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CHAPTER 6

The Social Position of Women

The Broader System of Domination

Relations between the sexes, and thus woman's position in the family and in the society at large, fit into a broader system of domination. In order to understand the problem reflected in the title of this chapter, therefore, we must first examine the way in which power was organized and distributed during the slavocratic period of Brazil's history, inasmuch as some of the patterns and attitudes, today justified in the name of tradition, were first formed at that time. I shall refer to that tradition in an attempt to shed light on the origins of the myths and preconceptions which present-day society uses to justify barring women from certain jobs and confining them almost exclusively to the performance of social roles and occupations assigned by convention.

Initially, Portugal's purpose in colonizing America was to extract wealth; later, it was to produce articles in its colony that would contribute to the development of European mercantile capitalism. Essentially, the form this colonization took amounted to an attempt to transplant a patrimonial structure of domination to Brazil.¹ Since the person of the king, his functionaries, and thus the Royal Treasury² were

central to the distribution of power and to securing economic advantages, the power structure in Brazilian colonial society may be described, following Weber, as a state patrimony.³

However, the colony was vast and communication problems were many; it was therefore difficult to watch over the royal officialdom. The exercise of arbitrary power was an easy matter for those to whom the king's favoritism had brought riches and the advantages of social position. Thus in practice, the workings of the colonial state patrimony clashed with a patriarchal order. The latter was represented by people who, although they had ready access to the royal coffers, were mindful of their official duties as administrators of the royal patrimony while others sought to draw personal advantages from their position at the expense of the patrimonial state.⁴ European mercantile capitalism at this time was approaching the fullness of its development and beginning to shift its course toward industrial capitalism. This process, together with the economic and power structures that had evolved in the colony, prompted the Crown to transfer its interests from the royal functionaries to individuals whose power was based on property and its exploitation for profit. As the heads of families accumulated more and more economic power, the Crown found itself increasingly constrained to seek their support to safeguard its interests. To ensure their continuing prestige and authority, the civil and military representatives of the patrimonial state found themselves obliged to become entrepreneurs in economic ventures.

It was not long before the conflict of interest emerged between this new entrepreneurial group and the patrimonial state. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the family heads had consolidated their power into a structure of domination that might in rough terms be described as a "patriarchal patrimony." Indeed, from its roots, Brazilian society had been developing in that direction since the very first days of colonization. The colonial economy, geared to foreign

markets, had been developing along a path more conducive to the emergence of a patriarchal rather than a state form of patrimonialism (i.e., a patron-client form of domination, based on personal relationships, rather than the more institutionalized form). This would have created major obstacles for the development of capitalist productive relations, already in formation. By contrast with feudalism, the limiting case of the patrimonial structure is that in it relations between lord and vassal became institutionalized and fixed,⁵ and the patrimonialistic power structure proved to be eminently compatible with capitalism in its first stages of development.⁶ Although functions and responsibilities in colonial Brazil did tend to become institutionalized and concentrated in the hands of a few people, this tendency was not strong enough to cause the colonial society to develop all of the attributes of a state. Never a dominant social relation, patrimony increasingly came to be rooted in the exploitation of landed property for profit.

Since Brazil was colonized to bring profits to commercial capitalism, its social structure during the slavocratic period and the colonial epoch in general had the appearance of an exotic edifice that had retained some rather faded traces of European feudal structures, combined with an emergent patrimonial structure favorable to external trade and the exploitation of slave labor. Under these circumstances, the caste system that took root presented grave cultural inconsistencies. It rested on a pecuniary as well as an economic basis; freedom itself became a negotiable item. For this reason the Brazilian caste system allowed for upward social mobility, even if only in terms of formal status, and in this respect it was different from typical caste societies. Nevertheless, the rigid asymmetry of relations between lord and slave, the pecuniary foundation of slavery, and miscegenation gradually undermined these relations. The purely formal measures on which the dominant stratum relied to protect its position—

for example, prohibiting interracial marriage but not miscegenation—show that the caste division of the population had economic and not racial roots. The absence of any feelings of mutual repugnance among the various strata of the slavocratic society produced a peculiar type of caste stratification in which color, and hence race, were merely outward signs signaling the individual's economic condition. With respect to female roles, this cultural discrepancy in the Brazilian caste system had diverse consequences.

The Female Slave and Her Master

The production relations of slavocratic society and the cultural inconsistencies of the caste system were major determinants of women's roles in both castes of Brazil society of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, but, seen from either perspective, the role of the black woman subverted the social order. Florestan Fernandes' statement that "the social alienation of the black initially transpired as the social alienation of the slave as an individual"⁷ must be examined very carefully in the case of female slaves. Differences in economic position among individuals were often matched by differences in social position, the latter determined by race and color.⁸ Accordingly, for the black, being a slave meant being an instrument of labor, with no rights whatsoever; in other words, precisely the social status of an object. Still, reification of blacks was not total. Although whites had always denied blacks human status, both subjectively and objectively, some of the black population, mostly craft groups, actually did receive relatively humane treatment from whites, by virtue of the value placed on their particular functions in the productive process. To be sure, if the slave crafts worker was held in higher esteem, it was less a real bond and more because such regard was adapted to the

economic ends of the master. However, true motives often remain concealed in the action itself, and although it may indeed have been a more refined way to exploit their labor power, the better treatment accorded the black slave appeared to be the very opposite of reification. Of course, merely partial reification of the slave in terms of attitudes and behavior did not impede the appropriation of surplus value, nor for that matter the functioning of a system of production already partially capitalist, nor did it in any way jeopardize the continued existence of the system of caste stratification. It merely added to it one more inconsistency, which, together with all the other cultural discrepancies of the caste system in Brazil, helped to expose the true nature of the emerging society. The contradiction between the white master's economic interests as capitalist entrepreneur and the more refined treatment accorded some types of slave progressively undermined the credibility of all the sustaining myths of Brazil's slavocratic order. A number of situations, though only peripherally related to the system of production, shed light on these inconsistencies in the caste society, such as, for example, the gifts "house children" sometimes received by virtue of their living in the same quarters, or even because of affective ties, sometimes strong enough to motivate manumission.

