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Article in *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* · January 2009

DOI: 10.1353/hcs.0.0038

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# Brazilian Culture, Family, and its Ethnic-Cultural Variety<sup>1</sup>

*Dr. Cláudio V. Torres graduated in I/O Psychology by the California School of Professional Psychology, and is currently a Professor at the Department of Social and Organizational Psychology at the University of Brasília, Brazil. He develops research on cross-cultural psychology, investigating differences in, mainly, consumer behavior, diversity in organizations, and international leadership.*

*Dr. Maria Auxiliadora Des- sen developed her Ph.D. dissertation in Human Development Psychology, is currently an Associate Professor at the University of Brasília, Brazil. She has developed post-doc research at University of Lancaster, UK, and at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education, Berlin, Germany. Her main research interests involve patterns of communication in Brazilian families, particularly in poor families.*

RESEARCH on cultural differences and their relationship with family structure has been producing many significant findings in the social sciences, particularly in social and organizational psychology. Apparently, the family structure and its relationship with variables, such as marital and parental relationships, child-rearing practices, and even people's jobs or positions, are related to cultural aspects, which in turn, result in a different impact on people's lives. For instance, in highly individualistic countries such as the United States, "work and family are often viewed as separable" (Earley and Erez 3) and, yet, in conflict. Differently, in countries such as Brazil, where people tend to perceive their *self* as part of a group (Hofstede, *Culture's*), work may be seen as an extension of their families, and consequently, we are able to find strong family-work bonds, which are a direct reflection on the mode of production of that society. In this paper, we attempt to understand the structure of the Brazilian family, how it is impacted by, and impacts the country's culture. It is our belief that this understanding can provide the basis to propose how the previously cited relationship, and many others, can be investigated. Literature that integrates the Brazilian cultural and family aspects appears to be missing, particularly those related to poor families. Our aim with this article is to take some steps in this direction.

This article is divided into three parts. First, we will briefly discuss the cultural variable itself, and clarify what we mean by *culture*. Then, we will discuss Brazilian culture in specific terms, bridging with sociological and psychological literature. Finally, we will present some information on

the Brazilian family, and discuss how this information can serve for the purposes of this paper.

## Culture

The concept of culture has been widely discussed by several authors (e.g., Ashmos and McDaniel; Campbell, Bommer, and Yeo; Hofstede, *Culture's*; Smith and Bond; Torres; Triandis, "Cross-Cultural"), who often define it slightly different, and in most of the cases, complimentary manners. Culture has been defined as a group of utilitarian, intellectual and affective activities (Saraiva), as the integrated sum of learned behaviors (Shapiro), and also as a system of shared meaning (Earley and Erez). Other scholars (e.g., Malinowski) described specific elements of culture and the relationships between them. For instance, Kluckhohn observed two distinct cultural elements, their objective—that is, craft work produced by social groups—and subjective (i.e., values, beliefs, social norms) elements. Among the research projects devoted to the understanding and description of culture that developed by Hofstede (*Culture's*) deserves special attention.

For Hofstede (*Culture's*, "Organizational Practices," "Quality of Life," *Software*), we could make an analogy between culture and a computer program, the former being equivalent to the software that controls human behavior. Perhaps, the most important aspect found by Hofstede is that culture can be used as a predictive variable (Smith and Bond). To achieve this finding, he developed an ecological analysis of 53 countries and regions of the world based on responses about people's preferred values. With the notable exception of African countries among his data, Hofstede was able

to identify four dimensions of cultural variation. The dimensions identified by him were named masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and individualism. Exceptional reviews of Hofstede's work, with implications for the work of psychologists in different cultures, were done by Smith and Bond, Smith et al., and Triandis ("Cross-Cultural"). In this article, we will limit ourselves to briefly discuss his fourth dimension, individualism-collectivism, which has received considerable attention from many researchers (e.g., Earley and Erez; Smith and Bond).

This dimension refers to the extent to which social groups emphasize personal or group goals. Individualist societies tend to include people who perceive their *self* as independent, who are more rational-oriented, and who are attitude-driven. People in collectivist cultures, on the average, are more relational-oriented, have a perception of the *self* as interdependent with their in-groups, and have a need to know their group norms, that is, the accepted and expected behaviors in the collective. Subsequent projects have confirmed and found more empirical evidence for this behavioral pattern (e.g., Smith et al.; Smith, Dugan, Peterson, and Leung).

