Para Yani e Bebo
um abraço
Danielle

ABOUT THE HOUSE
LÉVI-STRAUSS AND BEYOND

Edited by

Janet Carsten
University of Edinburgh

and

Stephen Hugh-Jones
University of Cambridge

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

To Claude Lévi-Strauss

THE HOUSES OF THE MẼBENGOKRE (KAYAPÓ) OF CENTRAL BRAZIL – A NEW DOOR TO THEIR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

10

Vanessa Lea

Plate 7   Mẽbengokre houses in Kapôto Village, 1987.

LÉVI-STRAUSS defines the house as 'a moral person which possesses a domain that is perpetuated by the transmission of its name, its fortune and titles, along a real or fictive line, held as legitimate on the sole condition that this continuity can be expressed in the language of kinship or of alliance, and more frequently of the two together' (1984: 190).[1] The Mẽbengokre, a Jê-speaking society of Central Brazil[2] recognize Houses (as opposed to houses, dwellings or abodes) as moral persons in the sense alluded to above. I shall show here how Lévi-Strauss's conception of house-based societies offers the possibility of a new perspective for understanding Mẽbengokre social organization but first it is necessary to distinguish between those of its characteristics which are compatible with the Mẽbengokre case and those which are not, discussing the incompatibilities that exist.[3]

The distinction between Houses and dwellings is invisible to the eye of a casual observer. The dwellings are very similar to one another and are regularly spaced around the village circle (Plate 7). Their only distinctive external architectural feature is their size. A dwelling may house only one nuclear family, though ideally it is occupied by an uxorilocal extended family. Nowadays, matrilateral parallel-cousins (and sometimes even uterine sisters) tend to inhabit separate dwellings, but in such cases they consider themselves to belong to the same House. In the Mẽbengokre case, 'House' is a synthetic gloss for *kikre dzam dzà*

(House/on foot/place). Each House occupies a fixed position within the village circle in relation to East and West and each is considered to have a place of origin in a specific portion of the circle where its members have built their dwellings since time immemorial.

In recent years the men have taken over house-building from the women and have adopted the regional style: oblong constructions with windowless vertical-pole walls and thatched roofs. Dwellings generally lack any internal divisions but have one or two doors (depending on size) which open onto the village circle. The doors serve as windows and light also filters through the spaces between the poles. The floors are of beaten earth. The women construct pole beds where they sleep with their husbands and small children, separated from the next couple by no more than a few feet. Pots and pans are strewn about the floor or stored on pole racks; other possessions are hung from the walls or from the rafters. The senior woman of the dwelling tends to occupy the centre of the house with her daughters (along with their husbands and children) distributed to either side. The daughter of a dead sister of the senior woman tends to occupy one extremity of the dwelling or to construct a separate dwelling, but next door to her maternal aunt. The number of inhabitants per

dwelling ranges from two to thirteen. The size of a dwelling depends upon the number of its inhabitants and is independent of its symbolic wealth; its upkeep reflects the number of resident able-bodied men available for rebuilding and restoration. There is generally one stone oven per House, out in the patio, though each dwelling also has one or more cooking hearths inside too.

Mention is made of the absence of any House, in a particular village, by saying *dzam dzà kapni*, which can be glossed as 'vacant position'. When new villages are built, spaces may be left between the occupied dwellings in the hope of filling them, in due course, with the arrival of representatives of the empty positions. If a House is definitively subdivided (*aben ngrà*), its patrimony is also subdivided and the members of the two Houses that result from such a fission start to intermarry.

The Mẽtùktire (also known as Txukarramãe) are a Mẽbengokre sub-group, who consider themselves to be members of a community linked by kinship relations and sharing a cultural heritage distributed amongst nine villages in the states of Mato Grosso and Pará, Central Brazil.[4] In conceptual terms, each actual village has as its reference an ideal village which is constituted by the totality of Houses distributed amongst these villages, each one with its own distinctive patrimony[5] of personal names and prerogatives. No contemporary village has dwellings representing all the Houses. In Kapòto, for example, in 1987, there were 31 dwellings representing 14 Houses. All Houses have their members unevenly distributed amongst the above-mentioned villages. I therefore disagree with Turner when he claims that for the Jê and Bororo,[6] the individual village community constitutes the highest level of the social structure (1979a: 174).

Each House is an exogamous unit whose distinctive identity is substantialized, metaphorically, by the symbolic goods which compose its patrimony and that are considered inalienable. It could be argued that all goods are symbolic, nevertheless, this term is particularly appropriate in the sense that heritable goods in Mẽbengokre society are non-material – personal names and prerogatives (*nekrets*). The latter include:

(a) for both sexes, the right to make and use particular adornments, play specific ceremonial roles, and collect or store certain goods in one's House;

(b) for men, the right to specific cuts of meat from large game animals;
(c) for women, the right to raise certain animals as pets.[7]

Traditionally, and nowadays sporadically, a House may be visually distinguished from the outside by its pets which wander in and out like live emblems. Inside each House hang its members' masks and ornaments which are stored in order to be publicly displayed during ceremonies.

The patrimony of the Houses is not static. It can be enriched through new acquisitions or impoverished through robbery. For instance, people are accused of stealing names and *nekrets* from enemies who died at their hands. Nevertheless, each House has a nucleus of goods which is conceived (rightly or wrongly) as attesting to its immemorial origins. Rather than possessing a name as such, the Houses are referred to by the name of one of their most prominent items of wealth, such as 'the House of the yellow feather headdress', which is also 'the Eastern House'.[8]

The most highly valued names and *nekrets* are the 'purest' in the sense that they belong indisputably to one House. Names and *nekrets* which have started to circulate in another House can be renounced (*kanga*) by those who consider themselves to be their legitimate owners since they have lost their differentiating role. The Mẽbengokre claim that in the past women used to engage in physical combat due to the illegitimate appropriation of names and I witnessed various verbal disputes over names and *nekrets*.

