Ownership, Appropriation and the Reproduction Cycle of Afro-descendent Houses in Salvador, Bahia

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The term "house" in this article has two meanings and is used here as a synonym for a domestic group, or one which I understand as "family"[1]. The first meaning refers to the tangible concept of a physical and geographical space which different people inhabit (house). The second, in line with Gilberto Freyre (1933 [1992]), DaMatta (1985) and Lévi-Strauss (1991, 1992) – *House* (in italics and with a capital H) – illustrates the concept of a domestic or family group, the lives of its members and their interactions and approaches, notions of kinship, clan or family. I have adopted the use of the concept proposed by Janet Carsten & Stephen Hugh-Jones (1995) and, in the context of the Bahian Recôncavo (the bay of Salvador and the surrounding area), that of Louis-Herns Marcelin (1996; 1999). These authors have critically updated the Levi-Straussian concept of *House*, articulating it within certain dimensions, such as "practice" and "process" and inspired by the theories of Pierre Bourdieu.

[1] "Family" is understood as a synonym for a domestic group, having or not having the potential to form a "unit of production", but always having scope for "social reproduction" and "consumption", where complex and dynamic social relationships are established between the members. The domicile where families usually gather appears to be a space of co-habitation for people linked by family ties or dependence, in which they establish relationships of affect, solidarity, tension and conflict. It is a space of social division – both sexual and generational – and of work, where power games establish themselves in relation to the distribution of each individual's rights and responsibilities,. I include in this concept of the family the definitions of Bruschini (1990) and Jelin (1994), which are associated with the concept of the life course, developed from socio-demographic and sociological studies of the family (GOLDANI, 1989; HAREVEN, 1978; OJEDA: 1989). From this perspective we begin with the assumption of the existence of a variety of family arrangements that extrapolate from the traditional (or elementary) nuclear model. Each transverse domestic arrangement is understood to have come about as a result of a variety of combinations of prior domestic arrangements. This means that throughout its history the same family group may pass through the extended, nuclear, incomplete or composite stages. To sum up, the analytical scheme proposed by the concept of life course is characterised by an understanding of family and personal dynamics during domestic cycles and incorporates aspects such as a) temporariness b) variation in the sequence of events and c) life transitions; thus treating individual and collective trajectories and the family life cycle as processes.

The house as a physical construction cannot be separated from the bodies which inhabit and pass through it, nor from the personal relationships which shape it. As a physical construction (house) and through its relationship with *House* as a complete social institution, the house constitutes one of the best registers of moments that articulate and mobilize intra and inter-generational alliances between members. For this reason, the representation of spatial transformations in house(s) (property) has shown to be an efficient and dynamic indicator of its members' domestic life course. For those who inhabit it, the house is as much a *temporary reference point*, a place of transit, as a *permanent reference point,* because it is the symbolic well-spring from which family myths and the family collective are born (MARCELIN, 1996).

In this article I will analyse the mode of reproduction in matriarchal Bahian *Houses* by describing the spatial transformations that occur in a particular extended family property (house) headed by a mother-grandmother, and by describing how distinct family sub-groups of this family make use of a piece of land. Four new houses emerged from the transformations and new constructions on this piece of land, which was the original house. The breaking up of the matriarchal *House* was the result of successive donations of plots of land by the matriarch to her descendents when she was still alive, unfair appropriation of plots of land by family sub-groups, as well as inheritance after the death of the matriarchal owner. In summary, I will describe the process by which members of this kinship network were included or excluded in respect of their inheritance and their right to use the house.

Transformations in this house, which occur throughout its life course, demonstrate its dynamic, revealing a series of situations of conflict and alliance interwoven with distinctive sub-groups and feelings of ownership and identification which are constructed and

renegotiated (though not always consensually), stigmatizing some and empowering others. Division in many nuclear families, instead of breaking away from the extended family's organisational logic, reaffirms it by repeating similar processes within new cycles. These new homes are more autonomous from the original house; however old dynamics are reproduced in the new houses, demonstrating similar *habitus* to the original, by the incorporation of grandchildren or children's partners. This is also seen in the way in which they remain connected to the prior network, beyond the family home of which they are a part, as close neighbours and central constituent elements of the social field in which the inheritance of the position previously occupied by the matriarch becomes disputed.

A matriarchal *House* may function in one home (house) or in various distinct homes (a configuration of houses). Further, more than one family sub-group may gather in this same house (home), dispersed in distinct spaces within the house, according to their dependence on the matriarchal nucleus. The notion of *House* here is similar to the notion of familial network; these two notions are occasionally confused.

Studies concerning the importance and form of inhabiting houses, and the historic importance of slavery in contemporary Brazil, illustrate some of the principal characteristics of a cultural matrix of poverty in the Bahian Recôncavo region, where Afro-Brazilian culture is so central and predominant (AGIER, 1990; FREYRE, 1992; HARDING, 2000; LANDES, 1967; LIMA, 2003; MARCELIN, 1996; WOORTMANN, 1987; 1990). In this context, matriarchal (or matrifocal) homes are common and have greater recognition in their respective communities than may at first be apparent. Observation of different ways of inhabiting houses in the popular milieu reveals that individuals living in conditions of poverty are not consistently distributed across these houses throughout their lives. Circulation between

different houses within a kinship network is intense, particularly during childhood, due to practices such as the circulation of children and foster children.

The "circulation of children" differs from this other practice and frequently occurs simultaneously in the same home, particularly within those studied. This circulation (associated with the frequent mobility of people between different houses) does not deny biological paternity and is, in general, a mechanism which occurs between blood relatives. In this case the child maintains the identity of its biological parents, while the identity of the foster parents may be additional, leading to the child having *"many mothers"* or many individuals responsible for their upbringing. Contact with biological parents is not broken, indicating that the relationship between the foster and the genetic mothers isn't, necessarily, excluding. Foster children, on the contrary, are usually those without family ties who are incorporated into a new home in the manner of an adopted child. Contrary to common, erroneous western representations of maternity *"the circulation and bringing up of children happens because children are wanted and desired"*, this demonstrates the child's inherent value. Fonseca (1995; 2000) makes a distinction between a child who is seen as a "gift" and a child who enters the *House* as a burden.

