

“Dysfunctional contexts and the possibility of resourceful absent ties”

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Introduction

This article presents a current overview of an informal practice present in the Brazilian society known as the *jeitinho* [pronounced *jaytcheenyoo* (Duarte 2006:510)]. The article presents this practice as the sense of imminent possibility for “personalist relationships”, also in casual and ephemeral encounters, stressing the importance of absent ties (Granovetter 1973) for a comprehension of informality in the city.

The influence of the *jeitinho* on social relations in Brazil has been presented in different studies (cf. DaMatta 1979, 1986; Barbosa 2006; Duarte 2006, 2011; Levine 1997, Rosenn 1971; among others). The *jeitinho* is in general considered as a practice that emerged to cope with the excess of formalism imposed during the processes of urbanization and industrialization. In practical terms, the *jeitinho* is said to be a characteristic of the *malandro*, a social personage from 19th century, Rio de Janeiro. This social personage is known for its specific way of acting, a specific behavior that entails an informal lifestyle and the use of mischief, creativity and improvisation to get by (Rodrigues et al. 2011; Barbosa 2006; DaMatta 1986). Surely, the *jeitinho* from the 19th century *malandro* has nuances that changed along historical and urban development. However the notion of such specific way of acting to get by remains in the social imaginary in Brazil, strongly perceived as a national identity (see Barlach 2013).

Despite that, and the fact that it is considered a counteraction to formalism, the *jeitinho* constitutes a set of personal characteristics that are used strategically to get by. These characteristics, normally related to friendliness, are associated to the effectiveness of a *jeitinho* to solve problems (see Barbosa 2006), used as skills to enhance the capability of managing social situations to create or foster advantageous relations. Such relationships might not even exist or be considered irrelevant from a network standpoint, they can as well, be part of casual encounters that happen in everyday life in the city.

It is important to highlight that these social skills work on an emotional and personal level, but that does not mean that the relationships involved are always

personal. Rather, the idea is to “personalize” the most varied social situations, fostering what we explore here as “personalist situations”, not enduring, superficial, yet with high level of intimacy and personalist elements.

Therefore, the role of personalism as a way to shape relationships is explored in this article for a comprehension of how informal practices are used by individuals to get things done by “personalizing” relations, and as a universalized practice, even in the most trivial situations. If one goes to a bakery in Brazil, one might observe that there are ways to behave to guarantee that you get served first, or ask the seller to save some product for you even if there are other customers looking for it and there is none left. These ways involve the personalization of the situation, not necessarily related to strong ties (Granovetter 1973), and those short contacts affect the way someone uses and thinks about the paths in the city.

The Brazilian *jeitinho* is a practice that is submerged in an informal lifestyle, improvisation and creativity when dealing with problems, obstacles, limitations and hierarchization (cf. Barbosa 2006), said to emerge from the excessive formalism of institutions (Duarte 2006, DaMatta 1979). Oriented toward practical functions, the practice is at the same time structured and structuring different patterns of informal social interactions.

At least in the social imaginary the practice confirms its frequency and weight in social encounters in Brazil. The idea that it is always possible to solve a problem with a *jeitinho* (see Barbosa 2006:47) represents in the social imaginary the imminent possibility for the use of social relationships to ask for assistance and information, even with total strangers. Considering that, the theory of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1992) may highlight important aspects for the comprehension of the *jeitinho*. Therefore, this will be explored further through the notion of a relational *habitus*, or a common set of social skills and dispositions that are passed on through social, cultural and emotional aspects, and is reproduced through the individual capability of shaping social encounters, and the notion of diffuse reciprocity (Barbosa 2006:43), that is not an immediate reciprocity but there is a trust that the *jeitinho* will be reciprocated, not

necessarily directly: “anyone can receive retribution for a *jeitinho* that was not granted by him or her” (Ibid.).

Commonly portrayed as a practice that is draw on the notion of improvisation and creativity when facing problems, limitations or bureaucratic barriers, on the other hand, it might be related to fraud, corruption and swindle. In one way or the other the *jeitinho* is typically attributed to problematic contexts. Therefore, some authors position the phenomenon as a *continuum* in which “favor” is on the positive side and “corruption” on the negative side (Ferreira et al. 2012; see also Barbosa 2006). The interest here is not to bring up a peremptory conceptualization of the Brazilian *jeitinho* that would finish the discussions that ask if it is a benign social practice or not. Rather it is to present the practice as a “measure of stability and confidence” a “regularized practice to get things done” (cf. Simone 2001). Even if the practice of the *jeitinho* arises in contexts in which individuals are facing problems with no apparent solution, it is not only present in precarious environments as we will see. Despite being a phenomenon that function as a trigger for the mobilization of networks when facing complications or seeking for resources, and a “strategic behavior to get things done” in dysfunctional environments (cf. Duarte 2006), its regularities and regulations are not restricted to specific environments.