From the Mẽbengokre perspective, mythical time converges with historical time with no significant rupture between the two. Along the mythical–historical trajectory of each House, the exploits of its uterine ancestors account for the origins of its patrimony of names and prerogatives; this is why they form a seemingly arbitrary collection. The use of the names and *nekrets* of the ancestors erases the temporal vacuum between them and the living. What the ancestors had that is non-perishable can be found amongst the living. It is as if the essence of each House were transmitted along a vast genetic-like thread.

Of the 29 myths that I collected, 22 were associated with one or more Houses; 9 myths mentioned an individual in one House and his or her spouse in another. Mythological figures tend to have various

names; these belong to specific Houses and are passed on in the same way as any other names. Some of the ornaments and roles which are *nekrets* of certain Houses have their origin explained in myths which legitimize their possession of them. Other acquisitions mentioned in the myths benefit or prejudice society as a whole. The myths demonstrate that, from the Mẽbengokre point of view, not only did some aspects of the cosmos emerge from society – the sun, the moon, the night – but also certain physiological processes – old age and death, and even the pupils of the eyes.[9]

In the literature on the Jê, the women's domain (the ring of dwellings at the edge of the village circle) is usually depicted as 'peripheral', with connotations not just of space but also of value. Bamberger, for example, describes the female area as weakly social (1967: 128), claiming that women have an almost nonexistent role in communal affairs (1967: 162). According to Bamberger: "The localization of women on the periphery of the village is symbolic of their apolitical and marginal social role in Kayapó society' (1967: 173).

In synthesizing the research carried out by members of the Harvard–Central Brazil project and focused on the Jê and the Bororo, Maybury-Lewis expresses the opinion that these societies share a sharp distinction between the public and private spheres, between the ceremonial domain and the households to which everyday matters are relegated (1979: 305). But when the Houses are recognized as moral persons it becomes clear that they control all scarce goods in Mẽbengokre society. These goods include beautiful names which give rise to the great naming ceremonies, adornments, a large quantity of ceremonial roles, songs, and even the maracas which are used to mark the dance and song rhythm in all ceremonies.

Ceremonies are supremely aesthetic events because they achieve the most complete composition of the social corpus, articulating together the members of each House through their respective roles. Even the dead come to attend the ceremonies which is why the Houses are abandoned to them by the living who camp out in the plaza. J. C. Crocker stated that '… the Bororo have created an organic solidarity which is no less real for being symbolic' (1985: 35). This is perfectly applicable to the Mẽbengokre.

The Houses are private, not only because access to them is limited to certain individuals, but also because they constitute the domain of particularities – symbolic goods, political interests and the male duty to avenge homicides which victimize its members. The cultural heritage of Mẽbengokre society is segmented by the Houses which, added together, form a totality. The village is decribed metaphorically by the Mẽbengokre as a body, with its legs to the East, its head to the West, and with the plaza representing its belly.

The Houses converge toward the centre because it is in the men's house that matters of collective interest are discussed and communicated to the entire village.[10] In other words, the men's house, which brings together members from all the Houses, represents a neutral space where an effort is made to harmonize the particularistic and factional interests that constantly threaten to disrupt the integrity of the village.

A Mẽbengokre belongs automatically to his or her mother's House. Half siblings who share the same father are distinguished from uterine siblings; only the latter are designated by the term *atsikot apoy* which could be glossed as 'brought out in a series'. When a man marries and is installed in his wife's dwelling, she should regularly send part of the fish and meat that she obtains from her husband to his mother and sisters. When a man inherits the right to eat a specific cut of 'beautiful' meat – that is, one that constitutes *nekrets* – this is taken to his mother's House, where it is cooked, consumed and ideally shared with his sisters' sons, his legitimate heirs within his House. The Mẽbengokre claim that hereditary meat cuts are not shared with the wife or children of their owner.

Consequently, I cannot accept Turner's interpretation that the Mẽbengokre have developed to the maximum the principle of separating a man from his natal family and integrating him into his family of procreation (1979b: 181 and 189). Turner also argues that as a man's children grow older, he comes to be considered less as an affinal member of his wife's household and more as a consanguineal one (1979b: 184). In my opinion, Nimuendajú's view of the Timbira reflects Mẽbengokre reality with greater clarity. According to him, a man has much stronger links with his mother's house because these are indestructible, than with his wife's house, for these links can be dissolved at any time (1971: 126). Dreyfus expresses the same point of view when she states that Mẽbengokre men are merely habitual guests in their wives' houses and never the heads of the family, and that the strongest ties are those that link men to their sisters, ties which are detrimental to the conjugal relationship (1963: 61).

PERSONAL NAMES

The transmission of names and of *nekrets* is identical. For reasons of space I will concentrate on the former. Ideally a man transmits the names he bears, if they originated in his own House, to one or more of his sisters' sons or else to the sons of his female matrilateral parallel-cousins (i.e. 'ZSs'). The Mẽbengokre of both sexes have between a minimum of five and a maximum of thirty names. On the occasion of their transmission, the names borne by one person are divided out amongst various name-receivers. This phenomenon could be attributed to a dialectical logic. Each person is identified with an eponym[11] or 'name source' with whom he or she shares one or more names in common but, at the same time, they should also be distinguished from him or her by receiving a name(s) from one or more other sources as well.

The actual name-giver, who merely proclaims the names being transmitted, is much less important that the eponym, a person in the ascending generation who is the bearer and source of the names transmitted to a baby or child. Thus, when a mother transmits her dead brother's name to her son, she acts as the name-giver but it is her brother who is the eponym. The splitting up of names on the occasion of their transmission, and the fact that people normally receive names from various eponyms – even when all of them are transmitted by the same name-giver – results in the fact that nobody is the exact replica of another person. The simultaneous process of identification and contrast is possibly due to the fact that the dead are held to be a threat to their close living relatives; they want to carry them off in order to be together. When names are split up amongst various receivers, this dilutes the eponym's identification with any one of them.

