

# *Demography, Territory, and Identity of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil: The Xavante Indians and the 2000 Brazilian National Census*

**Nilza de Oliveira Martins Pereira, Ricardo Ventura Santos, James R. Welch, Luciene G. Souza, and Carlos E.A. Coimbra Jr.**

Brazilian census data show a remarkable increase in the population self-reporting as “indigenous” between 1991 and 2000 but do not readily enable that increase to be analyzed in terms of the nearly 200 specific indigenous societies or ethnicities that exist in Brazil. In this article, we investigate some instances and implications of how the 2000 Brazilian National Census employed categories conceived for the national population to register one specific people—the Xavante of Mato Grosso, Central Brazil—with their own inherent social arrangements and morphologies. We do so by comparing census data corresponding to Xavante Indigenous Reserves with an independently collected set of demographic data for the same year. Although we found census data to adequately represent basic characteristics of the Xavante population (population size and age and sex distributions), we also found they reclassified and transformed Xavante households and thereby denatured Xavante sociality of its demographic and sociocultural complexity. The Xavante case is an example of how national demographic censuses not only capture data regarding indigenous peoples but also help shape those data by contributing to how indigenosity is perceived. Our findings suggest that the Brazilian National Census should seek to be more sensitive to indigenous realities and thereby to assess more accurately fundamental aspects of indigenous societies.

**Key words:** Brazil, South American Indians, census methods, cultural anthropology

## **Introduction**

**B**razil is an exceptional case in Latin America for having a reported indigenous population that constitutes such a low proportion of the total population (0.4%). Only the indigenous population of Uruguay is lower than Brazil's, being just 0.02 percent of the national population.

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Although heterogeneous demographic histories may explain much of the variation in indigenous population proportions among Latin American countries, they are insufficient to explain the radical differences in indigenous population size between Brazil and its immediate neighboring countries. For example, Brazil's indigenous population size is striking when compared with Guyana (6.0% indigenous), Colombia (2.0%), Venezuela (2.0%), and even Argentina (1.0%) (Meentzen 2001; Montenegro and Stephens 2006). In Brazil, as in many other South American contexts, indigenous ancestry is prevalent in the population even though perception of or identification with that ancestry may be uncommon in many segments of society (Ramos 1998; Santos and Maio 2004; Yashar 2005). Accordingly, it is that very perception, whether within the censused population or institutionalized in the census project, that may have enormous impact on reported national figures regarding indigenous population size. Furthermore, this and other perceptions regarding indigenosity and non-indigenosity inescapably permeate the entire census process, thereby affecting their results and tangibly influencing public discourse.

One of the most surprising results of the most recent Brazilian National Census, done in 2000, compared to the previous census (1991), was the increase in the number of people self-reporting as *indígena* (“indigenous”) (IBGE 2005; Kennedy and Stephen 2000). The number of people

who declared themselves as indigenous rose from 294,131 to 734,127 people between those years (IBGE 2005:19). Among all of the “color or race” categories employed in the Brazilian census, it was indígena that showed the greatest rate of population increase between the two censuses.<sup>2</sup>

A similar population increase among those self-reporting as “American Indian,” reported for the United States between the 1960 and 1990 censuses, has been explained in terms of “ethnic switching” motivated by changing national politics of indigenous identity (Nagel 1995). That example illustrates that the extraordinary increase in the Brazilian indigenous population must not be assumed only to be a matter of simple population growth, but is also likely due to diverse demographic factors, including, potentially, increase due to reclassification from other segments. Accordingly, such population changes, as well as other data generated through the National Census about indigenous people, are best understood as complex phenomena involving multiple layers of demographic processes, some less overt than others. Furthermore, those processes cannot be assumed to be independent from one another or from the census project itself. As we shall argue, national censuses do more than record demographic reality; they also contribute to the formation of that reality.

A principal objective of this paper is to document in the Brazilian context some instances and implications of how national censuses, through their institutional and methodological authority, help produce and reproduce perceptions of indigenosity. We do so by investigating demographic aspects of a specific indigenous people—the Xavante—based on 2000 Brazilian National Census data. This study benefits from a dialogue between two different bodies of data that address different but overlapping dimensions of Xavante demography: one from the very large, macrodemographic perspective of the Brazilian National Censuses and the other from an ethnographically informed, microdemographic perspective based on independently collected demographic data and anthropological fieldwork carried out by our research team in Xavante reserves. Geospatial analysis was used to identify census sectors corresponding with Xavante Indigenous Reserves and thereby compare the two sets of data. We focus on two conjunctions of census variables (“household characteristics” and “resident characteristics”) in order to evaluate the accuracy and implications of a census program that employed categories conceived for the national population but applied to Xavante society with their own inherent social arrangements and morphologies. Although we found the census to be highly accurate in terms of basic population statistics (size, geographical distribution, sex and age compositions), it grossly distorted Xavante socio-cultural organization by reclassifying it in terms congruent with national rather than indigenous social realities.

### **Indigenous Peoples and Demographic Censuses in Brazil**

The practical significance of national censuses for all populations, including indigenous, cannot be overstated.

According to the Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute (IBGE 2000b):

Demographic Censuses constitute the only source of information about the life conditions of the population in each one of the municipalities and localities in the Country. Other household studies are accomplished through sampling and are not representative at all of these geographic levels. Censuses produce fundamental information for the formulation of public policies and for private and governmental investment decision making.

Yet, despite the recognized value of national censuses for public planning and awareness at all levels, logistical aspects of how census instruments are designed and applied necessarily reflect somewhat restricted goals because they impose certain limitations on how data are generated.

In Brazil as well as in other countries, census categories intended to capture ethnicity or race are inescapably problematic because they involve a conjunction of non-exclusive identity-related concepts, including cultural affiliation, language, religion, place of birth, nationality, and ancestry, to name just a few (Morning 2008; UN 2003). The problems involved in applying such conceptually elusive categories are especially apparent when one considers that they are reported according to self-perception. Furthermore, how those categories are construed in the survey instrument affects directly how individuals categorize themselves. For example, providing fewer or more categories from which to choose may serve to sustain or diminish a unified image of any single potential category, such as “indigenous.” Similarly, whether the selection of categories is nonexclusive or exclusive may serve to sustain or diminish perceptions of multiethnicity. As was documented for American Indians in the 1980 United States census, two differently stated questions regarding race and ancestry produced dramatically different results. The race question resulted in an estimate of 1.5 million American Indians while the ancestry question yielded 4.4 times that (6.8 million) (Snipp 1989). How ethnicity was construed in the 2000 Brazilian Census is equally important for the data generated about indigenous peoples.

