

**OF LIFE AND HAPPINESS: MORALITY, AESTHETICS, AND
SOCIAL LIFE AMONG THE SOUTHEASTERN AMAZONIAN
MEBENGOKRE (KAYAPO), AS SEEN FROM THE MARGINS OF
RITUAL**

Adolfo de Oliveira

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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Of Life and Happiness

**Morality, Aesthetics, and Social Life among the
southeastern Amazonian *Mebengokré* (*Kayapó*),
as Seen from the Margins of Ritual**

Adolfo de Oliveira

**Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in
the University of St. Andrews, Dept. of Social Anthropology**

14th October, 2003



I, Adolfo Neves de Oliveira Júnior, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

6th August, 2003 signature of candidate


I was admitted as a research student in September 1997 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September 1998; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1997 and 2003.

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This thesis deals with different aspects of the processes of production of sociability among the Xikrin-Mebengokré of the Cateté River, central Brazil. I focus on ceremonies and their performance, as ways of access to Mebengokré conceptions concerning the morality and aesthetics of social life. I analyse the semiotics of 'kin'-ship production, the performative aspects of emotion as a sociability tool, the use of song and dance for the co-ordination of collective technical tasks, and a Mebengokré 'theory of language' as social agency. In the conclusion I focus on the criticism of some of the key theoretical aspects of Ge ethnology, in the light of my previous analysis.

Esta tese trata de diferentes aspectos dos processos de produção de sociabilidade entre os Xicrin-Mebengokré do rio Cateté, no Brasil Central. Centro minha abordagem em cerimônias e sua performance, tomadas como formas de acesso a concepções Mebengokré concernentes à moralidade e à estética da vida social. Analiso a semiótica da produção de 'parentesco', os aspectos performáticos da emoção enquanto ferramenta de sociabilidade, o uso de canções e dança para a coordenação de tarefas técnicas coletivas e uma 'teoria Mebengokré' da linguagem como capacidade de ação social. Na conclusão, critico alguns dos aspectos centrais da etnologia Jê, à luz de minha análise prévia.

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*To Tainá and Elisa, who put up with my absence for so long
To the Mebengokré, who put up with my presence for so long
To M.C.R., dearest of friends, who did not have time to finish his own
To L., whose absence will always be present*

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The idea (...) which says that the elimination of Others provides the self with unlimited freedom, is psychologically false, corresponding to the physical falsehood which would have us believe that since shape is given to water by the shape of the vessel that contains it, the breaking of all vessels provides that water with ‘absolute freedom’. Whereas, just as water, when deprived of a vessel will spread out into a puddle, so, too, will a totally isolated man explode, that explosion taking the form of a complete deculturalisation.

Stanislaw Lem, A Perfect Vacuum

Introduction

Because it's Good Fun: *Me toro* as *Mebengokré* Social Philosophy

*You must bear in mind that
the language-game is so to say
something unpredictable. I mean:
it is not based on grounds. It is
not reasonable (or unreasonable).
It is there - like our life*
Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty

This thesis is primarily about *Mebengokré* (*Kayapó*, a Northern *Ge*-speaking Indian people) ceremonies, called *me toro*. But this is not a work on the interpretation of ritual, at least not in the sense the expression usually takes in anthropological discourse nowadays. I do not intend to produce an interpretative account of the internal universe of meaning of the ceremonies I observed; rather, I want to emphasise the unfolding of the ceremonies in the way that, I think, they appear to the *Mebengokré* themselves - to take the *me toro*, the *Mebengokré* generic term for 'festival/ceremony/party', as a significant experience for people taking part in it. This, I contend, is a way of thinking, representing and acquiring a social state among them - a social philosophy in its own right, although not expressed by means of rational, discursive argument, but through dance, rhythm, music, and story-telling, to mention but a few expressive forms. In accordance with this idea, I will not analyse specialist interpretations of the symbols of ritual, but will strive to capture the distinctiveness that the experience of the *me toro* has for 'common people', the anonymous – up to a point – organisers, participants, and audience of the ceremonies. I will, in sum, probe into the question that first puzzled me when I came to the *Xikrin-Mebengokré* village of *Pykatingrät*, or 'sandy beach', for my first fieldwork term: why the *me toro*? What is the importance of ceremonies for

people's lives?¹

In a certain way, the questions that I then posed myself were akin to that asked by anthropologist Anthony Seeger (1987b) with respect to a very similar issue, and in relation to a very similar people: Why do the *Suyá* sing? My question, if it were to be formulated as a single sentence, would be: Why do the *Mebengokré* (their self-denomination) spend so much time and energy organising such intricate and massive performances, to the point of devoting most of their everyday lives to it, directly or indirectly? As will become clear throughout my narrative, the terms of the question were themselves misplaced, and the awareness of such misplacement is a crucial element for the understanding I intend to build of the *me toro* and their importance for the *Mebengokré*.

After a couple of months, having become immersed in the ceremonial atmosphere of the *Pykatingrot* (Cateté) village of the *Xikrin-Mebengokré*, it still astonished me by its remarkable liveliness. People would talk incessantly about *me toro*, and accomplish their daily jobs having it always in sight. Collective tasks² were accomplished explicitly because of the ceremony; individual jobs were collectively done, by everybody concerned all at the same approximate time, because of the *me toro*.

¹This is not to say, of course, that such 'specialist' interpretations are not useful and worthy in themselves - see, for instance, the masterly ethnography of the Cateté *Xikrin*, written by Lux Vidal (1977) at the end of 1960's. Vidal worked primarily with a single informant, *Bemoti*, a veritable *Xikrin* intellectual who, in that same period, was busying himself with the refashioning of the Cateté *Xikrin*, then almost disappearing after the establishment of 'peaceful' relations with Brazilian society. Vidal's ethnography shows the *Xikrin* from the point of view of one who not only possessed specialised knowledge much beyond that of the 'common people', but who also shaped their society through that very same knowledge. Indeed, *Bemoti* was one of the only three elders left in the village at that time, and has been since then the main transmitter of knowledge, ceremonial and otherwise, to the new generations of *Mebengokré* who form that village. Thus, he is, for both reasons, probably the most credible interpreter of their tradition for that particular village and people. Nevertheless, I have other, theoretical reasons for not building my interpretation of *Mebengokré me toro* on specialised knowledge, as will become clear in this introduction.

The ceremony itself had become a daily routine in the literal sense for the village at large: day by day, at sunrise and sunset, people would dance for a short time, and eat something collectively at the *ngobe*, the men's house afterwards, before going home. True, in the beginning there wasn't much of an audience. There were fewer dancers, and they were dancing rather poorly. But with time the performance – and the audience – improved, and people commented lively about the *ami aprã*, the culminating point of the ceremony, the 'real *me toro*' , when people would dance the whole day, when 'all would dance': *me toro* means, literally, 'all dancing'.

These characteristics of the *me toro* were all the more remarkable because they went against all I would expect from a ritual as usually defined in anthropological theory, which determined the way I first tried to understand it. A ritual is something that by definition is not a part of daily life³. It is something set apart from the everyday world, performed in a sphere of its own, which it creates by its very performance. To be fair with ritual theory, or with those theorists who espouse a speech act theory of some sort⁴, the *me toro* were conspicuously performative, but the main characteristic of performance, in my view, was still this visceral connection with the routine of everyday existence. It thus made sense to me to talk of a ceremonial season, a time when ceremonies are performed in succession, which roughly coincides with the dry season in Southwest Amazon (May to October), but starting when rains have not altogether

²By 'collective' here I mean, tasks that are accomplished by people from different households, although not necessarily by all people from a given village, or from a given age-grade in the village.

³ See for instance Stanley Tambiah's (1985: 128) definition of ritual as "... patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement is characterised in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)." While I would agree that *me toro* includes all these characteristics, I would nevertheless question their adequacy for the task of capturing the lived side of *me toro*, its experience as a living rite, in the words of Hocart (1952) - its relation to everyday existence. This dimension is effaced by the use of Tambiah's parameters, which seems to me to work toward understanding 'ritual' by isolating it from the actual experience of people.

finished, and continuing into the beginning of the next rainy season, so that ceremonies are performed in sequence for a lapse of time that goes beyond the dry season, although having the latter as its core. During this time, the *me toro* is the main preoccupation of the village at large, whose people would co-ordinate their individual efforts so that they could accomplish similar tasks at the same approximate time, in order that the *me toro* could happen (as it involves most people in a village, they must be all free, or relatively free, for it to occur).

In the same way the ‘internal’ dynamics of the *me toro* produces homogeneity, so its ‘external’ unfolding produces performative homogeneity in the everyday of the people involved in it. Homogeneity of action is highly praised by the *Mebengokré*, being seen as a social value in itself. To do the same things as others do, simultaneously, is to enhance their identity as a single village and, in the end, as a single people. The significance of the performance of the same ceremonies goes yet further, to become a common ‘marker of identity’⁵ for *Mebengokré* of different villages. In the same way, small differences between, say, ceremonies from the *Xikrin Mebengokré* and those of the *Gorotire Mebengokré* are used as ‘markers of identity’ between the different sub-groups involved. As ceremonies require specific ‘kinds’ of people to be performed, the performance of a given ceremony in a particular village is also used as an ‘identity’ element, distinguishing that specific village (in relation to other *Mebengokré* villages) as ‘the one that performs such and such *me toro*.’ Such homogeneity was accomplished despite the strong emphasis on individual autonomy that likewise characterises

⁴ I refer here primarily to Tambiah (1985).

⁵ The reason why I use inverted commas here will become clear throughout the thesis, which focuses on what this ‘identity’ might be.

Mebengokré social life as a whole⁶.

The different *me toro* do not happen only during the dry season, or near to its timing: there is at least one *me toro* that happens during the rainy season – the *kwyry-kangô*, or the manioc feast – and there were others in the past, like the *puru me toro*, when married people of different age-classes exchanged spouses (and which is not performed anymore, at least among the *Xikrin*, because of missionary influence). The ideal ‘ceremonial season’ for the *Mebengokré* is, according to them, one where one *me toro* ends just in time to do the core activities of daily life⁷ that allow them to be ready for another one!