Although several scholars have demonstrated the importance of this dimension for cross-cultural studies (e.g., Ashmos and McDaniel; Campbell, Bommer, and Yeo; Smith and Bond; Torres; Triandis, McCusker, and Hui), it may still be considered as too broad for precise measurement (Singelis et al.). Triandis (*Individualism*) suggested that individualism-collectivism should be understood as a polythetic concept, and that specific attributes will define the different kinds of individualism and collectivism. In an attempt to refine the concept, Singelis et al. described two manifestations of this

cultural variation, named horizontal and vertical individualism-collectivism. Both of these manifestations refer to the degree of acceptance and expectation of power inequality within a social group. In horizontal cultures, there is a preference for equality of power among people, whereas in vertical societies, inequality and social hierarchy is accepted and expected. Thus, we can observe four cultural patterns, described by Singelis et al. as vertical-individualism, horizontal-individualism, vertical-collectivism, and horizontal-collectivism. Some empirical evidence (e.g., Torres; Triandis and Gelfand) has demonstrated the usefulness of measuring such cultural patterns.

Using this cultural framework, we will now look at the idiosyncrasies of the Brazilian culture and its sub-cultures, and how they differ among themselves. However, before that, it is important to clarify what our understanding of culture in this article is. We will follow Heller's conceptualization of culture, described as follows:

Shared experience forms the basis of a shared way of looking at the world; through interaction they, *members of groups* jointly construct ways of making sense of experience. These ways of making sense of experience, these beliefs, assumptions, and expectations about the world and how it works underlie what we think of as culture. However culture is not only a set of beliefs and values that constitute our normal, everyday view of the world; it also includes our normal, everyday ways of behaving. (184; emphasis added)

Implicit in Heller's definition is that national and ethnic cultures are not synonyms, although they are used interchangeably in the present paper. National and ethnic

cultures are distinguished by their degree of regulation of behavior, attitudes, and values, the domain of regulation, and the consistency and clarity of regulation and tolerance of other cultures. Moreover, we must note that culture is not restricted to our beliefs or values (Ferdman). The ways that we "make sense of experiences" regulate what we expect and what we consider to be "acceptable" of other people, including the members of the family.

## Characterization of the Brazilian Culture

Just as Hofstede ("Organizational Practices") described the different countries and regions of the world, Cândido also used a metaphor to discuss the Brazilian national culture. For Cândido, Brazil can be represented by the image of a big family, with few formal rules, but with a consensus regarding the authority of the father. Friedlmeier, who compared the implicit theories used by educators confirmed this interpretation. This author ALSO observed that Brazilians emphasize conformity and adaptation to social rules. In their research, Strohschneider and Güss (1998) found that Brazilian college students, when presented with an ill-defined ambiguous situation, have a high tendency to accept the situation as given, and not to inquire about its causes. Related to these results, Droogers suggested that an important concept to understand the Brazilian's worldview is the one of the *jeitinho*, also discussed by Amado and Vinagre-Brasil.

*Jeitinho* is a Portuguese term that is difficult to translate, which means that a problem should be accepted as given, and that "there might be no ways to reach the goal, but in a certain way we will achieve it anyway" (Droogers 699). Brazilian well

known *jeitinho* has been considered as a typical characteristic from the Brazilian culture (DaMatta). Whenever one thinks that something is irrefutably lost, that this time there is no way out, everything quite magically comes to a solution, through the use of *jeitinho*. We can understand the *jeitinho* as a “special” way to solve a problem or a difficult situation, as a creative solution to some emergency, via conciliation, ability, or playing the “smart person” (Barbosa). It is a special way to solve a problem quickly and efficiently. An interesting aspect regarding this social skill is that, while being a creative solution for the one *with* the problem, it is also considered to be a satisfactory solution with the other party involved. In other words, the other party does not feel, by any means, used or manipulated. Yet, *jeitinho* can be confused with other ways to solve a situation, such as doing favor, or even corruption. A good way to understand these categories is to think about them as a continuum, varying from a positive pole (the favor), to a more negative pole (corruption). Excellent examples of the difference between *jeitinho* and a favor, or corruption, were presented by Barbosa. It should be noticed that, in practice, it is quite confusing to separate these categories (Almeida). Smith, Peterson, Ayestaran, Jesuino, and Ferdman observed a great similarity between the Brazilian *jeitinho* and the notion of improvisation found in other Hispanic cultures. Taken together, these results suggest that in the Brazilian context there is little room for participation, and that social hierarchy is accepted.

