

Tensions between genders among the working class: a debate with the holistic paradigm*

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ABSTRACT

This article questions one of the main hierarchical paradigm assumptions, the reciprocity principle configuring working class men and women relationships. In contrast, it suggests that structural tension pervades their relationship synthetically denoted as an opposition: female bonding vs. male circulation. Proposing that these disparate symbolic dispositions are inherent to each gender construction within this particular moral context, it implies ingrained system tension. Using Bateson's complementary schismogenesis concept, the article unveils potential escalating dynamics of this tension and speculates on internal/external factors in the conjugal arena maintaining it in a contained equilibrium state. Special attention is conferred upon mother/her adult son dyad to illustrate the ability of other family pacts, alternative to the conjugal to elucidate persistence of the value allocated to family/men in contexts where male impermanence repeatedly infringes the gender reciprocity principle. The article equally considers possible impacts the strength of the mother-son relationship on the sons' conjugal relationships.

Keywords: Urban Working Class, Inter-Gender Tensions, Family Relations, Matrilocality, Holistic Paradigm.

Entre l'homme et la femme, il y a quelque chose que ne marche pas.
(Lacan)

Introduction

A renowned anthropological paradigm produced on the urban working class in Brazil argues for their cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis middle-class cosmology (especially that embraced by its cultivated and psychologized sectors) and suggests, moreover, that their contrastive moral differences can be expressed in terms of Dumont's holism/individualism opposition.¹ At one pole, it locates the 'modern individualists' who, guided by the principle of equality (*i.e.*, an aversion to encompassments), confer prominent value to the individual over relationships. At the other pole, it posits the working class, which, adhering to the ideal of

hierarchy, emphasizes social totalities rather than individual units and find the primary affirmative qualities of their culture in complementary relationships and reciprocity.

The peculiarities of these moral configurations are illustrated, for instance, in the meanings that each of them imputes to the relationship between genders and to sexuality. The contention is that we – the modern-individualists – segment sex and the marital-family sphere. Compartmentalized in this way, sexuality, besides being represented as a domain which makes sense in itself is deemed as a crucial element of our personal identity. In contrast, the working classes are claimed to subsume sex and pleasure within a wider moral order embodied mainly in the family; at an extreme, sex is deprived of its sexual connotation to function, basically, as a mechanism that nourishes the whole moral system.² Furthermore, while the relation between genders among modern individualists is based on the principles of equality and indifferentiation (Salem 1987, 1989, 2007; Heilborn 2004), the working classes reveal a pervasive belief, and bestow value, on their irremovable differences. Expressed in terms of an inside (female) *versus* outside (male) dichotomy, these differences imprint a legitimately hierarchical character to gender relations simultaneously making men and women truly complementary. Hence, the principle of reciprocity incarnates one of the most important mainstays of this cosmology [Duarte (1986, 1987); Heilborn (1999); Leal & Boff (1996); Heilborn & Gouveia (1999)].

This paradigm is undergoing revisions (see, for example, Duarte 2005); even so, its central framework remains intact. One of my aims here is to call into question two of its central premises: firstly, that *both* gender identities are rooted in the family and locality, more than in sex; and secondly, that the relationship between men and women is founded on the principle of reciprocity. I do not intend to exhaust the literature on the issue; rather, I shall limit myself to just a few of the more representative works of this interpretative paradigm.

In an earlier article, I focused on representations of male and female sexuality, as well as the relationship between genders, from the viewpoint of working class men (Salem 2004). The work was based on 41 testimonies taken from the qualitative material produced by the Gravad Research Project, which, performing 123 interviews with young people of both sexes from the working and middle classes, intended to depict their sexual and reproductive behavior from a biographical perspective.³ In contrast to the idea of a relational identity and to the holistic meaning that sexuality is supposed to have for both genders in the working class, I have argued that men in this social strata, as well as segmenting sexuality, conceive it of as a basic reference for defining their identity. This conclusion can be contested on the basis of two arguments. Firstly, it may be objected – indeed, with some reason – that their self-perception as being subject to an irresistible energy (which I have labeled as ‘sexual urge’) could have been incited by the research itself, which, by focusing on sexuality, instigated the presence of sex in speech. Secondly, it may be alleged that the fact that the informants were between 18 and 24 years meant that sexuality was invested with specific and perhaps more intense meanings. However – and in favor of my conclusion – it should be noted that the same interview script, when applied to the other gender and/or to the other social strata from the same age group, opened up space for alternative modes of self-presentation. Nonetheless, the relevance of the time variable – as upheld by Leal⁴ – is undeniable and I will return to it below. The writing of the article in question and the female testimonies resulting from the Gravad Research Project now lead me to highlight, and seriously take remarkably distinct meanings that working class men and women impute to sexuality into account, as well as to reflect on the analytic consequences derived from this evidence.

The suggestion of postulating the gender template when considering personhood in general, and sexuality in particular, is by no means a novel approach. However, although this procedure is followed by the interpretative paradigm under consideration, it very often does so, especially in relation to sexuality, by focusing on just one gender – mainly, female – which then functions as a mouthpiece for the other. Leal & Boff express a similar discomfort

when they point out that ‘perhaps the anthropology of the working classes, when dealing with men outside the sphere of work, has to a certain extent *‘feminized’ men*, given that women are the key informants’ (1996:133, my italics). Furthermore, despite recognizing that sexual pleasures, meanings and interdictions are undeniably different for men and women, the literature continues to assume that both genders embed, if not dilute, sex and sexuality in an eminently larger moral order.

I challenge this premise and the foundation on which it ultimately rests: the principle of reciprocity between the genders. I argue that this interpretative paradigm extrapolates disposition that is peculiar to women both to men and to the model itself. In other words, it seems to me that there is an undue homology between the model and the female ethos.⁵ Although I endorse the fact that both genders cherish the value of hierarchy, I question whether reciprocity as the mainstay of this cosmology is a symbolic attribute pertinent to men and women alike. My negative reply then prompts me to inquire why and how these gender differences are constructed, as well as to reflect on the implications of these disparities in the formulation of the analytical model.

My hypothesis that working class men segment sexuality, and understand it as a domain that makes sense by itself, can suggest that, at first sight, their moral nearness to modern individualist sectors. However, this affinity is only superficial: I am not proposing that the cultural differences between these two moral cosmologies are becoming diluted, nor are they tending to merge. As argued by Duarte (1987), there is no indication that the working class in contrast to the individualists, submit sex and/or themselves to psychologized discussions on sexual pleasure or, even less, sexual repression. On the other hand, the idea that working class people do not apprehend sexuality rationally and abstractly (as asserted, for example, by Heilborn 1999:41) needs to be reassessed. Even though it may be true that working class men do not rationalize sexuality on the basis of an ‘individual-psychological-sexualist code’ (Duarte 1987:214), they do have fairly precise conceptions of its distinct meanings and modes of expression for each gender. Evidence will be provided over the course of this article in support of this assertion.

