

The Home Sanctuary – Personhood, Family and Religiosity

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ABSTRACT

It is our aim to deepen the understanding of family life in modern societies through an emphasis on its 'religious'-like quality. The description of some of its phenomenal properties, of its intense and crucial experiential dimension, includes several traits of a family cult (mostly inexplicit). This fact has important consequences for the actualization of the contemporary experience of established religious institutions. The intrinsic 'relatedness' at the basis of both 'cults' take shape in a broad and varied range of empirical phenomena, dependent on the status of personhood within the family structure. Our data include both the results of direct original research within several status groups in the area of Rio de Janeiro and the information available about family and religion in Brazilian society.

Key words: family, religion, personhood, family cult, relatedness.

“Plus me plaît le séjour qu’ont bâti mes aïeux,
Que des palais romains le front audacieux (...)”

Joachim du Bellay [1522 – 1560]

“I entered. A caring and friendly spirit
The ghost perhaps of maternal love
Took my hands – looked at me, solemn and tender,
And step by step, walked me through (...)”

Luís Guimarães Júnior, “Visit to my father’s house,”
1876

1. Introduction

Towards the end of a series of interviews on family and religion among the Rio de Janeiro elite, I had already become resigned to the almost total absence of references to any explicit religious

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experiences (though more formal or ritual situations of contact with churches, especially the Catholic Church, were fairly common) when I realized that the recurrent, intense and almost obsessively reverential tone associated with contexts other than religious experience were, in this social circle, linked to family living, the memory of past family experiences, the fate of close kin and the enveloping feelings of family identity. The theme unleashed a stream of digressions, complex references to a universe of meaning imbued with an active and continuous symbolic force; literally, a 'sacred' universe. This allowed me to re-read the flow of information produced in the interviews with other social sectors and to perceive the extent to which the abundant references to explicitly 'religious' experiences were mixed, in these cases, with 'family' experiences, configuring a kind of unified field traversed with value-laden references, identificatory marks and experiential dispositions.

Although metaphors of the sacred are frequently used to refer to the family, both in Western common sense and in sociological theories and descriptions, this resource serves only to highlight the seriousness with which social subjects experience this institution, rather than the exploitation of any real phenomenological proximity between these two dimensions of social life. This means we are compelled to take the affinity seriously and try to understand how the experience of family life in modern societies is defined by a centrality and intensity matching a kind of 'religiosity.' Likewise, the aim should be to describe some of its phenomenal properties (especially that of a frequently inexplicit family cult) and analyze the implications of this correlation for the contemporary functioning of religions in the strict sense.

Various works examining the empirical relationship between family and religion suggest that, in our culture, the proximity between these dimensions is due to structural features shaping the modern public world and the withdrawal of family and religion to the dimension of the 'private' where they are supposedly condemned to live in close proximity (see Christiano 2000, for example). In fact, religion – despite being officially excluded from modern public affairs – achieves a complex mediation between public and private life due to its simultaneously intimate and ecclesiastical, subjective and institutional nature. The same applies to the family, since, despite being confined to the walls of the household, it constitutes a legally recognized institution, valued as a minimal instance of

sociopolitical organization and attributed with responsibilities and rights carefully safeguarded by the State.

Analytically, it is more profitable to consider the two dimensions as jointly responsible for affirming the constitutive ‘relatedness’ of social life (in the sense of the term explored in Carsten 2000). Not the *a posteriori* relatedness posited by individualist theories of the western public realm, but a relatedness thought and lived as *a priori* in relation to the emergence of the subject. Although both family and religious life trajectories usually anticipate a passage from the attributed to the acquired (creation of a new family; conversion or confirmation of religious affiliation), both base themselves on what is conceived as an originary situation, a pristine sanctuary from which the family member or the follower of a specific faith emerge (for instance, “this is my family of origin” or “I’m a Catholic by birth”).

This ‘relatedness’ amounts to a sociological version of a more ambitious analytic possibility, cosmological in kind, heir of the Durkheimian definition of the sacred as the expression of a feeling or perception of ‘totality’ (Durkheim 1968). The notion that the elementary quality of religious life is one of the encompassing order of a cosmos of *a priori* meaning pervades the thinking of M. Mauss, C. Lévi-Strauss and L. Dumont, in contrast to more empiricist or phenomenological definitions.² It is this acceptance of ‘religious’ that enables an inexplicit or even lay form of religiosity to be postulated, such as the kind characterizing the modern western family. This is certainly the sense in which Durkheim analyzes modern, laic, rationalizing individualism as a ‘cult of the self,’ a paradoxical religiosity (Durkheim 1968:606).³ Robert Bellah extended this insight to what he called ‘civil religion’ (developing an idea from J.-J. Rousseau) in the ideology of North American national public life: a set of cosmological premises of a ‘sacred’ kind, structuring a lay – or at least a religiously non-institutionalized – idea of nation.

² Even for William James, however, despite his basic empiricism, religion “is a total reaction of a man to life” (1995:31).

³ The trail is briefly picked up by Lévi-Strauss in his celebrated reference to the fact that “in mechanical civilization there is no longer any room for mythical time, except within man himself” (1970:224). On the other hand, this observation comprises one of the pillars of Louis Dumont’s analysis of individualism as a structuring ideology in western culture (see especially Dumont 1985). In the same direction, see too Duarte 1983.

If we follow Louis Dumont in taking the ideology of individualism as the key to the worldview of modern western culture, we also have to consider that this overtly laïc representation possesses a symbolic force just as structuring and encompassing as that of any other religion. Other authors have shown us how the social implementation of this ideology is highly dependent on the institution of the ‘modern family,’ as a paradoxical nucleus of *societas*: a factory of individuals internally structured according to a hierarchical order (Foucault 1979; Duarte 1995). The tense and institutive overlap between the individual and the modern family set in motion from the 18th century remains fully active in the dominant sectors of contemporary societies, in spite of intense changes and supervening shifts, without ceasing to influence the less individualized social sectors. More specifically, the family enables the combination of two cosmological principles concomitant with individualism: *subjectivism*, as the emphasis on the value of individual subjective autonomy, and *naturalism*, as the particular representation of the reality and substantiality of the universe considered subjacent to the moral or cultural world (Duarte *et al.* 2006). The naturalist representation of kinship as communion and inheritance of family *blood* is linked to the subjectivist representation of freedom of choice in the forging of matrimonial alliances (especially through the ideology of love), a conjunction recognized and analyzed in some of the most successful analyses of western kinship (see in particular Schneider 1968; Viveiros de Castro & Araújo 1977; Strathern 1992). The contradictions intrinsic to this combined model of ascribed and acquired status help sustain its complex dynamic, allowing slippages of meaning that are highly productive in sociological terms.⁴ The sacredness of representations of inherited blood, as well as those characterizing the ideals of individual freedom and autonomy, comprise the religiosity imprinted on the family institution in our culture.

2. Approaches and characteristics

The central empirical material underlying this work derives from long-term anthropological research into family and religion among various social sectors of the Greater Rio de Janeiro area. The

⁴ A recent and fascinating example is the analysis made by Naara Luna of the ideas on contemporary assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), which provide a paradigmatic enactment of the dilemmas of blood and individual will (Luna 2005).

difficulty of conducting research on often personally intimate questions among a range of social classes over the same period of time is offset by the comparative dimension being incorporated into the same investigative process, rather than comparing the results deriving from different studies.

