\$ 500,000. Initially the agency was responsible for building the new capital, Novacap still oversees various aspects of Brasília’s administration.

transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.⁸

Modernity is best understood not as a fixed category or as a linear process, but rather as a mode of expression, a language through which people articulated their beliefs and priorities.⁹ The promise and perils inherent in the confrontation with modernity are universal. The impassioned nature of the debates surrounding Brasília illustrate Berman's description. To fully comprehend the plan of Brasília and the nature of the debates surrounding its construction, it is essential to understand the long and fraught relationship between Brazilians and the concept of modernity.

I hope to convey a sense of the variety of ways people have confronted modernity and sought to harness its power through examining the way Brazilians experienced modernity in the latter half of the twentieth century. Brazilians developed their own brand of modernity, one that shared common ground with other, foreign, modernities and engaged in a discourse with them. Modernity is, of course, related in origin and concept to the process of modernization and the language of modernism. The builders of Brasília used all three of these terms in describing the project: it promised the attainment of modernity (a future ideal state) through the process of (material) modernization. The modernist aesthetic filled in the picture: Brazilians could look at the capital and actually see the future, making it seem imminently attainable.

Before the twentieth century most of the elite culture in Latin America could be described as inferior renditions of art forms developed in Europe (this is especially true in

⁸ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1988), 15.

⁹ Vivian Schelling, "Introduction: Reflections on the Experience of Modernity in Latin America," 1-33 in Vivian Schelling, ed., *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America* (London: Verso, 2000).

Brazil, where the French cultural mission of 1816 exerted a powerful influence on artistic production for nearly a century, as generations of artists dutifully replicated the French example). At the dawn of the twentieth century, however, Latin Americans began to question and reject the idea internalized by generations that they were inherently inferior to the North Atlantic. Writers such as José Martí and José Enrique Rodó urged those across the hemisphere to declare their own spiritual¹⁰ emancipation by producing art that highlighted rather than rejected the region's heterogeneous past. Throughout the hemisphere artists answered their challenge.

I approach Brazilian modernism by seeking to understand its own particular contours and context, not presuming it to be a second-rate version of European modernism. To do so would be to neglect the intellectual history of Brazil and Latin America broadly. Three hundred years of European colonial rule shaped the region and its influence combined with indigenous and African traditions to define the cultural and social landscape of Latin America. Modernism in Latin America explicitly sought to valorize that heterogeneity by drawing on European ideas, but consciously seeking to create a uniquely American form of modernity. Ideas also flowed in the other direction as the production of Latin American artists and intellectuals proved increasingly influential in Europe and North America.¹¹ One of the most important differences between Latin American modernism and its counterparts in Europe and the United States is that, in the former, its scope extended far beyond the artistic realm. As Wilson Martins described modernism in the Brazilian context: “More than a simple literary *school*, or

¹⁰ Throughout this dissertation I use the word “spiritual” not in its religious sense, but rather to describe that which is non-material, encompassing the intellectual as well as emotional realm.

¹¹ Néstor García Canclini's concept of modernity in Latin America is especially useful. See Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

even a period in our intellectual life, Modernism in my opinion was a whole *epoch* of Brazilian life inscribed within a wide social and historical process, the source and result of transformations which far overflowed their esthetic frontiers.”¹²

I seek to understand the meanings contemporaries attached to the construction of Brasília. To do so, it is first necessary to understand modernism as it emerged in the Latin American and, more specifically, Brazilian context. Cultural nationalism lay at the core of Latin American nationalism. The term modernism was first coined by Nicaraguan Rubén Darío in the 1880s.¹³ By the second decade of the twentieth century, growing U.S. imperialism in the western hemisphere and the destruction wrought by the First World War together helped discredit the western models Latin Americans had long sought to imitate while the Mexican Revolution offered a dramatic example of the emancipatory potential of modernism. While Brazilian modernism had much in common with the varieties taking shape elsewhere in Latin America, according to Jean Franco, there was an importance difference: while modernists in Mexico and elsewhere tended to identify the countryside and the folk who resided there as the authentic representations of the nation, Brazilian modernists, like their contemporaries involved in the “Martinferrista” movement in Argentina, was essentially urban and cosmopolitan. It aimed to create vision of a unified Brazilian culture, at the core of which lay its

¹² Wilson Martins, *The Modernist Idea: A Critical Survey of Brazilian Writing in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Jack E. Tomlins (New York: N.Y. University Press, 1970), 7.

¹³ Art historian David Craven puts forth the provocative thesis that the development of European modernism owed much to the precedent set by Darío, who spent much of his career in Barcelona, where his ideas exerted a significant influence on artists such as Pablo Picasso and Antonio Gaudí. David Craven, "The Latin American Origins of 'Alternative Modernism'," *Third Text* 36 (1996): 31-35.

heterodoxy. In those movements, “national culture was identified with the avant-garde culture of the modern city rather than with the folk culture of the backlands.”¹⁴

Thus there is a significant divergence from the earlier *indigenista* intellectual movements that emerged throughout Latin America.¹⁵ Rather than looking for a single, authentic and pure source of nationality, then, the modernists’ shared the, “vision of an integrated and modern Brazil whose distinctive form of civilisation and culture would not be a mere regional folk-culture.”¹⁶ Not coincidentally Brazilian modernism burst on the scene in the centennial of the nation’s independence in 1922 when a group of avant-garde writers and artists equated the modernist aesthetic with the continuation of the project of independence, which in their eyes remained incomplete more than a century after the expulsion of the European colonizers. To Brazilian modernists, unity was the key to national culture. This helps one understand the central metaphor employed by the Brazilian modernists, who exploded on the scene during Modern Art Week in São Paulo in 1922, that of cannibalism. As articulated in Oswald de Andrade’s *Manifesto antropófago* (Cannibalist Manifesto), Brazilian culture is defined by its original and selective ingestion of various traditions and cultural forms from a variety of sources, both local and imported. The content of Brazilian modernism was decidedly (and self-consciously) national in character, defined ultimately by its heterogeneity. The metaphor

¹⁴ Jean Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 92.

¹⁵ Indigenismo emerged as an intellectual and artistic movement in the nineteenth century as a close ally of Romanticism. José de Alencar is the most important Brazilian indigenista. Not surprisingly, indigenismo was a more significant phenomenon in countries with large indigenous populations, mostly in the Andean region and Mesoamerica. In both Mexico and Peru indigenismo informed political change in the twentieth century. After the Mexican Revolution, especially under Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, indigenismo contributed to the formation of a new national identity. Peruvian indigenista José Carlos Mariátegui drew heavily on Marxism. Under the APRA movement and the progressive military dictatorship of Juan Velasco Alvarado, indigenismo became official state policy.

¹⁶ Franco, 98.

of cannibalism illustrated the modernists' vision of national identity: the nation's unique character lay in its ingestion of various cultural traditions. The incorporation of foreign inspirations was thus not just consistent with the tenets of Brazilian modernism, rather the nation required new sources of intellectual sustenance to continue its long-standing pattern of cultural development.

The modernism of the Brazilian avant-garde found official sanction following the Revolution of 1930. Under the new regime, modernism was a key ingredient in the emergence of a new national myth, the "racial democracy" described by Gilberto Freyre. The Vargas regime used modernist architecture to communicate its program of social and economic development and distinguish it from previous regimes. In 1937 the federal government commissioned a team of Brazilian architects to design a new headquarters for the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) in downtown Rio de Janeiro. The concrete slab appeared to float above the street on *pilotis*,¹⁷ adorned with a blue and white mural of *azulejos*,¹⁸ and marked a clear stylistic departure from the hodge-podge of baroque and neo-classical buildings that dominated the city center. Given the ascendancy of modern architecture in the 1950s and the prominence of Brazilian practitioners of the genre, it is hardly unexpected that President Kubitschek chose modernism as the style of the new capital. Rather, it would be quite surprising if he had not.

Kubitschek was heir to the *varguista*¹⁹ political system. Of humble origins, Juscelino received medical training and served in the Revolution of 1930. His political career took off after he married into a powerful political family of his home state Minas

¹⁷ The pillar-like structures upon which many modernist structures sit, which allow for unimpeded movement and gaze from the ground level, and give them the appearance of floating above the landscape.

¹⁸ Decorative tiles characteristic of Iberian architecture, with origins in the Muslim occupation of the peninsula.

¹⁹ In the tradition of Getúlio Vargas, president of Brazil 1930-45 and 1950-54.

Gerais, serving as mayor of the state capital, Belo Horizonte, and governor before becoming president. During his term as mayor Kubitschek undertook a controversial building plan, the creation of a leisure development for the middle class in the suburb of Pampulha. In his memoirs, Kubitschek referred to Pampulha as a “satellite city.”²⁰ To design the lakeside casino, dance hall, and church, the mayor commissioned a young *carioca* architect by the name of Oscar Niemeyer. While the two men differed in politics, their working relationship proved mutually beneficial, as the politician gave the architect *carte blanche* to create. Building projects provided ample opportunity for the practice of patronage politics and created permanent, concrete memorials to the politicians who made their construction possible.

While it drew on ideas developed elsewhere, Brazilian modernism had its own distinct character, shaped by the nation’s particular social, political, and economic context. As described by architectural historian Valerie Fraser, in Latin America modernist architecture, “is not an uncritical reworking of European modernism with the addition of some local colour, but a deliberate and more profound adaptation of or challenge to European models. In this it constitutes an ‘alternative modernism’, to appropriate a term coined to describe Latin American art.”²¹ This dissertation focuses on the idea of modernity inherent in the ideological orientation of the builders of Brasília. This vision shared much in common with contemporaneous modernities and modernisms that took shape in other contexts. According to Néstor García Canclini, “within the crisis of Western modernity—of which Latin America is a part—the relations among tradition,

²⁰ Kubitschek, 36.

²¹ Valerie Fraser, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930-60* (London: Verso, 2000), 15.

cultural modernism, and socioeconomic modernization are transformed.”²² Brasília rendered this crisis in concrete form. It forced observers to confront modernism, in the process pondering the implications of modernization and the fate of tradition. It put into action what García Canclini identifies as the four processes that combine to comprise modernity, implying simultaneous projects aimed at emancipation, expansion, renovation, and democratization.²³ These four movements, while complementary in certain respects, come into conflict as they evolve. It is the nature of this conflict that this dissertation seeks to understand.

Nationalism was an essential component of Brazilian modernism, which had an overall celebratory tone, in keeping with its close connection to nationalism, seeking to valorize the nation’s unique cultural heritage. This was in its own way a revolutionary proposal, one that achieved a great deal of success. There was a perhaps paradoxical conservatism inherent in the modernist project, therefore, as it sought to legitimate Brazil’s predominately non-European past, while at the same time rehabilitating to a degree the image of the Portuguese colonizer.²⁴ Its advocates sought to promote a unified Brazilian national identity characterized by unity and progress. Brazilian modernism had a decidedly futuristic bent, motivated by the intellectuals’ belief that Brazil “would soon be on the vanguard of civilization,”²⁵ a conviction rooted in the nation’s tremendous potential. To become the country of the future, Brazil needed to sever its dependence on foreign ideas and models.

²² García Canclini, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴ The most notable example of this tendency in Brazilian modernism is seen in the works of Gilberto Freyre, especially Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-grande e senzala: introdução à história da sociedade patriarcal no Brasil*, 42 ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2001).

²⁵ Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist*, 95.

The nationalist content of Brazilian modernism helped form the intellectual basis for the emergence of developmental nationalism, the ideology that dictated the strategy the Kubitschek administration pursued in its effort to achieve modernity.²⁶ The modernist ideology, along with developmental nationalism, provided intellectual justification to buttress Brasília and gave the city its form. Brasília's promoters asserted that the new capital represented a rupture with the past, the dawning of the future, and a number of other related metaphors explored in this dissertation. While it did usher in significant change, however, beneath the rhetoric of revolution and the city's highly original façade, Brasília represented a surprising degree of continuity with the past. Thus it illustrates how modernism is, "a deeply contradictory project marked by both a plurality of divergent tendencies, thus being constituted by both progressive and regressive moments simultaneously."²⁷ This ambiguous attitude toward tradition, the tendency to embrace and reject the past simultaneously, is present in the discourse of Brasília's planners and their vocal critics during its construction. These heated debates about the new capital served as a forum for Brazilians to offer conflicting visions of the nation's future, which frequently also meant the existence of competing notions about Brazil's past.

Through the process of debating the new capital Brazilians participated in ongoing negotiations about the meaning of modernity, a word used along with

²⁶ There is a considerable literature on developmental nationalism. See, for example, Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Miriam Limoneiro Cardoso, *Ideologia do desenvolvimento - Brasil: JK-JQ*, 2nd ed., Estudos Brasileiros, vol. 14 (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978), Angela Maria de Castro Gomes, ed., *O Brasil de JK*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2002), Celso Lafer, "The Planning Process and the Political System in Brazil: A Study of Kubitschek's Target Plan, 1956-1961" (Cornell, 1970). Celso Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*, trans. Maria Victoria de M. Benevides (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2002)..

²⁷ Craven, "The Latin American Origins of 'Alternative Modernism'," 43.

development as a synonym for the future, embodied in Brasília. The modernity embodied the new capital was decidedly top-down in both conception and implementation. It is this characteristic that made the project so intensely controversial, as it provided a focus for concerns about who would benefit from the modernity and modernization the government sought to foment. To García Canclini, “modernism is not the expression of socioeconomic modernization but *the means by which the elites take charge of the intersection of different historical temporalities and try to elaborate a global project with them.*”²⁸ Modernism does not prescribe a wholesale abolition of the past to make way for the future, or rejection of the foreign to make way for the national. Rather, García Canclini urges, “rethinking [Latin American] modernisms as attempts to intervene in the intersection of a semi-oligarchic dominant order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy and semitransformative social movements.”²⁹

Developmental nationalism provided the economic theory behind Juscelino Kubitschek’s promised “Fifty Years of Progress” in his five-year term, expressed in his thirty-point Programa de Metas, or Target Plan. In the judgment of Thomas Skidmore, this represented a continuation of the process of import substitution industrialization initiated in the 1930s. Thus developmental nationalism under Kubitschek, “was a pragmatic approach to an already mixed economy, aimed at achieving the most rapid rate of growth possible by encouraging both the private and the public sectors.”³⁰ By the 1950s, Brazil had succeed in producing most of its own light consumer goods, and attention turned toward heavy industry, especially automobile manufacturing, and energy

²⁸ García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, 46. Italics in original.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁰ Thomas E. Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil 1930-1964: An Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 164.

production. Between 1957 and 1961, real economic growth averaged seven percent, far outpacing other countries in the region. Industrial output, which increased by 80% during Kubitschek's presidency, was the main driving force behind this growth.³¹

Economic growth was the goal of developmentalism—distribution of the new wealth was little discussed. The prevalence of the assumption that a rising tide would lift all ships, that prosperity would be an automatic outcome of growth, explains the apparent lack of concern with improving the lives of the poor directly or immediately.

Developmental nationalists believed that economic expansion would bring an end to poverty and other social problems in Brazil.

Kubitschek carefully tailored his policies to cater to key sectors in society. Industrialists were perhaps the group that most readily supported his developmentalist program. The president, whose base of support was the landholding class of Minas Gerais, was careful not to propose measures that would threaten traditional power relations in the countryside. He also managed to maintain cordial relations with the labor movement by continuing the conciliatory policies begun under Vargas. It was the middle-class that Kubitschek had the most trouble courting. To that group, the rampant spending and constant rumors of corruption proved most alarming and which the main opposition party, the UDN, would exploit. Compared to most of his contemporaries in politics in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America, Kubitschek relied less on populist tactics to garner support. While Michael Conniff labels Kubitschek a populist,³² this belies the extent to which he fit the mold of a traditional politician, who mostly worked behind the scenes to build support among key sectors and avoided entanglement with

³¹ Ibid.

³² Michael L. Conniff, "Brazil's Populist Republic and Beyond," in *Populism in Latin America*, ed. Michael L. Conniff (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 52.

ideologically divisive positions. To Thomas Skidmore, “[i]nsofar as Kubitschek himself resorted to a populist appeal to the mass voter, at least until 1959, it was on non-ideological issues such as Brasília.”³³ The exception to which Skidmore refers was Kubitschek’s controversial break with the International Monetary Fund in January 1959 after abandoning a highly unpopular austerity program implemented in October 1958 to combat rising inflation. Above all, “Kubitschek’s brand of nationalism was based on the Brazilian entrepreneurial elite, not on any mass movement.”³⁴ Although he certainly made appeals to the popular classes to arouse enthusiasm for the construction of Brasília, the main constituency that Kubitschek courted was the elite, not the masses.

Intellectuals were another group Kubitschek sought to convert to his cause and promote his program. The Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB), an organ of the Ministry of Education and Culture, was the center for the creation and diffusion of developmental nationalism. Founded in 1955 and abolished by the military regime in 1964, ISEB concerned itself foremost with diagnosing the problems that resulted from underdevelopment and formulating their solutions. Not only did ISEB produce hundreds of books, articles, and lectures, but thousands of young Brazilians took a year-long course at the institute that inculcated in them the developmentalist ideology. Not surprisingly, members of ISEB were among the most articulate and strident articulators of developmental nationalism generally and the construction of Brasília in particular. Roland Cavalcanti de Albuquerque Corbisier, co-founder of ISEB and a key player in the integralismo movement in the 1930s, provided one of the clearest articulations of the connection between cultural and economic development. In *Brasília e o desenvolvimento*

³³ Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil 1930-1964: An Experiment in Democracy*, 169.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

nacional (Brasília and National Development), a book published by ISEB in 1960, Corbisier described the new capital as offering the potential to pull the nation out of a state of underdevelopment and semicolonialism. To Corbisier, underdevelopment was a, “total social phenomenon, that affects and characterizes all of the other elements that constitute it. In this sense we could say that just as everything is colonial in a colony, everything is underdeveloped in an underdeveloped country.” Therefore, “underdevelopment is not just economic, but also cultural, and it will only be possible to create an authentic Brazilian culture by installing the objective conditions that make that culture possible, that is promoting independence and economic integration of the country through a national revolution of development.”³⁵

To Corbisier and other advocates of Brasília’s construction, then, culture and economics were inextricably linked and both were targets of the developmentalist program. The aim was to bring about true independence, to leave behind its underdeveloped and semicolonial state and therefore make possible the achievement of prosperity and independence. Corbisier and his allies had quite a neat, clearly defined view of societal development as a progression through various, predetermined phases. The conflicts and disappointments that arose from the construction of Brasília arose in large part from the gap between this effort to delineate history into neat and ordered phases and a limited, reductive conception of modernity. This clearly differs from García Canclini’s conception of the hybrid nature of Latin American modernity—which refers not only to cultural heterogeneity but also the commingling of the past and present, a modernity in which the past is not eradicated, but continues to exist, albeit in a

³⁵ Roland Cavalcanti de Albuquerque Corbisier, *Brasília e o desenvolvimento nacional*, Textos sobre a nova capital, vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, 1960), 23-29.

transformed state. Thus he writes about the flexible nature of modernity, which can be left and entered. This description stands starkly at odds with the linear view of development held by Corbisier, Kubitschek, and others who promoted developmental nationalism in the 1950s.

Brasília has been the subject of a great number of books and countless articles, of varying degrees of intellectual rigor. A significant number of participants in the construction process themselves have published histories of the city, memoirs of the pioneer period, and books of poetry dedicated to the city.³⁶ Amateur scholars have produced myriad histories of Brasília, overwhelming uncritical and laudatory in tone. Fewer in number are harsh criticisms against the capital, some near diatribes.³⁷

In the late 1970s there emerged a new body of scholarship by social scientists interested in life in the city, in assessing the social experiment that Brasília represented. Anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars in related fields continue to add to studies of life in Brasília and the surrounding region. These researchers frequently conclude that the planning of the Federal District ultimately served to marginalize poor residents.³⁸

³⁶ For example, see Kubitschek, *Por que construí Brasília*, Theodoro Figueira de Almeida, *Brasília: a cidade histórica da América* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, 1960), Kubitschek, Oscar Niemeyer, *Minha experiência em Brasília* (Rio de Janeiro: Vitória, 1961), Ernesto Silva, *História de Brasília* (Brasília: Editora Brasília, 1970), Luiz Sérgio Duarte da Silva, "A construção de Brasília" (Ph.D., Universidade de Brasília, 1996), Mário Diniz, *Brasília: a cidade da esperança* (Rio de Janeiro: n.p., 1960), Virgílio Domingos Filho, "Brasília: a grande metrópole," *Revista do Serviço Público* 84, no. 1 (1959), Moisés Gicovate, *Brasília, uma realização em marcha* (São Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, 1959).

³⁷ Gileno de Carli, *JQ, Brasília e a grande crise* (Rio de Janeiro: Pongetti, 1961), Geraldo Irenê Joffily, *Brasília e sua ideologia* (Brasília: Thesaurus, 1977), Paulo Monteiro Machado, *A mudança da capital: a quem aproveita? a quem prejudica?* (Rio de Janeiro: Serviços Linotipo, 1957), Antonio Miranda, *Brasília: capital da utopia*, Revised ed. (Brasília: Thesaurus, 1985), E. D'Almeida Vitor, *História de Brasília* (Brasília: Thesaurus, 1980).

³⁸ David G. Epstein, *Brasília, Plan and Reality: A Study of Planned and Spontaneous Urban Development.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), Holston, José Pastore, *Brasília: a cidade e o homem, uma investigação sociológica sobre os processos de migração, adaptação e*

Such works frequently exhibit an implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption that the social and economic exclusion of the impoverished majority was an intentional, or even central, motive behind both the transfer of the capital to the remote Planalto Central and the design of the city itself.³⁹ As the first study to center on a critical analysis of the contemporaneous debates surrounding the construction of Brasília, this dissertation considers that question among others, and sheds doubt on some of the assumptions underlying previous understandings of this significant moment in Brazilian history. I suggest that the phenomenon of social marginalization that exists today in Brasília (and Brazilian society as a whole, it must be emphasized) was not created intentionally; rather, Brazilian policy makers in general and the builders of Brasília in particular have been overwhelmingly influenced by various theories of modernization, especially positivism and developmental nationalism, which take for granted that all would benefit from the fruits of economic development (though perhaps not equally). Thus little attention was paid to the plight of the poor since adherents of developmental nationalism held that development would bring a sudden eradication of poverty, erasing it and other unpleasant reminders of underdevelopment and replacing it with a peaceful, prosperous Brazil. Irrefutable evidence for the flaws in such models for growth came with the “Brazilian miracle” of the period 1968-1973, during which the country simultaneously saw record

planejamento urbano, ed. Florestan Fernandes, Biblioteca Universitária, Ciências Sociais, vol. 30 (São Paulo: Nacional, 1969), Aldo Paviani, *Brasília: a metrópole em crise: ensaios sobre urbanização*, Coleção Brasília (Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, 1989), Aldo Paviani, ed., *Brasília, ideologia e realidade: espaço urbano em questão* (São Paulo: Projeto, 1985), Aldo Paviani, ed., *A conquista da cidade: movimentos populares em Brasília*, Coleção Brasília (Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, 1991), Aldo Paviani, ed., *Brasília, moradia e exclusão* (Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, 1996), Nair Heloísa Bicalho de Sousa, *Construtores de Brasília: estudo de operários e sua participação política* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1983), Hermes Aquino Teixeira, “Brasília: o outro lado da utopia (1956-1960)” (M.A., Universidade de Brasília, 1982), Mauricio Vaitman, *Quanto custou Brasília?* (Rio de Janeiro: Pôsto de Serviço, 1968).

³⁹ Holston, *The Modernist City* and Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*.

economic growth and deepening impoverishment of the majority, accompanied by accelerating rates of deforestation.⁴⁰

In the current popular imagination, the presidency of Kubitschek represents a golden age for Brazil, a time of cultural florescence and international prestige, exhibited in the construction of Brasília, the carefree Bossa Nova era, and Brazil's first World Cup victory in 1958. It was a rare period of democracy, peace, and relative prosperity in the nation's tumultuous modern political history.⁴¹ Increased interest in the Kubitschek years is reflected in the recent publication of two thoroughly researched biographies.⁴² My research builds on the work of number of scholars from various disciplines who have challenged the nostalgic popular imagining of the "golden age" of the late 1950s. Angela de Castro Gomes sets the tone for a collection of essays dedicated to the Kubitschek years by titling her introduction, "What Color [Were] the Golden Years?"⁴³ All Brazilians did not enjoy and equal share of the fruits of this apparently prosperous era. In 1958 a particularly devastating drought hit the northeast. The years of Kubitschek's

⁴⁰ See, for example, Shelton Davis, *Victims of the Miracle: Development and the Indians of Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁴¹ Kubitschek, who had received a paltry 36% of the vote, carried with him associations with the Vargas period, and had the controversial populist João Goulart as his running mate. Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145. A movement took shape within the military to prevent forcibly Kubitschek from taking office. General Henrique Texeira Lott led a counter-coup that quashed the plot against Kubitschek, who rewarded Lott with the post Minister of War. In 1960, he became the official presidential candidate of Kubitschek's party (the PSD, Partido Social Democrático).

⁴² Claudio Bojunga, *JK: o artista do impossível* (Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2001), Ronaldo Costa Couto, *Brasília Kubitschek de Oliveira* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2002).

⁴³ Angela de Castro Gomes, "Qual a cor dos anos dourados?" 9-19 in Gomes, ed., *O Brasil de JK*. Other significant works on the Kubitschek presidency include Maria Victoria de Mesquita Benevides, *O governo Kubitschek: desenvolvimento econômico e estabilidade política, 1956-1961*, Estudos Brasileiros, v. 8 (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1976), Lafer, "The Planning Process and the Political System in Brazil: A Study of Kubitschek's Target Plan, 1956-1961", Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*. The latter is a translation of Lafer's 1970 Ph.D. dissertation in Economics at Cornell University, titled "The Planning Process and the Political System in Brazil: A Study of Kubitschek's Target Plan, 1956-1961".

presidency coincide with the heart-wrenching diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus,⁴⁴ a poor black *favelada*⁴⁵ struggling to eke out a living for herself and her children in São Paulo. Four years after the inauguration of the new capital the military seized power and governed for more than two decades (1964-1985). The new regime made its home in Kubitschek's Brasília. Beyond making the city the seat of its power, it adopted the vision of development the new capital embodied. Rather than altering the path to economic development onto which Kubitschek had steered the nation, the military regime continued and extended the vision of Brasília.

On its surface Brasília seems a radical departure from the nation's tradition of urban development. According to understandings of the history of Brazilian urban planning, the Portuguese colonizers, in contrast to their Spanish counterparts, settled in a generally ad hoc fashion, paying little attention to the deliberate planning of urban areas or the surrounding regions. Since the 1960s, however, scholars of Brazilian urban history have understood that the planning of cities was not just carefully and thoughtfully conceived and implemented, but was the cornerstone of the larger process of asserting Portuguese control over its American possessions.⁴⁶ According to Valerie Fraser,

[t]he impulse to design and build a city *ex nihilo*, on mythological virgin land, is a powerful one in Latin America, and one with a long tradition. In the USA, prior to Washington, few cities were laid out before they were inhabited; but in Latin America, from the earliest Spanish settlements in the Caribbean, the conquistadors had staked out the blocks of their grid-

⁴⁴ The diary, first published in 1960 under the title *Quarto de despejo*, spans the years 1955-60. For the English version see Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Child of the Dark*, trans. David St. Clair (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962). Although Carolina comments on Brazilian politics and expresses a general disdain for politicians and the electoral process generally, it is worth noting that she makes no mention of Brasília in the diary.

⁴⁵ The terms *favelada* (feminine) or *favelado* (masculine) designates residents of a *favela*, or shantytown.

⁴⁶ A pathbreaking 1969 study of Brazil's early colonial architecture has been expanded and reissued: Néstor Goulart Reis, *Evolução urbana do Brasil: 1500/1720* (São Paulo: Pini, 2000). Another fundamental work on colonial Brazilian urban planning is Roberta Delson, *New Towns for Colonial Brazil: Spatial and Social Planning of the Eighteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms for Syracuse University, 1979).

plan towns on an optimistic scale, the regularity a deliberate and explicit metaphor for the social order the Europeans were importing.... First foundations in colonial Brazil were less uniform, but the motivations were the same: cities were founded in orderly fashion with the twin aims of simultaneously demonstrating and instituting ‘civilization.’⁴⁷

The parallels between the colonizers’ view of urban planning and that in Brasília is striking indeed, a fact that challenges much of the conventional wisdom about the city, which dominates not only much of the scholarly literature on Brasília, but also popular judgments (both contemporary to its construction and in the present day) of the new capital as aberrant. In Brazil, the pattern of urban planning established in the colonial period continued past independence. Examples of planned state capitals include Belo Horizonte (1893-97) and Goiânia (1938-42), both of which are located in the interior and, like Brasília, built in the span of four years.

Architectural criticism is subject to the vicissitudes of fashion; what is one day new and fresh quickly becomes stale. Brasília, the most complete application of modernist urban planning and architecture ever implemented, marked the crest of the modernist wave. During its brief golden age, enthusiasts of modernist design imagined themselves the inventors of a timeless new aesthetic. Just one year after Brasília’s inauguration Jane Jacobs published a highly influential indictment of modernist planning and helped to lead to it being widely discredited among critics and planners.⁴⁸ As attentions turned overwhelmingly to the fresh and new post-modernist design, practitioners of “high modernism”⁴⁹ such as Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa received

⁴⁷ Fraser, *Building the New World: Studies in the Modern Architecture of Latin America, 1930-60*, 214.

⁴⁸ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961).

⁴⁹ “High modernism” is the term employed by James Holston.

less notice than their more famous counterparts Le Corbusier, Mies Van Der Rohe, and Walter Gropius. In general, histories of modernist architecture and urban planning, Brazil's contributions tend to be subsumed (and largely dismissed) under the general heading the "International Style."⁵⁰ In recent years, however, a small but growing number of scholars have reexamined Brazilian and other Latin American contributions to modernism through an understanding of cultural exchange as a dual-sided process and thereby posing a significant challenge to our understanding of modernism and countering those who would readily dismiss Latin American modernism as fundamentally derivative.

The primary sources for the study of Brasília are voluminous and varied, ranging from published and unpublished written records, to diverse visual materials. The experiences of participants at all levels in the construction of Brasília are available in various publications and in an archive of oral histories created and maintained by the Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal (ArPDF). Located on the Novacap campus, the ArPDF houses diverse documents related to the construction of Brasília, including newspaper clippings, films, photographs, maps, plans, and administrative and government documents. The archive was created in 1983 and provides invaluable insight into the construction and first decades of Brasília. Its collections have been mostly neglected by researchers both in Brazil and abroad; with some notable exceptions, most

⁵⁰ Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1973).

scholars who have written about Brasília have not used this rich resource.⁵¹ The ArPDF was the principal archive used for this dissertation. It also makes use of the collection held by the Instituto Histórico-Geográfico do Distrito Federal (IHG-DF), especially its collection of newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets documenting the history of Brasília. The Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC) of the Fundação Getúlio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro was the third major repository used in the research of this dissertation. A private archive, CPDOC holds the papers of various figures instrumental in the construction of Brasília.

In the early nineteenth century Brazilians began discussing the construction of a new capital in the interior. The idea enjoyed the support of many of the nation's most influential figures and became a constitutional provision in 1891, 1934, and 1946. Chapter 1, "Brasília before Kubitschek", analyzes proposals for an interior capital prior to presidential candidate Juscelino Kubitschek's 1955 pledge to fulfill the constitutional mandate. There were significant advances of the project made in the immediate decade preceding Kubitschek's presidency, without which his task would have been more difficult, if not impossible.

Chapter 2, "'Colonizing Ourselves': The Idea of Brasília," explores the vision of that produced Brasília. It analyzes the rhetoric and actions of the men and women involved in the planning and building of Brasília. The new capital embodied the future Kubitschek promised to create. To garner necessary support for the costly undertaking,

⁵¹ Graduate students in various disciplines at the Universidade de Brasília have utilized the archive in their theses. Laurent Vidal made extensive use of the ArPDF's holdings for his book Laurent Vidal, *De Nova Lisboa à Brasília: l'invention d'une capitale (XIXe-XXe siècles)* (Paris: Institut des hautes études de l'Amerique latine, Université de la Sorbonne, 2002).

Brasília's boosters launched a massive propaganda campaign that depicted the new capital as a panacea for the nation's ills. Official discourse represented the *candangos* who built the city as soldiers, waging a war on stagnation and underdevelopment. In the end, however, those men and women found that had to fight to claim a place in the new society they helped construct.

Brazilians heatedly debated all aspects of the new capital during and beyond the construction period. Critics harshly attacked Brasília while defenders passionately touted its virtues. These public debates offer rich insight into conflicting ideas about what kinds of policies Brazil should implement in its pursuit of development. They reflect, furthermore, competing visions about the meaning of the terms "development" and "modernity". Chapter 3, "Many in Favor, Some Against, All Benefit": Domestic Reception," explores these themes and includes the perspectives of the men and women who worked to build the city.

Brasília attracted intense interest from abroad. As the most complete application of modernist planning, the city understandably drew the attention of architects and critics worldwide. While initial reception was generally positive, Brasília soon became a target for the growing chorus of critics of modernism in architecture. The sheer audacity of the undertaking captured the imaginations of foreign politicians and journalists. Brazilians were very aware that Brasília attracted the world's attention and took great pride in their new image as a dynamic, rapidly modernizing nation. In chapter 4, "'Where Lately the Jaguar Screamed, a Metropolis Now Unfolds': Brasília Viewed from Abroad," I analyze both foreign commentary on Brasília and Brazilians' efforts to promote the new capital abroad.

Out of the intense debates during the period of Brasília's construction, which are explored in chapters 2-4, arose a particular vision of modernity and development and, perhaps more significantly, put in place a plan for achieving those long-elusive goals. The epilogue, "Brasília and National Development, 1960-2006," analyzes the evolution of Brasília and the developmentalist program it prescribed through after becoming the official capital of Brazil. In it I seek to assess the degree to which the city lived up to its promises, focusing on the pattern of regional development that emerged around the new federal district, especially the thousands of kilometers of highways that connected Brazil's interior with the coast. I argue that the military dictatorship decided to follow the path to development and vision of modernity embodied in Brasília. The new regime did not significantly alter Kubitschek's recipe for progress, but rather implemented policies consistent with the precedent he had so firmly implanted. Brasília provided the map and lexicon for Brazil's subsequent attempts to achieve development and modernity. It put forth a vision of modernity that was carefully planned and coordinated. It was imposed from above, by politicians and skilled experts who would accelerate the achievement of *grandeza* (greatness) in Brazil. To Brasília's advocates, blame for the nation's failure to achieve progress fell on the shoulders of those who persisted in the "old ways," content to reside in coastal areas, looking toward Europe, with their back to the nation and the rest of the South American continent. Brasília was an indictment of the Portuguese colonial system, which failed to sufficiently settle, civilize, and exploit the riches of Brazil's continental dimensions. According to this view of history, the rugged, racially mixed *bandeirante* did more for Brazil's advancement than did the European

colonizers—the former was the historical model valued by the planners of the new capital.

According to the discourse of Brasília's boosters, the nation needed to complete the process of colonization left incomplete after more than a century of political autonomy. Attainment of *grandeza* required Brazil to complete the conquest of its interior, implying both effective occupation of the territory and exploitation of its resources. In his campaign slogan of "fifty years of progress in five," Kubitschek promised that he would accelerate the historical process. Brasília lay at the center of his program for national development. With its construction, and the process of internal colonization of which it was a part, the nation could finally move past the stagnation that prevented its attainment of full independence.

Brasília was the perfect vehicle for communicating the developmental nationalist program, a physical manifestation of Brazil's imminent transition from semi-colonial state to world-class power and undisputed leader of Latin America. Architecture was a rare area of cultural production in which several Brazilians were acknowledged world-class practitioners. The new capital promised to reverse the traditional one-way flow of ideas from the industrialized to the developing world by providing a truly original creation, an example to be imitated abroad. By contributing to a completion of the process of colonization, the transfer of the capital to the interior asserted Brazil's leadership vis-à-vis its South American neighbors, with all but two of which Brazil shares a border.