Pearson and Stephan, consistent with Hofstede (*Culture's*), found Brazilian samples to be significantly more collectivist than their American sample. Their study also suggests that, in Brazil, social hierarchy is highly valued, suggesting that Brazilians do

endorse a vertical cultural pattern. Triandis and Gelfand suggested that the discrepancy between incomes within a country could be used as a measure of verticality. This measure would be “the ratio of the incomes of the top 20% to the bottom 20% of the population of the country” (126). Triandis and Gelfand observed that in 1993 this ratio in Brazil was about 35, and there are reasons to believe that the ratio has increased since then (Santos) and will keep on increasing (Ettorre). The increasing division between the richest and the poorest social classes in Brazil can be considered to be another indicator that verticality is the preferred cultural pattern in this country. The fact that Brazilians see themselves as members of an in-group, that they accept inequality and differences in status (i.e., social hierarchy), and that they have high income stratification (i.e., ratio of the high and low income), indicates that Brazil as a whole would have a preference for a vertical-collectivist cultural pattern.

Yet, as discussed previously, we cannot consider the several countries in the world as culturally homogeneous. A lot of variance can be attributed to within-cultural differences. For instance, Triandis (“Cross-Cultural”) noted that individuals who live in more industrialized centers tend to be more individualists than those who live in rural areas. As suggested by Smith and Bond, the population of a specific region of a country may endorse certain cultural patterns different from those preferred by people in other regions of the same country. Due to its wide territorial extension and its colonization process in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Brazil is very heterogeneous in cultural terms, with different groups being formed by the European immigration and the African slavery commerce. For Ribeiro, the country has a cultural division that originates from its social-economical history. Brazil has an

extensive variety of weather and soil, which would be determinants of the division into five Brazilian sub-cultures proposed by this author, which are described below.

Ribeiro denominates the sub-culture observed in the Northeast region of the country as the *crioula* culture. This region has a history characterized by the proliferation of sugarcane mills in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, constructed by the African slaves, under the orders of the Portuguese colonizers. Another sub-culture pointed-out by Ribeiro is the *cabocla*, represented by the North region of the country. Due to the fact that the Brazilian Amazon rain forest is located entirely in this region, the forest's resources, especially the latex (rubber) exploration, sustained most of their economy. Under the categorization of the author both sub-cultures, *crioula* and *cabocla*, are based on subsistence agriculture and, paradoxically, on enormous farms, as in the case of the sugarcane mills. The farmers and slave-owners established a very authoritative and quite patriarchal social system in these regions. Yet, the remaining inhabitants—most of whom were non-voluntary immigrants like African slaves (Lesser), or Natives who lived on the land for centuries before the Portuguese arrived—put a lot of emphasis on group norms and group loyalty. Therefore, we suggest here that these regions have a preference for the vertical-collectivist cultural pattern, as a result of their colonization history. Singelis et al. understand this cultural pattern as one in which the individual sees the *self* as an aspect of an in-group, but the members of the in-group are different from each other, some having more status than others. Inequality is accepted, and people do not see each other equals. Such acceptance of inequality is, up to these days, a clear characteristic of the region (Woortman, "Cambios"). These two aspects, acceptance of inequality and

collectivist orientation, characterize these regions as vertical-collectivist.