The first demographic census in Brazil was conducted in 1872. Since then they were realized approximately every 10 years, at times with interruptions and/or intervals other than one decade (Nobles 2002; Osório 2003). An important characteristic of censuses in Brazil is that there is a long tradition of including a question about the “color or race” of the interviewee. Through time that question assumed different formats and even came to be excluded from some of the censuses (Table 1). Since the 1940s, there has been relative stability in the census categories used for “color or race,” although the category “indigenous” was included in demographic censuses only since 1991. Previously, according to various authors, it is possible that indigenous people were largely classified in the category *pardo* (“brown”) (Oliveira 1999; Pereira, Santos, and Azevedo 2005). The “color or race” categories employed by IBGE in the 1991 and 2000 Censuses

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**Table 1. “Color or Race” Categories in Brazilian Censuses****Census Date “Color or Race” Categories**

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1872	White, black, brown, and caboclo 15
1880	Census not realized
1890	White, black, caboclo, and mestizo
1900	No question regarding color/race
1910	Census not realized
1920	No question regarding color/race
1930	Census not realized
1940	White, black, yellow, and brown
1950	White, black, yellow, and brown
1960	White, black, yellow, and brown
1970	No question regarding color/race
1980	White, black, yellow, and brown
1991	White, black, yellow, brown, and indigenous
2000	White, black, yellow, brown, and indigenous

Source: IBGE (2005:12-13); Nobles (2002:68); Osório (2003)

Obs.: Until the 1950 census, the question regarding color/race was open. It was only beginning with the 1960 census that the categories appeared as pre-coded in the questionnaires.

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were *branca* (“white”), *preta* (“black”), *amarela* (“yellow”), *parda* (“brown”), and “indigenous.”

Previous analyses of the 1991 and 2000 Brazilian Censuses with respect to indigenous people significantly improved descriptions of some of their general demographic characteristics, such as age composition, fertility, infantile mortality, and migration (IBGE 2005; Pereira, Santos, and Azevedo 2005). One limitation of Brazilian census data is that they do not enable inferences to be readily drawn about the demography of the nearly 200 specific indigenous societies or ethnicities that exist in Brazil, a great portion of whom speak native languages and inhabit indigenous territories officially recognized by the Brazilian government, which together comprise nearly 15 percent of the national territory. Seeking to analyze the census data in terms of this enormous indigenous sociodiversity is a challenge because even when a person self-reports as “indigenous,” the Brazilian Census has not yet collected additional data regarding language spoken, ethnic identity, or other relevant variables that might facilitate more detailed demographic and anthropological analyses.

It is not our intention here to detail the entire conjunction of demographic results and interpretations regarding indigenous peoples in the 1991 and 2000 censuses, but it is important to indicate some of the major findings. A detailed study was published in 2005 regarding indigenous people in the 1991 and 2000 Demographic Censuses, entitled “Demographic Tendencies: An Analysis of Indigenous People Based on the Results of the 1991 and 2000 Demographic Census Samples” (IBGE 2005).<sup>3</sup> The results of this study show that, among all of the “color or race” categories employed in these two censuses by IBGE, indígena was the one that showed the greatest annual rate of population increase in the nine-year

period (10.8 per year for “indigenous” compared to 1.6% for the Brazilian population as a whole). The indigenous population increase was greater in urban areas (increase of 5.4 times) than rural areas (increase of 1.6 times). That increase is notable because until the 1970s there were frequent forecasts that indigenous peoples in Brazil would not survive as ethnically differentiated segments. Yet, by the 1980s, new interpretations had emerged, anticipating a reversal of that pattern (Pagliaro, Azevedo, and Santos 2005).

One explication for the dramatic increase in people self-reporting as indigenous in Brazilian censuses is a changing landscape of indigenous identity politics, especially since the increased visibility of the indigenous movement in the 1980s and a new Brazilian Constitution in 1988 that established a legal imperative to provide for the permanence of indigenous peoples as culturally differentiated societies. Those changes not only reward indigenous identity with a series of public policies aimed at improving health, education, and access to land, but they also stimulated recognition of the political value and viability of indigenousness (Garnelo, Macedo, and Brandão 2003; Pagliaro, Azevedo, and Santos 2005). A recent study argues that ethnic reclassification motivated by such sociopolitical conditions was more important than demographic factors in the reported indigenous population increase between 1991 and 2000 (Perz, Warren, and Kennedy 2008).

Despite those new increases, in 2000, indigenous people still constituted the IBGE “color or race” category with the lowest proportion in the Brazilian population (0.4%) (*branca*/white: 54.1%; *preta*/black: 6.3%; *amarela*/yellow: 0.5%; *parda*/brown: 38.7%) (IBGE 2005).

According to the 2000 Census, the indigenous population profile shows a series of unique characteristics, particularly

in urban areas (IBGE 2005). Urban indigenous people follow the overall national Brazilian pattern for composition by sex and age, showing characteristics such as low fertility and mortality, as well as a low dependency rate and medium high age. Thus, in the case of indigenous peoples in urban areas, the demographic census does not permit delineation of a clearly discernable population based on demographic characteristics other than self-declaration.

In contrast, in rural areas there emerges an indigenous population contingent distinct from the national pattern for a host of demographic characteristics (IBGE 2005). One of the most important findings of previous studies regarding rural indigenous peoples is that 85 percent (of a total of 350,829 individuals) live in municipalities in which there are indigenous reserves recognized by the federal government. That is to say, the great majority of rural indigenous individuals live in or near federal indigenous lands. Additionally, the demographic characteristics of this population show various similarities to those described in demographic anthropological studies of specific indigenous communities and which differ from the national population (see the synthesis in Pagliaro, Azevedo, and Santos 2005). Among the most notable of those characteristics are majority composition of children and youth (45.2% below 15 years), low formal education, high fertility (total fertility rate of 5.8 children), and high infantile mortality (47 per thousand live births). Although the indigenous population in rural areas of the country in the 2000 Census was less than estimates by other sources, such as the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the National Health Foundation (FUNASA) (around 400,000-450,000 in 2000), it may be concluded that the Census, in general terms, was able to capture important demographic characteristics of indigenous people.

## Population and Methods

### The Xavante

The Xavante are a Gê-speaking people located in seven demarcated indigenous reserves in the east of Mato Grosso State, Central Brazil, which are Areões, Marechal Rondon, Parabubure, Pimentel Barbosa, Sangradouro-Volta Grande, São Marcos, and Maraiwatsede (Figure 1). The Xavante population, which approximated 10,000 people in the year 2000, is one of the most populous indigenous ethnic groups in Brazil. Only a few ethnicities among the more than 200 living in Brazil had populations greater than 10,000 at the beginning of the 21st century. Among them, in addition to the Xavante, were the Tikuna, Terena, Guarani, and Yanomami (Ricardo and Ricardo 2006).

Within Brazilian ethnology the Xavante people are among the most studied, with publications on as diverse themes as ecology, health, demography, ethnohistory, and social structure and organization (for a review see Coimbra et al. 2002). The Xavante have factored importantly in public discourse since the mid-20th century for, among other things,

being pioneers in the Brazilian field of indigenous politics (Conklin and Graham 1995; Garfield 2001) and being pivotal in the development of anthropological structuralism (Lévi-Strauss 1963; Maybury-Lewis 1967, 1979).