Due to the constant mobility in the type of residency that occurs in the popular sector, it is difficult to circumscribe certain family agents within a specific domestic unit, as they circulate between various other units within the same kinship network, neighbourhood or "configuration of houses". For this reason, the house must be thought of in the light of the inter-relationships which are established with other houses, and which also participate in the construction of the kinship network. The essence of kin is passed on through blood, but also via the principle of *consideration*. The principle of *consideration* is the third term – together

with consanguinity and affinity – for the kinship system through which the mechanisms of selection, integration and exclusion are activated, mediating relationships of affinity, friendship, neighbourhood, god-parenthood or belonging to a group, and transforming the fictitious relative into an effective or operational one. This dilutes the efficacy of the principle of blood and institutes the modality of "choice" through which the *relative* "in principle" may become an effective relative. Through "*consideration*" the affinal may become a close relative, that is, a non relative is considered as a "fictitious relative", *as if s/he were* consanguineous, but it is also a principle in which certain people from the kinship network are chosen since they are more significant in the interaction of individuals (see MACHADO, 1998; MARCELIN, 1996; SCHNEIDER, 1984). In this way, the condition of a "relative of consideration" encompasses all the individuals who conform to a specific network of closer co-operation. The organisational principle of consideration and the practice of circulation and upbringing of children are both constituent elements of what I have termed "matriarchality".

The idea of matriarchality refers to a collection of domestic relationships and relatives centred around the figure of a mother-grandmother (matriarch), who is the hub of interactions in her consanguineous network and the *locus* of descent and inheritance in her family. She is the one who exercises power regarding the house and her kin and is an important centre of diffusion from whom relationships between all the other members of her network multiply, occasionally extrapolating the physical limits of the house when it is a specific residence (i.e. in her house) and able to operate in conjunction and co-participation with various houses in the same kinship network. In this type of family configuration the role of these women is essential for group survival, and their role differentiates this mode of *being in the world*[2] from

[2] The concept of phenomenology. See Merleau Ponty (1994)

those other arrangements and roles performed by women in traditional patriarchal models or in more egalitarian nuclear models. To be the owner of a house is an essential requirement of what I have termed "matriarchality", since it is principally through this resource that these women exercise their power.

There are three elements fundamental to understanding matriarchal family arrangements. Firstly, the primacy of the principle of consanguinity over that of affinity. Secondly, and related to the former, high levels of instability in conjugal affinal relationships. Thirdly, the centrality of the mother-grandmother (matriarch) in this configuration. On the one hand women's power and autonomy and on the other conjugal instability or reproduction (of children) with different partners; these are both distinguishing characteristics in the history of the members of the two matriarchal groups studied (men who womanise, autonomous and independent women who, like "Mother Dialunda", do not want to commit themselves to only one man throughout their lives). Monogamous relationships only occur in a temporary or circumstantial fashion. Men abandon their partners and children, women evict partners from their houses, but children, even after they have left the maternal home, always return to their mothers' houses. Due to the eternal debt owed to the mother, adults or married couples are always found close to their kinship network. In this model, and due to factors inherent in the mother-child dyad, the family beings and remains stable. A father may or may not participate in these *Houses*, since paternity, despite being fundamental to reproduction, does not play an active part in the dyad.

However, the possibility of a woman becoming a "matriarch" within her relative group depends on her strength and the symbolic importance her *House* is able to achieve amongst her relatives and her community, as well as on the material and symbolic possessions that she

(above other members of her network) manages to accumulate throughout her life. This is directly related to the autonomy and strength these women develop in overcoming adversity during their lives and to their temperament, the early exposure to and predisposition for work which differentiates their lives from those of other women. The power these "matriarchs" hold over their children, grandchildren and the other members of their domicile, depends on "the symbolic power of their *House"* and the authority which they exercise over others. It is this matriarchal "power" that I have called "Circulating symbolic force" – CSF, as an analytical metaphor of the idea of "mother-of-all" based on Afro-Brazilian concepts, and alluding to Mauss' notion of *hau*. For this reason, in order to analyse the principle of matrifocality I begin with the premise that it is necessary to analyse and study the trajectory of *matriarchal Houses*, since they provide sustainability to matriarchality in the observed context of urban poverty. The *matriarchal House* is characterised by extensive domiciles headed by mature or elderly women.[3]

Thus, for a woman in this context to become a matriarch, it is necessary that she: 1) is the head of her family; 2) is the owner of her house (a house which essentially circulates between women); 3) has the material resources to support a large kinship network; and 4) has the power, autonomy and determination which is found in their life trajectories. In the two extended *Houses* headed by mother-grandmothers described in Hita (2004), the matriarchs had an early relationship with the world of work and underwent significant professional

[3] Throughout Latin America the significant presence of extended homes amongst the poor has been correlated with a lack of adequate housing policies commensurate with the impact of accelerated and unplanned urban growth. This growth took place as a result of the appropriation and occupation of empty plots of land (known as "invasions" in Brazil) by large contingents of migrants and homeless people who then utilised a variety of methods of self-build home construction. In the 90s, new residential Programmes, with support from the World Bank, began what became known as a process of "the re-classification and urbanisation of shanty towns". In this period, in the context of precarious urban development in the city of Salvador – the capital of Bahia, which is characterised by a population of approximately 80% Afro-descendents – I analysed the ways in which a form of extended matrifocal domestic organisation was reproduced amongst the Bahian poor: the matriarchal. This form of domestic organisation is as much a product of the lack of housing policies as it is, more importantly in the context studied, an expression of a black cultural matrix which has developed since the colonial era.

transformations at a certain point in their lives, by developing within professions which were seen as prestigious in their communities: one as a priestess and *Baiana* of *Acarajé* (significant female roles within *Candomblé*, the local Afro-Brazilian religion), and the other as a community midwife linked to her city's hospital network.

Taking matriarchality as a particular form of female-headed household which is sustained by household possessions, resources and the CSF, we can see the advantages of this form of arrangement both in terms of the difference and decreased vulnerability in comparison to homes headed by women who are simply "abandoned" by their partners (or who never had one) and who appear to have fewer resources to enable them to face the difficulties of heading the house and who appear more helpless. On the contrary, the matriarchal head of household has the power to bring up her own children as well as those of other women, which endows her with prestige and greater power, elevating her role of mother to *mother-of-all,* a situation which can also be seen within the family of a *Candomblé* priest. As in the studies of Landes (1967), Lima (2003), Woortmann (1987) and Marcelin (1996), I begin with the premise that there is a strong correlation between the post-colonial Afro-American cultural matrix[4] described in religious research and studies of *Candomblé* and a series of values, beliefs, feelings and organisational principles also seen in studies, undertaken between 1992 and 2003, of these extended matriarchal *Houses*.