The third sub-culture described by Ribeiro is the *caipira*, concentrated in the Southeast region of the country. This region, and especially the state of São Paulo, had its history initially linked to gold and diamond mining, which gave room to the coffee farms in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and later became a notable industrialized center of South America (Ettorre). Another cultural sub-division is represented by the *gaúchos*, a distinct social group composed of descendants of the great European immigration (mostly Italians and Germans) of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries to the South region, who were mainly devoted to cattle commerce. European immigrants were highly influential in the formation of the Southern sub-culture (the *gaúchos*), especially Germans, who between 1824 and 1832 arrived in this region, creating the "Mother Colonies" (Woortman, *Colonos*) which were close to be little pieces of Germany in the country. On the other hand, the Brazilian Southeast region has been under a continuous industrialization process, which started in 1808 with the relocation of the Portuguese Court there, which was escaping from Napoleon's invasion into Europe. Since the 1950s, we have been observing a massive movement of multinationals to the Southeast due to its cheap labor and other favorable economic conditions. The South region, center of the *gaúcho* sub-culture, still keeps some of the cultural characteristics of its European immigrants (Oliven), which is recognizable in their traditions and costumes. So, we propose that both regions would tend to prefer a vertical-individualist cultural pattern. Vertical-individualist is a cultural pattern in which an autonomous self is postulated. Individuals see each other as different and inequality is expected. Singelis et al. suggested that competition is an



important aspect here, and individuals are especially concerned about comparisons with others. In other words, people have the right to be equal, although the existence of inequality is recognized and accepted.

Finally, Ribeiro describes the *sertaneja* sub-culture, concentrated in the inland part of the Northeast and especially on the savannas of the Central-east of Brazil. This region presents as its main social-economic characteristic the development of agricultural and cattle farms. Furthermore, this region had a remarkable economical and political development after the transference of the country's administrative capital to Brasilia in 1960. Consulting the available research and literature, it is still not clear for us what would be the preferred cultural pattern there. However, we could assume a tendency for increasing individualism and reducing power distance in the region, due to its rapid economical development (Triandis, "Cross-Cultural"). Thus, we could expect the Central-east region to endorse autonomy and social status differences. In other words, people would have the right to be equal, although social inequality is recognized and accepted—which would lead to a preference for vertical-individualism. At the same time, this region still has large rural areas with small populations devoted to subsistence agriculture. In those places, we would expect group goals to be put ahead of individual goals, and thus, a disposition for vertical-collectivism should be encountered. Yet, this theoretical inference deserves to be carefully investigated.

Nevertheless, how can this within-cultural variance affect and be affected by family structure? What does research have to tell us about the Brazilian family? We now move to the discussion of theory and research regarding family structure in Brazil.

## Families<sup>2</sup> in the Brazilian Cultural Context

We discuss the importance of the family institution in Brazil, through the presentation of a profile and of the situation of the Brazilian family on the country's society and constitution in this section. Then, we elaborate on the multiple ethnic-cultural composition of the Brazilian population, with special attention to the current family structure, making comments about the transformations that have happened in Brazilian families over time. Finally, we discuss the main problems and issues faced by families in Brazil, focusing on poverty and drop out rates, two big challenges encountered by the government and the family.

## The Importance of Family in Brazil

Family can only be understood as a social group within a social-cultural context, and in relation with its movements of organization—disorganization—reorganization (Carvalho). According to this author, the model that characterized global social politics in the last century, which understands protection, well-being, and social reproduction of the individual as a mission of the State and the workplace, is still "far from being reached by the majority of the so-called third-world country populations," including Brazil (14).

As one would expect, the social movement of Brazil and of Latin America in general, did not follow the rest of the world's scenario. In Brazilian history, social-cultural networks and solidarity campaigns have always been present. For Carvalho, these networks represent a necessary condition for the survival of low-income families. For

instance, the large families characteristically found in the Northeast and other rural regions of the country function as a way to maximize income, social support, affect and relationships, in order to obtain better jobs, housing, and health conditions. A recent example of one of these campaigns is the so-called “Bolsa Família” ‘Family Grant,’ created by President Lula in 2004. As the first President elected from the Labor Party, Mr. Lula developed a program directed especially to poor families. In this program, any family whose total monthly income ranges from 61 to 120 Reais (US \$37.50 to US \$75.00), legally considered as “poor families,” or under 60 Reais a month (“below poverty families”), is immediately eligible to receive funds from the Federal Government. In 2008, more than 11 million families were receiving an amount of 172 Reais (US \$107.50) a month as a complement of their salary (*Programa*).