### Data and Analyses

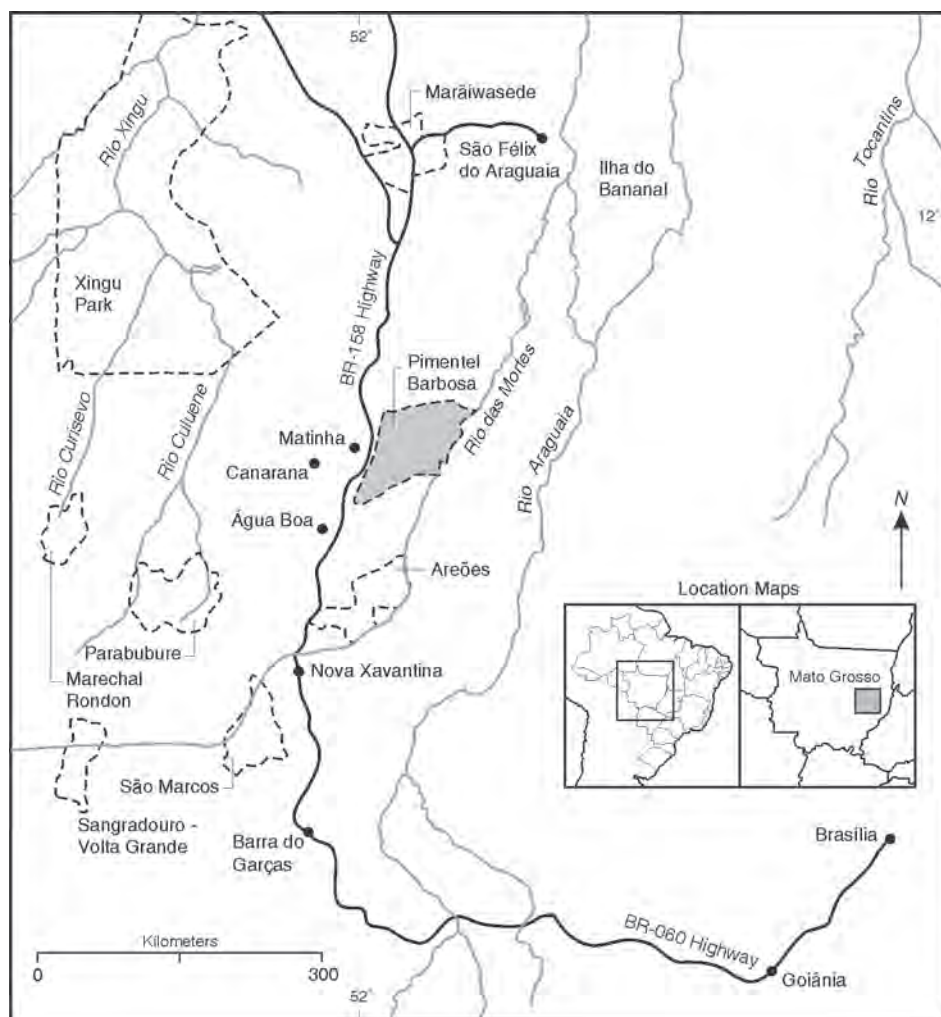
In this paper, we use two data sources: (1) demographic data relative to Xavante reserves collected by the 2000 Brazilian National Census, carried out by IBGE; and (2) demographic information on the Xavante generated by our research group<sup>4</sup> and with its origins in a database of the Indigenous Health Information and Care System (SIASI), managed by the Brazilian National Health Foundation (FUNASA).

Collection of information for the 2000 Census was accomplished by IBGE census takers with two questionnaire models: a "Basic Questionnaire" for households not selected on a sample basis and containing questions regarding characteristics of the household and its residents that were investigated for 100 percent of the national population, and a "Sample Questionnaire" with additional detailed questions and applied only to 10 or 20 percent of households, depending on the population size of the municipality (IBGE 2003b).<sup>5</sup> In this article, we deal only with data derived from the 2000 Census "Basic Questionnaire" that was applied in all households located in Xavante reserves.<sup>6</sup>

As we pointed out above, it is not possible to identify directly from the Brazilian census data pertaining to the Xavante or any other specific indigenous ethnicity. In order to overcome this limitation, we identified and analyzed the conjunction of census sectors, the smallest unit of investigation utilized in the demographic censuses, located within and comprising Xavante Indigenous Reserves.

For the purposes of the 2000 census, Brazil was divided into 215,790 census sectors.<sup>7</sup> Among the variables investigated in the census there is one, "type of census sector," which allows for the classification as "*aldeia indígena*" ("indigenous village"), defined by the IBGE as a grouping of at least 20 indigenous inhabitants in one or more habitations (IBGE 2003b). Were it applied consistently according to its definition, this classification should provide an effective means for associating census sectors with specific indigenous villages and thereby making possible comparisons between census and other sources of data for specific indigenous populations. However, in practice it was not useful for that purpose because census sectors located in indigenous reserves were routinely not classified as indigenous villages. To give an indication of the scope of the problem, in the 2000 Census, only 0.2 percent of 214,319 populated census sectors in the entire country<sup>8</sup> were classified as "indigenous village," while close to 15 percent of the national territory falls within officially recognized indigenous lands. Of the sectors classified as "indigenous village" nationally, 40.8 percent were located in just one state, Mato Grosso, which had just 3.8 percent (27,654 individuals) of the national indigenous population and 6.1 percent (21,457 individuals) of the national rural

**Figure 1. Location of Xavante Indigenous Reserves** [Source: Coimbra et al. (2002:18)]



indigenous population. In contrast to Mato Grosso, census sectors corresponding with indigenous villages in other states with much larger rural indigenous populations were much less consistently classified as such. For example, Amazonas State had 15.7 percent (115,227 individuals) of the national indigenous population and 27.0 percent (94,585 individuals) of the national rural indigenous population, but only 3.6 percent of sectors classified as “indigenous village” nationally.

Given that it is not possible to derive from the census data accurate information regarding “indigenous village” sectors, the methodological alternative we pursued was to locate data pertaining to the Xavante by comparing the territorial network of IBGE census sectors with that of federally recognized indigenous reserves, provided by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI).<sup>9</sup> That is, the aim was to locate the census sectors that correspond with Xavante reserves. Associating the two geographic territorial networks required detailed cartographic

analysis that was facilitated by geospatial referencing. This analysis was conducted using ArcView version 9.2 software (ESRI 2006), which consists of a desktop GIS (mapping system adequate for use with microcomputers) that loads special and tabular data transformed into maps. ArcView assists the visualization of information in database archives in order to reveal new relations, models, and tendencies.