The most serious discrepancy of all, however, emerges in a review of the various things the black woman was called upon to do. In addition to her functions in the productive system, the female slave also had a sexual role to perform. This sexual exploitation augmented her reification, but at the same time helped to expose the true foundations of the caste society. She was a mere tool of her master's sexual pleasures and nothing indicated that this relation between slave and master ever went beyond "the primitive and purely animal level of sexual contact."⁹ Yet its issue, the mulatto offspring, became a dynamic point of ferment for social and cultural tensions.

By demanding the female slave administer to his sexual needs, the master was treating her at once as an object and as a human being. The sexual act became for her a process of reification, while her role as a *thing* (i.e., an instrument of labor) assumed human aspects. The characteristic of sex, whose mode of operation is basically determined by the mode of production, came to have a weighty influence over the mode of production itself.

The belief that miscegenation, provided it occurred outside the legal family, would not have any consequences on the relative social positions of the two races betrayed a striking lack of awareness of the degree to which the continued existence of the slavocratic order depended on the ethnic composition of the population. The number of people of mixed origin continued to grow, and this, combined with the inability of the slave population to expand in sufficient numbers to meet the requirements of production (mortality in the slave quarters was high), constituted a permanent threat to the established order. Although the lives led by male and female slaves were basically similar as far as bare existence was concerned, the functions they were called upon to perform were different, and these differences determined the magnitude of the role they played in eroding the foundations of the social order. Neither the gentler treatment accorded the slave craftsworker in consonance with the master's economic interests, nor the master's use of the female slave as an instrument for sexual gratification (directly, when used by the master himself, and indirectly, in a classic example of economic exploitation, when he hired her out to other whites) were enough to bring the slaves to a general awareness of their lot and impel them to undertake some form of resistance.

Whereas the white woman's role was that of wife and mother of legitimate children, the black woman's function remained confined to satisfying sexual needs. The different

social fates that awaited a woman depended on her place in the caste system. This was not conducive to maintaining a stratification system that separated people into strata rigorously defined by differences in juridical status and the individual's role in the productive process; nor did it protect the white patriarchal family from the influences of the slave population. The belief that a young black virgin was the most effective physic for the white syphilitic male was not only a convenient excuse for sexual intemperance; it also meant that black women became carriers of the disease and transmitted it to new generations of whites as wet nurses.

At the other extreme, the white mistresses were not immune to jealousy provoked by their husbands' love affairs, although the woman's subordinate position prevented that jealousy from developing into a constant source of conjugal friction.¹⁰ It did, however, create snags in the work setup and in the morality demanded of life in the manor, at least with respect to white women's conduct. Judging from accounts of foreign chroniclers, it seems that some women simply flouted the rules that were supposed to govern a white woman's behavior and had love affairs with other men of their caste or even with male slaves.¹¹ This illustrates one element in the discrimination against woman independent of socioeconomic condition. Since a child's social status was determined by the juridical status of the mother, one might expect that the son of a female slave and white master would inherit the slave status of his black mother, and that the issue of a union between a white mother and a black father would be fully accepted into the seigneurial class as free persons. However, the frequent manumissions of the offspring of these free unions indicated that in fact paternal filiation determined rights of inheritance and juridical status. The emancipation of these mestizo progeny was, of course, not in itself sufficient to permit their immediate integration into the seigneurial stratum—for this they would have had to lose many of their

physical traits as well—but it was unquestionably a crucial step in that process, since it at least gave the mestizo formal equality. Less-than-total social rejection of mestizo offspring became not only total, but even extended to the father, in the rare case where the mother was white, despite the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*. Since amorous relations between women of the ruling stratum and black slaves were rare, they obviously do not provide the key to why so few persons were incorporated into a family structure.

A number of factors contributed to the sexual liberty that became a part of life in slavocratic Brazil. In addition to the fact that the white master regarded the sexual services of the black woman as a function intrinsic to her condition as slave, the way in which colonization took place was also an important element promoting sexual license. The colonizers very rarely arrived in families. Usually there were lone individuals, who in some cases had left their families behind, awaiting the fortune they were going to amass in the new world. But with a contingent of submissive women of lower social rank readily available to gratify their sexual needs, many a colonizer's family had to wait a long time before he finally returned to Europe, if he ever returned at all. Outside the narrow and marginally organized family structure of the ruling stratum, license was the rule. Indeed, the organization of the white family presupposed a lack of family structure among the slaves. So long as white women were raised for the roles of mistress of the house and mother of a legitimate family, there had to be a class of women with whom the young white males could indulge in the art of lovemaking before marriage. Thus, slavery met not only the needs of the productive system, but also those relative to colonization and family structure.