Getting things done with creativity and improvisation. How is it so?

Nunes (1997) states that familiar life has great importance in Brazil and the accelerated industrialization did not affect the familiar structure the same way that it has in other capitalist societies. When in Brazil people say “my family” the reference is the extensive family, utilizing “my wife (husband) and children” when referring to the nuclear family. During the process of industrialization and urbanization there was a strong emphasis in individual realization, however this emphasis was made within the familiar environment, and this “individuation” was followed by a reinforcement of the extensive familiar structure (*kinship/parentela*), exactly in the urban and industrial centers (Ibid.:30-31). This individuation, with reinforcement of the kinship ties created

an intersection between kinship and social order that are determining in the process of development.

This notion of individuation with reinforcement of kinship, during the process of urbanization and industrialization, has given origin to the high level of “personalism” in Brazilian society. Dominant in the analysis about the country’s development (Souza 2001), this perspective assumes that personalism is intrinsic to the Brazilian culture, and has impregnated and “framed” many institutions.

[...] Personalism is alive and well in contemporary Brazil, reflected in the centrality of networks of family and friends which are routinely called upon to solve problems or to grant favors. (Duarte 2006:34).

In Brazil, the universalism of procedures is constantly under tension. [...] The propensity to personalism is well illustrated by the institution of the *jeitinho* and the use of personal authority, well represented by the expression “do you know who you’re talking to?” brilliantly and extensively analyzed by DaMatta (Nunes, 1997:31-32).

DaMatta (1997) is one of the classic authors of this perspective, according to him the Brazilian dilemma lies in this symbolic conflict between the personalism of social relations and the impersonalism of universal bureaucratic systems that have been implemented in the processes of development. This author states that the *jeitinho* allows the individual to “pass from a social status to another”, going from the impersonal anonymity, in which equality and individualism are the core, to a social position defined within a personal logic. To DaMatta, this conflict is the result of the differences between the notion of “individual” and “person” that is present in the Brazilian society, and operate simultaneously in the social system. According to the theoretical paradigm of personalism, the *jeitinho* is related to the notion of “person”, functioning almost as a “sense of being a person” in determined situations that is inherent to the Brazilian culture.

Souza (2001, 2004) questioned this perspective, especially with respect to a naturalization of personalist characteristics in Brazilians as a justification for the persistent social problems we have:

The notion of personalism (that is the dominant interpretation of Brazilians about themselves, be it in the sphere of methodical

reflection, or in the political and institutional sphere, is related to the notions of Iberian heritage and patrimonialism. It is a conception that has representatives such as Buarque de Holanda and DaMatta, and has become since long the common sense of everyday reality, and an explicit political project that influences decisively our institutional reality and the social practices associated to it. (Souza, 2001:51).

According to Souza's (2001) argument, to this body of research, especially in his dialogue with DaMatta, personalism is perceived as the only way we exercise the social critics of our problems, as the counterpoint to the problems of institutionalism. "We are behind because we are personalists in this largely dominant sociology among us" (ibid.:61). What enables this paradigm to be dominant is the interpretation of the urbanization processes that emphasizes this transformation mainly as a following model of bureaucracy and institutionalization of Europe and North America that would never be complete because of the cultural personalism present in Brazilian society (ibid).

In this sense, the *jeitinho*, and other personalist informal practices, are part of a cultural scheme that should be eradicated for the stability and functionality of a democratic and egalitarian society, organized by its institutions and bureaucratic processes. However the complexion of the *jeitinho* poses a tricky question: since it is a known practice to get things done (Duarte 2006), and proven to be "a problem solving strategy" and "a benign social mechanism used in work settings for positive, altruistic purposes" (Duarte 2011:524), it is not simply a personalist informal practice that disrupts social stability. On the contrary, because it may as well be used with such finalities, the *jeitinho* might be the measure for social stability in adverse situations. Thus, practices viewed as being "from below", as results of dysfunctional contexts are not necessarily disruptive, nor function as a simple cultural resistance, innate behaviors proper from cultures that do not adapt as expected to the models of urbanization.

That implication is not clear in propositions about the practice based on the paradigm of personalism. At the same time that the *jeitinho* is portrayed as "a social navigation tool" (DaMatta 1986), "a coping mechanism to deal with stressful situations" and a "problem-solving strategy to get things done" (Duarte 2011), the

innatism attributed to the practice resume it either in a “cultural resistance” to the domination of the impersonal relations that the processes of urbanization impose, or in an eternal capacity of resilience that is intrinsic to societies like Brazil.