The following Xavante indigenous reserves were analyzed: Areões, Marechal Rondon, Parabubure, Pimentel Barbosa, Sangradouro-Volta Grande, and São Marcos. Maraiwasede Indigenous Reserve was excluded because its reoccupation by Xavante occurred after 2000. Within the six Xavante reserves were identified 64 census sectors, distributed as follows: 9 in Areões, 1 in Marechal Rondon, 41 in Parabubure, 5 in Pimentel Barbosa, 5 in Sangradouro-Volta Grande, and 3 in São Marcos.<sup>10</sup>

We now turn to our second data source. Beginning in 1999, when the Brazilian government implemented a new

**Table 2. Comparison of Census Data Collected in Xavante Indigenous Reserves in the 2000 Demographic Census with FIOCRUZ/SIASI Data**

Indigenous Reserve	2000 Demographic Census (1)	2000 FIOCRUZ/SIASI Data (2)	Difference Between 1 and 2 (%)
Areões	857 Males: 445 Females: 412	925 Males: 469 Females: 456	-7.9%
Marechal Rondon	436 Males: 223 Females: 213	440 Males: 225 Females: 215	-0.9%
Parabubure	3761 Males: 1917 Females: 1844	4023 Males: 2062 Females: 1961	-7.0%
Pimentel Barbosa	1349 Males: 652 Females: 697	1362 Males: 670 Females: 692	-1.0%
Sangradouro-Volta Grande	1077 Males: 553 Females: 524	1055 Males: 545 Females: 510	+2.0%
São Marcos	2125 Males: 1121 Females: 1004	2229 Males: 1192 Females: 1037	-4.9%
Total	9605 Males: 4911 Females: 4694	10034 Males: 5163 Females: 4871	-4.5%

health system for indigenous peoples, the federal agency responsible for this system (FUNASA) began the implementation of a specific information system aimed at indigenous societies (SIASI). One of the modules of that information system is related to the maintenance of demographic data. Despite its potential, structural problems in the information system, interruptions in data entry, and high personnel turnover prevented the SIASI from becoming a reliable national source of data regarding health and demography of indigenous peoples (Sousa, Scatena, and Santos 2007).

Since the 1990s, our research group has worked in partnership with researchers from other institutions and technicians from governmental agencies associated with indigenous topics, such as FUNASA, to conduct studies regarding varied aspects of Xavante health, ecology, and demography (for a summary see Coimbra et al. 2002). Part of this effort involved professionals affiliated with the health services directed at the Xavante, including technicians (Souza) working with SIASI. That system is fed directly by health professionals working in the communities, who should document in registries and enter in electronic databases vital and health events (births, deaths, illnesses, hospitalizations, etc.) (Sousa, Scatena, and Santos 2007).

The second set of data used in the present study is derived from the SIASI databank. However, in order to compensate for deficiencies caused by deficient data collection, as described above, it was then subjected to a thorough restoration process informed by our own original data collected in the

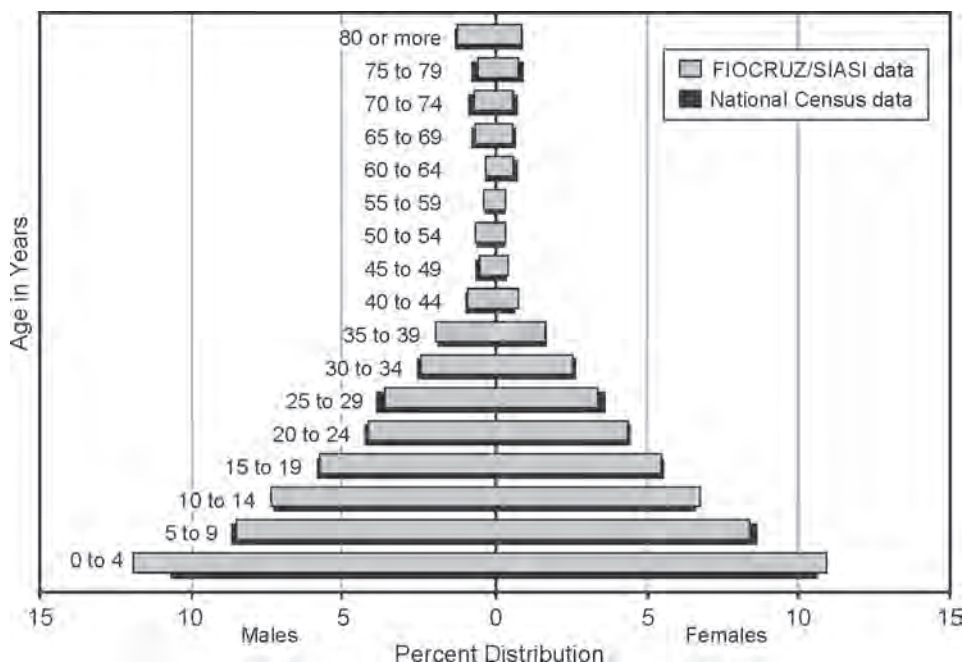
field for specific Xavante communities (Sangradouro-Volta Grande, São Marcos, and Marechal Rondon) (Souza 2008; Souza and Santos 2001). Our methodology involved detailed proofreading and analysis of the SIASI data and comparison with our own original data, correcting for duplicate entries, underestimates, and other inaccuracies. For the purposes of this study, we use demographic data for the year 2000 that address the population distribution by indigenous reserve, age, and sex. The resultant data is referred to below as “FIOCRUZ/SIASI data.”

### The Micro Illuminating the Macro

What do the 2000 Census data tell us about the Xavante? In general, the analyses show a high degree of agreement between the 2000 Census data collected in census sectors located in Xavante reserves and FIOCRUZ/SIASI data for the same geographical areas and time period (Table 2). According to FIOCRUZ/SIASI data, the resident population in the Xavante reserves was 10,034 people in the year 2000. The 2000 Census produced very similar results, counting 9,605 people in census sectors corresponding with Xavante Indigenous Reserves. The greatest discrepancies were observed in the Areões and Parabubure Indigenous Reserves. Otherwise, the percentage population distribution by age and sex were very similar between reserves (Tables 2 and 3).

Comparison of demographic pyramids derived from Census 2000 data and from FIOCRUZ/SIASI data also

**Figure 2. Comparison of Age Pyramids for Xavante Reserves Derived from the 2000 National Census (in black) and FIOCRUZ/SIASI Data for 2000 (in grey)**



shows very similar age structures (Figure 2). According to both sets of data, approximately one-half of the Xavante population is comprised of children of less than 15 years of age (Table 3), which is a characteristic frequently encountered among indigenous peoples in Brazil because of high fertility (Pagliaro, Azevedo, and Santos 2005). In both pyramids, the upper portion calls attention, having a substantial proportion of people over 60 years of age. These are self-reported data and, therefore, may reflect age overestimates as a result of overstatement by individuals born before having access to birth certificate registries.