However, I suggest that the distance between working class men and the individualist model is more sharply expressed in two dominant representations among the former. Firstly, it resides in their self-perception, or self-presentation, as driven by a ‘sexual urge’ (Salem 2004). This determinist and naturalist viewpoint contrasts with the voluntarism and culturalism typically associated with modern individualism. Secondly, in endorsing the hierarchical order as molding the relationship between genders, that is, in agreeing that men and women are endowed with disparate natures and dispositions, which ground and legitimate their segregated domains and irreducible characters. This view opposes the egalitarianism inextricably woven into individualist ideology.

I take these differences separating working class men from modern individualists as *structural pillars* of their worldview. For this reason, I question the persuasive force of an idea prevalent in the literature, which, to save space, I designate the contamination hypothesis (or enlightenment hypothesis, depending on the point of view adopted). Its main argument is that the modernization of Brazilian society over the past few decades is dissipating the symbolic frontiers between these two moral systems (Zaluar 1984). Even though this thesis is frequently associated with a critique of the holism/individualism paradigm, its followers sometimes endorse it. Thus, Heilborn & Gouveia argue in favor of ‘a partial diffusion of individualist culture into a cultural context’ (1999:179). Resorting to the gender template, Leal & Boff also conclude that while women are ‘noticeably hierarchical in the construction of their values, men are guided by *values typical of individualist ideology*, such as freedom, equality and autonomy’ (1996:129-130, my italics). It remains for us to cogitate on whether the meanings imputed by working class men to such terms coincide with the meanings

attributed to them by the moderns sectors. The profound and persistent differences noted above between these moral configurations lead me to suspect that they do not.

My objections to the contamination hypothesis are not grounded on the supposition that the holistic worldview is impermeable to any outside influences. Rather, I insist on the inadequateness of interpreting dissonances between the model and the ethnographic information as attesting the permeation of individualist principles among the working class. In an earlier work, I proposed a distinction between individuation and individualization, suggesting that only the latter concept would denote a commitment to individualist ideology (Salem 1987:42-43; see also Salem, 2007:37). In other words, my intention was to stress that *being individuated is not the same as being individualist*. My demur regarding the contamination hypothesis raises the question of how to elucidate the quality of individuation – which I reckon to be crucial in the construction of masculinity in the working classes – and of speculating on its impact on the relation between genders.

Likewise, it seems sometimes precipitated to justify the disparities between the model and the ethnographic data as a divergence between Fact and Value, as the paradigm's devotees frequently allege. Instead, I prefer to displace the explanation for this analytical malaise towards the model itself, by asking where its persuasiveness is less convincing. I reiterate my discomfort over the way in which *gender relations* are portrayed in this model. While concurring with Leal & Boff over the need to 'consider the gender issue not only by analyzing their relations, but also primarily by highlighting their *tensions*' (1996:133, my italics), I distance myself from the authors when they reduce these conflicts as noticeable only at a 'microscopic level' (1996:129). Put in more general terms, it doesn't seem to me that the hierarchical paradigm followers failed to perceive these tensions between the genders. However, I certainly confer more analytic weight to these dilemmas than they do.

This article is divided into three parts: in the first (items II and III), in an explicit dialogue with the hierarchical paradigm, I argue that a structural tension pervades the bond between men and women in this moral context, and I then examine how their divergent dispositions are constructed. In the second part (item IV), I invoke the concept of complementary schismogenesis (Bateson) to discuss how these irreconcilable gender inclinations can mutually reinforce each other, as well as to speculate on internal and external factors to the conjugal arena that maintain these tensions in a contained state of equilibrium. I confer special attention to the dyad formed by the mother and her adult son to illustrate that the disruption of reciprocity in conjugality can be compensated by other family pacts which, in turn, explain the persistence of the value allocated to the family and even to men despite of what goes on in the partnership. And still, I speculate on possible impacts that the strength of the mother-son relationship may have on the conjugal relationship. Finally, in my concluding remarks (item V), I summarize my divergences with the holistic paradigm concerning the depiction of gender bonds, suggesting that they may refer, at least in part, to distinct ways of conceiving theoretical models.

A final observation: this article does not survey the abundant national and international literature that makes use of other theoretical frameworks to deal with some of the questions discussed here. I understand that this exclusion may be deemed to limit the range of scholars with which this work debates. However, although I choose the followers of the holistic paradigm as my main interlocutors, I have no wish to restrict the debate to them. Indeed, I argue that, from a certain point of view, the discussion with this particular theoretical model provides a point of entry for presenting a particular reading of the relation between working class men and women: it is this reading, as much as the dialogue with the holistic paradigm, which I intend to open up for discussion here.

On gender oppositions

The literature highlights various contrastive oppositions between the female and male with regard to sexuality, expressed from the most concrete level (that is, where each gender's 'pleasure' is preferentially located) to the most abstract (*i.e.*, in the meanings that each gender attributes to it). Firstly, a correspondence is established between male/penetration and female/foreplay (or romance). Leal & Boff (1996:130), Heilborn (1999:44) and Torres (2001) stress this point.

This opposition is intimately associated with a second one. As I emphasized in a previous work, the male propensity to segment sexuality becomes evident in a variety of ways. One of them is their insistent *dissociation of sex and relationship*: the first, directed towards satisfying an urgent and uncontrollable impulse, is understood (and pursued) as an end in itself (Salem 2004).⁶ This point of view contrasts sharply with the one expressed by working class women – as the testimonies from the Gravad Research amply illustrate. In fact, two basic meanings imputed to sex emerge from the latter: it is invariably understood as a complement to (that is, as encompassed by, and submitted to love or bonding)⁷ or a means to (that is, as a resource for bargaining with men). The peculiarity of the feminine style is endorsed by the native male version: the qualification of women as 'more attached', or 'more clingy' (and hence themselves as less so) and the usual accusations that 'women use sex to trap us' reiterate that, in their view as well, female sexuality is used for something *beyond* sexual satisfaction. In sum, there is a significant consensus among academics and natives when it comes to the female inclination to subordinate sex to the dynamics of the relationship.⁸

Rather, more precisely, relationships. In a written comment on the work of Torres (2001) about sexual representations and experiences among poor adolescents in Salvador (Brazil), I highlighted a series of contrastive gender oppositions. I suggested that the value attributed by girls to 'doorway dating'⁹ condensed the way in which they conceived of their sexuality and/or the relation between genders: besides testing the boy's commitment to a more long-term relationship, it indicates that, for girls, dating does not involve just the couple: the pair is encompassed by her family network, which simultaneously controls and legitimizes the relationship. Also, from the female viewpoint, dating should ideally take place in 'well-lit' and socially approved places (such as the 'chapel' or the 'at the doorstep') and the '*transa*' (sexual intercourse), in addition to being 'calm' and preceded by foreplay, should happen in an intimate and cozy space. The representations of adolescent boys are very different: sex for them is reduced to coitus, and the seduction or dating (described as forms of 'duping' girls or 'sweet-talking them') are asserted as ways of attaining the former. As well as 'sudden and hurried,' sexual activity ideally occurs in dark, prohibited and dangerous places (such as alleys, dockyards and so on). Exercising their sexuality also excludes the family: boys are not subject to family control and their relationships dispense its approval. These observations reveal that the male disposition for isolating sex from wider moral networks and/or considerations, and the inverse female inclination, already emerge in adolescence – and, among boys, at the same time as their sexual initiation.¹⁰

However, female understanding of men allows us to go further: it is not only male sexuality that, due to its nature, is regarded as disconnected from the family, but also, *et pour cause*, they themselves. The insistence of interviewed females in classifying men as 'easy prey of women and [therefore] less tied to the family', 'more irresponsible' and 'freer by nature' (Salem 1981:60) reveals the native representation that men are 'naturally' more *individuated* from conjugal relationships and the family.