Souza (2001) draw attention to the duality of this argument, especially when DaMatta opposes the “individual, that does not participate in any powerful system of personal relations, and the “person”, innate from the personalism and plasticity of Brazilians, therefore, basically relational. (Ibid.:51). The intention of DaMatta is to demonstrate that he perceived “the profound grammar” of the social universe in Brazil by bringing together two dimensions of the social formation “the culturalist dimension (sociology of the person) and the institutionalist dimension (sociology of the individual)”(Ibid.:48). The main problematic in this duality is the lack of an articulation between these two dimensions. According to Souza, DaMatta does not clarify the Brazilian singularity because does not explain the social norms and rules that constitute the articulation between the “individual” and the “person”. “Duality as such is an *aporia*”: without being determined in its rules, it might be used *ad hoc* for a no-number of questions, highlighting one or another principle, without precisely explaining why one, or another, is more or less efficient. The ultimate explanation is an indeterminate duality, which varies according to the situation (Souza 2001:51).

Nevertheless, what stands out in the personalist perspective is that possibility of not being part of any powerful system of personal relations, as the “individual”, however be able to shape intimacy in social situations, and thus be seen as a “person”. According to DaMatta, the *jeitinho* is exactly what allows the individuals to transform relations with personalist elements, that means that even if the criticism made by Souza is pointing on the right direction of overcoming dual explanations, it does not cover the ability some “individuals” have to obtain empathy from others and be seen as “persons” to have their needs and existence recognized in society. In that sense, by the perspective of personalism, only in transactions where people manage to be seen as “person” they are able to guarantee their survival and access to resources. This assumption has implications for social inequality, for example.

Now, this is a problematic point of explaining the practice mainly through the paradigm of cultural personalism. That perspective implies that in Brazil, for someone to flourish as a citizen, it is intrinsically necessary to become, or maintain, his conditions as a “person”, which on one hand would presume the reinforcement of familiar, kinship and affective ties, and on the other that institutions and organizations maintain a high level of personalism in its processes.

The expansion of many services lately in Brazil has considerably reduced inequality in multiple dimensions, as the recent publication of Arretche (2015) demonstrate. Income inequalities have become lower; access to fundamental school, electricity and waste removal has become almost universal; the association between poverty and lack of access to basic services has significantly diminished; and so on (Ibid.:424).

That means that as the social system expands, these informal practices used to get things done gain different significance. To say that personalism is “alive and well” in Brazilian society (Duarte 2011), that this is part of the social dilemma (DaMatta 1997), a matter of cultural behavior, that the *jeitinho* is an “universal practice used from the janitor to the businessman” (Barbosa 2006), would lead us to think that, on one hand, all the individuals that are benefited by the expansion in social services are so because they are able to deal with institutionalization and bureaucratic processes as “persons”. On the other hand, the ones who continue excluded from the social benefits, because even if inequalities have diminished they are far from being eradicated, are those who are not able to be seen as “persons”, and that would have effects when accessing social benefits. That would explain how the *jeitinho* produce inequality in society, and corroborates with the idea that it should be eradicated, so the benefits would be better universalized. However, the urbanization processes are more complex than that, and the nuances of such informal practice must be explored for a better comprehension of it.

Souza (2001) affirm that the personalism is presented in a generic and indeterminate duality, in which some individuals have personal relations that are able to remove them from the “declassifying impersonality of the multitude of mass

individuals” (2002:7). As if, using DaMatta’s terms (1997) “in a society commanded by personal relations there is the “home”, social spaces of personalist and affectionate practices and the “street” of the impersonal practices of the modern world”. This clear separation between both worlds presupposes that institutional practices have no influence in the “personal world”, as if, for example, “the socialization and education of children by their parents was not largely influenced by the knowledge gained from psycho-social presuppositions [...] that gives account to the core of the imperatives of institutional reproduction of these practices that control our relative chances of life and access to benefits and scarce resources” (Souza 2005:90).

Regardless of making a relevant criticism to the dualist perception and the naturalization of personalism in societies like Brazil, when attributing socialization as mainly influenced by the “imperatives of institutional reproduction” because those are what “control our chances and access to benefits and resources”, this author seem to deny the importance of personal networks to the access of goods and services outside the markets (Marques et al. 2008; Marques 2012). If the personal relations are not so important as institutional imperatives for the outcomes of an individual, patterns of mobilization of personal networks would not be important for the access to goods and services, and researchers have already stressed the importance of such networks to obtaining resources (see Blokland and Savage 2008; Marques 2012).

Also the formation of informal practices regardless pre-made rules or institutionalizations would be almost impossible, meaning that an individual should pertain to a class or a group and necessarily rely on institutions and organizations to guarantee access to benefits and resources. The *jeitinho* would be the contrary of that, first because it is a practice associated to shady social spaces, located in interstitial places within society, however universalized as a national identity. Second because it is an imminent possibility of forming, or transforming, relations to achieve personal aims. In that sense, the practice take contours of an attempt to mobilize personal and impersonal encounters in a peculiar way that can involve any type of social tie, including absent ties (Granovetter 1973).

In Brazil, for example, there is a code of how to behave to “get things done” associated to personalist elements and skills that involve emotional categories like friendliness, charm, politeness, *simpatia* (the ability to empathize and strive for harmony in interpersonal relations, see Duarte 2011), and so on, to obtain empathy from others.