In studies of *Candomblé* temples led by Priestesses (mães de santo, mothers of saints) we see the clearest evidence of the "principle of matrifocality" based on the power and centrality of these female priests and matriarchs, who are "*mothers-of- all*". Silverstein (1979) affirms

[4]For more on the effects of the post-colonial black American cultural matrix in the formation of extended family in the Caribbean and the United State, see Clarke, 1972; Gonzalez, 1979; Smith, 1973; Stack, 1974.

that every mãe de santo, like the most important and visible *Candomblé* priestesses, is both representative and symbolic of this religion in Bahia and the maternal figure, the "Black Mother", or *mother-of-all-the-world,* has overriding responsibility for the production and reproduction of her temple – the house of *Candomblé*. And, just as in the hierarchical structure of *Candomblé* temples, as in the world of consanguineous relatives, the members of these *Houses* occupy certain positions. In Bahia, being a priestess means being a woman "chosen" by the *Orixás* (gods and goddesses), the one who reaches a position of maximum authority in the temple (in the same way as a priest does in temples led by men). This person inherently has, or develops, certain personality traits – such as charisma, a strong personality, sharp intelligence, authority, sensitivity and the capacity to command – in order to manage their temple and maintain relationships with the *Orixás*.

The matriarchal *Houses* in this study are regarded as the products of certain life trajectories and specific experiences (not as *a priori*, ethnic or social class characteristics), which, only when understood in their complexity and dynamism, articulate their alterity and the recognition that this type of family composition receives as it occurs in the context of poverty, compared to standard (western nuclear or elemental) arrangements. Above all, matriarchal homes such as those studied are the product of the post-slavery regional historical context which characterises this area of the Brazilian North East. Colonial and post-colonial kinship practices develop in this type of home, where the presence of the kinship network and the centrality of the mother-child dyad are constant. Many women, with the support of their kinship networks, have become the focus of their family groups by overcoming adversity during their lives. This can best be seen in factors such as the importance of earned resources (salaries, pensions, possession of one or more inherited houses), and also in the opportunity to raise their own children as well as those of other women (bringing up children and the

circulation of children). In a context of poverty these women have tended to convert to an extended family arrangement headed by grandparents.

In a 1992 study, in which a survey was undertaken in 120 domiciles in a popular neighbourhood of Salvador[5], it was found that 51.6% of families resided in extended family arrangements[6] (of which there is strong evidence that more than half were female-headed); 35% in pure nuclear families; 10.8% in incomplete nuclear families (the majority being female-headed) and 2.6% in other types of family composition. The number of female-headed households is growing in many different locations and this figure is thought to be disproportionately higher in the city of Salvador than in the rest of Brazil. According to the 2000 census, the number of female-headed households was 38.24% in the neighbourhood studied. It is estimated that 65% of this total (or a little more than 25% of the total population of the neighbourhood) are matriarchal *Houses*. The phenomenon of female-headed houses has always existed but has been underestimated, so that some of the increase recorded is also the result of developments in new methodological instruments following those invented by the French School in the 1950s and the Cambridge School in the 1970s.

Use and Inheritance in the Matriarchal House: circulation of people, inclusion and exclusion

[5] Study: *"Processos de Fragilização e Proteção à Saúde Mental na Trajetória de Mulheres de Classe Trabalhadora Urbana"* (Processes that Weaken and Protect Mental Health in the Life Course of Urban Working Class Women), funded by the Carlos Chagas Foundation (FCC) and the National Council of Investigation (CNPq), co-ordinated by Dr Paulo César Alves and Maria Gabriela Hita, MA. The survey was the first contact with the two matriarchal houses studied in depth.

[6] I define as extended family those domiciles containing more than one nuclear family (complete or not) and which include other individuals – relatives or not – who are not from the same family nucleus (father, mother and their children).

Both Mother Dialunda (a *Candomblé* priestess) and Dona Cida (the only midwife in her community), left estates that were distributed amongst various children and grandchildren. The acquisition of different plots of land in both kinship groups was possible since the two matriarchs had formerly been prosperous, both financially and also in terms of prestige in the community. This was due to the respectability of their professions and of certain of their husbands or partners. This prestige was exemplified by the hosting of "family parties" and "meals" which were open to the community, similar to those described by Marcelin (1996) in groups linked to *Candomblé*. Another factor which characterizes this prestige was the strength and will-power they applied to raising other women's children, whether consanguineous or "strangers".

> In my grandmother's house there was always space for, and relationships with, strangers. **There could have been 12 relatives, but there always had to be a stranger** [...] Rosenildo **came with 12 and left with 21, he left and returned...** We called her the Greek. [...] It was as if the stranger were another child, getting everything that we got...clothes, food. But they all worked, they always worked. All the family members, only the little ones didn't. [...] **We were treated absolutely equally**. (Pedro A., grandson brought up by Dialunda, 02/05/01).
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> **I brought up children, grandchildren, I'm bringing up a great-grandchild!...and I'm still here! With my head... in the right place! Absolutely! *Oxênte*** *(a regional exclamation)*. I am who I am. Grandma. It's grandma. It's with me they [the children of the late Lena] sleep, they sleep there with me, eating... I'm everything to them. The **person responsible for them is me**, they don't have a father, father [the real one] doesn't call, **SO I AM THE GRANDMOTHER, MOTHER AND FATHER** (Dona Cida, 18/09/1992. and Dona Cida, 24/2/1999 combined).
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> "Ibijara [Dialunda's son] doesn't give anything, doesn't support [his own children]... so, you could say that **she is the mother, father and grandmother of the children. Why does she support everyone? She is the one who's responsible. Because she got the medicine, she got the clothes, she got the food, she got everything! She even got College. She got everything."** (Betinho, foster son, 30/01/00).

A recurring strategy used by extended families such as those in this study, is to obtain by occupying or purchasing at reasonable prices various empty plots of land in the city, particularly where other relatives can be found, in a clear strategy of expansion of the original estate. This may occur in different plots of land or locations or even in the same original plot by extending the house laterally or vertically. Even though family reproduction has a place in the complex and diverse urban context which is marked by occupations and unplanned growth in city wastelands, the example of these matriarchal *Houses* demonstrates that whether or not relatives continue to reside together or separately in future generations depends to a large extent on the resources that may be mobilised by taking up occupation in a

new house and the type of internal and consideration relationships which develop between the maternal home and the new nuclei.

The following section explores certain key aspects of the dynamics that drive reproductive processes in the matriarchal *House*, either through their capacity to include strangers or consanguineous kin in the *House* (through continuing practices of the circulation of people from these kinship networks), or through the process of the differentiated and hierarchical exclusion of certain members of these *Houses* when the criteria is inheritance of property.

The constant circulatory movement of people in both matriarchal *Houses* varies across different situations depending on relationships between relatives who are in alliance or conflict: leaving the mother's house for one of their own or for that of another relative, neighbour or acquaintance, and usually returning to the house of the maternal-grandmother (from the family of origin), by overcoming conflicts or when new needs arise. The comings and goings of grandchildren, children and others, accompanied by constant spatial reconfiguration, were intense in both matriarchal houses over time and across generations.