CHAPTER I

BRASÍLIA BEFORE KUBITSCHER

A used Studebaker dealership in the remote town of Jataí, Goiás provided the setting for Juscelino Kubitschek's apparently spontaneous pledge to build a new national capital in the interior of Brazil. This moment in April 1955 marked the beginning of a process that would profoundly alter the Brazilian political and cultural landscape over subsequent decades. Heavy rains had forced the president's first campaign rally, intended for the town *praça*, indoors to the largest building available, which happened to be the car dealership. After briefly describing his plan to bring fifty years of progress in his five-year term, Kubitschek opened the floor to questions or suggestions about his thirty-point target program. Most Brazilians, particularly those in the interior, had no experience with this kind of attention from a presidential candidate, and those attending hesitated to speak up. One exception, however, was twenty-nine year old Antônio Soares Neto, known familiarly as Toniquinho ("little Tony"), the employee of a local insurance firm. Toniquinho asked Kubitschek whether or not he intended to implement the constitutional provision that mandated construction of the new federal capital in the *cerrado*—the semi-arid grasslands or savannah—of central Brazil, which encompassed most of the state of Goiás. The candidate responded that he would dedicate himself wholly to whatever the constitution required of him and thenceforth made the city's construction the "metasynthesis" of his thirty-point Target Plan for national development.⁵² Just five years after the Jataí campaign stop, President Kubitschek

⁵² The Constitution of 1946, then in effect, like its predecessors promulgated in 1891 and 1934, included a provision calling for the federal capital's transfer to the Brazilian *cerrado*. Documentation of the event is

presided over the inauguration of a new national capital, nearly one thousand kilometers north of Rio de Janeiro.

The proposal to transfer the nation's capital to the interior recurred regularly in Brazilian political discourse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many of the nation's most revered historical figures had supported the proposal and the constitutions of 1891, 1934, and 1946 included provisions mandating the capital's move. In 1892 the newly formed republican government sent Belgian-born astronomer Luiz Cruls to head a technical expedition charged with conducting a comprehensive survey of the central Brazilian plains to identify the optimal location for a future national capital in accordance with the 1891 constitution. The chosen site, a 14,400 km² section of the state of Goiás (the location of the present-day Federal District, became known as the Cruls Quadrilateral and appeared on national maps for more than half a century as the location of Brazil's future capital. (Figure 4) The Cruls Quadrilateral included the city of Formosa, from where historian Francisco Adolfo Varnhagen wrote a letter in 1877 to Emperor Dom Pedro II urging the transfer of the capital to that part of Goiás. In 1883, Italian Saint Dom Bosco dreamed that a great civilization would take root in that part of South America, providing Brasília's advocates with further symbolic ammunition.

found in, *Correio Braziliense* and *TV Brasília*, *Brasília 40 anos* (*Correio Braziliense* and *TV Brasília*, 2000), 33-34. and Kubitschek, 7-8.



Figure 4.

Map indicating the Cruls Quadrilateral, 1893. Source: Luiz Cruls, *Relatório da Comissão Exploradora do Planalto Central do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1947).

Taken together, Brasília’s origin myths and documented historical roots give the unmistakable impression that the city was predestined and came about not just through the labor of men, but also the inexorable forces of fate. Brasília’s origins are rooted in myth and historical fact; the Jataí incident is illustrative of how, the city appears to have come into being at least in part through supernatural forces—whether the result of divine

inspiration or mysterious coincidence. The message of the narrative is quite clear: the city of Brasília seems to have been fated, the result of inexorable forces pushing the Brazilian nation toward modernity and its rightful place among the world's powers.

The spontaneity evidenced in the Jataí story is a recurrent theme in Brasília. In this respect it bears a striking similarity to Lucio Costa's description of how he came up with the Pilot Plan. Mirroring Kubitschek's initial involvement in the project, Costa described his entry as wholly unintentional. Though already a seasoned architect with an international reputation, he disclaimed all credit for the design. He did not even consider his winning plan a proper entrant in the contest Novacap⁵³ held in March 1957 for the capital's design.⁵⁴ In Costa's account of his entry, the idea, not the man, was the agent for joining the competition. Costa prefaced his simple presentation⁵⁵ with an apology, consisting of rough sketches on note cards, by begging the committee's pardon, explaining, "I am merely passing on a possible solution which was not sought but, so to speak, took shape almost spontaneously."⁵⁶ The city plan, as he described it, came to him as a coherent whole, a vision he felt compelled to share with the contest committee.

Whereas the campaign stop at Jataí and Costa's conception are the immediate origins of the building of Brasília, its mythic roots extend much deeper into the nation's

⁵³ Costa's former student and fellow modernist, Oscar Niemeyer, had already been selected as the capital's chief architect, and construction had already begun on the Presidential Palace he had designed. Niemeyer sat on the committee judging entrants (the contest was limited to Brazilian designers) alongside Novacap president Israel Pinheiro and international authorities on architecture, including Sir William Holford and Stano Papadaki. Because the modernist aesthetic had clearly been settled upon before the contest began, the competition seems to have been something of a farce.

⁵⁴ The original documents pertaining to the contest, including the top entries and supporting explanations and the jury's decision, are held by the ArPDF ("Concurso do Plano Piloto", March 1957, Nov.B.01, no.0002). The contest is discussed in various sources, including Silva, *História de Brasília*, 167-175.

⁵⁵ In my estimation Costa exaggerated the simplicity of his proposal, and most sources mirror his hyperbole. A comparison between his original submission—which included an explanatory narrative in addition to the sketches—and the other proposals shows a roughly equivalent degree of detail.

⁵⁶ Lucio Costa, *Relatório do Plano Piloto de Brasília*, 4th ed. (Brasília: Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal, 1991), 77. Translation in source.

past. The narrative of Brasília's antecedents occupies a central place in the iconography of the city and, therefore, has played a key role in shaping the way people have understood its significance. Thus the history of the desire to build an interior capital for Brazil leading up to the fateful encounter in Jataí—Brasília's "prehistory" as I will call it for clarity's sake—is the central focus of this chapter. Since this history is so important to the construction of Brasília's identity, an investigation of its symbolism is central to the task of understanding what the new capital meant for the nation writ large. Though for the most part factually "correct", the repeated retellings of Brasília's history tend to stress aspects of the past that adhere to an "official narrative" in which the city appears as the cornerstone of an ongoing struggle for national development. This chapter seeks not just to summarize Brasília's roots prior to 1956, but more importantly to the larger purpose of the dissertation, to understand how that past has served to root the brand-new city in both the secular and spiritual traditions of Brazil. The proponents of Brasília constructed an official narrative that not just lent credence to the costly endeavor, but depicted the new capital at the key moment in the nation's attainment of *grandeza*.

The most striking aspect of the official narrative that has emerged, as it pertains to the issue of identity, is the way in which Brasília appears inevitable, a key step along Brazil's long journey toward *grandeza*, or greatness. Though painstakingly slow (and even altogether stalled at times), according to Brasília's promoters, Brazil's eventual realization of *grandeza* is a foregone conclusion and the new capital is both evidence to that fact and a catalyst for bringing it to fruition. Such an optimistic vision of the nation's future has long been the rule rather than the exception among Brazil's leaders. This perspective squared nicely not only with the "developmentalist" ethic of Kubitschek, but

was shared too by the positivism popularized in the late nineteenth century and the modernism that took hold in the 1920s and 1930s.

Because available sources for some of the episodes under discussion are people's memories, one must bear in mind that they may be subject to the often distorting machinations of time and memory, thus leading us to recognize that they may not be a complete and accurate representation of the "facts." Thus the support lent by heroes of the past toward the project of constructing an interior capital tends to be overplayed in the popular rendering and mysticism figures prominently. According to the dominant narratives of the city's history, Kubitschek, Costa, et al. are the terrestrial fathers of the city, but it really owes its existence to its spiritual progenitors, most notably Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, better known as "Tiradentes" and Dom Bosco. Rather than diminishing the importance of the stories, however, the gaps and exaggerations inherent in remembering can themselves prove fruitful subjects for investigation. Thus this chapter seeks not just to give an overview of Brasília's history, but at the same time understand how the past has been given meaning and incorporated into a coherent narrative of the nation's evolution from colony to nationhood. The mythic dimension that the history of Brasília has achieved is in itself evidence of the importance people attached to the city's construction.

The idea of relocating the capital of Brazil in the interior dates to the late colonial era, soon after the colony's administrative headquarters' move in 1763 from Salvador da Bahia to Rio de Janeiro. The idea of building a new capital in the interior surfaced continually for the next century and a half, arising again and again in discussions of the nation's future development. Although the terms of debate changed, reflecting

contemporary intellectual currents, at moments of great transition for Brazil and in most discussions about the nation's future development (a theme that has consistently occupied Brazilian intellectuals) the proposal to "interiorize" the Brazilian capital reemerged time and again.

Tracing the idea of building an inland federal capital is hardly an original exercise; indeed the frequency with which it has been repeatedly retold is a subject that begs further investigation. Since the promise hastily made at Jataí in 1955, more than a dozen books have been published which provide detailed, well-documented though mostly uncritical narratives of the idea of moving the capital from its supposed origins in the eighteenth century.⁵⁷ In addition to these secondary works, primary sources related to the prehistory of Brasília have been reissued in various forms since the 1950s,⁵⁸ and historical references are woven into the fabric of the city. Despite the speed with which the city was erected, the builders were keenly aware of the significance of their task to the nation, and took great care to ensure the documentation and preservation of the city's history. During the construction period, Novacap, the agency that oversaw Brasília's planning and building, began collecting documents related to the project. In 1983 that collection formed the basis of the Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal, created by the Government of the Federal District, and dedicated to the maintenance of the Novacap

⁵⁷ Examples of this genre include: Raul de Andrada e Silva, "Os idealizadores de Brasília no século XIX," *Revista de História* 52, no. 102 (1975), Anonymous, "Brasília: síntese histórica," *Revista brasileira dos municípios* 10, no. 39/40 (1957), Astréa de Moraes e Castro, ed., *Mudança da capital: exposição de documentos históricos* (Brasília: Câmara dos Deputados, 1971). Ismael Pordeus, *Raízes históricas de Brasília: datas e documentos* (Ceará: Imprensa Oficial, 1960), Serviço de Documentação Presidência da República, ed., *Antecedentes Históricos (1549-1896)*, Coleção Brasília, vol. I (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento da Imprensa Nacional, 1960), Silva, *História de Brasília*, Willy Stäubli, *Brasília* (London: Leonard Hill, 1966).. The most rigorous study of Brasília before Kubitschek is Vidal, *De Nova Lisboa à Brasília: l'invention d'une capitale (XIXe-XXe siècles)*.

⁵⁸ Of particular significance is the eleven-volume series *Coleção Brasília* published by the Federal Government, which brings together primary documents and details about Brasília's construction.

records and collecting other materials related to the history of Brasília and making them publicly available.⁵⁹

Brazilian modernist architecture first drew international attention with the construction of the *Ministério de Educação e Cultura* (MEC) headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. Built between 1936 and 1943, during the Estado Novo period, the MES structure was a collaborative effort between Le Corbusier and Brazilian architects including the established architect Lucio Costa, a recent convert to modernism from neo-colonialism, and his student, Oscar Niemeyer.⁶⁰ Because of the reputation Niemeyer had established in Brazil, he was chosen as one of the dozen architects commissioned by the United Nations to design its headquarters in 1947. Indeed, in 1942 the Museum of Modern Art in New York featured an exhibit dedicated to Brazilian architecture, from the colonial period through modernism.⁶¹

Before running for president, Kubitschek had served as both governor of Minas Gerais and mayor of the state's planned capital, Belo Horizonte, where he had worked closely with Oscar Niemeyer on the construction of the lakeside neighborhood of Pampulha, for which the young architect designed a chapel, a yacht club, dance hall, and casino.⁶² While the development project was plagued with various problems, the architecture drew international renown for its architectural innovation, adding to Brazil's

⁵⁹ Such attention to maintaining records is the exception, not the rule, in Brazil. For a more detailed discussion of the ArPDF and sources available for the history of Brasília, see Introduction. For a discussion of the problem see Marshall C. Eakin, "Cultural Amnesia: Systematically Erasing the History of Brazilian Industrialization," in *Documenting Movements, Identity, and Popular Culture in Latin America. Papers on the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials*, ed. Richard F. Phillips (Austin: SALALM Secretariat, University of Texas at Austin, 2000)..

⁶⁰ For an application of the cannibalist metaphor to the design of the MEC, see Valerie Fraser, "Cannibalizing Le Corbusier: The MES Gardens of Roberto Burle Marx," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 52, no. 2 (2000).

⁶¹ Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652-1942* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943).

⁶² For an analysis of Niemeyer's designs at Pampulha, see David Underwood, *Oscar Niemeyer and Brazilian Free-form Modernism* (New York: George Braziller, 1994).

growing reputation in that area. Pampulha also marked an important departure from the rigid right angles characteristic of the modernism of Le Corbusier. To architectural historian David Underwood, Pampulha marked the beginning of Niemeyer's characteristic "free-form modernism," deeply influenced by the Brazilian landscape and its traditions, especially the baroque style of the colonial period. Representing more than just a "formalistic" innovation, as most architectural historians have described Niemeyer's modernism, seeing Brazil's modernist architecture little more than a national example of the so-called International Style that emerged out of the work of Le Corbusier and the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). While these were important influences on Niemeyer, Costa, et al., Underwood convincingly argues for the, "evolution of a distinctly Brazilian free-form mode that celebrates the inherent plasticity of the native curve over the rigid rectilinearity of the International Style."⁶³

While Brasília represented a collaborative effort of Brazilians from various regions, for the most part its designers were *cariocas*, its investors and technicians *paulistas*, its laborers *nordestinos* and *mineiros*, and its staunchest allies *mineiros* and *goianos*. It was fitting that a *mineiro* built the city at the behest of resident of *goiano*; geography had made those two states the source of Brasília's most enthusiastic supporters since the federal government annexed a portion of the latter's territory near the border of Minas in 1892 to serve as a future national capital.

For more than a half a century the demarcated federal district was still a mere abstraction. It existed quite literally on paper alone, a neat square occupying the center of maps of Brazil. (Figure 4) There was not yet a consensus on what the new capital should be named. As late as 1956 the main contenders were Brasília and Veracruz; those

⁶³ Ibid., 7.

preferred a century earlier—Imperatôria and Petrópolis—had fallen out of favor for obvious reasons.⁶⁴ Kubitschek chose “Brasília,” the moniker Lucio Costa thought best, and which appears to have originated with José Bonifácio, the “patriarch” of Brazilian Independence. The main contender was “Veracruz,” the “True Cross,” the first name given to Brazil and thus stressed continuity with the Iberian past and the conquest specifically.

In his 1947 book, engineer Manuel Demosthenes made the following hyperbolic but essentially accurate description of the idea to move Brazil’s capital away from the coast: “The form of government changes, the names of cities and streets change; only the idea of the interiorization of the Capital remains prominent, periodically revived in the constitutions that are promulgated from time to time.”⁶⁵ Despite the considerable support the proposal appears to have consistently found among Brazil’s political and intellectual elite, for nearly two centuries it remained an abstraction. On numerous occasions throughout Brazilian history, agitators for political change advocated the construction of a new capital in the interior, offering varied reasons for the project. Along the way Brazilians took small but concrete steps toward realizing this dream—in addition to various constitutional provisions, scientific commissions surveyed the Planalto in search of a suitable site in 1894, 1946, and 1953.

Sources disagree on the precise origins of the idea of building an inland capital. Most narratives of Brasília’s history—including the version Kubitschek consistently put forth—begin in 1789 with the Minas Conspiracy, an aborted independence plot centered in the rich mining captaincy of Minas Gerais. The conspiracy’s leader, Joaquim José da

⁶⁴ A detailed discussion of Brasília’s antecedents, including names proposed at different times, see Vidal, *De Nova Lisboa à Brasília: l’invention d’une capitale (XIXe-XXe siècles)*.

⁶⁵ Manuel Demosthenes, ed., *Estudos sobre a nova capital do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 1947), 3.

Silva Xavier, better known as Tiradentes,⁶⁶ was executed, his corpse dismembered and displayed in various sites throughout the captaincy as a bloody warning to would-be rebels. Following independence, the once-disgraced Tiradentes emerged as a national hero, the honored martyr of Brazilian nationhood. The lengthy transcript of the conspirators' trial, published as the *Autos de devassa* contains numerous references to their plan to make São João d'el Rei into the capital of a newly independent state.⁶⁷ Interestingly, however, the *inconfidentes* were very clear in their vision of an independent Minas Gerais, *not* all of Brazil as is commonly understood. Nevertheless, as shown below, Tiradentes remains a strong presence in the iconography and discourse of Brasília. His place as one of the capital's spiritual fathers offers important clues about how the capital's founders propagated an image of Brasília as the direct heir to heroes of the past.

After the Portuguese court moved to Brazil in 1808, bringing with it the colony's first printing press, an interior capital became an oft-discussed topic in the national press. The idea drew the attention of national elites throughout the course of the nineteenth century, persisting as Brazil shrugged off its colonial status to become a co-kingdom equal to Portugal in 1815. It continued to appear throughout and beyond the Empire (1822-1889), surfacing in nearly every discussion of Brazil's economic and political future.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hipólito da Costa, the exiled editor of Brazil's first newspaper, the pro-independence *Correio Braziliense*,⁶⁸ published in

⁶⁶ Literally meaning "tooth-puller", the nickname refers to Silva Xavier's occupation as a dentist, or what passed for one in colonial Minas.

⁶⁷ Kenneth R. Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal, 1750-1808* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 132.

⁶⁸ This name was taken for Brasília's daily newspaper, retaining the antiquated "z" in the title. Notably the word "brasiliense," an antiquated synonym for the adjective "Brazilian" (brasileiro), today refers to the residents of Brasília, thus emphasizing the aregional, national character of the city.

London, printed numerous articles in favor of building an inland capital. For Hipólito, who had visited the new North American republic and its planned capital, the United States offered a model for the Brazilians. He used the example of Washington, D.C. to counter claims that constructing a new capital would be too difficult, and challenged his fellow Brazilians to follow the example of their northern counterparts who managed to simultaneously build both a new capital and state.⁶⁹ To Hipólito, Brazil's "empty" interior represented enormous squandered potential. According to him, two factors held Brazil back: its underpopulation and the "unsuitability" of Rio as a national capital.⁷⁰ To build a strong Brazilian empire, Hipólito advocated a two-pronged approach: encourage foreign (ideally European) immigration and settlement of the interior. In his eyes the two policies were related. Thus, he urged his compatriots to,

establish a city in the interior, central and near to the headwaters of the great rivers; [and] build there a new city, begin opening roads leading to all of the seaports [... and] thus lay the foundations of the most extensive, interconnected, well-defended, and powerful empire possible on the face of the earth.⁷¹

Hipólito thus stressed two main features of the location for a new capital: it should be as centrally located as possible, ideally in that part of the great Planalto Central from which South America's three great river systems flow—the Amazon, the Plate, and the São Francisco. The rivers not only facilitated communications, but also provided powerful symbolism.

⁶⁹ Andrada e Silva, "Os idealizadores de Brasília no século XIX," 289-90, Pordeus, *Raízes históricas de Brasília: datas e documentos*, 19.

⁷⁰ As an explanation, he offers the argument that a port capital afforded merchants with disproportionate political influence. See *Correio Braziliense* vol. 16 (1816) reprinted in Barbosa Lima Sobrinho, ed., *Antologia do Correio Braziliense* (Rio de Janeiro: Cátedra, 1977).

⁷¹ *Correio Braziliense*, vol. X (March 1813), reprinted in Pordeus, *Raízes históricas de Brasília: datas e documentos*, 87-88.

During the constitutional debates that took place in Lisbon in 1821-22 the theme of founding a new capital again rose to the fore. It was there that the name “Brasília” seems to have first appeared: according to one Brazilian delegate, an unnamed colleague of his was circulating a proposal among the commission that called for a new capital for the American kingdom to be named “Brasília.”⁷² What is clear in the records is that within a year of Independence, José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, the “patriarch” of Brazilian Independence, voiced his support for building an interior capital of the new Brazilian Empire, to be named either “Brasília” or “Petrópolis” (after Emperor Pedro I).⁷³ Citing the economic benefit of settling the interior, José Bonifácio directed the imperial constituent assembly to address the, “foundation of the city of Brasília as the seat of the National Government.” The new capital, “would radiate to the diverse Provinces and their cities, interior and coastal, a network of appropriate communications, which would not delay in creating an internal commerce of the highest magnitude.”⁷⁴

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the proposal to interiorize the capital gained considerable momentum, thanks in large part to the efforts of Francisco Adolfo Varnhagen, the Viscount of Pôrto Seguro and one of the Empire’s most respected intellectuals.⁷⁵ Concerned with the vulnerability of a coastal capital, Varnhagen pointed out that most European nations had interior capitals. Those that did not were strong naval

⁷² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷³ José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva, *O patriarca da independência*, Bibliotheca Pedagógica Brasileira, vol. 166 (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1939), 118, M.A. Teixeira de Freitas, et al., *A localização da nova capital da República*, ed. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço Gráfico do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 1948), Pordeus, *Raízes históricas de Brasília: datas e documentos*, 32.

⁷⁴ Theodoro Figueira de Almeida, “Ideal em marcha, 1930,” Plan for new capital; shortened version previously published in newspaper *A Ordem* 30 May 1930, p. 5, ArPDF Box 0001, código Nov.A.06.

⁷⁵ Freitas, *A localização da nova capital da República*, 293, Francisco Adolfo (Viscount of Porto Seguro) Varnhagen, *A questão da capital: marítima ou no interior?* 3rd ed. (Brasília: Thesaurus, 1978; reprint, Rio: Arquivo Nacional 1935).

powers capable of repelling attacks (i.e. Portugal), which of course Brazil was not.⁷⁶

Varnhagen traveled to the Planalto to see with his own eyes the place the city he called “Imperatória” would someday be built. “Providence,” according to Varnhagen, “had destined” the construction. As evidence, he pointed out that because of its central location, water flowed from the Planalto into the three great rivers of South America.⁷⁷

Varnhagen’s enthusiastic support for the idea of building a new capital was contagious, persuading many with his arguments. As will be shown below, Kubitschek’s depiction of Brasília as the cornerstone of a divinely inspired plan for the nation bears striking similarity to Varnhagen’s arguments. The new capital, however, existed merely in the imagination of some elites during the entire imperial era (1822-89).

From the earliest days of the Old Republic (1889-1930), the government began taking concrete steps, however small, toward constructing an interior capital. Article 3 of the 1891 Constitution read: “There will pass into the possession of the Union, in the Planalto Central of the Republic, a zone of 14,000 square kilometers, which will in a timely manner be demarcated for the establishment there of the future Federal Capital.”⁷⁸ During the constitutional debates of 1890, a senator from Bahia suggested that the capital be named “Tiradentes;”⁷⁹ the constitution does not include a name for the city. President Floriano Peixoto (1891-94) was a vehement supporter of the project and other efforts to improve internal communications.

Congress appointed engineer Luiz Cruls to head a scientific commission dispatched to explore and survey the Planalto in 1894. Motivated by a sense of duty to

⁷⁶ Andrada e Silva, “Os idealizadores de Brasília no século XIX,” 293.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Almeida, “Ideal em marcha,” p. 6.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Luis Cruls, *Relatório da Comissão Exploradora do Planalto Central do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1947), 85.

⁷⁹ Pordeus, *Raízes históricas de Brasília: datas e documentos*, 96.

settle the region, Cruls wondered, “Does it not behoove us to seek to give to that immense region the life it lacks?”⁸⁰ He explained his interpretation of the constitutional mandate to locate the city in the “*Central Planalto* of Brazil,” arguing that that phrase “should be understood as the *most central* part of the Brazilian Planalto.”⁸¹ Cruls praised the region for its temperate climate, abundance of clean water, and geographic centrality, dismissing opponents as barriers to progress, stuck in the past. Once a railroad was built, Cruls estimated, it would take a mere twenty hours to reach Rio de Janeiro. Development, he believed, would inevitably follow the city’s establishment.⁸² The Cruls commission, comprised of several dozen engineers, botanists, and geologists, produced detailed surveys of the Planalto Central and designated what was the optimal location in their view. The federal government appropriated the piece of territory, which appeared on subsequent maps of the nation, a visual reminder of unfulfilled mandate.

On the centennial of Brazilian Independence, 7 September 1922, one group chose to celebrate by dedicating a monument in the form of an obelisk at the site of the new capital. Transporting the 3.75 meter tall piece of stone to the remote location, 315 km from the nearest railway station, was no easy task.⁸³ Representative Marcelino Rodrigues Machado of Maranhão, who had lobbied Congress and President Epitácio Pessoa to commission the monument, later described the capital in the following terms: “It transforms into reality the secular aspiration, that comes from the primordial roots of [our] nationality, to move the Capital to the Planalto Central of Brazil!”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Cruls, *Relatório da Comissão Exploradora do Planalto Central do Brasil*, 108.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 53, 109-10.

⁸³ Marcelino Rodrigues Machado, “A aspiração mudancista no centenário da independência: a pedra fundamental da futura capital no planalto central” in “Special Inaugural Edition,” *Brasília*, 21 April 1960, 99. The stone is located within the present-day Federal District, about 15km from the center of the city.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

In 1929 presidential candidate Júlio Prestes made the capital a campaign issue as he criticized his opponent Washington Luis for not supporting the project.⁸⁵ The following year Theodoro Figueira de Almeida published an extensive articulation of his plan for the capital, which he directed to the attention of the venerable Instituto Histórico-Geográfico do Brasil (IHGB), in the newspaper *A Ordem* under the pseudonym, “Th. Emerson.” (Figure 5) Contemporary Brazilian leaders, he passionately argued, were duty-bound to promote the happiness and wellbeing of the citizenry by building Brasília. Progress, he believed, hinged upon the fulfillment of that long-standing goal.⁸⁶ The plan he drew up is fascinating, if not in terms of its design, but the names with which Almeida adorned his Brasília: the center of the city is occupied by government buildings, and roads radiate outward to the circular road that delimits the city’s borders. In this way it bears the mark of the urban planning practiced by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in Paris, Pierre Charles L’Enfant in his design of Washington, D.C., and Aarão Reis in planning Belo Horizonte. Streets in Almeida’s conception of Brasília bear the names of figures from the pantheon of Liberal heroes, including, Montesquieu, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke, Simón Bolívar, and José Bonifácio. It is a paean to the nation’s western heritage, presenting a quintessentially Liberal perspective, the influence of which in Brazil reached during the Old Republic (1891-1930).

⁸⁵ Almeida, "Ideal em marcha, p. 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

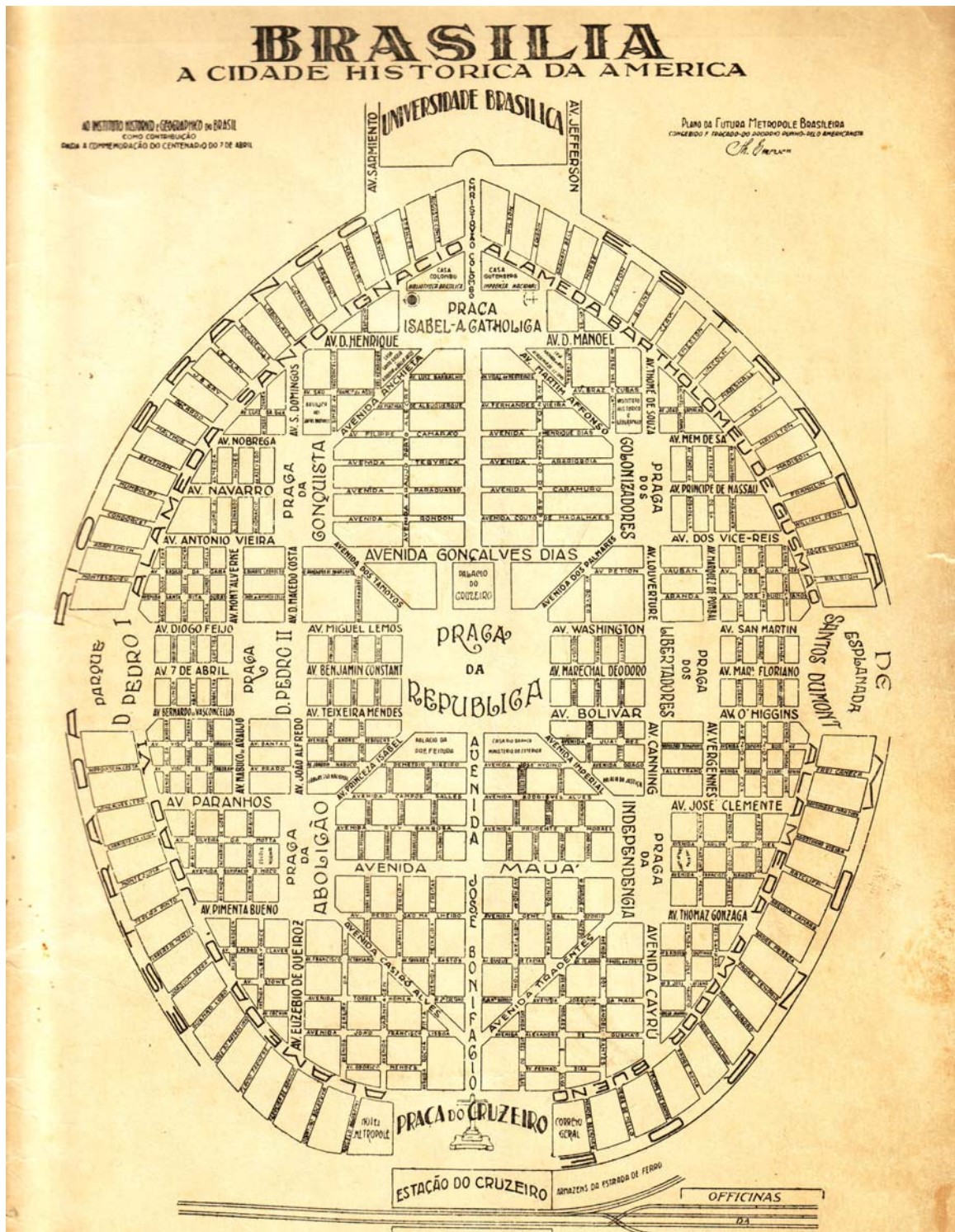


Figure 5.

Proposed plan for the new capital of Brazil by Theodoro Figueira de Almeida, titled "Brasília: The Historic City of America," 1930.

Source: ArPDF Nov.A.06 Plano Urbanístico, 1930

The 1946 Constitution contained the by then *de rigueur* clause supporting the construction of a federal capital in the interior. It differed from its predecessors, however, in laying out a clear time frame for the measure, requiring the president to appoint a commission of technical experts charged with surveying the Planalto Central within sixty days. Subsequently Congress would use the information gathered to choose a location and annex it.⁸⁷ In 1946 and 1953 the government dispatched two additional scientific commissions, both led by high-ranking military officers⁸⁸ to the Planalto in search of the best location for a future capital. Reports produced by the first, the Polli Coelho commission, stressed the task's centrality to the nation-building process. Praising the quality of the land and "healthful" climate of the Planalto, the commission challenged Brazil to build the city and thereby demonstrate the "determination necessary of any nation that does not want to be relegated to the secondary ranks of international life."⁸⁹

Though consistent in many of respects, members of the Polli Coelho expedition, however, disagreed on which part of the huge Planalto was best suited for the future capital. Engineer Lucas Lopes and others discarded the Cruis Quadrilateral in favor of the "Minas Triangle" (Figure 6)—a rich agricultural region of his home state of Minas Gerais bordered by the Grande and Paranaíba rivers—several hundred miles to the south.⁹⁰ Describing the area as the "Brazilian Mesopotamia," Engineer M.A. Teixeira de Freitas argued that this corner of Minas offered a superior climate and would more easily

⁸⁷ Described by Agostinho Monteiro in his introduction to Demosthenes, ed., *Estudos sobre a nova capital do Brasil*, ix.

⁸⁸ The 1946 commission was led by General Djalma Polli Coelho, the 1953 group by Marshal José Pessoa. Pessoa's rich personal archive is held by CPDOC.

⁸⁹ Freitas, *A localização da nova capital da República*, 3.

⁹⁰ This perspective is demonstrated in *Ibid.* and Lucas Lopes, *Memória sobre a mudança do Distrito Federal* (Belo Horizonte: 1946). On the Polli Coelho Commission see also Cybelle de Ipanema, "Brasília - uma expedição injusticada," *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, no. 336 (1982).

stimulate internal trade.⁹¹ Aware of the resistance sure to result from shifting so much power into that already powerful state, Freitas proposed that the Federal District of Rio de Janeiro merge with the remainder of Minas Gerais to form one state, with Rio as its capital. This would, in his estimation, both assuage regional rivalries and compensate the former national capital by bestowing it with control over the proud *mineiros*. No need to worry that the “marvelous city” would suffer from the change: “Rio will always be the ‘biodynamic capital’ of Brazil.”⁹²

⁹¹ Lopes, *Memória sobre a mudança do Distrito Federal*, 12.

⁹² Freitas, *A localização da nova capital da República*, 86.

retain its purely regional character.” Instead he supported the historically favored Cruls Quadrilateral since unlike Minas, Goiás was historically peripheral in political and economic matters. He described the Cruls Quadrilateral as thus occupying “Neutral Territory,” lacking an established regional character or power on a national level.⁹³

Both sides in this debate envisioned the move occurring through a two-step process: the seat of government should be immediately be transferred to a temporary location in an accessible part of Minas Gerais—Freitas suggested its own planned capital, Belo Horizonte.⁹⁴ Construction of a new city in a more remote location would soon commence, but the federal government would not move there for several decades, perhaps as long as a century.⁹⁵

In 1953, Congress passed a measure requiring the president to oversee “definitive studies for choosing the New Federal Capital, which should be concluded within three years.” Allocating 20 million cruzeiros (about \$14 million USD) the project, the legislation further stated that an area of five thousand square kilometers—the optimal location for a future city of 500,000 residents—pass into the national patrimony. Getúlio Vargas, then in his final moments as president, obliged the measure by appointing Marechal José Pessoa, head of the CLNCF (Comissão da Localização da Nova Capital Federal/Comission to Locate the New Federal Capital) to oversee another expedition to select a location for the future federal capital and produce detailed plans for its implementation. Pessoa took up the call to help build the city he called “Vera Cruz” with patriotic zeal and made strategic use of symbols of Brazilian nationality; for example, he

⁹³ Demosthenes, ed., *Estudos sobre a nova capital do Brasil*, 13-15. This topic will be explored in chapter 4.

⁹⁴ Freitas, *A localização da nova capital da República*, 90.

⁹⁵ Demosthenes, ed., *Estudos sobre a nova capital do Brasil*, 4.

dedicated the flag carried by the expedition, in addition to other materials, to São Paulo's Ipiranga Museum.⁹⁶ Under Pessoa's stewardship, the CLNCF engaged the Ithaca, New York-based firm of Donald Belcher and Associates to conduct aerial surveys of the Cruls Quadrilateral to select the best site for the new capital's location, settling on the site on which Brasília would later be built, down to planning the artificial lake. It also hired architect Raul Penna Firme to design a "pilot plan" for the new capital. (Figure 7)

⁹⁶ Ipiranga is the place in São Paulo state where Pedro I declared Brazilian Independence in 1822.