The White Woman of the Manor

The white woman of the slavocratic epoch had the basic traits required for unquestioning submission to patriarchal authority: she combined ignorance with woeful immaturity. She usually married so young that a girl still single at the age of twenty was considered practically a spinster.¹² It was normal to find a fifteen-year-old girl married and already a mother, and there were many who became mothers as young as thirteen. Brought up in a rigidly patriarchal environment, these child-mothers escaped their father's rule only to fall under the rule of a husband. Foreign chroniclers have given us accounts of the cruelty with which single and married women were treated when there was even the slightest suspicion that they had indulged in amorous flirtations behind the backs of fathers or husbands.¹³ Of course, there were some who, aided by their female slaves, did manage to consummate these flirtations. But the difficulties were not to be taken lightly: a thousand eyes were watching them, and the loyalty of the female slave could falter at any moment. As G. Freyre stated wryly, in describing the circle that grew up around the white woman of the manor: it may have been relatively easy to have the eyes of the busybody male and female slaves put out, but it was not so easy to do the same with the eyes of priests and mothers-in-law.¹⁴

Added to this, the woman of the ruling stratum rarely went out of the house, and then only to go to church, which she never did unaccompanied. Stifled by the rigorous upbringing, uneducated, and broken by a steady string of maternities, she yielded submissively to father or husband. Although some became respectable matrons and enjoyed considerable sway over the domestic servants, their sphere of authority was kept clearly demarcated from that of the patriarch. Given her inferior status in the patriarchal family, the woman often had to shoulder the burdens issuing from

the man's sexual excesses. Alcântara Machado refers to wills in which he found husbands enjoining their wives to personally take charge of the upbringing of their natural children.¹⁵ In other cases, the white woman took it upon herself to raise or free the illegitimate children. These situations were especially frequent in the south of the country, where economic poverty sometimes equalized differential status based on sex.

Marriage remained practically the only course of life open to women. True, a girl could always choose the alternative of a secluded life in a convent to escape subjection to father or husband; but even this course seems to have been taken more frequently on the men's initiative. It was not rare to find single girls interned in convents because their fathers suspected misconduct, and husbands were also known to send troublesome wives off to the cloisters, although this was less frequent. Convent life seems to have been held out as a constant threat to single and married women alike. This is one more indication that the white woman of the manor bore little responsibility for the restriction of family structure to the ruling stratum. It is not difficult to see that the chastity of the vast majority of women of the seigneurial class was made possible by the prostitution of others. Daughters of poor whites, without inheritance and surrounded by scruples against work, earned their livelihood with their own bodies. Prostitution blighted not only the cities but the villages.¹⁶ It was the lot of a good number of women in that economically unstable segment of the population who lived from hand to mouth or by their wits.

These economic factors worked against an organized family structure among this layer of the population, as did the fees demanded by the clergy to perform a marriage. The unprejudiced acceptance of extra-legal marriages among the poorer segments of Brazil's population during the slavocratic period has persisted, at least vestigially.

The white woman of the manor usually played an impor-

tant role in the management and supervision of activities in the home, but we should remember that those activities covered a much wider range than what we think of as domestic chores. The mistress did not only oversee the work of the slaves in the kitchen; she watched over the spinning, weaving, and sewing; she inspected the lacemaking and embroidery, supervised the preparation of meals, the tending of the orchards and garden, and the care of the children and domestic animals. She was in complete charge of arrangements for the celebration of the big social events that convoked family and relatives.¹⁷

There are other indications, however, that a good number of the women of the dominant class led an idle life. Incapable of commanding discipline from their household slaves or their children, they lolled about in the hammocks, sloppily dressed and unkempt, hushed to sleep by their black slaves' soft songs. This image of the indolent woman, passively looking on as her husband cavorted with the female slaves, seems to have been more frequent in the sugar-growing Northeast, although it was by no means rare in the South. Some authors have even regarded cases where the white women of the ruling strata personally took charge of certain activities as genuine exceptions.¹⁸

Prudence tells us not to exaggerate the frequency of either of the two types. By all indications, they existed side by side in the dominant class, and both roles were possible to an equal degree. Quite apart from whether a woman performed a useful function or whether she led an idle life, what was universal in the slavocratic society of Brazil was her acceptance of the man's total supremacy within the family and the society at large. Every aspect of a young girl's upbringing was keyed to this submissiveness. "The young girl was denied anything that smacked of independence, even raising her voice in the presence of elders. The saucy and forward little girl was abhorred and punished, while shy bashful ones were

adored."¹⁹ Raised to marry a man chosen by her father, usually older than she, the Brazilian woman's expectations of married life were quite realistic, and in this respect she fulfilled social expectations.

It is quite true that many women, oppressed by their husbands or fathers, went against the grain and indulged in sexual irregularities through which they sought to requite desires and feelings denied expression within the confines of the patriarchal family, and in colonial times it was not rare for single girls to become mothers.²⁰ This was insufficient, however, to work any deep change in society's attitudes toward female virginity and chastity, which remained unbending, nor enough to weaken the upper hand of men. Maternal filiation, then, notwithstanding the illusions it has fostered, neither derived from rank held by the woman nor made for any change in her social status. Girls more often than not received their mother's family name indifferently. The relations of production and the prestige attached to different positions within the productive system often came into conflict with traditions regarding the inheritance of the family name.