The ‘ceremonial season’ seems to have grown organically with the population growth of the Cateté river *Xikrin* over the past thirty years. The anthropologist Lux Vidal, who has worked among the Cateté river *Xikrin* from the 1960s on, has described (Vidal 1977) the sequence of ceremonies as lasting about three to four months every year. She has seen them in a time when *Xikrin* population was slowly recuperating after the contact, a time when most older people had died (there were only three *mebengêt*, or elders, at the village at that time) and, in consequence, when most *Xikrin* feared that their ceremonial life was not going to survive. This period was one of a reconstruction of their rituals, many of which had not been performed in the several previous years, and consequently were not fully known by the younger generation.

An anthropologist who visited the *Xikrin* just after their ‘pacification’ in 1962/1963, Protásio Frikel, reported (Frikel 1968) that in those years, due to the

⁶ It seems that this is the very special ‘paradox’ of Amazonia as a whole - see Overing and Passes (2000) for a presentation of similar cases elsewhere in Amazonia.

⁷ Between the ‘sunrise’ and ‘sunset’ *me toro*, people accomplish their daily activities: gardening, hunting, fishing, chatting, etc.

population decrease following the contact, they had all but abandoned their ritual life. Vidal, in her turn, documented the revival of their ceremonies, together with the slow reconstruction of their lifestyle (the reconstruction of the *atykbe*, the traditional men's house at the borders of the village) and of their population (the return of almost all young *Xikrin* men, who had abandoned the village in its darker period). She tells that in 1967 the *Xikrin* had performed a small *aruanã* ceremony, and in 1971, upon the reconstruction of their village, they performed a longer one, that lasted more than four months (Vidal 1977: 180). At that time, they did not perform specific naming ceremonies, but only those that, by their very generality, allowed one to confirm any kind of (gendered) name to be bestowed upon someone⁸.

Since then, they have successfully performed most of their `specialised` naming ceremonies. The highly intricate *Bep-yry me toro*, for instance, which confirms the names with the *Bep-* ceremonial prefix, was performed in 1988, 1989, and 1991, and again during my first field trip in 1999. The *Bekwynh-yry me ungrõr*, which Vidal reports in her book (1977: 181) as having been the object of several attempts at performance was also performed, as well as the *Panh me toro*. `Non-specialised` *me toro* are also regularly performed. The result of these joint, sequential performances makes up the ceremonial season that I intend to describe in this work. One of the reasons

⁸It must be remembered that only now, after nearly fifty years of severe depopulation, the *Xikrin* are again living in a large village, bound by reasons of contact with Brazilian society to make it their permanent abode. Nowadays, the *Xikrin* only retire en masse from the village to collect Brazil nuts, when they live in small huts scattered in a single clearing, or in nearby ones, in the forest. The whole situation is reminiscent of that of ancient *Mebengokré* villages like *Pykatoti*, the first known *Mebengokré* village in the Xingú basin, reported to have 1500 to 3000 inhabitants, but which only lodged together as a whole population for the conducting of their massive ceremonies (Posey 1979). In the same vein, present-day *Xikrin* villages stretch this ceremonial season to (ideally, at least) include almost the whole time the village is inhabited by its population, that is, most of the year. In a certain way, the ceremonial season is so stretched because they can count on material means to keep such a long season, that is, because they can count on the (meagre) monthly payment that they get from CVRD mining company, and with the later's 'goodwill' towards the *Xikrin*, materialised in the form of supplements of bread, soft drinks, etc, which the *Xikrin* enjoy so much.

forwarded by the *Xikrin* for their present profligate ceremonial life is that now there are sufficient people to perform them. Ceremonial societies like the *apieti* (large armadillo) and the *àk`re* (‘bird’, or more specifically, bird of prey - probably a kind of falcon) were again formed; *kukràdjà* ceremonial rights are again proliferating around the village, the acting out of which introduces difference within the homogeneity created by the (intense) wearing of (similar) ceremonial garments. Many children bearing names with the same ceremonial prefix are celebrated at the corresponding *me toro*; and so on. Nowadays the *Xikrin* perform their ‘ceremonial season’ for some nine months each year.

There are four types of *me toro*: naming ceremonies, which are either male or female (although some, coupled ceremonies⁹ may celebrate different-sex names); life-cycle ceremonies; annual cycle ceremonies; and ceremonies ‘adopted’ from other peoples. In the first case, to mention just a few, there is the *bep-ryr me toro*¹⁰ for male bearers of names with the *bep-* prefix; and the *memybiôk*, the ‘painted men’ party, when male names with all ceremonial prefixes can be celebrated. There is the *takák-nhák* ceremony, different from others of this category, which can confirm both male (*takák-*) and female (*nhák-*) names. There is also the *mereremei*, which means literally ‘good/beautiful people’, a name that refers to those who are celebrated in a naming *me toro*, and which can be applied in principle to all naming ceremonies. However, it is used most commonly to designate the female ceremony when all female names with

⁹ That is, *me toro* that are celebrated as integral parts of other *me toro*, or together with them. The *akro ka’oi*, for instance, is part of the *bey-ryr me toro*, as is the *panh me toro*. *Bep-ryr me toro* is celebrated together with *me kutop*, and so on. The ‘coupling’ of several *me toro* becomes, in its wider enactment, what I call here a ceremonial season.

¹⁰ In other *Mebengokré* groups, this ceremony is called *Benp-ryr me toro*, although the prefix in itself remains *bep-* for personal names.

ceremonial prefixes can be celebrated.¹¹

In the second case, that of life-cycle ceremonies, there are – again, to mention only some of the variegated *Xikrin* ceremonial repertoire- the *mekukatyk* and, again the *memybiôk* male ceremonies, both of which are for the *menõrõnyre* (unmarried men, who sleep in the men’s house¹²). There is also the *mekutop* ceremony, which marks the passage to (male) adulthood. Annual cycle ceremonies are performed every year (different from the others, to be performed only when there are children enough of the right age to be celebrated), the main ones being the *kwyry-kangô*¹³, performed when the manioc tubers are ripe, and the *ngôre kam me toro* ¹⁴, when the whole village moves to a spot on the so-called dry river¹⁵ to fish collectively with timbó vine’s juice. Among the ‘adopted’ ceremonies are the *Aruanã* mask ceremony (from the *Karajá*), the *kwyry-kangô* (from the *Juruna*), and the ceremony of the 19th of April, Brazilian Indian day.

As will be seen throughout this work, even the ceremonies that are seen (by the external observer) as part of their ‘cultural heritage’, are understood by the *Mebengokré* themselves as acquired from outside their own society. Even the songs sung on such occasions relate to the events involving the ‘coming’ of them to their society, a ‘centripetal’ tendency that has already been noted for them by Viveiros de Castro as opposite to that ‘centrifugal’ one of their Tupi-speaking neighbours, the *Arawete*

¹¹ This at least is the use that people in both villages where I worked gave to the denomination; I don’t know whether this is the case in other *Mebengokré* villages.

¹² *Me-nõr(õ)-ny-re*: ‘Those who sleep in a new way’. When boys become *menõrõnyre*, they begin to sleep in the men’s house, remaining there until they get married and move to their wife’s house.

¹³ *kwyry-kangô* : ‘manioc juice’ . *Kwyry* is the term for sour manioc, whereas *kwyry djwynh* is the name for the sweet, non-poisonous species. In order to make manioc meal, the poisonous juice (*kangô*) has to be squeezed away.

¹⁴ *Ngôre kam me toro* : ‘*me toro* of the place of the small water’.

¹⁵ This is not the Cateté river, which is too large, but another, smaller river, which becomes almost dry during the apex of the dry season, allowing for this kind of fishing technique to be deployed.

(Viveiros de Castro: 1992).

Although people may talk about the different ‘kinds’ of *me toro*, on a certain level of their actual practice they are fused into one broad category, that of *me toro* or *me kot tó*¹⁶. The different *me toro* may be held in succession and actually complement each other. Such is the case of the *me bi`ôk*¹⁷ and the *mekutop*¹⁸ both performed in succession as part of the initiation of young men: the *me bi`ôk* is meant for the age-grades of the *menõrõnyre*-to-be, and the *mekutop* for the recently married men. Both are the ceremonies that integrate these two categories of young males to their new ‘positions’ within the life-cycle. In Cateté in 1999 (and again in the next season, in year 2000), other, shorter ceremonies were also performed during this ‘initiation complex’, including the *ngôre kam me toro*, the fishing ceremony, which was an integral part of the initiation of the young men. *Me toro* thus pertains both to the general and the particular, the individual ceremony and the continuous, interlacing stream of ceremonies unfolding throughout the year. In this broadest sense, *me toro* can be used to designate what I’m calling here the ceremonial season and the whole festive atmosphere implied by it, as when one shows, opening one’s arms as to encompass the whole of the ceremonial apparatus at the men’s house, the painted men and/or women, the festive mood of the village at large, saying: ‘this is *me toro* ‘.

Me toro is also both the culminating point of a ceremony, the all-day-long performance, called more specifically *ami aprã*;¹⁹ and the integral totality, taking

¹⁶ *Me kot tó* : ‘to dance all together’.

¹⁷ *Me bi`ôk* : ‘Those who are painted’.

¹⁸ *Mekutop* is the name of a ‘helmet’ made of bee’s wax, worn by the young men undergoing this ceremony.

¹⁹ People sometimes refer to the *ami aprã* as ‘*me toro* proper’, or *me toro djwynh*. This categorisation is not held in opposition to the category *kaigo*, or ‘false’, ‘counterfactual’, but to designate the point

months to complete. It is the particular, concrete dance in an *ami aprã* (with the row of dancers going either around the circular plaza or crossing it from house to house, or going from the centre towards specific houses and back) and also the whole ritual event being celebrated (initiation, naming, etc). The 'wider' significations of the term may be broken into pieces that become elements of the whole ceremonial 'complex' being performed, and those elements themselves are *me toro*. People may all choose to dance (*me toro*) a particular 'step' - a specific way of dancing - that has been taken from another ceremony, just because it is *metx*, 'beautiful/good'. Among the *Djudjekô* village's younger men, for instance, the *kwyry-kangô* has been highly appreciated in the past two years (1999-2000), and thus they usually dance 'steps' of this *me toro* at least once during the *ami aprã* of any ceremony. Women in both villages are also particularly fond of the *okapá* 'step' (also from *kwyry-kangô* - a *me toro* that has been recently introduced from the Xingú *Kayapó*, and thus a certain novelty) and would dance it whenever they could.