Thus, comparative analysis of the 2000 Census with primary data collected directly in the Xavante communities shows high agreement in terms of population size, distribution between indigenous reserves, and sex and age composition. In other words, the 2000 Census adequately captured basic characteristics of the Xavante population.

In the remainder of this section, we address whether the 2000 Census accurately characterized other dimensions of Xavante sociality, as entailed by the IBGE's stated purpose to furnish information about the life conditions of local populations for the sake of public and non-governmental administration at all levels (IBGE 2000b). In other words, how did the census capture particularly complex socioanthropological categories pertaining to households and relations between their residents that comprise local demographic realities?

As discussed above, the Brazilian demographic censuses include the possibility of identifying which individuals self-

report as indigenous but are not conceived or structured to collect information for segments of society, such as ethnically and culturally differentiated indigenous peoples. That limitation is apparent not only in the absence of questions about the individual's ethnicity or spoken language, such as are included in national censuses and specifically indigenous censuses conducted in other countries (Loveman 2006; UN 2004), but also in how some other data are captured. For example, in the "Sample Questionnaire" there is a series of questions about "physical incapacity," one of which asks if a person is incapable of or has great difficulty walking or climbing stairs, which is an apparatus not present in most indigenous communities. Also, items pertaining to work and religion, among many others, are illustrative of low applicability for indigenous people since they are based on categories derived from an occidental perspective.

Given an extensive anthropological literature about the Xavante (e.g., Coimbra et al. 2002; Graham 1995; Maybury-Lewis 1967; Silva 1986), their forms of household organization are well understood. Even today in the majority of Xavante reserves, residents maintain traditional spatial arrangements in the form of semicircular villages, characteristic of Central Brazilian Gê groups (Costa and Malhano 1986; Silva 1983). The position of houses along the arc may be defined by aspects of social and cultural order, such as leadership, ceremonial prerogatives, and familial associations. In the majority of Xavante reserves, people also live in extended family households (Figure 3) with residence

**Table 3. Comparison of Age Distributions in Xavante Indigenous Reserves in the 2000 Demographic Census and FIOCRUZ/SIASI Data**

Indigenous Reserve	Demographic Census 2000 (a)	FIOCRUZ/SIASI Data Collected among the Xavante 2000 (b)	Difference (a-b)
Total			
0-14 years	52.6%	53.3%	-0.7%
15 to 64 years	38.6%	38.7%	-0.1%
65 years or more	8.8%	8.0%	+0.8%
Areões			
0-14 years	49.5%	51.1%	-1.6%
15 to 64 years	44.7%	44.1%	+0.6%
65 years or more	5.7%	4.8%	+0.9%
Marechal Rondon			
0-14 years	52.7%	53.7%	-1.0%
15 to 64 years	39.9%	39.7%	+0.2%
65 years or more	7.4%	6.6%	+0.8%
Parabubure			
0-14 years	54.7%	55.7%	-1.0%
15 to 64 years	36.2%	36.2%	+0.0%
65 years or more	9.1%	8.1%	+1.0%
Pimentel Barbosa			
0-14 years	47.6%	53.4%	-5.8%
15 to 64 years	47.5%	42.0%	+5.5%
65 years or more	4.8%	4.6%	+0.2%
Sangradouro-Volta Grande			
0-14 years	52.8%	53.2%	-0.4%
15 to 64 years	42.4%	43.5%	-1.1%
65 years or more	4.8%	3.3%	+1.5%
São Marcos			
0-14 years	52.3%	53.6%	-1.3%
15 to 64 years	40.9%	40.4%	+0.5%
65 years or more	6.8%	5.9%	+0.9%

following an uxorilocal pattern, whereby new sons-in-law, usually between the ages of 18-25 years, take up residence in their spouses' fathers' households. That pattern tends to result in multiple generations of mothers and daughters living together in large households of, often, 20 or more residents, including husbands, sons, and, perhaps, elderly individuals (mothers, uncles, etc.), and others. Because it is common for men and women to marry their spouse's siblings and that a given man may marry two or more sisters, the articulations of individuals within and between households are often very intricate. Inside Xavante houses there are elaborate divisions of space, with each married couple and its children occupying demarcated spaces identified by the placement of mats on the ground or the construction of rod bed frames around the perimeter. Houses rarely have permanent internal walls and meals are usually prepared in annexed structures shared by members of a single or multiple adjacent households.

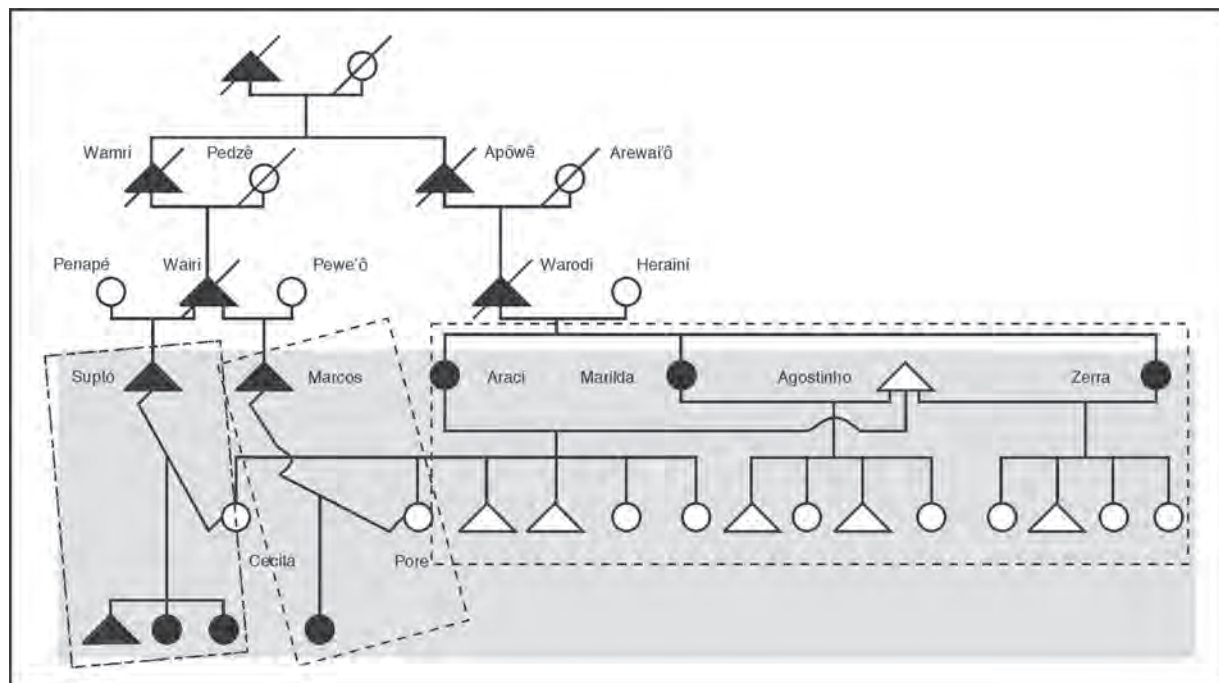
Before detailing the results of the 2000 Census regarding census sectors located in Xavante reserves, it is necessary to clarify how data regarding households and their residents were captured by the census. For the purpose of the Brazilian

census, a household consists of a "structurally separate and independent locale that is dedicated to serving as habitation for one or more people, or that would be utilized as such." The criterion "separate" applies when the habitation locale is "bounded by walls (interior or exterior) or fences, covered by a roof, permitting one or more people that live in it to be isolated from others in order to sleep, prepare and/or consume meals, and to be protected from the environment, sharing, completely or partially, their food and housing expenses." (IBGE 2003a:32). The "independence" criterion is met "when the habitation locale gives its residents direct access to enter and leave without the need to pass through the living spaces of other people." Those two criteria must be met simultaneously and should be applied to the residential units located on a single property or tract (IBGE 2000a:25).