If you are calm and *simpático*¹ and all that, you’ll get things done. But if you lose your cool, or if you don’t treat people nicely –even if you just raise your voice or give people a disapproving look– they will get angry, and even if you’re right, they won’t help you [...] At work, I’ve noticed that people often say “I know I had to help the customer but he was rude and shouted at me. So, I decided not to help him.” (Rodrigo, Retail industry employee. Source: Duarte, 2011:40).

Duarte (2011) sustain that *jeitinho* is used strategically in Brazilian society. Drawing on DaMatta’s and Barbosa’s description of the *jeitinho* as a “*simpático way*” of doing things, she states that “The *jeitinho* embodies our cordial, conciliatory, joyful, *simpático*, warm spirit, [the spirit] of a beautiful, sensual, young tropical country, full of possibilities” (Ibid.:35). On one hand, the argument is interesting because it exposes this “sympathetic way of doing things”, and how this way of behaving is important to get things done. On the other hand, the innatism of this behavior attributed to a “sensual, young tropical country” might lead us again to the assumption of “eternal resilience”, and cultural answer for the outcomes of society and perpetuation of inequalities. Therefore there is a necessity to move away from this dualist perspective of personalism and give attention to the way this “sympathetic way of doing things” affects the access to resources, how this has implications to the use of absent ties and informality and the permanence of inequalities in the city.

Souza (2005) proposes for a new perspective on the interpretation of the social formation in Brazil. He has the intention to demonstrate how the naturalization of inequalities in countries like Brazil should be understood not like a supposed pre-modern and personalist heritage, but by the contrary, as a result of an effective

¹ The quality of having *simpatia*.

process of modernization of big proportions, that imposes by reference, even if “selectively”, the historical European and north American models, coming to Brazil in the beginning of the XIX century. To this author, the State and the markets reproduce and materialize empirical impulses that actualize everyday life through a peculiar *habitus* (in the Bourdieusian sense), inscribed in the bodies through gestures, ways of dressing, talking, moving, expressing oneself, and that are not at all related to some “atavistic personalism” (Ibid. 2002:7).

Souza defends the importance of the concept of *habitus* for a theory of classification, and therefore a better social recognition of peripheric countries (2002:7). Drawing on Bourdieu’s conceptualization of *habitus*, Souza divides it in a triad: a *primary habitus* that is part of the objective demands for an individual or social group, to be considered productive and useful, able to enjoy all the social recognition and its dramatic existential and political consequences. In the “limit below” from this *primary habitus* is the *precarious habitus*, whose personalities and dispositions of behaviors do not attend the objective demands of the *primary habitus*. Finally, in the “limit above” is the *secondary habitus*, that presupposes the generalization of the *primary habitus* to large strata of the population, based on the homogeneity of operative principles determined in the *primary habitus*, and institutes classificatory criteria of social distinction, which Bourdieu call “taste” (Souza, 2005:80).

The *primary habitus* is the one that is related to an adequate performance of functions in the market that presuppose, as well, a specific secondary socialization in school, and a privileged access to information. Those privileges are from a group of individuals that have been able to “europeanize” themselves, by “adapting their structures of personality to the new objective exigencies in which the differential performances are effectively measured”. Plus, the author states that personalism is an intervening variable, but in no way personal relations are necessary in this context. “In that sense, there is no background difference between the modern societies of the center and the modern societies of periphery”. (Souza, 2002:7-8).

This notion of *habitus* is highly determined by the class or social strata of the individual. Notwithstanding the central criticism made by Souza (2001) about the

damattian scheme of analysis is that, because we cannot find classes or social groups in DaMatta's work, social stratification is of small interest in his explanation, so it lacks explaining why some values are institutionalized and others not, being mainly understood as "something that exists independent of its institutionalization, acting in a mysterious way over the individuals and social spaces".

So according to Souza's (2004:93) criticism, the economic and cultural capital are structuring, but that is not valid for social capital of personal relations, even if "personal relations are important in the definition of carriers and individual chances of social aspiration", they could not be determinant in institutional relations. Souza is referring to a social capital defined mainly by the accumulation of contacts and influence: "it is as if the personal relations play among us the role of Judiciary in individualist and egalitarian countries" (Ibid.).

However, the *jeitinho* only happens through personal contacts, without great attention to its relational dimension it is not possible to comprehend its patterns of sociability and mobilization of resources. And the mobilization of resources mediated by the *jeitinho* is not necessarily being structured by institutions, classes or social groups. What structures the practice is the imminent possibility of fostering or creating personalist situations, and the diffuse reciprocity (Barbosa 2006; Duarte 2006).

The differentiation of "personal situations" to "personalist situations" is necessary to indicate that despite being "personalized" there is not an obligation of enduring personal relations, kinship or friendship relations, for the situations that involve such informal practices. In that sense, what *jeitinho* would tell us the most is about the possibility of personalization of ties that informal practices seem to bring up.