If the house is a *temporary reference point* for those grandchildren or members dependent on the matriarchy (domestic group) where they live, but one which is transitory and circulates between various other houses in their network, it is also a *permanent reference point* for them. This is because the kinship network and the houses through which they circulate are places where their individuality is constructed via the complex network of relationships and family experiences of which they are a part. Thus the *House* is above all a reference point of belonging.

The principle of consideration found in these types of popular neighbourhoods and especially in this matriarchal model, "unites" like to like or one of its own to another – blood relatives. And in the case of relatives of consideration, "it transforms" the other into "one of our own"; thus (and this is related to the principle of hierarchy) it sets out positions and differences to those from within the network. The principle of consideration is a principle of recognition,

selection and relationship because it constructs and delineates the boundaries of social proximity, internality and externality. It constructs the identical and the different, the proximal and the distal: it is a principle of legitimacy. The concept of consideration provides structure to the pursuit of sociability, codifies the criteria of "evaluation" and the choice of spouse, friend or godparent, and determines the future of these relationships (MARCELIN, 1996). In this way the condition of a "relative of consideration", brings together all the individuals who conform to a predetermined network of closer cooperation which, in this principle, includes children and those without shelter within the kinship network, incorporating them into the dynamics of these *Houses*.

Although foster and non consanguineous children had a greater chance of being included in this receptive kinship network, in both families they had more tasks than the consanguineous and suffered greater discrimination, particularly regarding inheritance of property, having less rights in respect of receiving a piece of land or part of the house. In this way, for them the house is not their own, but belongs to those who run it, the focal centre in which relationships and their right to use or not to use and the possession of the house(s) are determined. For these people, the dream of owning their own home almost never occurs in this network and may not even be considered. They are always dependent on being accepted or integrated into the houses of their relatives or those with whom they have close attachments, where they often stay. The house, in its turn, is a "more permanent" reference point for those members with closer blood ties and who are better placed within the family structure or on the matriarch's scale of "consideration", her legitimate heirs or the future owners of the property, as determined by her.

Access to or restriction from household goods in both groups also reveals dependence on criteria of gender, generation, consanguinity and consideration. These criteria are complex and not static and their origin may vary depending on each case and personal trajectory, on power games and other variables which intervene in the struggle for possession of the house in certain situations (particularly after the death of the matriarch). Also seen is a clear tendency to prioritise inheritance of the house or construction of a new home in order to

benefit women (just as they become mothers) ahead of men (even when there were no blood ties, as was the case with Dalva[7], where "consideration becomes action"); the oldest (daughters and primogenital granddaughters) and those who have blood ties. In both groups foster children (independent of their gender) were thus excluded. Two primogenital daughters from the matriarchs' first unions were also excluded, since these earlier partners had not participated in the construction of the estate. This appears to indicate an additional criterion in the definition of the excluded: it shows that beneficiary children were the "primogenitures" of those parents who helped the two matriarchs as they advanced during their lives. What emerges is that the line of paternal (and bilateral) consanguinity also influences the way their respective heirs are defined.

In the matriarchal family arrangement, independent of the power exercised through the principle of consanguinity, authority within the world of the house and the exercising of this power in domestic dynamics and relationships is predominantly female. Women truly are the owners of the house and usually retain the house in cases of separation, living within these homes with their respective offspring. Men, independently of whether they are the son or consanguineous kin in this matriarchal network, are the ones who tend to circulate more between different houses, frequently being the ones who depart to form nuclear families which they then head or to enter another woman's home in order to co-habit; but returning whenever the man needs to be within his respective, original, kinship network (whether on the paternal or maternal side; these respective networks are activated indiscriminately, depending on each given situation).

[7] Dalva is Dialunda's daughter-in-law who married Dialunda's youngest and preferred son. She finally appeared to have earned the right to succeed Mother Dialunda and the expulsion of her ex-husband from the house; he had other families but decided to accept a plot in the house of his father.

The circulation of people in Mother Dialunda's house was more accentuated and intense than in Dona Cida's, particularly amongst those most discriminated against within this hierarchical system of domestic relationships. Additionally spatial (house) movement was more visible in Dona Cida's *House*, which is why it was chosen as the principal example for analysis in the next section. Specific distribution of people is not chaotic and reveals different values and criteria: for example we have the bedrooms of the matriarch, one for couples with small children, the living room for singles (where men, for security purposes, sleep close to the outside door, while women are placed near the kitchen or the inside of the house), and there is space for favourite adolescent girls in their grandmothers' bed[8], etc. In the case of the priestess' *House*, there are other particular uses for different spaces, such as having a room/space just for saints, another for religious artefacts, another for clothes used in religious festivals etc. A similar dynamic regarding the use of space was observed in both houses, in that it was adaptable to the needs of each situation. Every bedroom, room, sofa or part of a bed is distributed amongst the occupants of the house according to marital status, gender, age, consideration etc, and where constant arrivals and departures, due to varying life situations, are determining factors. This human mobility and circulation may be the result of new unions, separations, childbirth, or the departure of members of the home due to the matriarch's wish and her decision regarding the lives of her dependents and the future of her houses. A clear example of this was observed in the following narrative regarding a granddaughter raised by Dialunda, when the construction of her own house began, in a separate domicile, after seven years of living in a rented house with the father of her children.

[8] A peculiar occupation of Dona Cida's bed was noted (similar to that seen at Dialunda's): she shared it with two of her granddaughters (Neneca's daughters – and her favourites). Firstly with Lia – a granddaughter who later married – and then Lídia, her sister, who also married some years later. During a certain period both sisters competed for a strip of their grandmother's bed, and for her affection, this reached a point in 1997 (when Laísa, – Lia and André's daughter – was born), at which point four women of three different generations slept in the same bed: Dona Cida on one side, Lídia in the middle, Lia and the baby on the other side. This is one of the examples, laughingly told to me by Dona Cida and Neneca, that demonstrate the struggle between the sisters for the affection and "consideration" of their grandmother

> **I don't like her [her granddaughter Carla, who she raised] being alone in her husband's hands, no. T**hey are making a little house for themselves there now, aren't they? [...] **When he [her granddaughter's husband] laid 100 blocks, I laid 200!** [...] That's my share, she's my granddaughter, isn't she? **If he brings food to the house, she has to eat it, and if not, she'll always have something, because I'm her grandma! [alluding to the possibility of always being able to return to her original home]. If he gives her something to wear, she has clothes, if he doesn't, she'll still have clothes, because she's got grandma!** (Dona Dialunda, 22/02/99).