The polarity that represents women as 'more clingy' and men as 'more detached' leads to what I believe to be the core of contrastive gender oppositions: *the female propensity for bonding versus the male disposition for circulating among women*.¹¹ I also propose that this equation conveys a condensed formulation of the *structural tension between genders*. Male

betrayal – when enacted without damaging the relationship and the family unity – comprises the most superficial and least dramatic aspect of this circulation. This is the main reason why women express a notable leniency in relation to this sort of male practice. We can designate it simultaneous circulation.¹² However, the circulation has a distinct and a much more dramatic meaning when it results – frequently, in fact – in the abandonment of the partner, offspring or domestic unit and their subsequent failure to reappear, either physically or financially, or do so only intermittently. In these circumstances, men violate the premise of reciprocity between genders at its core and more or less typically engage in successive and contingent alliances with other partners during their lives. It is this latter mode of circulation, which I call ‘successive’, that receives attention here.¹³ The bonding vs. circulation opposition is echoed in others heavily emphasized by the literature: while women are associated with *permanence, continuity and sentiment*, men are linked to *impermanence, discontinuity and sensation*.

Numerous works highlight the impermanence of men, their successive circulation and/or recurrent disruption of the reciprocity presupposed in the relation between genders. The most hard-hitting examine the matrifocality that pervades these social segments, based on the evidence of a large number of domestic units that survive without the continuous presence of the man or with the succession of various men (Barroso 1978; Salem 1981).¹⁴ This scenario unfolds the root of the deep-seated female perception of the precariousness of conjugal ties and the source of their ‘ambivalence in relation to men or even in relation to the man as a value’ (Duarte 1987:219). Although there are some cases of women abandoning the home, these instances are exceptional. Alluding to the logic between genders in *gaúcha* (from southern state of Rio Grande do Sul) society, Leal & Boff conclude that, ‘women try to catch men, while men strive to avoid this contact’ (1996:123). From this perspective, the male avoidance of bonding or of stable relationships, rather than defying the premise of the reciprocity of genders, undermines it from the outset.

The construction of gender oppositions: bonding vs. circulation

Let us now consider how each gender’s dispositions and their symbolic properties are constructed: on one hand, female/bonding/ permanence/continuity and on the other, male/circulation/impermanence/ discontinuity. Or, to use native categories, how the female ‘clingy’ quality and the male ‘detached’ attribute take shape.

The authors to whom I turn at this point in my argument – the same, in fact, with whom I have been dialoguing until now – answer this question highlighting the differential gender socializations and ensuing implications. More precisely, and anticipating propositions examined below, they point out to *an intense ambivalence in the constitution of the male in contrast to the absence of any significant ambiguity in the shaping of the female vis-à-vis the home*. The thesis of male ambivalence regarding the domestic sphere is crucial to my argument since it threatens both the primordial role designated to men and the relation between genders as supposed in the paradigm under consideration.

Therefore, let us examine the case in point. Duarte suggests that the category of *duty* – expressive of the man’s moral imperatives in relation to family – implicitly contains the principle of his *exteriority* in relation to the home: he is the one, after all, who represents the domestic unit in the outside world. The author concludes that, ‘a structure that confers to men such a degree of exteriority in relation to the *home* and which associates them, therefore, with *street life* [...] conveys a very *high degree of potential ambiguity*’ (1986:177, final italics my own). Heilborn locates the origin of this ‘structural ambiguity’ [sic] in a precise moment of the life of working class boys: the author suggests that at around the age of 13, precisely when a confluence between the timing of their sexual initiation and that of their entrance in the work market is noticeable. Based on this temporal coincidence, Heilborn concludes that it ‘involves a physical and moral movement of exteriorization in relation to the home. In

structural terms, the working class effectively *expels* its male members from the domestic world' (1999:43, my italics). Leal & Boff also endorse this idea (1996:133). In summary, *it is this expulsion that accounts for men's structural ambiguity vis-à-vis the domestic domain.*

This thesis contrasts sharply with the premises of the contamination hypothesis. According to the latter, the *individualization* of working class men is a recent phenomenon and, for this reason, factors *outside* the holistic model need to be invoked in order to explain a sort of moral duplicity in their way of being. In contrast, the above reflections suggest that the early *individuation* of boys is inextricably linked to the very elaboration of the male subject. This comes with a price, though since, while 'expulsion' is deemed as a *requirement* for the performance of man's duty, it introduces, at the same time, a significant ambivalence in the fulfillment of the latter.

These considerations lead me to conclude that *hierarchy and individuation are both equally decisive and structural determinants in configuring male modes of being in this moral context.* Here I distance myself from the cited authors: while they understand male ambiguity in relation to home as secondary to the principle of gender reciprocity, I propose placing both these vectors on the same level of analytic relevance.

Also crucial to my argument is the consideration of a perceptible consonance between the male structural ambiguity vis-à-vis the home and their disposition for circulation, for impermanence and/or 'detachment'. From this viewpoint, the male compulsion for circulation emerges as a moral inclination anticipated – if not stipulated – by the model itself. Duarte suggests that the matrifocality of the working classes 'can be better understood from the angle of this male ambiguity' (1986:177). However, the author expels this ambivalence from the paradigm by qualifying this and other correlated behaviors of working class men as 'deviant even for themselves' (*Ibid*); he stresses, therefore, on a split between Value and Fact. Instead, I interpret this insistent tendency towards transgression as an expression of the fact that working class men are simultaneously molded to comply and to violate with the principle of gender reciprocity. The repercussions of male individuation upon gender relations cannot, therefore, be dismissed as 'microscopic evidence'.