Following Souza's logic, the "sociology of the Brazilian *jeitinho*" would simply reduce the complex world to a world of personal and friendship relations, which would never achieve a comprehension of the complexities of the formation of the Brazilian social development². However, the proposal presented by Souza does not explain how informal practices are reproduced in the social world, happening independently of

² Interview given to the O Globo newspaper. Available at:
<http://oglobo.globo.com/blogs/prosa/posts/2012/05/12/entrevista-com-sociologo-jesse-souza-444686.asp>

institutional regulations, but not necessarily dissociated, and not necessarily related to personal and friendship relations.

Also the domination of a *primary habitus* that homogenizes the ones who are able to take part on the demands of the social relations of the market and the State, do not take in account practices that not necessarily rely on personal relations, but that bring up personalist, emotional categories and informal behavior opening a possibility of personalization of relations that is not predicted in the “imperative institutional reproduction”, but that are happening and making things happen, especially considering that bureaucracy is the domain *par excellence* of the *jeitinho* (Barbosa 2006:46), and that it is used in bureaucratic environments as a problem-solving strategy (Duarte 2006). It is as if the explanation for the reproduction of inequalities of access to resources by the duality of the “individual” and the “person” was surpassed by the idea of *primary habitus*, with high amount of institutionalized relations, to which do not participate the individuals who are not able to “europeanize” themselves, and thus share the *precarious habitus*.

In Souza’s triad of *habitus*, the practice of *jeitinho* would be a feature of the *precarious habitus* that insists to endure its negative effects, being part of the inability to achieve the objective demands of the *primary habitus*. It would be part of the absence of “cognitive preconditions for an adequate completion of the demands (variable in time and space) for the role of producer” (Souza 2004:89) that constitutes the *precarious habitus*, “with direct consequences on the rights of citizenship” (Ibid.).

To some authors, even in affluent societies as Germany, it is observed that today some segments of workers and individuals with low income that live from social security, present traces of a *precarious habitus* (Bittlingmayer, 2002: 225-254 *apud* Souza 2004:87).

However, this would not explain, for example, how come in Brazil people from middle class that fulfill the expectations of the *primary habitus*, identify themselves with the practice and make uses for it (since the *jeitinho* is an informal practice used from the “janitor” to the “businessman” as Barbosa suggests), either would explain how it happens to persist as a problem-solving strategy in organizational contexts.

Souza did not deny the existence of such informal practices, and made a relevant criticism to the analysis that attributed the persistence of social inequalities uniquely because of the cultural patterns of resistance to the impersonality of institutions, among them the *jeitinho*. Yet, by withholding the importance of personal relations in the mobilization and access to resources, the scheme proposed by Souza limits the *jeitinho* to a particular class of individuals with a *habitus* that lies in precarity because cannot afford to exist by the objective demands of the institutionalized world. That would imply that the informal practices that utilize emotional categories and personalist elements are inexistent in social classes that share the *primary habitus*, which is simply not the case.

Willingly or otherwise there exist in Brazil a social consensus that the *jeitinho* might be a practice resorted by anyone in society (cf. Barbosa 2006). A practical example of this is that in 2013 the results of a research for the contribution to public policy and strengthening of institutions published by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV - Brasil) launched the IPCLBrasil (Index of Perception of Law Enforcement). The IPCLBrasil is composed by the sub-index of Behavior, formed by evaluations of the frequency the interviewees said to have violated the social harmony and the law, and the sub-index of Perception, composed by four indicators: legitimacy, instrumentality, social control and morality.

The indicator of legitimacy evaluated the opinion of the interviewees according to the importance they give to law obedience and to obedience to the police and the judges. One of the results for the last trimester of 2012 and the first of 2013 is that 79% of the individuals interviewed agree that, whenever possible, the Brazilian citizen appeal to the practice of the *jeitinho*. The majority of people that participated and agreed with this information had high income and secondary education (FGV-IPCLBrasil Report, 4^otri 2012-1^otri 2013). The actualized data equivalent to the first trimester of 2015, shows that 80% of the interviewed agreed that Brazilians tend to opt for the use of the *jeitinho*, the majority with the highest income that appeared in the poll (more than 8 times the 788,00 reais minimum wage, approximately 223,60 Euros and 255,00 dollars)(FGV-IPCLBrasil Report, 1^otri 2015).

By Souza's logic it is possible to assume that people with such incomes are able to participate appropriately in the market and institutions, and thus share the same *primary habitus*, the same dispositions to be considered productive and useful. Yet an expressive number recognize the usability of the practice of the *jeitinho*. How could this issue be addressed without falling in the trap that it is a cultural heritage that is passed through the persistence of personalism to cope with excess of formalism that is intrinsic to the processes of urbanization and industrialization in Brazil, or that it is a facet of a *precarious habitus* in society, that is reproduced through personalities and dispositions of behaviors that do not comply with the imperatives of institutional reproduction?