In social politics nowadays, especially in the last decades when the family has regained its place in the world scenario, either as a recipient or as a partner of the social inclusion movement, the State and the workplace stopped being seen as substitutes for the family. In the 70s and 80s (and even in the beginning of the 90s), the pre-school teachers in Brazil were called “aunts,” showing that the school was one of the major sources of social formation. Although this may still occur in Brazil, especially in the small towns, it has become clear today that the family has regained its role in the socialization of its members, particularly children and adolescents, and in the promotion of relationships that prevent against social isolation, resulting from growing poverty or urbanization.

Research has shown (Biasoli-Alves, “Famílias,” “Continuidades”; Dessen and Braz; Romanelli, “Famílias”; Simionato-

Tozo and Biasoli-Alves) that the family has a privileged place in the protection, support, creation, and maintenance of relationship links. We believe that these characteristics are strongly present in Brazilian culture, especially as it relates to the socializing function of the family. In a country where the political and economic pressures are strongly present; where the demands of a complex society, characterized by social diversity, grow enormously, just as unemployment, poverty and social inequality, it is not a surprise that the family may assume part of the responsibilities of the State.

According to Genofre, the Brazilian Constitutions of 1934, 1946, 1967, and 1969, only considered the “legitimate” family. By legitimate family we understand those that were formed by marriage, a clear evidence of the influence of Catholicism in the country. The Constitution of 1988 represented an evolution in the concept of family, recognizing that the former definitions resulted in injustice, especially to women. In this last Constitution, the term “family constituted by marriage” was suppressed, and the equality of rights amongst the consorts was established, protecting Brazilian women from discrimination in judicial procedures. Family planning became the couple’s right, leaving to the State the duty of providing the family with educational and scientific resources to act on this right. Senior citizens became the responsibility of their offspring, who have the duty to provide care for the elderly, and although the State and the society also have similar responsibilities, it is the family who has to support its seniors. Regarding children and adolescents, the Federal Constitution of 1988 “determines that to them it must be assured their rights to citizenship, such as the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, a professional life, culture, dignity,



respect, freedom and social and family companionship, in conditions of liberty and dignity" (qtd. in Genofre 102). However, the Brazilian reality is quite far from that described in the Constitution of 1988. The reader may have a look at this sad reality in the discussion below, which addresses the main problems and difficulties faced by Brazilian families.

### Characterization of Brazilian Families. A Brief History

To describe the contemporary situation, we need to report on the history of the organization of the Brazilian family. From its origin, the creation of the Brazilian nation is comprised of Black slaves and descendants of African origin, Natives from several nations, and Whites from European origin. Thus, from a historical and anthropological point of view, there is not a single model of family organization in this society, and the nuclear bourgeois family, which originated from the European patriarchal family model, does not represent the "only historical possibility of family organization to guide ordinary life in the path of progress and modernity" (Neder 28).

Historical studies about the families in Brazil are relatively recent. Yet, they allow us to portray an ethnographic picture of the Brazilian family. The *Africans* who were taken to Brazil<sup>3</sup> after its "discovery" in 1500 came from several African cultural groups, so that we cannot refer to them as originating from a *single* African family structure, but from various types of family organizations, which implies the presence of different structures, such as matriarch, patriarch, polygamy, and so forth, on top of religious, language, and tradition differences (Neder). For this author, the slavery that worked as

a cornerstone for the Brazilian society and the organization of the *slave family* in the country, has aspects more linked to political-institutional factors than to cultural factors. For instance, the authority and violence that characterized slavery in Brazil were responsible for the separation of couples, parents and their offspring, and other relatives, creating irreversible losses. Although the end of slavery in Brazil happened more than 100 years ago, the low-income classes of African origin show, up to the current time, a pattern of loss of family bonds. This pattern can be seen, for example, in the migrations from rural to metropolitan areas or in forced family separation.

Along with the family of African origin, which was forced into slavery, there were the *traditional families*, which were patriarchal and from Iberian origin, and which present differentiation depending on the regional idiosyncrasies (North-South) presented in the first part of this article. In the Northeast of the country, the wife in the patriarchal family was called *sinhazinha*, a term that can be translated as the little owner of the land, and which represents a profile of the woman as being docile and passive, and whose only activities related to the maintenance of the farm headquarters, or the *big-house*. In the Southeast, especially in the state of São Paulo, due to the military and strategic character of the Portuguese colonization, women—known as *bandeirantes* in the region—were able to manage the farms and to control their legion of slaves in the absence of men. These women "did not lose, however, their characteristic of being subordinate and submissive, neither did they lose the extensive characteristics of the family structure" (Neder 29).