In this way, any particular *me toro* (in the wider sense) being performed contains a formal structure that comprises all its prescribed phases (each of them individual *me toro* themselves), but whose performance involves as well recourse to a wider repertoire of 'elemental' *me toro*. Both the fragment and the whole, *me toro* in its wider meaning is a replication of *me toro* in its 'elemental' signification, to become an aggregation of pieces performed within the formal structure, within its empty spaces, so to speak.

when *me toro* unfolds as a whole, encompassing the whole village, the whole day. During the other days, *me toro* is one activity among others, performed at sunrise and sunset, for about half an hour each time. During *ami aprã*, *me toro* is the sole activity of the village. Longer *me toro* can have more than one *ami aprã*.

This is so, the *Mebengokré* say, because what really matters in *me toro* is that, when it is performed in this way, it becomes a vehicle for the creation of joy. This joyful aspect is the emphasis that the *Mebengokré* usually place on *me toro* when asked about why they are so prone to perform it: it is something whose explicit finality is to create a joyous environment among people. This is not to say that *me toro* is not also seen as celebrating the specific event, such as the confirmation of ‘good/beautiful’ names previously bestowed upon children. Knowledge of the material event that generates the ceremony is obviously widespread, but not the knowledge of the intricate ceremonies themselves, which are a matter for specialisation. It is generally the case that many people, if not most of them, do not know the specifics of the ceremony being performed. If there is something widely known and agreed upon about *me toro*, though, it is that it makes all the people joyful.

It is this stress upon the ludic, the pleasurable side of *me toro*, that I want to focus upon in this work, as well as the stress upon the need to get *everybody* into a joyful mood. As it will become clear throughout this work, this is an important feature of *Mebengokré* ceremonies. Although they are usually only performed by some of the people, and not by every person in a given village, and are for the benefit of some people only (those celebrated in them), it is expected that everyone should be ‘contaminated’ by the joyful disposition they bring about. As will be seen, this is an essential characteristic of the *Mebengokré* notion of ‘society’ and of ‘the social state’.

Ceremonies of different ‘kinds’ may be understood as elements of a performative complex, up to the point of each having a similar internal organisation to the next, and this holds for even the more recently ‘adopted’ ones. Most of them involve one, or several, kinds of people who dance for other kind(s) of people, who are being

‘celebrated’ by the dancing (and through the *me toro* as a whole). And they all relate to everyday life in the same way. I was constantly told that the performers, and those for whom they perform, all furnish a frame of reference for core everyday activities, in the sense that they provide a ‘rhythmic frame’, not only for the ceremony itself but also for the performance of joint social activities related to the everyday. Ritual is embedded in everyday life, as the British anthropologist Arthur M. Hocart has put it (Hocart 1952). This particular characteristic, I contend, is essential for the understanding of *me toro* in relation to - and as part of - people’s lives.

The point I wish to make here is very much a methodological one, pertaining to the significance of *me toro* for the people participating in it. Basically, for every single person in a given village and for many from other villages as well (as there is an interchange of people between villages in the attendance of specific *me toro*) the *me toro* can only be understood in its relation to everyday life. I make this point to counterpoise approaches to what is commonly called ‘ritual’ in anthropological theory, which usually centre on the relation between something called ‘symbols’ and something else called ‘social practice’ - as if ‘symbolization’ at the start were something separated from social practice.

To defend my counterpoising stance, I would like to relay to the reader all those amused faces and funny expressions I usually got from my *Mebengokré* friends when I ventured to ask them about the ‘meaning’ of specific *me toro*, or the ‘reason’ for them to be performed. They usually implied, by the most varied - and laughable - means, that the question in itself was misplaced. Their different reactions could be summed up in the expression that a friend of mine used to answer me, whose meaning would be roughly translated into English as something like ‘bollocks, it doesn’t mean a bloody thing!’

Other answers would, more politely, convey that it was performed ‘because it is good/beautiful/enjoyable’: in sum, because it is good fun²⁰.

This, I think, is expressive in itself of people’s attitudes towards *me toro*, and deserves a better understanding from the anthropologist’s part. The *Ge*-speaking peoples in general (and also the *Bororo*) have always had their ceremonial lives analysed through an optics that privileged the meaning of rituals in relation to the all-pervasive dualistic discourse that is the hallmark of such peoples within Amazonian ethnology. Fuelled by structuralist approaches²¹, these analyses have made massive contributions to the understanding of *Ge-Bororo* social life, from the abstract point of view of their institutional life and the symbolic meanings associated with them²², - but the issue of how people themselves actually live these ‘rituals’, how they relate to them, has been, I believe, rather neglected.

The *Mebengokré*, as the *Ge*- and *Bororo*-speaking peoples as a whole, are (justly) famous for their ‘structural thinking’, being prone to always display a dualistic reasoning in all matters concerning social life in general. Nevertheless this ‘structural’ propensity is a ‘surface’ phenomenon, of which they are entirely aware, bearing little resemblance to Lévi-Strauss’ notion of a ‘deep’, unconscious structure underlying (human) thought. In fact, the *Mebengokré me toro*, the way it is lived by people, has little to do with the interplay of dual oppositions, that is, it has little to do with the ‘meaning’ ascribed to them by anthropologists (and, arguably, by *Mebengokré*

²⁰ See Driessen (1997) on the irony of anthropology taking seriously what the ‘natives’ mean as play.

²¹ One must remember here that the *Ge* and *Bororo* were the initial source of inspiration for Lévi-Strauss (1952) in the development of the earlier forms of structuralism.

²² See, for instance, Melatti (1978) and Carneiro da Cunha (1978) on the *Kraho*, Viertler (1991) and J. C. Crocker (1985) on the *Bororo*, Turner (1966) and Vidal (1978) on the *Mebengokré*.

ceremonial specialists, when they are imposed upon to interpret them for the sake of the anthropologist). This practice, on the part of anthropologists, leaves one with the impression that *me toro* is an intellectual device, that is ‘used’ as a way to produce meanings, thoughts. But nothing is farther from the *Mebengokré* view of *me toro*, as will be shown in this work. An awareness of the ‘living’ aspects of *me toro* could thus disclose not only new, hidden (for the anthropologist, at least) dimensions of *Mebengokré* ritual life (and their social life in general), but also serve to lighten the over-emphasis on ‘meaning’ in most anthropological approaches to ‘ritual’, which misinterpret the reality of ‘ritual’ as a ‘meaning-creative’ device.

And this is no small matter. The Sri Lankan anthropologist Stanley Tambiah, in his approach to ritual analysis (Tambiah 1985), makes a distinction between a formal sphere of the ceremonies *per se* and the individual interests of participants, the latter affecting matters related to attendance, economic outlay, etc. He thus sees ritual as comprising a bi-partition between formal aspects and those other aspects concerning the private interests of people, which are somewhat related to the ritual. This presupposes a partition between a ‘supra-individual’ sphere of ritual ‘interest’ and the sphere of individual interests, the latter being the link between ritual and the ‘everyday life’ of private, parochial interests. As I – and, I think, also the *Mebengokré* – see it, the *me toro*’s main characteristic as lived experience is the direct link between ritual and the core of everyday life, the unmediated relationship between *me toro* and what we would call economic, political, productive matters. For the *Mebengokré*, I contend, there is, at the level of lived experience, no clear-cut, formal distinction between ‘ritual’ and ‘private/individual’ affairs, the same way as there is no clear-cut, formal distinction between these ‘ceremonies’ and the ‘economic’, ‘political’, ‘productive’ spheres of life. A ceremony may be marked as distinct from ‘ordinary, everyday events’, as Tambiah

puts it (Tambiah 1985: 126), but at the same time be part of the flux of the everyday, in fact generating it through its unfolding. As such, the *me toro* is a 'life-giving tool' in the sense that Hocart attributes: it creates everyday life (Hocart 1952). This understanding of *me toro* is part of a *Mebengokré* theory of social action, one concerned with the inducement of social agency in people who are otherwise not bound by 'communal' links that would restrict their individual autonomy.

The *me toro* is performed because the ancestors, the 'old people', made it, and that suffices to explain its existence and persistence. The *me tumre*²³, or tradition, as the *Mebengokré* say in Portuguese ('tradição'), incarnates the way the *Mebengokré* should socially be, and through ritual they can acquire this social state. This implies a notion of 'social' that is different from that usual in anthropological theory. It is a notion that involves the creation of the social state, instead of assuming its ever-static presence - and that creation is out of different stuff than those usually considered by anthropological theory.

Anthropologists have usually been baffled by how little *Mebengokré* (and other *Ge*) ceremonies are 'metaphysical', in the sense that they do not seem to imply an extra-physical, para-mundane world of spirits and supra-normal beings, who would come into contact with 'this world' through the ritual itself. *Me toro* are said to be performed only because 'it is like it should be', or in a slightly more elaborated way, because 'it is the way of the old' , *me tumre*. True, there is a metaphysics involved in the ceremonies, through references to myth that is known by anybody, as well as the more elaborate exegesis that points to less widely known mythical (and symbolical, in the more general sense) connections. But above all ceremonies are performed because they

should be, and that suffices for the *Mebengokré*. *Me toro* 'talks' - quite literally, as will be seen, about the way people should be, and in doing so, through its very performance, people act as they should – and things are as they should be, at least ideally. A paragon of the illocutionary act, the *me toro* creates the way people should be: it (re)creates the state of things as they were for the *me tumre* , and of which they are said to be the expression.