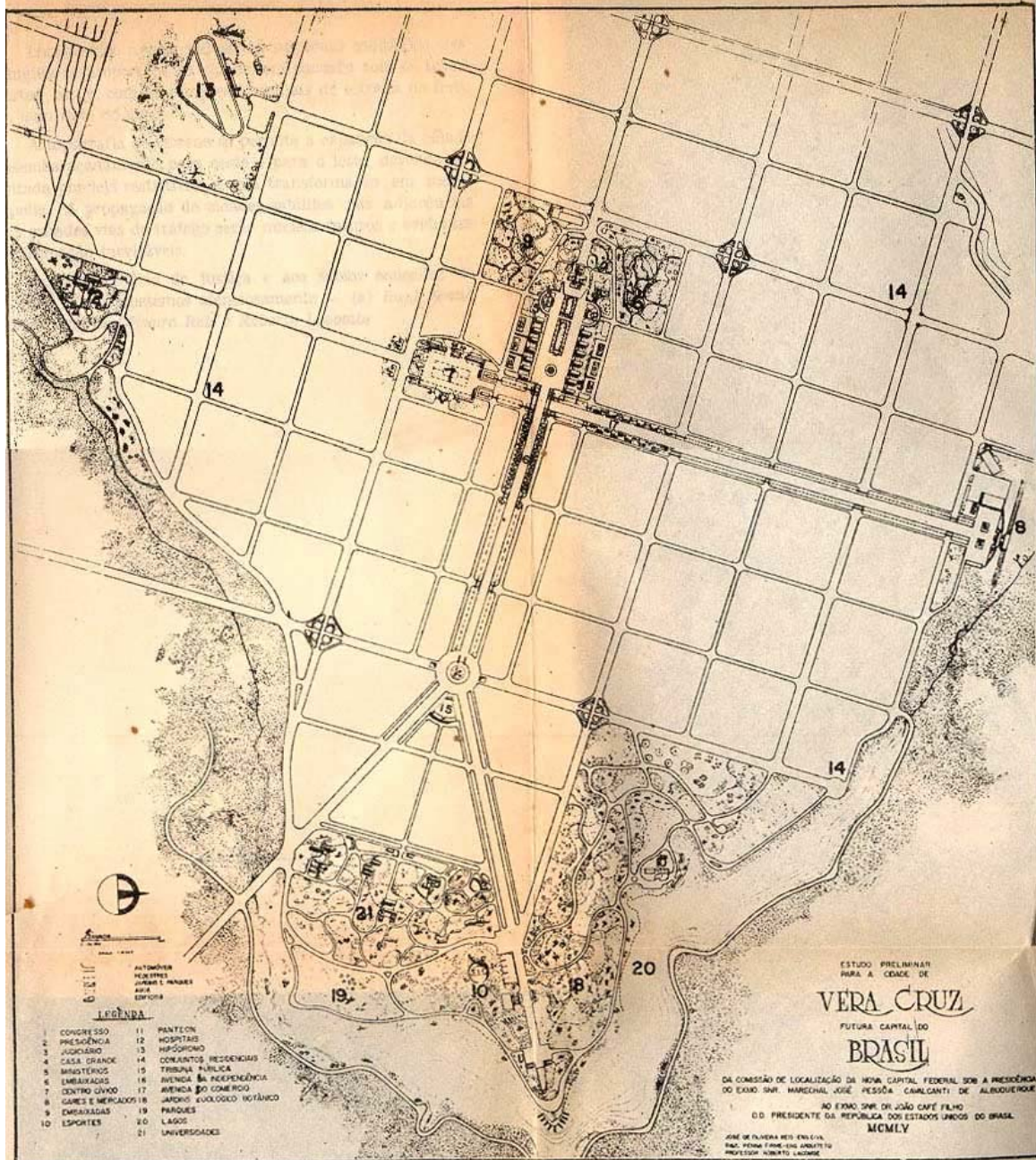


Figure 7.

The first Pilot Plan of Brasília/Vera Cruz commissioned by the CLNCF. By Raul Penna Firme, Roberto Lacombe, and José Oliveira Reis, 1955. Source: www.epdoc.br.

Compared to the Polli Coelho expedition, there has been a striking lack of attention to the Pessoa commission. A veteran of the latter believes this is no accident: “the history of Brasília has been done with the systematic omission of the role performed

by General José Pessoa in its implementation.”⁹⁷ Why is so little remembered of the CLNCF and Pessoa’s role? Perhaps because it belies the image put forth by Brasília’s planners that emphasizes its spontaneity and originality (e.g. Kubitschek’s claim that he had never thought about Brasília until the famous 1955 campaign stop).

Tiradentes is the father of Brasília in the city’s official narrative. Subsequent historical figures, praised for their contributions to building a strong, independent Brazil, are depicted as carrying out the martyr’s dream. Israel Pinheiro, president of Novacap, summed up the narrative in the inaugural edition of *Brasília* magazine: “Since Tiradentes, every time a more profound political movement arises, or when institutions enter into crisis, the idea of the interiorization of the capital reappeared.”⁹⁸ Kubitschek likewise emphasized Brasília’s linkage to Tiradentes, writing:

How was Brasília born? The answer is simple. Like all great initiatives, it came from almost nothing. The idea of the interiorization of the capital of the country was old, reaching back to the time of the Inconfidência Mineira.⁹⁹

Donatilla Dantas, in her 1958 poem “Brasília, Queen of Brazil” stressed the city’s connection to the heroes of Brazilian independence: “Brasília, one of the ideas of the Minas conspiracy; / a dream of José Bonifácio and of many generations!”¹⁰⁰ There was an obvious political advantage to tracing the project’s origins to the heroes of the past: it not only generated public support by appealing to nationalistic sensibilities, but also lent legitimacy to the project by establishing its illustrious trajectory. It is thus no coincidence that Kubitschek chose April 21, the anniversary of Tiradentes’s martyrdom, as the date of the new capital’s inauguration.

⁹⁷ Umberto Peregrino, “Missão no Planalto Central: O General José Pessoa nas origens de Brasília,” *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 147, no. 350 (1986): 163.

⁹⁸ Israel Pinheiro, “Introduction,” in “Special Inaugural Edition,” 3.

⁹⁹ Kubitschek, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Donatilla Dantas, *Candango: poesia* (Rio de Janeiro: Minerva, 1959).

Not only did the rhetoric of Brasília's builders emphasize the role of Tiradentes, but he has come to feature prominently in the iconography of the city. In 1986 Niemeyer designed the Panteão da Pátria (Pantheon of the Fatherland) Tancredo Neves on the Plaza of the Three Powers, directly across from the congressional complex. The Supreme Court and an executive branch office building occupy the other two sides of the square. A bust of Tiradentes sits in front of the pantheon and a large mural depicting the martyr's life story dominates its interior. The final panel depicts Tiradentes's execution, showing him in a Christ-like pose. In front of the mural sits the "Book of the Fatherland's Heroes," which includes among others the names of Tiradentes, José Bonifácio, and Zumbi, leader of the runaway slave community of Palmares that resisted Portuguese conquest for nearly one hundred years. Congress added Zumbi's name only in 1996, a belated acknowledgement of the Afro-Brazilian past, which has been strikingly absent from the new capital.

Indigenous Brazilians, in contrast, have been employed as a symbolic device in the imagery surrounding Brasília as the discussion of the first mass illustrates. A striking example representations of Indians in the narrative of Brasília is an allegoric painting by A. Mondin displayed in the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Distrito Federal. The figure of the Indian, "the spirit of Brasília" points to his right to the state as represented by the congressional complex, while over his other shoulder we see the cross of discovery. Thus the process of colonization moved to the Planalto, bringing with it the forces of civilization including the Church and state. The wise, silent Indian welcomes the arrival, and one suspects that he had been waiting for it all along. The interior is paradoxically isolated from the nation but is its soul nevertheless.

The Brazilian interior that appeared so desolate and/or idealized through the eyes of those who advocated the capital's construction, however, probably did not seem so devoid of life to the Indians and others who had long lived there. As the capital's builders continued the process of conquering and colonizing the interior, Indians figured both as symbols and objects of the project. By moving the capital more than one thousand kilometers inland, the "forces of civilization" would stretch their reach into Indian lands, increasing the potential for conflict with the state while at the same time increasing these remote populations' access to the halls of power.¹⁰¹

While they discarded names suggested in the past such as "Petrópolis" and "Imperatória," Brasília's planners paid homage to the erstwhile royal family, emphasizing their contributions to furthering national independence and development. In 1958, for example, Rio's Jardim Botânico sent five imperial palm trees derived from those King João VI had transported across the Atlantic in 1807-08, to be planted alongside the future national congress.¹⁰² Costa begins his Pilot Plan for Brasília with the following quote: "José Bonifácio, in 1823, proposed the transfer of the capital to Goiás and suggested the name Brasília."¹⁰³ Costa's invocation of the patriarch at the beginning of his report was a powerful way to link his decidedly modernist design to Brazil's independence, thus placing it firmly within a historical continuum, a monumental step toward achieving national greatness. His proposal comes full circle, closing with another

¹⁰¹ An excellent analysis of relations between indigenous Brazilians and the state is Seth Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937-1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁰² Israel Pinheiro, "Letter acknowledging receipt of 5 imperial palms," ed. Jardim Botânico Dr. P. Campos (Brasília: ArPDF ofc. No. 0055, 1958).

¹⁰³ Costa, *Relatório do Plano Piloto de Brasília*.

reference to José Bonifácio: “Brasília, capital of the air and highway; park city. *Arqui-secular* dream of the Patriarch.”¹⁰⁴

Religious imagery overshadows the secular past in Brasília’s iconography and monumental architecture religious imagery. The ceremonies described above have already suggested the centrality of Catholicism to the legitimacy of the new city, which is unsurprising given the important role the Church has played throughout Brazilian history. It is no accident, this analysis suggests, that the most prominent building in the cityscape, after the congressional complex, is the cathedral. Outside its entrance, in clear imitation of Aleijadinho’s baroque masterpiece in Congonhas (Minas Gerais), stand statues of Old Testament prophets designed by sculptor Alfredo Ceschiatti. The cathedral in Brasília, however, is set at the edge of the governmental buildings. Unlike the baroque central plazas of colonial Iberian urban planning, the Praça dos Três Poderes in Brasília is a purely secular space. Costa initially conceived of it as a triangle, from which the structures representing the three branches of government would gaze out over the cerrado and lake toward the horizon. The Panteão da Pátria, however, designed by Niemeyer and constructed hastily in 1986 to commemorate the death Tancredo Neves, who would have been the nation’s first civilian president since 1964 on the open end of the plaza, effects a significant alteration to Costa’s plan.

The most prominent figure in Brasília’s iconography is its patron saint, Dom Bosco. Known for his visions and founding of the Salesian order, Dom Bosco lived in Italy in the nineteenth century. The first building constructed was a shrine to Dom Bosco, located on a hill overlooking what is now a lake, on the same spot where the first

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

mass in the new capital took place.¹⁰⁵ The first school opened in Brasília was the Colégio Dom Bosco, founded by the Salesian order.¹⁰⁶ Adjoining it is a particularly beautiful church, the walls of which are comprised entirely of blue glass, dedicated to the saint. An undated promotional video produced during the construction process opens by “quoting” Dom Bosco:

Between the 15th and 20th parallels, at a site where a lake had formed, a Great Civilization will arise, the Promised Land, where milk and honey will flow. An unconceivable richness will be established there. These things will occur in the third generation.¹⁰⁷

Kubitschek’s ghost-written memoir *Por que construí Brasília* includes a very similar quote as its epigraph: “...and there will appear here the Great Civilization, the Promised Land, where milk and honey will flow.”¹⁰⁸ This version has thus become the standard one, and most *brasilienses* can at least recite its main points.

Versions of this dream published by the Salesians, however, differ in several important aspects from the above descriptions.¹⁰⁹ The so-called “South American” dream occurred on 30 August 1883 when Bosco, as he told Father Lemoyne, found himself in a large hall which he somehow knew was located in South America. On a table there was a large rope marked with numbers which represented degrees of latitude; as he pulled the rope he found himself floating over the landscape that corresponded to the number on the rope. Most of the dream deals with his travels through the Andes and

¹⁰⁵ L. Fernando Tamanini, *Brasília: memória da construção* (Brasília: Royal Court, 1994), 99.

¹⁰⁶ Anonymous, “Correio da Manhã,” *Correio da Manhã*, 7 January 1958.

¹⁰⁷ Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco?* vols., vol. XVI (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana, 1964-1983).

¹⁰⁸ Ellipses in original. Kubitschek.

¹⁰⁹ Dom Bosco personally recorded only a few of his many visions; the majority, like the one under discussion, he verbally related to his confidante Father Lemoyne who then transcribed and submitted them to Bosco for him to edit. The complete collection is published in English as Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*. The “South American Dream” is transcribed in pp. 305-310

Patagonia, where Salesian orders had recently been founded. A small and vague paragraph provides the source for Brasília's mythology. Bosco recalled:

Between 15 and 20 degrees latitude lay a very broad and lengthy body of water that had its origin from the end of a lake. Then a voice kept repeating to me, 'When the mines hidden in the midst of these mountains will eventually be dug out, here will appear the promised land flowing with milk and honey. Its wealth will defy belief.'¹¹⁰

Notice that the word "civilization" never appeared, but Bosco did use the term "promised land." Ignoring the fact that Brasília's lake is man-made, the city is indeed located at the 16th parallel and the surrounding region is rich in minerals. It is also located, however, next to Minas Gerais which, as indicated by its name, which translates as "General Mines", contains a high concentration of valuable minerals. Indeed this land had already provided extremely profitable to the Portuguese crown since a group of *bandeirantes* discovered gold there and triggered the western world's first gold rush, nearly two hundred years prior to Dom Bosco's dream.

Dom Bosco's vision, Tiradentes' martyrdom, and the Jataí story provide key moments in the official narrative of Brasília's history repeated in numerous kinds of publications aimed at varied audiences, from scholars to Brazilian schoolchildren and foreign visitors. These mystical roots augment the secular progression of the plan to build a new capital, and may in fact lend more legitimacy to the project than the endorsement of José Bonifácio, Varnhagen, and the learned framers of constitutions. The mythical history makes the construction of Brasília appear not just sensible and rational, but predestined, mandated by spiritual forces. The fact that all aspects of the official narrative of Brasília do not stand up to historical scrutiny did little to diminish its appeal. Virtually all renderings of the history of Brasília, repeated in the streets of the city as well

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 309.

as numerous scholarly treatments, accept the official narrative of events, according to which the idea originated with Tiradentes, endorsed in the vision of Dom Bosco, and revived by chance, at the urging of a humble citizen of the interior.

However, an article by journalist Murilo Melo Filho published in the pro-Kubitschek magazine *Manchete* in April 1960 presents a different version of how the presidential candidate came to include Brasília in his campaign. According to the article, Kubitschek, who continued to serve as governor of Minas Gerais during the presidential campaign, decided to include Brasília in his platform after members of the state's UDN suggested it, after having been asked by Kubitschek what they would like to see included in his program.¹¹¹ Although this version cannot be corroborated,¹¹² it provides an intriguing alternative to the Jataí story and would be consistent with the effort undertaken by Brasília's planners to persuade the Brazilian people to support the city's construction. It does seem curious that Kubitschek had never given a thought to building the long-imagined interior capital until the campaign was well underway and the Target Plan already drafted, as he always maintained.¹¹³ The new capital had not only been the subject of discussion in political circles for generations, but had increased markedly during the decade or so preceding Kubitschek's election.

The official narrative of events obscures the fact that momentum had been building steadily behind the project since passage of the 1946 constitution. João Café Filho, who became president after Getúlio Vargas's suicide in August 1954, implemented

¹¹¹ Murilo Melo Filho, "O Romance Político de Brasília," *Manchete* 419 (April 1960): 62-65.

¹¹² I interviewed Murilo Melo Filho in June 2004 in his office at the Academia Brasileira de Letras in Rio de Janeiro. He told me that he recalled neither the article nor any of the facts therein (indeed he has been very prolific in his half-century as a journalist). He referred me to his memoir, in which he repeats the dominant version of events, according to which Jataí marked the moment Kubitschek first thought about transferring the capital.

¹¹³ Kubitschek, 8.

concrete measures to further the capital's transfer according to the constitutional requirement. Marshal José Pessoa, whom Café Filho appointed to head the existing Comissão de Localização da Nova Capital Federal (CLNCF), took various important steps in early 1955, precisely at the moment Juscelino Kubitschek began his campaign for presidency. The frequent discussion of the new capital in political circles, especially in Minas Gerais, and the existence of the CLNCF and several surveys conducted both before and during Kubitschek's candidacy, leads one to doubt that the campaign stop at Jataí marked the first time the candidate had ever thought about building the new capital. Indeed, both Kubitschek and Pinheiro were both delegates to the constituent assembly that drafted the 1946 constitution, which mandated that progress be taken toward constructing a new capital.

The idea of moving the Brazilian capital into the interior is an idea with roots that extend to the colonial period. That history, however, has been utilized by Brasília's promoters as part of a larger political project aimed at legitimizing their project and providing historical roots for the broad economic and social reforms they proposed. The vision of Brasília's past cast it as the fulfillment of a national destiny, a necessary precondition for it to become a truly great nation. The invocation of national heroes lent legitimacy to the project, casting it as a nationalistic imperative, a necessary and inevitable step along Brazil's path to *grandeza*. By employing Dom Bosco's dream and other mystical elements, Brasília's planners conveyed an image of the city as predestined, the realization of the nation's divinely ordained greatness. It also misrepresented the plan to move the capital as forgotten prior to Kubitschek's pledge at Jataí. Indeed, the activities undertaken between 1946 and 1955 laid vital foundations for the new capital.

Without those preparations, it is unlikely that the construction could have been possible in the given timeframe. The following chapters will delve into the ideology and politics of Brasília from the moment Kubitschek promised to build the city in April 1955.

CHAPTER II

“COLONIZING OURSELVES”: THE IDEA OF BRASÍLIA

*Here, from this high crossroads of the interior, a new thinking will radiate, all the currents of Brazilianness will flow, everything that is most ours, original and preserved, for the configuration of a great synthesis.*¹¹⁴

*It is not necessary to dwell on what the gigantic undertaking [Brasília's construction] means to the nation, as it is embodied in the revolutionary administrative action of his Excellency President Juscelino Kubitschek. And of course it represents the satisfaction of a historical characteristic...of our civilization and our destiny as an imperialist people, whose imperialism means only...to conquer the opulent expanses of territory that it possesses itself, for its own benefit and well-being.*¹¹⁵

The president planned the inauguration carefully to ensure maximum symbolic impact. At 11:30 PM on 20 April 1960, President Kubitschek, accompanied by his wife Sara and Vice President Goulart, entered the Plaza of the Three Powers and took their place in front of the “Cross of Discovery,” apparently the same one used to celebrate the first mass in Brazil in 1500, a holy relic lent by the Diocese of Braga in Portugal for the occasion. Portuguese Cardinal Carerjeira, the papal legate, then began to celebrate mass. According to Kubitschek’s recollection, just after communion was given, the bells tolled midnight and the sound “echoed in the calm night of the Planalto, announcing the inauguration of the new capital, dream of the Inconfidêntes.”¹¹⁶

In October 1957 Congress set 21 April 1960 as the date for the official inauguration of the new capital. The choice of 21 April offers insight about how

¹¹⁴ Israel Pinheiro, “Revolução construtiva,” speech delivered at Brasília’s inauguration, 21 April 1960. Israel Pinheiro, *Discursos* (Rio de Janeiro: Bloch, n.d.).

¹¹⁵ Manoel Caetano Bandeira de Mello, Diretor do Serviço de Documentação do D.A.S.P, Introduction to Donald J. and Associates Belcher, *O relatório técnico sobre a nova capital da República* (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa Nacional, 1957).

¹¹⁶ The term “Inconfidentes” refers to Tiradentes and his co-conspirators. Kubitschek, 290.

Brasília's planners established symbolic connections between the newborn city and the nation's past; Tiradentes was executed on the same date in 1792. Thus the dream for independence that died with Tiradentes was reborn. The inauguration was Kubitschek's shining moment, as thousands gathered to baptize the city that was his greatest legacy. The inaugural ceremony offers insight into the ways in which Brasília's planners, to borrow Hobsbawm and Ranger's well-known formulation, invented a tradition that established direct connections between the city and the nation's past.¹¹⁷ The carefully crafted image they propagated placed the new capital firmly within a teleological vision of Brazilian history in which the new capital occupied a central piece of a divinely inspired plan for the nation's future *grandeza*. The discourse and iconography of Brasília establish firm links to secular heroes of the past such as Tiradentes while at the same time depicting it as the center piece of God/Nature's plan for Brazil. As the previous chapter demonstrates, however, although Kubitschek et al. "invented" a past for Brasília in certain key aspects, the idea of building a capital in the Planalto does indeed have a well-documented and long history. The official narrative of Brasília's history depicts the city as completing the colonization process, in the words of Kubitschek, rendering Brazil the "chief (*dono*) of its own destiny."¹¹⁸ Brasília's planners stressed its historical continuity with the nation's independence; ubiquitous religious references, particularly the figure of Dom Bosco, provide a deep rooted foundation of legitimacy for the ultra-modern city.

Brasília's planners conceived of their project as part of the process of colonization initiated in 1500. Polli Coelho reflected a similar perspective when he wrote: "the

¹¹⁷ E.J. and Terrence Ranger Hobsbawm, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹¹⁸ Kubitschek, 33.

problem of the localization of Brazil's capital is contemporary to its discovery."¹¹⁹ The construction workers who built the city were repeatedly referred to as *bandeirantes*¹²⁰ and pioneers who were active participants in the process of conquering and taking possession of the whole of the vast national territory.¹²¹ In a speech before Brazilian bishops, Kubitschek used a similar metaphor to explain that the capital would in the future become the "trampoline that allows for the leap of conquest of the Amazon."¹²² Celso Lafer attributes Kubitschek's ability to render Brasília so quickly a "*fator consumido*", a *fait accompli*, to the following crucial factors: the creation of Novacap, an autonomous entity charged with both the planning and execution of the project, which functioned as something of a political buffer for the president and the placement of highly qualified technical experts in key decision-making positions. Vagueness in bookkeeping and the existence of a degree of patronage politics were, Lafer points out, were problems but characteristic of contemporary practices in Brazil.¹²³ Indeed, such practices surely aided the efforts of Brasília's planners to push forward their project at all costs and avoid any efforts by congress to launch inquiries.

What united the planners and supporters of Brasília—politically diverse as they were—was not just a faith in the potential of Brazil, but a belief in progress. They shared a worldview of linear development, the notion that nations and peoples passed through various necessary stages of evolution. While the ends they envisioned may have varied,

¹¹⁹ Djalma Polli Coelho, et al., "Notícia histórica sobre o problema da mudança da capital do Brasil, 1947," ArPDF, Brasília.

¹²⁰ Term for the racially mixed explorers who roamed the Brazilian interior in the colonial era in search of slaves and gold.

¹²¹ Kubitschek repeatedly compared the construction workers to the *bandeirantes* of the past in his speeches and published works. He was not the first to draw the connection, however; see Lopes, *Memória sobre a mudança do Distrito Federal*, 2.

¹²² Printed in "Special Inaugural Edition," 81.

¹²³ Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*.

they drew together . Propaganda sought to infect the populace with the belief that progress was near. Brasília reified this idea, at once offering evidence of the proximity of Brazilian grandezza and a means for its attainment. While Brasília's advocates ultimately succeeded in bringing the plan into fruition, they met with considerable resistance. The new capital was a contentious topic. The extent of the pro-Brasília campaign described above is evidence of the intense battle for popular support that continued up to, and indeed past, its official inauguration.

The rhetoric used by Brasília's advocates tended to describe the new capital as occupying an essentially regionless space. Its location near the geographic center of the country symbolically placed all states equidistant from the center of national decision-making. (Figure 8) Thus, Brasília's advocates stressed the "balance" the new capital would bring to the large nation, in which there existed a long history of regional division and competition. Moving the federal capital to what amounted to virgin territory, an ahistorical and aregional space in the minds of most Brazilians. This allowed the planners of Brasília considerable freedom to shape the city, both physically and imaginatively. It provided a truly national place in a way that no other part of the nation could have, serving as both a weight and magnet in the center of the country.



Figure 8.

Back cover of promotional pamphlet produced by Novacap, n.d. (CPDOC/FGV/arquivo Anísio Teixeira/at-186f)

To make Brazil a world power, it was necessary to make Brazilians behave like citizens of a world power. Brasília was a projection of the possible, the potential of Brazil. It embodied order and progress, eschewing calcified habits such as street names and organizing life neatly into “sectors”, separating residential from commercial life by

creating bucolic “superquadras” as the main housing unit. Though it drew on design elements developed elsewhere, Brasília was innovative, a city unlike any before it, springing from the imaginations of two of the greatest artists the nation had ever produced, unlike any other urban construction.

From the moment candidate Kubitschek pledged to fulfill the constitutional mandate to transfer the capital until Brasília’s official inauguration some five years later, construction proceeded at a dizzying pace. During that time, the rustic location was transformed into the capital of Brazil, in the form of the most ambitious and fully realized example of modernist urban planning ever implemented. Ground broke on the project in October 1956. Congress created Novacap on 19 September 1956, headed by a four member executive committee¹²⁴ with Cr\$ 500,000 (slightly less than USD 200,000) in initial funding to oversee planning and construction of the new capital. On the same date the new agency announced a contest for Brasília’s urban plan, with judging scheduled for the following March. Kubitschek had already contracted architect Oscar Niemeyer, with whom he worked in Belo Horizonte in the 1940s, to design the principal governmental structures. Niemeyer was part of panel of experts that selected the design submitted by Lucio Costa, Niemeyer’s former teacher and collaborator, from among twenty-six entries. In October Kubitschek, Niemeyer, the Novacap directors, and military officials visited the site of the new capital and oversaw groundbreaking ceremonies for the future presidential palace, airport, and a hotel. Novacap immediately set up headquarters and began coordinating the construction process. Between 1956 and April 1960 nearly one hundred and fifty thousand workers came to the city, lured by the promise of abundant

¹²⁴ Kubitschek appointed Ernesto Silva and Bernardo Sayão directors Israel Pinheiro as President of Novacap. The opposition party (UDN) nominated Iris Meinberg to become the fourth director.

work at relatively high pay. The bulk of the *candangos*, as the laborers came to be known, came from the nearby states of Goiás and Minas Gerais, though about forty-percent came from the impoverished northeast. Living conditions were very difficult, especially in the first years. Engineers, architects, and Novacap administrators endured frontier conditions along with the *candangos*. Accidents and disease claimed an unknown number of victims. The *candangos* further suffered at the hands of the repressive construction managers and the feared Guarda Especial de Brasília, (GEB) that enforced order with an iron fist when necessary. During the infamous massacre at the Pacheco Fernandes camp during February 1959, at least one (perhaps more than a dozen) candango protesting inhumane working conditions died under fire from the GEB.¹²⁵ More often and more effectively, however, Novacap appealed to a sense of patriotic duty to exact obedience from the *candangos* and use their example to generate support among the wider public.

Tens of thousands of workers labored nonstop to implement the urban plan and thousands of kilometers of roadways to link the new capital with existing population centers. Although the city was far from finished in April 1960, it already had a fixed population of one hundred thousand and was the official seat of the federal government. While it would take more than a decade to complete the transfer, the Congress, Supreme Court, and Presidency began functioning in Brasília on the day of its inauguration. The project was a massive political and logistical undertaking. Kubitschek and his aides achieved success in large part by effectively manipulating the political process and public opinion to generate support for the costly undertaking.

¹²⁵ Vladimir Carvalho made a documentary film about this infamous incident: Vladimir Carvalho, "Conterraneos velhos de guerra," ed. Vladimir Carvalho (Rio de Janeiro: Sagres Home Video Ltda, 1992).

As the “metasynthesis” of Kubitschek’s thirty-point plan for achieving fifty years of progress in five (his campaign promise), Brasília was the center of a comprehensive prescription for achieving specific policy objectives aimed at economic development. Previous generations of Brazilians had advocated transferring the capital and articulated a series of persuasive arguments for the undertaking, many of which continued to carry weight in the middle of the twentieth century. The long history of the idea lightened Kubitschek’s burden in justifying the project: while the new capital formed part of a specific political and economic agenda, its historical roots provided a strong foundation of legitimacy that helped persuade even the president’s staunches foes to nonetheless back Brasília. The president invited all Brazilians to participate in his program for achieving national development. Highlighting the inclusive nature of the endeavor, Kubitschek openly courted high-ranking members of the clergy and military, allowed the opposition party to appoint a member to the executive board of Novacap, the agency overseeing Brasília’s construction, and engaged an avowed Communist to design the capital’s key buildings, including the cathedral.

For political reasons Kubitschek decided that the capital’s transfer must be a fait accompli before the end of his term (he was ineligible for immediate reelection). Since Brazilian politicians tend to abandon the projects initiated by their predecessors, Kubitschek had good reason to insist on an accelerated construction schedule. To secure support for the project, Kubitschek and those he enlisted to plan and implement the project launched an extensive publicity campaign aimed at generating support for the ambitious undertaking, which consumed an estimated between 250 and 300 million 1961

cruzeiros, or 2-3% of the annual GDP during the construction years (1956-60).¹²⁶ During that period, the annual federal budget of Brazil hovered around Cr\$400 million.¹²⁷ Therefore, the cost of Brasília's construction equalled roughly 20% of the federal budget during the initial years (not all of the funding, however, came directly from the government; much was in the form of bilateral and multilateral loans).

Novacap officials traveled throughout Brazil touting the merits of the new capital. National and regional media covered the building of Brasília on a daily basis for at least four years. It was common to find multiple articles dedicated to the new capital in one newspaper. Although many critics launched an unrelenting campaign against Brasília, supporters of the new capital successfully used the national media to promote the city.

As president, Kubitschek employed both the traditional behind-the-scenes patronage politics and a sophisticated media campaign aimed at generating popular support for the construction of the new capital.¹²⁸ Although Brasília's massive expense sparked intense opposition, the city's critics could not compete with the Kubitschek administration's relentless campaign to convince key sectors of Brazilian society to support the costly undertaking. The project's advocates articulated a clear set of practical justifications for building Brasília. At least as important in generating popular support, however, was the long history of the idea to build a new capital in the interior. Repeated

¹²⁶ Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*, 147. and Vaitman, *Quanto custou Brasília?*

¹²⁷ Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*, 150.

¹²⁸ There is a considerable body of research on various aspects of the Kubitschek administration. Among the most important analyses are: Gomes, ed., *O Brasil de JK*, Lafer, "The Planning Process and the Political System in Brazil: A Study of Kubitschek's Target Plan, 1956-1961", Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*, Sheldon Maram, "Juscelino Kubitschek and the Politics of Exuberance, 1956-1961," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 27, no. 1 (1990), Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina*, Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil 1930-1964: An Experiment in Democracy*, 163-86.

references to the capital's rootedness in Brazil's spiritual and secular heritage proved to be an important strategy in the effort to persuade Brazilians to support the monumental undertaking. By stressing continuity with the national past, Brasília's advocates imbued the city with a degree of legitimacy that appealed to various sectors in society, particularly the military, much of which opposed Kubitschek. Opponents of Brasília feared that the large expenditures required by the rushed construction schedule would bring economic ruin. Kubitschek answered his critics by arguing that the capital was already a century overdue. According to the logic of Brasília's advocates, the fact that the capital *should* have been built by previous governments justified the rushed pace of construction and the accompanying sacrifices.¹²⁹ Transferring the capital to the Planalto Central marked the birth of a "new Brazil, in short a rectified Brazil, installed in its interior, put where it should always be." Brasília would bring about a "shock" to the nation, to bring about, "a necessary and urgent transformation...in the way Brazilians think and feel, waking them up, making them more attracted to private enterprise, instilling in them a greater desire to improve the indices of our productivity."¹³⁰ Kubitschek rejected the recommendations of the IMF to institute economic shock therapy to combat rising inflation, however, Dr. Kubitschek used the same metaphor to explain the no less radical and disconcerting course of treatment he prescribed for the nation: to alter profoundly and permanently the economic, social, and cultural geography of the nation, to invert the historic power dynamics between Brazil's regions.

¹²⁹ "Brasília já devia estar concluída há um século," speech by Juscelino Kubitschek printed in *Diário Carioca* 5 January 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

¹³⁰ Juscelino Kubitschek, speech delivered in São Paulo during the Primeira Semana Nacional Mudancista, printed in *Brasília* No. 3 (March 1957): 1-2.

Essential to Brasília's success was the propaganda campaign that convinced many Brazilians that the new capital would accelerate their ongoing journey toward order and progress. This effort depended in large part on the construction of a mythical official vision of Brasília that combined spiritual with secular elements to firmly root the new city in national traditions. Brasília's promoters sought to depict the city as the realization of the nation's destiny, proof that Brazil was fated to join the ranks of the world's great powers. The key was economic development, and Brasília furthered that goal in both material and spiritual terms: by providing an impetus for development of the interior, strengthening national identity, and by altering Brazilians' perception of themselves as residents of the Third World. Later chapters will assess the success of these promises; the task at hand is to understand why and how Brasília came into being.

IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The variety of nationalism that took hold after the Revolution of 1930 shaped the outlook of Brasília's planners, who answered Vargas's call for a westward march in the 1940s to integrate the isolated interior and tap its economic potential. Congressman Fernando Ferrari of the PTB¹³¹ viewed Brasília as a necessary step toward the nation's achievement of full independence. Only by shifting focus away from the coast toward the interior would Brazil realize its potential as a great nation. Although Brazil had achieved political independence in 1822, adherents of developmental nationalism¹³² believed that

¹³¹ Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro, the party of Vice President João Goulart, was in a coalition with Kubitschek's PSD (Partido Social Democrático). Vargas created the two parties, representing different aspects of his legacy, after redemocratization in 1945.

¹³² There is an extensive literature on the subject of developmental nationalism. For example, see Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil 1930-1964: An Experiment in Democracy.*, pp 163-186; and Benevides, *O governo Kubitschek: desenvolvimento econômico e estabilidade política, 1956-1961*, Cardoso, *Ideologia do desenvolvimento - Brasil: JK-JQ.*

the nation continued to exist in a semi-colonial state, occupying an inferior position vis-à-vis the North Atlantic powers. Brazil exported raw materials and imported manufactured goods and ideas. True independence required a change in both material and spiritual terms.

President Kubitschek relentlessly promoted his agenda for achieving the “fifty years of progress” during his term. Kubitschek’s preoccupation—some might say obsession—was the achievement of “development”, to propel Brazil out of the Third World through rapid economic growth. Relying on nationalistic language, Kubitschek promised that he would bring the economic liberation of Brazil, believing that growth would redound to the benefit all sectors of society. Expressing an unbreakable faith in his nation’s potential, Kubitschek told his countrymen that poverty was a stage to be overcome, not a permanent condition to which multiethnicity doomed the nation. In addition to the material improvements prescribed by the Target Program, Kubitschek repeatedly spoke of the need to increase Brazilians’ “self-esteem”: convincing his compatriots that their nation was great and the new capital a necessary step toward making that a reality. To Kubitschek, cultural and psychological factors were as important as material ones in the process of development. The goal could be met only if Brazilians joined together in a massive, coordinated effort to attainment of *grandeza* backwardness. Kubitschek promised to eliminate regional inequalities by bringing the benefits of “civilization” to the vast, sparsely populated interior. Rather than seeking to alter the distribution of wealth in Brazil, Kubitschek envisioned a revolution in which all gained; rich and poor alike would reap the benefits of development, there was little need to address social inequalities directly.

During the democratic period 1946-64, the ideology of developmental nationalism informed much of the policies enacted in Brazil. This was also, significantly, the period during which the nation shifted from a predominantly agricultural, rural society toward a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing new order. Developmental nationalism dominated political discourse in the middle of the twentieth century and found strong support among intellectuals, students, professionals, and the military. The Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB), an arm of the Ministry of Education and Culture, promoted the ideology and furnished the rationale behind Brasília's construction. Roland Corbisier, one of ISEB's co-founders, published a book titled *Brasília e o desenvolvimento nacional* in which he argued that development was a total process, involving economic as well as cultural components. Brasília's power lay in the fact that it targeted all of these areas. Corbisier defined development in the following terms: "although its content is economic and social, it is fundamentally political and ideological. It is about recuperating lost time and converting space into time, geography into history."¹³³ To developmental nationalists such as Corbisier, not only was culture an important component of development, it was perhaps more significant than economic policies. To achieve true prosperity required integration of the interior into both the material and spiritual life of the nation.