The ethnographic groupings obtained from the latter approach are highly unequal, since the referential axes vary enormously between the elite and middle classes sectors and those of the working classes – in ways that I explicate below. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, I believe that the greater possibilities for objectifying family sacrality among the elite and middle classes help cast a new light on the corresponding data in the working classes, where synchronic intensity tends to prevail over diachronic intensity. A key differentiating factor between the two groupings is that my working class informants are primarily men, while the middle and upper class informants are mostly women, an outcome of the very distinct protocols regulating relations between genders and a male researcher in these two social environments. This is a relevant factor in terms of obtaining information on family and religion since in both these social macro-sectors the intensity and the type of dedication given to the family and to religion are highly gender-dependent.

Given this broad spectrum of research, I kept in mind the possibility of incorporating information obtained from informal social contexts into my ethnographic corpus, in parallel with information available in the bibliography. Whether in my network of friends or in academic contexts, mention of the research issues examined in this text always elicited interesting feedback on aspects of the personal life or research experience of my interlocutors. Nor have I discarded either my own personal experience as a member of this culture or information from newspapers and magazines and the vast material already objectified in western fiction, whether in literature, films or television. However, the examples examined here are mostly taken from the formal research material.

It is interesting to note that, although the literature on the family and religion in our culture is extremely abundant, there are very few works that shed any real light on the overlapping of these two dimensions. What can be found are texts on the value and representation of the family (and hence conjugality, reproduction and sexuality) in religious contexts or on the presence, importance and onus of religion (and hence doctrine, congregation and the kind of affiliation) in family contexts. Most of

the time, authors attempt to evaluate (as Christiano 2000 notes in his survey) the ‘influence’ or ‘impact’ of religious attitudes on the conduct of family life. This general tendency demands an oblique inquiry into the literature, reading between the lines of the ethnographic information for potential insights into our topic of analysis. As I have emphasized in other works, I think it is insufficient to analyze the relationship between religious belonging and private ethos in modern western societies in terms of a religious ‘influence’ on the behaviour of believers. Rather, this relationship should be understood in terms of broader (and apparently laïc) behavioural patterns that help determine the persistence or transformation of the religious affiliation of subjects (cf. Duarte 2005 and Duarte *et al.* 2006).

The biggest problem faced in any ethnographic treatment of family religiosity is its essentially unconscious and non-explicit nature. Due to the predominant idea of religion in western culture as something primarily associated with ecclesiastical institutions, the subtle presence of the sacred in areas that are not conventionally religious makes social subjects less willing to consider the experiences and representations discussed here as religious or even sacred. Although this problem is not confined to the family, it is particularly evident in this area, tending to manifest in two forms: among the upper class sectors, the prevailing rationalist ethos means that the family world is not conceived as sacred, while religion tends to be limited to very specific experiences, ritually distanced from everyday life, or is simply eliminated as a relevant category in terms of personal life histories and identities. Among sectors of the working class, the presence of the sacred is almost always strongly institutionalized, although in many different ways, meaning that the sacred dimension of family life is recognized as immediately religious – rather than as the result of its familial nature *per se*. Hence, the same effect of boundary blurring arises on one hand from a curtailment of the religious experience of the world and on the other from its intensification.

A female informant of my own generation, coming from the highest circles of the Brazilian elite, strongly associated with the Catholic religion and an avid consumer of ‘New Age’ symbolism, provided a highly emotional account of the most varied aspects of her family life: her family tradition, its values and tensions and the building of her experiential universe of origin in constant contrast with

the challenges of her new family, the tradition and values of her spouse's family and the characteristics of the experiential universe in which her descendents live today. In her case, the sensibility to private life which our culture attributes to women is enhanced by her training in social studies and the arts – in addition to a specific attentiveness to family life that can be attributed, as she herself suggests, to the powerful tensions making up her family of origin. She once described a visit she had recently made to a prestigious family property in the process of being sold. This led to a profuse and complex mingling of sensations and feelings about this episode (and its lengthy back history), ending with her declaration that she had succeeded in 'desacralizing' this legacy by staunching the emotional 'overflow' that it always provoked.

Another informant from the same social class and the same generation, a fine artist, the grandson of a key figure from Brazil's art world, told me at one point that "my grandfather is my Holy Spirit," an expression that encapsulated the ongoing dialogue with this family inheritance, present in his existential dilemmas, in the present-day relations with his family network and in his own artistic choices. At that time, he was working on a painting in which his grandfather appeared, destined for an event celebrating his life.

Another informant from the upper middle class, older and recently widowed, emotionally recalled her early home life and the memory of her father in particular (expressing her belief that she had been his favourite daughter). After describing various experiences involving shifts or intensifications in her own religiosity, including the family's participation in a prayer circle at a Presbyterian church during a period when the fate of her own children particularly concerned her, she commented on the close bond she had developed with her youngest granddaughter. Her recent absorption of Kardecist beliefs mean that she now conceives of her granddaughter as "my mother too," eliciting and reinforcing the intense communion emerging between them.

In this somewhat random array of references, we can encounter three feelings essential to any recognition of the sacred dimension of family life: **communion**, **reverence** and **intensity**.⁵ Although

⁵ This is not a case of returning to affective theories of the religious after opting for Durkheim's cognitive theory. Here we are dealing with the expressive properties of religiosity in modern western culture, probably in resistance and contrast to the cosmological shifts arising from the dominant rationalization and equalization (or 'flattening') of the world.

these social feelings may occur in many other life contexts, their combination typifies the sacred and its particular force and legitimacy. The feeling of communion, stressed by all the classic analyses of religion, is first and foremost here too. This communion shares features with the *Gemeinschaft* of Tönnies, a fact highlighting the omnipresence of the category of 'community' in Western religious language (as well as Victor Turner's use of the word *communitas* to explain the same feeling in another ethnographic and analytic context). More individualized, the middle and upper class informants lack the feeling of communion as a pervasive dimension of their life experiences. Instead, it is expressed in their occasional (and often fleeting) involvement in activities that help symbolize their particular desire for well-being and individual fulfilment. (Such activities may comprise love affairs, psychoanalytic therapy, practicing some kind of sport, becoming involved in a 'New Age' pastime or dedicating oneself to art and aesthetics). These segmentary forms of communion, described by Bellah *et al.* as typical examples of 'lifestyle enclaves' (1985), are complemented by the somewhat unique totalizing experience of family communion, even in cases where life circumstances have tended to generate an indifferent or even blasphemous attitude in relation to the value of this communion.

For these class sectors, the experience of the feeling of reverence is very similar. Raised on the individualist critique of any kind of hierarchy, their members usually avoid manifesting axiomatic respect for much of the surrounding culture. Apart from the occasional constructions found in their lifestyle enclaves, the family is once more the primary recipient of this feeling.⁶

Finally, communion and reverence are complemented by the differential intensity with which the sacred dimensions of social life are experienced. This basically amounts to an experiential, affective and sentimental intensity linked to a strong mobilization of bodily expression. A range of altered states of consciousness are associated with religious experiences in all kinds of cultures, especially those we classified as trance and possession. These situations are particularly radical examples of the intensity being described here, present in the statements of informants in more

⁶ The idea of reverence should not be confused with that of contrition. Reverence is an interior valorative disposition that may become manifest in contrite and controlled or exuberant and dramatic form.

conventional circumstances, although enveloped with the aura of exceptional affective states.⁷ For the informants cited above, the immediate experience and the recollection of their family experiences (or some of them, at least) form a strong nucleus of feeling in which the emotions of sharing and respect are magnified by a particular intensity.