Matrilinear descent, the purpose of which was to maintain, at least nominally, the purity of the stock, was created and sustained by miscegeny and hypogamic (interracial) marriages. The marriage of a poor mulatto student or soldier with the miss of the manor required maternal filiation in order to preserve at least the illustrious names, even at a time when the social order was already in a state of rapid decline. Thus, the women Castelo Branco, Albuquerque e Melo, Holanda Cavalcanti, Silva Prado, etc., gave their names to their sons. Matrilinear filiation was an attempt at conciliation: the most drastic solution was for the judge or priest, even in the epoch before Brazil became independent, to refuse to perform interracial marriages, or for the white girl's father to send her off to a convent. The expedient of matrilinear descent, designed

to mollify the white race's anxieties about its continued dominance, did in fact represent a clear breach in the rigor with which the seigneurial layer had defended its social supremacy. As for woman, despite the fact that no deep change had been wrought in her social condition or in her position in the home, she began to demand a say in the choice of her mate. Thus commenced a long process of transformation of relations between parents and children and, in a certain sense, an even longer process of change in relations between husband and wife.

Still, women never did attain full awareness of the opportunities for bringing about changes in their position in the patriarchal family, which was already in the process of breaking up, and as far as change was concerned they remained far more its unconscious vehicle than its conscious agent. In the situation offered by the seigneurial order, women represented the embodiment of all the conservative forces of society.²¹ Geographically immobile, and confined to a narrow socio-cultural universe, they were undeniably more conservative than men, and in that respect represented a stable element in society. It was the sons, not the daughters, of the manor who received their education in Europe, and who were the political and social innovators, even introducing changes in feminine fashion. On the other hand, these new trends affected only the youngest men, and left the older generations untouched. In the final analysis, women remained far removed from the currents of social and political change, and their isolation was deliberately fostered by the men who remained openly hostile to woman's participation in any and every activity that went beyond the bounds of the family.

The exclusion of women from the focal points of socio-cultural change is exemplified by the way that various secret societies that existed during the colonial epoch recruited their members. Around the end of the eighteenth or beginning of the nineteenth century the first Masonic lodge was

founded at Bahia, soon followed by other secret societies. The political movements that grew out of these societies (especially the Masonic lodges) were those of a white, male elite, and participation was effectively barred to anyone from the lower strata and to women. To be sure, participation in these movements was not the only means to promote change in the established order, but it was one of the few deliberate expressions of conscious social action. The exclusion of women, particularly those belonging to the ruling elite, hence constituted an effective barrier to their achieving an awareness of the country's political and economic problems. Under these circumstances, even though the women of the upper stratum contributed unconsciously to undermining the existing status quo, the disintegration of the slavocratic order was not, and could not have been, matched by a parallel process of female emancipation.

Originally, ownership of land was the sole source of political rights, and indeed in this respect women were no better off than slaves.²² Many women, however, became property owners through inheritance and proved themselves quite capable of meeting the responsibilities that that task entailed. On the other hand, those who had capable husbands were never given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. Indeed, the woman herself was sometimes considered an economic good.²³ The right to bequeath to a third party was contingent on the condition *si in viduitate permanserit*. Thus, if a woman married again, she lost the third party right, as well as the right to keep and raise the children from her first marriage. Society faced a woman with a dilemma: she was obliged either to renounce being a woman and live only as a mother, or to relinquish her rights as mother in order to marry again. Usually a widow would renounce the property and children of her first marriage, since she was then free to find a successor to her first husband. The sexual taboos surrounding women during the colonial period were backed

not only by social sanctions but by physical constraint. In prohibiting women exercise of the right of property, Brazilian colonial society added to its caste division a social stratification based on sex. This rigid system of physical and moral constraint of the female segment of the population, created and maintained by the androcentricity of the patriarchal family, left deep marks on the life and mentality of Brazilian women.

*Changes in the Family Structure:
The Nineteenth-Century Transition*

With the spread of urban life in the nineteenth century, the life of women in the manorial class underwent corresponding changes. Although their social position remained essentially unchanged, women no longer had to live in manor houses. The city environment provided opportunities for more social contacts—at feasts, church, the theater. The patriarchal family lost some of its rigidity, allowing women to become freer and more at ease in their attitudes and bearing. Yet their education was still neglected, except that in addition to their instruction in domestic duties women were taught the art of conversation to grace social gatherings with their presence.

Meanwhile, poverty and prostitution continued to spread outside the homes of the wealthy landowners, and disintegration of the slavocratic order proceeded apace. The white woman, however, lacking education and devoting herself almost exclusively to her family, the Church, and the great feasts, remained oblivious to the changes taking place in the world around her, including the ferment of public opinion over the question of abolition that raged in the cities during the last ten years of the empire. Since the abolition movement thrived on the written word, Brazilian women had no

chance to develop a critical stand on the conditions of their existence.

Like the later movements for independence from the metropolis, the abolition movement was the work of men. Although the end of slavery did not bring about the momentous changes it might have, it had many consequences for the life of women in the seigneurial class. The mere fact that master and slave no longer lived together in the same household reduced the tensions generated by easy access to black women. Of course, many blacks, male and female, continued to work for their old masters and hence to share the same household, but their relationship changed. Blacks too were individuals, free beings, and part of the social world. To be sure, prostitution continued, but no longer by virtue of the black woman's status as slave. The universalization of wage labor helped to lay bare its economic roots, in addition to the moral degradation suffered under slavery.