Another reason why each Mẽbengokre has so many names is that although individuals can choose the people to whom they transmit their names they only have the right to transmit names which originate from their own House. Names may be lent out in one generation but they must be returned to the House that owns them in the following generation. Thus a woman who receives names from her FZ has lifelong usufruct of such names but she cannot transmit them to her BD or other person of her own choice (see Fig. 10.1). The borrower may return the names to her FZDD or may simply
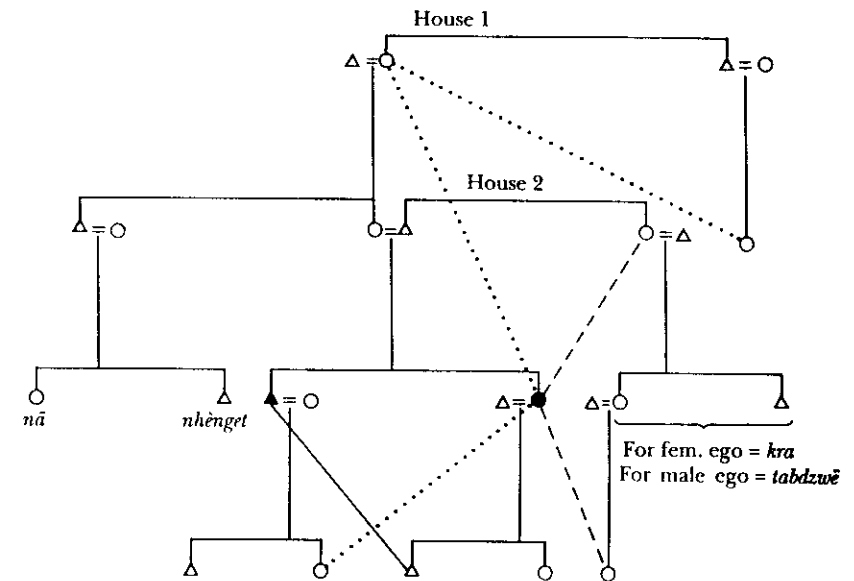
Male and female ego use the same terms *nã* (M) and *nhènget* (MB) for their matrilateral cross-cousins.

Female ego's patrilateral cross-cousins are her classificatory children *(kra)*; for male ego, these same cousins are classificatory sister's children *(tabdzwë)*.

Example 1: ———— male ego transmits names to ZS.

Example 2: – – – – female ego receives usufruct of names from her FZ which she later returns to her FZDD. Since ego is not the rightful owner of these names, she must return them to their House of origin.

Example 3: ·········· female ego's MM gave usufruct of her names to her BD and later retransmitted them to her DD, thereby enabling female ego to transmit these names to her BD, since they are the property of ego's House.

Fig. 10.1 Cross-cousin terms and examples of name transmission.

relinquish the right to transmit them to the owners of the names, i.e. to the closest uterine relatives of the person who loaned them to a member of another House.

Ideally opposite-sex siblings name each other's children, men giving their names to their sisters' sons and women reciprocating by giving lifelong usufruct of their names to their brothers' daughters. Since parents can under no circumstances give their own names to their children, mothers have to await the birth of a granddaughter *(tabdzwë)* in order to transmit their names (names that they received from their MM for example) to a uterine heiress. For men, it is their

sisters who produce their uterine heirs. Names and *nekrets* pass solely from the categories *nhènget* (MB, MF, FF . . .) and *kwatëÿ* (FZ, MM, FM . . .) to *tabdzwë* (for male ego, the ZC; for female ego, the BC; and for both sexes, the CC). These terms indicate a bilateral or cognatic kindred. A uterine ideology is expressed through the claim that names and *nekrets* must always return to their House of origin, from whence they sprang (*katòro dzà*; spring out/place) and where they have their roots (*dzà kray*; place (of) origin/base/beginning).

The combination of this ideology and the uxorilocal residence rule, together with the existence of a cognatic kindred, generates certain tensions. Grandparents have a relationship of strong affection with their grandchildren, independently of whether they are their uterine heirs,[12] whether they merely reside together,[13] or whether they live in another House.[14] The fact that the grandparents who are not in the uterine line (MF, FM, FF) can transmit lifelong usufruct of the names and *nekrets* they own to their grandchildren helps to diminish the conflict between affection and duty, or between the rules and their manipulability inherent in the Mēbengokre social system. In other words, individual agents have various strategies available and choose the one best suited to their interests at any particular time.

This is reinforced by the fact that if their sisters neglect their duties in the reciprocal exchange of food and names, the men claim that they can reprimand them by handing over lifelong usufruct of their own names to their grandchildren. This obliges their sisters to await the birth of a great-grandson (DDS) to recuperate these names – since names should be held by only one person in each generation.

The bilateral aspect of the naming system, frequently noted in the literature, is deceptive. The term *kàÿmêtà* designates the usufruct of names and prerogatives. This term was explained to me by the Mēbengokre through the following examples: when people go off to the city they ask someone to keep an eye on their house for them; the owners get back the house upon their return. If somebody lends out a name to a child in a different House, when another child is born to the owner's own House, the name must be returned.

The terms for cross-cousins (people with whom marriage is prohibited) are compatible with the naming system (see Fig. 10.1).[15] For both female and male ego, the female matrilateral cross-cousin is the potential name-receiver of their own mother's names and is thus a 'M' (*nà*). The brother of this 'M' is a 'MB' (*nhènget*). For women, their

patrilateral cross-cousins are their classificatory children (*kra*); for men they are classificatory sister's children (*tabdzwë*). This is intelligible when we remember that, for a woman, the daughter of her female patrilateral cross-cousin is the legitimate heiress of the names that she herself received from her FZ and which she should later renounce in favour of this heiress, who is a *tabdzwë* for both her MM and her MMBD. Thus, in the Mēbengokre case, these Omaha-like features of the terminology make sense in terms of female name transmission. As I have noted elsewhere (1986: 234), Héritier's claim that Omaha terminologies entail the dominance of the male principle (1981: 48–50) is not valid in the case of the Mēbengokre.