The process in Dona Cida's *House* is similar to that seen in Dialunda's. The same transformative and configurative cycles and movements are seen whether there is one founding house or many such houses, thus expressing the life course of different domestic groups through the house's successive structural transformations. This manifests itself over time as the transience and transformation of a house (and a kitchen, where everyone eats from the same pot) into diverse new residences, independent of the mother-house. But it is a cycle which is rapidly reinitiated with the birth of a new grandchild and the union of their children (the grandchildren of the matriarch) who continue living in their parents' habitations or houses until they can set up one of their own.

Spatial transformations and the emergence of new houses

Movement is not exclusively seen amongst people but is also observed in the physical environment in which they live. This process of constant house reform and renovation is a distinguishing characteristic of such popular occupations, particularly since the 90s. The growing number of houses constructed with bricks and more permanent materials began to transform the landscape of the peripheral neighbourhoods. This process of construction and constant reform was striking during the years when I was researching in the neighbourhood. It was seen in the knocking down of dividing walls or the creation of new ones; doors, entrances and wall colours being changed and, especially, homes being expanded through the construction of new walls on top of the flat ceiling – concrete roof[9] – of the original house.

[9] When such houses are built it is common to leave a flat, concrete ceiling on the top of the house; a kind of roof. This is to facilitate the building of new floors on top of some part or all of this concrete ceiling at some point in the future.

Because of the high population density of this neighbourhood and the lack of horizontal space, vertical growth was favoured and then facilitated by incipient financing for the construction of popular houses that began in Salvador in the 90s. All this structural and spatial movement in the house lent a new and fluctuating identity to the neighbourhood environment. And observing the principles of transformations present in each house plan was, at the same time, a way of following the process of development in the diverse life cycles through which each familial group passed.

In 1992, Dona Cida's group functioned as a large extended family. Everyone ate from her pots and pans and Neneca (the primogenital daughter of Dona Cida's second husband) was already the proprietor of the small bedroom at the front of the house. But Neneca and her 7 children, from her first husband and a new partner, did not have sufficient resources to operate as an independent nucleus.

> **There was the house which had, had twenty, twenty-two children, who I had inside the house, at least. I fed these twenty-one children. These days some are a bit more... a bit more independent, some are getting there, but they're all still here with me. I always worked [as a midwife], then I retired, I'm retired, right?** (Dona Cida, 22/01/1997).

It was in around 1995 that Dina (the youngest daughter, who lived with her four children in the worst little bedroom of the house), earned, as recompense for her work on the expansion of her mother's already deteriorating house, the right to build her own house. This would be on top of the concrete roof over the part occupied by one of Dona Cida's familial sub-groups made up of the matriarch, 7 grandchildren from her primogenital daughter who had been murdered, and another grandson who she raised and who was a descendent of her foster daughter, Merina. This was the phase when the process of consolidating the new homes began, transforming both the room at the front, which was occupied by Neneca, and also Dona Cida's concrete roof into the base of these two new domiciles and it occurred at the same time that Neneca and Dina acquired their respective ovens. From a large family group

on a common plot, the house became a place in which various nuclear families occupied the same plot, where bedrooms and spaces which had constituted one, single house, were divided and transformed into new homes. With each successive transformation and new construction, these spaces reveal few remnants of that original, single house.

Subsequently, around 1997/98, Dona Cida ceded another smaller part of her concrete roof to her primogenital granddaughter and Neneca's daughter, Lia, when she became pregnant by her partner-provider, André, and who had sufficient finances and materials to erect her own house, whilst also bringing to this *House*, the support of a "respectable, working man". Thus the fourth domestic group or *House* was formed, marking a new stage in the life course of this broad kinship network. This process of constructing new *Houses* was characterised by the new nuclei's greater independence and the separate preparation of food, redefining the groups and people who occupied these new spaces (*Houses*). This process was as much the result of the decisions, orders, desires and willpower of the matriarch as of the real possibility for certain groups of her relatives to achieve independence. This process was always marked by differential power games and fierce conflicts amongst those involved.

> They fight a lot because of the house, don't they? They sit around saying: 'it's my house!; and the other one says, 'the house belongs to so-and-so, the house belongs to thingy!' [talking about her adopted grandchildren, the primogenital children excluded from inheritance and the other foster daughter who came to live with them after the death of the matriarch]. The house doesn't belong to any of them! The house doesn't/doesn't/doesn't have an owner like that, **the owner is me and Dina – we are the two daughters of the couple**. There isn't anyone else. **Because Merina is a foster daughter.**.. [...] (Neneca, 27/01/2000, after Dona Cida's death).

However, in Dona Cida's *House*, despite the different groups that, under a variety of circumstances, fought for possession of the house, as seen in the narrative passages, the principle relationships of conflict and alliance observed were most often focused on the two bilateral sisters: Neneca and Dina. They lived in the same house in endless dispute, attempting to win the love and respect of their father and mother while they were still alive. They also fought for the best space in the reconfiguration of the new houses. Seu Diogo, initially, and Dona Cida later, distributed favours and parcels of the house's land according to their favourite children (initially only Neneca and later also Dina and Lia, the granddaughter).

> Dina is more ... greedy-eyed [envious, ambitious]... **Because the right thing would be for Dina to have the house on top... my mother the part that is with her there, and [the space over there is] my bedroom; grandma in the one in the middle and Merina, the mother of / grandma's other daughter [foster daughter], on top of the/the concrete roof [in part of the extension of Dina's house]. Dina doesn't have a reason to... [occupy the whole plot] My grandma asked her and she didn't allow... [Merina] to make her own house.** (Lia, 8/02/1999). [At the time Dina had been asked to allow her bathroom and kitchen to be absorbed into her niece's, Lia's, small house. As Dina refused, the others began to seek an alliance with Merina, the sister Dina gave most consideration. And the one Neneca had denied the right to part of the matriarch's house because she was a foster daughter and not consanguineous]
>
> **Now after she [Dona Cida] died everyone wanted to have their own piece, you know? Sure they did! That's what they wanted. One wants more than the other: 'the house is mine', 'I've got a right too'. Then they're quarrelling, there... (they're all) fighting... So there was a fight. She was also fighting then** [Neneca]... ('-and Lia too?') **Her too! All of them wanting... A piece** <l> [laughs]. The one who has no right (to downstairs) is me, yes? I/I... **I'm the one who doesn't want anything, I'm resigned to what I have [here upstairs]. Right?** (Dina, 29/01/2000).