Within the census classification, domiciles may be classified as "private" (with "permanent" or "improvised" subdivisions) or "collective." A "private household" consists of a residence where "the relationships between its occupants are dictated by ties of kinship, domestic dependence, or by the norms of living together." A private household is "permanent"



**Figure 3. Sample Xavante Household Genealogy at Pimentel Barbosa, 1990.** Three nuclear families within a single extended family and residing in a single house are indicated with dashed lines. Source: Coimbra et al. (2002:46)



if it “was constructed exclusively to serve for habitation and... ended up serving as residence for one or more people.” It is “improvised” if “located in a nonresidential unit (store, factory, etc.) that did not have quarters exclusively destined for living but that... were being occupied by resident(s).” Examples of “improvised” households are buildings under construction, railroad boxcars, carts, canopies, tents, trailers, caves, spaces under bridges, viaducts, etc. “Collective domiciles” are registered for establishments or institutions where the relationships between the people that live in them “were restricted to norms of administrative subordination.” Examples include hotels, boarding houses, military prisons, jails and penitentiaries, barracks, military posts, asylums, orphanages, convents, monasteries, hospitals, inpatient clinics, worker lodgings, motels, and camping sites (IBGE 2000a:52-55).

A central feature of the Basic Questionnaire is the collection of information regarding the relationships between a household’s residents, which may be based on kinship or of another nature. Taking the Xavante case as a point of reference, two aspects of how the census collected and processed such data had important consequences for the characterization of relationships between household residents.

The first is that even though the Basic Questionnaire allowed for multiple women in a single residence to be designated as spouses of the “responsible person,” known as “head of household” in previous Brazilian censuses, in practice the census did not permit characterization of polygynous arrangements

(one man married to two or more women), as are common in many Xavante communities. This occurs at two levels of data consolidation. The first involves a process called “imputation,” whereby data deemed absent or inconsistent are “corrected” in the database (IBGE 2003b:109).<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, available census data do not allow comparison of variables before and after imputation and, therefore, preclude the possibility of determining to what degree that phase of data consolidation was responsible for the elimination of multiple spousal relationships. The second results from the database structure (the “universe” of variables analyzed) excluding a variable such as “number of spouses” derived from the number of individuals indicated as spouses of the “responsible person” (head) of each household. The absence of such a variable precludes analytical detection of polygyny (IBGE 2003b:410-411).

The second point to be made about the generation of data regarding relationships between members of a household has to do with a specific kinship category of great importance for Xavante social organization. According to the normative pattern of uxorilocality, young Xavante men often reside in their wife’s parents’ houses and may continue to live there until they eventually become heads of household. The presence of sons-in-law is a basic structuring principle of Xavante extended family households with important implications for how resources are produced and shared. Furthermore, the degree to which sons-in-law co-reside with their fathers-in-law may be a useful indicator of economic and social change. Despite the

**Table 4. Classification of Households in Xavante Indigenous Reserves, 2000 Demographic Census**

Indigenous Reserve	Permanent Private	Improved Private	Collective	Total
Areões	30 (17.2%)	0	144 (82.8%)	174 (100%)
Marechal Rondon	49 (60.5%)	1 (1.2%)	31 (38.3%)	81 (100%)
Parabubure	381 (50.7%)	0	371 (49.3%)	752 (100%)
Pimentel Barbosa	35 (15.6%)	1 (0.4%)	188 (83.9%)	224 (100%)
Sangradouro-Volta Grande	129 (63.2%)	0	75 (36.8%)	204 (100%)
São Marcos	99 (22.4%)	0	343 (77.6%)	442 (100%)
Total	723 (38.5%)	2 (0.1%)	1152 (61.4%)	1877 (100%)

importance of that social institution for Xavante society, the 2000 Census was unable to detect it. The Basic Questionnaire permitted designation of the relationship between a resident and the “responsible person” (head of household) as spouse, child, parent or parent-in-law, grandchild, or sibling, among others. However, it did not permit classification of a person as a child-in-law.

What do the census data tell us about Xavante households and their residents? As we will show, the manner in which Xavante households were classified in the 2000 Census demonstrates in a fascinating manner how native social morphologies, distinct from occidental ones, were reclassified by census takers and transformed by analysts to the effect that the Census did not adequately meet its objective of representing the life conditions of local segments of the Brazilian population.

In total, the 2000 census identified 1,877 domiciles in Xavante reserves. The great majority of those (61.4%) were classified as “collective” rather than “private,” varying from 36.8 percent in Sangradouro-Volta Grande to 83.9 percent in Pimentel Barbosa (Table 4). Three reserves (Areões, Pimentel Barbosa, and São Marcos) had more than 75 percent of domiciles classified as “collective.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Xavante households were, in their majority, classified in the 2000 Census as structures where the relationships between the people that live in them “were restricted to norms of administrative subordination,” among which, as we mentioned above, are included boarding

houses, prisons, barracks, asylums, and orphanages, but not residences based on kinship or “domestic dependence.”

In addition to this conceptual dimension about what is a Xavante “household,” upon comparing the census data with primary information collected by our research team, another important difference was observed. Whereas the national census identified 1,877 households in Xavante census sectors, FIOCRUZ/SIASI data show a significantly lower total of 1,278 houses in Xavante reserves (Table 5). How might this difference be explained? One plausible explanation is that census takers tended to classify as separate households rather than constituent parts of single households each of the multiple nuclear families that typically reside together as extended families in large dwellings that frequently number over 30 related individuals.<sup>13</sup>

Parallel to the discrepancy between the number of houses in our data and the number of households indicated by the 2000 Census data, there is another set of data that reinforce the explanation that Xavante households were “nuclearized” during the census survey. Tables 5 and 6 compare the average residents per Xavante household as ascertained by our own research and derived from the census data. Although the demographic census data indicate that the average number of residents per household in Xavante reserves varied from 4.8 to 6.0, our data indicate averages between 7.2 and 11.8 residents.