Nonetheless, the structural tension between genders does not arise only from male moral duplicity, but also from its *conjugation* with the very distinct way of being female. While both men and women endorse hierarchy in shaping their relationship, they do not adhere to the principle of reciprocity with the same intensity. Put otherwise, *men combine hierarchy and individuation, while women associate hierarchy to reciprocity.* And, indeed, the correlation between women and bonding is more a structural constraint than a choice. While the socialization of boys carries an ambiguity in relation to domestic life, that of girls stresses its value: far from being expelled from the home, they are kept within it, either through family control, or because they continue to be responsible for household tasks, even when engaged in work outside the home. Women therefore remain 'internal and private, interwoven in an inextricable fashion with the meaning of the *home*' (Duarte 1986:177) – and, we can add, with relationships, permanence, continuity and so forth. This explains their 'clingy' quality and why the value placed on family and bonding is more in tune with the female than the male way of being.¹⁵

It is also worth exploring some of the potential repercussions that the experience of matrifocality causes in gender predispositions since an early age. In iconic terms, such family arrangement depicts women as stayers while men as transient members of the home; this makes it a powerful image for learning and internalizing the female inclination for permanence and the male propensity for circulation. As far as girls are concerned, it may also be that the successions of men who transit the home teach them not only about the fragility of conjugal ties but also the weakness of the complementarity between genders. From the boy's perspective, the experience of matrifocality – precisely by enacting and instructing them

about male impermanence – is one more element towards shaping his structural ambivalence with regards to domesticity.

In summary, rather than understanding gender tension as the outcome of women endorsing holistic values while men individualist ones (as proposed by Leal & Boff 1996), I comprehend it as the result of the fact that whereas *women are relational, men, in comparison to them, are individuated*. If persuasive, this suggestion impacts on the very depiction of hierarchical culture. Indeed, if relational morality coincides with the female ethos more clearly, then we can conclude that, rather than ‘feminizing men’ (Leal & Boff 1996), the interpretative paradigm under scrutiny *feminizes the hierarchical model itself*. It is as though, as it already occurs in the family domain, women were responsible for the moral maintenance and reproduction of the holistic culture and of the hierarchical model.

The acknowledgement of the structural character of male impermanence (and female permanence) also implies recognition that tension between genders is not a recent phenomenon. Even if one concedes to the hypothesis that divergence between working class men and women has intensified over the past decades, I stress its chronic and structural character; in other words, I perceive the individuation of working class men as logically and factually anterior to their potential ‘contamination’ by modern individualist values. Understanding the bonding vs. circulation opposition as constitutive of the system implies recognizing that, rather than being functionally integrated, the relation between genders is permeated by a structural uneasiness in this moral context.

From a certain viewpoint, the bonding vs. circulation polarity derives from another one very much emphasized by the literature: female interiority vs. male exteriority or, in succinct form, ‘inside vs. outside.’ However, these oppositions possess very different statuses: the latter is the maximal expression of reciprocity between genders in this moral context. The poles are presented as compatible and complementary in it and they are welded together precisely because of those *differences* in status. Potential breakdowns in this arrangement are not constitutive of the opposition itself. The nature of the bonding vs. circulation equation is distinct: here the female and male propensities are not only different in their content, but above all *divergent in their direction*. It is, in fact, the reverse of the principle of reciprocity and, for this reason I understand it as a synthetic enunciation of the structural tension between genders. Furthermore, rather than interpreting the bonding vs. circulation dichotomy as a mere dissonance between Fact and Value, I suggest it should be understood as coexisting in tense relation with the inside vs. outside equation – that is, with the premise of reciprocity – at the same level of analytic relevance.

However, let us return to the theme of male expulsion from domestic space. The specialized literature offers indications that this trend continues to pursue men beyond adolescence – as we have seen, a crucial moment in affirming the phenomenon. Selecting informants between 40 and 60 years of age, Leal & Boff (1996) examine the complaints of men who circulate among women. The authors stress that, in cases where their impermanence has been responsible for the break-up of a conjugal relationship, an alliance is established between mothers and children, which results in the ‘expulsion’ [*sic*] of the circulating men. Leal & Boff propose the following link in this chain: ‘the man’ ‘expelled from home’ becomes, in his own discourse, the abandoned and unfairly treated father-husband and subsequently approaches another, more worthy woman to correct the situation’ (1996:127). We can, thus, infer that men tend to compensate for any exclusion from the network of solidarity founded on affiliation by circulating even more. At the limit, this circuit will only be interrupted when the man, breaking with the pattern of impermanence, becomes (femininely) more permanent – precisely, in fact, when he is older. This illustrates, once more, how the time variable is capable of producing significant inflections in gender dispositions.

It is sometimes postulated that the symbolic properties relating to the genders go beyond any particular social context. This is the argument found, for example, in “Gênero e Hierarquia. A Costela de Adão Revisitada” (Heilborn 1993; also see Heilborn 2004). Comparing heterosexual conjugality with homosexual partnerships (both gay and lesbian versions) among the middle class sectors, the author speculates on whether their embracement of the egalitarian ideology would be capable of counterbalancing, or disrupting, the links between male, marked, impermanence and discontinuity, and female, unmarked, permanence and continuity.¹⁶ The author is skeptical: she insists that the presence of this ideology is insufficient to annul the logic of gender, which remains active in all three kinds of couples. Heilborn interprets this persistence as evidence of the inevitability of a hierarchical logic in gender classifications. Although my purpose here is not primarily to be comparative, I venture the hypothesis that, even if universal, the operation of this logical principle is most clearly expressed among working class men and women. From this point of view, they embody *exaggerations of male and female symbolic properties in relation to modern individualists*, thanks on one hand to values that found their cosmology and, on the other, to class-based conditioning factors.

Let’s begin with the case of men. Their explicit recognition of the hierarchy shaping the relationship between genders and also their socialization, not made softer by any egalitarianism, make the distinctive gender logic manifest in a clear-cut way. It is unsurprising, by the way, that they attribute their circulation to their own ‘nature’. The male propensity for impermanence is even more radicalized due to social class constraints. Moving towards a more concrete level of analysis, it is perceptible that the pressures on working class men to perform the role of provider are so intense and so challenging to attain – especially in a context marked by very low wages and unemployment – that they end up, paradoxically perhaps, inciting men to avoid and/or disengage themselves from more permanent relationships. The wound to the male self-image, imposed by these class conditions, is thus perhaps another factor, among others already listed, that nourishes their structural ambiguity in relation to the home.¹⁷ Furthermore, it is possible that, confronted with their failure as a worker and provider, men tend to establish, as a kind of compensatory mechanism, an equivalence between masculinity and physical virility; sexuality becomes therefore the symbolic locus for affirming their masculinity. From this perspective, the presentation of themselves as possessed by sex, the circulation among various female partners (either simultaneous or successive), making children and so on, reaffirm their masculine identity. Likewise, women’s attachment to the relationship and the value that they impute to the gender differentiation are heightened by the living conditions of these populations: it seems that, in order to deal with their circumstances, women need men in a more radical sense. I return to this question below.

Complementary schismogenesis and the radicalization of gender dispositions

In addition to the belief and value imputed to the differences between genders and class-based factors, another element that may elucidate the *radicalization of the contrast* between the female and male predispositions among the working class is the dynamic of *complementary schismogenesis*, as proposed by Bateson (1958). Extrapolating his theory from the relationship between men and women in Iatmul society, the author suggests that the differences between the ‘ethos of the sexes’, as well as emerging from their different modes of socialization, may also be intensified by a schismogenic dynamic. The concept is important here insofar as it establishes an *interconnection* between the symbolic dispositions of each gender that works towards their mutual reinforcement; in other words, the concept supplies a genuinely *relational* approach to understanding the dynamic between genders and their mutual tensions. For this reason, I devote special attention to it.