Finally, it should be emphasized that these experiences, however intense and relational they may be, do not always correspond to collective, shared social situations, whether ritual or mundane. These feelings are basically lived as personal and intimate and very often seen as unshareable with others. In many cases of my research, across a variety of social contexts, people expressed their gratitude to me for having given them the chance to externalize these feelings in a sustained and systematic way; there was also some concern that the recordings may have stored overly secret, sensitive, serious and important matters.

This intimacy is a core aspect of the fictional literature (or personal memoirs) describing the subject's embedding in the family, providing a literary outlet for these intense personal experiences. 'Family novels' may well have emerged simultaneously with 'individual novels,' highlighting the intimate connections between the two institutions. In some cases, the fictional emphasis on the individual meant that family memories had to seek refuge in other types of text: Goethe, for example, constructed his personal memories essentially as a family novel (1986), a focus uncharacteristic of his fictional texts which are typical of the nascent and individualizing *Bildungsroman*. Many of the novelists from his generation, such as Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters, did focus on the family as much as the emergent individual, though. This process became one of the mainstays of 19th century literature, manifest in works as renowned as those of Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky and Eça de Queiroz. In 20th century literature, the most prominent example is Marcel Proust's *Recherche*, finding other leading exponents in Brazil like José Lins do Rêgo, Lucio Cardoso and Érico Verissimo.⁸

⁷ This intensity is explicitly evoked by Durkheim as part of the 'excitement' provoked by the feeling of collectivity *in actu* and performed in religious ritual (1968). The affective force of the 'ideal' in Durkheim can also be detected in the return to the sacred in the guise of '*mana*' in Mauss or the 'floating signifier' in Lévi-Strauss. William James also refers to something similar in the form of a *more* which produces the difference in intensity (James 1958:384-5).

⁸ 20th century cinema also worked this tradition, offering innumerable fine explorations of the relationship between family and individual, evident in the work of Visconti, Bergman, Saura, Woody Allen, Louis Malle and many others.

The human sciences have contributed two important currents towards recognizing and explicating the crucial nature of family experience for social subjects. The most obvious contribution comes from psychology where attention on the family roots of subjectivity grew from the end of the 19th century in contrast to the formalist tendencies then prevalent in academic psychology. Here the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis is fundamental: its organization of the individual's psychic development around family experience set off a process of focusing attention on the 'parental' dimension that subsequently evolved into an extremely wide variety of theoretical approaches. These distinct theoretical lines have resulted in a copious literature on family experience, a corpus of extremely uneven quality and not always readily accessible to anthropological perusal due to the specific conventions involved in the production of psychological or psychoanalytic case studies. In terms of contemporary works, my research has particularly benefited from analyses formulated in the context of systemic (or 'family') therapies and transgenerational psychoanalysis, where the recognition of the high intensity that surrounds the feelings of family communion and reverence helps reveal the sacrality of such experiences through the contexts of disturbance and pathology (see, for example, Ponciano & Feres-Carneiro 2003 and Abraham & Torok 1987).

The social sciences have also produced fundamental works in terms of comprehending the historical relation between family and person in modern western culture. These include texts by the likes of Philippe Ariès and Michel Foucault, as well as a specific strand of sociological and anthropological studies on the family, focused on presenting and discussing the affective and experiential dimension of this space. Without pretending to provide an exhaustive list, we can cite a number of classic works, more monographic in style, such as *Worker in the Cane* by Sidney Mintz (1964), or *Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart (1973), or indeed more recent studies such as those produced by Josette Coenen-Huther (1994), Anne Muxel (1996), Jean-Hughes Déchaux (1997) and Claudine Attias-Donfut (2000) in France, and Myriam Lins de Barros (1987), Miriam Moreira Leite (1993), Guita Debert (1999), Claudia Fonseca (2000) and Clarice Peixoto (2000), among others, in Brazil.

3. A 'religion of the family'

In claiming to explore the specific properties of the relationship between family and religion in modern western culture, I am not discarding the potential contribution of comparative ethnographic and historical evidence to the project. What simply needs to be stressed is the considerable distance prevailing between these materials and the context at hand.

The difficulty resides, above all, in the differences between what is conceived as religion and family in our culture and what is taken as an equivalent to these institutions in other symbolic orders. We know, for instance, how these categories are largely unsuited to describing the social experience of small-scale 'tribal' societies where the categories of kinship and cosmology are more adequate for comprehending their internal modes of organization.

In other cultures, such as traditional China, what corresponds to the western idea of religion is frequently presented as a rationalization of the sense of family belonging, at least from the viewpoint of the hegemonic Confucianist ideology (cf. Weber 1968). In classical Roman culture, the complementarity between the wider civic cult (including the personal figure of the Caesars during the Empire period) and the domestic cult within the family provided the basis for the prevailing cosmological and sociological order. The spread of Christianity depended on a fundamental subversion of this complementarity, both at the broader doctrinal level and the level of the personal experiences of potential believers, who were led to renounce their loyalty to the two traditional orders simultaneously.

A shared trait of these culturally distinct situations is the segmentary nature of their dominant kinship model; that is, unilinear descent – guided in both cases by patrilineal privileges. Hence, instead of our institution of the 'minimal, reduced, nuclear family,' we find a clan-like corporate lineage, even more explicitly endowed with moral pre-eminence, a transgenerational identity and affective identification. The other fundamental trait is an investment in the reproduction of relational persons and a system predicated on the ascribed status in a way completely antagonistic to the individualizing precepts of modern western family education.

The corporate and hierarchical nature of these ‘families’ confers them with have an immediate congregational quality, expressed through sacred objects, places and times and guaranteed by the performance of regular explicit rituals. Here we also find the elements of communion, reverence and intensity mentioned earlier, but acting within a very different context – at the visible and explicit centre of the symbolic and social order. Ancestor cults, a common feature of segmentary societies, gave shape to these feelings at a totalizing level of meaning where the generational theme directly embodied an encompassing cosmological order (cf. Fortes 1970).

In the western tradition, where religious belonging is originally represented as alien or antagonistic to public order and the outside world, and where the process of conversion rather than linear inheritance comprises the main model of affiliation, there is an inevitable ontological distance between the family and the congregation (as a basic form of bringing together converts).

The Christian focus on acquired religious status has a couple of important implications. Firstly, the religious congregation is frequently presented as an alternative to the family, or indeed a hyper-family, possessing a sense of communion and reverence capable of producing a redoubled intensity.⁹ Secondly, like any other organizational form, the Christian sects (in the Weberian sense) depend on the reproduction of their members and can only achieve this through a relationship with families (which continue to produce the people capable of becoming believers).

The intersection of these two antagonistic dispositions led to the production of highly varied solutions over the time and space of the Christian tradition. While the ‘sect’ form maintained the focus on the community of converts, investing it with family-like qualities, the ‘church’ form depended on the institutional acceptance of attributed status, meaning the establishment of enduring relationships with the family units in which its followers were born and raised. Obviously the main concern was to ensure an ethos was cultivated in favour of the church in question, thereby dispelling any tensions between the two forms of belonging. This meant that, alongside an internal structure that evoked

⁹ The use of categories of close kinship, associated with the household unit, is notorious in terms of designating Christianity’s sacerdotal and institutional positions (father, mother, *Papa*, Pope, *sóror*, *frade*, sister, brother, abbot, etc.), reiterating at a mundane level the imagery of paternity, affiliation and fraternity prevalent in the representation of Christ’s divinity. This category shift was particularly accentuated in monachism as a result of its desire to build a world ‘outside the world,’ including – and indeed especially – as an alternative to the terrestrial family.

family order and hierarchy (analogous to the structure of the sects), fairly complex rationalizations were able to be developed vis-à-vis the close ties between religious communion *sensu stricto* and family communion. Indeed, this process has been a notable aspect of Christianity's history, amply registered in histories of the western family (see Ariès 1978, for example).