Developmental nationalism drew together various strains of thought. Positivism, which shaped the thinking of generations of Brazilians from the second half of the nineteenth century, certainly contributed to the preoccupation with the employment of rational planning and technical expertise to achieve peace—in this context a code word for order—and development, or progress. One government official characterized the

¹³³ Corbisier, *Brasília e o desenvolvimento nacional*.

reasons behind building Brasília in the following way: “They are not simply economic, social, political, [and] military; but above all historical, and represent, above all, the triumph of natural law.”¹³⁴ Viewing Brasília as part of a spiritual mandate is also entirely consistent with Positivism as it evolved in Brazil.¹³⁵ As described by one contemporary enthusiast, Brasília arose out of a “historical determinism” to become the “propulsory machine of *Progress*, over a base of *Order*.”¹³⁶

In Brazil the word “interior” has historically been (and remains) synonymous with backwardness and stagnation. Kubitschek promised his countrymen that the new capital would fundamentally alter material conditions in the interior and, by extension, perceptions of the vast region and its relationship to the coastal population centers. Brasília’s planners concerned themselves, above all, with integrating the west and north of Brazil into the nation’s economic and social life, thereby minimizing regional inequalities. Brasília provided the impetus for the construction of an extensive network of highways to link the city with the developed south. The roadways built between 1956 and the 1970s fundamentally transformed the Brazilian landscape, opening the vast Amazon region and the grasslands of western Brazil accessible to economic exploitation. Although the Amazon lies several hundred miles to the north of Brasília, its untapped potential has long inspired the romantic imaginations of Brazilian nationalists. In fact, the construction of Brasília contributed in no small part to the expansion in human

¹³⁴ Manoel Caetano Bandeira de Mello, Diretor do Serviço de Documentação do D.A.S.P., Introduction in Belcher, *Relatório*.

¹³⁵ Positivism was extraordinarily influential in late nineteenth-century Brazil. There is an extensive literature on positivism in Brazil. See, for example, João Cruz Costa, *Contribuição à história das idéias no Brasil: o desenvolvimento da filosofia no Brasil e a evolução histórica nacional*, ed. Octavio Tarquinio de Sousa, Coleção Documentos Brasileiros, vol. 86 (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1956), João Cruz Costa, *O positivismo na República: notas sobre a história do positivismo no Brasil*, *Brasiliana*, vol. 291 (São Paulo: Nacional, 1956).

¹³⁶ Domingos Filho, “Brasília: a grande metrópole.” Italics in original.

activity in the region during the last forty years (the long-term repercussions of Brasília are the subject of the epilogue). Simultaneous with the construction of Brasília was a highway connecting Brasília to the Amazonian port of Belém. Expansion of the national infrastructure into the Amazon region of northern Brazil provided a key rationale for the transfer of the national capital to the interior.

Kubitschek cultivated an image that emphasized his boundless optimism in Brazil's imminent greatness and infectious enthusiasm for accelerating the attainment of the nation's destiny as a real world power. According to developmental nationalist ideology, Brazil had yet to attain complete independence, and economic dependence on the industrialized north was the principal barrier for achieving development. Unlike their counterparts in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, by the 1950s Brazilian intellectuals and policy makers generally agreed that the nation's economic underdevelopment was due not to inferiority inherent in a multiracial society, but rather a stage to be surpassed en route to modernity. Although Kubitschek was a nationalist he was by no means a radical; he sought to improve Brazil's position in the world capitalist system, not to change or withdraw from that system. Kubitschek firmly believed that Brazil was destined to become a world power and that economic growth was the key to achieving that goal/destiny. While he angered more radical nationalists by depending on foreign investment to finance his proposals, to Kubitschek, Brasília was a necessary step along the road to development. Although it required tremendous sacrifice, he promised that the new capital would accelerate the arrival of a better future.

SELLING BRASÍLIA

Kubitschek and his allies relentlessly promoted Brasília. During the period of construction the president and his surrogates courted powerful sectors in society and used the media to communicate the message of Brasília to the larger public. The pro-Brasília campaign proved so intense that Federal Deputy Herbert Levi (UDN-MG) complained that, “the opposition cannot remain contrary to the vast official propaganda that the government has been transmitting through newspapers, radio, and television.”¹³⁷ Every day newspapers throughout Brazil published articles detailing the new capital’s progress. Novacap officials toured the country delivering lectures on Brasília for both the public and targeted groups. The city’s planners made numerous appearances on the nation’s radio and television. (Figure 9) The president even managed to persuade the always serious Oscar Niemeyer to appear on the program “This Is Your Life” on TV Tupi.¹³⁸ In early 1958, when construction of Brasília was still in an early phase, the government established an office of Radio Nacional with a staff of forty-two to broadcast four hours of programming daily from the future capital.¹³⁹ The government leveraged its control of a considerable share of Brazilian broadcast media to prevent transmission of criticisms of Brasília. For example, government-owned or -controlled broadcasters were not permitted to play the 1958 samba “I’m not Going to Brasília,” which included the lyrics “I’m not going to Brasília / I won’t take my family there / I’m no jungle Indian, / I haven’t a hole

¹³⁷ “O monólogo do govêrno,” *Diário de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 7 March 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-1).

¹³⁸ “JK convenceu Niemeyer a comparacer à televisão” *Diário da Noite* (Rio de Janeiro) 7 January 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.01.Z Box 0660).

¹³⁹ “A Rádio Nacional vai falar da Nova Capital,” *O Popular* (Goiânia) 8 February 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-1).

in my lip.”¹⁴⁰ Although the government sometimes resorted to censorship, for the most part it countered Brasília’s critics by propagating an image of the city as a panacea for the nation’s ills. The administration both directly disseminated pro-Brasília propaganda and encouraged the publication of positive depictions of the undertaking in the national media. While a vocal minority railed against Brasília’s excessive costs and hurried pace, coverage of the construction served to secure public support for the project and the Kubitschek government more generally.



Figure 9.

"Brasília is a reality". Israel Pinheiro (at left) appearing on TV Tupi to promote Brasília. Unknown author, Unknown date (1957-60). Source: ArPDF Nov.D.04.04.D.02 ficha 3599

¹⁴⁰ Various newspapers reported on censorship of criticisms of Brasília. See, for example, *Tribuna da Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro) and *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) 31 October 1957 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0657), and *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 31 March 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-1).

Scenes of the president in a hard hat touring the massive construction site and embracing the enthusiastic construction workers appeared in newspapers and footage carried on television and in newsreels played in movie theaters across Brazil. For those who could not visit the remote construction site the footage helped convey the scale of the undertaking, the drama inherent in the erection of a complete city in less than four years on the desolate Planalto Central, “the largest empty space I’ve ever seen,” as Aldous Huxley reportedly described it.¹⁴¹

The president enlisted his political allies to deliver talks justifying the capital in centers of higher education and planned exhibitions showcasing the city that toured Brazil and abroad during the construction period. Ernesto Silva, one of Novacap’s four directors, gave lectures about Brasília at the Biblioteca do Exército and the headquarters of the Polícia Militar in Rio, and the Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas at the Universidade de Recife. Kubitschek proudly played host to numerous visitors to the construction site. Since construction on the presidential palace began in October 1956—five full months before Novacap closed the contest to choose the urban plan—Kubitschek was able to receive important visitors to the chaotic construction site in the stunningly elegant Palace of the Dawn. He used his shining new presidential Viscount airplane to dispatch visitors from Rio and São Paulo to the Planalto Central in comfort and in just a few hours. (Oscar Niemeyer, terrified of flying, rarely left Brasília before its inauguration, when he did, choosing the arduous overland route). During the period of construction the president played host to foreign dignitaries as well as Brazilian politicians, union officials, business leaders, students, and military officers. Kubitschek

¹⁴¹ Huxley visited Brasília in 1958. Discussion of his visit is found in chapter four. This quote appears in various sources, including *Diário de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 21 October 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

invited students, artists, and architects to the city to stimulate interest. Columnist Benjamin Costallat mocked the president's use of the presidential airplane to bring a group of twenty-two society women from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília in a *Jornal do Brasil* article titled "The Picnic in the Sky". The president spared no expense to enlist these women's support for the new capital, wining and dining them during their day trip to Brasília aboard the luxurious ultramodern four-engine Viscount. Apparently the journey paid off: Costallat concluded that the women, "returned enamored and from now on will be the greatest promoters and propagandists of the miracle of the future Capital."¹⁴² The president used similar visits to host business leaders in hopes of persuading them to invest in Brasília and brought in journalists to encourage positive coverage of the construction process.

Henrique Pongetti, a prominent newspaper columnist and frequent critic of Kubitschek, became an early supporter of Brasília. Writing in *O Globo*, one of the nation's leading newspaper, Pongetti concluded that the 1957 reissue of the Cruls Commission's 1894 report served as, "complete and undeniable evidence of the correctness of moving the capital of Brazil – an old dream of patriots." Referring to the construction site, demarcated by Cruls and confirmed by two additional surveys conducted in the early 1950s, Pongetti called it, "the place demarcated by God and by logic."¹⁴³ Thus in Pongetti's eyes, providence, not Juscelino Kubitschek and his tight-knit circle of allies from Minas Gerais, had mandated the transfer of Brazil's capital to the plains of central Brazil. Kubitschek served merely as a catalyst for building Brasília;

¹⁴² Benjamin Costallat, "O piquenique aéreo," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 21 October 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

¹⁴³ Henrique Pongetti, "Razões," in *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 31 October 1957 (ArPDF Nov.D.05.01.Z, Box 0657).

to his opponents the fact that he had not originated the idea to move the capital made supporting him more palatable.

A further aspect of the government's pervasive efforts to promote Brasília was through numerous officially produced or sanctioned exhibitions and publications. In March of 1957 Novacap organized the first "Semana Nacional Mudancista" (National Pro-Brasília Week) at the Universidade do Brasil in São Paulo. During the event Novacap officials delivered lectures about the new capital to the students and members of the public. Various dignitaries participated in the conference, including members of Congress, Clovis Salgado, the Minister of Education, and Cardinal Dom Carlos Carmelo de Vasconcelos Mota, the Archbishop of São Paulo. Novacap had offices in the Ministry of Education and Culture, itself an important early example of modernist architecture, designed in 1937 by a group of young Brazilians, including Costa and Niemeyer, in collaboration with the iconic Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier. In this impressive building in central Rio de Janeiro a permanent exhibit offered details about Brasília, including the cost (insisting, as its promoters always did, that city would be self-financing, that the government would recoup the expenses by selling real estate in the new capital), statistics on workers, and models of the plan and architecture. Exhibitions that showcased the new capital's radical design with models, sketches, and photographs traveled the country. In January 1957 Novacap began publishing *Brasília*, a glossy monthly magazine promoting the capital and aimed at a general audience. *Brasília* detailed the construction process with extensive maps and photographs and published commentary in support of the project. Until October 1958 subscriptions were available free of charge; after that point demand proved so high that Novacap began charging for

the magazine. Those involved in the construction of Brasília exhibited a widespread belief that they were part of a historically significant undertaking that ought to be documented for posterity.¹⁴⁴ This attitude is noteworthy, since Brazilians have until recently showed relatively low concern with preserving the nation's historical patrimony.¹⁴⁵ Beyond publishing *Brasília*, from the first day Novacap took pains to collect, classify, and disseminate official documents related to the city's construction as well as media coverage, both Brazilian and foreign.

The effort to preserve the history of the new capital culminated with the 1983 opening of the Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal (ArPDF) on the site of the original Novacap campus to preserve and make this material available to the public.¹⁴⁶ Since its foundation the ArPDF has added to its collection by conducting oral interviews and continuing to amass and disseminate materials, print and audiovisual, documenting Brasília's construction.¹⁴⁷ The attention given to preservation of Brasília's history fit within Kubitschek's larger efforts at documenting his government. In late 1959 the presidential Serviço de Documentação began publishing the eleven-volume *Coleção Brasília*, a series of primary documents dedicated to various aspects of the new capital, such as historical antecedents, domestic and international media opinions about the new capital, and day-by-day accounts of the construction process. These publications added

¹⁴⁴ Historian Daryle Williams has studied historical preservationism during the Vargas era. See Daryle Williams, "Ad perpetuum rei memorium: The Vargas Regime and Brazil's National Historical Patrimony, 1930-45," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 31, no. 2 (1994), Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁵ Eakin, "Cultural Amnesia: Systematically Erasing the History of Brazilian Industrialization."

¹⁴⁶ Novacap continues to exist, maintaining its original headquarters. Now a part of the local government of Brasília, Novacap oversees certain aspects of the Federal District's administration.

¹⁴⁷ The existence of such an extensive and well-preserved historical archive is relatively uncommon in Brazil. Perhaps this helps explain why, despite the dozens of books published on Brasília by Brazilian authors, until now no one made systematic use of the ArPDF's rich collection. Extensive published primary documents are probably an additional explanation. The ArPDF's holdings provided the bulk of the primary sources used in this dissertation. See Introduction for a detailed discussion of archives.

to the more than thirty volumes the Serviço de Documentação had already published detailing the day-to-day activities of the Kubitschek government.

THE PROMISE OF BRASÍLIA

Perhaps the most effective rhetorical device employed by Brasília's advocates was their insertion of the city into a clear narrative of Brazilian history. The use of history to justify its construction attracted supporters who normally disagreed with Kubitschek. Justifications that emphasized the city's continuity with the nation's spiritual and secular past allowed Kubitschek to transcend ideological divisions. Brasília's advocates cast the capital as a timeless question, not tied to any particular ideological agenda or social class, but rooted in the very soul of the nation. In this way the capital's advocates managed to attract a broad base of support in Brazilian society. Although Brasília was part of an explicitly political agenda, its deep historical roots allowed Kubitschek to transcend ideology and unite diverse groups in society during a very divisive era. While a vocal minority continued to attack the new capital, Kubitschek and his promoters managed to convince most Brazilians that the undertaking was justified, if not in political or economic terms, then by virtue of its illustrious pedigree.

Brasília's boosters envisioned the city as part of an epic struggle against backwardness and underdevelopment. President Kubitschek explained the importance of Brasília in the following way: "The philosophy of my government is the fight for development. This would not be possible if we fail to conquer the six million square kilometers that remain totally deserted and unknown."¹⁴⁸ Brasília's supporters spoke of

¹⁴⁸ "JK acorda a gigante," interview with Kubitschek published in *Manchete* No. 407 (6 February 1960): 57.

the new capital as the key to making Brazil realize its destiny as a great nation. By depicting Brasília as a war necessitating national cooperation and mobilization, the city's planners sought to justify the real human toll the undertaking required. Workers of all social classes, from distant regions, joined together in a common effort to build a better future for Brazil. It was, as Pinheiro described it, a "constructive revolution," the "battle to construct a New Capital worthy of our Fatherland and its proportions, in a virgin location, one thousand kilometers removed from the great [urban] centers." In the Planalto Central the workers used "new and shining weapons" to combat the "inferiority rooted in the colonial past, the sense of incapacity for freedom, the fear of independent expansion." At long last, due to "God's mercy," Brasília was "driving Brazilians toward a new understanding of the problems and the men of Brazil."¹⁴⁹ They were soldiers united in a common struggle against backwardness, embodied in the formidable Brazilian geography and landscape, engaged in a military-style campaign to bring civilization to the interior.

The inaugural ceremony described at the beginning of this chapter offers insight into the ways in which Brasília's planners deliberately established connections between the city and the nation's past. The carefully crafted vision they propagated placed the new capital within a teleological vision of Brazilian history in which the new capital occupied a central piece of a divinely inspired plan for the nation's future *grandeza*. The discourse and iconography of Brasília established firm links to secular heroes of the past while at the same time depicting it as the centerpiece of God/Nature's plan for Brazil. As shown in chapter one, the idea of building a capital in the Planalto does indeed have a

¹⁴⁹ Israel Pinheiro, "Revolução construtiva", speech delivered upon presenting Kubitschek with the key to Brasília, 20 April 1960, published in Israel Pinheiro, *Discursos*, Rio de Janeiro: Bloch, n.d., 7-13.

well-documented and long history, but the official narrative includes certain deliberate omissions and distortions of the historical record. It is therefore quite revealing to question the particular decisions Brasília's planners made in representing the city's place in national history, paying close attention to the choice of historical references and the use of symbols and language. Ubiquitous religious references provided a foundation of spiritual legitimacy for the ultra-modern city.

Brasília represented at once rupture and continuity with the national past. The new capital's supporters put forth a deterministic view of history in which Brasília figured as a necessary step in completing the process of colonization stalled for more than a century. As the inaugural mass illustrates, Kubitschek made a conscious effort to insert Brasília into a comprehensive narrative of the nation's history, beginning with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500. Brasília represented the continuation of the process of conquest and colonization initiated by the Portuguese but left incomplete by them and by subsequent generations of Brazilians who continued to concentrate along the coast, lacking faith in the interior's infinite potential and the courage to exploit it. According to this logic, Brazil had never achieved meaningful independence because generations of selfish, timid leaders had impeded that nation's progress, postponing its development. Two very different Brazils thus continued to exist side by side in the twentieth century: one coastal and civilized, the other interior and inert. Kubitschek, a medical doctor by training, prescribed shock therapy for the nation, with the goal of forcing the "two Brazils" to finally confront one another. Brasília's inauguration on 21 April 1960 marked that fateful confrontation. A journalist who attended the inaugural ceremony described its symbolic content in the following terms:

Brasília was the point where, at that moment, two Nations crossed paths: one, 460 years old, coastal, stagnant, pessimistic, underdeveloped; another, newly born, courageous, confident, optimistic, energetic. The exact moment of their encounter was when the National Anthem played, following the Papal delegate's celebration of the Holy Eucharist, making the crowd's skin tingle, on their knees and with tears in their eyes.¹⁵⁰

To its promoters the new capital represented the, “liberation of the federal capital from the negative and exclusionary forces” that dominated life in Rio de Janeiro. Brasília would provide, “a vigorous psychological impact, to liberate the interior... like Independence liberated the colony from the exploitation of the metropolis, moving the government would liberate the interior from the slavery of the coast.”¹⁵¹ Attentive to the powerful interests on the coast, Pinheiro made sure to point out that the gains resulting from the development of the interior would reinvigorate the coastal area, providing cheap agricultural products and a market for Brazil's growing industry. For the first time in history, a revolution would be completely constructive. The enemy in the war for development was conveniently inanimate. All citizens of Brazil would benefit; the only victims were the flora and fauna sacrificed along the path to development and the martyred workers who fell along the way.

Brasília was a projection of the potential of Brazil. It was a stylized representation, conceived of by architects—preoccupied with artistic concerns above all and constrained by considerable material challenges and the pressure of a tight schedule—for the seat of the federal government. Thus the monumental aspects of the city and creating the necessary infrastructure to support the city and link it to the rest of the nation took precedence. Housing was at a premium as the residential aspects of the

¹⁵⁰ Murilo Melo Filho, “Aqui e agora começa o novo Brasil,” in *O Manchete*, 420 (7 May 1960): p. 37.

¹⁵¹ Israel Pinheiro, “Porque se impõe a mudança da Capital,” *Brasília*, June 1957.

plan progressed slowly compared to the governmental buildings and ad hoc structures housed the workers in difficult circumstances. The construction companies erected enormous tent towns and fed workers in large mess halls. In this respect Brasília resembled a highly organized military operation. There was a less controlled, lawless “Wild West” side to Brasília as well. Novacap not only controlled all aspects of the construction process, it was also charged with enforcing order in the future federal district since February 1957 when the state of Goiás transferred the territory to the union. Until the official inauguration in April 1960, Brasília existed in a peculiar kind of legal limbo; since it lacked regular juridical status, births and deaths in the district had to be registered elsewhere, most frequently in the nearby town of Formosa. Social services were provided by the *Pioneiras Sociais* (Social Pioneers), a volunteer organization headed by the wives of Kubitschek and Pinheiro, which provided what little medical care was available in a small clinic and several converted buses known as “traveling hospitals.”

Brazil’s population of African descent, its largest and most impoverished minority, is conspicuously absent in both the vision of Brasília’s planners and in discussions about the new capital. Afro-Brazilians represented a large proportion of the unskilled and skilled laborers, especially but not only from the northeast, who migrated to Brasília. Among the professionals involved in the project, there were very few of African descent.

Despite the widespread belief in racial democracy in Brazil, Brasília made little or no room for Afro-Brazilians. The most striking evidence of this fact, of the continuation of policies of the past, was the fact that the government pursued policies of populating the

new capital, at least in part, with foreign immigrants. Because contemporaries used the word “migrante” to refer to all newcomers, both from other regions of Brazil and abroad, it is sometimes difficult to know the national origins of migrants to Brasília.

Nonetheless, Novacap instituted a policy to recruit Japanese farmers to create an agricultural industry to supply residents of the new capital, thus continuing an explicitly racist policy first implemented by the state of São Paulo, and later the federal government, beginning in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵² While some of these farmers apparently came directly to the Planalto from Japan, others of Japanese descent came from southeastern Brazil. When the Japanese prince visited the site of the new capital he stopped to see the agricultural enclave constructed by Japanese-Brazilian farmers outside the federal district in neighboring Goiás. (Figure 10).

¹⁵² See Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).



Figure 10.

Fomati plantation near Brasília, 17 March 1958. Those pictured include Iris Meinberg (second from left) and Mário David Menequette (far right).

Photo by Mário Fontenelle. Source: ArPDF D.04.04.C.03 ficha 2592.

In an interview with the *Jornal do Comércio*, Chief of the Foreign Ministry (Itamarati)'s Immigration Service, Manuel Emílio Guilhon, shows how the federal government was still, in 1959, pursuing a policy of attracting European immigrants. The future capital was the destination for a number of these, mostly of Italian and Portuguese origins. To Guilhon, attracting quality immigrants made it all the more imperative that Brasília be a desirable, modern place to live. "To attract immigrants," he told the newspaper, "above all Europeans, for the colonizing task, it is necessary that Brazil

makes a concerted effort toward making the investments required to bring into being a well elaborated plan.”¹⁵³

Press coverage of Brazilian migrants to the new capital stood in marked contrast to their foreign counterparts. The overwhelmingly positive tenor of the coverage of the skilled and foreign workers in Brasília stood in contrast to poor, unskilled, unschooled northeasterners who threatened to overrun the future capital, turning it into one gigantic refugee camp. Although the Novacap leadership and Kubitschek constantly praised the workers for their patriotic contribution to the “constructive revolution,” away from the cameras and journalists using its private army, the Guardia Especial de Brasília (GEB)¹⁵⁴ used whatever means necessary to discipline the labor force.

Martial imagery was central to the pro-Brasília propaganda campaign and proved persuasive to key sectors in Brazilian society, as well as proving useful in motivating and controlling the workers. The military overwhelmingly supported improving Brazil’s inadequate infrastructure, especially in the more remote regions, and had long backed construction of an inland capital. It was especially critical for Kubitschek to cater to the military, since a significant percentage of the officer corps had backed a plan to step in and prevent Kubitschek from taking office. The middle classes, an important segment in Brazilian politics in the late 1950s and a group that tended not to support Kubitschek, generally approved of Brasília. Preoccupied as they were with the trappings of modernity, white collar urban residents could not help but feel a twinge of pride at the frenzied pace of progress being made in Brasilia in theory, but worried about excessive

¹⁵³ JC June 9 1959 “Brasília exige nova política imigratória” ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0665 (Junho-Julho 1959)

¹⁵⁴ In December 1958 Novacap reorganized the ineffectual Divisão de Segurança Pública and created the more militaristic GEB.

costs born out of the ambitious timeframe. Images of parading tractors and dump trucks in military formation and workers in hard hats welding massive steel girders reinforced the idea that Brazil was beginning to exhibit the characteristics of a modern developed nation, worthy of respect and power in the world. The next chapter centers on the contemporary reception of the plan in Brazil.

A primary goal of Brasília was to populate the interior and tap its economic potential. It picked up where the Estado Novo's (1937-45) "Westward March" left off, seeking to occupy and economically exploit unpopulated regions in order to prevent outsiders from coming in.¹⁵⁵ According to the official narrative of Brasília, the Portuguese, a maritime people, had never managed to effectively settle the interior. Brazil owed its enormous territory not to the Portuguese colonizers, but rather to the *bandeirantes*. In an influential 1955 comparison of territorial expansion in the United States and Brazil, intellectual Clodomir Vianna Moog contrasted the constructive legacy of the North American pioneer with the extractive activities of the Brazilian *bandeirantes*, who were above all nomadic and rarely founded permanent settlements in the interior.¹⁵⁶ Brasília's supporters sought to rehabilitate the image of the *bandeirante*. No longer was he a parasitic opportunist, rather the spiritual father of the twentieth-century pioneers who converged on the Planalto Central of Goiás to build a revolutionary new capital. To Osvaldo Orico, author of numerous pro-Brasília publications, "Brasília is an act of *bandeirismo*. A task for pioneers. Conquest or reconquest. Above all, march

¹⁵⁵ "Ocupar para não entregar", translated as "occupy so as to not give up", was the mantra of the March to the West campaign of the 1940s.

¹⁵⁶ Clodomir Vianna Moog, *Bandeirantes e pioneiros: paralelo entre duas culturas*, 19th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Graphia, 2000).

and possession.”¹⁵⁷ By continuing the colonial project they suggested continuity with that history while breaking the long-standing tendency of Brazilians to remain concentrated along the coast like crabs, while the vast interior remained “forgotten” and “abandoned.”¹⁵⁸

Those who flocked to work on the new capital’s construction were, in the words of Pinheiro, young idealists above all, motivated by their faith and confidence in Brazil’s future. They desired to participate in the monumental undertaking. Infused with the “spirit of Brasília,” these “soldiers” for Brazil’s future operated under a self-imposed discipline, willingly subordinating their individual welfare to the greater good. Pinheiro described the construction climate as follows:

Everything happened like in a battle. The team organized itself along the natural hierarchy of combat, according to the discipline of war. From there arose the false impression of authoritarian organization. In reality what existed was that feeling of discipline imposed by the circumstances and made possible by the confidence, faith, and enthusiasm in each of us, mobilized to realize the greatest urban construction project of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁹

The first task in the effort to connect Brasília to the nation’s transportation infrastructure was to build a road linking the new capital to the nearest paved road and railroad depot at the city of Anápolis, more than 150 kilometers away, en route to the Goiânia. Simultaneously construction began on the most ambitious road project hitherto implemented in the country: a highway leading due north from Brasília, traversing more than 2000 km of territory, most of it dense jungle, to city of Belém, where the Amazon river empties into the Atlantic. Kubitschek hoped to complete an even more monumental

¹⁵⁷ Osvaldo Orico, “Interpretação de Brasília,” *Brasília* No. 10 (October 1957): 1.

¹⁵⁸ Since the colonial period writers from and about Brazil have frequently employed the crab metaphor to describe its uneven settlement. Supporters of Brasília frequently described the interior as “forgotten” and “abandoned”.

¹⁵⁹ Israel Pinheiro, “Espírito de Brasília” in Tamanini, *Brasília: memória da construção*.

road project before his term in office, the Acre-Brasília highway, which would connect the new capital to the far west of the Amazon region, in the city of Rio Branco, capital of the state of Acre, not far from the borders with Bolivia and Peru. The Acre-Brasília highway was delayed until the 1970s. However, the two teams that had set off from the termini of the Belém-Brasília highway met in the dense jungle in the state of Maranhão in January 1959. While an enormous swath had been cut through the forest, the road was not fully paved and maintaining it from efforts of the jungle to reclaim it has since been an ongoing struggle.

The triumph represented by the completion of the Belém-Brasília highway was tinged with sadness as it had brought the death of the vivacious Novacap director Bernardo Sayão, who oversaw the roadbuilding projects associated with the new capital. An engineer by training, Sayão was born in Rio but spent most of his life in Goiás, where he had overseen construction projects in the 1940s during Vargas's Westward March campaign. Tall, ruggedly handsome, and charismatic, Sayão was the embodiment of Brazilian confidence and potential, styled as the "New Bandeirante", the fearless conqueror of the forest who stood in marked conquest to the timid "crabs" who clung to the coast, and to the past. Crushed by a falling tree while in his tent alongside the highway in January 1959, Sayão was not the first to die in the construction of Brasília, he was the most famous and celebrated to fall in the struggle to create the "new Brazil". While most of those who died in construction or other accidents, or from violence committed at the hands of criminals or authorities, remained anonymous, Sayão's funeral attracted thousands of mourners to the Igrejinha, the first chapel in Brasília, designed by Niemeyer at the urging of first lady Sara Kubitschek. A pattern repeated in a more

somber setting than usual the common gathering of Kubitschek, military personnel, construction workers, to attend mass and commemorate through ritual the construction of Brasília.

Bernardo Sayão, the charismatic Novacap director charged with roadway construction, became the first martyr to the cause when a falling tree crushed his tent deep in the Amazon forest along the Belém-Brasília highway. Thousands of *candangos* mourned Sayão's death in January 1959. At the funeral, Kubitschek said that Sayão had fallen,

in the battle for the new Brazil.... [H]is name is part of legend; he is one of [our] national heroes.... He was the commander of the battle that will extract the Amazon from its prison, which will bring that large, obscure and important region of our Fatherland out of pre-history.

His death represented, “the vengeance of nature against this modern bandeirante, this incomparable explorer.”¹⁶⁰

The image of Brasília as a peaceful war against backwardness allowed Kubitschek to appease sectors of society who desired rapid and decisive change. At the same time, however, the historical roots of the proposal to move the capital served to sway more conservative sectors and society and assuage their fears about the breakneck speed at which Kubitschek operated. The president was a political moderate; Brasília was not just a war against underdevelopment, but a practical and constitutional imperative. At the opening of the exhibition on Brasília in Rio's Ministry of Education and Culture, Kubitschek stated that,

Brasília is not an improvisation, it is the result of maturation. It is not just the relocation of a capital but the announcement of reform. Brazil

¹⁶⁰ Juscelino Kubitschek, *Brasília*, January 1959.

needed...a reform in everything—reform in its political customs, reform in its concept of a paternalist state.... We will not merely conquer—extending the benefits of our civilization—a large and blessed part of our land, valuing a fertile region, with a temperate climate, we will change, by virtue of healthy vigor.... [T]he rhythm of our work will become faster and more intense, nothing will distract us...from our duty which is to elevate Brazil to the place it deserves but does not enjoy in the international arena.¹⁶¹

Religious references intertwined with mentions of Brasília's secular heritage. The sign of the cross (a recurrent image in the iconography and discourse of Brasília) both highlighted the city's spiritual roots and stressed continuity with the process of colonization that had been left unfinished by previous generations. While the cross is obviously a symbol of Christianity, it is also linked to the history of European colonization, specifically the Iberian conquest of the Americas. Costa recognized the importance of this symbolism. In the introduction to his pilot plan for Brasília (Figure 11):

¹⁶¹ "Brasília não é improvisação: resulta de um amadurecimento," *Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro) 22 January 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J 01).

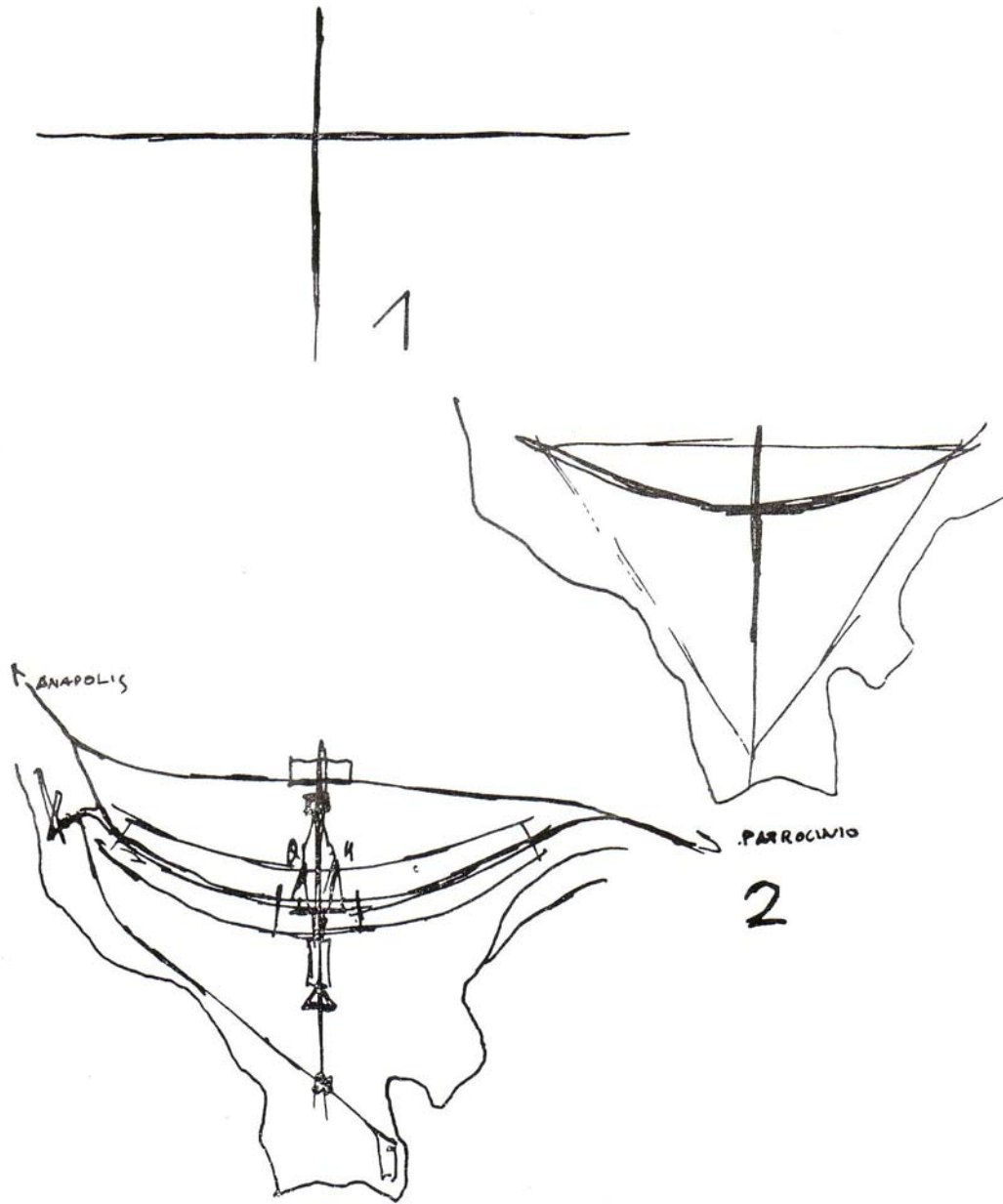


Figure 11.

Sketch showing evolution of the monumental axes. From Lucio Costa, *Relatório*, p. 19.

Founding a city in the wilderness is a deliberate act of conquest, a gesture after the manner of the pioneering colonial tradition.... This is particularly so because the city will not be a result of regional planning but the cause of it: its foundation will lead, later, to the planned development of the whole region.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Costa, *Relatório do Plano Piloto de Brasília*.

With the new capital, therefore, Brazilians would at last conquer and populate the interior, a plan God had mandated but man had failed to fulfill. The design of the city itself emphasized the sign of the cross and the city's place within broader regional development. Rather than drawing people into the city, Brasília's urban plan sought to accelerate movement through the city and distribute populations along the axes, thereby preventing the creation of a "megalopolis" like labyrinthine and polluted Rio and São Paulo. Costa explained the symbolic rationale behind the two intersecting axes that form the foundation of Brasília's urban plan as follows: "Basically, it was born of the primary gesture of one who marks or takes possession of a place: two axes crossing at right angles; the very sign of the cross."¹⁶³ Although people commonly liken the urban plan of Brasília to an airplane or a bird, the only analogy made by Costa was to the cross. The curvature of the residential axis arose from the planner's adaptation of the design to the topography.¹⁶⁴

Brasília's promoters carefully depicted their city as the heir not only to heroes of the Brazilian past, but at the same time positioned it within the context of international traditions in urban planning. Costa claimed varied influences on his plan for Brasília: in addition to colonial Brazilian baroque, he pointed to Paris, the English Garden Movement, imperial China, and New York's Greyhound station.¹⁶⁵ The 1958 government publication *When Capitals Move* places Brasília at the end of a long list of "artificial" or planned national capitals including Alexandria, Peking, Constantinople, Madrid, Washington, and Ankara.¹⁶⁶ By drawing explicit linkages from great

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁶⁴ Carpintero, "Brasília: prática e teoria urbanística no Brasil 1956-1998".