The singularity of the complementary schismogenesis process resides in the fact that it develops through mutual reactions and feedbacks: A's action triggers a response in B, which in turn triggers an even stronger response in A, and so on continually. When focusing on gender, Bateson stipulates that this dynamic can result in a progressive differentiation of their particular forms of ethos, accentuating and increasingly polarizing the contrast between them. In these circumstances, the dispositions of each gender undergo a distortion: the exaggeration of their specializations in a single direction entails the underdevelopment of other aspects, which come to be considered as exclusive to the other gender. One of the outcomes of this dynamic, Bateson adds, is that the more intense the contrast between male and female and their respective specializations, the more difficult it will be for either of them to understand the viewpoint and emotional reactions of the other. Bateson also suggests that it is inherent to the schismogenic dynamic to escalate indefinitely, implying, at the limit, and if left unchecked, a destruction of the system – that is, the destruction of the relation itself.

To be activated, complementary schismogenesis presumes relationships founded on differences,¹⁸ thus, the concept is appropriate to illuminate the relationship between working class men and women. Indeed, the value that both genders attribute to hierarchy presupposes – and, at least at the level of the model, does not survive without – a rigid demarcation between the feminine and the masculine.¹⁹

It seems to me, though, and distancing myself from Bateson, that the radicalization of gender specialties, even when intense, does not necessarily place the relationship at risk. To backup this argument, I return to the distinctions between the inside/outside from the bonding/circulation polarities. In the former, the differences between the opposite poles – expressive of their hierarchical configuration – pose no threat to the overall system; on the contrary, they ultimately consolidate it. Far from introducing uneasiness into the system, the radical segregation between feminine and masculine is proclaimed as a value. This arrangement is therefore only perceived as a problem when seen and evaluated by a logic foreign to this ethical context – that is to say, by the egalitarian logic.²⁰ The bonding vs. circulation dichotomy, on the other hand, refers to gender propensities that involve a divergence: their directions are so irreconcilable that the very idea of exchange loses its meaning. In other words, female permanence relies on the male category of exteriority or duty, but, by definition, cannot repose on that of impermanence.

I shall focus, therefore, solely on the bonding vs. circulation equation since it is the one capable of destroying the moral system grounded on reciprocity. Firstly, I ask whether it can be read in the light of the concept of complementary schismogenesis; that is, whether the very dynamic of the relation between genders can strengthen their divergent dispositions. Since I am not arguing for a collapse of this relationship, but a tension endemic to it, I turn to a second question, which involves speculating on the *persistence of the family-value, or 'man as a value' in a context where male impermanence repeatedly throws the principle of reciprocity into question*. I have already highlighted various factors that not only instill but can also reinforce the male tendency towards circulation and the female tendency towards permanence. Their particular forms of socialization, the experience of matrifocality from early childhood, the specificity of their moral context, as well as factors more directly related to their social class, teach each gender not only about their own inclinations but also those of the other gender. We now need to ask whether, and how, it is possible for their respective dispositions towards permanence and impermanence to enter into a dynamic of mutual feeding to the point of producing an increasing polarization.

It is quite possible that the direct and/or indirect experience of men 'escaping' the relationship radicalizes even further the female obsession with conjugality and the urgency of trapping them. Ethnographic information reveals that women work towards this end by using resources that range from jealous rages (which men abhor) to those deemed to be questionable – which men themselves and the specialized literature refer to as 'the use of sex' and above all

pregnancy. This female attitude, besides fomenting the male perception of women being devious and/or Machiavellian (Salem 2004:57-58), aggravates the man's feeling that her only aim is to entangle him in a stable relationship. It should be noted that men make this accusation retroactively, that is, after the relationship has terminated, and it can target even partners once considered to be trustworthy and stable.²¹ Men will tend to shun the relationship and even their responsibilities in relation to children; as I suggested earlier, somewhat paradoxically perhaps, class conditions may stimulate this tendency even further. It is also plausible to venture that, at least in part, men feel freed in relation to their offspring knowing that, one way or another, their partner and/or family will assume responsibility for them. From this point of view, *male impermanence rests on female permanence and/or on the permanence of their support network*. In other words, these people, precisely because permanent, are those who 'authorize', from a particular perspective, man's circulation. This impermanence (re)confirms the usual idea among women that men are 'worthless' and/or 'irresponsible', which perhaps intensifies their urge to retain them. In sum, this mutually aggravating spiral feeds gender stereotypes, places the principle of reciprocity at risk and also introduces a fundamental disturbance in the relation between men and women. It is noticeable that, through the lenses of Bateson's concept, the female disposition towards bonding and the male tendency towards circulation *constitute a system*.

The above observations lead to our second question: what are the mechanisms that work to arrest this progressive spiral, preventing the system from a complete breakdown. Indeed, the persistent linking of the female and the bonding testifies to the consistency of the family-value and men as a 'value,' capable of enduring even a constant stream of setbacks. It is precisely this resilience that incites one to surmise that the structural tension between the genders is somewhat contained. It remains for us to determine which factors help to produce this result.

Bateson also ponders the conditions that prevent the escalation of the schismogenetic process towards system collapse.²² In the opening pages of his work, the author asserts that it is in the nature of this dynamic to escalate indefinitely, placing the relation itself at risk. Further on, however, he claims that this vicious circle may be self-containing, contained by an element outside the relation or even remaining uninterrupted but still leaving the system intact. In any circumstance, a 'dynamic equilibrium' is attained - that is, a state is reached in which the tendencies towards schismogenesis and/or towards the final implosion of the system are adequately halted by inverse processes (Bateson 1958:186). The author proposes that, in examining these containable mechanisms, it is important to consider not only factors, which are *internal* to the relationship but also those, which are *external* to it. I follow his suggestion.

The *mutual dependency* established between working class men and women emerges as a crucial reason for the system to remain in a state of 'dynamic equilibrium.' In fact, the value that both sexes confer to the hierarchy between genders with its inextricable segregation of feminine and masculine domains, together with their social living conditions, result in an intense interdependency between them. I have already sustained this idea in an earlier work based on life-stories of women living in slums in Rio de Janeiro: 'the absence of the man is, in terms of the material subsistence of the household unit, especially dramatic in these sectors of society, not only because he is deemed as more capable of performing this function, but also because the impoverished living conditions stimulate the *mutual dependency* [between genders]. This explains why the experience in becoming the heads of household is always recalled by these women as the most painful moment of their lives. Faced with this situation, they are left to deal alone with the pressures and insecurities that arise from their class and gender alike. Perhaps for this reason, the successive experiences of abandonment end up [...] confirming the belief in their low capacity to operate in male territory and reiterating, moreover, the belief that they lacked the 'right man'' (Salem 1981:96-97). Even acknowledging that the indispensability of the other appears to be more strongly marked among women (or, at least, they are the ones to refer to this dependency most clearly), men

are not exempt: the very fact that they engage, albeit transitorily and successively, with different female partners over their life-time corroborates the dependency between genders (and, as I have already suggested, the value that the relationship has for them, even if temporary).