Changes effected in the caste system by abolition, however, were not accompanied by equivalent changes in the system of sexual stratification. Indeed, with the disintegration of the caste system, the black woman acquired at least a formal freedom which had previously been denied her. Her status was inferior to the black male's inasmuch as the emancipation of the "black races" did not bring her full human rights. Under the new order, the male ex-slave was considered a Brazilian citizen for electoral purposes, while women, both white and black, were marginalized from the selection of popular representatives to the government. Though abolition therefore may have meant emancipation, albeit unstable and incomplete for the black woman, for the white woman it represented a veritable step downward relative to the status of the black man. Once the caste division of Brazilian society was eliminated, the sex factor took on a new significance in the class society then emerging. Just as race had done in caste society (and still does, for that matter,

in today's competitive societies, although perhaps to a lesser extent), sex now served effectively to conceal the social tensions generated by a fully formed but not yet fully developed capitalist system of production.²⁴

Abolition had more immediate effects on the structure of the family group. Now that the black female slave was free, the head of the family no longer was able to give free rein to amorous impulse. The sexual decision was not unilateral any more, and extramarital sexual relations suffered corresponding restraints. With prostitutes, of course, payment in effect sustained the unilateral nature of the decision, although from another perspective it brought out the impersonal and contractual character of a commercial relation in which the wills of both parties have to be taken into account. Naturally, this does not mean that prostitution was voluntary. The pressures the social structures of capitalism exert to drive a considerable segment of the female population into prostitution are too well known to permit that conclusion. Nevertheless, whereas the freedom of the nonslave to prostitute herself remained abstract, in a system of free labor power prostitution is a purely commercial proposition, and as such essentially amounts to the exploitation of one social class by another.

One of the most salient effects of the disintegration of the slavocratic-seigneurial order and the patriarchal family's loss of its *raison d'être* was to uproot the white and mestizo populations that had lived in the shadow of the manor house and give them a certain social, and, above all, domestic autonomy. A great amorphous mass of people emerged from the state of near anomie in which it had existed under the slavocratic order and began to gradually develop perceptible contours of its own. These people were gradually absorbed into the lower strata of the new society, where they formed more or less stable monogamous families, although there was already discernible the instability inherent in the nascent urban proletariat. Yet, given the conditions under which it

had to live, this social layer retained the distinct features of its former social structure. Common law marriages continued to exist alongside the legal monogamous family.²⁵

The disintegration of the patriarchal family did not proceed evenly throughout the entire country. Even today, the Brazilian family presents a wide variety of structures, extending from the semipatriarchal family to the modern married couple that has lost its ties with family and tradition. As the family lost its patriarchal foundations—a process which varied in accordance with the pace of the nation's economic development—the family head saw his despotic rule weakened, as a result of the loss of some of his previous political and economic functions. Of course, he continued to wield authority over his wife and the minor children. However, the source of that authority gradually shifted from his male identity alone to his role as family wage earner.

The Uneven Spread of Urbanization and Industrialization

Urbanization, which began in earnest during the second half of the nineteenth century, and industrialization, which received its biggest boost in the 1930s, had profound repercussions on family structure. However, since neither urbanization nor industrialization proceeded evenly throughout Brazilian society, the restructuring of the family group became a function of the modernization of economic life (although in the countryside family structure sometimes lagged behind economic development). Immigration provides an example.

The importation of foreign workers, which had been encouraged to promote the coffee economy of the South, might have been an innovative force in family structure, but this was subject to the cultural values the immigrants brought with them. The importation of European labor frequently

only reinforced the patriarchal family pattern. São Paulo, for example, received southern Italians, with all their paternalistic tendencies, and Syrians, who brought with them a semi-patriarchal family structure. The result has been that, despite that city's remarkable economic development, its social structures have not changed much. The pace of social change varies: in some areas of social life it is brisk and rapid, in others it plods along under the weight of history. Accordingly, while southern Brazil has achieved a high level of economic development, family structure has not been equally responsive to modern needs.

Immigrants from other parts of Europe—for example, Germans—have had little influence on the restructuring of the Brazilian family. In the majority of cases they either formed veritable self-contained enclaves which effectively blocked cultural exchange, or else isolation, scanty means for coping with their environment, and other factors produced effects that were just the opposite to those that might have been expected from their cultural heritage. It was not uncommon to see the German immigrant transformed into a backwoodsman.

Where they developed together, urbanization and industrialization gradually changed woman's roles, and gave her life new dimensions. Work in factories, shops, and offices brought many women out of the isolation in which they lived, and in the process also altered their attitudes toward the outside world. Courtship took on entirely new aspects. Parents no longer arranged marriages; now the children saw to it they had a say in the matter, and their efforts were made easier by the new customs of going to dances and movies. Once the system of sexual segregation and domestic seclusion of women was undermined, differences in the degree to which men and women participated in cultural life also diminished.

This major readjustment of the family structure to the new conditions of urban life brought about profound changes in

female education. Although education in household duties remained the ideal, the need for formal schooling was becoming increasingly evident by the end of the nineteenth century. Of course, this did not mean that it was thought that women should receive the same education as men, or that the roles traditionally assigned to the two sexes should be on an equal social footing. Then as now, society put up considerable resistance to the education of women, and this resistance increased the higher one climbed the educational ladder. In any event, the broadening of women's cultural horizons, the wider possibilities for birth control, and the growing utilization of legal means to dissolve the marriage bond were open testimony to the fact that woman's status was in the midst of a process of continuous redefinition, at least in the dynamic centers of Brazilian social life.