With the general spread of the modern model of the family from the 18th century onwards and the consequent hegemony of the process of producing 'individuals,' there was an intensification in the Christian idealization of the family. This was especially pronounced in the Protestant universe where the dynamic tension between sect/congregation and family became more acutely manifest. Kevin Christiano's analysis (2000) of North American Christianity in the 19th century provides a deep insight into this process, describing the emergence of what he calls 'domestic Christianity' in the midst of a national society more radically committed to experimenting with individualizing forms of sociality. As the author stress, this formula – typified by a radical sacralization of intradomestic life, a supplement to (and sometimes substitute for) congregational life – initially took root and expanded within the Protestant universe but ended up spreading to Catholicism too (particularly in connection with the cult of the Holy Family).¹⁰

This wider process did not prevent the emergence of numerous other solutions specific to particular social classes, ethnic groups, national traditions and belief systems. This is how the elite classes tended to ensure their own reproduction through a very specific emphasis on the corporate nature of their family networks, sustained by an ideology of inheriting identity, even in contexts where the acquisition of individualized dispositions (in the business world, for example) may be crucial to their reproduction (see for instance Lomnitz & Perez-Lizaur 1987 and Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot 1989). The explicit religious dimension may have an important bearing here under highly ritualized forms in which the sense of religious and family communion and reverence is hard to distinguish.

An interesting alternative example is the constitution of a spiritual congregation that complexly overlaps family belonging, as found among groups influenced by Kardecism. One of the

¹⁰ A striking example is that of the devotional history of Saint Theresa of Lisieux, in which an intense parallelism between the earthly and divine family occurs at every moment, particularly in the highly maternalizing visions of the Virgin, Christ and the oldest nuns themselves (Maître 1996).

informants cited above evokes precisely this point when she claims that her kinship with her granddaughter intensified as a result of discovering her to be the reincarnation of her own mother (see Mazur 2006 for an extended analysis of a similar case).

4. Religion in the family

There is a shifting and subtle boundary between the religiosity of the family and the experience of religion *in* the family, that is, within the domestic unit or home. Although this distinction is not ontological, it is situationally relevant, demonstrating the differential properties of the forms in which the phenomenon examined here is actualized.

The hegemony of the model of the minimal nuclear family in modern societies does not eliminate the feeling of belonging to some kind of wider relational order, even in national and class cultures more exposed to individualization. What I described earlier as a lineage congregation in other cultures can be compared here with the imaginary congregation formed by the complex of transgenerational bilateral kinship conceived as an ideal, private and intimate corporation of affects and memories – rather than an effective corporation or network. Although the network may also exist and sometimes be activated, it depends on the feeling of intimate and personal communion without which the self tends to detach from any effective conviviality, experiencing the latter as inauthentic and lacking in any stimulus towards intensity.

Various authors have worked to demonstrate the historically constructed form of the modern western ‘family feeling’ (‘family life,’ the ‘family environment’ and so on) in association with the complex sequence of transformations providing us with the representation and practice of the modern family (see Ariès 1978, for example). This new domesticity is composed by a set of ideals such as intimacy, privacy, interiority and comfort, and depends on a total reorganization of sociability, social relations and the use of space.¹¹

¹¹ The historical description of the emergence of intradomestic comfort allows us to correlate this element – as a kind of compensation – with the relative disenchantment of religious churches that occurred with the Reformation in northern Europe. An entire aesthetic and liturgy relating to the arrangement of domestic space developed from this point, becoming an obligatory theme of modern social life: interior decoration. The phenomenon can be traced back to the shift from the erudite

This privatized and segregated space has inherited from earlier family models the responsibility for forms of religious worship that were already performed in domestic space and that always varied widely according to the social class in question. A continuity in forms of domestic worship can therefore be found, perceived as refractions of the institutional sacrality centred on churches and shrines. These devotional practices may be more or less institutionalized, centred on real chapels or altars for collective use by the household or dispersed in individual nodules, according to the localized predilections of each member of the family against a shared religious background.

Although this ‘domestic Christianity’ is fundamental to consolidating the religiosity we are examining here, it is just one aspect of domestic sacrality: it makes up the more visible and official component of the more deep-lying experience to which I am referring here as the ‘religiosity of the family.’ The feelings of communion and reverence dedicated within this interior space to the outer ecclesiastical sacred order overlap feelings of communion and reverence directly relating to family experience. Various informants report instances of collective or individual prayer held in their residences, making use of conventional religious formulas to transmit their anxieties, expectations and evaluations of interpersonal family life, particularly during periods of crisis and suffering. In the Catholic tradition, novenas, rosaries, vows, jaculatory prayers and various set prayers were capable of establishing a flow of relations with the sacred whose meaning was primarily attached to the cult of the family itself – its preservation and salvation.¹² The feelings of communion and reverence were simultaneously centred on the invocation of propitiatory supernatural entities and the dedication to family entities. There are even two or three cases in which informants reported conversing directly with dead family members, albeit through fixed prayers, combining the terrestrial and transterrestrial planes in a singular form (cf. Taussig 1980 and Cioccarri 2006, for other examples of this cult).

picturesque representations of sacred or mythological figures and themes to the representation of individualized portraits and scenes of family life (the well-known ‘conversation pieces’ of the 18th century). In some national cultures, such as England’s, this family cult centred in particular on the cultivation of domestic gardens, formally heirs of the convent gardens, the *hortus conclusus* (cf. Thacker 1979). For a correlate analysis relating to the decorative use of flowers in ecclesiastical and domestic space, also see Blacker 2000. The ideology of the cosy home (‘home sweet home’) pervaded English society as a whole, as recorded in Richard Hoggart’s fine monograph on the English working classes in the 20th century (1973).

¹² In two of the family archives I consulted there were ‘santinhos’ (small prints with images of Catholic saints and ritual devotional formulas) containing the photograph of a dead family member where the saint would usually be. On the back, instead of the usual prayer or invocation, there was the phrase: “Remember So-and-So in your prayers,” often followed by the birth and death dates of the person and a small citation from a canonical sacred text.

The particular intensity of the sacred is not absent from family-based worship. There are numerous references – across all social classes – to situations of exceptional emotion in dealings with living or dead family members: a presence in dreams, premonitions, hauntings, a feeling of intense communion during jubilant commemorations (marked by religious rituals such as baptisms, first communion, bar mitzvahs, marriages, wedding anniversaries, graduation masses, etc.). Indeed, this set of simultaneously ecclesiastical and family devotional practices, characteristic of devote families, is also found among ‘disenchanted’ families lacking any contact with ecclesiastical religious experience. The sacrality of the family is expressed in innumerable forms in this context while the language used derives precisely from the religious universe. These forms involve rituals, prayers and other forms of worship, invested with a de-institutionalized lay piety, yet still undoubtedly containing feelings of communion and reverence tinged by a particular intensity. In some cases, this lay piety also makes use of religious formulas dislocated from their original context, as in the case of night time prayers to dead ancestors: here the prayer inscription serves merely as a pretext for a form of ritual invocation aimed directly towards the family cult. The latter practice was recorded among various informants from the middle and upper classes with Catholic or Jewish family backgrounds whose personal histories evince a drift towards a more laïc lifestyle.