The suggestion here is that if "the social world is ontologically constituted by relational patterns of various types and intensities in continual transformation" (Marques 2012:28), the *jeitinho* works in Brazil as a relational *habitus*, in which the social knowledge and "personalist" skills, the emotional content used to manipulate, or shape personal and impersonal situations, is a common feature, even if the actors pertain to different social classes.

As Marques points out 'networks and sociability patterns mediate access and the goods and services provided', but this does not mean that people do not have access to the market, goods and services through social support that is not subsumed to the logic of the market or the state, and through them are solving several daily problems and mitigating situations of poverty (2012a:119), for example. In that sense, at least when acting as mediator of access to goods and services through the ability of shaping social situations into "personalist situations", the *jeitinho* structures some patterns of mobilization of resources.

Since it is not an informal social practice that is product or outcome of durable engagements between people, but a *manière* people use to shape their relations, it should not be considered simply as an informal resistance to impositions of urbanizations processes in the cities. As an informal practice that entails the use of "personalized" relations to get things done, the *jeitinho* is ontologically a relational practice. But the relational proposed here is not exactly the relational proposed by

DaMatta. The relational proposed here refers to the “personalization” of impersonal situations, and thus the possibility of fostering “personalist relationships”.

The *jeitinho* is a relational practice not only because the development of social relations in the country sanctioned this practice as a form of informal sociability (with variations determined by social capital in general) even in formal environments, the *jeitinho* is relational because it function as a trigger for the use of personal and impersonal contacts when facing complications or seeking for resources. It is a relational practice because it assumes the character of being a strategic tool to get things done in the use of social relations.

Resourceful absent ties and dysfunctional contexts

The practice of the *jeitinho* represents a way of interaction in which creativity and improvisation foster informal patterns of sociability that determines substantial transactions. It has become an effective mechanism to deal with norms and social regulations in dysfunctional bureaucratic contexts in Brazil (Duarte 2006). Duarte states that *jeitinho*, and other personalist characteristics “can be seen as coping mechanisms to deal with stressful situations arising from dysfunctional environments” (ibid.:34). The term dysfunctional is used to describe effects of social elements in society that disrupt social stability.

However, as a strategic tool to get things done in dysfunctional environments, the *jeitinho* works *quasi* as a “guarantee” for the stability in such environments. Moving away from assumptions that would think of this as an eternal capacity of resilience, the common sense idea that for every problem there is a *jeitinho* to solve, “in life, you only cannot find a *jeito* to death” (cf. Barbosa 2006:47), expresses how the functionality of unstable environments is imbued of strategies to get things done that are not predicted by formalities, norms and rules.

Those assumptions might lead to think that the *jeitinho* arises mainly in unstable or dysfunctional contexts, ultimately, social spaces with some kind of precarity. Therefore there is a necessity to move away from conceptions that

approximate informal practices to the idea that they are a thing of individuals who are not able to adapt to the transformations of urbanization and social development in the city, especially because, considering its universal character (Barbosa 2006), it is not a practice restricted to precarious environments, and when it is present in spaces with some kind of precarity, it is not a matter of social “maladjustment”, but an aspect of specific functionalities.

Desmond (2012), for example, studying poor neighborhoods in the U.S., identified that resources necessary for survival were transferred through short-lived relationships, between virtual strangers. The author defined this way of shaping social situations as disposable ties, which comprehend forming, using and burning ties whenever needed. In this sense, “strong ties often were treated like weak ones, disposable ties like strong ones” (Ibid. 1311). Disposable ties, as Desmond suggests are “strong yet weak, crucial yet unstable, young yet demanding, personal yet superficial— involving “strangers,” each “near and far at the same time” (Simmel [1908] 1971, p. 148)—disposable ties often are characterized by a short duration but high levels of propinquity and by low levels of trust but high levels of resource exchange”. (Desmond 2012:1329).

There are some similarities with the *jeitinho* here, like the possibility of forming, using and burning ties; however in the situations where the practice mediates the resources, what is formed is not a special type of tie that presume strong ties treated like weak ones, or else. Rather, the *jeitinho* has specific functionalities in each tie. Theoretically, because strong ties (Granovetter 1973) are related to in depth relationships, within a homogeneous group (Soenen 2006:2), there would be no need for a “personalization” of relationships to get things done when the situation involve such ties. In that sense, it would be enough to have a strong and influential personal network, and the chances for the mobilization of resources would be greater. Considering the above exposed, within strong ties, the skills necessary for performing an effective *jeitinho* are less important than an influential network to get things done.