By contrast, the extension of the legal family to more and more social groups meant *de facto* and *de jure* a reinforcement of the sexual taboos surrounding girls and married women, except among the more educated strata of the urban industrial centers. Even now, although an increasing number of nonvirgin women marry and are no longer condemned to a life of prostitution, this is true only for those groups that are furthest removed from the value system of the middle social strata. There is no sociological evidence to suggest that such behavior takes place on a broad scale. The vast majority of Brazilians belong to the Catholic Church, whose ethic provides no prospect for breaking the virginity complex, and society has put up strong resistance to social groups that have tried to introduce fresh ways of thinking in this area. Furthermore, in a society that maintains a double moral standard and legitimizes prostitution, there is no compelling reason why the virginity complex should ever disappear.

Machismo, still the essence of the male ideal, also does much to maintain sexual restrictions. A survival from the patriarchal manners of the colonial family, this "Don Juan-

ism" is a true emblem of the male supremacy that exists in the family and the society in general. A woman's loss of virginity before marriage is felt to permanently detract from her husband's manliness, and the consequences of that attitude for relations between the sexes in the family are obvious. Under these circumstances a Brazilian wife is not really a companion to her husband; indeed, this has been cited as one of the most important factors in the breakup of numerous marriages.²⁶ The historical evolution of the family from a consanguinous group to a more conjugal one seems to have depended on the changing role of the wife and consequent reduction of inequality in relations between the sexes. However, resistance to these changes has been intense and has by no means come only from men. Women, too, have found it difficult to accept changes, insofar as they have not had to confront directly the demands of a rapidly changing world and have allowed themselves to remain hidebound in an antiquated tradition. It is no wonder, then, "that the Brazilian man learns to formulate his self-esteem to a large extent in terms of sexual potency."²⁷

For the Brazilian woman, marriage in no way loosens the social restrictions to which she had been subject as a girl. Indeed, even in the cities she is forced to give up some of her freedoms when she marries. She not only has to avoid certain actions that are taboo for all women regardless of their civil status; she must also allow no behavior, no matter how innocent, that might encourage inferences prejudicial to her reputation as a married woman. Although this morality is dominant in the middle strata, both the upper and the lower classes are much more relaxed about their morals, albeit for different reasons. The lower classes still have fewer biases and prejudices, even none at all, about casual marital unions, although it has been among this segment of the population that the legal family has been making its latest inroads in Brazil.²⁸ The economic instability and poverty among this

population is not conducive to stable marital ties; these are dissolved and resumed without great ceremony. This example illustrates the kind of changes in family life wrought by the fact that urbanization preceded industrialization in many parts of the country.

The family structure in the countryside stems directly from the patriarchal family of the colonial epoch. More resistant to the changing patterns of urban industrial life, it displays features that hark directly back to its historical roots. Although the father's say in the choice of mate has been considerably curtailed, and companionship between young lovers is becoming more and more common, the casual flirtation is still tolerated only with misgivings and only within limits. Flirtation often consists merely in the exchange of glances, leading directly to engagement or marriage. The boy ordinarily does not visit the house of his chosen one, but when he does he jokes and converses with the other members of the family instead of with the girl. Feasts and dances do not offer much opportunity for closer contact; many dances are exclusively for men as modern ballroom dancing for couples is generally looked on with disfavor by more conservative parents (although this too is changing in the countryside). Some girls are not permitted this type of dancing at all, and for those who are, decorum requires that the fiancé be passed over in favor of other young men. All these obstructions placed in the way of close contact between young men and women fulfill very well-defined functions in an isolated environment where intimacy on the sly would be very easy. Even engagement, which generally lasts about a year, is often abruptly cut short to prevent intimacy from progressing in a way that tradition could not condone.

Although there are cases of deflowering and flight that result in a declaration of marriage in absentia, the abduction of a betrothed is not always considered a breach of traditional patterns of morality. Many abductions, or pretended ab-

ductions, occur with the connivance of the parents, who hope in this way to escape their obligation to host the traditional feast. When money is scarce, elopment is made-to-order. Occasionally, it is not followed by legal marriage. However, free unions of this sort more often involve widows, widowers, or others whose marital situation has been dissolved; families with single daughters will usually try to secure legal sanction. Free unions entered into as second marriages, on the other hand, do not at all diminish the reputation of the parties involved. Even male bigamy is accepted, and does not cause rivalry between the two women. True, such cases are not very frequent,²⁹ but there are enough of them to show a lingering pattern of old colonial ways in male sexual behavior and they bring to light the conformism that continues to permeate women's upbringing.

For women, matrimony is regarded as the soundest social fate, even in urban areas; while the countryside has no place for the bachelor. The social position of a young girl bereft of her parents is totally indeterminate and her economic situation extremely insecure. So powerful are these forces that in the countryside a girl who has passed the ideal marriage age will sometimes break the traditional reserve and embark upon amorous conquest, though she may be aware that the life awaiting her after marriage is a grim one. If young bachelors are scarce, she will attach herself to a married man, since even a free union of this sort is considered preferable to the life of a spinster.