Melatti's observation about the Timbira that the transmission of names seems to negate the incest prohibition (1979: 78) is in fact relevant to all the Jê. This is because although a man's semen creates the bodies of his children, it is his Zs and his WBs who create his children's social personae by transmitting their names and prerogatives to them. The women give up their brothers who leave to procreate children in another House; in return they recuperate their brothers' names and *nekrets* (prerogatives) for their own children.

SUBSTANCE VERSUS ESSENCE

The so-called 'relations of substance' have received much emphasis in the Jê literature. They refer to the sharing of food restrictions by members of the nuclear family when one of these is ill.[16] Seeger calls groups with such relationships 'corporeal descent groups' (1980: 131). I do not consider them to be descent groups for they denote substance in a very specific and limited way. Nimuendajú described such relations of substance as a mystical tie which links the (organic or corporeal) well-being of parents and children (1983: 80). For the Mēbengokre, people's individuality perishes with their flesh and with the memory of them as individuals. Their essence or metaphysical substance, contained in personal names and heritable prerogatives, is non-perishable because it is recovered by society.

Names have a mystical aspect which is expressed by the fact that, before its skin or wrapping hardens (*kà tëÿts*; wrapping hard), a baby can neither receive many names nor have them ceremonially confirmed without placing its life at risk. A series of food prohibitions

is applicable to people with determined categories of names. To infringe such taboos results in a skin disease (*kà noy noy*). Turner describes the Mẽbengokre notion of skin as the boundary of the individual as a social and physical being (1966: 476). The same word is used to designate clothes. This suggests that names and *nekrets* are considered as a wrapping for the organism, a second skin that society recuperates from individuals at their death in order to reproduce itself.

Turner implies that names and *nekrets* can circulate *ad lib* from house to house. Consequently, although he recognizes that ceremonial activity is the focal point of Jê and Bororo life, he makes the enigmatic claim that, for the Mẽbengokre, 'Most ceremonial activity is devoted to name-giving and other forms of celebration of marginal relations' (1979b: 206). Both he and da Matta define as marginal the relationships between those who transmit and receive each other's names – between the *nhènget* (MB, MF, FF) and his *tabdzwè* (ZS, SS, DS) and between the *kwatëÿ* (FZ, MM, FM) and her *tabdzwè* (BD, DD, SD) because these relatives do not form part of the nuclear family whose members are responsible for each other's physical well-being through the mutual observance of dietary and other restrictions.

Da Matta associates the domestic area with the realm of nature and biological ties (which include the 'relations of substance'), whilst he associates the ceremonial area, an area he describes as juridical (or moral) and/or public, with the realm of culture (1976b: 154–5). In my own view, the Mẽbengokre Houses constitute the jural domain of society as much as the domestic one.

In sum, if genitors make and nourish the human being's organism it is the *nhènget* and the *kwatëÿ*, the sources of names, who transform it into a person, transmitting to their *tabdzwè* the metaphysical substance of the ancestors.

FORMAL FRIENDSHIP

In Mẽbengokre society one acquires formal friends (*krab dzwè*) through one's father. Men, but not women, transmit their formal friends to their children. This gives rise to patrilines rather than patrilineages because there is no founder of the line. I use the term patriline to emphasize its unconscious aspect. Unfortunately, lines and lineages

have tended to be used as synonyms in writings on the Jê.[17] The Mẽbengokre focus on the patrilateral aspect of formal friendship, that is, as a dyadic relationship between a man (or a woman) and his (or her) father – who share the same formal friends. Since transmission follows this pattern for *n* generations, it generates *de facto* patrilines. A notion of descent is not necessarily involved, for if someone lacks formal friends, his or her parents may appoint someone to this role.

There is not space here to enter into details of the roles played in ceremonies by formal friends. Of greater interest is the avoidance of cross-sex formal friends and the joking relations maintained with the close kin or affines of one's formal friends. The Mẽbengokre state that one must not marry one's formal friends, yet it is good for a man to marry his female formal friend's daughter, reciprocally envisaged as marriage between a woman and her mother's formal friend. I lack data on the extent to which this ideal is complied with in practice.[18] The relationship of formal friendship is inherited patrilaterally but such friends are not considered to be relatives. Inheritance of formal friendship could suggest the presence of a system of double descent, where one inherits, for example, movable property matrilineally and immovable property patrilineally, as in the case of the Yakö of Nigeria (cf. Forde 1950). In the Mẽbengokre case, however, one has full rights (i.e. the right to transmit to any person of one's choice) only wealth received through one's uterine line. All that a Mẽbengokre inherits from his or her patriline are formal friends, and the basic duty which this entails (besides ceremonial obligations) is that a man should transmit them to his children.

If a man marries his female formal friend's daughter, his behaviour to this friend, now his mother-in-law, is unaltered. He avoided her as a cross-sex formal friend and he will continue to avoid her as his mother-in-law. While Houses exchange men in order to procure genitors to give continuity to the uterine descent group, patrilines exchange women. In the case of Houses exchange is conscious; in the case of patrilines it appears to be unconscious for it is never verbalized as such.

J.C. Crocker's depiction of the Bororo rings true for the Mẽbengokre when he says that the men are caught between the demands of their uterine and of their affinal bonds. They are intruders in the female-dominated households in which they reside with their wives, and the ritual and normative emphasis on patrifilia-

tion may represent an effort to escape the almost total domination by women (1977b: 189–91). The patrilines of the Mēbengokre could be seen as an attempt to redress the imbalance posed by the all-pervading uterine logic of the Houses in favour of a male-dominated logic. This, in turn, could help to explain how divergent interpretations of the Mēbengokre have arisen.