These feelings of communion and reverence sometimes acquire a rationalized tone where the emphasis falls on the moral exemplarity of a past relative’s behaviour or identity. In these cases – such as that cited above of the grandson of the renowned artist – distinguishing the profane and sacred components of this private hagiography becomes nearly impossible.

As we can see, dead relatives, especially ancestors, have a privileged and more overtly sacred place than the contemporary and living, though this rule is by no means absolute. Feelings of communion with the dead are obviously more readily capable of acquiring a transcendental nature than communion with the living, who are more likely to be merged with the profane and the mundane. In many cases, including in Kardecist families, this distinction may be blurred considerably not only by the overlapping of living and dead identities but also the feeling of proximity and frequent conversation with ‘disembodied’ spirits, whether family or otherwise.

My research revealed a wide array of domestic, private practices making up family cults, along with a specific range of *sacra* relating exclusively to family memory and circulating in more or less private contexts. Among upper middle class and elite families, these *sacra* may include real estate, residences, lands or monuments linked to family history, making them fairly public, therefore. As we descend the social ladder, these *memorabilia* become more discrete and private, at an extreme becoming merely the simple personal memory of people and events, or merging into broader references to a neighbourhood, a home town or a region.

The most well-known storehouses of these cults are photographs, already widespread in our culture for several generations (see Lins de Barros & Strozenberg 1992; Leite 1993). Because of their directly referential nature (linked to the idea of a personal ‘portrait’), they have a prominent place among other kinds of family memorabilia, such as art objects, archives, libraries, furniture, jewellery and so on. Among the middle classes, the hereditary transmission of certain objects such as recipe books (passed down via a female line) and old pocket watches (passed down via a male line) has been a topic of detailed study (Carvalho 2005).¹³

Many of these heirlooms are kept in private places and little frequented, like relics in a shrine. They only receive more pronounced attention when ownership is passed on, often becoming the object of lively disputes, revealing their permanently high potential for generating intense emotion. For my middle and upper class informants, the bequests of jewellery, antiques and small *objets de vertu* imbued with family *mana* are particularly significant. In the same way as the sacred *kula* objects of the Trobriand Islanders described by Malinowski, these wealth items may circulate far and wide across space and time, traversing the generations and accruing sacredness. I collected various emotion reports on items or objects that had vanished or been sold, but whose symbolic force remains in the memory of informants and sustains the feeling of communion and reverence. Just as the accumulated memory of such *sacra* is crucial, taking due care over their future transmission is fundamental. One informant, aware that she was soon to die, spent hours with me discussing the destiny of some of the main items

¹³ Here it is worth recalling how the inheritance of family recipe books and of specific cooking dispositions by one of the branches descending from a upper bourgeois Mexican family became its most distinctive and positive feature in a context of growing social differentiation that threatened the feelings of corporate communion (Lomnitz & Perez-Lizaur 1987).

from her personal collection, trying to match the qualities of each of her descendents and those of the heirlooms, as well as striving to ensure an overall equity that would preserve the mutual understanding and communion of this inheriting generation. For her, separated many years ago from her original Protestant faith, it was a crucial and serious task to complete as her life drew to an end.

As the manager of her family memory, this informant's case typifies how a specific conjunctural intensity may be concentrated in family figures that Myriam Lins de Barros calls 'memory guardians' (1989). This is generally a privilege afforded women who are entrusted with the functions of an informal moral priesthood in our culture. The same author describes various aspects of these functions among elderly women from the middle and upper classes, including public reverberations within the Catholic Church, which can be described by categories imbued with a religious flavour such as 'mission' or 'witnessing' (Lins de Barros 1980, 1987 and 1989).

The concentration of such feelings in a determined physical locus may provoke actual pilgrimages, whether occasional or systematic, individual or collective. Among the elite class, we encounter frequent reports of families who periodically gather at traditional properties during the holiday season or to celebrate important rites of passage among their members. Meanwhile, among the middle classes, visits may occasionally be made to places of origin (houses, neighbourhoods, towns and cities, and so on) during which one generation attempts to pass on and thereby preserve this point of reference to the next generation. For many families, this role is confined to family tombs, the object of sporadic or regular visits and grave tending.¹⁴

The search to maintain communion and reverence for a shared pantheon is the motive for very common strategies among adult generations in terms of interacting with their descendents, stimulating the repetition of edifying stories and training younger people's attention on certain objects or themes. This involves a far-reaching didactics on how to adopt a reverential attitude, whether concentrating more on the topics of physical inheritance or moral inheritance. The transmission of moral qualities is

¹⁴ A general survey here should also include the complex feelings associated in Brazil with 'trips to Europe.' These involve both the idea of visiting an originary locus of family roots and the originary locus of the most sacred values of each subject. For many informants, the first trip to Europe or the first long stay are moments of particular intensity and reverence due to the feeling of communion with the most profound and deep-rooted images sustaining their identity. A revealing case is found in Araújo (1987), concerning the 'pilgrimage' of Alceu Amoroso Lima to Europe. The theme has parallels in the fascinating European thematic of journeys to Rome – and that which Freud undertook at a certain point in his life provided him with a rich source of reflections on the personal and familial symbolism involved.

especially revealing of the sacred nature of these family legacies, precisely due to their greater abstraction and their ethical and behavioural dimension (see Lins de Barros 1989:36). These nodules of moral inheritance, sometimes dependent on a physical medium, are the object of a particular reverence, eliciting frequent rituals of invocation and vehement recollections. This is particularly notable in cases where the characteristics of these personal or behavioural traits contain an element of class distinction capable of being emphasized.¹⁵ The confirmation of the effective inheritance of phenomena such as a refined artistic taste, a pronounced sporting bent, a recognized intellectual value or even a positive property of bodily hexis (such as elegance, for example) may comprise a focus of intense identification among subjects, the guarantee of a transcendent communion across time. Many small rituals may arise from this valorization, celebrating the continuity of communion and reverence. Frequenting certain social environments in specific circumstances (such as making a special point of attending Mozart concertos, because that was “what my grandmother most enjoyed,” or dining at certain restaurants or eating a particular dish, because that “was what daddy did on his birthday”) looks to perpetuate the intensity of feelings and values invested in these situations.

As Durkheim foresaw in relation to religion in the strict sense, this family religiosity includes various forms of negative or positive cults. The feelings of reverence and communion can be lived as painful and harmful experiences, a heavy burden to be assumed only on ceremonial occasions or one which should be denounced and exorcised. A potential informant, the brother of one of the people most intensely devoted to expounding the value of family memory, practically refused to give an interview, explaining that he was unwilling to go over these topics again, ‘tired’ as he was of dealing with the ancestral inheritance. Informal observation revealed that, in fact, he was immersed in a painfully intimate communion with the family pantheon, surrounded by physical memorabilia and impregnated with signs of his moral heritage.¹⁶

¹⁵ An important dimension of the class distinction in our culture is precisely that of status being inherited in contrast to the democratic and ‘vulgar’ emphasis on acquired status (see for instance Velho 1998 & Bourdieu 1979).

¹⁶ Freud’s work on the feeling of the ‘uncanny’ is entirely pertinent here: in this text, he examines how the German expression *das Unheimliche* contains the ideas of familiarity, intimacy and secrecy, on one hand, and expresses the feeling of strangeness and hauntedness on the other (1969-80).