The married woman occupies a singular position in the rural, backwoods family of southern Brazil. She may do as much subsistence labor as the man, although she will be spared the heavier tasks, and in addition she does all the household chores, including caring for the children. Yet once outside the intimacy of the home, a woman is not her husband's equal. In the presence of strangers she withdraws

into the background, not daring to enter into conversations or even to remain nearby. At feasts her role is to prepare the food, and she enters the dining room or hall only to serve the guests. One more observation will round out the picture of the conjugal inequality of rural life: "On journeys or trips into town, the husband may be seen riding on the family's only horse, with the wife trotting along behind bearing the youngest child."³⁰

This describes accurately enough the situation in the state of São Paulo, a region which has seen most of the disadvantages as well as advantages of modernization. In areas that have been economically stagnant, vestiges of old patriarchal family patterns linger on in even greater abundance. There, broken by the strenuous farmwork and household chores, crushed by an endless succession of maternities, and reaping only marginally the benefits of increasing opportunities for social contact, it is only by humble submission that a woman may secure the social position and economic security made necessary by rural isolation. Since women still perform a basic economic function in the rural family, there is no need to mystify her by concealing her social heteronomy under an outward show of equal treatment at the personal level.

The persistence of the patriarchal family structure may no longer be evident inasmuch as the extended family is being pushed increasingly into the background by the conjugal family, but old patterns remain very much present in the institution of the godparent. Family solidarity has come more and more to reside in the godparents, who have effectively become part of the kinship structure in that they fill the place of natural parents. While their obligations with regard to socialization and religious training have become superfluous, their closeness and companionship continues to be very much coveted and still performs its traditional functions.³¹ In urban areas these ties are becoming looser, and traditional obligations are undergoing a process of redefini-

tion, as the younger generations gradually effect change in the structure of kinship by marriage, through the religious sacrament of baptism. In rural Brazil, where kinship by marriage serves an important function, godparent relations do not show any notable signs of disintegration.

Thus, relations between husband and wife have undergone substantial changes only in the more urbanized areas of the country, where the conjugal family has taken root. Although at its core it has clung to the old moral traditions, the urban family has adjusted to the new roles that economic change has brought for women. Education is being extended to growing numbers of women, and in so doing has induced members of both sexes to initiate a process of redefinition of women's social roles.³² But formal schooling is only one aspect of education, and hence while some aspects of the female personality are being brought into line with modern life as a result of exposure to new conceptions of the world, others have remained immersed in tradition. The male personality also shows the effects of uneven development, but it is among women that the process has been most conspicuous. The most recent social and economic changes have had deeper repercussions on women; specifically, their roles have undergone transformations that have sometimes clashed with religious and moral conceptions. History, of course, does not proceed by a series of synchronized ruptures in all of society's structures at once, so that this uneven development is to be expected. But what is important is that a process of redefining the world, and, within it, the social roles of men and women and their relations with each other, has begun. In this process education occupies a place of fundamental importance, and it is to this that we now turn.

Notes to Chapter 6: The Social Position of Women

1. The patrimonial structure resides in a decentralization of the household "when the lord settles dependents (including young men regarded as family members) on plots within his extended landholdings, with a house and family of their own, and provides them with animals and equipment." Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 3, p. 1010. Patrimonial domination derives originally from organized power over the household; patriarchal domination is "essentially based not on the official's commitment to an impersonal purpose and not on obedience to abstract norms, but on a strict personal loyalty. The roots of patriarchal domination grow out of the master's authority over his household." *Ibid.*, p. 1006.
2. See Caio Prado Jr., *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, p. 362.
3. Although it is not my intention to classify Brazilian society according to Weber's typology, which rests on a specific interpretation of history, it is useful to employ his concepts in their political dimension insofar as it is possible to separate them from their economic dimension.
4. See Fernando Henrique Cardoso, *Capitalismo e Escravidão no Brasil Meridional*, p. 108.
5. Weber, *Economy and Society*, vol. 3, p. 1070.
6. Weber discusses this point more fully:

Patrimonialism is compatible with household and market economy, petty bourgeois and manorial agriculture, and the absence and presence of capitalist economy. . . . In general we can say about capitalism only that, since its opportunities for expansion are limited under feudalism and patrimonialism, its champions usually attempt to substitute bureaucratization or a plutocratic domination by *honoratioren*. This, too, however, is only true of production-oriented modern capitalism, based on the rational enterprise, the division of labor and fixed capital, whereas politically oriented capitalism, just as capitalist wholesale trade, is very much compatible with patrimonialism. . . . In contrast to feudalism, *trade* has often been a historically important factor in the development of strong, centralized patrimonial bureaucracies.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 1091-92.)

7. Roger Bastide and Florestan Fernandes, *Branços e Negros em São Paulo*, p. 83.
8. The question here is one of a correspondence between interethnic