In the Jê literature, the formal friend has been characterized as a metaphor of otherness.[19] As far as the Mēbengokre are concerned, what seems to be in question is inherited affinity. In sum, there is seemingly a Dravidian-like aspect to Mēbengokre social structure – the inheritance, albeit indirect, of affinity.[20] I intend to elaborate on this question in a forthcoming paper. For the moment it must suffice to emphasize that since formal friends are not considered to be relatives it seems inappropriate to talk of double descent in the Mēbengokre case.

Clues to Houses

As I have shown above, reference to the House, as an indigenous category, provides an explanation for some hitherto ignored or puzzling aspects of Mēbengokre social organization. In this section I shall consider to what extent an explanation in terms of the House might be applied to other groups in the same cultural area.

The names and *nekrets* of the Mēbengokre Houses are similar to the clan property of the Bororo, property which is bound up with the Bororo concept of *aroe*. J. C. Crocker comments that for the Bororo, *aroe*, which might be termed 'totem' (1977a: 247), denotes the soul or sometimes a name (1985: 33). Amongst other ideas it '... designates some immaterial essence which is the metaphysical dimension of a human being ...' (1985: 15). Thus Bororo *aroe* and Mēbengokre names and *nekrets* would seem to be equivalent.

On the other hand, Crocker is confusing when he argues that the Bororo are functionally but not ideologically matrilineal (1985: 32). He argues this because, when the Bororo infer that the members of a clan are linked by common descent:

... the reference is to this matrilineal relationship with the clan's mystic self, its totems, rather than to an ideology of hypothesised genealogical connexions. (1969: 47)

Lévi-Strauss has argued that when an exogamous group grows so large that its members can no longer define its membership directly in terms of known genealogical links, then membership is defined instead through a clear rule of filiation or descent and through a name or other distinguishing mark transmitted in accordance with this rule (1962a: 20). Lévi-Strauss characterizes the Bororo as having clans and his description of these (1973a or 1989: 103–13) is sufficient for one to recognize striking analogies between Bororo clans and Mēbengokre Houses. Rivière (in this volume) considers that both the Bororo and the Jê might profitably be analyzed as house-based societies. This, in turn, might help to approximate them to the Barasana and other Tukano speakers of the Northwest Amazon, a point taken up by Hugh-Jones (this volume).

As I have already shown, Mēbengokre Houses occupy fixed positions around the perimeter of the villages; this same layout is maintained in camps during the trekking season. A similar pattern occurs amongst the Bororo whose eight clans have an invariable spatial distribution which determines a fixed sequence of clan-dwellings in their villages and temporary camps. This same constancy has also been noted for the Timbira (Nimuendajú 1971: 44; Melatti 1979: 51) and for the Mēbengokre and Xicrin[21] (Turner 1966: 32; Bamberger 1967: 131; Verswijver 1983: 302; Vidal 1977: 63), but there is no agreed explanation as to why this should be so.

If one reads the anthropological literature on the Northern Jê, looking for the existence of Houses, whilst no other author makes explicit reference to them, some interesting if fragmentary analogies can be found in reference to 'longhouses', 'residential segments', 'domestic clusters', 'matrilines', 'matrilineages' and 'clans'. Both da Matta and Melatti adopt the term 'residential segments' to designate uxorilocal extended families, occupying two or more dwellings which are usually contiguous. Melatti points out that among the Eastern Timbira these segments are exogamous and exist at the supra-village level (1979: 51). This clashes with Turner's claim that exogamous groups are nonexistent among all the Northern Jê (1979b: 180). For da Matta, these segments are part of the Apinayé political scenario and only function as corporate groups when they take on the role of factions (1976a: chap. V). Named, exogamous residential clusters were also discovered by Seeger among the Suya. He considers (1981: 74) that these Northern Jê residential segments or clusters are

relatively transient and that they are important socially and politically but not ceremonially. My data suggest otherwise.

W. H. Crocker, who studied the Ramkokamekra, notes (1979: 239) that longhouses (or matrilines within them) are the owners of particular, named rites. He mentions the temporary transmission of rites by women to their brothers' daughters, with the assumption that they will be returned to the lineage which is their rightful owner, where they should remain forever (1977: 260). This is directly analogous to what happens with names and ritual prerogatives amongst the Mēbengokre. In her study of the Krĩkatĩ, Lave uses the term 'domestic cluster' rather than 'residential segment'. She mentions but cannot explain why sets of names are held to remain in one place, i.e. in the same domestic cluster (1967: 315). From accusations of name thefts Lave deduces that names are conceived of as property (1967: 148).

Heelas (1979) and Schwartzman (1987) have identified the Panara or Kreen-Akore as Southern Kayapó.[22] Heelas characterized them as having spatial descent groups, units which Schwartzman later designated as clans. There are four such clans, situated in a specific portion of the village circle, and a person belongs automatically to his or her mother's clan. The clans are exogamous but, in this case, the clans do not appear to possess any specific property or prerogatives. Schwartzman considers the existence of Panara clans to be self-evident (pers. commun), consequently, he does not enter into a theoretical discussion concerning them.

Turner claims that the Mēbengokre '... do not think in genealogical terms and are generally indifferent to the genealogical nature or degree of relationships' (1966: 302). This surprises me because I collected genealogies covering five to seven generations, totalling approximately 1,260 people, directly related to the 184 members of the village Kretire in 1981. Turner (1979b: 180) and Bamberger (1974: 377) consider that the Mēbengokre lack any form of descent. Turner's model of Mēbengokre society does not take account of Houses, for their existence was something that he overlooked.