¹⁶⁵ Maria Elisa Costa, ed., *Com a palavra, Lucio Costa* (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2001), 93.

¹⁶⁶ José Osvaldo de Meira Penna, *Quando mudam os capitais* (Rio de Janeiro: Novacap, 1958).

civilizations of the past, the text transmits the capital's promoters' belief that Brasília was essential to ensuring Brazil's future greatness. Brazil, they believed, was destined to join the ranks of the august civilizations detailed in the book.

Colonization is a recurrent theme in the discourse of Brasília. This was the goal of the “constructive revolution”: to incorporate economically and culturally the interior into the nation, to rectify the tension between interior and exterior. In short, to shift the balance of power that had historically existed between the coast and the inland territory, a wide gap that separated the two Brazils. The vast expanses of land lying, in the eyes of those who built Brasília, long neglected by the decision makers on the coast. The interior belonged to Brazil thanks to the rustic indomitable (and, yes, savage too) *bandeirantes* who served as early transmitters of Portuguese culture (albeit in a hybrid form) to the backlands. The builders of Brasília saw, and projected an image of, themselves as picking up where these pioneers had left off more than three centuries before. The construction of Brasília inspired a series of neo-bandeiras throughout the country. For example, the Sociedade Geográfica Brasileira of São Paulo organized a group they called the “Bandeira Juscelino Kubitschek” to explore southern Pará and study conditions for colonization of that region, hitherto occupied by members of the Araguaia and Xingu indigenous groups.¹⁶⁷

Participants in the construction frequently spoke about the “sprit of Brasília” that guided and propelled the unrelenting pace of work. Unexplained phenomena surfaced regularly in discussions about the new capital of Brazil and combine to make the city seem like the realization of a destiny. Brasília's planners sought to convey the notion that

¹⁶⁷ CM 16 may 1959 “Partindo êste mês bandeira pretende colonizar Amazônia e Brasil Central” ArPDF Nov. D. 04.01.Z (Feb-May 1959) box no. 0662 (vol 17)

they were acting not out of free will, but motivated instead by unseen forces. The apparent spontaneity of Kubitschek's decision to build Brasília during a campaign stop in 1955 is an example of how he sought to deemphasize his ownership of the project. Lucio Costa also claimed to have been an unwilling participant in the project. His design, as he described it, came to him as a coherent whole, a vision he felt compelled to share with the contest committee. "I am merely passing on a possible solution which was not sought but, so to speak, took shape almost spontaneously," he wrote.¹⁶⁸ The apparently unplanned origins of Brasília aided in Kubitschek's attempts to cast the city as predestined. This image of spontaneity represented a divergence from Kubitschek's normally methodical approach to government. The careful planning behind his Target Program contrasted with the impromptu image of Brasília.

Brasília was designed to achieve two principal objectives: to remove the nation's capital from Rio de Janeiro and to encourage settlement, or colonization, of the interior. By providing an impetus for unprecedented expansion in the nation's transportation and communications infrastructure, Brasília was the cornerstone in a coordinated policy of internal colonization. Although its planners wanted to limit growth of the city itself, they envisioned a mass migration from the crowded coastal centers and the establishment of settlements along the new highways. However, as seen later, while development of the interior did occur, it was characterized overall by large-scale enterprise and thus tended to inhibit social development of the region.

In a speech at the 1958 inauguration of the new presidential residence, the "Palace of the Dawn", Kubitschek encouraged his countrymen to focus on the nation's potential,

¹⁶⁸ Costa, *Relatório do Plano Piloto de Brasília*, 77.

its future greatness, rather than its current shortcomings. Brasília offered a concrete vision of that future and contributed directly to its realization. Speaking specifically to radical nationalists who argued that development would best be achieved through carving out an independent space within the world capitalist system, Kubitschek argued that,

the struggle for development should begin in our own country. And Brasília is one of the basic points for that battle to integrate Brazil's territory, to strengthen the nation. Brasília will not only result in the fulfillment of a constitutional provision: it is a mark, a campaign in the fight against underdevelopment. And it is more than that: it is the conquest of what had only been [part of Brazil] on paper only.¹⁶⁹

The war for development required the participation of all Brazilians. It was, in Pinheiro's words, "constructive revolution" from which all would benefit. Unlike in typical wars, however, the battle for Brasília would have no losers; the enemy was conveniently inanimate, the "indomitable nature" of the interior and the "obstacles of distances and low demographic indices."¹⁷⁰

In 1959 the Bloco Parlamentar Mudancista issued a manifesto to the Brazilian people in which it detailed the reasons behind the new capital. Of foremost importance to the parliamentarians was that Brasília would aid the development of the huge Amazon region, with an average population of less than one person per square kilometer. Beyond untapped economic potential, the underpopulated regions represented a potential danger to national unity and sovereignty. Congressional supporters of Brasília believed that the new capital's most important benefit would be its contribution to a process of "interiorization", a

¹⁶⁹ Speech by Kubitschek reprinted in "Apêlo à união em tôrno do Brasil," *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 1 July 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0658).

¹⁷⁰ Juscelino Kubitschek, speech marking the inauguration of a bridge linking the states of Goiás and Matto Grosso. Reprinted in "24 horas no Catete – Brasília: integração do homen do campo no Conjunto Nacional," *Última Hora* (São Paulo) 7 January 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J 01).

decisive instrument to correct the economic contrast, human inequality, the disparity in social structures, in sum, the total disequilibrium that bothers and retards us.... On the other side, the civilizing function of the seat of the Government serves as balance between the *Littoral*, with its modern civilization...and the *Interior*, in striking contrast, with two-thirds of our territory in a stage of under-development.¹⁷¹

The Bloco pushed openly for agrarian reform to accompany the opening of the interior. Such a policy is completely consistent with the vision of national development shared by those who supported the construction of Brasília. Indeed, a convincing argument could be made that such fundamental reform would be necessary to achieve the sweeping promises made by Brasília's promoters. Kubitschek, however, ultimately chose not to implement reforms that would redistribute wealth, and alienate powerful sectors in society, particularly his party's landowning base and the military. Although his economic policies did meet with considerable success (Brazil's industrial output increased by eighty-percent during Kubitschek's term in office), in keeping with tradition the wealthy and poor disproportionately bore costs and benefits. While a few gained enormously, the majority saw marginal improvements while facing rising inflation and social tensions. In the end, the vision of modernity and development embodied in Brasília proved quite persuasive to the majority of the Brazilian public. The following chapter explores how Brazilians received the plan to build the new capital.

¹⁷¹ Bloco Parlamentar Mudancista, "Manifesto ao povo brasileiro," *Brasília*, April 1959.

CHAPTER III

“MANY IN FAVOR, SOME AGAINST, ALL BENEFIT”:¹⁷² DOMESTIC RECEPTION

Today, the year 1958 figures in the Brazilian popular imagination as a golden age, their Camelot. In popular memory 1958 represented the apogee of the all too short Bossa Nova era, a time in which democracy and hope prevailed. In the eyes of author Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos, 1958 was the “year that never should have ended” and “The Brazilian was never as happy as he was in 1958.”¹⁷³ It is understandable why Brazilians today should look back to that year with such a rosy lens: the nation won its first World Cup victory and the series of crises that precipitated the military coup of 1964 had yet to commence (or, at least, to progress very far). According to sociologist Helena Bomeny shows how “*os anos JK*” (the Juscelino Kubitshek years), have become a popular expression that connotes a “time of culture, of musical comedy, of dances and of the optimism around an idea of nation, the ‘golden years’, source of nostalgia, inspires even television series.” The *anos JK* passed into social memory as an expression of freedom, of humor, of cultural fluorescence, of national development, of democracy.”¹⁷⁴

Dos Santos’s characterization of 1958 as a carefree era of boundless optimism, peace, and prosperity is in stark contrast to contemporary perspectives. In its first edition of the year, the carioca newspaper *Diário Trabalhista* ran a headline quoting a prediction made by federal deputy Raimundo Padilha that “1958 Will Be the Year of Hunger!” if

¹⁷² This is the text of a sign that greeted visitors to Brasília during its construction.

¹⁷³ Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos, *Feliz 1958: o ano que não devia terminar* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1998).

¹⁷⁴ Helena Bomeny, “Utopias da cidade: as capitais do modernismo,” in *O Brasil de JK*, ed. Angela de Castro Gomes (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2002), 201.

the government did not devote more resources to the agricultural sector.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, in the Brazilian northeast, the poorest region of the nation and victim to frequent droughts, 1958 was a year of particularly intense suffering.

Despite serious reservations, opponents Brasília soon recognized that the transfer of the capital was a fait accompli. The project's most vehement critics frequently prefaced their complaints by claiming to support the idea in principle, focusing instead on the way in which the Kubitschek government implemented the plan. The major issue for opponents was the financial burden the project imposed, a concern that increased as inflation soared during the second half of 1958, and northeasterners suffered a particularly devastating drought. Thus the opposition switched tactics: they sought to slow the pace of Brasília's construction rather than advocating complete abandonment of the project.

Public opinion on Brasília varied widely by geography. Not surprisingly, residents of Rio de Janeiro were the most vocal critics. As the federal capital and center of the national media, cariocas' opinions tended to dominate the national debates, receiving a disproportionate access to the press. Critics were not limited to Rio, however. Many members of the urban middle classes there and elsewhere believed the project to be overly burdensome on the national treasury. Although they recognized that the construction of a new capital was mandated by law and was laudable in theory, many believed that other priorities should come before undertaking such a costly project from scratch. In particular, existing infrastructure projects remained unfinished; the highway connecting Rio with Salvador was not completely paved, and construction projects in the

¹⁷⁵ "Padilha profético: 58 será o ano da fome!" *Diário Trabalhista* (Rio de Janeiro) 1 Jan 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-17).

capital dragged on for years, while the government diverted resources to the construction of Brasília.

As shown in the previous chapter, Brasília was part of a projected national network of highways. Few doubted the need to improve the nation's overland transportation and communications infrastructure. Vast expanses of the territory in the north and west of the country were virtually inaccessible except by air, a factor that obviously limited efforts to economically develop these regions. Thus, the construction of the Belém-Brasília highway and the others projected to access the far west via roadways, enjoyed overwhelming support. Even the widely read columnist Eugênio Gudin, who stood in strong opposition to Brasília, endorsed road construction. "Routes of penetration, especially highways, yes. Cities, no", he wrote, expressing exasperation at very notion of the "Pilot Plan," in which the city comes before regional development. To him it was an "insanity" (*loucura*), to build a city in such an "artificial" manner, before there existed a network of communications with the rest of the country.¹⁷⁶ Of course, Gudin did not recognize here the fact that this *loucura* is a characteristic feature of Iberian urban planning during the colonial period.

Discussions of Brasília and of Kubitschek were intertwined. The president's political foes, not surprisingly, tended to oppose the construction of Brasília, at least the manner in which it was being implemented. To many the accelerated timeline seemed not only unnecessary, but dangerously irresponsible. Not surprisingly, geography played a larger role than did ideology in shaping people's opinions of Brasília. Those living outside of Rio had generally positive perceptions of the undertaking; even in the drought-

¹⁷⁶ Eugênio Gudin, "Desenvolvimento pela urbanização," *O Globo* 14 January 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669).

ridden northeast the new capital was generally popular. While criticisms came from all regions, it was exceedingly rare in the center-west. Industrialists, construction firms, and large landowners tended to support the project, as they were the groups that were most likely to profit from the project. Members of the middle class tended to view the undertaking with a healthy dose of skepticism. While generally supportive of efforts to bring about development and modernization, they worried about the apparently reckless manner in which the construction progressed. The massive spending offered an excellent opportunity for the distribution of patronage and in this way a continuation of “politics as usual.” As the previous chapter demonstrates, the Kubitschek administration implemented an intense propaganda campaign to generate public support. It combined this democratic, very modern strategy with old-fashioned patronage politics to achieve its goals.

BRASÍLIA AND THE MEDIA

A small number of media conglomerates controlled most Brazilian newspapers and broadcast stations in the 1950s and early 1960s. While many journalists delighted in opportunities to mock Brasília and criticize the Kubitschek government, others parroted the hyperbolic rhetoric used to promote the new capital. Maurício Vaitsman was one of the most faithful and prolific voices in support of Brasília’s connection to development of the interior. During the construction period he published a number of lengthy, illustrated pieces featured prominently in the *Diário da Noite* in Rio de Janeiro, and reissued in various other papers owned by the media conglomerate Diários Associados, owned by Francisco Assis Chateaubriand, which controlled, at one time or another, dozens of

papers throughout Brazil, including *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), *O Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro), *O Diário de São Paulo*, *O Estado de Minas* (Belo Horizonte), *A Folha de Goiás* (Goiânia), and the broadcast stations Rádio Tupí and TV Tupí (in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo).¹⁷⁷ The government itself also controlled much of the broadcast media, which they manipulated more successfully than the print media.

Chateaubriand founded two of Brasília's earliest and most important media: Rádio Planalto and *O Correio Braziliense*, which remains the capital's main daily newspaper. Significantly, as the retention of antiquated spelling in its title indicates, the paper's name pays homage to the newspaper published in London by exiled agitator for independence Hipólito da Costa in the early nineteenth century, in which the idea for constructing a new federal capital in the interior first appeared in print (see chapter 1). *O Correio Braziliense's* first edition appeared on April 21, 1960, the same date as Brasília's official inauguration. Chateaubriand, who served as a senator for the states of Paraíba and Maranhão, left congress to serve accept an appointment as Kubitschek's ambassador to the United Kingdom. This illustrates how Kubitschek used patronage politics to reward loyal supporters of his policies. Chateaubriand's simultaneous involvement in both national politics and newspaper editing was typical many of his counterparts; most newspapers and other media served less as vehicles for objective reporting than as highly partisan mouthpieces for their owners. Another of Brasília's allies in the media included Chateaubriand's former employer Samuel Wainer, founder of the sensationalistic *Última Hora*, with editions published in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In its blend of

¹⁷⁷ For a biography of Chateaubriand, see Fernando Morais, *Chatô, o rei do Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994).

sentimentality, sensationalism, and nationalism, the newspaper's appeal to the urban poor and working classes faithfully continued in the tradition of Varguista populism.

Equally sensationalistic was the anti-Kubitschek press. Media outlets such as the *Diário de Notícias*, *Manchete*, and the *Tribuna da Imprensa*, edited by Kubitschek's most unrelenting opponent, Federal Deputy Carlos Lacerda (UDN-RJ), to whom the president represented not just a shameful example of the geographic and political favoritism, but also a continuation of the Varguista tradition. Lacerda had not just a political but a very personal reason to recoil at any association with the late president, whose 1954 suicide had been prompted by a scandal involving an assassination attempt on Lacerda involving one of Vargas's bodyguards. Kubitschek, however, managed to distance himself sufficiently from *varguismo* to garner the support of many powerful voices who had opposed Vargas (though Lacerda's opposition remained unwavering, he had fewer allies than he did in his campaign against Vargas. In his memoirs, Samuel Wainer described how,

[t]hrough the course of his government, Kubitschek discovered how to neutralize ably the aggressivity of Lacerda.... [and] captured the sympathy of men like Roberto Marinho, Assis Chateaubriand and Paulo Bittencourt, princes of the great press that had combated Vargas with ferocity and opening room for Lacerda to attack him. By intelligently maneuvering his networks of influence, Kubitschek virtually expelled Lacerda from television.¹⁷⁸

While Lacerda and many other critics of Brasília in the government and media spoke from the comfort of their offices in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, concentrating on concerns about perceived negative macroeconomic and political implications of the new capital. As the construction of Brasília continued, however, an increasing number of

¹⁷⁸ Samuel Wainer, *Minha razão de viver: memórias de um repórter* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1987), 222.

idea- and policy-makers traveled to the city and thereby extended their comments to the city itself and the “new way of life” emerging in the heart of the Planalto Central.

Newspapers frequently reprinted speeches delivered by politicians in their entirety. Often political and other leaders made private letters available for printing in the press. Thus the newspapers not only presented the reports of professional journalists, but provided a vehicle for individuals in power to communicate directly with the public. Pro-Kubitschek media printed his speeches and those of his officials, and the words of supporters of the administration’s policies. For example, *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) printed a letter from the distinguished leftist lawyer Sobral Pinto, a *mineiro* who had defended the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (PCB). In this supposedly private letter, Pinto praised the president for constructing Brasília which, he believed, would, “inaugurate a new era in the moral and material progress of the Brazilian Nation.” He parroted the rhetoric used by Kubitschek, saying that the new capital would, “give to the man of the interior, from the North to South and from the Center to the West, a limitless confidence in the capacity of our race to accomplish (*capacidade realizadora da nossa raça*).” Significantly for a *carioca* publication, Pinto went on to say that, “if Rio de Janeiro suffers, in the initial years, painful and intense moral trauma, the rest of the country will feel, on the contrary, those hopes that inspired the men of the legendary *bandeiras* reborn.”¹⁷⁹ Papers that tended to be critical for the president also served as mouthpieces for opposition politicians; indeed, Carlos Lacerda owned and wrote columns in the *Tribuna de Imprensa*, his personal vehicle for expressing his views in the media.

¹⁷⁹ “Sobral Pinto a JK: ‘Brasília inaugurará nova época no progresso moral e material da nação brasileira,’” *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 7 Jan 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669).

PARTY AND REGIONAL POLITICS

From the moment candidate Kubitschek announced his intention to transfer the capital, the project was the subject of constant debates in the media and within the halls of power. Kubitschek's party, the Partido Social Democrático (PSD), and that of his vice president, João Goulart, the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB), represented two distinct legacies of Getúlio Vargas. While it is difficult to define these parties ideologically, they tended to occupy a center or center-left position on the political spectrum. Though frequently allied, these two parties had very different bases of support and tensions between the two became evident in the controversy over Brasília's construction. While the PSD found its greatest support in rural areas and state party machines, the PTB claimed to represent the interests of the urban working classes, providing a moderate counterpoint to more radical workers' organizations. While Goulart and his party did generally endorse the construction of Brasília, they needed to balance their political alliances with the interests of their constituents, who tended to fear that moving the capital away from the centers of industry would silence workers' voices in the political process.

Israel Pinheiro became a familiar face in the national media as a promoter of Brasília. He also played a key role behind the scenes by serving as Brasília's principal advocate in Congress. A consummate politician, Pinheiro persuaded key legislators to lend their support to the new capital. A number of congressmen crossed party lines to back Brasília. A sharp divide emerged within the conservative União Democrática

Nacional (UDN), the main opposition party, over the issue. While the party's base in Rio and São Paulo vehemently opposed the transfer of the national capital, many of its members in other states supported the project. One of Brasília's chief advocates, Deputy Emival Caiado (UDN-Goiás) who, though a member of the opposition, was one of Brasília's key allies in Congress served as president of the Bloco Parlamentar Mudancista, an alliance of congressmen in favor of moving the capital. Thus geography trumped party affiliation and ideological persuasion when it came to Brasília: those living outside the Southeast were for the most part supportive of Brasília, and those in the Center-West and North were most uniformly enthusiastic about the project. Not surprisingly, residents of Goiás—the state out of which the Federal District was carved—were among the most eager for the construction of Brasília. Caiado and other politicians from the state relentlessly promoted the capital. For example, a delegations of deputies to the state legislature of Goiás visited their counterparts in other states, including Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro, to garner support for Brasília.

Neither the political left nor right was united on the issue of Brasília. Geography was a better predictor of one's opinion of the new capital, but there were many *cariocas* who had a favorable view of its transfer. Its nationalist appeal—in particular the progressive image it projected to a foreign audience, the subject of the following chapter—went a long way toward garnering support among those who wished their country to be known for something more than diversions. People of all political persuasions expressed concern about the cost of the undertaking and what was widely perceived to be pervasive profiteering. While the majority of Brazilians believed that the cost of Brasília was excessive—and that the compressed time line exacerbated its

economic toll—and that it was fraught with corruption, most of the same people still supported the capital in principle. Moreover, of those who did oppose the construction of Brasília believed that the capital should be transferred, at least in a gradual or delayed manner. A cartoon published in the *Diário de Notícias* displays the widespread belief in corruption and overspending, using as an example a notoriously expensive bathroom in the Palácio da Alvorada, complete with solid gold fixtures. (Figure 12)

Politics divided the key figures involved in building Brasília. Oscar Niemeyer, a lifelong Communist and atheist, clearly did not allow his personal beliefs to interfere too much with his work, as he has designed numerous churches (not to mention office buildings) during his long career. Brasília was not, however, a job like all the others. It was also a once in a lifetime opportunity for Niemeyer and Costa to put their artistic vision into practice, to conceive of and build an entirely new city. But it was more than this too. It was the chance to play a central role, literally and figuratively, in building his country's future. Like the others who conceived of the new capital and participated in its construction, Niemeyer derived considerable pride from his contribution toward the making of a new Brazil. While Niemeyer has usually sought to distance his political beliefs from his work, it is not difficult to understand the appeal that Brasília would have to adherents of socialism, who were just as preoccupied with adorning Brazil with the trappings of modernity as were their conservative, positivistic political opponents.

The military overwhelmingly approved of the capital's transfer; indeed, as shown in chapter 1, that institution played a key role in developments made prior to 1955. The Church sanctified the plan by participating in the rituals. While construction on the cathedral in Brasília stalled, its concrete frame left unfinished a decade, when it was

finally completed, the Catholic Church did not hesitate to sanctify the cathedral, in contrast to its refusal to bestow that honor on the chapel of São Francisco de Assis, designed by Oscar Niemeyer at the Pampulha complex outside Belo Horizonte. To nationalists on the left and right, the new capital was a source of pride, that showcased Brazilian talent, audacity, and productive capacity.

The main opposition party, the conservative União Democrática Nacional (UDN), was split on the issue of Brasília. While some members of the UDN such as Carlos Lacerda were among the most vehement critics of the transfer of the capital, other *udenistas* wholeheartedly supported the move. It appears that geography proved much more important than party affiliation when it came to the construction of Brasília. The UDN faced a major crisis over this issue, which aided Kubitschek in his efforts to secure congressional approval and funding for the construction of Brasília. In September 1956 Congress passed law number 2874, which created Novacap and allocated Cr\$ 500,000 (slightly less than USD 200,000) in initial funding for Brasília. Novacap's directorate was headed by *mineiro* politician Israel Pinheiro, Ernesto Silva, and Bernardo Sayão. The UDN named the fourth member of the organization, Federal Deputy Iris Meinberg from São Paulo, who became the treasurer of Novacap. This act, securing a significant sum to commence construction and making a gesture toward including the opposition in the project's leadership, was a significant one in propelling the construction forward. Appointing Meinberg as treasurer made him the target of accusations of irregularities in the financing of Brasília. Since Kubitschek's five-year term in office would expire in January 1961, and the constitution prevented presidents from seeking a consecutive term, Brasília's advocates knew that they had little time to make the transfer of the capital a fait

accomplish before the end of his term. No time could be wasted in political bickering. On the day of its creation, Novacap announced a contest to select a “pilot plan” for the city’s design, open only to Brazilians, to be selected by an international panel of urban planning experts in March 1957. Among those on the jury was Oscar Niemeyer, with whom Kubitschek had worked while mayor of Belo Horizonte. Novacap employed Niemeyer to design the buildings that would occupy the new city. Construction could not wait for the city’s plan to be chosen: weeks after the passage of law 2874, Kubitschek paid his first visit to the site of the future capital, and ground broke on the projects to build an airport, a hotel, and not one, but two presidential residences, all designed by Niemeyer. The first, a simple yet modernist wooden structure completed in just ten days, and called “Catetinho” after the presidential palace in Rio, served as the headquarters for Novacap. The second, to serve as the president’s permanent residence, would be known as the Palace of the Dawn and built near the shore of lake that would be created after the damming of the Paranoá River.

The beginning of construction did not itself guarantee that Brasília would be completed within Kubitschek’s term in office. To ensure that this would take place, federal deputy Emival Caiado (UDN-Goiás), authored a piece of legislation known as the “Lei Caiado” which set the official inauguration of Brasília for 21 April 1960, coinciding with the anniversary of Tiradentes’s execution in 1792. Kubitschek signed the Lei Caiado in October 1957, thus providing a legal mandate for the transfer of the capital eight months before the end of Kubitschek’s term in office. Thereafter, those who advocated delaying the transfer faced a legal barrier to their efforts.

By the time Brasília entered its second year of construction, the majority of its critics had accepted the fact that the progress had gone so far to abandon altogether. Accepting the new capital as an inevitability, they pursued strategies aimed at delaying the inaugural date. The principal means the opponents of Brasília used to slow the timeline for its completion was to use the press to shape public opinion and pursuing legislation to delay or stall the transfer of governmental functions to Brasília. Both of these efforts continued through the city's inauguration, indeed persisting through the 1964 coup. The military regime abolished political parties but not the Congress; politicians who survived *cassação* (a stripping of political rights that was the fate not just of ideological radicals, but also of many moderates, including Kubitschek) or worse, could choose between two new parties sanctioned by the regime. Years after the military regime had settled into Brasília, until 1971,¹⁸⁰ legislators continued to put forth measures



Figure 12.

aimed at returning the federal capital to Rio de Janeiro. It is interesting that during the construction period itself, a time of democracy, Brasília's many critics were overall much more conciliatory and less radical in their stance toward the new capital than were their counterparts during the dictatorship a decade later. One would not expect the opposition to become more radical with time. It is striking indeed that very few voices spoke against the transfer of the federal capital in theory. Rather, most questioned the compressed timeline imposed by the Lei Caiado, believing that it contributed excessively to inflationary spending, an argument seemingly confirmed by the state of the economy in late 1958. Brasília's opponents sought to counter the optimistic rhetoric of the city's advocates by bringing attention to its problems, particularly the fact that what little infrastructure existed failed to support the basic needs of the ever-growing population. One cannot wonder how much of the opposition in the government, especially among members of the legislature, was personal in nature. Indeed, it is easy to empathize with the tens of thousands of government employees, and their families, who faced the prospect of leaving their homes in Rio to move to the remote Planalto Central, to establish new lives in a projected city, one that existed more in the minds of its planners

"- Just a bathroom will cost \$15 million [cruzeiros]. - Well, to clean up so much dirt!"

Diário das Notícias (Rio de Janeiro) 21 May 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0658).

¹⁸⁰ For this I am relying on an exhaustive bibliography of primary sources related to the all aspects of Brasília, Congresso Nacional Brasil, Câmara dos Deputados, *Bibliografias 3: Brasília* (Brasília: Centro de Documentação e Informação, 1972). This bibliography, which includes more than five thousand citations, citations from the various records of the federal Congress and other government publications in addition to Brazilian and international press coverage, includes material published through 1971. While I have made some use of government documents in my research, I have not explored these sources in depth.

and in the neat drawings and models displayed in the lobby of the MEC and elsewhere. In his “Voices of the City” column in the *Tribuna de Imprensa*, José do Rio reported an incident in which a friend asked Senator Mourão Vieira (PTB-Amazonas), who appeared to be in a bad mood, what was wrong, to which Vieira apparently replied, “I had a bad dream. I dreamed the Senate had already transferred to Brasília.”¹⁸¹ It is interesting here to note that this anecdote is about the distaste for the new capital coming from a resident of the North, not a *carioca de gema* (authentic citizen of Rio). The Brazilian Institute of Lawyers issued an official statement in opposition to the transfer of the Supreme Court to Brasília, echoing statements made by several of the justices, on the basis that there lacked in the city, “conditions for habitability and comfort.”¹⁸² Such rhetoric was shared by all of those who sought to delay the project.

The transfer of government functions required that journalists who covered political affairs join the tide of *cariocas* moving to Brasília. No longer would they discuss national politics in the cafés and historic buildings of Rio. In order to succeed in efforts to delay the transfer of the capital, Brasília’s opponents launched an ongoing effort to challenge the optimistic image promoted by the city’s boosters. During and after the period of construction, in both the halls of government and in the pages of the newspapers, Brasília was daily the source of direct and heated confrontation.

An analysis of these discussions reveals a great deal about competing visions of the nation and the path it should take toward modernity. To its planners, Brasília would provide the fulcrum for an entirely new national policy, for a turn inward, ending the domination of the coast, ridding the nation of the parasitic drain exerted by complicated,

¹⁸¹ José do Rio, “Vozes da Cidade,” *Tribuna da Imprensa* 22 Oct 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0668).

¹⁸² “Advogados também não querendo o STF em Brasília,” *Jornal do Comércio* 27 Oct 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0668).

decrepit old Rio. In the eyes of its opponents, however, Brasília represented little more than a grotesque manifestation of the corruption and nepotism that characterized the Kubitschek regime's perpetuation of patronage politics. Frequent too were accusations that the president's main concern was his own legacy. In the words of one columnist, by building Brasília, Kubitschek would allow him to, "purchase his place in history." While Kubitschek would only live in the city for a short time, his self-serving actions would create, "at the most, an agglomeration of constrained and disillusioned citizens, obliged to live in the forest (*mato*), by the omission of many, by the caprice of one, but never of their free will."¹⁸³ Most of those who opposed the construction of Brasília expressed mistrust of Kubitschek's motives. Foremost, they suspected that his motives arose mainly out of his desire to be the constant focus of attention in the short-term and to have a permanent monument to his presidency. A political cartoon published in *O Globo* expressed this perspective on Kubitschek's megalomania, a characteristic his critics frequently attributed to him. The cartoon lampoons Kubitschek's efforts at constructing Brasília as a transparent effort at self-aggrandizement. (Figure 13)

Rather than forcing the nation to deal with its problems, as the capital's supporters suggested it would do, to its opponents, Brasília was a distraction, a shameful example of the government's tendency to avoid engagement with the nation's structural inequalities and insufficiencies. Kubitschek preferred to spend time in Brasília, thinking of the future and ignoring the existing problems in the country. Critics feared that the transfer of the capital would prove detrimental to Brazil's fragile democracy. Headlines appearing in the *Correio da Manhã* before Brasília's inauguration declared it, "Burial in the

¹⁸³ Hélio Fernandes, "Em primeira mão," *Diário das Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 19 Feb 1960 ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671.

Planalto”¹⁸⁴ and “Dictatorship in the Desert.” In the latter piece the unnamed author feared that in the new capital, the government would exert increased control over the press. Through isolation from the majority of the population, this “institutional aberration,” this “monstrosity” of a capital would cause the democratically elected government to transform into a dictatorship.¹⁸⁵ Other commentators warned of similar dangers. Gustavo Corção, whose columns appeared in numerous newspapers throughout Brazil, was one of Brasília’s most unrelenting and persuasive critical voices. While



Figure 13.

Depiction of Kubitschek. "- Who is he talking to? - That there, when he is not talking about Brasília, he only talks about himself."

O Globo (Rio de Janeiro) 10 March 1959 ArPDF Nov. D. 04.01.Z

¹⁸⁴ “Entêrro no planalto,” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) 25 March 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

¹⁸⁵ “Ditadura no deserto” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) 6 may 1959 (ArPDF Nov. D. 04.01.Z Box 0662).

recognizing that the new capital would eventually bring about “a new anthropogeographic configuration of the country,” in the intervening years the new capital would diminish Congress’s ability to counterbalance the power of the presidency.¹⁸⁶ The leading journalistic voice in opposition to Brasília, Kubitschek, and the Vargas legacy more generally, the *carioca* Carlos Lacerda, published daily criticisms of various aspects of Brasília in his newspaper *Tribuna da Imprensa*. Among the myriad objections to the new capital, Lacerda’s paper quoted a speech delivered in Congress by Senator Mem de Sá, member of the Partido Libertador (PL), a conservative party based in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and allied with Lacerda’s UDN, predicting that the transfer of the capital would become the “tomb of the opposition.” To back up his claims Sá cited the fact that the new capital’s infrastructure was still incomplete, a fact that would compete with the demands of an election year to reduce further the time members of congress would actually be able to spend in the new capital, with the potential of bringing the legislative process to a standstill if Congress failed to make a quorum.¹⁸⁷ The ever-optimistic Kubitschek countered that, a democratic regime’s successful implementation of such an audacious undertaking would provide both a positive example to the world by casting doubt on one of the frequent justifications of authoritarianism—that democracy impeded progress—and offer evidence of Brazil’s political maturity.¹⁸⁸ Ironically, a few years later the military regime that took power in Brazil justified in large

¹⁸⁶ Gustavo Corção, “A mudança do Congresso” *Diário de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) Jan 31 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669 (Janeiro 1960)).

¹⁸⁷ “Congresso lá em Brasília será túmulo da Oposição,” *Tribuna da Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro) 23 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

¹⁸⁸ Quotes from speech by Kubitschek included in “Novo e glorioso destino para o Brasil,” *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro) Jan 31 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669).

part its rule using precisely the arguments in favor of authoritarianism that Kubitschek had sought to undermine.

In contrast, to residents of the coast, the transfer of the capital to the sparsely populated interior represented a threat to democracy. Not surprisingly, this view was particularly common in the southeast, which had for more than a century exerted political and economic dominance. From the perspective of the middle class and industrial workers in Rio and São Paulo, the transfer of the capital represented a threat to their hard-won efforts in previous decades to open up, however slightly, national politics, traditionally dominated by small slice of the elites.

Accusations of corruption plagued Brasília as the opposition repeatedly attempted to launch inquiries into apparent irregularities in the financing and execution of the city's construction. The split within the UDN over the issue of Brasília ultimately benefitted the president, as members of the opposition turned against one of their own, Iris Meinberg, seeking his ouster from Novacap's directorate, claiming that he was not serving as a voice of the opposition. Rather than serving the interests of his party, critics claimed that Meinberg was motivated by personal enrichment. Carlos Lacerda spearheaded efforts to investigate corruption in Brasília. He pointed out numerous examples of apparent nepotism in the project, for example the fact that members of Iris Meinberg's family and political allies personally benefited by receiving lucrative contracts in Brasília.¹⁸⁹ In a letter to Carlos Lacerda printed in the *Correio da Manhã*, Meinberg brought into question the patriotism of his critics, pointing out the "impatriotic

¹⁸⁹ "Iris Meinberg fêz favores a seus filhos," *Tribuna da Imprensa* 27 July 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0665).

effort you are making to upset the giant effort underway to implant the capital in the interior of the country, an old aspiration of all good Brazilians.”¹⁹⁰

Attempts to put in place a congressional inquiry failed as the UDN leadership, including its acting leader in congress Rondon Pacheco, supported the transfer of Brasília on its appointed date.¹⁹¹ Others, such as Deputy Aliomar Baleeiro came out as early supporters of Brasília, but on a lengthened timeline, which would reduce the inflationary pressures that would inevitably arise from such an enormous expenditure of capital by the federal government.¹⁹² Thus because of dissent within its own ranks the UDN leadership in congress failed in its ongoing attempts to launch an official inquiry into alleged corruption in the construction of Brasília, an act that would have likely delayed the inauguration date. In May 1959 Lacerda and his anti-mudancista colleagues launched a call for an investigation into the finances of Novacap, claiming support from over two hundred legislators. Emival Caiado and the pro-mudancista block responded on the same date by issuing a “manifesto to the Brazilian people” calling on them “to renovate and intensify the struggle for the transfer of the Capital of the Republic.”¹⁹³ The Bloco Mudancista thus made a popular appeal in its efforts to head off an investigation into Brasília. The apparent popularity of the new capital is evidenced by the fact that a significant number of Lacerda’s allies in congress withdrew their signatures, causing the measure to fail. Israel Pinheiro confronted Brasília’s arch-enemy during a hearing of the

¹⁹⁰ Iris Meinberg, “Resposta a Carlos Lacerda” *Correio da Manhã* 18 July 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0665).

¹⁹¹ “Brasília, fôrça centrífuga a serviço do progresso do país,” *O Jornal* 29 Aug 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0666).

¹⁹² “Baleeiro a favor de Brasília,” *Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro) 23 Dec 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

¹⁹³ *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 14 may 1959 (n.t.) and “UDN quer saber como se constrói Brasília” *Diário das Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 14 may 1959. (Both in ArPDF Nov. D. 04.01.Z box no. 0662, vol. 17).