This is not to say that *me toro* actually 'makes things as they should be', a somewhat utopian idea: but it does provide the social opportunity for accomplishing it. Whether it 'succeeds' (and I am using here a category the *Mebengokré* themselves deploy, that of a *me toro* 'working' towards the creation of the situation it proclaims) or not in concrete settings, to create a social state, is another matter, and the history of the *Mebengokré*, full of village splits (many of them happening during a *me toro*, or related to one) shows how difficult it is, in practice, to attain such ideal state²⁴. *Me toro* in itself is less dependent on 'tradition' to be performed than on individual action, and - as with almost everything involving a collective, co-ordinated effort among the *Mebengokré* - it needs someone to 'trigger' it, to arouse people to the performance and the extensive preparations for it, which, up to a point, tends to involve the whole of their daily existence. *Me toro* also 'speaks' literally about creating social action, and quite literally as well, induces people to action. This is an important aspect of *Mebengokré* political theory, which is one that deals with the inducement of agency conducive to sociality in otherwise autonomous people, and with the creation of joy (as well as the creation and management of other emotions and sentimental dispositions) in all those individual

²³ *Me tumre*: 'Old things', 'things of old'. Another form commonly used, *me tum jarenh*, means 'to tell things of old', or 'things of old that are told', that is, transmitted through discourse.

people living together. *Me toro* are about transforming a moral understanding of how one should relate to specific others in shared agency: it expresses, and is about, an ethic and an aesthetic of conviviality.

When I say the *me toro* creates a social state I mean that, although they constitute in themselves ‘moments of exception’ in the usual chores of daily life, and as such are anxiously yearned for by everybody, on another plane of understanding they come to be conceived of as pertaining to everyday life. This in the sense that the very expectation of people, that leads to their promoting the string of ceremonies that fill the annual cycle (linked to the annual cycle of other, non-ceremonial activities) makes ceremonies intertwined with the everyday. First of all this is the expected outcome of some of them, but also they are responsible for generating other sets of activities. The *me toro* is a way of provoking and organising autonomous, independent people in accomplishing activities together, and in accomplishing individual activities to co-ordinate with others.

This inducement of social agency, entailing the co-ordination of people’s efforts is achieved through the use of vocal forms, directed to an audience ‘at large’ composed ideally by the entire village. Vocal forms - and expressive forms in general, including here the non-vocal ones, of body painting, corporeal adornment, etc - are seen as ‘working’ towards specific ends. A common expression to designate a tentative vocal performance, *ami ã ngrere akré*, ‘to experiment/measure the *ngrere*’²⁵, means trying to

²⁴ See Overing & Passes (2000) for a comprehensive overview of processes through which such social states are created, as well as the difficulty in attaining them, among other Indigenous peoples throughout Amazonia.

²⁵ The same expression is sometimes translated as ‘to teach the *ngrere*’. In the first sense it is also used, for example, to describe the action of checking if a cupful of water will be enough for all drinking from it to be satisfied. There is a relation here with the conception the *Mebengokré* hold of music ‘coming out’ of a singer to ‘fill’ his/her listeners.

move people to some end by means of the *ngrere*. This movement is made through the creation and management of emotional and sentimental states more generally, so that people themselves feel inclined to co-operate. Indeed, great stress is put on the fact that these vocal forms are *seductive* and not imposed. The *Mebengokré* promptly react in a rather negative fashion to any attempt at ordering or imposing.

There are several different vocal forms (*ngrere* or songs, *ben* or formal, stylised oratory; formal, stylised wailing; and ‘cries’, or *me ungrōr*) that are used as tools for such ends. All of them differ in some way from *kaben*, or everyday, common, unmarked speaking. Those forms have in common the fact that they are directed towards a wider audience, that is, towards people that are not necessarily related to the speaker. The presence of a wider audience is the equivalent, in the realm of discourse, to the concrete situation of a *Mebengokré* (and other *Ge* and *Bororo*) village. Different from most Amazonian villages, it comprises ‘kin’ as well as ‘non-kin’ (or ‘kin-like’, as the *Mebengokré* themselves would put it), that is, they comprise ‘known’ as well as ‘unknown’ people. To live in the same place with non-related people, with people one has not been brought up with, that is, people with whom one has no intimacy, is a concrete problem for the *Mebengokré*, and their social theory elaborates extensively upon it, through *me toro* and through the exercising of vocal forms in other contexts, like the one an external observer would call the ‘political’ context.

For the *Mebengokré*, the individuality of people - or, more precisely, that of an ‘intimate unit’ made up by those who have the closest contact with each other, having been raised together (i.e., the familial group) - is a given in a certain way, as it is focused upon nurturance and the sharing of good feelings towards each other. This is something which usually obtains, in general, among people sharing the same house (or

cluster of houses). Larger ‘gatherings’ of people, on the other hand, have to be continuously built through ongoing individual action. It is thought that people actually have to be moved to act, and the most pronounced (or the most displayed, at any rate) of a leader's abilities is to induce people to action. Vocal forms (and expressive forms as a whole) are seen by the *Mebengokré* as tools for such task: their theory of language and expression, if we can admit such theoretical concerns on their part, would be a theory on the inducement of social agency in people, to be closely allied to their building of ‘the social state’.

The issue here is primarily one involving the assembling and co-ordination of people – who are different from one another – for the accomplishment of collective tasks (and for their individual accomplishment of other tasks). This involves more than the ‘material’ sphere in the economic sense, being closer to the Wittgensteinian notion of a ‘form of life’, as elaborated upon by the Swedish philosopher J. Meloe (1988, 1988b): a production of conceptions that is at the same time a material production of life, and vice-versa. A production with its own peculiar logic, ethics and aesthetics, a production of things and of meanings, and above all a production of very different things and meanings, indeed from those we usually associate with productive activities, because these things are primarily emotions and sentiments, and their meanings relate not to individual psychologies, but to the fruitful relationship with ‘others’. The ideas the *Mebengokré* might have with regard to something we could call ‘social’ or ‘society’ have to do with the managing of emotion and sentiment, which are thus social matters, rather than individual ones. Their social philosophy is a social psychology.

The direct outcome of the *me toro* in this perspective is neither profit nor (unqualified) consumption. Rather, it is festive consumption. There is a wider

implication here, and is that *me toro* must generate the right kind of feelings and sentiments to be associated with it. Ceremonies ‘talk’ about this consumption and such generation, that is, about what kind of consumption, and what type of sentiments, are to be involved in *me toro*, and thus they encourage people to produce, to consume, and to feel in specific ways - and, in the more general way, to relate to each other in specific ways, something that is seen as akin to having specific emotional dispositions towards people. These ways are seen as images, fac-similes or reflections, of the way smaller, ‘kin-based’ groups of people (i. e., in the very special sense *Mebengokré* attribute to relations between relatives, as a ‘intimate’ continuum involving different individuals in a nuclear family) live together. The *me toro* may be seen as an effort to replicate (in a sense), at a wider level, the sociality of people that are very closely related, thus creating a social relationship between people that are not related (or are poorly related) otherwise.

Again, this is accomplished through the creation and management of emotional (and sentimental in general) states, that result in the bonding of people that are otherwise not related. In this way, *Mebengokré* social organisation, as seen by itself, is not forthcoming from groups but from the creation of suitable emotions. At the same time, their ‘political structure’ is not one of supra-familial structures proper, but one of fractal replications, at wider levels, of emotional dispositions similar to those present in familial settings. ‘Society’ for the *Mebengokré* would thus be a whole whose constituent parts bear to it a relation of similarity: it is, on a wider scale, similar to what the familial group is to those that are part of it.

All these considerations bear a direct relation to the interpretative task itself. Far from stressing a meaning ‘behind the thing in itself’, hidden in some way and

therefore subject to an interpretation that rejects its ‘superficial’ meaning in benefit of a ‘deeper meaning’, the *me toro*’s meaning is explicit and evident: it creates sociality through the engendering of certain emotions, triggered by the use of specific vocal, and other expressive forms, which are managed according to the models put forward by the ceremonies. The *Mebengokré* are explicit on this point, which I believe that some previous anthropologists have only failed to see due to the theoretical bias informing their approaches²⁶. What I intend here is not to analyse or to understand *me toro*’s ‘hidden meanings’, be they structural principles or otherwise: it is to understand the ways people see and experience them; to express in a meaningful way for us anthropologists the importance the *Mebengokré* themselves accord to it in their lives.

And that means much. The *Mebengokré* usually refer to *me toro* when they want to express to foreign people how they live. My description of the ‘ceremonial season’ intends mainly to convey why they do so. It is a description of the ways ceremonies relate to the everyday, how they are ‘life-giving’ for the *Mebengokré*. I would like to contrast this characterisation of ritual by Hocart (as ‘living’ rites, opposed to ‘fossilised’ ones like those found in the books written by commentators of ancient rites performed by long-dead peoples) to Weber’s comment on the great religions²⁷, that once they have formed their distinctive perspective, they are subject to a historical process of rationalisation and systematisation by religious specialists, both in terms of

²⁶This is quite evident, for instance, in the work of Giannini (1991), who did her fieldwork in one of the villages where I did mine (some ten years earlier). Her interpretation of the *Xikrin* naming ceremonies *takàk-nhàk* (performed together, the first for male bearers of names with *takak* ceremonial prefix, and the latter for female bearers of *nhàk* - prefixed names) stresses connections between symbolic aspects supposedly present in the ceremonies, resulting in the conclusion that the *Xikrin* human and social identity is obtained by means of an identification between humans and birds (p. 139) - a notion that highly amused my *Xikrin* friends when I was able explain it to them. Part of the problem might be that the author in question approached the *me toro* as a “...privileged expression of the way the *Xikrin* build their cosmovision” (p. 106, my translation), thus taking *me toro* only as a communicative device, while the *Mebengokré* themselves have a different notion of what a *me toro* is supposed to be and to build.

doctrine and practice. How about the 'small religions', where no elite exists and where the 'religious specialists' are not in a position detached from 'the mass of believers'? In this context, the idea of a 'living rite' is especially appealing. Just how is it, to 'live' a rite? It is this special 'quality' that I intend to describe. *Ge* and *Bororo* peoples are well-known by the explicit importance accorded to dualistic oppositions in their ritual life and otherwise. Less attention, though, has been given to the fact that this importance is a 'surface' element, not a 'deep structure' as structuralists would have it - and this is particularly interesting if one considers that the *Ge* were among those that furnished the model for Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theory. It is my argument that such oppositions, at least among the *Mebengokré*, are the expression of, and the vehicle for, a particular social philosophy, comprising a particular ethics, and a specific aesthetics of conviviality. This ethics and aesthetics, as well as the ways they are concretely produced, are what I want to disclose in this work: a *Mebengokré* notion of society, and how they strive to acquire it.