As Marques (2012) demonstrates in the case of São Paulo, the sociability of the middle class, in comparison with the networks of individuals living in poverty, is much

more strongly based on work and education, and much less associated with the local neighborhood. That means that the middle class is more likely to have a more varied set of networks, and since networks influence access to social benefits, these different patterns in networks may indicate causality for the differences in mobilization of resources in situations which the *jeitinho* is the mediator. Thus, accordingly to a perspective that takes in account the networks, considering that the *jeitinho* is an informal practice that depends on social contacts to act as a strategy to get things done, it must be somehow influenced by the different configurations of social networks. Therefore, taking social networks in consideration for an explanation of the patterns of mobilization of resources is important to comprehend how the practice works in different social spaces, within different types of ties.

Thus, when directly related to personal, kin and friendship relationships, the *jeitinho* is more efficient as a practice to get things done when such networks are stronger and influential. However the *jeitinho* might as well work within weak ties. In weak ties, it is a trigger for a more intimate relation that presupposes some type of exchange. In this sense, it rely on the “potential relationships which can be activated when necessary” (Soenen 2006:2), or the imminent possibility of fostering “personalist relationships” with less enduring ties. These relationships can be shaped into more personalized as the situation is carried on with more intimacy. Some examples of situations in which *jeitinho* works by shaping weak ties:

“Yeah, just today I used my charm to get a *jeitinho* [...] I do post-graduate studies and tomorrow I have an exam. I don’t know anything about the subject. I haven’t studied, I don’t know anything, and I won’t learn the stuff by tomorrow. So, I rang the subject coordinator, with whom I have a friendship; a relation of *simpatia*. I told her nicely that I could not do the exam tomorrow, and she said: “Marcos, don’t worry, you can do it next week, so you have some time to study [...] There you go, I got a *jeitinho* through *simpatia*” [giggle]. (Marcos, MBA Student. Source: Duarte 2011:42)

“I could not let [the communities] down. (...) So I had to give a *jeitinho* in the situation. I knew the guy who managed [the environmental Non-Governmental Organization nominated to provide the technical expertise for the courses]; he was a childhood friend. I managed to convince him to reduce the course fees in

exchange for some free workshops on project management I was prepared to give at their NGO. With the reduction in price, we would be able to run the courses. This was highly irregular and I never told the government about it. But everyone was happy at the end!" (Maurício, Project Officer. Source: Duarte 2006:521)

As we can perceive, there are differences of how the *jeitinho* is seen within strong or weak ties, with implications to its functionality and to the amount of resources individuals are able to mobilize. Also, it is possible, for example, the use of strong ties to "personalize" weak ties for the accomplishment of personal aims:

Hospital: Joana is sick and goes to the ER. Once there, she sees that there are 50 people before her in the queue. She then talks to the receptionist and tells her that she used to work at the hospital and is a friend of the nurses, and asks her to be treated before the other people. (Ferreira et al. 2012:18)

In this sense, it is as well important for the effectiveness of the *jeitinho* to have a strong network, in which the weak ties are strong enough to be activated whenever necessary. It is not like with strong ties, because the personal skills related to friendliness, charm and *simpatia*, here also crucial for the effectiveness of the *jeitinho*, and are used more strategically to get things done. Different from the usual empathy already existent within strong ties, within weak ties the *jeitinho* is the trigger to the "personalization", or the creation of empathy for personal aims.

Considering only the strength of the ties in the networks in which the *jeitinho* might be involved, however, might lead us to miss important aspects of the practice that are taking place in the most varied situations. The sense of imminent possibility for "personalist relationships" that is common in Brazil is extended to encounters with strangers. It is not uncommon, for example, to see strangers confiding their everyday lives to each other in the bus³. As Blokland and Nast (2004) remarked:

A crucial aspect of the definition of social capital by Putnam (1995) is that support occurs when one person learns casually about the needs of others. Social capital, such as information about opportunities for

³ Some studies demonstrated the importance of ephemeral relationships in public transportation (see Soenen 2006).

jobs, schools, housing and the like, may well be formed much more through casual conversations and the overhearing of conversations of others than simply through exchanges in strong or weak ties. (Blokland and Nast 2014:1157)

That aspect is important for the comprehension of the practice as a *habitus* that instill in the individuals this imminence for “personalist relationships”, ephemeral, casual, yet with great amount of intimacy, informal behavior and personalist elements, and possibly transaction of different kinds of information. A dimension of the *jeitinho* that has not been explored until now and that might have implications for how exchanges are occurring in everyday lives. Some examples of how this happens objectively in Brazil:

Every time José takes a taxi for company purposes, he has the right to request reimbursement for the amount paid. When he is without money, he requests a receipt for a greater amount than he has paid and submits this to the company. He keeps the extra money. (Ferreira et al. 2012: 335).

“People know that if they are *simpáticos*, if they lower the tone of their voices, or if they joke around with you a bit, maybe this excessive *simpatia* will charm you and will get you to solve their problems.” (Sonia, nurse in a public hospital. Source: Ibid. 2011:39).