Comissão da Mudança¹⁹⁴ in 1959 for continuing to criticize the new capital while never having paid it a visit, and offered to host him there. Lacerda responded that he would only go to Brasília as part of an investigative commission.¹⁹⁵ While the attacks against Meinberg led him to resign his post as treasurer of Novacap in December 1959, their ultimate efforts to delay or prevent the inauguration of Brasília failed. Although members of the opposition continued to fight the transfer of the government up to—and indeed for nearly a decade following—Brasília’s inauguration in April 1960, their efforts met with failure.

Evidence of Kubitschek’s success in promoting Brasília can be gleaned from analyzing the content of the most common critiques launched against it. It is evident that almost immediately the president’s foes accepted the transfer of the capital in principle, choosing to concentrate their attacks on the manner in which the project was being implemented. Over and over again, those who spoke out against Brasília prefaced their comments with a statement that they were not against the project per se, but rather opposed the way in which it carried out, particularly the enormous costs required by the timeline imposed by the Lei Caiado. While this may not have been an entirely honest argument—by delaying the transfer until after Kubitschek’s term they perhaps hoped to prevent it altogether—it does speak to the tremendous popularity of the idea of Brasília. As its inauguration date approached, Brasília’s critics intensified their attacks on the transfer as posing a threat to the functioning of the federal government. On the floor of the Congress less than two months before the inauguration, deputy Othon Mader (UDN-Paraná) warned that “The transfer of the Capital to Brasília, and principally of the

¹⁹⁴ The Transfer Commission, the congressional committee charged with overseeing the construction of Brasília and the relocation of the federal government.

¹⁹⁵ “Jôgo,” *Jôrnal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 12 June 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0665).

legislature, in the precipitous and disorganized manner in which it is being conducted is a grave error and even a crime...threatening the constitutional functioning of the government of the Republic and in particular of the National Congress.”¹⁹⁶

A definitive accounting of the expenditures incurred in the construction of Brasília has never been conducted, and it doubtful it would be possible to account fully for the cost—in economic as well as human and environmental terms—of the new capital. It is equally difficult to assess the economic benefit derived from the project and the subsequent development of surrounding regions and along the roadways, including the Belém-Brasília highway completed before 1960 and subsequent roadways cut through the north and west of Brazil. The best estimates come from the work of political scientist Celso Lafer on the Kubitschek government.¹⁹⁷ Lafer estimates that Brasília cost approximately Cr\$ 250 million and Cr\$ 300 million in 1961 prices (approximately 30 million USD), or two to three percent of the national GDP during the period 1956-1961. He goes on to point out that the new capital contributed to economic growth by leading to the achievement, and in some cases surpassing, of some of the specific goals included Kubitschek’s Target Plan, particularly in railroad and road construction and pavement of existing roads.¹⁹⁸ There is no doubt in Lafer’s analysis that Kubitschek’s economic policies in general, and the construction of Brasília in particular, contributed to accelerating inflation and the deepening of other economic problems, such as the public deficit and imbalance in payments.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ “Mudança do legislativo para Brasília provoca tumultos na sessão da Câmara” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) 13 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0670).

¹⁹⁷ Lafer, “The Planning Process and the Political System in Brazil: A Study of Kubitschek’s Target Plan, 1956-1961”, Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*.

¹⁹⁸ Lafer, *JK e a programa das metas (1956-61): processo de planejamento e sistema político no Brasil*.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

While there is no doubt that Brasília did indeed accelerate economic development of the surrounding region, many of the arguments put forth by its advocates tended toward the incredulous. Most unconvincing were the repeated assertions that the project would be “self-financing” in the short-term, that is, that sales of real estate in the new city would quickly not only allow the government to recoup its costs, but to even turn a profit. Its political advantages were largely unspoken, but there is little doubt they were preeminent in Kubitschek’s mind.

The financing of Brasília was and remains the project’s most controversial aspect. There are several points of contention that require clarification. First of all, economic policy was key to many of the most heated political disagreements in twentieth-century Brazil, with parallels seen other places in Latin America and the global South more generally. Kubitschek walked a middle line between two extremes: radical economic nationalists who opposed the government’s reliance on foreign capital to fund its developmentalist program, and those on the right who believed the state played too active a role in directing economic growth. This tension resulted in some of the greatest challenges faced by the Kubitschek administration, and Brasília brought it to the surface. In response to pressures from international lenders brought on by accelerating inflation, the president implemented a plan developed by his two principal economic advisors, Roberto Campos, president of the Banco Nacional do Desenvolvimento Econômico (BNDE), which financed the Target Plan, and Lucas Lopes, Finance Minister. They co-authored the Plano de Estabilização Monetária, an austerity program that sought to control monetary and credit expansion and, most significantly, curb government spending. It aroused immediate opposition from a variety of influential sectors of

Brazilian society, including the industrial class of São Paulo. This resulted in an unlikely alliance that brought together the UDN and the PTB to protest measures such as the end to government subsidies for wheat, gas, and other basic commodities, causing a sharp spike in prices of transportation and basic foodstuffs. In June 1959 Kubitschek bowed to pressures and canceled the plan, prompting both Campos and Lopes to resign their posts. The seeds of discontent had been planted before the stabilization plan, however, as Kubitschek failed to consult his key economic advisors before committing to the costly construction of Brasília. Thus the administration suffered both a political crisis and lost two of its central figures, the co-authors of the Target Plan which formed the core of Kubitschek's presidential platform. Both had served as his allies in defending the use of foreign capital from those on the left, despite the fact that both opposed the last-minute addition of Brasília to their carefully measured twenty-nine point plan for "fifty years of progress in five".

Most scholars agree that Kubitschek hoped to run for president again in 1965. He hoped to postpone necessary but politically difficult fiscal reforms for his successor to implement, paving the way for him to return as a candidate associated with the heyday of the late 1950s. This has been used to explain Kubitschek's support for an obviously weak candidate for his party's nomination for president in the 1960 elections, the decidedly uncharismatic General Henrique Lott, who served as Kubitschek's minister of war and to whom the president owed for having aborted a coup in November 1955 that threatened to prevent Kubitschek from ascending the presidency. If Kubitschek wished to run in 1965, it was to his advantage to be running as a candidate of the opposition

party. Subsequent events culminating in the 1964 military coup and Kubitschek's subsequent *cassação*²⁰⁰ and exile rendered his plan moot.

The split within the UDN reveals that support for Brasília fell along regional rather than party lines. Politicians in Rio and São Paulo rightly perceived the new capital as posing a threat to the disproportionate share of national wealth they both produced and enjoyed. A capital hundreds of miles in the remote and sparsely populated interior represented a shift in the nation's geographical distribution of power. In the rhetoric of the *carioca* and *paulista* press and politicians, the move represented a danger to democracy, as the new seat of the national government would lie at a considerable remove from the centers of industry and population. Brasília not only increased the power and prestige of the state of Goiás, never a major power on a national scale, but more significantly represented a political triumph for the historically powerful state of Minas Gerais. The state assembly of Minas Gerais passed a unanimous motion in support of the new capital in 1958.²⁰¹ Not only do the state's borders lie close to the new Federal District—it literally occupies most of the territory separating Rio de Janeiro from Brasília—the dominant role played by *mineiros* in the project burnished the record of those politicians and, significantly, placed in their hands a tremendous source of patronage to distribute to political allies. Minas Gerais's proximity to Brasília explains why so many migrants to the Federal District came from that state, mostly from rural areas.

²⁰⁰ A process frequently employed by the military regime that stripped one of all political rights, including running for office and voting.

²⁰¹ "A assembléia aplaude Brasília por unanimidade," *Estado de Minas* (Belo Horizonte) 10 Dec 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

Allies and foes of Brasília inscribed on the city strikingly different meanings, as they gazed the city it took for them very different contours. As different people viewed Brasília through different lenses, so too did contemporaries have dramatically opposed views of the interior of the nation generally, and the Amazon region more specifically. As discussed in the previous chapter, a key justification for the transfer of the capital was economic development of the interior. As chapter one shows, however, despite exaggerated claims to originality on the part of Brasília's planners, the intentional planning of an urban nucleus to promote settlement of the surrounding region has a long history in Iberia, a colonizing tactic they inherited from the Romans and put to use during the Reconquest of the peninsula and the conquest of America.²⁰² Since regional development was central to the construction of Brasília, its planners conceived of a series of highways and railroads to provide overland transportation from all directions to the new capital. This plan also contributed directly to the fulfillment of certain aspects of Kubitschek's Target Plan, particularly goals aimed at improving the nation's infrastructure. Many critics accepted the developmentalist logic undergirding the plan for Brasília; while they might have disagreed with the implementation of the proposal, they accepted it in theory. Others believed it to be largely devoid of benefit for the nation. Claiming that the strategic rationale behind the construction of an inland capital justified the idea in the nineteenth century, one journalist argued that there were no longer any material benefits to be derived from the idea in the middle of the twentieth century. The high costs of transportation rendered the city's cost prohibitive. This writer concluded that Brasília was nothing more than a, "constitutional caprice, positivistic stubbornness

²⁰² This concept is stressed in Delson, *New Towns for Colonial Brazil: Spatial and Social Planning of the Eighteenth Century*, Reis.

that the legislators of Brazil after 1891 never took the initiative to correct...an anachronism.... It is a flagrant challenge to all tradition, a radical break with custom—and, above all, indisputably useless in practical terms.”²⁰³

The tragic accident that felled Bernardo Sayão, like Kubitschek’s death in an automobile accident in 1976, prompted speculation of an official cover-up. While the latter has been frequently seen as an assassination carried out by the military regime, part of a campaign that also claimed the lives of João Goulart and Carlos Lacerda, who had joined together in opposition to the dictatorship; Lacerda’s participation represented a shift as he had initially supported the military when it ousted Goulart in 1964. Immediately following Sayão’s death, rumors that Indians had murdered the engineer prompted the *carioca* edition of *Última Hora* to publish an interview with General José Luiz Guedes, director of the Indian Protective Service, specifically denying that rumor, as well as others circulating about frequent raids made by Indians.

Such stories appeared frequently in various newspapers. The *Jornal do Brasil*, which ran a headline with the ominous prediction: “Belém-Brasília highway will be colonized by Indians.” The article itself included quotes from General Guedes, in which he said that part of the road’s intention was the “integration of the Indian in society,” thus offering assurance that benefits derived from the roadway would redound not only to the capitalists who would profit from the newly accessible territory, but would also allow the neglected indigenous peoples of the forest access to the blessings of civilization and citizenship. Guedes’s was one of few voices in the national discourse who even bothered to speak of Brazil’s indigenous inhabitants as potential citizens, neither one-dimensional nationalist symbols nor dangerous savages. (As the previous chapter discusses, Afro-

²⁰³ “Brasília,” *Diário das Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro), 22 Feb 1959 (IHG-DF BSB J-17).

Brazilians are most conspicuous in their absence from discussions of Brasília, despite the fact that they comprised a significant percentage of the city's builders and residents.)

Lacerda and other critics of Brasília did not hesitate to appeal to his *carioca* constituents' racist sentiments in their opposition to the construction of Brasília. "Whites in danger" read one typically incendiary subtitle to an article in the *Tribuna da Imprensa*,²⁰⁴ an example of the paper's reliance on fear-mongering tactics and long-standing stereotypes about Amazonia's indigenous population, far less well known as imagined in the national consciousness. The *Tribuna* frequently associated dangerous Indians and animals with Brasília, thereby depicting it as an untamed and perhaps untamable place, one fraught with danger and few, if any redeeming qualities. The paper warned its readers that, "still uncivilized Indians could invade, at any moment, the Belém-Brasília highway." Moreover, it reported that Guedes, worried that ten separate groups of Indians represented a significant danger "to whites", not just along the desolate highway, but in Brasília itself, had asked the army to dispatch forces to protect the new capital. The same article suggested that Bernardo Sayão's death had been caused by Indian arrows, not a falling jequitibá.²⁰⁵ Not only then would Brasília fail to bring civilization to the interior, the savage interior would imperil those who foolishly participated in the ill-conceived construction of a national capital in the wilderness. While many of Kubitschek's and Brasília's most consistent opponents expressed support for increasing access to and economic development of the interior, Lacerda's objection to all aspects of the plan of Brasília and related infrastructure was total and unwavering.

²⁰⁴ "Sertanistas vão conter índios: Belém-Brasília," *Tribuna da Imprensa* 26 Jan 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669).

²⁰⁵ "SPI adverte o Exército: índios invadem estrada para Brasília," *Tribuna da Imprensa* 25 Jan 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669).

Five weeks before Brasília's official inauguration, newspapers throughout the country covered the case of a worker, Silvio Gomes de Almeida, who claimed to have been attacked by a group of Indians near Brasília. While some articles expressed uncertainty about the veracity of Almeida's story, others reported his story as documented fact. The *Diário Carioca* published the most exaggerated version of events, claiming that Almeida's injuries occurred during a raid of Indians against a camp of forty workers near Brasília, leaving several wounded.²⁰⁶ The story generated so much press that it prompted a response from General Guedes, who offered assurances in an interview with *O Jornal* that the nearest indigenous group was located at a safe distance from Brasília—some six hundred kilometers away. Moreover, Guedes assured, the nearest Indians were “já pacificados e mesmo civilizados (already pacified and also civilized).”²⁰⁷ Before long a coworkers came forward to say that Almeida's injuries resulted not from an attack by Indians, but a bar fight with a fellow worker.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless the image of fearsome indigenous Brazilians was frequently associated with the new capital in the press, emphasizing the untamed nature of the Planalto Central. Political cartoonists frequently depicted Indians in their efforts to stress the remoteness of the new capital and its disconnectedness from Brazilian “civilization”, concentrated as it was along the coast.

The notion of indigenous peoples as representing a danger stands in contrast to the way the pro-Brasília campaign employed the image of the Indian as a romantic

²⁰⁶ “Índios atacam lavradores em Goiás,” *Diário Carioca* 16 March 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

²⁰⁷ “Não há índios perto de Brasília,” *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro) 17 March 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

²⁰⁸ “Os índios ainda em foco,” *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 26 March 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

nationalist symbol. Their place in the modern nation was confined to the realm of symbolism. Actual indigenous peoples represented a threat. Advocates of Brasília challenged this perspective. For example, journalist Maurício Vaitsman reported sympathetically about indigenous Brazilians. As for violence along the Belém-Brasília highway, according to Vaitsman, Indians were the victims, not the perpetrators, of such attacks.²⁰⁹ While he may have been sympathetic for the plight of the Indians against the intruding progress brought by the new highway, Vaitsman, like Euclides da Cunha, saw the conquest of the interior as a necessary, and thus welcome, step along the nation's path toward progress. Vaitsman enticed his readers with the unknown of the jungle. Countering the images propagated by Lacerda and other voices in opposition to Brasília, of the savage interior as fraught with danger, Vaitsman resuscitated the age-old attraction of the unknown. In a lengthy article in early 1960, he reported rumors circulating about sightings from the air of the stone ruins of an unknown city (which searchers on the ground had failed to locate) outside Rio Branco, near the Venezuela border. Apparently, according to Vaitsman, workers along the Belém-Brasília highway, working virtually on the other side of the huge country, were propelled in part by the prospect of encountering new El Dorado. Behind this sensationalistic headline, the article went on to trumpet, in a typical fashion, the nationalistic rationale behind the construction of Brasília and the related conquest of the interior.

The transfer of the federal capital to the interior reinvigorated the *Marcha para o Oeste* (Westward March) declared by Getúlio Vargas. There were two principal purposes behind Brasília: to create a new administrative capital and to catalyze economic

²⁰⁹ Maurício Vaitsman "Índios na Belém-Brasília solicitam proteção contra outros silvícolas," *Diário das Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 11 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0670).

development and population growth in the interior. Since the colonial period, Brazil's population has been concentrated along the coast. Accelerating population growth since independence tended to deepen this tendency, leaving enormous portions of the nation's territory largely unoccupied. In the 1940s Getúlio Vargas had launched a "march to the west" to promote development of the languishing interior, site of untold natural resources. Vargas hoped to find petroleum in the west. His successors in the 1950s touted the region's agricultural and hydroelectric potential, but many of their promises were quite vague. Potential was the word they promoted, relying on the faith of the public to complete the equation, to imagine what form the "milk and honey" presaged by Saint John Bosco might take.

Those who spoke in support of the construction of Brasília adopted the rhetoric of this program of the Estado Novo. Development of the interior had not just an economic motive, but a strategic one. In the article, Vaitsman described the Belém-Brasília highway as the "effective conquest of our demographically empty spaces, for which imperialist appetites have already been building up." Vaitsman goes on to describe, in what one must assume to be hyperbolic terms, Açailândia, an outpost along the new highway in the jungle of Maranhão. Where two years ago had been only jungle, there had taken shape, "a prosperous community", comprised of clean, orderly streets and populated by, "brave pioneer families."²¹⁰ While the jungle had yet to be fully tamed, Vaitsman wrote the following week, though it had yet to be completed, one could travel the new highway without fear from jaguars, snakes, or Indians (apparently, in the popular imagination, these were the three great dangers of the rainforest). Already, again noting

²¹⁰ Maurício Vaitsman, "'El-Dorado' é a nova meta dos conquistadores da 'BB'" *Diário das Notícias* 10 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671)

his tendency to exaggerate, he believed that “Amazônia is no longer isolated from the rest of Brazil, as it has been for 460 years of the nation’s history.” What the rainforest needed was population, colonization, a process that required roadways.²¹¹ Thus the Belém-Brasília highway was a crucial step toward incorporating the vast Amazon rainforest into the national territory, by opening it up to an influx of settlers and capital which would not just bring economic development, but represent the conquest of a significant, long-standing obstacle to the nation’s development.

Stressing the new capital’s proximity to untamed jungle helped serve the opposition’s efforts to paint Brasília as unsuitable for habitation, thereby justifying the position that the transfer of governmental functions should be delayed. As the legally mandated date for the new capital’s inauguration drew near, the opposition increased its depictions of the progress of construction. Lacerda’s *Tribuna da Imprensa* ran a series in February 1960 titled “Brasília on the Eve of the Move (Brasília às vésperas da mudança),” featuring large pictures of empty lots designated for foreign embassies with a simple sign in the foreground reading “Chile”, “France”, etc.²¹² Other photos in this series depicted half-built structures and laborers and their families living in improvised tent cities, cooking over open flames, alongside articles decrying the high cost of living in the city, brought about by scarcities and the expense of transporting goods to the remote location.²¹³ One photo in the paper showed of the skeletal frame of the “bowl” of the Chamber of Deputies building behind a large, untamed scrub brush amid the cleared red

²¹¹ Maurício Vaitsman “‘BB’ faz brotar do nada uma promissora e real civilização” *Diário das Notícias* 18 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

²¹² “Brasília às vésperas da mudança: adaimes, poeira e muito mato” *Tribuna de Imprensa* 17 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

²¹³ See, for example, “Brasília às vésperas da mudança: Quilo de açúcar custa Cr\$ 20, mais Cr\$ 40 de transporte,” *Tribuna da Imprensa* 18 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

dirt, alongside a deeply rutted dirt road, with the caption, “In the middle of the forest (*mato*)—where not even a jeep can travel—stands the congressional palace. This is the state of conditions in the city that will be the capital of the country on April 21.”²¹⁴ A cartoon appearing in *O Globo* exactly one month from the official inauguration offered the humorous suggestion that legislators could use Indians’ drums to communicate with the outside world. (Figure 14)

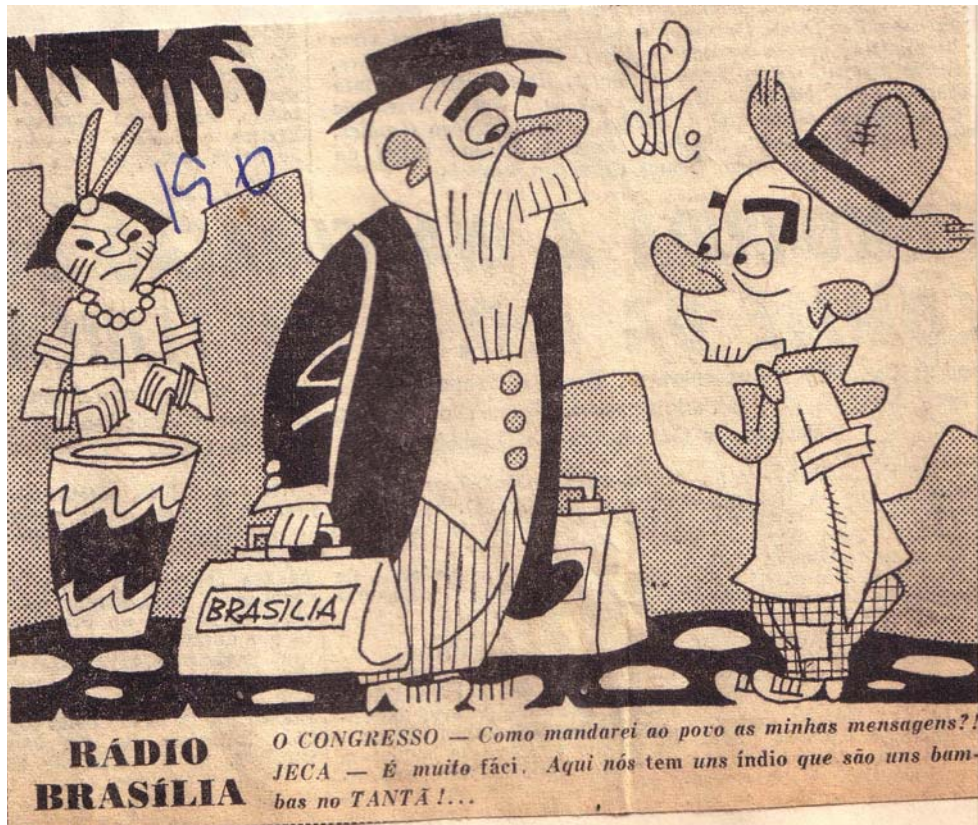


Figure 14.

"Congressman - 'How will I send all my communications to the people?'

Jeca - 'It's very easy. Here we have some Indian who plays powerfully the tomtom.'"

O Globo, 21 March 1960 (IHG-DF BSB-J 32)

²¹⁴ Jayme Negreiros and Antônio Andrade, “Brasília: prontos só o hotel de luxo e um palácio para Kubitschek sonhar” *Tribuna da Imprensa* 17 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

Brasília's defenders directly challenged those who expressed pessimism about the conditions extant in Brasília in the months directly preceding its inauguration. In the *Diário Carioca*, journalist Pedro Gomes suggested that the *Tribuna da Imprensa* should run a series titled "Rio, Two Hundred Years after the Transfer (O Rio, 200 após da mudança)," to provide a parallel to its articles on conditions in Brasília, documenting Rio's potholed streets, favelas, flooding, and traffic. (He failed to recognize that this could have furthered the point made by Brasília's critics: that it was foolish for the government to undertake new projects when the existing centers of population suffered from lack of investment by the government in infrastructure. When construction of the Belém-Brasília had been completed, portions of the highway linking the two former capitals, Rio and Salvador remained unpaved.) Gomes dismissed claims by Brasília's critics in the media that the semi-arid climate of the Planalto Central made it unsuitable for agricultural production, thus raising questions about its ability to sustain the city's population, writing that, "Brasília was built to better govern Brazil, not to produce better potatoes."²¹⁵ In this way Gomes sought to undercut the authority of those who declared the city uninhabitable, if not for its unfinished state, then for the more permanent obstacle of poor soil in the region. Journalist Brenno Ferraz do Amaral predicted in the *Diário de Notícias* that, "in Brasília there will be permanent hunger, as much because of the infertile land where it is being built, as for the lack of any provision for....establishing, with the possibilities opened by modern technology, the indispensable 'green-belt.'"²¹⁶ To Brasília's critics, a key flaw in the construction of the city was the lack of a sufficient area for agricultural production, a plan that did exist, while it was not fully implemented,

²¹⁵ Pedro Gomes "Considerações Mudancistas" *Diário Carioca* 21 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov. D. 04.01.Z Box 0663)

²¹⁶ "Recreação para Brasília" *Diário das Notícias* 5 Sept 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0666).

was to be developed and run mostly by farmers of Japanese descent. Eventually, the area around the federal district became an important agricultural region, particularly in soy bean production, with the aid of modern technology. Upon approaching Brasília by air, one is struck by the numerous circular-shaped irrigated green fields scattered like islands in the orange and brown sea of the *cerrado*. Nevertheless, in the frenzied early years, faced with the incredibly complex task of building a new city from scratch, Kubitschek and Novacap needed to make many difficult choices about which aspects of the plan should receive the highest priority. The particular decisions they made to these ends were the subject of endless criticisms.

Indeed, despite round-the-clock construction, conditions in Brasília were still difficult in April 1960 and beyond. The show of the inauguration went on as scheduled, and indeed the Congress met in the new capital from that date forward. Kubitschek (after the inauguration) and Jânio Quadros governed mostly from Brasília, while João Goulart spent most of his time in Rio's Laranjeiras palace. The military regime definitively located its capital in Brasília, though many ministries and foreign embassies did not transfer until a decade or more after the new capital's official inauguration. Itamarati, the foreign ministry, was the last to move.

An optimistic headline in the Rio edition of *Última Hora* in February 1960 declared, "Brasília Could Already Be Inhabited." The content of the article, however, did not justify the headline. The article quoted Felinto Epiácio Maia, executive director of the administration's Grupo de Trabalho de Transferência para Brasília (an example of the parallel administration created by Kubitschek to create an effective infrastructure staffed by technocrats for implementing his programs while not suffering the political

consequences of also dismantling the existing bureaucracy, comprised in large part by patronage appointments). Maia assured the paper that, “by the middle of March, the inhabitants of Brasília will have satisfactory conditions for life there and, perhaps in a sense even better than those in Rio. On March 10, all of the public and residential buildings will have well-functioning electricity, water, and sewage.”²¹⁷ The latter statement here seems to indict directly the infrastructural problems that plagued Rio. The effect of the headline’s strong statement of insurance remained, even though Maia clearly did not claim the capital was already prepared for the massive influx.

RECEPTION OF BRASÍLIA AS AN IDEA OR EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Chateaubriand suggested that while the *carioca* press and other local elites lambasted Brasília, the humbler residents of the soon-to-be former capital actually supported its transfer.²¹⁸ While it is difficult to gauge precisely the contemporaneous popular opinion of Brasília’s construction, available sources offer access to a diversity of perceptions.

A good place to start understanding popular opinion of the new capital is with polls conducted by the public opinion research group IBPOE, the Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística.²¹⁹ The first survey, conducted in January 1958 in five cities: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Porto Alegre, Recife, and Salvador. In November and

²¹⁷ “Brasília pode ser habitada desde já,” *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 27 Feb 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

²¹⁸ Assis Chateaubriand, “Sobre a carniça de Kubitschek, a carne sêca de Jânio Quadros” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) Feb 7 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0670).

²¹⁹ The summary of the IBPOE polls comes from the research conducted by historian Vânia Maria Losada Moreira in the Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação Social in the city of Campinas in São Paulo state (IFCH-Campinas), published in Vânia Maria Losada Moreira, *Brasília: a construção da nacionalidade: um meio para muitos fins (1956-61)* (Vitória: Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, 1998). According to Moreira, the methodology of the surveys is not clear from the extant sources.

December of the same year, IBPOE conducted a poll in those five cities plus Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Campinas, Santos, and Fortaleza. In January 1960 there was a third poll, about which little information exists. In the first poll, 32.5% of those surveyed declared themselves opposed to the transfer of the capital.²²⁰ Only 21% agreed that the capital should be built within the timeframe proposed by the government. Of those surveyed in January 1958, 20.4% had no opinion about the new capital.²²¹ The second poll found 30.8% in support of a gradual move, 29.3% in support of the government's timetable, 27.5% totally opposed to the transfer of the capital, and 12.3% with no opinion.²²² The final poll conducted by IPBOE four months before Brasília's inauguration, found 60.1% of respondents supported the transfer of the capital.²²³ These public opinion polls must be used with caution, since they include a bias in favor of urban, middle-class Brazilians. This is the sector of society, however, that tended to fear most the potential costs of the new capital. What the polls do suggest is that a strong majority of urban residents did support the construction of the capital in theory, but feared that Brasília had the potential to bring about destabilization in the country's chronically fragile economic and political order. A minority of voices spoke against Brasília both in theory and in practice. For example, one journalist wrote that, because of its remote inland location, "Brasília will be an austere Brazil, without dance clubs, without parties, without carnival, without samba, without society. A Brazil preoccupied with the problems of this great country will not be able to become a great Nation."²²⁴

²²⁰ Ibid., 69.

²²¹ Ibid., 70.

²²² Ibid., 72.

²²³ Ibid., 73.

²²⁴ Reflecting the numerous Brazilianisms that refer to parties and fun, many of the words used in the first sentence quoted do not have direct translations in English. I have offered an approximate translation. The

This perspective is particularly interesting given that it was published in São Paulo, a city with a reputation for the seriousness and work ethic of its inhabitants, especially when compared with supposedly hedonistic Rio.

While Chateaubriand claimed the majority of his fellow *cariocas* supported Brasília, critics voiced opposition to the rival capital in a number of different ways, both impassioned and lighthearted. The government did allow for opponents to voice their opinions of Brasília, though there were limits to its tolerance. Many journalists complained that, although the print media was free from government censorship, such was not the case for radio and television. A widely covered incident occurred 30 September 1958 when André Carrazzoni, chief of the government's censorship service,²²⁵ ordered that Luis Jatobá stop in the middle of reading a newspaper column written by Darwin Brandão on the program “Noite da Gala” on TV-Rio. The government censor justified his action by arguing that the political content of the column was not appropriate to a program oriented toward entertainment.²²⁶ The press's outcry against this instance of censorship apparently had some effect, since very few complaints subsequently appeared in the press. The effort to stifle criticism of the president backfired as the incident drew more attention to Brandão's essay than Jatobá could have achieved by reading it on television. It also lent credence to the very criticisms in the column. Brandão's complaints about Brasília were quite typical. His column began, “Our subject today is the story of an obsession and an obsessed. The obsession: Brasília.

original reads, “Brasília será um Brasil austero, sem boites, sem farras, sem carnaval, sem samba, sem *society*.” The word “society” appears in English. *Correio Paulistano*, 11 Jan 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-17).

²²⁵ Serviço de Censura de Diversões Públicas.

²²⁶ Examples of coverage of this incident are: Joel Silveira, “Brasília, Planeta K-21” *Diário das Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) and “O chefe da censura diz por que cortagem a crônica pelo meio” *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) both 1 October 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

The obsessed: Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira... a *mineiro* who never became quite accustomed to the sea.” He then took on a more biting tone when he imagined himself as a capricious Kubitschek. Finding Rio not to his liking, Brandão as Kubitschek said, “I’m going to go away to Brasília. There I will be king. There is found the air I want, the palace I will choose.”²²⁷ Brandão’s depiction of a selfish, capricious Kubitschek is in marked contrast to the image the regime sought to promote as a tireless advocate of Brazilian *grandeza*, who endured personal hardship for his country’s future. A more ominous example of government censorship is the reported case of police in Belo Horizonte who arrested several individuals for distributing pamphlets criticizing Brasília as a boondoggle and in support of the candidacy of Jânio Quadros for the presidency, who used the symbol of a broom to emphasize his promise to reduce corruption.²²⁸

The first song released for the city’s 1958 Carnival was a samba titled “I’m not going to Brasília.”²²⁹ The same year the Samba School Gente Bomba from Rio founded a new branch in the future capital. During a ceremony at the presidential palace, still under construction, author of the school’s song Herivelto Martins presented the wistful lyrics: “Goodbye Mangueira, Goodbye my Vigário Geral²³⁰ ... / Juscelino called me, I go dying of longing,²³¹ / But I go....”²³² These lines emphasize the real sacrifice endured by

²²⁷ *O Globo* published the text of Brandão’s column on 30 September 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

²²⁸ “Presos por distribuírem folhetos glosando Brasília,” *Correio da Manhã* 26 March 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671).

²²⁹ The censorship office for Carnival approved “I’m not going to Brasília” and around one-hundred other songs during the 1958 season. Nonnato Masson, “Sputnik, Brasília, Morango e Lambretas nas composições carnavalescas deste ano,” *Diário das Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 8 November 1957 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0657 (Out-Dez 1957)). About twenty-five were banned for overly explicit sexual content.

²³⁰ Mangueira and Vigário Geral are two of Rio’s favelas and also the homes to the most famous of the city’s Samba Schools who compete in the annual Carnival.

²³¹ The word *saudades*, which means something akin to longing, defies satisfactory translation to English.

²³² “Sambistas da Velhacap fundam escola de samba em Brasília!”, *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 18 December 1957 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0657).

early migrants to Brasília, resulting from the lack of infrastructure, the difficult “conditions of life” endlessly described in the press and providing justification for those who advocated postponing the transfer of vital government functions. The samba also highlights the difficulty of leaving one’s home, an especially grave loss when one’s home is the *cidade maravilhosa*, the marvelous city, as Rio is affectionately and immodestly called by its residents. Nevertheless, the pioneers of Brasília answered the call of their president, responded to a patriotic imperative, analogous to the sense of duty to nation that motivates soldiers to go into battle. Theirs was a war with peaceful aims, a “constructive revolution”, a fight to vanquish backwardness and underdevelopment. It was an effort that required the sacrifice of thousands, but, as the sign that greeted visitors to the city promised, all Brazilians would benefit from the fruits of the new capital.

Nationalism was a powerful tool employed by the promoters of Brasília to counter the project’s critics. Arguments based on emotion and faith existed alongside practical, reasoned ones in the vision of the new capital. These apparently contradictory nature of the debates belies the fact that the opposing visions were not only ideologically coherent, but what seem to be contradictions in fact serve to reinforce one another. The coexistence of mysticism and rationality has a long tradition in Brazilian intellectual history, perhaps best evidenced by the tremendous importance of positivism, particularly the mystical variety developed by Comte late in his career. Advocates of Brasília blamed the Portuguese, a maritime people, for establishing the nation’s uneven population distribution. They sought to expand the nation’s economic borders to coincide with its physical ones. This not only made economic and political sense, it also promised to

correct a sort of spiritual imbalance that had retarded Brazil's development and denied it its rightful place as a world power, attracting the admiration and respect of other nations.

Brasília's boosters cultivated and displayed their nationalist credentials through two main strategies (as discussed in the two preceding chapters). First, they rooted the new capital in the past, inserting it into a narrative of national progress and stressing connections to heroes of national heroes such as Tiradentes. Second, the city's planners always stressed the fact that Brasília was part of a larger plan for national development and material improvement. In this way they shaped the discourse of the new capital. Once they depicted the construction of Brasília as a nationalistic imperative, which they achieved by repeating that fact repeatedly and by employing the strategies described above, the city's advocates could easily launch ad hominum attacks about its opponents' patriotism and personal courage. Augusto Frederico Schmidt, aide to President Kubitschek, used such methods to counter the critiques of Brasília launched by syndicated columnist Gustavo Corção. "Por causa de Brasília, tornou-se êle um partidário do litoral contra a penetração e conquista do *hinterland*". Schmidt suggests that those who oppose Brasília are standing for the continuation of the past, stubbornly clinging to the stagnant ways characteristic of the coast (i.e., Rio de Janeiro).

Corção and others, who think that the interiorization of Brazil is an error, and that we should continue on the coast, austere, ascetic, but on the beach—unmoving, with our eyeglasses, gazing at the sea."²³³

In this way Brasília's supporters effectively depict those who opposed the project as mired in the past, lacking the faith in the fatherland that imbued the "spirit of Brasília." On the other side, Novacap faced allegations that its failure to keep the project under

²³³ OG Jan 5 1960 "Brasília, ou a irritação geométrica" by Augusto Frederico Schmidt ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669

control extended from financial matters to include a failure to control the ever-growing unruly masses arriving every day to Brasília.