This work will thus have as its thread the description of some elements, or aspects, related to the 1999's ceremonial season in *Pykatingrot*, or Catete, *Xikrin* village. The chapters will deal with particular elements or situations presented during the months it lasted, and will introduce discussions relevant to the central aim of the work. Initially I will set up the problem, by means of a description of the villages where my fieldwork was carried out, and by reviewing the recent history of the *Mebengokré* villages more generally, and of *Xikrin* ones in particular. Against such a background, I will more importantly consider the very idea of a *Mebengokré* social organisation, unfolding as well what I consider to be waywardness in the approach to the issue put

²⁷ See Tambiah (1990, p. 153) for an appraisal of this point.

forward by previous ethnographers of *Ge* societies.

As I will argue, any notion of *Mebengokré* social organisation must take into consideration what I call the factional tendency of their society²⁸, the way new villages are created out of previous ones, in a process set by internal strife. The way the *Mebengokré* usually represent their villages is an ideal model, the very acquisition of which, when attempted, brings the village to the verge of a split. This is because it is based on too large a populational contingent²⁹, which has little chance of attaining the social quality required by the *Mebengokré* as an essential aspect of their ethical philosophy and what they would view, in our terms, as ethical practice, that is, of their ways of leading a good life.

After setting the parameters of the questions that are, I contend, the relevant ones for *Mebengokré* social philosophy (or social psychology), I will move on to showing how they cope with them, both in discourse and practice. I will do this, as stated before, by depicting the ceremonial season that I witnessed in the *Pykatingrät* village in 1999. The description itself is intended as a contribution to the ethnography of *Mebengokré* (and *Ge* at large) ceremonial life. Although descriptions of specific *Mebengokré* ceremonies are by no means rare³⁰, no one to my knowledge has ever written about the intertwining of individual ceremonies in a single, continuous flux, something that I am calling here the ceremonial season. This may be due to different factors, among them the fact that, up to recent times, many *Mebengokré* villages have

²⁸ See, for instance, the importance accorded by Maybury-Lewis (1967: 304) to factionalism among the *Ge*-speaking *Shavante*, proposing that it is "...a fundamental fact of *Shavante* life, on a par with, and independent of, any dualistic ideology".

²⁹ There is more than simply a large number of people involved in this qualification, as will become clear in the following chapters.

³⁰ See, for instance, Vidal 1972, 1977 and Giannini 1991 for the *Xikrin*; Lea 1986 and Verswijver 1982, for the *Mekragnotiç* Turner 1976 and Banner 1978 for the *Gorotire*

not had the opportunity - either by not having enough of a population or material resources - to develop a full ceremonial life, restricting it to a few short ceremonies every year, or even to no ceremony at all for more than one, sometimes for several years. As will be seen, the same happened to the Pykatingrot village during the last 40 years. From a pitiful situation when they all but completely abandoned any project of having a ceremonial life - in post-contact time, when their population had dropped to less than a hundred people, and with the guidance of only three elders - they manage the performance of short, generic naming ceremonies, and then the organisation of massive, months-long specific naming ceremonies, which are themselves part of full initiation cycles. During this period, the population in the village has risen well above 700 people, and another village has split from it, having established itself 18 km. away from it. Also, the *Xikrin* could count upon some material 'help' from CVRD, the mining company that explores the largest iron ore open-air mine in the world, within *Xikrin* traditional territory. This 'help' makes the *Xikrin* 'better off' than most other *Mebengokré* groups, facilitating the organisation of such massive ceremonies. Another reason I can think of for other researchers not having described what I call here *Mebengokré* ceremonial season is the fact that, although generally with long fieldwork experience, most of them seem to have spent only several short periods in the villages they researched into, while I have myself endeavoured to spend longer periods with the *Xikrin*, even though the sum total of my fieldwork time, some nine to ten months between 1999 and 2000 (I spent shorter periods with them since 1996, both with the Cateté *Xikrin* and in *Pykany* and *A'ykre* villages), is less than that of some other researchers.

Besides that, I intend to use the description of *Mebengokré* ceremonies as a

means to access what I am calling here *Mebengokré* social philosophy. As will become clear throughout this work, this is not a philosophy in the discursive, argumentative way we usually consider the term. Nevertheless, wisdom is the stuff it is made of; it reflects upon it, it transmits it, and it promotes it in the most general way, being thus entitled to be called a philosophy, an ‘amity for wisdom’, in its own right. The ways it is expressed are connected to dance, rhythm, music, (body) painting - and also some kinds of discursive forms, to mention just a few of its expressive means.

This task will be accomplished by introducing data related to aspects of it that will be interpreted in connection to other areas of *Mebengokré* social life and thought. Thus, the description of ceremonial hunting is a chapter that will introduce the reader to the evening talk of one of the ceremonial specialists who, in a very significant way, praised the next *me toro* for the younger men present. This will be the basis for considerations relating to the character of *Mebengokré*’s ‘teaching’, which, I will argue, is not what we would call pedagogic or informative, but seductive, in the sense that it intends to ‘win people over’ to performing a given *me toro*, by describing the niceties of it and enticing people to perform it. As will be seen, the main ‘argument’ used by the speaker is the promise of joy, of pleasure. Although people do ‘learn’ (in the Western sense of information/knowledge being transmitted from one person to another), this learning is accomplished by ‘filling’ people (and I suspect this would be a quite literal statement for the *Mebengokré*) with joy, i.e., by means of the arousal and the channelling of sentiments toward the end of accomplishing a collective endeavour.

Another aspect of ceremonies to be analysed is the complex of ideas and practices regarding a *Mebengokré* theory of ‘value’ and ‘exchange’ - which I prefer to call give-and-get, for reasons that will become clear throughout this work - that springs

from *me toro* itself and is essential to the understanding of their notion of ‘the social state’. I will argue in this chapter that, although exchange is what ‘objectively’ obtains in transactions between people outside the most intimate familial relations - that is, outside the ‘intimate unit’ mentioned before - it cannot be understood as such, but as actions performed with the explicit intention of being ‘sharing-like’, or fac-similes of the sharing relationship characteristic of this ‘intimate unit’. This characteristic is essential, as noted above, to understand the quality of such relationships as a basis for their social life, because the *Mebengokré*, I contend, do not situate their social philosophy either with the ‘intimate unit’ or upon impersonal, economic-like, ‘public’ transactions, but in transactions that, although not to be confused with those present in the scope of the more intimate ‘intimate unit’, are nevertheless suitable, acceptable fac-similes of these latter.

Another aspect of ceremonies that will be analysed will be that of language as a tool for agency, which will be done by means of a description of the *ben* ‘ceremonial’ discourse. I will then endeavour to relate it to *Mebengokré* ‘political’ discourse³¹ and to conceptions of language in general (*ben* is used both for the highly stylised ceremonial vocal form, and to describe ‘political’ speech directed towards an audience, mainly at the men’s house). I will argue that its main characteristic, that which defines it as comprising what a Western-biased approach would classify as different kinds of discourse, is the fact that it is directed towards an audience. The notion of an audience, which will be introduced early in the description of *me toro*, is central for the understanding of *Mebengokré* society. As I will argue, it implies the presence, in any given village, of people to whom one’s relationship is that of a performer to an audience.

³¹ Again, such definitions cannot be applied to the *Mebengokré* without severe revision. This will be accomplished in this chapter, where I endeavour to show the reasons for the inadequacy of the distinction between the ‘political’ and the ‘ceremonial’.

This quality, of ‘people at large’ to whom one is not necessarily connected in any other way, is present throughout the whole of *Mebengokré* social life: one performs in a ceremony in order that people at large may see one; one uses relationship terminology in order that people at large may see one doing so; one displays one’s social qualities - like unselfishness, generosity, or stillness - in order for people at large to see it. Far from being burdened with Western-based notions that value such display negatively (one thinks here of the idea of hypocrisy), such audience-oriented behaviour is an essential trait of *Mebengokré* sociality: to show oneself aesthetically to others at large is to act in a virtuous, social way, according to *Mebengokré* understanding of the term.

The ceremonial season will have its ethnography interrupted once more to allow for a description of *Mebengokré* ways of using relationship terms to establish relations to people. The issue of the ‘nature’ and character of *Mebengokré* kinship - as well as that of other *Ge*-speaking peoples - has been a controversial one since its inception. Although the initial studies, made by T. Turner and by J. Bamberger in the 1960’s (Turner 1966; Bamberger 1974), drew a picture of a kindred-based social organisation, with the corresponding absence of unilineal descent structures, in line with the general approach adopted by other members of the Harvard-Museu Nacional research project³², other studies have characterised the *Mebengokré* as possessing a sort of ‘descent system’ based on the transmission of names and ceremonial prerogatives

³²This project, realised in close cooperation between the two institutions, promoted the comparative research into several *Ge*-speaking societies of Central Brazil, and also the *Bororo*. Carried on both by American and Brazilian anthropologists, its research was a landmark in *Ge* studies, setting the parameters of understanding for *Ge*- and *Bororo*-speaking societies up to the present day. Its main inspirations were Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism and Needham’s review of it (at the theoretical level) and the ongoing revision of descent theory carried out by anthropologists working in Melanesia. See Maybury-Lewis 1979 for a comprehensive volume with contributions of all members of the research team.

within a matri-line³³ -something that had not been entirely strange even to previous researchers engaged in the comparative research of the Harvard-Museu Nacional project³⁴.