- and racial stratification and socioeconomic stratification, according to Florestan Fernandes. (*Ibid.*, p. 79) In my opinion, the question is rather one of a correspondence between social stratification and class structure, although in slavocratic Brazil the classes only partially tested on caste stratification.
9. Prado Jr., *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, p. 342.
 10. The belief in the authority of the lord is "rooted in filial piety, in the close and permanent living together of all dependents of the household which results in an external and spiritual community of fate. The woman is dependent because of the normal superiority of the physical and intellectual energies of the male." Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1007.
 11. See, *inter alia*, Charles Expilly, *Mulheres e Costumes do Brasil*.
 12. In a letter dated June 19, 1881, in which Ina von Binzer describes her life as a tutoress in Brazil, she says: "Dona Gabriela, Dona Olímpia, and Dona Emília are already nineteen, twenty-one, and twenty-two years old, respectively, which means for Brazilians they are almost old maids." Ina von Binzer, *Alegrias e Tristezas de uma Educadora Alemã no Brasil*, p. 23.
 13. See *inter alia*, Domingos do Loreto Couto, *Desagravos do Brasil e Glórias de Pernambuco*, vol. 24; and Afonso de E. Taunay, *Sob el-Rei Nosso Senhor*, cited by Gilbert Freyre, *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, vol. 2, p. 588.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 592.
 15. A. Alcântara Machado, *Vida e Morte do Bandeirante*, chapter entitled "A Família." This author claims that vast legions of bastards grew "alongside and in the shadow of the legitimate family. Few were the homes in which they were not present" (p. 158).
 16. "Our most humble poor display a most shameful lustfulness with an impudence that finds no counterpart in the most corrupt cities of Europe." Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, *Voyages aux sources du Rio São Francisco et dans la province de Goyaz*, vol. 1, p. 127.
 17. See Antônio Cândido Mello e Souza, "The Brazilian Family," in Smith, *Brazil—Portrait of Half a Continent*, p. 296.
 18. In a letter dated July 11, 1882, written in the province of São Paulo, Ina von Binzer refers to the activity of Dona Maria Luisa, the woman of the household where the German tutoress was teaching:

She is everywhere, she always has her eye on the blacks; she herself is an excellent white master. . . . She makes the butter

herself, despite the considerable difficulties involved, using a cream separator as a churn; she sews on and on without tiring at her Singer, making underclothing and dresses for the children and huge winter coats for the house servants. In short, she is busier than any of those celebrated German Hausfrauen in a much more trying situation, and she demands and receives the consideration and respect of all. . . . Dona Maria Luisa, unlike the majority of Brazilian mistresses of the house, has literally everything under control.

(Binzer, *Alegrias e Tristezas*, pp. 99-100.)

19. Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, vol. 2, p. 587.
20. Mello e Souza, "The Brazilian Family," p. 303.
21. Gilberto Freyre, *Sobrados e Mocambos*, vol. 1, p. 102.
22. Property, "the source of all political rights, assumes, so to speak, the traits of sovereignty. It is the privilege of free men. Women in principle shall not be permitted sway over it." Machado, *Vida e Morte do Bandeirante*, p. 41.
23. The dowry made by Garcia Rodrigues Velho for his daughter included "first, two silk dresses, one of satin, and a third of camel's hair." *Ibid.*, p. 155.
24. The economic consequences of the full establishment of the capitalist system of production in Brazil with regard to female roles will be analyzed later.
25. Blacks began to constitute legal families about the middle of the nineteenth century. In areas with a high concentration of blacks, such as Bahia and Maranhão, there was a hybrid between legal, Christian monogamous marriage and certain primitive customs with regard to the organization of sexual and domestic life, and a marked polygynous tendency. See Mello e Souza, "The Brazilian Family," p. 305.
26. Even the members of the Catholic clergy recognized that the roles society ascribed to the Brazilian married woman were incompatible with the indissoluble Christian family. In various pronouncements Father Charbonneau indicated a favorable attitude toward a transformation of woman's roles within the family so that the woman would be able to act as her husband's lover alongside of her other functions.
27. Emílio Willems, "A estrutura da família brasileira," p. 332.
28. Even at the end of the empire the number of persons who were legally married was infinitesimally small. "The family as a bureaucratic privilege, within the means of 27 percent of the population,

is not a public institution; it is an immoral disgrace." Tito Lívio de Castro, *A Mulher e a Sociogenia*.

29. Antônio Cândido Mello e Souza, "A vida familiar do caipira," p. 350.
30. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 352.
31. Antônio Cândido has summarized this as follows:

In theory, the purpose of selecting a godfather is his function as a replacement for the father; in practice, the godchild functions almost always as merely an occasion for establishing some sort of cross-familial bonds. But in principle, the function of the godfather is so clear and so important that very often grandchildren refer to their grandfathers by this name, regardless of whether they are real godchildren or not, thus demonstrating the semi-paternal character of that institution.

(*Ibid.*, p. 358.) See also Donald Pierson, "Família e compadrio numa comunidade rural paulista."

32. A recent event shows not only that female roles are undergoing a redefinition within urban industrial centers, but also that certain taboos are vanishing. The January issue of the journal *Realidade*, devoted entirely to the woman question, was widely read in the large cities. Half of the issue of 300,000 copies was sold in little more than one day, even though it was confiscated as soon as it appeared. (A statement by the first curator of minors of Guanabara, Newton de Barros Vasconcelos, published in *Fôlha de São Paulo*, January 5, 1967, read in part: "in neither the press nor in any other human activity . . . shall different situations be blended together indiscriminately with the manifest intent of perverting aims, confusing minds, and upsetting the social order.")

Notes to Chapter 7:

Education for Women in Brazil

from the Colonial Period to the Present

1. On the instruction of parents in their religious tasks, see Serafim Leite, *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*.
2. Fernando de Azevedo, *A Cultura Brasileira*, pp. 512-13.
3. According to Gilberto Freyre, for example:

In the sixteenth century, priests and brothers of the more flexible orders, that is, with the exception of the Jesuits who