In sum, *it is as though the hierarchical configuration between genders – embodied in the strength of the inside vs. outside equation – counterbalances the schismogenic tendency implied in their divergent dispositions, expressed in the bonding vs. circulation polarity.*²³ However, it is noteworthy that from the male point of view, there is no incompatibility between impermanence and dependency in relation to women. Indeed, they are capable of solving this dependency through (more) circulation, meaning that male *impermanence can persist despite mutual dependency.*

Containment of the schismogenic dynamic is also clarified by shifting the level of analysis, that is, by displacing the bonding vs. circulation opposition from the structural plane to a more ethnographic and less abstract level. This move introduces qualifications, as well as softens the dichotomy under consideration: here we find the allusion to a predominance, rather than exclusivity, of each gender's inclinations. The structural divergence between men and women obviously neither impedes reciprocity nor prevents men from abiding - with or without their simultaneous circulation among women. In the same way as women believe that the male predisposition to break the pact between genders can be neutralized by encountering the 'right man,' men also point out that not all female partners 'cause trouble' – or, at least, not to the same degree – and that not all of them 'use' men and manipulate their sexuality (Salem 2004). So much so that the native perspective oscillates between the generalization that 'all men and all women are equal' and the recognition that there are exceptions among each grouping. It may also be speculated that each stopover, or interval, in male circulation nourishes women's hope of finding *the* ideal relationship. It is precisely the inevitable inconsistencies in the ethos of each gender that impels them to search for and cultivate the belief in finding the right partner. In sum, these inconsistencies are one more factor to reaffirm the value allocated to the conjugal partnership and to dampen the system's tendency towards total collapse.

It is also crucial to note that the persistence of the family-value relies on *factors that go beyond the relationship between the conjugal partners.* Focusing attention exclusively on the dyad implies adopting an individualist-egalitarian approach, since it is in this ethical context that the couple is conceived to make sense *per se.*²⁴ In contrast, it may well be that reciprocity as a moral mainstay of the working classes is not located either uniquely or perhaps not even primordially in the couple. We can go further, in fact, by suggesting that one of the factors that halts escalation of schismogenesis *between* partners is precisely shifting or diffusion of reciprocity *beyond its expression in conjugality.*

In the suggestions that follow, I make no reference to the reciprocity enacted among the wider kin group.²⁵ Instead, I focus on a specific dyad aforementioned from one of my earlier articles: that formed by a mother and her male child, in particular her firstborn son (cf. Salem 1981).²⁶ This personage, who I designated the 'chosen-son', speaks of a transference performed by the mother to the grown-up son regarding the male support role previously assigned to her partners. The procedure is particularly noticeable among women who have experienced successive abandonment by their companions; it expresses, then, the expectation of reparation to be fulfilled by one man owing to the infraction of another (or others). This transference confirms and perpetuates the value bestowed to the complementarity between male and female: the son, seen as a representative of the family unit in the outer domain, is the one who enables the permanence of the mother in the inner realm. And with one advantage: precisely because it is based on consanguinity, women invest this relation with an expected solidity that contrasts with the uncertainty that typifies the relation established with their partners. According to one of my informants: 'a son's love never ends, while a man's

love is always fleeting' (Salem 1981:89). It is as though the impermanence of the mate is compensated by the (almost feminine) permanence of the chosen-son. In sum, this personage, and/or the relation that the mother establishes with him, not only reiterates the family-value, but also lessens what Duarte refers to as 'the ambivalence in relation to men or even *man* as a value' (1987:219).

The Gravad Research testimonies of the young men offer evidence which allows us to close the circuit of intergenerational loyalties by highlighting *the son's perspective* at this point. Some spontaneously manifest an intense recognition of their mothers' endurance along life and a strong want to reciprocate. This is especially remarkable when their mothers lack or lacked support from a partner, which is suggestive that *the experience of matrifocality increases the son's moral commitment to her*.

However, more than loyalty, some interviewees reveal a *conflict of loyalties* – possibly radicalized by the scarcity of resources – between the family of origin (represented above all by the mother, but sometimes also by younger siblings) and the family formed through conjugality. It is not unusual for these men to admit that they are more diligent in sustaining their family of origin than their partners and children, especially in cases where the latter live with the woman's family – thereby reiterating the idea that male impermanence reposes on female permanence and/or on her network of support. In fact, this residential pattern – not infrequent, by the way - in which men shuttle between their mother's house and that of their partner, although justified on economic grounds and/or as a form of retaining 'freedom', should not be overlooked as an indication of this male division or, indeed, their resistance to the conjugal relationship. In more radical terms: it is possible that this double residency expresses the pre-eminence conferred upon the family of origin in relation to the family established by conjugal union. This conflict of loyalties between two women or two domestic groups is also manifested in more subtle ways.²⁷ For example, there is the case of an informant who, although declaring himself to be 'married' and father of a child, explained his search for a permanent job on the fact that, 'I have to help my mother' with whom he lived. Another young man claimed that he wanted to have a child because, 'I'm dying to give my mother a grandchild'. Yet another one who lived with his mother and a daughter from a previous relationship stressed the intense attachment between them as a justification for his reluctance to marry the girlfriend he had been seeing for two years, 'I don't want to destroy my mother's life, because she's really attached to the girl'.²⁸

Duarte suggests that the male condition of 'respectability' involves 'their global performance as *worker, son, husband and father*' (1986:176). Nevertheless, considering the above evidence, as well as the thesis of male circulation, I wonder whether these roles are all of equal value to men. While the individualist system rests upon the indifferenciation and horizontalization of social relations (Heilborn 1993), its counterpoint model – the hierarchical system – can, if not must, be anchored in a differentiation and verticalization of relations, including family relations. In sum, I am hypothesizing that *the husband/partner role in the working classes may be legitimately subordinated to that of son, in the same way as the figure of the mother may predominate over that of the female partner*.

I am somewhat uncomfortable in delving into the role of the father in this hierarchy of relations. It may be that in cases where he accepts responsibility for the child, the value of the latter also predominates over that of the partner, but I shall refrain from speculating on the position of the children in relation to the informant's mother. It is noteworthy, though, that numerous young men interviewed in the Gravad Research project had experienced the absence of the paternal figure, in some cases resulting in what could be termed a 'strategy of reparation': attributing problems suffered during childhood and adolescence to this absence, they declared that they intended to avoid repeating the same model of relationship (or similarly the lack of it) with their own children. In many other cases, however, the attitude of informants vis-à-vis their children reproduced the family model known to them. Based on

some of the ideas discussed above, it can be surmised that the fact that the children of the interviewed men were living in matrifocal families makes them into potential candidates for the role of 'chosen-sons.' Also recalling the hypothesis of Leal & Boff, this family experience would be already inciting this child to form an alliance with the mother in which the father (circulating or absent) would be excluded.