The autonomy won after Neneca achieved her own house in 1995 was relative, because Dona Cida carried on (until the day she died) paying the electricity and water bills and other general expenses of the houses "downstairs" (Dona Cida's and Neneca's) but she had already stopped paying for "the houses upstairs" (Dina and Lia) and they in turn had started to support Dona Cida's and Neneca's original home in the form of materials. On the other hand, the slow-paced evolution and expansion of Neneca's house over the years (the largest family but occupying less space on the plot than her sister's family) is more clearly seen when compared to the speed of the construction of Dina's house (a smaller familial group than Neneca's though occupying a larger portion of the plot), who, ambitiously and with great determination, was expanding beyond the space given to her by the matriarch, which provoked most of the relatives' conflicts and resentments.

The circulation of goods

In almost all the conflicts or manifestations of jealousy that I witnessed between Neneca and Dina in the *House* (and in other "wars" that were mentioned in the narratives of the sub-groups), the principle, ulterior motive for most of the misunderstandings was the struggle for physical space. The conflict of January 1999, which was labelled one of the worst to date, culminated in Dina calling the police to deal with her sister and one of her nieces. The family recounts that it was began with a trivial issue concerning gossip about the respectability of the niece/daughter that started the trouble. This was the catalyst for a battle that lasted the

whole day, involving broken furniture, crockery and glass. Dina threw objects from upstairs hoping to hit her sister and niece downstairs and the neighbours were alerted by screaming and swearing from both sides. The women "downstairs" (Neneca and her daughter Lídia) accused Dina "upstairs" of theft, prostitution and lesbianism, and Neneca's partner joined in the fray on their side. These "calumnies", coming from the mouth of her sister downstairs and leading to screams that all the neighbourhood could hear, profoundly offended Dina, who was often later ashamed to leave the house and experienced suicidal thoughts and a longing for revenge. The battle between the families only calmed down that night, when Doca, Dina's partner since 1995 and the father of her four children, who hadn't witnessed the conflict, came home from work and took his wife's side, insulted by the accusation that he was a cuckold. The next day when I dropped by for a visit the house was as quiet as a grave with everything closed up... it wasn't until several months later that I was able to ascertain the facts and understand what happened. The fight continued in the following days, with threats and mutually anonymous telephone calls; bozos (offerings to the Gods made in *Candomblé* to put a hex on your enemies) left at doors and nearby crossroads and the temporary departure of Lídia (the niece, Neneca's third daughter) from the house in fear of Dina's and her husband's threats. It became clear over the years that the majority of conflicts in this familial group were related to disputes regarding inheritance, the right to the house and matriarchal succession, in which these two sisters were the strongest candidates despite there being others (such as the foster grandchildren and foster daughter) interested in ownership and who, in different ways, caused disruption in accordance with the extent of their prospective chances and resources.

> **We were there making a small room here [upstairs] – [...] [When] we started to put up the wall, little by little and... we started to have [bad] luck with/with the family here, wanting to take part of the concrete roof, take this bit, take that bit... We didn't let them... So, then we started to build over that part** [over the whole of Dina and Doca's concrete roof, creating a second floor] **/ we did that bit, then everyone... living... we were all here, right?,** and the children. Including, even... Greice – one of our colleagues – she came with two nephews from the countryside that didn't have anywhere to live, they stayed with us. So, then it started... **Her family started a fight... her sister, right? Her niece/and the other daughter, then it started, even Dona Cida was against her, against me.... Because of this... do you understand?** And... Yes... Because they didn't think/that we could do it/**but we/she had/I didn't!/she, yes? She was completely right because... she built Dona Cida's house – she did everything – that no-one else wanted to do...** Do you understand? It was **Dona Cida who consented to us making our / a small house here upstairs... She did.** Then [they think like this:] **'because he couldn't do it – us – couldn't get on with it without Dona Cida's permission.**

> **[But] Dona Cida gave us the opportunity. [...] And she said that we could do what we wanted here.** (Doca, Dina's partner 23/01/2000).

In a form of logic of the gift, based on the *give-receive-reciprocate* cycle, Dina's refusal to "reciprocate" (and her growth in power, which was proportionately greater than that which she had been granted by the logic of her kin) can be seen as her declaration of war on the familial group, her way of imposing change on the field rules. Her relatives recriminate her because, from the perspective of reciprocity in which they all participate, Dina should return maternal gratitude: by ceding the right to build on the concrete roof of her own house, by respecting the matriarch's wishes and orders, in solidarity with the others and by helping them construct their homes, in compliance with third party house rights to her concrete roof. Perhaps Dina was disrupting the order because her logic was more concerned with that of the market economy, in contrast to the logic of the gift, or perhaps, for her, the circulation of gifts was neither eternal nor extendible to all members of her kin, as her relatives expected. For Dina, her house was a prize worth more than a "donation" from her mother or one which had to then be repaid to everyone. She understood that her right to the concrete roof was already a counter-gift from her mother because of the greater effort she made in the re-construction of the maternal house, and that the greater care she took in providing materials for her mother's house was her repayment to her mother. In contrast, what she could do with her concrete roof was up to her family and not to the wishes of an elderly, weakened, matriarch.

> **So I started building on the whole of mamma's concrete roof, right? [...] I built on the entire roof of the house – let me see... the two living rooms, kitchen, two bedrooms, yes. Making five in all.** But not my bedroom, where I slept, nor Júlio's, my brother's bedroom, right? [...] [Dina and her four children were still living in the worst part of the house and when it was flooded in heavy rains her mother offered to build her house on her mother's concrete roof.]. **Then she said when I got home from work, she started to talk to me: 'hey, build your house on top of the roof there'. On top of 'your' roof.** [Because Dina, who worked in civil construction, was the one who worked hardest in the upgrading and expansion of the house] **After I helped?** [in the improvements in her mother's house]. **Here** [the upstairs house] **is mine. Downstairs: the concrete roof is mother's**. [She tried to convince her sister Neneca to swap the plots so she could construct on top of that roof – which was bigger – and she gave up the part of the house in front of the matriarchal house, which had already been built]. **Then I went to talk to Neneca. Neneca didn't want to! She said no, that I had a cheek. 'You've got a cheek; you don't have a house to give to anyone, not here. Go and build yours there on top'.** Then she thought this: that the roof there was large, and that she didn't have the money to build a house, right? [...] But it was a just a trick. (Dina, 27/07/1999).

The breakdown in the process of reciprocity brought about the state of conflict described in the narrative passages. But Sahlins (1983) said that every war is an unsuccessful exchange and that suppression by the victor doesn't always imply the victory of one and the submission of all the others, it can also be a mutual surrender such as that which seems to have occurred, at least temporarily, after the death of Dona Cida. Dina's destructive behaviour, at times involving her own household goods, as illustrated by several narratives, clearly expresses what Leffort (1979) identified as the prestige value that is related to exchange. This can be seen in specific cases in which kin lay down challenges in the form of gifts to each other, explicitly seeking their adversary's submission, attempting to dominate though gifts or the declaration of war. This leads to the destruction of riches in the *potlatch* style. In certain cases it is even necessary to let everything go and conserve nothing: since he who knows how to consume all and to destroy all is seen as the leader.