As I will argue in this work, the discussion itself is misplaced, and I believe this is due to the theoretical bias informing its background, and this, I think, in at least two ways. Firstly, it allows for a confusion between analytical and substantive concepts, whereby the analytic categories, initially used as tools for the understanding of social situations, were incorporated into the discussion as facets of the social world studied, being taken afterwards as such. Secondly, it uses views of ‘kinship’ and ‘society’ that are not relevant to the understanding of what actually goes on in everyday life. I will in this chapter attempt to sort out a genealogy of the confusion stated in the first point above, in order to tackle the issue represented by the second point, showing how ‘*kin-like*’ relations are produced by people’s discursive practice, and how these come to be seen as the central basis for ‘society’, instead of ‘*kin*’ ones, a practice that defies the distinction between ‘kinship’ the way it is understood by structural theory and ‘kinship’ as ‘amity’.

Another discussion will be introduced in the ethnography of *me toro*, related to the quality of the relationship with ‘nature’ propitiated by it. In more specific terms, I intend to show the *Mebengokré* way of getting fish from dancing. I will argue in this chapter - following Joanna Overing’s (Overing 1992) discussion of Amazonian economics as aiming at the production of social relations and not to the production of goods - that *me toro* is also a way, in our (Western) view, to produce ‘goods’, and that

³³The main proponent of this thesis is Lea (1986; 1992), although a similar view obtains from the studies of Verswijver (1982a; 1983/84).

is accomplished, in its technical aspects as well as ideologically, through rhythm, dance, music. A *Mebengokré* economic theory would be one that spoke of the ways of bringing autonomous people to work collectively, and this is carried out by means of the creation of joy. I will argue furthermore that this is essential also to what we would have as the ‘technical’ aspect of the economic activity, thus breaking the classical division between ‘ritual’ and ‘technical’ aspects of social action³⁵.

Finally, in the conclusion I will endeavour to present what I think is a suitable model of *Mebengokré* society. This, I assume, must be one that suits *Mebengokré* social philosophy itself, being the (ever provisional) result of a dialogue between the notions of anthropological theory and those of the *Mebengokré*. This model will question several points in previous models, which, I contend, were driven wrongly by the concepts that the anthropologists used in order to build them. It will question such hallowed notions (for the *Mebengokré*, and other *Ge-* and *Bororo*-speaking societies at least) as the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’, and even more generally, quasi-commonsensical anthropological ideas such as the one that states that the content of ‘social relations’ is something unquestionably universal – ‘social rules’, or ‘hierarchy’, for instance.

According to my view - and this, I expect, is a view that is conversant with *Mebengokré*’s social philosophy itself - *Mebengokré* society is a fractal one, an endless replication, in different scales and different spheres, of relations that are seen as suitable facsimiles of a set of relations, which obtain in the ‘intimate unit’ mentioned above. A result of people’s agency, *Mebengokré* society is one based on the creation of certain emotions and sentiments, and in the administration of them in suitable ways. *Me toro*, I

³⁴See, for instance, J.C. Crocker (1976); W. Crocker (1977; 1979).

argue, is the epitome of such creative and administrative faculties that *Mebengokré* consciously develop and preserve: their social philosophy, or social psychology, reflected upon, displayed, enacted, and transmitted through the generations.

This philosophy, as I will argue, revolves around the creation of different ‘kinds’, or qualities, ascribed to people in different moments. Autonomus individuals may thus be similar to others in some contexts, by showing a same quality as others, while at the same time remaining singular beings. These two traits, far from contradicting each other, are necessarily intermingled in the creation of society as *Mebengokré* conceive of it. The French anthropologist Christian Geffray, an Africanist, when visiting an Amazonian village in Brazil, was astonished that - different from its African counterpart, where he would be subtly but inexorably directed towards the person who would mediate his access to the group, usually the head of the local lineage group - everybody would approach him with the same eagerness, exchanging and conversing freely, and usually trying to do so at the same time and place as all the others. This readiness to establish unmediated, individual contacts and exchanges - and I use the word here in its most ample, un-specialised sense - reveals the value of individual autonomy, indeed of the singularity of individuals not bound to social groups, which is pervasive in social philosophies throughout Amazonia, as well as a corresponding little importance accorded to social groups *per se* in such philosophies.

Diverging from Geffray’s interpretation of the phenomenon (but, I think, agreeing with the essentials of it) I assume it as a display of the ‘non-groupal’ - even ‘anti-groupal’ - character of Amazonian social organisation, also present among the *Mebengokré* (and, I think, other *Ge-* and *Bororo*-speaking peoples as well). Foreign to

³⁵ See Tambiah (1990) for a thorough revision of the discussion concerning this point.

the conception of such metaphysical entities (labeled as ‘social groups’ and therefore as ‘society’), which attribute an ‘essential’ similarity to different beings, to the point of regarding them as an ‘essential’ continuum through space and time - one thinks here of the significance accorded to the notion of ‘blood’ in European kinship and its later development in such scientific notions as the human genome - *Mebengokré* social philosophy is one based in the recognition of autonomous, discontinuous, singular beings, whose similarity to others is created by means of human *agency*. Beings of becoming, to use the expression coined by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1992), the *Mebengokré* become ‘proper’ beings through their own hands, so to speak.

This notion is akin to that expressed by Joanna Overing in her masterly description of the generative quality of *Piaroa* everyday life. Reframing Sahlins well-known opposition between ‘prescriptive’ and ‘performative’ structures, Overing goes on to show how the informal, non-prescriptive, and the intimate play a crucial role in *Piaroa* social philosophy. Becoming the veritable tools for the creation of social engagement, such spheres of being are stressed in an elaborate metaphysics that bases sociality in the exaltation of individual autonomy, rather than in the submission to a ‘group’, that is, to a unit comprising an ‘essential’, innate continuity between its members. It is through the convivial engagement, through the ever-present, ongoing efforts of individual will, that such continuity is achieved, albeit always in a precarious, non-definitive way. It is interesting to see how she deals with the interplay between individual autonomy and the social order:

The Piaroa notion of living under the ‘sky of the domesticated’ depicts well the means through which they decentre social power: they ‘domesticate’ power by personalising it and providing the individual actor, and not the group, the responsibility for this domestication. As a result, power always

become a matter of personal trust - or distrust. And thus, community life becomes deeply dependent upon the creation of individual trusting relationships. What is more, a good deal of social energy is directed toward creating new morally competent beings with the personal capabilities for living harmoniously (or artfully) with others: the young must learn how to trust, and how to become trustworthy (...)

(...) Their insistence upon personal autonomy, their high evaluation of the social, and their affection for custom are not conflicting values, or rather they only appear to be from the point of view of the dominant strand of our own individualism that takes the superiority of the disengaged ego. The Piaroa individual by definition partakes of the social and the cultural (...) By refusing the imperatives of institutional law, they can properly socialise personal power, and link it to customary action without neutralising the autonomous I. At the same time, by personalising power, they can further inhibit the development of the institution, and the hierarchical arrangements through which it flourishes.

Different from the *Piaroa*, called ‘the philosophers of the Orinoco’ because of their rich (discursive) metaphysical elaborations, the *Mebengokré* rely on rhythm and dance, on music, story-telling and other vocal forms - one could say, expressive forms, including here the bodily expressions through dance, painting, the use of adornments, etc - to convey *their* social philosophy. Relying on the endless elaboration of ‘kinds’, collectively ascribed to people, *Mebengokré* place upon this notion - that could be called ‘collective qualities’ - a stress very much similar to the one that the *Piaroa* place on creating individual qualities in people.

We arrive here at a notion of the ‘everyday’ as the *locus* of sociality, in the sense that is through the continuous acting out of such generative capabilities as displayed by *Piaroa*, *Mebengokré* and many other Amazonian peoples - albeit in different ways - that the social quality is ever-presently produced. Far from being one ‘social sphere’ among others, what is being called here ‘the everyday’ is akin, in the plane of concrete agency, to what Wittgenstein calls common sense, the process through

which we become solidly bound to (social) reality, as common sense (in Wittgensteinian use of the term) does in relation to cognitive reality.

In this sense, the 'everyday' is not to be distinguished from the 'symbolic' - because if the latter means something for the people that symbolises, it can only do so through, or by means of, their everyday existence. I am talking here, thus, of the unfolding of life itself, of concrete existence in its full, the only means through which 'meaning' obtains.

This brings to the fore the issue of what is exactly meant by 'meaning' in the description of *me toro*. When one watches it, one is confronted with (at least) three different possible ways of considering its 'meaning'. One of them is to take those oppositions that abound in the enacting of *me toro*, all the articulation of binary elements that it offers to the anthropologist's eye, and build them into a system. Whatever its intrinsic merits - and much has been said about *Mebengokré's* and other *Ge-speaking* peoples' institutions by means of such an expedient - this 'meaning' tends to ignore one of the most striking characteristics of *me toro*, and this is the prolific, exuberant, essentially a-systematic ways in which the many ceremonial elements that make up the *materia prima* of *me toro* arrange and re-arrange themselves. Any attempt to reduce such process to a 'system' would only succeed at the expense of a reasonably large part of the mentioned ceremonial elements, which would scarcely fit in the picture thus traced.

Such elements - *ngrere* songs, adornments, *ben* vocal forms, *kukradja* ceremonial rights, and other ceremonial roles - although highly 'structured', possess a degree of mobility materialised in manifold legitimate (i.e., traditionally sanctioned) ways of being used, so much so that the sheer multiplicity of possible associations in

itself prevents (meaningful) systematisation.

Another way of ascribing ‘meaning’ to *me toro* is through the deep insight of ceremonial specialists, present in relative profusion in both the villages in which I worked. This ‘meaning’, when taken isolated from concrete unfolding of *me toro* time and space, although having its merits - not the least of them the deepening of linguistic significance of that which happens during the *me toro* - also misses something of the very quintessential nature of the unfolding of *me toro* as concrete practice: its capacity of encompassing the whole of people’s lives, and of making it enjoyable.

The two latter characteristics suggest the ‘meaning’ that I seek in my description of *me toro*: the presence it has, as process, in people’s lives. Or, in other words, the capacity it has to create, validate, and fulfil as a ‘language game’, the very unfolding of *Mebengokré* social life, and the way they conceive of it.