This classificatory Westernization of Xavante households, which seemingly transformed extended family households into separate groups of smaller family units, is

**Table 5. Number of Houses, Total Population, and Mean Number of Residents Per House in Xavante Indigenous Reserves, FIOCRUZ/SIASI, 2000**

Indigenous Reserve	Number of Houses	Population Mean	Residents Per House
Areões	106	925	8.7
Marechal Rondon	60	440	7.3
Parabubure	549	4023	7.3
Pimentel Barbosa	115	1362	11.8
Sangradouro-Volta Grande	137	1055	7.7
São Marcos	311	2229	7.2
Total	1278	10034	7.9

**Table 6. Mean Number of People Per Household in Xavante Indigenous Reserves, 2000 Demographic Census**

Indigenous Reserve	Permanent Private	Improved Private	Collective	Total
Areões	6.9	--	4.5	4.9
Marechal Rondon	5.6	12.0	4.9	5.4
Parabubure	5.5	--	4.4	5.0
Pimentel Barbosa	7.7	9.0	5.7	6.0
Sangradouro-Volta Grande	5.8	--	4.4	5.3
São Marcos	6.1	--	4.4	4.8
Total	5.1	5.8	10.5	4.7

important for several reasons. In the first place, it is a central goal of national censuses in any national context to properly assess household structure in order to recognize and address historical processes affecting families. According to the United Nations (2007:327):

Information on household structure in terms of number of family nuclei in the household is needed for studies of household formation, projections of numbers of households and estimates of potential housing needs. Information from a series of censuses is very useful for the study of the disintegration of the households consisting of several family nuclei in countries where this pattern of living is changing.

Furthermore, mischaracterization of Xavante households has other, more concrete, implications. For example, as defined in the census methodology, information regarding water source and piping, as well as quantity of bathrooms and type of drainage (presence of drain, septic, etc.), were not collected for households classified as “collective.” Given that the majority of households in Xavante reserves were classified in that category, the result is that information regarding sanitation conditions were collected for only a minority of communities. Importantly, one of the principal motivations for conducting the Brazilian National Census, as given by the IBGE (2003b), and for conducting censuses of indigenous peoples in any national context (UN 2004), is to ascertain local sanitary conditions for the sake of national, regional, and local policy making and administration. Considering that adverse environmental conditions are important causes of illness and that sanitation-related illnesses such as diarrhea are important causes of death, especially among indigenous children (Coimbra and Santos 2004; Garnelo, Macedo, and Brandão 2003; Santos and Coimbra 2003), the implications of inaccurate characterization of indigenous reality by national censuses are acutely evident.

### Final Considerations: Census and Sensibility

In various parts of the world, census data are fundamental for ascertaining local social reality for planning public policy purposes. According to the United Nations (2007:6):

The results of a census are used as a critical reference to ensure equity in distribution of wealth, government services, and representation nationwide: distributing and allocating government funds among various regions and districts for education, health services, delineating electoral districts at the national and local levels, and measuring the impact of industrial development, to name a few.

In Brazil, where, despite important recent developments, information systems are still precarious and civil registry data are not completely reliable, census data are of singular importance. One example that may be given is that, in Brazil, the distribution of key federal resources among municipalities depends in part on the size of the populations of those municipalities, which are ascertained by IBGE and are based in large part on census data and projections derived from them. Information provided by IBGE regarding education, migration, household composition, sanitation conditions, among others, is regularly used in government planning and administration (IBGE 2000b). Given the importance of those applications of census data, it is crucial to ask whether and how such data correspond with social reality.

By employing the delineated category “indígena,” the Brazilian national censuses since 1991 reify what some anthropologists and demographers call a “generic indigenous identity” (Pagliaro, Azevedo, and Santos 2005). Additionally, the census enterprise further specifies indigeness by generating and disseminating data about the indigenous population that carry the force of official and statistical authority (Nobles 2000). In other words, from the census survey emerges an indigenous “type,” even though, as is well known, there is notable indigenous sociodiversity in Brazil, with more than 200 different ethnicities in the country.

Specifically in relation to the Xavante, the arguments developed in this article show how native social characteristics and arrangements are reflected and transformed through the generation of census data. The Xavante household, with all its demographic and sociocultural complexity, is translated into something altogether foreign to Xavante modes of thought. Extended family households are reduced to nuclear family residences and equated with such peculiar occidental institutions, “total” in the Foucauldian sense, as asylums and

orphanages (“collective domiciles”), in which the organizing structure is administrative rather than familiar. Important structural features of those families, such as multiple spouses and co-resident sons-in-law, are rendered invisible. Thus, our results demonstrate that the census did not have the necessary sensibility to portray and register fundamental aspects of Xavante sociality. This denaturing of an important fundamental organizing aspect of Xavante society—the family, as conceived emically—is echoed in the comment by Arjun Appadurai: “Statistics are to bodies and social types what maps are to territories: they flatten and enclose” (Kertzer and Arel 2002:6). That process not only homogenizes Brazil’s socio-cultural diversity, but does so such that the census becomes a vehicle of “selling the other” (Baumann and Gingrich 2004), whereby Brazilian normative culture recharacterizes in its own image nonconforming segments and thereby deprive them of their difference. It is also an example of how state strategies for seeing locally differentiated populations for the purposes of governance, what James Scott calls the imposition of “legibility,” can steal those populations of their uniqueness (Scott 1998). However, the means by which states can so effectively impose particular modes of visibility upon its subjects are not explicit.

Kertzer and Arel (2002:2) make a comment particularly relevant to the relationship between the Xavante and other indigenous populations and the Brazilian National Census: “Censuses are... generally viewed as matters of bureaucratic routine, somewhat unpleasant necessities of the modern age, a kind of national counting. Yet... the census does much more than simply reflect social reality; rather, it plays a key role in the construction of that reality.” That conclusion derives from the fact that national censuses do more than generate and communicate population data; they do so with the authority of central governments. As Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov summarize Bourdieu (1994), the state’s symbolic power is “the power to state what is what and who is who, and thereby to impose legitimate principles of vision and division of the social world” (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004:33). In the case of national censuses, that power disguises what is in fact a complex and human bureaucratic endeavor as a definitive process of information capture such that the very categories it employs are beyond question, not to mention the information generated about those categories.

Even with these limitations and difficulties, we subscribe to the idea that we should continually seek to improve data capture regarding indigenous peoples in national censuses, as those conducted in Brazil. So far, Brazil has had two national censuses (1991 and 2000) that collected specific information about indigenas, which is an important step toward reducing their “demographic invisibility” (see Coimbra and Santos 2004). However, it is also clear that the data collection system pertaining to indigenous peoples stands to be much improved. Said another way, the goal should be to seek a greater convergence between the national census and fundamental aspects of indigenous societies in terms of their social structures and demographic dynamics. That is, to be more sensitive to indigenous realities.