While Brasília's boosters succeeded in part by successfully persuading a sizeable percentage of the public and policymakers to support the costly undertaking, more importantly was the simple fact that they kept working. One attempt after another to launch congressional inquiries failed, and the construction did not pause. Kubitschek had managed to secure funding and institutional autonomy for Novacap in September 1956, helping ensure he would turn over the presidential sash to his successor in Brasília rather than Rio de Janeiro. After ground broke one month later, work on the new capital did not cease. This above all was the key to Brasília's success. As important as the public relations campaign and high level political machinations were, nothing was more vital than the "spirit of Brasília" which united and sustained the round-the-clock dedication of those involved in the city's construction. In an oral history collected by the Arquivo Público do Distrito Federal, Oscar Niemeyer recounted the connection between the controversy of Brasília and the dedication of its builders, using as an example the tireless and dedicated Israel Pinheiro, who,

[a]t six o'clock in the morning, was already running around the construction site. That was the way it was, at the beginning. There was much, much enthusiasm, you see? There were many diverse obstacles that arose, because the pressure against Juscelino was so great. That provoked in us [those involved in the construction] a positive reaction, to respond [to the opposition] by continuing, working better, you see?²³⁴

²³⁴ Oscar Niemeyer interview, 8. (ArPDF oral history project).

In the previous chapter I suggested that the enemy the “Constructive Revolution” embodied in Brasília sought to vanquish was largely inanimate—the dense forest and other physical barriers to modernity. Through the heated debates between the allies and foes of the new capital emerged new obstacles, this time in the form of those who, from the perspective of Brasília’s boosters, lacked faith in the *capacidade realizadora* of the Brazilian people, their ability to complete the process of colonization and thereby achieve development. Representing their opponents as relics of the past, clinging to the old, failed, ways of doing things thus positioned supporters of Brasília as the true patriots, who bravely faced and conquered the forbidding interior for the benefit of the nation.

Those who opposed the construction of Brasília recognized that they had lost. The project progressed so quickly, that the prospects of reversing the transfer of the capital to the interior. Bitter resignation was evident the critiques of Brasília by late 1959 and early 1960. Kubitschek had remained undeterred, going so far as to break with the IMF to avoid cutting spending on his Target Plan. Referring to the irretrievable fact of Brasília and its economic toll in particular, widely read columnist Pedro Dantas declared that, “of the insanities that were committed and continue to be committed [in Brasília], this country will never free itself.” To Dantas, the Brazilian nation was forced to shoulder a tremendous burden for the capricious, “pharaonic” decision undertaken by one man. Still, Dantas declared that they had come too far, spent too much to stop the construction. Rather, he advocated a delay of the transfer.²³⁵ Expressing the same

²³⁵ DN Feb 19 1960 “Em holocausto à vaidade” by Pedro Dantas” ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0671 (Fev-Março

sentiment was a headline appearing in the *Jornal de Natal* (Rio Grande do Norte): “There Is Only One Crime Greater Than Building Brasília: It Is Stopping Brasília!”²³⁶

Resigned as they were to the fact of the new capital, Brasília’s critics found some solace in the belief that history would reveal the justice of their position. Thus grim predictions appeared frequently. Some went so far as to predict its future abandonment; others claiming that history would judge the undertaking harshly: “When Brasília is analyzed, as a whole, one will arrive a the conclusion that Brasília is more than the scandal of the century in Brazil: [it is] a true monstrosity.”²³⁷

²³⁶ “Só há um crime maior do modo como está sendo feito Brasília: É parar Brasília!” by Moacir de Goés *Jornal de Natal* (Rio Grande do Norte) 18 Feb 1958 (IHG-DF clippings vol I)

²³⁷ DN Dec 23 1959 “Ur-Gente” ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0668 (Outubro-Dezembro 1959)

CHAPTER IV

“WHERE LATELY A JAGUAR SCREAMED, A METROPOLIS NOW UNFOLDS”:²³⁸ BRASÍLIA VIEWED FROM ABROAD

The goal was simple, but magnificent: To plant in the midst of Brazil’s trackless prairie a new, ultramodern city, capital of a nation of 65,000,000. The city’s dual aim: To serve as a seat of government and as a magnet to draw a nation’s people and energies away from the narrow, crowded coastal region first settled 400 years ago.

For Brazil’s rich and untapped back country is one of the world’s great remaining reservoirs of wealth, the slumbering heart of a continent that has experienced a surging boom during the past fifty years. Brasília is a daring, yet confident gamble on a nation’s and a continent’s future.²³⁹

During the period of Brasília’s construction the Brazilian press obsessively covered the interest their new capital provoked abroad. On a daily basis newspapers detailed visits made to the future capital by foreign luminaries and excerpted and translated international coverage of the city. The federal government also engaged directly in disseminating foreign reception of Brasília, devoting two of the eleven volumes in the Brasília documentary series to translated excerpts of opinions of the new capital from countries ranging from Japan to Paraguay to the United States.²⁴⁰

Why were Brazilians so interested in how the world perceived the construction of Brasília? Positive reception of the undertaking, particularly by First-World commentators, provided justifications for the new capital. Tellingly, Brasília’s advocates frequently evoked foreign precedents of urban planning, while rarely mentioning the

²³⁸ Quote is the subtitle of article titled “Kubitschek’s Brasília” published in *Time* 25 (April 1960): 34-39.

²³⁹ Hernane Tavares de Sá, “Metropolis Made to Order,” *National Geographic* 117(5) (May 1960): 705.

²⁴⁰ *Brasília e a opinião mundial* 2 vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Presidência da República, Serviço de Documentação, 1958 and 1959).

many precedents in Brazilian history.²⁴¹ Perhaps the continuation of preoccupation with outsiders' opinion is evidence of failure of modernist project, which in Brazil meant above all the movement for intellectual emancipation.²⁴² More than three decades after the modernists launched their movement, and within the context of a widely accepted official discourse explicitly dedicated to the pursuit of independence in all areas—culture, politics, and economics—discussions about Brasília show how Brazilians continued to look abroad for validation.

The overwhelmingly positive tenor of international coverage of Brasília—translated and reprinted in numerous media—provided ammunition for the pro-Brasília campaign.²⁴³ Newspapers frequently covered foreign commentary on Brasília and the city's promoters explicitly used positive coverage abroad in their effort to secure popular support for the project at home. Since a stated goal of Brasília was to improve Brazil's standing vis-à-vis the developed nations of the north, positive foreign coverage provided evidence of the capital's success. A typical headline cried “Indisputable the Prestige of

²⁴¹ Commentators did occasionally reference the planned state capitals of Belo Horizonte (1897) and Goiânia (1933), however they ignored the fact that urban planning was a cornerstone of Portuguese colonization, beginning with the foundation of Brazil's first capital, Salvador da Bahia, in 1549. The crown dispatched an architect to accompany Salvador's founder, Tomé de Souza. Prior to publication of *Evolução urbana do Brasil 1500-1720* by Nestor Goulart Reis (São Paulo: EDUSP, 1969), scholars tended to deny the planned nature of Brazilian colonial cities, using this apparent point of contrast between Spanish and Portuguese colonization. For discussion of Salvador's founding see Néstor Goulart Reis, *Evolução urbana do Brasil 1500-1720* 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Pini, 2000), pp. 18-24. Roberta Marx Delson provides a detailed discussion of historiography of Brazilian colonial cities in *New Towns for Colonial Brazil: Spacial and Social Planning of the Eighteenth Century* (Syracuse: Department of Geography, Syracuse University, Dellplain Latin American Studies Series, 1979).

²⁴² Not coincidentally São Paulo's Modern Art Week, which marked the beginning of the Brazilian modernist movement, coincided with the centennial of Brazil's political independence. Two classic studies are: Wilson Martins, *The Modernist Idea: A Critical Survey of Brazilian Writing in the Twentieth Century*, Trans. Jack Tomlins (New York: New York University Press, 1970) and Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America: Society and the Artist..* As discussed previously in the dissertation, the influence of modernism in Brazil extended beyond the arts. Gilberto Freyre and other important intellectuals are considered modernists. The discourse of economic emancipation came to be officially sanctioned following the Revolution of 1930.

²⁴³ One of the eleven volumes of documents related to Brasília's construction published by the President's Serviço de Documentação was dedicated to excerpted translations of foreign reception of the new capital. *Brasília e a opinião mundial* (Rio de Janeiro: Presidência da República, 1959).

Brazil and its President.”²⁴⁴ ISEB co-founder Roland Corbisier succinctly summed up the opportunity Brasília presented for improving the nation’s image abroad: it would show the world “for the first time, that we are not only a land of plantations and parrots, of carnival and soccer.”²⁴⁵ As another journalist put it, many Europeans “think, still, that we speak Spanish and that our music is the rumba, but nobody ignores [the fact] that we are building a new Capital in the heart of the country according to the most advanced ideas of architecture and urbanism.”²⁴⁶ Even Brasília’s critics could not deny that the new capital did help foreigners better understand their nation. In 1958 Joaquim Ferreira wrote that the world was aware that, in the space of two years, “the capital of the country will change... it will no longer be Rio de Janeiro, nor Buenos Aires.”²⁴⁷ Alas, Ferreira’s prediction proved to be overly optimistic as Brazilians still frequently complain that foreigners believe Buenos Aires to be their capital.

Much of the international coverage parroted the official justifications for Brasília presented in chapter 2. Foreign commentators, like Brasília’s advocates, tended to see the new capital as the key to finally complete the process of colonization. During his visit to Brasília in 1959, Fidel Castro told Kubitschek “You, the Brazilians, will conquer your own country and colonize it.”²⁴⁸ By taming the vast interior of Brazil, the “interiorization” brought about by the transfer of the capital permitted the nation to take full advantage of its rich natural resources. So long as the majority of the nation’s

²⁴⁴ *Jornal do Comércio* (Recife) 1 January 1960 (IHG-DF BSB J-13).

²⁴⁵ Roland Corbisier, *Brasília e o desenvolvimento nacional* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros, 1960), 62.

²⁴⁶ “Na Europa, Brasil rima com Brasília”, *Diário Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro) 16 May 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0658).

²⁴⁷ Joaquim Ferreira, “Brasília faz crescer o interesse pelo Brasil nas Ilhas Britânicas,” *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 24 April 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-1).

²⁴⁸ “Fidel Castro seguiu ontem para B. Aires,” *Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro) 1 May 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0664).

territory remained untamed and beyond the reach of “civilization” Brazil could not claim to be modern. Achieving full, meaningful independence was a necessary step toward Brazil claiming what nationalists considered its rightful place as the dominant power in Latin America and member of the first world.

The new capital offered a counterbalance to the image of hedonistic *Carnaval* and *futebol*, a far more serious face for the nation. It made Brazil notable for an achievement of vision and dedicated labor, not just a land of diversions. Carmen Miranda may have brought the world’s attention to Brazil, but the image she projected was a source of embarrassment for the nation’s elite. Brasília helped burnish the nation’s image abroad, to give it the appearance of an emerging world power, a country that should be taken seriously and treated as an equal.

The massive effort required to build an entirely new capital city in the remote Planalto Central of Brazil captured the world’s imagination and offered a rare opportunity to promote the nation abroad and shape international perceptions of the nation. Indeed the intention to alter opinions of Brazil abroad provided a key justification for the construction of the new capital. The Brazilian press obsessively covered international reception of Brasília. On a near-daily basis during the construction period newspapers reported on Brazil’s ever-increasing prestige abroad. Headlines announced “Singapore Knows Everything about Brasília,”²⁴⁹ “Great Interest in Paris about the Construction of Brasília,”²⁵⁰ “Brasília: Daily Subject in the Belgian Press,”²⁵¹ and “In Israel, Brasília Is

²⁴⁹ *Diário Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro) 9 January 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0669). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

²⁵⁰ *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro) 12 December 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

²⁵¹ *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 17 September 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

Almost a Magic Word.”²⁵² While the construction of Brasília was extremely controversial at home (see previous chapter), reception abroad was almost exclusively positive. Newspaper columnist Benjamin Costallat wrote that “Brasília is already amazing the world, before it amazes Brazil.”²⁵³ After a trip to Europe journalist Santos Vahlis wrote that “Who returns from Abroad, as is my case, brings with him a certainty that out there they believe more in Brasília than we do here in Brazil.”²⁵⁴ The new capital did draw the world’s attention to Brazil and showcased the fact that there was more to Brazil than football, carnival, and jungle. At least in the short term, Brasília caused foreigners to add cutting-edge architectural innovation and rapid progress to their image of the nation. Abroad the most significant and enduring effect of the new capital was in focusing attention on Brazil and altering (however fleetingly) perceptions of the nation. At the same time, however, the enormous cost of the project (the central complaint of Brasília’s detractors) decreased confidence in Brazil’s economic stability. Kubitschek’s refusal to scale back spending led to his decision to abandon the unpopular austerity measures and break from the International Monetary Fund in June 1959. After returning from a trip to Europe, a reporter for leading daily *O Globo* complained that, although Europeans expressed enthusiasm for Brasília and the related progress being made in Brazil, the high degree of monetary instability meant that banks refused to exchange the *cruzeiro*.²⁵⁵

²⁵² *Diário Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro) 31 August 1960 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0674).

²⁵³ Benjamin Costallat, “O piquenique aéreo,” in *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 21 October 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

²⁵⁴ Santos Vahlis, “Os bilhões de Brasília,” *Diário de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 15 August 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

²⁵⁵ “Brasília é popular mas o cruzeiro não melhora,” *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 30 October 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0667).

The government actively promoted the construction of Brasília abroad. At home, critics pointed to the promotional effort as another example of the government's financial irresponsibility; for example, one critic complained that the funds spent by Novacap on a full-page advertisement on page three of the *New York Times* could have been used to build six new schools in Brasília.²⁵⁶ As seen in the previous chapter, the president's allies countered such claims by pointing out that development brought by the new capital would, in time, make up for short-term economic costs of the undertaking. Brasília's ultimate goal was to bring about true emancipation for the country, both spiritual and economic. Economic growth alone was not enough; Brasília's planners believed that, in order for Brazil to join the ranks of modern capitalist nations, it had to alter perceptions of the nation both at home and abroad. They hoped that, by successfully implementing the construction of Brasília in the given time frame, Brazilians would prove to the world that they were able and ready to be treated as equals by the North Atlantic powers. In addition, the government used the positive reception abroad in its efforts to increase Brazilians' support for the construction of the new capital.

To promote Brasília abroad the Foreign Ministry organized various expositions that traveled the world during the period of its construction. An exhibition showcasing Brazilian architecture from colonial through modern times traveled throughout Latin America and New York's Museum of Modern Art presented a display of Brasília. Two separate exhibits traveled through various European cities and another made its way from Japan to the Middle East (China reportedly refused to receive the display).²⁵⁷ Aside from the exhibits organized by the Brazilian government, models and plans for Brasília were

²⁵⁶ *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 18 January 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-1).

²⁵⁷ Jaime Maurício, "Itinerário das artes plásticas," *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) 7 December 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

displayed in museums and fairs in Dallas, Minneapolis, Lisbon, and Angola.

Scandinavian Airlines flew Miss Brasília, Marta Garcia, to Europe to promote the new capital. The rapid construction of new roadways to connect Brasília to coastal centers of population drew civil engineers and road planners to visit and closely follow the progress of its construction. Brazilian media aided the government's efforts to garner support for Brasília abroad. The popular newspaper *Última Hora*, founded by Kubitschek supporter Samuel Wainer, published a special international edition devoted to the new capital in several languages. According to the paper, "[n]othing better symbolizes the Brazil of today, clearly on its path toward its definitive emancipation, than does Brasília."²⁵⁸

Kubitschek's critics accused the president of spending more time playing tour guide to foreign visitors in Brasília than dealing with government business, still headquartered in Rio. A journalist from Rio complained that, "It is fashionable to visit Brasília. The Government concerns itself with bringing eminent figures of the day to Brazil, less to help them learn about the Country, than to praise the future capital."²⁵⁹

The priority the government gave to receiving important visitors is evidenced by the fact that one of the first buildings completed in Brasília was the luxury Brasília Palace Hotel.²⁶⁰ With all the modern amenities, the hotel operated at near capacity from the day it opened in 1956. Less than two years after Kubitschek first visited the site of the future capital, a North American journalist observed that Brasília had, "become a must for official visitors to Brazil. Almost every visiting foreign dignitary who has touched

²⁵⁸ "Edição internacional de *Última Hora* apresentará ao mundo inteiro: Brasília, capital do século XX!", *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 7 February 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0661).

²⁵⁹ "Brasília e Rio," *O Globo* 30 October 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0667).

²⁶⁰ Construction of the presidential palace (Palácio da Alvorada), the temporary presidential residence (Catetinho), the airport, and hotel began simultaneously in October 1956, five months before the selection of the Pilot Plan. Fire destroyed the Brasília Palace Hotel in 1977.

ground in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo has been flown by proud Brazilians to this spectacular construction site.”²⁶¹

In a newspaper interview José Osvaldo de Meira Penna, chief of the cultural affairs for Itamarati, the Foreign Ministry, explained how Brasília presented a unique opportunity to alter perceptions of Brazil abroad. To Penna, Brasília was a “splendid vehicle for disseminating propaganda, in the good sense of the word.”²⁶² The undertaking captured the world’s imagination and changed the way they thought about Brazil. Penna played an important role in promoting Brasília at home by placing it within the context of other planned national capitals. This tactic redefined two key critiques of Brasília’s construction: while some derided the new capital as “artificial” and “pharaonic”, Penna provided positive associations for these terms by comparing Brasília to great planned cities of the past. In 1958 the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) published Penna’s survey of the history of planned capital cities, “*Quando mudam as capitais*”, with a preface by Israel Pinheiro. In the introduction, Penna carefully uses the term “artificial” in quotes, employing Lewis Mumford’s usage, that is to describe any planned city. In this way the label “artificial” when applied to a city does not mean that it somehow lacks authenticity.²⁶³ The book begins with the construction of the ancient city of Akhetaten (El-Amarna), built by the Pharaoh Akhenaton. In Penna’s reading, Akhenaton is less despotic theocrat than visionary planner.²⁶⁴ Subsequent chapters are dedicated to the construction of the “artificial”

²⁶¹ Tad Szulc, “On a Brazilian Plateau—A New Capital City,” *New York Times*, 3 August 1958, p. x33.

²⁶² Penna, *Quando mudam os capitais*, 17.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶⁴ Various commentators have sought to establish connections between Brasília and Akhetaten. In *Brasília secreta* (Brasília: Pórtico, 2000), self-described Egyptologist Iara Kern argues that there is a supernatural link between Kubitschek and Akhenaton. *Brasília secreta* is sold in bookstores and elsewhere in Brasília, including the Memorial JK. This theme will be explored in the epilogue.

capital cities of Constantinople, Tokyo, Madrid, St. Petersburg, Washington, and Canberra, among others. Building Brasília thus gave Brazil membership in an exclusive club of nations that had built planned national capitals; after Brasília it had a capital city worthy of a great nation, equal to or surpassing the great urban centers of the past.

At times the government's orchestrated photo opportunities did not quite come off as planned. One example was a ceremony marking the completion of phase one of the Belém-Brasília highway in the thick Amazonian rainforest of southern Maranhão. In less than two years, thousands of workers had succeeded in cutting a fifteen-hundred kilometer road through the dense jungle. At a remote site in the jungle various dignitaries, including the Ministers of War and Education, the Foreign Minister and the ambassadors from the Dominican Republic, Switzerland, and Belgium, gathered to mark, as a newspaper headline described it, the incorporation of four million square kilometers into the economic territory of Brazil.²⁶⁵ During the ceremony Kubitschek, clad in a business suit, sat in a throne draped with a jaguar pelt. The president took command of a Caterpillar tractor to fell the final tree standing in the path of the new highway: a *jarobá* that stood more than forty meters tall and measured two meters in diameter. For nearly an hour the president attempted in vain to pull down the tree. Two hours later, after the guests had enjoyed an elaborate meal, workers managed to fell the *jarobá* while Kubitschek, in a characteristic display of emotion, wept on his jaguar throne.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ “JK incorpora 4 milhões de quilômetros quadrados ao território do Brasil: Rodovia Belém-Brasília,” *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 2 February 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0661).

²⁶⁶ This embarrassing incident was covered in various newspapers. In addition to the citation above, see “Derrubada simbólica assinalou a efetiva abertura da estrada” *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) 2 February 1959, and untitled article in *O Estado de Minas* (Belo Horizonte) 4 February 1959 (both in ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0661).

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

During the construction period Kubitschek hosted political leaders including Fidel Castro, Dwight Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, Sukarno, Alfredo Stroessner of Paraguay, Francisco Higeno Craveiro Lopes of Portugal, Giovanni Gronchi of Italy, Golda Meir of Israel, and Nobusuke Kishi of Japan. Kubitschek did not play favorites—he hosted foreign leaders of all political persuasions.²⁶⁷ The United States’ strategic interest in South America’s largest nation rose in the 1940s as the Cold War set in. Perceptions of Brasília abroad—and the Brazilian government’s efforts to promote the city—must be understood within this context.

With the advent of the Cold War, the U.S. deepened its involvement in foreign affairs. After World War II the United States sought to extend the exercise of its power in the hemisphere beyond its historical dominance of the circum-Caribbean to include South America. The United States was the country whose support—both material and ideological—was most crucial for the success of Brasília, and for Kubitschek’s Target Program more broadly. To the chagrin of nationalists, the president relied heavily on government loans and private capital from abroad, the bulk of which came from the United States. (Figure 15) In May 1957 the U.S. Export-Import Bank granted a ten-million dollar loan to assist the Brazilian government in purchasing machinery and other supplies from the United States to use in Brasília’s construction.

There is no shortage of irony in the “U.S.-Brazilian Declaration” signed by presidents Eisenhower and Kubitschek during the former’s visit to the new capital, in which they affirmed their nations’ belief in “democratic freedoms and fundamental rights

²⁶⁷ The only restriction of movement into the city was of unskilled workers, who began to flood the city in the wake of the devastating drought in Northeastern Brazil in 1958.

of man.”²⁶⁸ In practice, neither side seemed much concerned with promoting democracy abroad—in 1954 Eisenhower approved the CIA’s ouster of President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala, and just two months after signing the declaration at Brasília, Kubitschek welcomed Latin American despots Somoza, Stroessner, and Trujillo to celebrate the new capital’s official inauguration. In response, democratically-elected President Rómulo Betancourt of Venezuela boycotted the festivities to protest Brazil’s support of dictatorial



Figure 15.

-Dulles: What's the distance between Brasília and Washington? I'd guess about 15,000 miles.

-Kubitschek: I'd say about 500 million dollars.

Source: O Globo (Rio de Janeiro) 13 August 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

²⁶⁸ The texts of the presidents' individual speeches and the agreement are reprinted in full in the *New York Times* 24 February 1960, p. 8.

regimes in the hemisphere.²⁶⁹ In the 1950s political leaders in both the United States and Brazil waxed poetic about democracy, freedom, and self-determination while at the same time offering tacit and sometimes direct support to authoritarian regimes.

The importance of positive perception in the United States extended beyond its crucial financial assistance. According to one article on Eisenhower's visit, the North American President's decision to begin his visit to Brazil at Brasília signified the "consecration of Brasília"; his approval bestowed a degree of legitimacy on the undertaking that no Brazilian commentator could hope to generate.²⁷⁰ By planning a new capital from scratch, Brazilians emulated the path pursued by their North American counterparts in the previous century. In André Malraux's generous estimation, the as-then-incomplete new capital represented an achievement of world historical proportions. In an interview with a Brazilian journalist the visiting writer and French Minister of Culture compared Brasília (favorably) to Versailles declared that, "Brazil is the only Latin country that has managed to equal in gigantic scale the great North American accomplishments."²⁷¹

In his remarks before the joint declaration made during Eisenhower's visit, Kubitschek stated that the ties between the two nations were such that "we can speak one to the other with the frank confidence of brothers."²⁷² In this way Kubitschek sought to stress the historical similarities between the two nations. While depicting the relationship between the U.S. and Brazil as fraternal does imply closeness, it does not necessarily

²⁶⁹ José Arthur Rios, "Imperialismo Brasileiro," *O Popular* (Goiânia) 29 January 1960 (IHG-DF BSB J-30).

²⁷⁰ "Consegração de Brasília," *Diário de Minas* (Belo Horizonte) 25 February 1960 (IHG-DF BSB J-30).

²⁷¹ Malraux quoted in "Aliança eternal entre o Palácio de Verasailles e a Obra de Brasília!" *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro) 13 February 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0661).

²⁷² "Texts of Kubitschek and Eisenhower Speeches and U.S.-Brazilian Declaration," *New York Times* 24 February 1960, p. 8.

connote equality; if the two nations are brothers, the former is the more mature sibling, despite the fact that the colonial period in Brazil commenced more than a century before that of the United States.

Kubitschek's emphasis on commonalities between Brazil and the United States served his goal to assert Brazil as the dominant power in the southern half of the western hemisphere as the U.S. was in the Caribbean basin. While the language of the Operação Pan-Americana stressed the goal of enhancing, inter-American relations, Pan-Americanism did not imply a union of equals; there is no doubt that Kubitschek believed that Brazil ought to be the leader of any Latin American union. Brasília served the nation's efforts to assert dominance in South America by shifting Brazil's attention toward the interior, away from Europe and Africa, toward the Spanish-speaking republics that lay beyond the vast wilderness. Besides the fact that Kubitschek was not the type to be inconvenienced by ideology, the nation's geopolitical aspirations further help explain why Kubitschek would support a despot like Stroessner. The planned network of new highways to extend from the new capital would eventually to the Peruvian border and thus to the Pacific Ocean. According to one Peruvian journalist, the new capital represented a shift in South American relations: "it will bring greater mutual interest, extending relations of solidarity and economic connections between those countries."²⁷³

BRAZIL AS TECHNICAL INNOVATOR

Architecture's position at the intersection of reason and imagination made it an especially useful tool for those who sought to improve Brazil's image abroad. In an

²⁷³ Hilda S. de Codina, "Brasília, nueva capital," *El Comercio* (Lima) 30 June 1957 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0677).

interview with a Brazilian newspaper, Penna explained why architecture was so well-suited to promoting Brazil: it “does not just represent artistic development, but also, a way of life, technical progress.”²⁷⁴ Music and architecture were the two Brazilian arts with the greatest prestige abroad, but the latter had more far-reaching implications, with the potential to position Brazil as an innovator in both cultural and technical terms. Although the Brasília’s construction depended heavily on foreign capital and machinery, the conception and realization was thoroughly Brazilian. The new capital’s planners were very conscious of it being a Brazilian undertaking: for example, entrance in the Pilot Plan competition was restricted to Brazilians.

Brazilian modernism had an explicitly political purpose: to achieve artistic emancipation. Modernists praised the baroque art and architecture of the colonial period as a truly original and authentic. Through the nineteenth century, however, beginning with the arrival of the French cultural mission that accompanied the Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro, Brazilians mostly produced mediocre imitations of European works of art and architecture. São Paulo’s 1922 Modern Art Week, which launched the modernist movement in Brazil, coincided with the centenary of Brazil’s political independence. The modernists envisioned their project as a second declaration of independence, no less significant for the nation’s development: they announced the artistic emancipation of Brazil, encouraging artists (modernism’s influence began in literature before extending to the visual arts and music). Intellectual independence is a prerequisite for the kind of technical innovation that characterizes “developed” nations. Although Brazilian modernists did draw on European and, to a lesser though ever-increasing degree, North

²⁷⁴ “Grande interesse em Paris pela construção de Brasília,” *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro) 6 December 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0660).

American influences, they self-consciously combined them with traditions rooted in Brazil's indigenous and African heritage. Art, therefore, reflected and helped disseminate the changing intellectual climate in twentieth-century Brazil (and Latin America more broadly), though its planners had little control over how their message was received.

To architectural critics the shocking appearance of the stark, original white buildings set in the remote Planalto was something to be praised. In terms of artistic invention Brasília ranked highly. Brazilian architecture enjoyed prestige in North America long before ground broke on the construction of Brasília. In the 1920s Gregori Warchavchik was the first to apply the new ideas about design and planning in São Paulo. Shortly after President Getúlio Vargas created the fascist Estado Novo in 1937, he engaged a group of young architects (including Lucio Costa and his student, Oscar Niemeyer) to design the new Ministry of Education and Health in the center of Rio de Janeiro. Costa invited Le Corbusier to consult on the design, which soon became one of the most widely praised works of the new architecture style. Costa's and Niemeyer's Brazilian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939 further consolidated Brazil's place at the forefront of modernist architecture. In 1942 U.S. architect G.E. Kidder Smith and director of New York's Museum of Modern Art in New York, Philip Goodwin, traveled to Brazil to study its architecture first-hand. From the photos taken by Smith, MoMA organized an exhibition surveying Brazilian architecture from the colonial baroque through the modern.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ A book emerged from this project: Goodwin, Philip L., *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652-1942* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943).

Brazilian architectural innovation continued in the 1940s, when Juscelino Kubitschek, then mayor of Belo Horizonte, engaged Niemeyer to design three buildings in the new middle-class suburb of Pampulha. The design of the church at Pampulha proved so shocking that the archbishop initially refused to consecrate it. The selection of Niemeyer as one of the dozen architects charged with designing the headquarters of the United Nations further contributed to his reputation of one of the leading practitioners of modernist architecture.

While Brazilian architects incorporated many aspects of design pioneered abroad (especially influential were Le Corbusier's modernism and Ebenezer Howard's Garden City) their designs had a distinctly Brazilian character. Among the distinct characteristics of Brazilian modernist architecture are the use of Iberian-style tiles as adornment, the liberal use of curves and subterranean entrances, and innovative window shadings to guard against the harsh tropical heat. This last element, which embodied the modernist dictate "form follows function", which was evident in early examples of modernist architecture in Brazil (for example, the MEC building in Rio), is strangely lacking in the architecture of Brasília. Indeed, one of the major critiques lodged against Niemeyer's designs are that they are not very livable. Particularly ill-conceived in these terms are the ministry buildings that line the monumental axis: their enormous glass walls face east and west, thereby leaving their occupants unprotected from the intense tropical sun. From an aesthetic perspective these buildings succeed, but their utility is diminished.

European architects must have felt a twinge of jealousy at the unprecedented opportunity Brasília presented its designers, an empty slate upon which they had complete freedom to project their vision of the ideal city for the modern era. Sir William

Holford, a prominent British architect and member of the international jury that selected Costa's entry for Brasília's design in 1957 implied that the decisiveness of the act was a sign of strength when he wrote: "Brazil is confident that an entirely new town, an administrative and federal capital, can emerge, fully appointed, from the designer's brain and become a metropolis within one generation."²⁷⁶ Architectural critics praised the originality and unity of form reflected in Niemeyer's buildings and Costa's city plan. In another publication, Holford wrote that:

To anyone who is a student of the growth of towns and of man's capacity to order his own environment, Brasília must appeal, even if in some respects the actuality disappoints: it is an act of will as formidable as that which founded the new capital of Constantinople in A.D. 330.²⁷⁷

The modernist project's success depended on Brazil becoming a producer rather than consumer of ideas. While artists were the first to articulate the modernist ideal of spiritual emancipation, other Brazilian intellectuals applied its tenets to the social sciences. Gilberto Freyre's path-breaking study of the Brazilian national character, *Casa-grande e senzala*, published in 1933, rejected racial determinism by conceiving of Brazil's ethnic pluralism as a positive rather than negative.²⁷⁸ The Revolution of 1930 brought to power a new generation that sought to achieve national greatness, *grandeza*, through state-driven economic growth financed by international capital. The economic policies pursued in the decades following the 1930 revolution did succeed in bringing about a stunning degree of industrialization—during the Kubitschek presidency alone, Brazil's industrial output increased by 80%. Ultimately, however, as Marshall Eakin

²⁷⁶ William Holford, "Brasília: A New City for Brazil," *Architectural Review* 122(731): 395-402 (December 1957), p. 396.

²⁷⁷ William Holford, "Brasília: The Federal Capital of Brazil," *The Geographical Journal* 128, no. 1 (March 1962): 15-17, p. 15.

²⁷⁸ Freyre's conception of race is part of a larger trend in Latin America, particularly in revolutionary Mexico, where the nation's mestizo characteristic formed the cornerstone of a new national identity. José Vasconcelos articulated this ideology in his influential 1925 essay *La raza cósmica*.

argues, the economic growth achieved in Brazil was fundamentally flawed because it was not accompanied by technical innovation and its benefits did not extend beyond the traditional elites.²⁷⁹

Regardless of the project's ultimate success, one sees clearly in the way Brasília was promoted an explicit effort to showcase Brazilian innovation. Moreover, an analysis of coverage of the new capital abroad suggests that the strategy succeeded in the short term: for a moment at least, Brazil appeared to the world a nation "on the move,"²⁸⁰ toward the future, actively progressing and developing. Brazil appeared to be "the land of the future,"²⁸¹ and Brasília its "capital of hope,"²⁸² the modern contours of which offered a glimpse into the future, prompting one visitor to predict that, "when New York is a pallid memory, Brasília will be the center of the world."²⁸³ Brasília seemed to confirm the nationalist contention that theirs was a great nation, the new capital providing tangible proof that Brazil was well on its way to attaining modernity.

Relaying the impressions of one visitor to the United States, columnist Décio Freitas wrote that while North Americans knew very little about Brazil, all were aware of the construction of Brasília. "This, with good reason, gives us celebrity throughout the world." Freitas confidently predicted that "Brasília will surpass New York, London, Paris, Moscow, Rome, cities that are thousands or hundreds of years old that still have

²⁷⁹ Marshall C. Eakin, *Tropical Capitalism: The Industrialization of Belo Horizonte* (New York: St. Martin's, 2001).

²⁸⁰ John Dos Passos, *Brazil on the Move* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963).

²⁸¹ The theme of Brazil as the land of the future is a recurrent theme in the literature, beginning with the book by Swiss visitor Stefan Zweig, *Brazil: Land of the Future*, trans. Andrew St. James (New York: Viking, 1942).

²⁸² Andre Malraux coined this term in a 1959 speech in Brasília. U.S. journalist Alex Shoumatoff used this moniker as the title of his book about Brasília (Alex Shoumatoff, *The Capital of Hope*, New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980).

²⁸³ Quote from Italian physician Pietro Matei, who visited Brasília after participating in a conference on Chagas Disease, quoted in article titled "Brasília será centro do mundo," *O Estado* (Florianópolis) 15 July 1959 (IHG-DF BSB J-13).

not adjusted to the jet age.”²⁸⁴ A headline in the *Jornal do Brasil* proudly quoted the visiting Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Gronchi: “Brasília is an undertaking worthy of the time of Rome.”²⁸⁵ An Argentine journalist expressed confidence on the fact that Brasília represented a prototype, a model upon which future cities would be based: “We will go to Brasília to see what the future capitals of our America will be like.”²⁸⁶

For those who could not visit the remote construction site, photographs printed in papers daily and footage presented in newsreels and on television helped convey the scale of the undertaking, the drama inherent in the erection of a complete city in less than four years on the apparently desolate Planalto Central, in the words of Aldous Huxley “the largest empty space I’ve ever seen.”²⁸⁷ In an interview diplomat Penna asserted that, by building Brasília,

[a]t least two long-standing preconceptions are being undone. The first is that laziness, lack of discipline, indecision, and the tendency to leave everything for ‘tomorrow’ is part of our temperament. . . . The second, still very common in Europe, is that all of Brazil is a vast virgin forest, inhabited by naked Indians and poisonous snakes. And it is precisely in the middle of this wilderness [*mata*], one thousand kilometers from the sea, in absolute jungle [*plena selva*], where the most modern, the greatest work of architecture and urbanism of the twentieth century was built!”²⁸⁸

Apparent confirmation of Brazil as the source of technical innovation came when experts of all kinds sought to witness and learn from the creation of Brasília. The fact that specialists from abroad would travel to the remote Planalto Central to witness this

²⁸⁴ Décio Freitas, “Brasília e a carestia,” *A Hora* (Porto Alegre) 14 March 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0662).

²⁸⁵ “Gronchi: Brasília é obra digna dos tempos romanos!” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 9 September 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

²⁸⁶ Manuel Kantor, “Brasília,” *La Nación* (Buenos Aires) 9 March 1958 ((ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0677).