I thus adopt here an approach that strives to acquire a dialogue with *Mebengokré* views of what we would call ‘social organisation’, without imposing upon their notions our own metaphysical load inherited in such concepts as ‘social groups’, ‘kinship’, or ‘society’, to mention only a few. I strive to establish what the German philosopher Karl-Otto Apel calls a hermeneutical language-game, a ‘translation’ of life-forms as a dialogical process:

“.. The specific function of the hermeneutical language-game would be to mediate the human interpretation of the world and the associated outline of existence in the continuum of discourse, or, to put it in largely Wittgensteinian terms, a mediation between one life-form and another.” (Apel 1985: 31)

The reference to Wittgenstein brings to mind the Norwegian philosopher Jakob Meloe’s (1988b) stress on the practicality of the understanding of a life-form, whose

meanings can only be grasped when understood within the context of the practice with which they are associated. In this vein, it is through a description - an ethnography - of the practice of *me toro* that I mean to arrive at an understanding of it, which is conversant with the meanings the *Mebengokré* accord to it.

In adopting this view, I am trying to avoid the deficiencies of an structuralist approach, still very much *en vogue* in Amazonian ethnology, that treats Amazonian worlds of meaning and practice as so much 'data' to fit into an 'universal' descriptive language. What is necessary is that the anthropologist's 'translation' of Amazonian (and of elsewhere, for that matter) worlds of meaning and practice into the world of anthropological theoretical meanings and practice be a learning process, as Joanna Overing (1987) stresses, whereby we chose, through our own experience of these worlds, the appropriate ways of representing it within our anthropological 'subculture'. The 'suspension of disbelief', as Overing puts it, is a way to recognise, and deal with, the different worlds of meaning and practice in a way that purports to be conversant, or dialogical, with them.

This aim is directly associated both with my choosing to represent the 'common people's' understanding of *me toro* instead of the 'learned' exegeses of them; and with my theoretical stress on the 'everyday' as the *medium* through which meaning is to be obtained. In fact, anthropologists (as all other intellectual professionals, academics, scientists, etc) are used to complicating the worlds they research by bringing into them the preoccupations of their discipline, in the form of analytical concepts, burdened with inevitable metaphysical assumptions, which are imposed upon the worlds being scrutinised. In so doing, we take a further step and assume that such complications arise from the worlds themselves, which thus become represented as subjects of problematic

interpretation by the ‘natives’. But worlds are not necessarily interpreted in such a way in the everyday flow of people’s lives. Thinking about (social) worlds is problematic only because our specialised, academic sort of thinking makes it so. Ordinary people do not at all see it as ‘problematic’ and having to do with such issues as ‘meaning’ and ‘interpretation’. This is something that struck me most when I was in the field, as I have already had occasion to mention. It is we who ascribe a ‘problematic’, ‘interpretive’ character to it. What I mean here by ‘everyday’, following Wittgenstein, is this unproblematic³⁶ fruition of daily life. This is what I want to represent in this work in relation to *me toro*. Wittgenstein, writing about this very same issue, has given a clear picture of the way we (scholars in general, I mean) represent the world as ‘problematic’:

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says over and over again ‘I know that that’s a tree’, pointing to a tree that is near to us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: ‘This fellow isn’t insane. We are only doing philosophy’.”³⁷

The American anthropologist, Mark P. Whitaker (1996: 7-8), looking for a way out of the dilemma placed by post-modernist critiques of representation, and thus of the place accorded to ethnography in the anthropological discipline (critiques that would have all ethnographical representation as a form of violence against those represented), found Wittgenstein’s approach useful to do away with what he portrays as an artificial dilemma: that which proposes the need to choose between a universal yardstick as the ruler of any description of different worlds of meaning and practice, or instead

³⁶ Of course, I do not assume it to be unqualifiedly ‘unproblematic’. It is relatively so, and the kind of problems that ‘natives’ are likely to have are different from those we usually attribute to them in ethnographies (that is, ‘meaning’ and ‘interpretation’ issues).

³⁷ Wittgenstein (1967, § 467). I give here the number of the paragraph, and not that of the page, to keep with the scholarly convention regarding Wittgensteins’s works.

completely refusing to describe them³⁸. He makes the distinction between what he calls ‘representations in general’ and ‘terrorist representations’, on the grounds that the better ‘representations in general’ are, the more they lead to interchanges between the worlds of the represented and that of the representer, whereas the better ‘terrorist representations’ are, the more they limit these interchanges. The former teach, while the latter oppress, or resist oppression. In this sense, the first are what Wittgenstein would call ‘primitive language-games’, attempted descriptions or ‘tries’ that bring one closer to the form of life one wants to master in thinking. Wittgenstein would have this approach as a solution of the dilemma depicted above, as Whitaker puts it:

Wittgenstein, as was so often the case with him, chose to opt out of this quandary rather than directly confront it. Why, he asked in effect, should one have to choose between epistemic capture and meta-linguistic misapprehension? Why not instead back up the whole process of philosophical debate into the process of learning which normally precedes it? One could do what (he believed) a child does when it wants to understand something: engage in ‘tries’, act experiments of gradually increasing complexity that move one ever closer to simply living a form of life (...) It would grant an observer what it gradually opens up for the investigator: a clear view, a ‘perspicuous representation’ (...), of the form of life one is trying to learn, and of its similarities and differences, its ‘family resemblances’, to other related, sometimes muddingly intermingled, but different forms of life. (Whitaker 1996: 08)

Whitaker thus arrives at the notion that, rather than being in the need for universal tools to be applied to every world of meaning and action, or worse, of having to abandon their representation altogether, as some of the postmodernist critiques would have it, the anthropologist must learn his or her way around a different form of life, and represent such learning processes by means of ‘trial representations’ usually suppressed in ethnographies. The adequacy of ethnographical representation would then be not (wrongly) measured against such universal yardstick - that is, by its relationship to ‘the

³⁸ The volume edited by Overing (1985) deals with these very same issues, arriving at similar

truth' it supposedly represents - but by the degree it brings different worlds of meaning and practice into purposeful, 'lucid' contact with one another. Ethnography as such is no longer seen as an epistemological relationship to an 'object' of knowledge, but as a learning process in itself (Whitaker 1996: 8), and here, one might add, ethnography in both its senses: as experience and as writing. Anthropology becomes an 'investigation' in the Wittgensteinian sense, when it gets itself rid of any 'universal logical language' claims.

This is what I have endeavoured to do in the present work: to represent my learning of traits of *Mebengokré* life form by means of a description of such a process of acquiring knowledge. This was not only the process through which I came to learn something of such traits, but also more or less the process through which *Mebengokré* themselves learn their own form of life. It is precisely this characteristic - of learning a form of life through successive 'trials', as Wittgenstein would have it - that I chiefly intend to convey in my representation. That is why it has the form I described in this introduction, that of a process unfolding in time, with reflections - 'translations', as it were, to our way of understanding - concerning aspects of it.

A basic strategy for the apprehension of such process is, as stated above, what Overing has called the 'suspension of disbelief', and what I called 'methodical innocence' when in the field. Exercising it, I could thus not agree with those who approached ethnographic experience from a purely 'textual' point of view, either reducing it to 'textual production' - presuming that anthropology 'produced' only academic texts, ignoring that anthropology is also a way of acting, besides a way of writing - or else expanding the meaning of 'textuality' to embrace the whole of

ethnographic experience, and thus producing a sort of ‘literary criticism’ of one’s form of life. The first position misses the entirety of experience by turning its gaze to the other side, so to speak; the second undermines it by explicit denial, by applying literary categories to it - again the Western yardstick, in a new version³⁹.

The exercise of such ‘methodical innocence’ implies, above all, placing oneself in the position of a learner by means of ethnography, and I mean here both the in-the-field experience and the writing-up experience. This is why I want to convey such a form of life in a description, as a means to share with the reader what I have learned of *Mebengokré* form of life, through the placing of successive fragments of it. This is also why I have chosen the ‘everyday’, as I described above, as the privileged *medium* of such description. Because it is the only means through which we, both myself and the reader, can gain a glimpse of the fullness of the unfolding of *Mebengokré* life.

O wa ne, as the *Mebengokré* say at the end of a story: and this is it.

³⁹ See, for instance, Overing’s (1985: 152-79) critique of the unreflective use of the notion of ‘metaphor’ in the understanding of other forms of life, similar to the remark put forward by Barley (quoted in Hobart 1985: 106) of the anthropologist’s common use of the term ‘symbolic’, as opposed to ‘rational’, to anything that is not immediately understandable by the anthropologist.

Chapter One

By Way of Introduction – On the *Mebengokré*

*Men come and go as leaves year by year upon the trees. Those of autumn
the wind sheds upon the ground, but when spring returns
the forest buds forth with fresh ones. Even so is it with
the generations of mankind, the new spring up as the old are passing away.*
Hippolocus to Diomed, Homer, The Iliad, book VI

The *Mebengokre*, or *Kayapo* as they are more commonly known, a Northern *Ge*-speaking people⁴⁰, occupy a region in the Southern side, and in the Northern side of the Brazilian states of Para and Mato Grosso, respectively. Its territory is circumscribed to the East by the rivers Araguaia and Tocantins, and to the West by the Jamanxim river, a tributary of the Tapajós.

The term *Mebengokré* means ‘those who came from the hole in the middle of the waters’. Other possible translation refers to a ‘place between the waters’. Some authors⁴¹ speculate that the latter translation could possibly refer to the *Mebengokré*’s historical origin from a region between two different rivers⁴². Apparently both explanations (and others) are placed by the *Mebengokré* themselves, in a speculative form, when questioned about it.

Although they are commonly represented as a single Indigenous society, the diverse *Mebengokré* subgroups present a series of differences between themselves on

⁴⁰ The Northern *Ge* are the *Timbira*, the *Mebengokré*, the *Suyá*, and the *Panará*. The *Ge* linguistic family comprises also the Central *Ge* (*Sherente* and *Shavante*) and the Southern *Ge* (*Kaingang* and *Shokleng*).