For Mauss (1988) "destroying upon giving" makes it impossible for the other to reciprocate, thus the instigator of *potlatch* destroys goods in order not to receive, but, above all, to lay down, to the other, the challenge of refusing riches... making it is a model of affirmation, in the manner of someone who knows how to free themselves from their possessions. Leffort says that this tearing up of precious materials, throwing necklaces into the sea and burning down of your house, are distinct manifestations of these materials, necklaces and "houses" *not being themselves*. We can see that *potlatch* is a clear demonstration of man's tendency to identify with his property because, Leffort continues, it is necessary for him to characterise it while at the same time being a rejection of himself. In this way, a man sheds his outward appearance and affirms the idea that "I'm not like this" ... in his confrontation with nature. Within the framework of this confrontation it appears that the aim is not to deny others the

opportunity to reciprocate, because the desired end isn't merely the submission of the other, but the submission of nature, which is continually re-enacted.

In Leffort's words:

> Giving is as much about making someone dependent on us as it is about making us dependent on accepting the notion that the gift will be returned [...] Not to give in order to receive; to give so that the other gives (1979, p33).

Social mobility is one factor capable of lessening the solidarity of a kinship network such as that observed in this example. There is the threat that those who manage to rise in the socio-economic hierarchy become scornful of or completely forget their poorer relations. There are also those who, by emphasising how much more they have participated in certain projects or family developments, fail to acknowledge the participation of others. They withdraw from their network by stressing their generosity and the sacrifices they have made that weren't reciprocated, saying that what sets them apart is the way their loyalty has been abused, as well as their superiority above everyone else. This was the case with Dina, Dona Cida's daughter, and the relatives, on their fathers' side, of Dona Cida's daughters.

CONCLUSION

To penetrate the domain of kin and the *House* is to enter a world of individual and collective strategies, a sphere in which relationships of affect, conflict and power take place; of struggles and strategies to achieve a position and a space within these houses, with all their ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes.

Just as can be seen in Radcliffe-Brown's (1973) definition of matriarchy, the *Houses* of mother Dialunda and Dona Cida are clear examples of the matriarchal model, since progeny, inheritance and success all come from the female line of the kinship network. Marriage or other predominant forms of union were matrilocal and authority over children was principally exercised by the mother's kin. Thus the space inside the house is seen to be a remarkably

feminine *field* in this type of family arrangement. Further, what was seen in the studied context is in general the same as what was noted in the research studies of Klass Woortmann (1982) and Marcelin (1996) which classify Bahian society, when living in poverty, as predominantly matrifocal.

The house and the mother's Strength

The legitimate authority and distinguishing positions of these two "black matriarchs" in their networks reside, amongst other things, in their CSF – linked to the strength of their *House* – expressed in the power to make decisions, which remain valid until death, about the circulation of this precious gift – the house – sanctioned in the popular imagination by the collective representation of "*s/he who marries needs a house*". In other words, the right to have a place in the world, a house (or part of a house), the physical space of habitation. The house can be seen as one of the most important goods (gifts) in circulation: desired and disputed by the integral members of this domestic configuration. And in this family model it is the matriarch, as the legitimate proprietor of lands and the house in which everyone lives, who has the last word and who decrees the future of her property. She administers the utilisation of the space, manipulating, offering, taking and redistributing it, depending over time on situations and relationships between certain members of her extended family group. These matriarchs are central figures who, to a certain extent, determine the rules of inheritance and succession; they are the owners and the leaders in their *Houses*. And it is through their houses that they exercise their matriarchy.

One repayment for receiving the gift of a piece of land is expressed through collective improvements effected in the construction of the collective property; these allow for a modification of what was initially the mothers' houses into something that is divided into

more than one entity: the children's and grandchildren's houses. Gifts and counter-gifts are not only material, they can also be affective (spiritual, etc) and occur in the course of established relationships amongst kin, whether proximal or distal to the projected expectations about each member. Within the circulation of that other desired property – expressed as the mother's affection – relationships of complicity, interest and spontaneous obligation, as well as conflicts and disputes were intertwined. In these relationships, what appears to be constantly at play and continually negotiated is a certain position, recognised and prestigious for those both within and outside the group; directly mediated by the women who centralize authority in their groups.

Of the principle exchanges in the process of circulation – such as the matriarch's affection – whatever is given and received must later be repaid, under threat of open conflict (*potlatch*). Children and kin are also circulated throughout houses, thus modifying the way the physical space is used. In fact, people circulate as much within the space as the space is circulated amongst them; speaking symbolically, the space also moves, being transformed and re-adapted in accordance with the dynamics and trajectories of its inhabitants as they move around within specific situations and people. Neneca and Dina, for example, were occupying different spaces in the matriarchal house – the bedroom designated for the married or for familial sub-groups who have children, the central bedroom-livingroom, the matriarchal concrete roof – competing between themselves while the matriarch was still alive (the *potlatch* between them was for the matriarch's affection), to demonstrate their merit to their mother, neighbours and kin, and to obtain a better position in the scale of consideration and the wider kinship network.

The "gift" of the "house" and the right to it, was the most valued article of exchange in the reciprocal relationships of the extended groups observed throughout the field work: a gift to be given, received and reciprocated, obtained, rejected or usurped, constructed and destroyed, transformed and translated into the matriarch's own "*hau*" (soul). It is a coveted gift and one of the principle motives of family conflict. Owning a house makes its owners "respectable" and legitimate carriers of the name of the family *House*. When a member of a domestic group leaves to construct their own home, it is an individual accomplishment but also a collective, group achievement, because it presupposes a certain amount of collective support and resources. Being able to mobilize "collective working groups" to construct your own house, shows the world, as you build, the extent to which you are respected by those around you, your importance and the extent of your integration into the community. Separation from the family home simultaneously brings with it something more than the feeling of strength and consequent group prestige (a sign of your CSF). It also brings a feeling of rupture and distance from the new familial sub-group because the new nucleus is different from the matriarchal group and prevents the family home from one day having, to the same previous extent, the power to channel those resources generated by its members, such as the power to work or to devote energy. These resources will now be directed to the new house.