Avoiding or prohibiting this sacred dimension of the family is frequently associated with the emphasis on creating a new life, an acquired autonomy being preferable here to traditional attribution. This idea is consonant with the individualist emphasis of modern western culture, itself an heir to the Christian emphasis on individual salvation and acquiring the status of a believer in contrast to the continuity of ecclesiastical affiliation.¹⁷ As in the Christian tradition and the identity practices of western societies, this is a point of creative tension within an ongoing interplay between individual performance and ancestral inheritance. Modern psychotherapeutic practices are a key space for attempting to resolve this tension, both at the level of encompassing theories and at the level of the representations of patients and lay people. Various contemporary therapeutic forms, more or less psychologized, are explicitly dedicated to working through the subject's relationship with his or her family past. The psychoanalytic currents more directly associated with Freud's theories tend to encompass this theme within a wider vision, integrating it within the psychic dynamic in which other kernels of meaning possess an equal weight. Systemic therapies and so-called transgenerational psychoanalysis (TTG) tend to focus more on this point, producing a veritable theory and strategy for exorcising family memory. In the latter strand of therapy, the notions of 'ghost' and 'crypt' are crucial, associated with the search for and placation of unconscious and malignant identificatory bonds with ancestors (see Abraham & Torok 1987).¹⁸

It is highly significant that the language of denunciation and exorcism applied to the family legacy also appears in specific areas of the contemporary religious field, such as the case of the cult of the Saint Joseph Group in Porto Alegre, analyzed by Carlos Steil. In this movement, an example of charismatic Catholicism, the therapeutic action of the Holy Spirit is invoked to dispel the inheritance of family ghosts crystallized in the subject during his or her foetal state (Steil 2006). As I highlighted

¹⁷ We can associate the ideological emphasis on 'acquisition' with the *sick soul* of William James, the Protestant *rebirth* and the models of 'divided self' in the formation of the modern western person. The feeling of continuity and non-conflictual communion, on the other hand, is associated with the *healthy-minded* religious attitude.

¹⁸ Another interesting example is the 'family constellation' system which seems to be related to systemic theory, Reichianism and transgenerational psychoanalysis. Consulting the site <http://www.constelacaofamiliar.com.br/> (accessed on 23/04/2006), we are informed that "family constellation is a technique created by Bert Hellinger, a German psychotherapist, that operates through the creation of 'living sculptures' reconstructing the genealogical tree, which allows blockages in the flow of love from any generation or family member to be located and removed. According to this approach, many personal difficulties and relationship problems are the result of confusions in family systems. This confusion occurs when the fate of another person, living or dead, is incorporated into the subject's life without the latter being aware of the fact. As a result, the fate of family members who were excluded, forgotten or unrecognized in the place that belonged to them ends up being repeated."

in another text, there is a notable similarity between the images used by transgenerational psychoanalysis and by this religious cult to describe the determinant, magical and malign character of a certain type of family inheritance (Duarte *et al.* 2006).¹⁹

The sacrality of the family is expressed here in the guise of negative and sombre feelings, similar to those encountered in explicitly religious universes. We also find sacrileges, blasphemies and profanities, recurrently denounced by the ideologues of the modern family, policed by civil legislation and churned over in the public imagination. Alongside the more traditional themes of incest, adultery and venereal contamination (today, HIV/Aids especially), there are the more contemporary themes of paedophilia and intradomestic violence. Given that the imagery of incest today primarily assumes the form of paedophilic behaviour, we should note that the risk of profanation has shifted even more clearly to the interior of domestic sacrality (see Barreto 2003 for a thought-provoking analysis of the incest theme in cinema productions).

Among the types of positive cult analyzed by Durkheim and encountered here are sacrifice and expiatory rites. However, these retain some of the traits of negative cults since their emphasis on pain and suffering means they go beyond simply enjoying the intensity of communion and reverence. The evocation of the latter allows us to highlight the extent to which family cults (even in cases which seem to be more positive) depend on negative feelings whose involuntary presence or stimulated cultivation makes up the sacred environment. Preoccupation, nostalgia and a yearning for the past (*saudade*) are recurring terms in the description of these phenomena, making them even more vivid and intense. The imagery of sacrifice is constant, whether as an act of the revered or as an experience of the informants themselves. Family communion is founded on a persistent imaginary of unequal exchange, the constant 'sacrifices' to be made at the altar of reproducing a shared identity. Inevitably, the accumulation of sacrificial offerings frequently results in a negative balance, explicitly evoked in the records of negative cults.²⁰ A group photograph in which one of the images has been cut out and

¹⁹ Another example is the 'intergenerational healing,' or 'healing of the family tree,' mentioned by Csordas (1997:43) as some of the modalities of charismatic curing in the USA.

²⁰ The expiatory rites of the 'good death,' described in Rachel Menezes's research on 'palliative hospitals,' include the theme of family pacification to be carried out *in extremis* in the presence of family members (2004). This amounts to attributing a positive spiritual quality to this transition.

eliminated or a particular effort to remember to send out prayers at the commemorative mass for the anniversary of someone's death provide dramatic examples of the emergence of expiatory rites of avoidance or placation, designed to express or compensate for the onerous negative feelings also present in family relations. One informant revealed that he prayed positively for various dead family members and negatively (in the sense of seeking to neutralize a possible malefic influence) for a particular ancestor with whom – nonetheless – he had always officially got on very well.

As the literature has repeatedly shown (see Csordas 1997:25 for instance), modern religiosity has tended to distance itself from traditional Christian suffering and absorbed a hedonistic 'mundanization' associated with the all-pervasive 'naturalism' (Duarte *et al.* 2006). The same applies to family religiosity. A complex and lengthy shift means that today – especially among the middle and upper classes – the stress has fallen on ensuring the 'satisfaction' of members of the family unit, both individually and collectively. My informants from these social classes describe the enormous efforts taken to create an elated communion and frequently contrast the result with the 'heavy atmosphere' of the households in which they grew up or which they knew in their childhood. The feeling of reverence is therefore produced through celebrating the idea that a pleasurable communion is being shared, one cultivated and confirmed by innumerable small rituals. Photos of family gatherings in which all (or nearly all) the participants are smiling are a striking ethnographic recurrence. The marked intensity of this communion is associated primarily with positive feelings, therefore, even if they are neither permanent nor prevalent. The ideology of 'love' in all its intrafamily variants provides a constant argumentative underpinning to these processes. In many circumstances there lurks a peculiar ambiguity between suffering and hedonism, such as, for example, in the references to the sacrifices necessary to maintain domestic bliss.

5. The differential modalities of the family cult

The mode in which this religiosity is manifest in modern western culture undoubtedly varies along a wide variety of axes. One of the most famous is that of age class, a phenomenon my investigation amply confirmed. It is elderly informants who most explicitly refer to family life as

surrounded with the halo of particular values, this peculiar intensity of sacred things. In one sense, this clearly derives from the growing depth of their life experience and consequent accumulation of a relational memory, reinforced by their habitual role of acting as the mediating generation between ascendants and descendents. At the same time, the approach of the end of the life-cycle also contributes – in an explicit way for many informants – to putting in focus the person's position in relation to his or her transgenerational network. Although I met some younger people (across all social classes) with a particular sensitivity and reverence towards family memory, on the whole they maintain a considerable distance from the inherited dimension of this experience, partly due to the challenges of building new families combined with constructing more or less individualized personal careers.