The proclamation of the Republic, in 1889, signed for the end of slavery in Brazil and the beginning of urbanization,

and consequently, industrialization processes. The Republican military project also included the organization of the modern family, called *new family* in agreement with bourgeois organization patterns. In this organization, the “modern woman” should be educated to perform her duties as a mother and as a support to the man. The Republican project was basically focused on the modernization of the White family with European origin, that is, the traditional family. This picture became worse when the military left the process, and the oligarchies assumed control of the country. The low class families of African origin have not had a specific policy directed towards their families and education since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Brazilian history is marked by strong influence from the Catholic church, which has been present since the beginning of Portuguese colonization. After the separation of church and State at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic church in Brazil started developing strategies that resulted in Catholic educational policies of broad impact. In relation to the family, it “received Catholic religious treatment with strong European connotations, based on an idea of a standard-family, patriarchal, with a clear presence of morality and sexual control, typical of this ideology” (Neder 34).

### A General Vision of the Contemporary Family

Like other societies in the world, the Brazilian society has seen a plethora of phenomena resulting from the processes of industrialization and urbanization, with clear implications for the family structure. Repercussions of these phenomena in different social classes and familial ways of life were seen, especially in the last four

decades, when the Brazilian society passed (and is still passing) through deep demographic, economic, and social changes. “The demographic transition that began in the 1940s, with a fast drop in mortality rates, and followed in the 1960s by the decrease of newborns, reached all social classes, and immensely affected the composition and size of the families” (Kaloustian 133).

Thus, the traditional model of family based on the idea of a couple with sons and daughters, which in 1981 represented 65% of homes in Brazil, represented 61% in 1990. Between 1981 and 1990, the average number of persons per family went from 4.5 to 4.1, both in urban and rural areas, although it is still usual to find bigger family in rural areas (Ribeiro et al.). The difference per region is also noticeable. Families in the urban areas of the North and Northeast regions have the highest number of components in the country (4.5), the highest number of children per family (2.5), and the highest fertility<sup>4</sup> rate (4.5 newborns per woman). On the other hand, in 1990 the average number of people in families from the Southeast region, the most developed in the country, was 3.9, with an average number of 1.9 children per couple.

In the 1960s and 1970s, along with the process of transition to democracy in the country, there was quick development in urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth. Such transitions resulted in a change in values, a redefinition of the role of Brazilian women in the society, and an increase of women in the workplace (Kaloustian). The “increasing feminine participation in the workplace and the transformation of traditional values that pointed to marriage as the more adequate model of life for women affected, in higher or lower degrees, people in all social levels, especially those at higher levels [...]” (Ribeiro et al.

¿?). For instance, in less than 10 years since 1995, the number of divorces or separations increased by 50% in Brazil.

Finally, the last decades have been characterized by enormous instability in all sectors of the population, and particularly in the middle and low classes. A strong economic crisis and the governmental policies of the last administrations generated this instability. The strongest crisis, which began in the 1980s, after the success of the economic growth of the country in the 1970s, drove families to a reformulation of their life styles. This reformulation refers basically to the form of obtaining income, as a consequence of recession, unemployment, and a decrease in buying power.

The proportion of Brazilian families living in precarious conditions is high. More than one-third (i.e., approximately 38%, based on the official data provided by the 2000 Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics,<sup>5</sup> lives below the poverty line, with a family income up to half of the minimum wage.<sup>6</sup> In the rural areas, families are even poorer, with 65.8% of them living below the poverty line, when compared to the families living in the urban areas. In the urban areas, in 1990, 27.9% of them lived below the poverty line, but there are reasons to believe that this number has increased since then (Ribeiro et al.).

The increase of poverty in the country lead to the discard of the traditional model of the Brazilian family. As noticed by Ribeiro et al., the Brazilian man was strongly affected by unemployment, which challenged his role of family provider, and contributed to the increase of family separations. It is in the Northeast region, the poorest region of Brazil, that we observe the highest frequency of families sustained by the woman alone. This change in "who is the boss" is due, in part, to the increase in

the level of poverty in the region, and also to the inter-region migration which affects mainly men.