The strength of the mother-son dyad, even though proposed here as a hypothesis, imposes some qualifications to the conclusion already put forward that while women combine hierarchy and relationality, men associate hierarchy and individuation. In fact, perhaps it is more appropriate to characterize working class men as simultaneously hierarchical and individuated in relation to their chosen-female-partners, and hierarchical and relational with respect to their mothers.²⁹ We can venture further: attempting to establish a relationship between the ways in which men relate to these female personas, it could be said that working class men are individuated in relation to their female partners precisely because they are not significantly individuated in relation to their mothers. In other words, *the centrality of the mother, or the symbolic retention of the man within the original household,³⁰ is yet another factor that fosters his impermanence vis-à-vis female partners and/or his resistance to conjugal relationships.*

Even without taking this line of reasoning to such extremes, we can conclude that the mother-son relationship among the working classes serves as evidence of a more widespread tendency: *the disruption of reciprocity at the level of conjugality is structurally compensated by other pacts operating beyond it.* These alternative family pacts, particularly those based on 'blood', are crucial to maintain the family value and to reiterate the principle of reciprocity in this moral context regardless of what occurs between partners. Obviously, infraction to reciprocity in the mother-sons relation may occur, but here perhaps it can be attributed to a split between Fact and Value and/or to short-term pressures.

Final remarks

One of the arguments of this article is that there is a *structural* tension between genders among the working class, which is expressed, in exemplary and condensed form, in the bonding vs. circulation opposition. Put otherwise, this dilemma is rooted in the fact that while women associate hierarchy with a relational propensity, men merge hierarchy with individuation. This male pattern results in their moral duplicity in relation to domesticity and incites, together with the concurrence of other factors, their disposition to conjugal impermanence. Just as important as the idea that reciprocity is a quality that does not apply equally for both conjugal partners, is the acknowledgment that their diverging moral inclinations are *stipulated* by their own socializations.

These speculations, if applicable, have analytic implications for the holistic paradigm. Firstly, by segmenting hierarchy and relationality, working class men undermine not only the pact between genders but the holistic model itself, which posits the togetherness of these moral qualities. In other words, I reiterate, an undue homology between this interpretative paradigm and the feminine ethos. Secondly, in the same way as I proposed that male ambivalence vis-à-vis domesticity is as significant as their disposition towards hierarchy, I also argue that the bonding vs. circulation and the inside vs. outside polarities should be placed at the same level of analytical relevance highlighting their tense coexistence. In other words, just as the male 'structural ambiguity' is the malevolent side of their socialization to be a provider, the bonding vs. circulation opposition can be interpreted as a perverse outcome of the inside vs. outside equation. Both of these 'perversions', I reiterate, deserve to be qualified as structuring vectors of, respectively, the fabrication of the male and the relation between genders among the working classes. Precisely for these reasons, it seems misguided to interpret their

structural tensions, and/or the repercussions of male impermanence upon gender relations, as 'ethnographic details'.

It is not my intention to cogitate to what extent the ideas I propose affect the integrity of the holistic paradigm, and much less to try to solve the problems that they may potentially pose. However, it is possible that, at least in part, we are faced here with competing conceptions of what a model is or should be. Rather than being reducible to distinct levels of abstraction, these different perspectives seem to debate, in the final instance, the issue of whether the models can or should themselves comprise tensions, dilemmas, contradictions and so forth. In contrast to a more formalist logic, I believe it is possible, if not necessary, to contemplate these types of dilemmas in construing models and structural principles on which they are based.³¹

Or still, and merely as an illustration, perhaps it is possible to understand male moral duplicity - or even the tense coexistence between bonding vs. circulation, on one hand, and inside vs. outside, on the other - not as the encounter of opposed and contradictory tendencies (*and which for this reason would need to be analytically solved and ranked*), but as composing a single unit. In more general terms, I am speculating on the possibility of treating the opposed tendencies implied in notions such as ambiguity, contradiction, paradox, etc. as a unity. The question is obviously highly complex since it ultimately involves transpose the dualism with which we are accustomed to think social life itself.³² This was not, for sure, the intention of this article; even so, I hope, the discussion is now open.

Notes

* I thank Mariza Peirano for her comments on an earlier version of this work. And also my esteemed interlocutors (and friends): Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte, Maria Luiza Heilborn and Isabel Ribeiro de Oliveira.

¹ This paradigm was consolidated with the publication in 1986 of Duarte's doctoral thesis on the urban working classes. This landmark text corresponds to what *A Utopia Urbana* of Gilberto Velho (1973) achieved for the study of the Brazilian middle classes (on the latter point, see Salem 1985).

² Referring to her informants, Heilborn ponders: 'sexuality itself is not an object of unease; the interest lies in comprehending the attitudes and desires of their companions. The (claimed) knowledge of male [feelings and pleasures] is a requirement of the female role in this conjugal order and integrates her duties into the family' (1999:53).

³ The project "Adolescent Pregnancy: A Multifocused Study on Youths, Sexuality and Reproduction in Brazil" (Gravada Research) was coordinated by Maria Luiza Heilborn (national coordination), Michel Bozon (INED), Estela Aquino and Daniela Knauth, 1999-2002.

⁴ "Debate: Sexualidade e ciências sociais: perspectivas e paradigmas no final do milênio," published in Heilborn (1999).

⁵ This is, for example, the case of Duarte's stimulating 1987 article. Although entirely based on women's statements, and despite regretting that the corresponding male representations were not examined, his conclusions on sex and morality are generalized to the working classes as a whole. Moreover, despite the women's constant allusions to male infraction concerning reciprocity (always duly highlighted by the author, in fact), the relation between genders, as well as the model, are still nonetheless presented as anchored on this moral principle. In other texts, Duarte analytically justifies these transgressions by referring to a discrepancy between Fact and Value (see below).

⁶ It can be argued – and here in favor of the paradigm with which I am dialoguing – that the split between sex and bonding is a mechanism through which working class men *preserve* the relationship – which would, in turn, unveil the value that they attribute to it. Other evidence provided further on leads me to prefer an interpretation that sticks less to the model. Even so, I return below to the theme of the value of relationships for men.

⁷ In Heilborn's words, 'it is as though for [women] love validates sex' (1999:51).

⁸ The recurrent idea that women 'use sex' has as its ultimate reference the operational rules of male sexuality. In fact, it is the representation of sex as reducible to the satisfaction of a sexual need that supports the illegitimacy of 'using it' for other ends. This differs from the (female) reading rooted in the logic of reciprocity: *being exchange currency is an intrinsic rather than extrinsic property of sex*.

⁹ The quote-marked expressions relate to native categories taken from Torres's ethnography.

¹⁰ The evidence that boys are familiar with the peculiarity of the feminine way of being is revealed in the fact that they resort to this knowledge in the seduction game ('I want to date you,' 'I'm going to give you a good future'). However, a diversion in the tone of the relationship is notable once sexual intercourse enters the scene; in other words, *the moment of seduction is marked by female language, while the sex itself – where and how it happens – is informed by male style*.