Two generational events appear explicitly in numerous life stories as the stimulus for special attention to the feelings of family communion and reverence: the birth of a couple's first child and the death of parents.²¹ Many systematic collections of family memorabilia are started following the birth of children, whether encouraged by preceding generations or not. Numerous mundane elements of this rite of passage demand renewed attention to family communion from a large pool of subjects, including the need to choose the child's name (both the forename and the surname, due to the flexibility in Brazilian customs relating to the latter), having to face the inevitable remarks on the physical likeness of the newborn to his or her relatives, the need to manage the intensified contacts between the kindreds of the new parents, or the decision on whether or not to submit the infant to a form of religious initiation. Above all, there is the transformation in the parents' status following the birth: the promotion to a higher level in the generational sequence imposes a different perspective on the relational complex in which they previously found themselves in the form of a social youthfulness.²²

²¹ A less frequent case that motivates a particularly serious intensification in reverential attitude is the death of a young descendent. The anomalous nature of this relation between generation and death provoked a particular growth of religiosity in the few cases that I find reported in my research. It should be pointed out that two of the cases cited earlier of 'little saints' with images of dead family members referred precisely to situations of this kind.

²² This widely relational character of the birth of the first child can be contrasted with the experience of the first pregnancy, which refers in particular to the couple (see Salem 1987, for a radical case). In another direction, Myriam Lins de Barros (1987) analyses a homologous effect of identity conversion and accentuation of the intensity of family roles in the passage to the condition of grandparents.

The death of a parent introduces another level of identity transformations, projecting subjects towards the experience of the inevitable final stage of their own life-cycle. Here too a series of everyday properties connected to the event demands special attention to family communion and reverence, particularly including the need to gather and pass on the family inheritance (however simple this may be). Disposing of the physical remains of the dead, the form of burial and the decision that sometimes has to be made on whether to hold some kind of religious ritual, reinforce the emergence of a special dedication to communion and reverence. In various observed situations, it is only after this event that a more explicit family cult really emerges, whether making use of overt religious formulas or otherwise. This is a period that can provoke or reinforce direct adherence to a religious faith, associated with a variety of ideas on the post-mortem destiny of the dead or the subjects themselves.²³

Another fundamental criterion working to differentiate these representations is gender. In terms of the family and religion alike, it is women who are presented as socially responsible. This idea traverses the social classes, although specific pockets of male dedication occur in all of them as a result of other variables, the main one being an intense and recent religious conversion. This – on the other hand – precisely tends to eclipse the explicitation of family religiosity in itself.

The same hypotheses that seek to explain the proximity between religion and family in our culture can be evoked in relation to the proximity between the two fields and the female gender. Here too I prefer to emphasize the critical role played by women's association with a fundamental social and cosmological relationality. A fairly widely explored theme is the individuating (if not individualizing) and fluid properties of male careers in contrast to the encompassing and stabilizing properties of female identity (Heilborn 2004). Among working class sectors, this correlation takes an even clearer form due to the association of women with the world of moral reproduction in general in contrast to men's association with the physical world (Duarte 1986). As far as family religiosity is concerned, one of the points that distinguishes female from male experiences is the more systematic

²³ In some cases, among middle class families, I found the representation and expectation of the re-encounter of subjects with their parents after death. These were not particularly religious informants and this belief was not based on any explicit religious premise, although it was externalized with great emotion and anxiety.

nature of women's attitudes. Men frequently express the feelings of communion and reverence described here, but they tend to be less dedicated than women to the cult and cultivation of the ritual forms and formulas. A notable ethnographic case is the large Mexican elite family studied by Lomnitz & Perez-Lizaur (1987): the women of the family, even when they were the more direct heirs, had no participation in the economic activities responsible for reproducing the family fortune. Instead, they spent their time managing the intense social life that allowed the family to maintain its overall social status. This social life can be read as a constant sequence of rituals designed to consecrate family communion and reverence, sometimes exposed in ceremonial form to the gaze of wider society.

Combining with gender, the person's sibling position can also influence their degree of affiliation to family religiosity. A particular onus falls on the figure of the oldest sister, regularly given the responsibility for an all-encompassing moral representativeness. This role may be assumed from an early age in contexts where the family's mother's role is weakened, increasing further after the death of the latter. The sibling position may lead to the formation of parallel lineages that corporately inherit properties from their founder. As a result, the descendents of the oldest sister (or, sometimes, brother) inherit part of the matriarch's moral responsibility over the family group. This is particularly notable among the working classes where living in close physical proximity (and hence knowledge and control of each member's behaviour) are more common due to the prevailing residence patterns (Duarte 1986; Guedes 1998). One family observed in my fieldwork presented a pronounced split in its religious affiliation following the emergence of two opposing lineages from an original group of siblings: the youngest brother's lineage ended up converting to Pentecostalism after the death of the matriarch, in contrast to the overt Catholicism of the lineage of the elder brother, whose pre-eminence in the family had passed uncontested until then. Interestingly, this brother – a rare example of a male figure assuming responsibility for the family's moral life – always speaks devoutly of their only sister who died young and whose role of moral administration he apparently inherited. His reverence for this figure – whose first name prompted his choice of protective saint – is extremely intense, the themes of her brief life comprising a motif to which the family's descendents continually return hagiographically.

Certain phenomenal differences may lead to the emphasis on the matrilineal or patrilineal legacy. The ideology of bilateral inheritance is a structuring factor, but the specificity of family life tends to impose a hierarchy between the two ascendant sides. A patrilineal emphasis has traditionally pervaded western culture due to the hierarchical pre-eminence of the male element in social structure. However, this emphasis always cohabited with the possibility of affirming the maternal line, which may even become predominant in some domains and certain social situations. This inequality is particularly important in the religious field due to the female privilege in terms of dealing with the sacred and tends to be expressed in family religiosity in the form of a matrilineal emphasis, especially among the working classes.²⁴ This privilege may result in a greater enrichment of the matrilineal *sacra*, since daughters tend to inherit the family's moral heirlooms, the latter themselves already imbued with this privilege from the previous generation. The situation is obviously different in terms of substantial legacies, especially urban properties where the official egalitarianism becomes more dominant, or in the case of public legacies (such as companies, offices, consultancies, libraries, archives, etc.) where the male gender tends to predominate.

At various points, I have referred to the social class as an important criterion in terms of recognizing the differences in contemporary forms of family religiosity. These differences are indeed discernible at various levels. We can distinguish a first dimension, more properly cultural, ideological or moral, through the lesser or greater presence of individualizing rationalization among the various social sectors, layers or classes. The weight and style of family relationality thereby increase as a differential factor.

A difference in the forms of family sociability is a second crucial factor. The size and extent of nuclear families, the age of parents when their first child was born, the degree of physical proximity of family networks, the intensity of mutual help within the family group, and the degree of privacy in household life all contribute to the construction of very distinct family feelings, a fact inevitably reflected in the organization of family devotion and worship.

²⁴ An interesting case of a matrilineage in the middle class, with explicit emphasis on the religious (including sacerdotal) heritage, is the Baptist family studied by Jabor (2006).

Thirdly, we should not underestimate the importance of the material capital owned by members of different classes, since it serves as the basis of a highly diverse interplay of values, especially in terms of transgenerational transmission and the possibilities for pursuing individualizing careers (see Pina-Cabral & Pedroso de Lima 2005).