“This something I’ve learned [...] you go to the bank, or to the movies, and notice that sometimes people get into negative moods; they don’t feel like working, or whatever. Look, what you should do is to act with politeness; be as polite as you can [speaking loudly and emphatically]. You may be feeling like s***, but you will smile and you will say “Please” [...] otherwise people lose their good will, and you can just give up! In other words, if you’re not *simpática*, my dear, you’ll most certainly hear a “No”!” (Luciana, school teacher. Source: Ibid. 2011:39)

Then, in a situation of *jeitinho*, involving casual encounters the use of personal skills and personalist elements (charm, *simpatia*, friendliness, and so on) is crucial to achieve the objective, and to perform resourceful transactions. DaMatta (1986) defined *jeitinho* as a social navigation tool, the effective summon of the above mentioned characteristics to move better through society. Blokland and Nast (2014)

argue that absent ties (Granovetter 1973) relate to the casual encounters between people one may never see again, and those are as well important for people's sense of belonging in their place of residence. The argument here is similar, absent ties are also important for a comprehension of how informality takes place in the city and how it affects everyday lives, shaping the social structure of relations and exchanges.

Letting the “impersonality” of the city go

DaMatta (1986) affirms that *jeitinho* is a 'clever dodge', a way or a style of performing or achieving something, 'it is a “nice/appealing way” [*modo simpático*], a desperate and human way of relating the personal with the impersonal, which allows combining a personal problem with impersonal problems' (Ibid.63). As mentioned before, personal characteristics like charm, *simpatia* (cf. Duarte 2011), friendliness and kindness, improvisation and creativity, and so on, are used as skills to make the 'other' empathize with the problem.

In this sense, the conceptualization of the *jeitinho* as a relational *habitus*, passed on by the capability of “getting things done” by using “personalization” of networks is important, and therefore it is necessary to comprehend the plurality of categories that permeate the practice as action and as skills, since there are emotional and personalist features that implicate the effectiveness of a *jeitinho*. Also, the notion that informal practices with a greater level of personalism are able to foster “personalist relations” enabling exchanges with strangers, matter for the comprehension of how this *habitus* operates. It indicates, as well, that informal and personalist behaviors might be related to absent ties.

Considering the fact that the *jeitinho* is a characteristic of the socialization of the country during its urbanization processes, it is possible to say that the notion that an individual is able to transform the quality of its relations is passed on in Brazilian society through this relational *habitus* that entails specific emotional and social capital. As Froyum (2009) highlights, the concept of emotional capital suggests that adults transfer emotion management skills to children, also it is a notion that offers a

framework for understanding the socialization of emotions and the broader role that it plays in reproducing inequalities (Ibid.38).

That said it is also significant to comprehend that the general relational dispositions of *jeitinho* do not imply necessarily personal contexts. Therefore, different from the perspective of personalism, this notion here is defined through the personal skills people use as tools to achieve their aims. In the case of *jeitinho* these skills are translated on the capability to shape relations with personalist and emotional categories.

Because the practice is seen as well as a skill, or ability, it is commonly assumed in Brazil that some people “have it”, and some people do not (Vieira et al. 1982). Some authors even affirm that only Brazilians “have it” (Torres 1973). But controversies aside, there is an undeniable recognition that for the *jeitinho* to exist a set of emotional dispositions enables the development of personal skills that are useful when there is the necessity of getting things done. To “have” *jeitinho* presume the action but is not the action per se, it implies personal characteristics that are part of this set of skills that is fundamental to effectiveness of the performance in casual encounters.

This common set of skills, be culturally apprehended, environmentally or economically determined or be it a combination of those, used strategically to get things done (cf. Duarte 2011), is what characterizes the *jeitinho* as *habitus*. Especially when associated to other personalist practices, and other emotional flattering categories. It is not the fact that it rises from the controlling relations that guide organizational activities as a way to avoid or facilitate realizing processes (Barbosa 2006) that characterizes this *habitus*. This would be not very much far from the idea of a *precarious habitus* that cannot afford to function within the demands of the *primary habitus*, and would not be different as well from an understanding of the practice as a persistent cultural personalism that counterpoints excessive formalism in institutions.

The fact that the *jeitinho* is a relational practice used to get things done is what characterizes the *habitus* of bringing intimacy to social situations. The demand for emotional categories (Barbosa 2006) to shape personal and impersonal situations that characterizes it as a *habitus* in the Brazilian society. Ultimately, what characterizes this

habitus is the social disposition of the imminent attempt to transform social situations with the use of personalist and emotional categories (skills) to create more intimacy and greater level of informality, with the finality of getting things done at some level. Evidently it is not the attempt to transform all relations into personal relations as Souza suggests. Such informal practices used to get things done might as well achieve their objectives by bringing informality into formal environments and by enabling more intimate contacts between strangers. That has implications for comprehensions of sociability in the city as impersonal and anonymous.

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