Consideration, construction of kinship and the necessity of reciprocation

Domestic life in popular communities such as those observed, produces and expresses itself in the language of the various members of the support network. These social networks are articulated through the positions that each one occupies in the family and in the houses of a given configuration, within territories that have been historically and socially constructed. Relationships of reciprocity and hierarchy established in the various matriarchal house configurations, comprehendible within the "paradigm" of the gift – as understood by Caillé

(1998) – are based on the assumption that the human condition originates from a state of indebtedness. Man finds himself obliged to recompense for what he owes to the people he interacts with – God, parents, family, society... – in particular, with the female entity who gave him life: his mother. In the logic of this system of exchange, and especially in this matriarchal model, it is this original debt that is the foundation for the need to give and repay in an eternal circular movement of gift-counter-gift. Refusal to participate in this cycle of obligatory reciprocity within the bosom of the family is seen as ingratitude and a renunciation of the desire to be part of the network. It is an act of disrespect and denial of repayment to the mother figure (one of the worst moral failings that it is possible to commit). Active participation in the kinship configuration to which you belong implies having proper *consideration* in your group.

The word *consideration* denotes recognition of what one has received, allowing for active entry into the symbolic cycle of reproduction of the family, the kinship network and society. Even when the rules of this hierarchical system produce and legitimise discrimination and inequalities "in general", these don't appear to be experienced as injustices. Differentiation in positions, rights and responsibilities between respective members is necessary for the holistic and hierarchical matriarchal family home. It is a mode of operation in this family home that, rather than being excluding, is, from a certain perspective, capable of being inclusive, bringing 'otherness' – difference – to the core of the family, letting it participate in the community.

Many studies on this subject note the efficiency of reciprocal exchange in improving the chances of surviving poverty; it is a means of supplementing resources in the struggle against scarcity. The logic underpinning this system is the belief that the more one gives to others,

the more one receives in return. This is an implicit rule in the logic of reciprocity which has been demonstrated to be very efficient amongst the poor, where, in order to survive, one always needs something from someone. In the eternal cycle of reciprocity these rules of mutual obligation are simultaneously expressed as generosity and selfishness. It is common to develop ties both of great competitiveness and aggression but also of solidarity and friendship.

According to popular attitudes, looking after children is different from other domains and is the most recurrent form of reciprocity within kinship and neighbourhood networks. Asking a neighbour or relative to "keep an eye on" the house and children in your absence, or leaving them watching over things inside your house is the "right" of all the participants in a certain family arrangement. On the other hand, looking after a child or accepting the requested service with good grace may be seen as a "responsibility". However, a service regarded as optional for a neighbour, appears to be translated into terms of rights and obligations amongst relatives from the same configuration of houses, in accordance with family ideology's code of conduct.

Popular morality and the concept of the Mother-of-all

In the model studied, children are highly desired and valued and have rights within the kinship network of their birth. Paternal and maternal responsibilities do not belong exclusively to birth parents but are shared with others – in fact it is extremely common for this responsibility to be transferred to others. In this context the criteria that defines who takes care of and raises children depends less on the wishes or life circumstances of their biological parents than on the life cycle within the residence, the size of the home and

employment, amongst other factors. Thus, the principle of consideration (usually associated with blood) is prevalent, since it is common for those who have special consideration to "raise" their relatives' children. In this way the ties of obligation, alliance and mutual dependency within social relational networks deepen and obligations of future reciprocity are, to a certain extent, guaranteed. However "raising other people's children" isn't a task for everyone; "aptitude" and "resources" are required to fulfil this function. Not all members of a family are always capable of assuming this role, which is usually undertaken by more mature women from the kinship or neighbourhood network, women who have a house, the availability and the requisite economic conditions to undertake such a task. This is the case with the two great-grandmothers Dona Cida and Mother Dialunda, who raised children and grandchildren, and also with Neneca, though at a later stage in her life.

According to popular morality and contrary to what is usually sanctioned by State laws, those who "raise" and "nurture" a child may have a greater right to that child than those who bring the child into the world. Whoever maintains and raises the child fulfils a maternal function and consequently has the right of mother (or father) *status*, although that person is never confused with the birth mother. Generally, the distinct "fathers" or "mothers" (birth and foster parents) of these children in circulation do not fight over the children, even though there are always tensions and conflicts in this domain. What prevails is an idea of social maternity that functions simultaneously with biological maternity, and may be expressed in terms of a child having "more than one mother" and "not only one" (the biological, the foster, and that of consideration, etc). A similar situation occurs with fathers, although the role is less important than that of the mother. This less central role is played out through the paternal figure of this model, in which the function of paternity is expressed through "recognition" of the child, allowing access to the father's kinship network rather than to his

provider role. Provision for children is the responsibility of the kinship network and those who lead it. In this system, in which children circulate (depending on the situation) amongst different houses in the network, contact with the child's respective parents (mother and father) is not normally lost, but is maintained and renewed at certain points in the life cycle.

Another aspect relevant to kinship and related to the circulation of members between different units, is that the responsibility for providing food, care, clothing, accommodation and the socialisation of children may be dispersed and distributed amongst several houses in the kinship network. The family cannot therefore always be reduced to the study of a single house or domestic unit since within this context these boundaries are usually much more fluid and diffuse. Someone may sleep in one house, have their meals in another and leave their clothes or personal objects in a third. They may also live in one house some of the time and elsewhere at others, circulating between different units. Human circulation within these houses is constant and the domestic arrangement and composition frequently oscillates. The notion of kinship "network" associated with family enables us to observe more clearly both the group and individual trajectories of the members of a certain house configuration. This form of residing and cooperation in the familial organisation of those involved in a kinship network, which has its own conflicts, quarrels, ruptures, alliances and solidarities is indicative of the constancy, permanence, stability and collective power present in this form of *extended House* configuration, as it occurs in urban poverty. The domestic composition of a single house usually reveals very little about the domestic organisation and cooperation established between close-knit adult women in a kinship network that is usually distributed across a group of houses. In this way, the idea of a "kinship network" that goes beyond the limits of a house and integrates a group of houses participating in the arrangement is much more powerful.

If the weight of "social maternity" appears to prevail or at least to function simultaneously with biological maternity, it can be deduced that in an ethic of "maternity" in popular communities such as those studied, the socialisation of children is shared and the network has greater responsibility for the child than the birth parents. The woman who raises her own as well as other people's children is the prototype "Mother", a "mother-of-all". This element is present in and central to the system that I have termed "matriarchality": a social maternity practised by the network, but under the vigilance and responsibility of women who are capable of fulfilling this function. In this system the concept of "maternity" with *care* is not sufficient; we also find the concept of mother as "provider" for her children and for the entire network that the matriarch supports. She is a strong woman capable of responding to the basic needs of her relatives, to whom she offers a roof, food, clothing and protection for their basic survival. In turn, for these kin the matriarch symbolizes the *House* that they feel part of and to which they belong.

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