I am convinced, nonetheless, that it is the first dimension which more closely conditions the contemporary forms of family communion and reverence. This effectively involves the representation of personal identity in terms of the determinations of family attribution. The process of individualization imposes a basic experiential distance in relation to the family of origin (and even, in some cases, the new family – whose constitution may even be rejected) meaning that the family cult assumes much more rarefied, non-explicit and unconscious forms. Full individualization presumes, however, the development of a concomitant interiorization, which enables greater reflexivity and mental elaboration of the relation to self and to the family. The interpretative and therapeutic resources made available by psychological knowledge are primarily directed at the subjects of this type of reflexivity, strengthening the dialogue with the family legacy and provoking the emergence of a particularly paradoxical type of cult (one which can assume more positive or negative tones): namely, that of family memory as a site for a form of psychic work aimed at consolidating subjective identity. Individualization also has implications in terms of differences in expressivity – that is, the willingness and capacity to talk about oneself (and, in terms of what interests us here, to talk with and about ones family) – which interferes in the viability and organization of the family cult, as well as the production of explicit discourses on this private dimension in response to the researcher's questions.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the forms of family religiosity among the working classes are closer to religion in the strict sense of the term, given the limited presence of the lay language (including psychologization) with its abundant and articulate resources for expressing these feelings. In compensation, the transit between ecclesiastical sacrality and family sacrality allows a greater wealth of phenomenal form, only touched on here in this text. It can also be seen that among the middle and elite classes the permanence or emergence of a explicitly religious reverence tends to materialize in psychologized or psychologizing formulas, such as the charismatic cult of the Saint

Joseph Group, cited earlier, or various others present in contemporary Christian religions (see Csordas 1997; Lewgoy 2005; Duarte & Carvalho 2006).

Additionally, the reference faith of each family or subject acts as a considerable source of difference. Even in cases where a secularized and disenchanted tendency is pronounced, some reference to the religious space of origin and education always persists, even if simply in blasphemous forms.

Catholic culture is particularly abundant in symbolic resources for expressing family religiosity. The way in which the Catholic pantheon is structured, with the incorporation of a wide range of mediators, facilitates the connection between ecclesiastical beings and family series (such as the lay 'little saints' mentioned earlier). In this case, the presence of images representing the sacred is essential, in particular since these also allow a flow between ecclesiastical and family *sacra*. I personally saw – and many informants described – the arrangement of small domestic altars, generally fairly informal, where ecclesiastical imagery and *mana* objects (such as holy palms, rosaries, medals and votive candles) were mixed with family items. The very boundary between familial and transcendental was blurred thanks to the presence of personalized patron saints, printed texts with favourite prayers or inherited images.

The representation of a Holy Family in which various divine or semi-divine personae maintain mythical kinship relationships enables a continual elaboration of the correlations between the sacred and the earthly family. The filial devotion to the Holy Father and the Virgin Mary is clearly correlated with the devotion for one's earthly father and mother though the Catholic custom – frequently mentioned – of making children refer to the former by affectionate names such as 'heavenly father' and 'heavenly mother.' The Church's official services various occasions for paying homage to ancestors, such as the masses in suffrage of the dead (*corpo presente*, the seventh day, month, year and so on) or for saving souls in Purgatory, not forgetting the family dimensions of the Day of the Dead and the celebration of Christmas. As one middle class family recalled, rites have even been created for sacralizing domestic space, such as the 'enthroning' of a sacred image in a prominent position in the home.

For the upper middle classes and elite, the reference to the Catholic Church is essential in all important rites of passage in family life, meaning that the boundary between the two dimensions becomes indiscernible: baptism, first communion, marriage, wedding anniversaries. Given the high rate of religious de-institutionalization prevalent in these sectors, it is notably more common for the feelings surrounding family religiosity to prevail over the ecclesiastical religious dimensions. Something similar also occurs among Jewish sectors in relation to the equivalent series of family rites.

These more experiential dimensions of the Catholic world should not blind us to the fact that, from the Church's viewpoint, the family possesses a more essential and abstract value, making it the object of continuous references in doctrinal texts and pastoral practices. Here the sacralization of the nuclear family is clearly defined through the specific coupling between points of religious doctrine and the reference to the 'naturalness' of this social form. In all cases, what predominates is praise for the feelings of internal communion and reverence, as well as the stimulus given for its continued practice.

This latter, more ethical dimension takes us to the Protestant universe whose empirical complexity is greater, divided into extremely varied alternatives. Generally speaking, Protestantism's lack of the relational resources and imagery of Catholicism is compensated by an intensification in its ethical orientation focused on cultivating the family. A crucial difference in relation to the Catholic universe is the pre-eminence of congregational life, which engages a much more direct and effective control over the modes of constructing personal and family careers. The exemplarity of family life becomes richer in a universe where ministers can marry. The minister's family is an important part of this configuration, contributing even more strongly to an ideal imaginary link between the believer's family and the congregation.

I have already cited Christiano's contribution (2000) to our understanding of the historical development of what the author calls 'domestic Christianity' in the 19th century United States. This involved precisely a strong sacralization of domestic life taking place initially in the Protestant universe where the key factor is not so much a specific religious doctrine but rather the emphasis on

the communion of individual worship in relation to the divine within the family context.²⁵ The significance of Thanksgiving Day in the USA clearly expresses this configuration, creating a bridge between ‘domestic Christianity’ and the ‘civic religion’ described by Bellah.²⁶ Christiano also calls our attention to the intensified family inclination of some of the denominations emergent in the Protestant context, such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Here family life is considered to be literally a part of the sacred dimension of human experience and surrounded, therefore, by specific ethical and ecclesiastical controls.

The last large religious complex directly present in my field of research is that of Kardecist or spiritualist religiosity. As I discussed earlier, the permanent communication between the earthly and spiritual worlds stimulates an extremely rich elaboration of family sacrality, constantly reconstructed through interpretations on the reincarnation of dead relatives into newborn relatives, or commemorated in the dialogue with the disembodied family. This flux also enables the incorporation of people into family communion and reverence without a terrestrial family tie: the recognition that they are the reincarnation of a dead family member also makes them kin (Mazur 2006).

Afro-Brazilian religiosity appears only obliquely in my research, although it would certainly afford a systematic discussion of other assemblages of institutional and family religiosity, particularly in a sacred context where the ideas of family and kinship have structuring cosmological and sociological implications. An analysis of the universe would, though, go beyond the very general aims of this article.

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The exploration of the theme of the ‘home sanctuary’ in this article has looked to dislocate the conventional boundaries of the grand themes of sociological knowledge. Neither the family nor religion are substantial or stable entities; they are culturally established and analytically stabilized

²⁵ A figure/informant from the story-report by Truman Capote *In cold blood* (1994) states the following about family prayer at the meal table: “I don’t see how anyone can sit down to table without wanting to bless it.”

²⁶ It is plausible to suppose that current lay family rites of Mother’s Day and Father’s Day emerged in this context of US family religiosity. Native ideas associate the two dates with events held in homage of a specific father and mother that ended up becoming generalized and recognized by the American nation as a whole: Father’s Day – invented by Sonora Luise in 1909, in Spokane, Washington, and recognized officially in 1972; Mother’s Day – invented by Anne Jervis a short while before becoming official, in 1919.

cuttings applied to a concrete experience that shifts permanently in response to a complex causality, a permanent challenge to models and regimes of knowledge. At the present moment, I have preferred to adopt a generalizing approach, capable of drawing attention to the wider analytic point, rather than pursue a deeper understanding of the specific ways in which my research material has challenged me to produce new interpretative schemas. In the narrow field of studies on family and religion, continuing to repeat the formula of one institution influencing the other will not get us very far – unless as the expression of native ideologies, which are precisely those in need of interpretation. We need to understand both generically and specifically how these dimensions overlap in social experience, delimiting the essence of a single moral field where the subjects of our contemporary societies are reproduced.

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