According to the United Nations Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples:

There is generally a lack of (both official and non-official) comprehensive documentation and disaggregated data on the socioeconomic situation and income levels of indigenous and tribal peoples in all regions as compared to that of the rest of the population. Even though a number of Latin American countries have relatively extensive resources allocated for indigenous-specific development initiatives, there seems to be a lack of in-depth and contextualized socioeconomic data on the livelihoods of indigenous and tribal peoples on the basis of e.g., household surveys. (UN 2004:2)<sup>14</sup>

One promising strategy for increasing the availability of demographic data regarding Brazil’s indigenous people is to undertake a specific indigenous census, as it is already taking place in other Latin American countries (Peyser and Chackiel 1994). For example, in 2002 the Paraguay Census Bureau undertook the specifically indigenous National Population and Household Census with the participation of indigenous communities and leaders throughout the country. Census questions addressed such topics as community location, ethnic identity, population by sex and age, legal land status, and socioeconomic characterization, among others. The result of that census was a highly detailed panorama of the 20 indigenous ethnic groups in the country (DGEEC 2004). Perhaps more so than in Paraguay, a relatively small country, a specifically indigenous census in Brazil would be an extremely complex undertaking, given that there are more than 200 ethnic groups distributed in a territory of continental proportions. Nevertheless, the Paraguayan case demonstrates in South American context the possibility of governmental agencies responsible for national population statistics collecting socioculturally pertinent demographic data regarding indigenous populations.

Even if specific indigenous censuses are undertaken in Brazil, there will remain the necessity to maintain and improve the capture of data regarding indigenous peoples in the national censuses. For example, there is an increasing contingent of individuals living in cities, including the capitals of some states, who self-report as indigenous. It is probable that specific indigenous censuses, if they occur, will concentrate on rural areas and will correspondingly not make available adequate time and resources to locate individuals in urban areas. Accordingly, questions related to indigenous peoples in the national census should be improved (perhaps by including questions about language(s) spoken and specific ethnic affiliation, among others), and there should be developed a greater sensibility to indigenous sociocultural diversity during data analysis and interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>14</sup>A preliminary version of this article was presented at the panel “Linking Territory, Identity, and Demography: Emerging Research with Indigenous Populations,” XVII International Congress of the

Latin America Studies Association, Montreal, Canada, September 5 to 8, 2007.

<sup>2</sup>A rapid demographic increase among indigenous peoples has been observed in other Latin American countries (for a review see McSweeney and Arps 2005).

<sup>3</sup>That report, available online ([www.ibge.gov.br](http://www.ibge.gov.br)), was prepared in conjunction with IBGE technicians and researchers (anthropologists, epidemiologists, and demographers) connected with the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA), Brazilian Association of Population Studies (ABEP), and the Brazilian Graduate Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO).

<sup>4</sup>Members of our research group, based at the National School of Public Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), Rio de Janeiro, have conducted detailed studies on Xavante demography, ecology, health, and social anthropology during the last 20 years (for a synthesis, see Coimbra et al. 2002; Souza and Santos 2001).

<sup>5</sup>The Sample Questionnaire contains additional detailed questions regarding the household and its residents, addressing such themes as religion, “color or race,” migration, education, fertility, marriage, labor, and income, among others. Sampling techniques employed in the 2000 Census were applied to private households and the families or components of co-resident groups registered in collective households, as detailed in IBGE (2003b).

<sup>6</sup>Since the question regarding “color or race” was contained in the “Sample Questionnaire” (which in the Xavante case involved 20% of households since they are located in municipalities with less than 15,000 inhabitants), data regarding indigenous peoples were subjected to a statistical process of expansion, whereby they were given weights (Dias and Albeiri 2004). That complex procedure resulted in an additional layer of indirectness between Xavante ethnographic reality and census data produced with the Sample Questionnaire, as compared to the Basic Questionnaire, and will be presented in another work in preparation.

<sup>7</sup>Census sector is one of the basic units of demographic censuses done in Brazil, being defined as the “unit of registry control formed by continuous urban or rural area, the dimensions and number of households or non-residential units of which permit the census taker accomplish his census activities within a determined term, respecting the calendar of activities” (IBGE 2000a:15).

<sup>8</sup>Although the 2000 Census methodology delineated 215,790 census sectors nationwide, only 214,319 of those were subsequently found to be populated and thereby came to be included in our statistical analyses (IBGE 2003b).

<sup>9</sup>For the purposes of this study, we assumed that all people registered in the 2000 Census in Xavante indigenous reserves are Xavante Indians. Although there is, in fact, a contingent of non-Indians located within those reserves, it is quite small. We carried out preliminary analyses on data derived from the “Sample Questionnaire” for the Xavante reserves and found that nearly 99 percent of the respondents self-reported as *indígenas*. These findings will be presented in another paper in preparation.

<sup>10</sup>Among the 64 sectors located in Xavante reserves, 53 (82.8%) were classified as “indigenous village” and 11 (17.2%) as “not special” by the IBGE. If one considers that “indigenous village” census sectors associated with Xavante reserves represent 17.9 percent of the national total of “indigenous village” census sectors, but that the Xavante population represents just 1.4 percent of the national self-reported indigenous population, it may be deduced that the network of census sectors for the Xavante was relatively well constructed and classified as compared to those located elsewhere in Brazil.

<sup>11</sup>The 2000 Brazilian Census applied the DIA (Detection and Automatic Imputation) computer kit by the National Statistics Institute, Spain, for the treatment of surveys with qualitative data. According to the IBGE, DIA “is based on the methodology of Fellegi and Holt (1976)—of probabilistic imputation—for treating inconsistent or absent qualitative data, also including the possibility of deterministic imputations” (IBGE 2003b:109).

<sup>12</sup>Among nearly 45 million households registered in Brazil during the 2000 census, only 1.1 percent were classified as “collectives.” Among the 209,943 households in which the “responsible person” self-reported as “indigenous,” only 2.5 percent were classified as “collectives” (unpublished data derived from raw 2000 census data). Comparing those rates with the 61.4 percent of Xavante households classified as “collectives” highlights the discrepancy.

<sup>13</sup>This possibility is suggested graphically in Figure 3, with three nuclear families (indicated within dashed lines) in one Xavante extended family and residing in a single house.

<sup>14</sup>This workshop and the resulting paper was organized to assist countries that have ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention Nos. 107 or 169. Brazil ratified No. 169, “Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries.

<sup>15</sup>*Caboclo* is a Brazilian Portuguese word derived from Old Tupi that indicates people of mixed indigenous and European descent.

<sup>16</sup>As we submit the final version of this article (July 2008), final planning activities are underway for the 2010 Brazilian National Census. Two of the authors have offered specialist assistance to the IBGE at public hearings, calling attention to our results regarding the Xavante and the 2000 Census. They report that there is a concrete possibility of improvement in the criteria for collecting demographic data for indigenous peoples. Plans are underway for a pilot study in indigenous communities of the applicability for the 2010 Census of specific questions regarding ethnic affiliation and spoken languages.

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