Vidal (1977: 55; 115) associates exogamy and heritable riches with the female-dominated and uxorilocal residential segments of the Xicrin, yet she considers that heritable wealth is more important for males than for females (1977: 116). She fails to use her findings to question Turner's interpretation of the male-oriented nature of Mēbengokre social institutions.

Verswijver's view of the Mēbengokre is much the same as my own, but he uses the term residential segments as synonymous with matrilineages (or matrilines) to which personal names, ceremonial prerogatives and other rights belong (1983: 313; 1984: 113). In my view, the term 'segment' tends to generate confusion; two or more dwellings which form a segment of a House in a particular village, constitute simultaneously a segment of that same House divided up amongst various villages. In other words, it is important to distinguish between two levels of segmentation – intra-village and inter-village. Although Verswijver and I are discussing the same phenomenon, I chose to interpret my data with recourse to the notion of house-based societies for it permits an analysis which accords with the Mēbengokre's own conception of their society.

What have been variably described as longhouses, residential segments, domestic clusters, matrilines, matrilineages and clans are obviously related to one another and to the Mēbengokre Houses, though to what degree is difficult to deduce from the existing literature. Within the continuum formed by the Jê and the Bororo, the focus adopted in this paper approximates the Mēbengokre to the Xavante (Central Jê), whose clans and patrilineages dispute amongst each other the prerogatives to which they are entitled.[23] It also approximates them to the Bororo, who jealously watch over their clan property, and to the Canela, despite the fact that the latter's incipient matrilineality is now on the wane (W. H. Crocker 1977; 1979; 1990).

HOUSES, CLANS OR LINEAGES – CONCLUSION

In Lévi-Strauss's view, house-based societies are characterized by tension or conflict between opposed principles or by principles, such as filiation and residence, or, in medieval terminology, rights of 'race' and of election which are elsewhere mutually exclusive. Considerations limited to the rules of filiation and descent are unable to explain them for they tend to subvert the language of kinship that they utilize (1984: 189–91; 1987: 152).

Giving examples of the types of problems that such societies may confront, Lévi-Strauss mentions the integration of an agnatic lineage

and a cognatic kindred (1984: 204), and the paradox that marriage only allies two groups when a woman is handed over to one group as a wife whilst maintaining her loyalty to the other group as a sister (1984: 215). These two examples are the reverse side of the Mẽbengokre case, with their uterine descent lines and cognatic kindreds, where men reside with their wives but belong to their natal Houses.

Lévi-Strauss considers that house-based societies have a historical dimension in the sense that they possess the mechanisms to create history from within. This could make sense of the Mẽbengokre tendency to appropriate names and *nekrets* via grandparents (MF, FM, FF) and/or inmarrying males (F or MF), whenever the opportunity arises.[24]

An important element of Mẽbengokre social organization is the fact that a large percentage of personal names and wealth is bestowed for life on individuals who are not members of the House that owns them, as in the case of the grandchildren of the true owners. Even someone who digs a grave single-handed acquires lifelong usufruct of one of the prerogatives of the deceased.

Consequently, the ideology of uterine descent does not always correspond to empirically observable reality in relation to property transmission. When someone from House X lends a name or *nekrets* to a member of House Y and, in the subsequent process of village fissions or of family migrations, there are no more members of House X residing in the village where the usufructuary of its name or *nekrets* lives, this House may appropriate (*amĩ~ nhõn*) the borrowed good, incorporating it into its own patrimony.

To take another example: if a woman does not know who her father's uterine descendants are, because her father died during her childhood and his House is absent from her village, she can save (*putã*) his name from extinction by giving it to a son (real or classificatory). If, subsequently, the legitimate owners of the name do not emigrate to this boy's village and demand their name back, the boy will consider himself to be the true owner, that is, able to pass it on to his ZS.

It is the possibility of finding a way round the rule which restricts the loan of goods outside the owners' House to lifelong usufruct that explains the transfer of certain goods from one House to another. The Mẽbengokre explain such cases as exceptions for they contradict their uterine ideology. In sum, amongst the Mẽbengokre, an affine

can never become a member of his spouse's House, but his property can be incorporated into it if, upon his death, he does not leave behind him uterine relatives to reclaim their legitimate property.

Lévi-Strauss intended to introduce the concept of house-based societies in order to advance understanding of cognatic or undifferentiated systems. I have argued that although the Mẽbengokre possess cognatic kindreds, this does not entail a cognatic kinship system.

I have avoided classifying Mẽbengokre society as characterized by matrilineal descent for a number of reasons. Whilst in the field and before having access to Lévi-Strauss's work on house-based societies, following Mẽbengokre usage I differentiated between Houses (*kikre dzam dzà*) and houses (*kikre*). What appeared to be in question was matrilineal descent, though it was unclear what level of society would correspond to clans and which to lineages.

In one sense, a clan could correspond to the sum of dwellings distributed amongst the Mẽbengokre villages that are associated with a particular House. Nevertheless, before establishing permanent contact with national society, the normal pattern of inter-village relations was one of warfare, so such a clan could amount to no more than a reference to the ideal totality of society, that is, in terms of defining who were fellow Mẽbengokre through membership of the same set of Houses.

There are no founding ancestors of Houses or of their sub-divisions on an intra- or inter-village level, and groups of sisters and matrilateral parallel-cousins are the owners of the same stock of names and *nekrets*. Members of different abodes belonging to the same House, whether in one village or in various villages, stress that they belong to the same House, sharing an identical symbolic patrimony. In other words, the division of a House into a number of separate dwellings does not appear to entail a division into lineages in Mẽbengokre thought. The eldest members of any particular House are usually able to trace the genealogical link with their uterine relatives in the same or other villages, whilst they are unable to trace the genealogical links between them and their mythological ancestors. Genealogically distant members of a particular House attest to their links through the sharing of a series of personal names and prerogatives during the course of several generations.

