

Family, healthcare and education: articulations between the public and private spheres

In the Essays section of this issue, *Interface* brings its readers studies based on different theoretical bases, coming from various fields of knowledge centered on the institution of the family. They penetrate the fields of healthcare and education, establishing a productive dialogue with them, and one that leads to instigating thinking as to the relations between this institution, of a private nature, and the public sphere.

The specificity of this issue, however, lies in the theme that underlies all the work, both that which discusses several aspects of home life, and the others. This underlying unity results from the way in which the studied themes are analyzed, as the frame of reference for all of them is the social inequality and cultural diversity of Brazilian society, both of which affect family organization and the possibilities of gaining access to formal education, as well as types of healthcare and usage of public healthcare services. These many essays try to understand the singularity of the situations experienced by the underprivileged population within the scope of private life and in their relation with the public sphere.

The texts on the family, which are the fruit of research and theoretical reflection, give rise to questions concerning the different dimensions of home life, particularly among the poor. The analyses look upon the family as a private institution responsible for social reproduction, in its dual dimension, i.e., biological reproduction and socialization, as well as a vehicle that conveys cultural standards that order social life, therein included informal education. The family is also a social group in which affectivity, whether positive or negative, and sociability may be expressed more freely than in the public sphere, and a unit that offers support, protection and healthcare to its members, especially children and the aged. In parallel, the institution of the family is configured as an arena of tension between the many interests and desires of the individual members that make up the group as a whole. Thus, domestic life takes place in a nucleus at once protective and fiery.

All of the papers in the Essays section illustrate, furthermore, the many changes that have become manifest in the organization of the family, articulating an internal analysis of the domestic unit with macro social processes that take place in the economic plane and within the sphere of the State. The changes reveal the heterogeneity of domestic arrangements

grasped through demographic indicators, concerning the size of families, the number of children and the growth of single parenthood. The opposition, or rather, the ambiguous coexistence of familism and individualism, which is present in many of the texts, is a central issue for reflection on the institution of the family, as it leads to the possibility of individual choices within domestic unity, in contrast to aspirations of a group nature. Within the several situations that may give rise to this alternative, there is the decision concerning biological reproduction that, because of the expansion of reproduction technologies (both contraceptive and conceptive) tends to shift toward women the possibility of choosing motherhood. This choice, however, is related to social and racial inequalities as well as to cultural differences, including religious ones, as illustrated by the reproductive behavior of Roman Catholics and Pentecostal or fundamentalist individuals. Moreover, this choice is also subject to State interference, as the government's demographic policy, particularly as regards the underprivileged, focuses on birth control. Moreover, an examination of the data concerning the biological reproduction of young women shows a rising number of children, while, in overall terms, the rate of fertility is declining. This indicates that young women are anticipating stages of their life cycle, entering the reproductive phase precociously. In another stage of their life cycle, "young elderly" women, many under fifth, choose to take part in senior citizen groups, anticipating the transition to another stage of their life cycle. In both cases, the behavior reflects individual, essentially feminine choices, that tend to counter the principle of familism and that, for this very reason, raise rather interesting questions concerning gender relations.

The problematics of education in its relation with the encouragement of healthcare and the avoidance of disease is present in texts indicating the need for healthcare professionals to become aware of the symbolic universe of the underprivileged population that, in embracing dominant cultural patterns, does not reproduce them faithfully, but rather reprocesses them in an ongoing and creative process of cultural renovation. To this end, the texts that deal with medical education and popular education raise suggestive ideas for reflection, concerning the need of lower class families to gain access to both formal and informal education related to healthcare problems, substance abuse and, essentially, to the right to healthcare. Besides this, information on healthcare can be publicized, using entertaining teaching methods such as the "Wave Game", through which it is possible to encourage reflection and debate on the consumption of drugs.

The presentation of the "Pegapacará" project brings this volume to its end, resuming the playful dimension of culture (already highlighted in the "Wave Game"), which is presented in the form of medical and scientific knowledge associated with the popular culture of the hinterlands of the state of Pernambuco, in order to inform people, and women in particular, about sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS and issues related to reproductive behavior. The investigations of this project allow us to resume reflection on the link between the family, healthcare and education while, at the same time, thinking about the relation between the private and the public spheres of life.

Finally, one should take into account a common element that tends to unify the analyses on the institution of the home and other themes, establishing an articulation between the private and public spheres. We are referring to questioning the family inequalities, which relate to other types of inequality, generated in the public sphere and connected to the struggle for the right to education and healthcare, in particular among the underprivileged.

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