¹¹ The idea of masculine circulation, as proposed here, is closer to that of *impermanence* than to a reversal of Lévi-Strauss's formula concerning the exchange of women as the foundation of social organization.

¹² We should not downplay – and here again in favor of the interpretative paradigm under consideration – indications that attest to the 'respect' that working class men owe to their stable female partners. Infidelity that maintains a low profile and is carried out in a way that, at least in principle, does not affect the domestic unit comprises one example of this kind of evidence (Salem 2004).

¹³ This mode of circulation can be equated with *successive temporary bondings*. On the one hand, the expression (re)attests to male specificity: the ephemeral quality of the relationship singularizes one of its meaning for men. On the other hand, however, it is suggestive of the value that the bonding, even though temporary, has for them. I return to the latter question later on.

¹⁴ Matrilocality has also become more widespread among the middle classes, especially in recent decades. However, among other important differences in comparison to the working classes, the value that modern individualists attribute to 'freedom,' 'authentic feelings,' 'autonomy,' and so on, implies that any affronts the reciprocity between genders do not jeopardize individualist model; on the contrary, they are explained by it. This differs from their impact on the premises that sustain the holistic paradigm.

¹⁵ Here we probably also encounter the explanation for the fact that women's self-definitions tend to be mediated by the figure of the other (cf. Salem 1981; Leal & Boff 1996:131).

¹⁶ The marked (male) vs. unmarked (female) opposition is inspired by the writings of Marika Moisseeff. Although Heilborn does not include the bonding/circulation pair in the list of structural gender qualities, I draw attention to her interpretation that the male homosexual couple is, among the other examined modalities, the one to display the highest probability of implosion and, inversely, the lesbian couple the one to present the highest relative stability. Accepting her suggestion that the gay and lesbian dyads function as 'hyperbole of gender' (1993:73), I wonder whether their differences in relation to the stability of the conjugal ties are not more accurately attributable to the association between masculinity and circulation (Heilborn speaks explicitly of 'sexual predation') and femininity and bonding.

¹⁷ Various testimonies from the Gravad research make evident the extent to which unemployment or the impossibility of sustaining the family affects male self-esteem. For example, it is usual for the interviewees to underestimate the help received from other family members (especially those of the woman, even when they are the ones to shelter the child or children), attributing to themselves alone the role of sustaining their offspring.

¹⁸ The concept of schismogenesis also includes the *symmetric* variant that presupposes a relationship grounded on *similarities*. This pattern would, therefore, be more pertinent to the analysis of gender relations based on the value of equality.

¹⁹ Mariza Peirano drew my attention to the *bricolage*, implicit in the present text, between Dumont and Bateson: while the former proposes the hierarchy between opposites, Bateson introduces movement to them. It can also be added that this movement points precisely to the *potential dilemma* that underlies relationships founded on differences. Indeed, the author examines ultimately how the exaggerated hierarchical character of a relationship, *precisely because it is based on radical difference and complementarity*, can become pathologized in the form of an escalating schismogenesis. It remains to investigate the extent to which this

viewpoint derives from Bateson's egalitarian biases (see note 20). On the dilemmas that afflict egalitarian gender relations, see Salem 1989:35-36 and 2007: 210-216.

²⁰ It seems to me that Bateson's analysis of complementary schismogenesis is sometimes pervaded by the subtle intrusion of egalitarian premises. I indeed believe that this bias is behind his idea that the radicalization of gender specializations is capable of destroying the system. In other passages, though, Bateson circumvents this analytic distortion; for example, when he highlights the importance of the valorative context in which these relations are immersed: 'the ethological aspect of the behaviour is fundamental for schismogenesis, and we have to consider not so much the content of the behaviour as the emotional emphasis with which it is endowed in its cultural context' (1958:183).

²¹ One male informant from the Gravad study, convinced that his three successive partners had become pregnant only to trap him, concluded: 'but they won't succeed: I'm still free, unburdened and on the loose' (Salem 2004:59).

²² According to Mary Catherine Bateson, this was the theoretical question that her father posed himself when encountering the acute gender contrast among the Iatmul (1994:87).

²³ Bateson would endorse this interpretation. Referring to the progression of schismogenesis, he ventures the possibility that 'a balance will be reached when the forces of mutual dependence are equal to the schismogenic tendency' (1958:196-197).

²⁴ Its most perfect translation is found in what I have already labeled as 'egalitarian couple' (Salem 1987, 1989 and 2007).

²⁵ This reciprocity undoubtedly exists, but strong tensions pervade it - especially between affines. In the Gravad research interviews, it is noteworthy the discomfort of male informants when facing charges made by his partner's next of kin for sheltering the couple and their children under their roof.

²⁶ The following considerations look to a later moment in the female life-cycle, precisely when their children reach adulthood and when they themselves, now elderly, are out both of the work and the mate market. Once again, the *time* variable stressed by Leal comes to the fore.

²⁷ Ethnographic information at my disposal hints at what goes on between these two women. The appearance of the daughter-in-law in the family scene may threaten the mother's hopes over the unconditional attention and/or permanence of her chosen-son (Salem 1981:90-92). Referring to this new competitor, one of my informants described herself as having 'a dark veil over my eyes.' The daughters-in-law, for their part, are clearly aware of the intense loyalty that their partners show to their mothers and kin: 'he lives with me [for 15 years], but has his own family: his mother and the rest of his people. I know he won't leave me, but, well, who knows he could leave me one day' (ibid:83). In sum, pronounced frictions exist in the daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship that relate to the provocative theme of competition between women of different generations for the favors of the same man.

²⁸ The lyrics to "Trem das Onze" (Adoniran Barbosa) and "Coração Materno" (Vicente Celestino) are complementary reversals of each other: the first speaks of the unconditional nature of filial affection, while the second sings the unconditional nature of maternal love. Again, the background to both songs is the dispute between women - mother-in-law and daughter-in-law - for the same man, and/or the conflict of loyalties he experiences.

²⁹ This hypothesis evinces that masculine identity (as identities in general), rather than fixed, undergoes translations depending on the context or situation to which it is referred. This

consideration is in line with the ‘primacy of the situationality’ that Duarte (1986) stresses as implied in Dumont’s theory of hierarchy.

³⁰ This idea suggests necessary qualifications to thesis of the man being ‘expelled’ from home. It also reveals proximities with the thesis set out by Aragão (1983), which postulates the absence of a male initiatory process in relation to the household. Interestingly, it should be noted that the author is referring to the Brazilian middle class.

³¹ I have already developed this proposal regarding the egalitarian principle on which the individualist cosmology is grounded (Salem 1987:268-274; 2007: 212-216).

³² This proposal is echoed, for example, in Simmel: ‘much of what we are forced to represent to ourselves as mixed feelings, as composites of many drives, as the competition of opposite sensations, is entirely self-consistent. But the calculating intellect often lacks a paradigm for this unity and thus must construe it as a result of various elements.’ (1971:77-78). Some of DaMatta’s works explore precisely this analytic seam (see DaMatta 1979).

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