In my view, the Houses are the key to Mẽbengokre social organization, despite functioning much like clans, as described in

chapter 4 of *La Pensée Sauvage* (Lévi-Strauss, 1962b). They produce men and women of different social species which justifies the exchange of men on the part of Houses, and simultaneously entails recognition of the fact that as members of the same natural species they are essentially all alike. Each House exercises specific ceremonial roles which are indispensable to the village community as a whole and which complement the roles attributed to the other Houses. Lévi-Strauss (1962b) treats clans and castes as variations on a single theme. It has long been recognized that the Jê and Bororo societies of Central Brazil constitute a system of transformations and this in turn implies that clan and house-based societies cannot be diametrically opposed; they are products of variation on a common theme.

In his discussion of house-based societies, Lévi-Strauss refers to 'pseudomorphs' (1983b: 1222) which appear to be patri- or matrilineal when in fact they are not. In my view, the Mēbengokre matri-Houses[25] are closer to matrilineality than to a cognatic or undifferentiated system. Clans and lineages are defined primarily with reference to biological continuity (even though this may be largely fictitious), whereas the Mēbengokre notion of House as a moral person is double-edged. It designates a uterine descent group; however, it also places emphasis not on people as such but on the House itself as the locus of a patrimony. A Mēbengokre House is represented materially by one or more dwellings, yet in comparison with the majority of societies discussed in this volume, the symbolic significance of the House as a building is unimportant. Various of the papers on Indonesia mention the association of heirlooms with Houses. This term, though analogous, is not applicable in the Mēbengokre case because individuals are buried along with their material goods. What survives them is the right to reproduce and display the patrimony associated with each House.

I disagree with Maybury-Lewis's statement that: "The supposed matriliny of the Northern Gê is ... a misinterpretation based on the cumulative effects of uxorilocality' (1979: 304). I also diverge from Turner's portrayal of the Jê and Bororo cultural area (1979a) as one which is dominated by men, more specifically, where fathers-in-law dominate their sons-in-law by maintaining control of their daughters thanks to uxorilocality. It is naive to hear from an anthropologist the explanation that the women who constitute the core of the household, 'remain together by simple inertia ...' (1979a: 178).

Yanagisako (1979: 190) notes that the classical dichotomy between the domestic and the public spheres has recently been called into question. As far as I am aware, nobody but myself (1986) sees fit to challenge the consensus among researchers of the Jê and Bororo, concerning the dichotomy between the peripheral domestic female sphere and the central, public and ceremonial male sphere.

It might be suggested that my use of the term House does not correspond exactly to the use made by Lévi-Strauss and that not even this author has satisfactorily resolved the question of house-based societies. Mēbengokre society, with its matri-Houses, cognatic kindreds and patrilines of formal friends, constitutes a no-man's-land, betwixt and between matrilineality, cognatic kinship and double descent. If I had not been inspired by Lévi-Strauss to analyze Mēbengokre Houses as moral persons, I would have resigned myself (like Boas in his study of the Kwakiutl *numayma*[26]) to describing them as corresponding to no known type of structure in the ethnological records.

11 The Waiyana, the eastern neighbours of the Trio, secure in the ceiling of the house in which communal events take place a wooden disc decorated with mythic creatures. Audrey Colson tells me that all the senior men of the village are involved in painting the disc and suggests that this activity is an expression of their collectivity. I would like to speculate that the disc is made from hard wood and that it is transported to a new village as and when the old village is abandoned, thus symbolizing continuity as well as collectivity.

12 An example of where the option to repair the existing house rather than to build a new one is preferred is afforded by the groups of the Upper Xingu. It might be added that the size of the house has no apparent bearing on whether the preference is to repair or to relocate. The Xinguano house is similar in size to those of the Tukanoans and of the Ye'cuana, both of whom prefer to relocate.

13 Among the Kapon and Pemon a village leader is also known as the 'village owner', the term being *pata esak*. *Esak* has a semantic range which is similar to but not identical with that of *entu*. Whereas both words mean 'owner', the former also means 'body' and has the general sense of 'incorporation' (Butt Colson 1989: 54–5).

14 The term *ebu/epu* is found in a number of Carib languages and everywhere has the connotations of shaft, axis, handle, support and pillar. Thus, in Trio, the term for 'cotton spindle' is *maru epu*, literally 'cotton shaft'. One also finds elsewhere in Lowland South America a terminological relationship between a structural part of the house and the village leader. For example, Rosengren (1987: 159) reports that the Matsigenka term for the beams which support the house roof is also used for leader.

15 I would still stand by most of what I wrote in that article although I am now able to elaborate on certain aspects of the question, in particular the political tension between brothers-in-law.

16 Analogies are dangerous, but the best I can think of to help understand this case is to liken it to an underground railway system in which the tracks are permanent but the stations temporary and shifting. An observer at surface level can see the station entrances (settlements) but not the tracks (the invisible world). Because the stations are shifting the observer will note them in different places at different times, whereas the unseen 'permanent way' will remain constant.

10: The Houses of the Mẽbengokre (Kayapó) of Central Brazil – a new door to their social organization

1 All translations are my own.

2 The Mẽbengokre are better known as the (Northern) Kayapó, who number some 3,600 individuals. For details of the other Jê groups see footnote 6 below.

3 I wish to thank the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) for enabling me to participate in the workshop that led to the creation of this book in 1990. I also acknowledge support for fieldwork from the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) and the Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos (FINEP).

4 These villages are Bàù, Pùkanù, Kubẽkàkre and Kapòto to the west of the Xingu river and Gorotire, Kubẽkràkeyn, Kokraymoro, Kikre-tum and Aùkre to the east. Kapòto, which united the members of the former Mẽtùktire villages of Kretire and Jarina, was itself later renamed as Mẽtùktire, reserving the name Kapòto for a new, inland village to which some of the inhabitants of Mẽtùktire are presently moving.