The size of the family is also associated with the social-economic situation, with the families of low income being bigger in number of components when compared to those of higher income. For instance, the number of components of families in situation of extreme poverty, the average of 5.8 members per family, is quite larger than the average of 3.4 members per family of higher income (Ribeiro et al.). In general, the poor neighborhoods are populated by young couples with children, elderly people living along, multiple families, and in particular, single women with children (Draibe).

The diversity in the organization of the Brazilian family refers not only to its composition, but also in the forms of sociability that characterize its internal functioning. For Romanelli ("Autoridade"), the existing sociability among family members is organized by structurally complementary, and yet distinct relations. For the author,

the basic attributes of the family model include: a hierarchical structure, in which the husband/father exerts his authority and power over the wife and children; a strong and rigid work division, that separates the masculine from the feminine tasks and attributions; the kind of affective link between the spouses, and between them and their offspring, with greater proximity between the mother and the children; the control over feminine sexuality, and a double-standard sexual morality. (Romanelli, "Autoridade" 75).

In summary, the transformations that have happened in the Brazilian families since the 1940s have resulted not only in changes in

their structural relations, but also in the redefinition of the traditional model of nuclear family. However, due to the fact that these transformations are still happening, we still cannot define with clarity a new model of functioning for Brazilian families in face of the changes in the society. One of the most important transformations observed refers to an increase of the participation of women in the workforce, leading to the redistribution of the domestic tasks between wife and husband, which made the husband performs tasks that were traditionally feminine (Dessen and Braz; Romanelli, "Autoridade").

## Final Comments

The agreements and disagreements amongst scholars in relation to a generic family model for Brazil reflect the interest of researchers, especially historians, for investigations that show "how difficult it is to conceive a unique image that can be applied to all different social segments in various moments of our history" (Samara 61). We did not have, in this paper, the intention of characterizing the multiplicity of Brazilian families or their life styles, what would be, we believe, an impossible task in the enormous diversity of social and family contexts in Brazil. Our intent was to illustrate this diversity and to provoke a discussion about the expression and meaning of "being a family" in Brazil. As suggested by Neder, to think about Brazilian families, in the plural form, means to think about a democratic construction, based on the appreciation of differences that, in fact, constitutes the Brazilian cultural pattern.

We recognize that in the diversity of contexts and of family group types, the fragility and richness of responses of the

Brazilian families to their own demands, to the demands of the State, and of the society. Nevertheless, we did not focus here on some of the aspects considered to be crucial to the families' well being, and which represent hard-to-face challenges by the Brazilian society. For example, some scholars (e.g., Neder) consider the failure of Brazilian educational system as an incapability of the public educational policy to consider the within-country *cultural differences*, which leads to the lack of formulation of effective educational strategies.

The value and importance of the family in the different Brazilian social contexts does not exempt the State of its responsibilities of protection, development, and social inclusion, although there is a predominance of disbelief in the efficiency of the government in Brazil. "The potential for protection and relationship of the family, in particular of those in a situation of poverty and exclusion, can only be optimized if the family itself receives some basic attention" (Carvalho 18). Even though a few basic social programs (e.g., program for generation of employment and income, community services programs, complementation of family income program) have already been created, they still were not effectively implemented to respond to the families' deficiencies, especially in the fields of health, food, and education, "because of an inversion of priorities or lack of public will from the government [...]" (Genofre 103). In this context, the family responsible for the breeding, nurturing, education, and child development, represents, in part, the hope and basis of the commitment of this country with its future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The authors are grateful for the important comments of Lorena Pérez-Floriano, from the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Mexico, in an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> As we refer to the term "family," plural or singular, we will be considering its ethnic-cultural diversity, which is the basis of the Brazilian demographic composition.

<sup>3</sup> The year of 1850 signs the end of the traffic of African slaves to Brazil.

<sup>4</sup> The mortality rate is also higher in these two regions.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <<http://www.ibge.gov.br>>.

<sup>6</sup> The minimum wage per month in Brazil corresponds to US \$80.00 in 2003.

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