²⁸⁷ Huxley visited Brasília in 1958. This quote was repeated in various Brazilian media. See, for example, *Diário de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro) 21 October 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

²⁸⁸ Jaime Maurício, “O Itamarati e a divulgação da arquitetura brasileira,” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro) 16 October 1958 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0659).

phenomenon provided powerful evidence of the success of Brazilian modernism: Brazil was at the cutting edge of urban planning and architecture. Reporting on the visit of a group of architects from the United States, one Brazilian journalist smirked that “they appeared not to understand much about modernist architecture.”²⁸⁹ Although this period of preeminence ultimately proved fleeting, for a few years at least, Brasília served as a brilliant medium for broadcasting to the world the image of society in rapid pursuit of modernity.

BRASÍLIA IN VOGUE

The list of notable visitors to the remote construction site is long and diverse; it included Prince Bernard of the Netherlands, William Randolph Hearst, architects Mies van der Rohe and Richard Neutra, writers Elizabeth Bishop, John Dos Passos, Aldous Huxley, and André Malraux (then France’s Minister of Culture). French film director Marcel Camus of the acclaimed Portuguese-language classic *Orfeu negro*, shot an adventure movie, *Os bandeirantes* along the new Brasília-Belém highway. Frank Capra filmed Brasília from a helicopter; Brasília’s design remains most impressive and easily appreciated from above. Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre visited too; Beauvoir wrote that she “hated” Brasília, though her biographer suggests that this might have had a good deal to do with Sartre’s flirtations with Brazilian women.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ “Arquiteto Niemeyer explica para americanos curiosos planos gerais de Brasília,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 1 March 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-1).

²⁹⁰ Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), p. 481.

Dos Passos's opinion of Brasília was much more favorable than was de Beauvoir's. His article on Brasília published in *Reader's Digest* in 1959 was subsequently translated into thirteen different languages and distributed in thirty-five countries. The Associação Brasileira da Imprensa organized an exposition of these multilingual *Reader's Digest* articles in June 1959.²⁹¹ In his 1963 book *Brazil on the Move*, Dos Passos praised the progress he observed in the country during several trips between 1948 and 1962 and dedicated a chapter to Brasilia, titled "A Nation in Search of a Capital."²⁹² André Malraux coined Brasília the "Capital of Hope"²⁹³ during his official visit there in 1959. Expressing confidence that the new capital would be "the most audacious city the West has yet to conceive of," and compared it in terms of both significance and audacity to the achievements represented in the construction of Alexandria and Versailles.²⁹⁴ Many believed the accelerated construction schedule to be irresponsible and irrational. To others this aspect was a virtue, evidence of Brazilian determination to "catch up" to the United States and other developed nations. An anonymous author wrote of Brasília in the *New York Times*: "It was created out of nothing in the midst of nowhere, a wildly extravagant dream that is being turned into a solid and useful reality. This is Latin-American genius and daring at its best. If the Brazilians had been 'sensible' in terms of orthodox economy they would not be building Brasília in four years, but in forty—if they built it at all."²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ "Exposições," *Diário Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro) 16 June 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0665).

²⁹² John Dos Passos, *Brazil on the Move* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963; New York: Paragon, 1991).

²⁹³ Journalist Alex Shoumatoff of the *New Yorker* titled his book about Brasília *The Capital of Hope* (New York: Coward, McCann, 1980).

²⁹⁴ Malraux, André, *Palavras no Brasil: visita oficial em agosto de 1959* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Cultura, FUNARTE, 1960): pp. 34-41.

²⁹⁵ "The President in Brazil," *New York Times* 24 February 1960, p. 36.

The U.S.-born silent film star Janet Gaynor had been living on a ranch in the state of Goiás, not far from the future capital, since 1939. Her friend, singer/actress Mary Martin followed suit and bought an estate in the area. Roy Rogers traveled to Brasília to investigate purchasing a cattle ranch in Goiás. At a lunch meeting with President Kubitschek the actor donned his typical Western-style costume and failed to remove his hat during the meal, as the Brazilian press was careful to note with disapproval. Reportedly Rogers expressed the desire to film a western in the region.²⁹⁶

Commentators predicted that Brasília would be a major tourist destination. While this did not prove to be the case in the long-term, for several years it attracted various curious and adventurous travelers. While some came to see the new capital itself, others took advantage of the improved accessibility of the dense Amazonian jungle along the Belém-Brasília highway. Eco-tourism this was not. The president of the Brazilian Tourism Commission told a journalist that a number of foreigners had expressed interest in hunting jaguars. In 1959 a group of twenty-five Germans went on a hunting safari along the new highway.²⁹⁷ In 1970, the Brazilian travel magazine *Quatro Rodas* dedicated a special edition to Brasília, more than half of which was dedicated to articles on hunting and fishing opportunity in the new capital's environs.²⁹⁸ The Amazon, one of the last great frontiers on earth, sparked the imaginations of explorers. The region's unfamiliar the flora, fauna, and unacculturated native peoples drew the attention of foreigners and most Brazilians alike. "Indians will be the attraction to our 'safaris,'"

²⁹⁶ "Roy Rogers foi 'cow-boy' na TV ontem e hoje vai a Brasília comprar terras," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro) 21 January 1958.

²⁹⁷ "Alemães pretendem visitar Brasília: vão caças onças," *Jornal do Brasil* 5 April 1959 (ArPDF Nov.D.04.01.Z Box 0664).

²⁹⁸ *Quatro Rodas*, Edição especial de turismo em Brasília (X: 118-A) April 1970.

declared one headline in the Rio daily *Diário Carioca*.²⁹⁹ Thus the image of the Amazon promoted abroad was of untouched wilderness, a pristine site of natural riches and an opportunity for wealthy foreigners to observe “savages” living in a supposedly timeless fashion and play at being a hunter, the chance to slay a jaguar, one of the world’s most fearsome predators.

An analysis of the international dimensions of Brasília’s construction reveals the extent to which Brazilians continued to rely on outsiders’ perceptions of themselves. Indeed Brasília’s image abroad proved key to Brazilians’ vision of their new capital and the nation writ large. Brasília’s boosters promised that the nation would be transformed in the process and, by the end of the twentieth century, the rest of Brazil would rise to meet the standard of modernity and progress set by its new capital. When the new city became the official capital of Brazil on April 21, 1960 its first objective had been achieved: Rio de Janeiro was no longer the seat of the nation’s government. The second, more significant purpose behind Brasília, to promote economic development of the interior, had just begun. Brasília was the capital of the future. It remained to be seen whether it would be the “Capital of Hope” many visitors imagined.

²⁹⁹ “Índios serão atração aos nossos ‘safaris’,” *Diário Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro) 24 May 1958 (IHG-DF BSB J-11).

EPILOGUE

BRASÍLIA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, 1960-2006

*I am drawn here by all that is terrifying in my nature. – I have never seen anything like it in the world. But I recognize this city in the depths of my dream. In those depths there is lucidity... – If they were to photograph me standing in Brasília, when they came to develop the film only the landscape would appear.*³⁰⁰

Brasília has never ceased being provocative. Neither the new capital's inauguration in 1960 nor its consolidation under the military regime during the following two decades diminished the highly polarized tenor of opinions about the new city. After 1960 the terms of debate shifted from the idea of Brasília to the lived environment it created. Still, the underlying hopes and anxieties provoked by the new capital remained the same. Brasília provided, and continues to provide, a tangible manifestation of development, a glimpse at the modernity its planners envisioned and subsequent governments extended. From the moment construction began, the new capital provided a focus for debates about the kind of modernity the nation's leader sought to attain and the means they employed in that pursuit. Neither its boosters nor critics accurately predicted how the city would evolve during the decades following its inauguration. It is a complex and contradictory story, one that shares aspects of both the promise envisioned by its promoters and the problems decried by its opponents.

The Brazilian travel magazine *Quatro Rodas* issued a special edition dedicated to tourism in Brasília in 1970. In the issue's lead article, "A New Way to Live," Cyro dos Anjos offered a reworked version of the slogan, "Many in Favor, Some Against, All Benefit," declaring that, "No one is indifferent to Brasília: either one likes it or does not

³⁰⁰ Clarice Lispector, "Creating Brasília," in *Selected crônicas* (New York: New Directions, 1992), 147. Punctuation, including ellipses, from the original text.

like it. And the majority like it.”³⁰¹ The magazine, aimed at a Brazilian audience, is full of large color photographs depicting bucolic scenes—children playing, women in bikinis laying out on the expansive green lawns of the *superquadras*, and laborers congregating during a break. Articles touted the ample recreational activities available in the city and the ease of life there. The optimistic judgment of one author is that, because of its calm pace and liveability, “Brasília is today the most human of cities.... The new city resuscitated, in Brazil, the lost pleasure of conversation.”³⁰² While half of the issue is dedicated to profiling Brasília itself, the other half is full of articles about opportunities for tourism in the surrounding area, particularly along the Belém-Brasília highway. Reflecting the fact that conservationism had yet to become a concern, the articles focus mainly on opportunities opened up by the city to hunt wild and exotic animals, such as piranhas, jaguars, and alligators.

The relentlessly positive tenor of the issue of *Quatro Rodas* does address, albeit indirectly, one of the most frequent complaints about the city: that it provokes an intense melancholy among residents. This characteristic emerges from both the flat expanse and remoteness of the *cerrado* and the striking uniformity of the architecture. To dos Anjos, Brasília’s atmosphere is tranquil and comforting, rather than depressing and isolating. Particularly for its elderly residents, the city promotes mental health rather than endangering it. Brasília, “is sedating...in an era in which all of humanity seeks sedatives.”³⁰³

Standing in stark contrast to this interpretation is a book published by Gileno de Carli, a Federal Deputy from Pernambuco between 1959 and 1963, notably a member of

³⁰¹ Cyro dos Anjos, ““Uma nova maneira de viver”,” *Quatro Rodas*, April 1970, 40-41.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 43.

Kubitschek's party, the PSD. The book, titled *JQ, Brasília e a grande crise (Jânio Quadros, Brasília, and the Great Crisis)*, is an effort to explain the abrupt and mysterious resignation of Quadros, Kubitschek's successor, less than a year after his election, leading to the ascension to the presidency by the controversial leftist João Goulart, whom the military deposed in 1964. Never adequately explained by Quadros, de Carli attempts to make sense of the resignation by presenting a psychological analysis of the man, arguing that living in Brasília intensified Quadros's tendency toward depression and solitude and led directly to his decision to resign. Describing Quadros's daily commute from the residential Palácio da Alvorada to his offices in the Palácio do Planalto across the open cerrado, where the open sky was devoid of all life, with not even a vulture to be seen. The twisted shapes of the trees exacerbated Quadros's psychological pain. His downfall therefore came from Brasília itself, which in de Carli's description, "is a beautiful cruel city.... A geometric city, rectangular, linear.... [M]ontony is imposed by the lack of contrasts.... Fabulously beautiful, it is terribly sad."³⁰⁴ The last words Quadros spoke before embarking on a plane to return to São Paulo, according to de Carli, were: "Damned city. I will never return here."³⁰⁵

This chapter seeks to understand the multitudinous and often contradictory implications of the construction of Brasília in the decades following its official inauguration of the capital of Brazil on 21 April 1960. The previous chapters offered a detailed exploration of Brasília during the initial construction period. Because of its

³⁰⁴ Carli, *JQ, Brasília e a grande crise*, 20.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

broader scope, this chapter cannot offer the same comprehensiveness in its discussion of Brasília's subsequent evolution, or maturation, nor the changes it wrought on the nation.

By becoming the concrete manifestation of the state, Brasília itself became a tangible focus for the projection of perceptions of the state. The city played an active role in the nation's political life, the setting acting as an active force in shaping national politics. In the four years between its official inauguration and the coup that ushered in a prolonged period of military rule, most writing about Brasília focused on the difficult conditions of life there. Politicians and other professionals who moved quite reluctantly to the desolate Planalto experienced profound culture shock.

It took more than a decade for all organs of the federal capital to move to Brasília. The National Archives and National Library are both still in Rio de Janeiro, although in Brasília various ministries and both houses of Congress maintain their own records. Many congressional records were transferred to Brasília, and many disappeared in transit. While tens of thousands of Brazilians had made the new capital their home by April 1960, many government officials resisted the move by leaving their families in Rio and returning there every weekend. Thus Brasília gained a reputation as a suitcase city, a place of business only, that emptied out every weekend. In the satellite cities, however, the people who cleaned, supplied, and continued to build the city resided full-time. As the city's fiftieth anniversary approaches, while many of its residents travel on the weekends—aided by the proliferation of bargain airlines in recent years—the city has its own life, generations of *brasilienses* who have known no other home. Residents of other Brazilian cities still look derisively at the capital.

In contrast to Washington, D.C., to which North American families flock in a sort of secular pilgrimage, one goes to Brasília solely for official purposes. (Of course, one must bear in mind that the planned U.S. capital is more than a century and a half older than that of Brazil). Despite its builders' promotion of the new capital as a locus for tourism, the city's few sites worth visiting are almost always empty. The place that draws the most visitors is the Kubitschek memorial, located next to cross that marks the highest point in the Pilot Plan, site of the mass delivered in Brasília in 1956, at the opposite end of the Monumental Axis from the congressional complex. The memorial, willed into being by Sara Kubitschek and designed by Oscar Niemeyer, opened in 1983, during the *abertura*, a loosening period implemented by then-president João Batista Figueiredo. While Brasília was home to the dictatorship during more than twenty years, it bears very few physical markers of that time; the most visible is the enormous flagpole on the east side of the Praça das Três Poderes. It is indeed so large that it is clearly visible in the satellite photo on Google Earth. Under military rule, the flagpole provided for a monthly civic ritual in which a particular institution staged a flag changing ritual. While the return of democracy brought an end to this ritual, it was recently reinstated on an occasional basis. On a bright Sunday morning in November 2003, I gathered with a crowd of perhaps one-thousand people, mostly families, leaving plenty of free space in the praça, beyond that cordoned off for the soldiers of the Brazilian air force to march. The ceremony culminated with a spectacular air show put on by the Brazilian Air Force, its friendly face emphasized by a huge heart drawn in the sky. It is difficult to imagine a landscape more suited to an air show. Nowhere does the sky seem as expansive as it does

in Brasília, a constant reminder of one's smallness in the world. Nowhere does Brazil seem so large.

The size of Brazil is not only felt in the city itself, but one is reminded of that no matter how one arrives in Brasília (most often by air). Air travel made possible initial construction and its accessibility. Brasília is most easily apprehended from above, at some remove. This is appropriate since the city was conceived of from afar, in Lucio Costa's Rio office, though it is important to note that its shape is this is the source of the "airplane" like shape, according to Costa; the shape began as a cross, the sign of conquest, and the arms (the residential axis) curved to fit the site's topography.³⁰⁶

Brasília has evoked widely varying descriptions; the city remains startling. Perhaps this fact best attests to the success of Niemeyer and Costa in achieving their principal goal: originality. Aesthetic and symbolic concerns were foremost in the minds of the men who planned Brasília. Consistency is one of the defining characteristics of Oscar Niemeyer, perhaps second to his complete impermeability to criticism. Nearing his one-hundred birthday, he has remained apologetically both a member of the Brazilian Communist Party and an unrepentant practitioner of modernist architecture—which began to fall out of favor at almost the moment of Brasília's inauguration. Much of the critiques have been sociological in nature—modernists' attempts to neatly relegate certain functions of life, and certain people, to distinct physical spaces. Transportation has been a persistent problem, as has the feeling of isolation many feel this division produces. It is important to stress that the city of Brasília, while adhering strictly to certain aspects of the master plan, never was a complete realization of Costa and Niemeyer's vision. Funding was an obvious obstacle. Still today, while much of land to

³⁰⁶ Carpintero, "Brasília: prática e teoria urbanística no Brasil 1956-1998".

the east of the lake has been filled with private homes, and the number of satellite cities have proliferated, some of the more distant residential superquadras, particularly in the Asa Norte, along the northern half of the residential axis, are still being built. While certain divergences from Costa's conception of the superquadra residential units have been permitted, for example the addition of balconies, the addition of Brasília to UNESCO's list of world cultural patrimony in 1988—something for which the government of the federal district lobbied hard—has led to even more careful adherence to the Pilot Plan.

Lucio Costa's daughter, Maria Elisa, is an architect and former director of IPHAN, the government's cultural preservation agency, the Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional. She designed the Sudoeste neighborhood, a middle-class community not far from the monumental axis comprised largely of apartments, organized in a manner similar to the superquadras. Niemeyer's fame has eclipsed his former teacher's to the degree that in the popular mind, Costa's role had been reduced if not forgotten. Niemeyer is still producing highly original but still distinctively his own designs, including a major development project in Niterói and a complex of cultural institutions on the Eixo Monumental in Brasília, on which construction began in 2004. Apart from the four years of initial construction, neither Niemeyer nor Costa lived in the city that was their most notable creation.

While Brasília did not live up to the highest utopian hopes of its creators and boosters, they did succeed in transferring the capital of the country to the Planalto Central. The success of the larger plan to economically develop the interior is also beyond dispute, though its environmental and human costs have no doubt been

considerable. The explosion of agricultural, extractive, and later industrial activities in the north and west of Brazil. This was facilitated by the construction of highways in the region, an extension of the plan begun under Kubitschek, culminating in the completion of the Transamazonian highway in the 1970s. While settlements have proliferated alongside the new roadways, air and river travel have nevertheless continued to be the lifeblood of the Amazon, as roads in the have proved exceedingly difficult to maintain, and economic crises have dried up funds needed for paving and upkeep.

While the terms of debate have changed over time, the highly polarized nature of opinions about Brasília has scarcely diminished. There are several reasons for the persistent polarization of opinion the city evoked. First, the simple fact that Brasília is the capital of the government makes it a focus for people's dissatisfaction with their political leaders. Second, the persistence is evidence of just how contentious the decision to build Brasília was. Brazilians frequently claim that the coup d'état resulted at least in part from the economic burden of Brasília, specifically the inflationary pressures it caused. Most importantly, during its construction but also during subsequent decades, Brasília became firmly established as the key national symbol for development and modernity. The dangers people saw in the city, what seemed to be lost in the abrupt transition to modernity that life in Brasília represented, these offer a unique opportunity to understand the ambiguity of Brazilians' attitude toward development. Clearly, the vision embodied in Brasília had triumphed. The ruling class, whether military or civilian, had encountered a fork in the road. They had chosen Brasília and the interiorization, the "constructive revolution", it prescribed. For the subsequent economic and environmental fate of the nation, Brasília accelerated forces that had deep roots, but the changes in the

landscape of vast regions in central, western, and northern Brazil have progressed at an ever-increasing pace since the 1960s.

Beyond these tangible implications of the new capital for the development of the interior (while they cannot be entirely attributed to Brasília, the transfer of the capital certainly played a significant role), its construction established a vision of modernity and a clear plan for its attainment. By establishing the seat of government in a showcase of modernist architecture, a strikingly singular and visually harmonious space. Brasília speaks as loudly as a city can. What it says, however, is open to communication. It is a place that seems to encourage reflection, as examples explored below demonstrate.

While its design does seem dated in some respects, Brasília still evokes a sense of the future, of an artists' projection of modernity. At the same time, it is a real, functioning city. To those who call the city home, it is normal. To outsiders and visitors, however, it forces one to confront the meaning of modernization and of what that means for Brazil and its people. Writers and musicians have frequently discussed Brasília and its meaning for the nation. The degree to which and the way that it is referenced provides evidence the new capital has long secured a place in the array of symbols of the nation.

Clarice Lispector, one of Brazil's most important twentieth-century writers, dedicated one of the weekly *crônicas* for the *Jornal do Brasil* to the subject of Brasília. "Creating Brasília" appeared on 20 June 1970, a decade after its official inauguration, and during the darkest days of the dictatorship. It is not of the political leaders, but of its two architects, she speaks. The *crônica* is powerful, complex, and contradictory. Its impenetrability seems to reflect the labyrinthine nature of the city itself. Neither the essay nor its subject is simple, neither is clear-cut, and both blur reality and myth. A

profoundly unsettling ambiguity is what Brasília ultimately provokes in Lispector. While she finds a certain degree of appeal in the city, it is deeply disturbing at the same time.

If I were to say that Brasília is pleasant, you would realize immediately that I like the city. But if I were to say that Brasília is the image of my insomnia, you would see this as a criticism: but my insomnia is neither pleasant nor awful – my insomnia is me, it is lived, it is my terror....³⁰⁷

To Lispector, then, the city renders concrete the contradictions inherent in modernity. It transports visitors into a sort of alternate reality, one that is highly ordered yet profoundly unfamiliar and unsettling.

Lispector's haunting description of Brasília as a sort of waking dream (or nightmare) recalls the disoriented protagonists of Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. Brasília offers a vision of the future in which much is lost, and the gains are questionable. Modernity brings solitude, and the pace of change disorientation. Brasília's architecture prompts such feelings. In that sense it is artistically successful: it provokes thought and emotion. It evokes in visitors an unrelenting stream of frequently contradictory thoughts and feelings. The starkness of the city provided no respite nor distraction from an enforced contemplation. One cannot help but wonder: what is gained and what is lost with the arrival of modernity? Lispector is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by Brasília. "Those two men [Costa and Niemeyer] created the image of an eternal city. – There is something here which frightens me. When I discover what it is, I shall also discover what I like about this place. Fear has always guided me to the things I love; and because I love, I become afraid."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Lispector, "Creating Brasília," 145.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

Like other monumental architecture, like that in Washington, D.C., for example, which provides one of the best comparisons to Brasília, the grandiosity of the structures serve to communicate the power of the state. Brasília certainly succeeds in achieving those goals, but it also provokes an existential fear.

The city was built without any escape route for rats. A whole part of myself, the worst part, and precisely that part of me which has a horror of rats, has not been provided for in Brasília. Its founders tried to ignore the importance of human beings. The dimensions of the city's buildings were calculated for the heavens. Hell has a better understanding of me. But the rats, all of them enormous, are invading the city. That is a newspaper headline. – This place frightens me. – The construction of a totalitarian state. This great visual silence which I adore. Even my insomnia might have created this peace of never-never-land. Like those two hermits, Costa and Niemeyer, I would also meditate in the desert where there are no opportunities for temptation. But I see black vultures flying overhead. What is perishing, dear God? – I did not shed a single tear in Brasília. – There was no place for tears.³⁰⁹

To Lispector, there is little accommodation for humanity in Brasília, causing her to wonder, “What is perishing, dear God ?” Just as her image does not appear in a photo taken there, she writes that, in Brasília, “the soul casts no shadow.”³¹⁰ Thus its very design seems to deny the Brazilian, indeed the human, reality. Lispector's essay conveys in a raw emotional surrealist manner many of the critiques of Brasília and the particular vision of development and modernization it represented. Brasília embodies the social disconnection that accompanies modernization.

Gilberto Freyre echoed Lispector's judgment that, “[Brasília's] founders tried to ignore the importance of human beings.” Both Freyre and Lispector see in the design of Brasília a fatal flaw: its apparent failure to consider how human beings actually live, most importantly their inherently social nature, in short, the importance of community. This is

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 332-333.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 147.

the same criticism of twentieth-century urban planning made by Jane Jacobs about her New York City neighborhood.³¹¹ Like Lispector, Freyre found plenty of good qualities in Brasília, especially the contribution it made toward national integration, bridging the gap between the two *Brasis* (Brazils), one modern and coastal, the other stagnant and interior.

The cosmopolitan character of the city challenged Freyre's essentially conservative conception of Brazilian identity, formed as it was on his family's *fazenda* in Pernambuco. Because of his affectionate, nostalgic view of the nation's past, it is not surprising that he would have preferred the city be built in a neocolonial style. Freyre's principal critique of Brasília, however, was that its architects exercised too much control over the city's planning. How, he wondered rhetorically, did Kubitschek and his advisors, "judge possible in a poor country, like Brazil, to give the luxury of raising a city only of sculptural architecture, with its construction ordered exclusively by architects—however illustrious—as though by a caste of sacred priests, all-powerful and omniscient?"³¹² The city's shortcomings, he believed, were due mainly to the fact that aesthetic concerns took precedence above all else. Rather than assembling a team including sociologists, psychologists, and other social scientists to plan Brasília, Kubitschek gave free reign to Niemeyer and Costa. The result was not only the melancholy characteristic of the city itself, but its lack of integration with the rest of the nation.

This theme is reflected in the lyrics of Caetano Veloso's 1968 song "Tropicália," the anthem of the Tropicalista movement pioneered by Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and Gal

³¹¹ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

³¹² Gilberto Freyre, *Brasis, Brasil e Brasília* (Lisbon: Livros do Brasil, 1965), 154.

Costa. Rather than defining a style of music, Christopher Dunn describes Tropicalismo as “a certain strategy toward cultural production which ‘cannibalizes’ both local and foreign styles and technologies in a process of ironic appropriation and recycling.”³¹³ As the quote suggests, Tropicalismo was rooted in the kind of modernism advocated by Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 essay “Cannibalist Manifesto.” Drawing the ire of many nationalists who opposed the obvious foreign influences, the military regime found threatening the movement’s creation of “fragmentary, allegorical montages of Brazil’s historical contradictions,” thereby presenting a challenge to the dictatorship’s efforts to promote “a unitary, conflict-free version vision of Brazilian society.”³¹⁴ Given the iconoclastic tendencies of Tropicalismo and its effort to expose the contradictions inherent in Brazilian society, it is not surprising that Brasília figures prominently in Veloso’s “Tropicália,” where its modernist conception and open spaces are juxtaposed with the jungle, straw huts, and poverty that also characterized Brazil:

The monument of *papier-maché* and silver
The green eyes of the *mulata*
Her long hair hides behind the green forest
The moonlight over the plains
The monument has no door
The entrance is an old street, narrow and winding
On his knees a smiling, ugly dead child
Extends his hand

Long live the forest
Long live the *mulata*³¹⁵

It is noteworthy that Veloso refers to Brasília not as a city, but rather a monument, thereby emphasizing its disconnect from the lived reality. Constructed of “*papier-maché*

³¹³ Christopher Dunn, “The Tropicalista Rebellion,” *Transition*, no. 70 (1996): 118.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ “Tropicália” (1968) lyrics by Caetano Veloso. Translation taken from: *Ibid.*: 119.

and silver”, Brasília is beautiful yet not made for human occupation. It seems to deny the forest, the mulata, and the dead child, all symbols, for better or worse, of the Brazilian condition. The capital has no door, it is equally difficult to enter as it is to exit. This may be a direct commentary on the authoritarian government then in power, but its scope is certainly broader. Like Freyre and Lispector, Veloso seems to be offering a warning about the kind of modernity the nation’s leaders sought to impose: one that above all denied the Brazilian reality.

Brasília defined modernity in a particular way—urban, orderly, efficient, segmented, a green oasis in the middle of the *cerrado*, made possible by the wonders of modern technology, specifically the airplane and motor vehicle. A utopian vision that highlights the contrasts between Niemeyer and Costa’s faith in the rapid arrival of modernity and the reality of life for the majority of Brazil’s citizens. It is a cliché to describe Brazil as a, “land of contrasts,” a country in which abject poverty and wealth, striking natural beauty and desolation, exist side by side. One of the frequent critiques of Brasília’s design is that it relegated the poor to the satellite cities, creating isolated and unseen ghettos at some remove from the prosperous, bucolic Pilot Plan, an island of modernity.

While there is certainly a degree of validity in this critique, the most striking contrast one finds in Brasília is not between the center of the city and its satellites, but contradictions inherent in the Pilot Plan itself. In the city constructed for motor vehicles, the majority of the city’s residents do not have their own cars, and make due on foot or with the imperfect public transportation system. Along the secondary roads, it is not

uncommon to come upon a horse-drawn cart driven by families that make their living from recycling cardboard. At several of the entrances to the Eixo Rodoviário, the main highway that runs along the residential axis, there are circular signs with an image of a horse and cart crossed out. From my apartment near the end of the Asa Norte, I would hear the clip-clop of the horse hooves intermixed with the roar of a motorcycle engine over the singing from the store-front Pentecostal Church down the block. On Saturday afternoons, the a Spanish restaurant located in one of the buildings of the Sétor Bancário Sul (South Banking Sector) hosts an enormously popular *sambão*—where more than one-hundred people gather to dance to live samba and choro. Friends of mine from Pernambuco and Rio told me on separate occasions that the *sambão* reminded them of home. In the 1980s Brasília was one of the centers of the rock movement that swept the country. This is hardly the Brasília imagined by its planners. The city has developed a life of its own.

In most other countries of Latin America, the capital city is the dominant urban center. This is not surprising in the smaller countries, but it is also the case in the larger nations of Mexico and Argentina. While São Paulo is the second largest city in the hemisphere, it has never been the national capital. Brazil is home to ten cities with populations over one million people. Brasília, with two million residents, is the fifth largest city in the country.³¹⁶ The original Pilot Plan is a small part of the Brasília, which is generally understood as the whole federal district, which includes the pilot plan, more than a dozen satellite cities, and the wealthy lake neighborhoods. In 2000 the local government officially removed the word “satellite” to refer to the cities surrounding the Pilot Plan. This reflects both the derogatory connotations of that term, but also the

³¹⁶ The population of Brasília is counted as that of the Federal District as a whole.

changing nature of the district's demographics. Wealthy, middle class, and poor reside outside of the Pilot Plan; no longer are the suburbs solely the site of social isolation described in many works by anthropologists and sociologists who have studied life in Brasília.

The costly construction of the new capital profoundly altered the lives of many and reshaped the landscape of central Brazil. Its construction can be linked directly to the marked increase in economic development of the interior. By the time the long period of military rule drew to a close in the 1980s, Brazilians had not only answered Vargas's call to march westward, but had also marched northward in ever-increasing numbers, an issue that at the same time began attracting the concern of the emerging global environmental rights movement.

According to the logic underlying Brasília, modernization is the process through which modernity it attained. The debates surrounding the capital were, at their core, about how this modernization would take place. Who should make the decisions? Which aspects of national life should be targeted for modernization? Modernization is a total process, but one that Kubitschek approached by targeting particular areas, especially material ones, for improvement. The impassioned nature of the project indicated that the debates about Brasília were about much more than the construction of a city, as tremendous a task as it might have been. I see Brasília as part of a broader effort to reshape national identity, to remake Brazil into a modern nation. By taking a rational approach to planning, the preference for quantifiable markers of modernity, Brasília defined modernization predominantly in material terms. Progress measured by benchmarks—miles of roads built, kilowatts of power generated—rather than social

indicators such as health and education. It defeated the more radical nationalists who advocated self-sufficiency by relying heavily on foreign investment and know-how. Still, however, those in charge of the city's design and construction were Brazilians. Somewhat paradoxically given the rhetoric of interiorization, Brasília embodied an outward-looking modernity, in which Brazil sought to increase its power in the world and particularly in South America. It was self-consciously rooted in traditions of the past while looking toward the future. While in its rhetoric Brasília embodied Brazilian democracy, in fact many were left out, intentionally or not, excluded from the new capital. Afro-Brazilians were especially left out.

Brasília became the focus for tensions in Brazilian society, particularly fears about the course the nation was pursuing toward modernity. Many expressed concern at about the accelerated, forced nature of progress that Brasília embodied. The city's planners sought to impose progress—understood in both material and social terms, though the former took precedence over the latter. Thus, the fundamental question became: who would benefit from the fruits of progress? The officials promised all would, but it became clear with time that few reaped the benefits of the economic growth of the Kubitschek years. Both the location and structure of the city appeared to remove the government from the majority of the population, which seemed to threaten the fledgling democracy. The commencement of military rule seemed to confirm this. Brasília became one of the key symbols of the dictatorship—not just for the fact that the regime's capital was the city, but to many its modernist design seemed inherently authoritarian.

Rather than an emblem of progress and development, Brasília came to epitomize for many the continuation of politics as usual—it was forced modernization imposed from above, a modernity that brought fabulous wealth to some, but that did not reach the majority of Brazilians. By focusing all attention on the future, the planners of Brasília appeared to ignore the present, failing to address the needs of the poor. This is the ugly underbelly of the pursuit of modernization in twentieth-century Brazil: the unseen poor get poorer while the minority are able to enjoy the benefits of technological and cultural progress. In the end, it became clear that the construction of Brasília failed to alter in a meaningful way a society marked by profound inequality. Indeed, in a sense it deepened the gap between the haves and the have-nots—not just their economic situation, but access to decision-making.

In intellectual terms, the question emerged: does the achievement of modernity mean the death of tradition? What would be lost in pursuit of modernization? In the age of nationalism, should Brazil rely on foreign capital and know-how? Modernity is difficult to define. Brasília put forth a vision of modernity that equated progress with socioeconomic modernization. In the end, what triumphed was a top-down, relatively shallow kind of progress that was unequally distributed across the social strata (though more equal in geographic terms).

The planned nature of the modernity embodied in Brasília lies at the core of its intensely controversial nature. A handful of individuals exerted tremendous power in creating the vision of Brazilian modernity that the state came to adopt, which persisted through the long period of military rule. The rush to complete the city before the end of Kubitschek's term in office further excluded the majority of Brazilians from weighing in

on the planning of their new capital. While the planners of Brasília were sincere in their conviction that they were working for the good of the whole nation, its military-like hierarchical organization was directed by just a few experts. The construction of Brasília, then, sparked concerns about the nature of the social and economic modernization being implemented in Brazil. It raised a number of unsettling questions: What is included and what is excluded from this vision of modernity? What is kept and what is discarded? For whom does the future make room? What are the implications for Brazilian democracy?

By creating an official narrative for Brasília that stressed continuity with the past, Brasília seemed the fulfillment of the nation's destiny, a predetermined and essential step toward achieving meaningful independence, a precondition for joining the modern world. The view of history shared by the builders of Brasília was a linear one, in which societies pass through various phases. When one phase (e.g., colonial, disorderly) is exited, another (e.g., modern, planned) is entered, leaving the previous stage completely behind. Progress is the force that propels a society from backwardness, a child-like state, to a mature, developed society. Kubitschek and his allies succeeded in much more than building a new capital for Brazil: they established a recipe for attaining modernity that framed the nation's subsequent economic development.

Despite the capital's promoters' efforts to root Brasília in the nation's past, its focus was on the future. The new capital offered a chance to start anew, a blank slate that provided a unique opportunity to avoid repeating the "mistakes" of the past. There does seem to be an element of self-indulgent monumentality in Brasília's design. However, the city did provide a powerful impetus for sorely needed improvements in the nation's infrastructure. While debating the priorities embodied in Kubitschek's planning, Brazil's

infrastructure (especially in the areas of transportation, communications, and energy production) was certainly in need of massive improvements, and Brasília was directly responsible for providing the necessary preconditions for economic development of the vast interior. While “pharaonic” in the eyes of its detractors, there is little doubt that Brasília helped provide useful project that provided the material conditions for the “economic miracle” achieved by the military dictatorship in the 1970s. Its greatest flaw was perhaps its simplistic notion of development and the unwavering belief that economic growth alone would magically transform Brazil into a modern nation. The modernity that had taken shape in Brasília, however, is much more complicated and contradictory than that envisioned by its planners.

Despite its deep historical roots, Brasília emerged virtually instantaneously from the untamed *cerrado*. Within a few short years, the architecturally daring modernist conception became the site of the federal government imbued Brasília with an immediate authority. It was a physical manifestation of ideology, of economic and social policies. It exerts cultural authority, too, at its distinctive form established it immediately as the officially sanctioned physical rendering of modernity, modernization, and modernism—these terms conflated in the official discourse. Despite its considerable popularity and construction by a democratically-elected administration, Brasília did not emerge out of an authoritarian vision. Rather, it was an efficiently planned and produced showcase of Brazilian potential. A handful of individuals exerted an enormous power over the idea’s execution and the enormous resources the new capital mobilized. It was in some respects as much a state-driven enterprise as the kind of industrial and urban planning, although the significant role played by private investment, the bulk of it from abroad, is an

important difference between those cases. Still, to understand the way Brazilians conceive of Brasília, it is important to recognize the top-down nature of the city's implementation. This points to the paradox that lies at the core of Brasília's identity: it is at once a relic of Brazil's heyday, the bossa nova era, and a conspicuous reminder of the specter of authoritarianism from which the nation has yet to comfortably distance itself.

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