Between 1978 and 1987, I spent sixteen months with the Mẽbengokre, mostly in the village of Kretire.

5 The term patrimony would be better rendered 'matrimony' if the latter did not already refer to marriage, since the Mẽbengokre patrimony passes along the uterine line.

6 For comparative purposes, the Bororo are often included in the same cultural area as the Jê-speaking societies of Central Brazil. This paper focuses on the Northern and Central Jê amongst whom the study of social organization has been concentrated. The relations between their various sub-groupings are shown in the following table:

Northern Jê
  Eastern Timbira
    Apaniekra
    Ramkokamekra
    Krĩkatí
    Krahó
    Gavião
  Western Timbira
    Apinayé
  Northern Kayapó
    Mẽbengokre
    Xicrin
  Southern Kayapó
    Panara
  Suya
Central Jê
  Xerente
  Xavante
Bororo
Southern Jê
  Kiangang
  Xocleng
(See Maybury-Lewis 1979: 4 from which this table was adapted.)

7 See Lea 1986, for further details on *nekrets*, and 1992 concerning onomastics.

8 *Mùt apoy dzà*, 'sun come out place'.

9 Further details of such myths are given in Lea 1993.

10 The Mẽbengokre say that in the old days the men had to remain assembled in the men's house in readiness to defend the village from the attacks of external enemies. Young boys used to be sent off to live in the men's house in the centre of the village. Nowadays they tend to remain in their mothers' homes until

marriage. Turner (1966 and 1979b) discusses the fact that the Mēbengokre used to have two men's houses.

11 The word eponym is used, rather than homonym, for the latter is a reciprocal term. What is in question here is the relation between someone in an ascending generation, whose name is transmitted to a relative of a descending generation, who is thereby the latter's eponym.

12 As in the case of the mother's mother in relation to her daughters' children.

13 This, ideally, is the case of the mother's father in relation to his daughters' children.

14 As in the case of the father's mother and father's father in relation to their sons' children.

15 Cf. Ladeira: 'Data collected by me among the Timbira indicate that the terms for cross-cousins vary depending on ego's sex, as a result of the influence of naming' (1982: 100).

16 They are also found among other Native Amazonians. See, for example, Viveiros de Castro (1986: 439), concerning the Araweté (Tupi-Guarani).

17 Verswijver, for instance, writes in English of matrilines (1983) but in Portuguese he uses the term matrilineage (1984). W. H. Crocker (1977; 1979; 1990) also uses an assortment of terms – uterine lines, matrilines, ritual matrilineages etc.

18 After last leaving the field I deduced a hypothetical system of generalized exchange (cf. Lea, in press). It has to be checked, for as yet it is merely an exercise in the formal analysis of extrapolation based on a possible principle of matrimonial alliance. Its plausibility is suggested here because it would be relevant to the understanding of Mēbengokre social organization and transformations throughout the Jê area. See also Viveiros de Castro (1990), concerning Jê and Bororo spouse preferences.

19 Cf. Carneiro da Cunha, 1978, Ch. V.

20 Cf. Overing (1975) for the first discussion of Dravidian systems in the context of lowland South America.

21 In the literature, the Xicrin are classified as a Kayapó sub-group. Since the Mētùktire consider them as a separate people (Dzore), this usage is adopted here.

22 The name Southern Kayapó is deceptive; linguistically the Mēbengokre (Northern Kayapó) appear to be closer to the Timbira and Suya.

23 Cf. Müller, 1976: 178–9 and 189.

24 In order to assess the extent to which this happens, further research on the patrimony of Mēbengokre Houses would be necessary, to allow the comparison of any House's heritable wealth on an inter-village level, on both sides of the Xingu river.

25 A neologism suggested to me by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

26 See Lévi-Strauss 1983a: Ch. 13.

11: Inside-out and back-to-front: the androgynous house in Northwest Amazonia

1 Based on some 30 months of field research, carried out between 1968 and 1991 by C. and S. Hugh-Jones, and variously supported by the Social Science

Research Council (now ESRC), King's College, Cambridge, and the British Museum. This support is gratefully acknowledged.

2 See especially C. Hugh-Jones 1979 and Béksta 1988.

3 Principal ethnographic sources include Goldman 1963; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971; C. Hugh-Jones 1979; S. Hugh-Jones 1979; Århem 1981; and Jackson 1983. Local ethnography refers to 'sibs'; here I employ the more usual 'clan'.

4 S. Hugh-Jones 1979 provides detailed discussion of these rituals.

5 *Wüogi*, a Tukano word usually translated as 'headman' or 'chief', actually means 'house builder'.

6 Historical records speak of malocas with up to 100 individuals and of several malocas in a single settlement. Though most contemporary malocas stand alone and communities rarely exceed 30 individuals, mission-inspired settlements may combine nuclear family dwellings with one or more adjacent malocas.

7 See also C. Hugh-Jones 1979 and S. Hugh-Jones 1994a.

8 Men and women call the children of co-resident adults 'son' and 'daughter' and treat them more or less as their own.

9 Condensed from Umúsin Panlõn Kumu and Tolamān Kenhíri 1980: 51–70.

10 See Shapiro 1987 and the works she cites.

11 In other versions, the anaconda becomes a slit-gong which is beaten to 'awaken' (i.e. bring into being) the people. At certain dances, young men pummel the beer-trough (= anaconda-canoe = slit-gong) with their fists to 'awaken' the people at the dance.

12 See Bidou 1976 for an account of such politics-in-the-mode-of-myth amongst the Tatuyo.

13 This two-headed house calls to mind the ancestral anaconda which heads upstream on its journey but comes to rest with its head downstream (see p. 234).

14 To take these suggestions further would require a systematic comparison of naming and hierarchy among the Jê and Tukano; data on naming are sorely lacking for the Tukano as are data on hierarchy for the Jê.