⁴¹ See, for instance, Vidal (1977), Verswijver (1985) and Turner (1991).

⁴² The term *ngo* may refer equally to a river or *ngo ratx*, ‘large water’.

the level of their institutional structure⁴³, similar in degree to those present among the different *Timbira* groups⁴⁴. It is thus more profitable to view the *Mebengokré* as a complex unit, comprising internal differences of varied scope, and tending to present themselves (sometimes) as a group of peoples that share the same language and cultural core. This would be, for instance, the case with the *Xicrin*, considered by some other *Mebengokré* groups as a distinct people⁴⁵. The *Xicrin*, by their turn, although considering the Xingu *Mebengokré* (that is, all other *Mebengokré* groups, as the *Xicrin* are the only ones that live out of the Xingu region, in the Tocantins basin) as *Mebengokré*, say they are ‘other *Mebengokré*’, calling them ‘*Kayapó*’, a name they do not apply to themselves.

To see the *Mebengokré* as a complex unit also implies recognising as problematic a series of differences presented by them at the institutional level. This, not as a minor issue, as some would have it⁴⁶, nor as something irrelevant for the understanding of their social organisation, as others would have it⁴⁷, but as essential for

⁴³ Among the Xingu *Mebengokré*, for instance, men (adult men with children, that is) are usually part of men’s societies, or *tchêts*, which work as ‘political’ groups and in ceremonial life. Among the *Xicrin*, with whom I did my fieldwork, this is usually done by age groups. Also, some authors (Verswijver 1982; 1984; Lea 1992) argue that the Xingu *Mebengokré*’s social organisation has a ‘matrilineal’ twist, whereas the *Xicrin-Mebengokré* (Vidal 1977) would have an agnatic tendency. For Lea (1986: 40), the *Mekragnoti* (who are Xingu *Mebengokré*) consider as ‘real relatives’, *õmbikwá kumrentx*, those who are linked by uterine ties. For Vidal (1977: 54-55), on the other hand, the group of ‘real’ brothers would be emphasised in *Xicrin-Mebengokré* social organisation. There are also other differences, related to the ‘institutional’ organisation of ceremonies, and the ‘transmission’ of names and ceremonial prerogatives. I have dealt in some depth with such differences in my masters thesis (de Oliveira 1995).

⁴⁴ The *Timbira* are Northern *Ge*-speaking groups, sharing the same language. Despite this, they are represented by anthropologists, government agencies and NGOs alike, as different ‘peoples’. They are the *Kraho*, the *Krinkati*, the *Gavião* or *Pyrkataje*, the *Canela* (*Apaniekrá* and *Ramkokamekrá*), and the *Apinayé*. The latter, speaking a different language (but very similar to that of the *Mebengokré*) are called Western *Timbira*, to differentiate them from the previous ones, all classed under the label of Eastern *Timbira*.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Lea (1986) to this effect.

⁴⁶ Turner (1966; 1991)

⁴⁷ For V. Lea, for instance (1986), the differences do not concern the *Mebengokré* but only the *Xicrin*, which she, following the representation commonly made of them by the *Mekragnoti*, with whom she

the understanding of their social life. This constitutes a ‘problem’ only in so far as *Mebengokré* social organisation is seen as static, immutable, and homogeneous throughout all different *Mebengokré* groups⁴⁸.

The *Mebengokré* pose a challenge to Amazonian ethnology as a whole. In Amazonia, most Indigenous peoples are homogeneously treated as intrinsically homogeneous by virtue either of their sheer smallness or of the lack of deep historical data that could co-relate different peoples in a larger whole. The *Mebengokre* on the other hand - and, in varying degrees, all other *Ge*-speaking peoples and the *Bororo* as well - are a large, thriving people, with quite well-known historical relations between its different groups. In such a situation, any understanding of their social organisation that does not take into account such complexity is not only artificially built, but also misleading. It would imply taking any one specific concrete configuration of *Mebengokré* society as ‘the *Mebengokré* model’, forgetting that other ways of being *Mebengokré* also exist, this existence alone being sufficient proof of their changing according to time and circumstance. To understand *Mebengokré* society implies understanding both these histories and these circumstances.

The term ‘*Kayapó*’ does not originate from the *Mebengokre* language itself. Some researchers say that it is of Tupian origin⁴⁹; but this seems to be doubtful⁵⁰. The term was originally utilised by the Portuguese to designate other Indigenous people that

worked, does not consider ‘real *Mebengokré*’ but a different people. This simply evades the problem posed by the difference within the *Mebengokré* ‘unit’ in favour of a static picture of their social organisation.

⁴⁸ I dealt with this issue in my Master’s thesis (Oliveira 1995).

⁴⁹ Turner (1966).

⁵⁰ Aryon d’Almeida Rodrigues, the renowned Tupinologist, has told me that, although the word ‘*kaya*’ can be found in several Tupian languages, the whole term ‘*Kayapó*’ has no evident meaning. He himself does not give credit to the version that the name has a Tupian origin. (Aryon Rodrigues, personal communication).

lived far to the South. This people would be that from which the present-day *Panará* have come. The mistake was initiated by the Portuguese administrator and writer Cunha Mattos, in his 1824 book *Chorografia Historica da Provincia de Goyaz* ('Historical Description of the Province of Goyaz'). He was the first one to say that the Indigenous people until then called *Gradaús* by Portuguese and Brazilian settlers was of *Kayapó* extraction. The *Gradaús* were a people who inhabited the margins of the Araguaia River and the *sertão*⁵¹ between there and the Tocantins river. Cunha Mattos' opinion concerning the *Kayapó* affiliation of the *Gradaús* was followed by the French naturalist Castelnau, who in 1844 said that they were a single people, speaking the same language. This conjecture, created by Cunha Mattos and popularised by Castelnau, became a tacit assumption on the part of those who busied themselves with such matters from then on. An example of this can be seen in Couto de Magalhaes' *Ensayo de Anthropologia* (Essay on Anthropology), published in 1874, where he states that the *Cayapó* lived then "... in the forests of the Province of Paraná, Matto Grosso, Goyaz, Maranhão, up until Pará, where, under the name of *Gorotires*, they possess powerful strongholds at the banks of the Xingu river"⁵². The confusion was only undone on the 20th century, by the Brazilian ethnographer Curt Nimuendaju, the first ethnographer of the *Ge*-speaking peoples, who called the *Mebengokré* Northern *Kayapó*, to distinguish them from the ancestors of the *Panará*, or Southern *Kayapó* (Nimuendaju 1952).

Mebengokré language, or *Mebengokré kaben*, is common to all *Mebengokré*. The *Mebengokré* themselves seem to establish different categories for linguistic classification, which can, for instance, state the difference between the languages of the *Mekragnoti* and that of the *Xikrin*, or the similarity between the latter and the language

⁵¹ The term '*sertão*' has the general meaning of deserted, wild land.

of the *Apinayé*. The *Mekragnoti* are the *Mebengokré* living farther South of the *Mebengokré* territory, while the *Xikrin* are the Northernmost group. The *Apinayé* are not *Mebengokré*, by all accounts, although they speak a language that is perhaps the closest to that of the *Mebengokré* from the linguistic point of view: they can understand each other in their own languages with no great trouble⁵³.

According to *Mebengokré*, to speak *Mebengokré kaben* is one of their distinctive features as a people; this is possibly why statements on the limits of the mutual intelligibility of their respective *kaben* (or *kapen* in *Apinayé*) have always a flavour of politics. For them, the linguistic competence is important in other areas than that of a functional mutual intelligibility. For instance, oratory is important in male social life, being cultivated by the elders. Also, linguistic competence as conceived by the *Mebengokré* implies not only the publicly spoken word but that of the song, *ngrere*, sung in most ceremonies, by men as well as by women. Specific people, the *ngrere djwyhn* and *ngre nho djwyhn* or ceremonial specialists, memorise the songs and other vocal forms (re-creating them in the process) that are sung or related during ceremonies. There is also the *ben*, the name applied both to formal ceremonial discourses but also to other, less linguistically marked forms of public speech. As a formal ritualised discourse, *ben* is performed by people during certain ceremonies. *Ben* is a form of speech that is used only by males. There are other forms, used only for females, such as the public wailing performed by women when someone dear to them has returned after a long absence. Finally, linguistic competence implies not only a formal but also a

⁵² Couto de Magalhaes (1873: 447-78).

⁵³ *Bemoti*, the elder and old leader of the *Pykatingrät* village, told me of his encounter with an *Apinaye* leader, when they spoke to each other in their own languages. *Bemoti* was really astonished that ‘other *Mebengokré*’ as the *Apinayé* could have been away for so long (from other *Mebengokré*, that is) and still speak *Mebengokré kaben*. He meant that the differences - always interpreted as historical, that is,

specific moral dimension: the ‘good’ and the ‘beautiful’ are not distinct dimensions for this people whose language expresses both notions by the same term, *metx*.

As in other spheres of social life, language also implies gender differentiation. Men and women have each specific sets of terms and expressions.. The latter possess a style of speech strongly laringalised, used on some occasions. This is the female equivalent of the rhetoric style of men, not laringalised but marked by a peculiar intonation⁵⁴.

The so-called ‘female language’ - and here one wonders why no one has ever called its counterpart ‘male language’, that is, the specific style of male speech as such - is ‘language’ in the sense of *parole*, as the social practice of speech. In this sense, it has some characteristics worth noticing. One is the ‘roundness’ of vocalic sounds in the end of some words, whereas male speech tends, to my knowledge, to produce them in a more nasal form. This coheres with the distinctive intonation of female and male speech, as men tend to project the sound from the frontal part of their mouths⁵⁵.

Another interesting aspect relates to the specific uses of terms describing movement. Several of my *Mebengokré* friends gave me the use of the terms *te* and *mo* (both roughly equivalent to the verb ‘to go’, in English) as examples of male and female ‘language’. Women, they would say, say ‘*mõ*’, while men say ‘*t~e*’. Some confusion arose from the fact that older men also say ‘*mõ*’ instead of ‘*t~e*’, and that some animals ‘*t~e*’ and others ‘*mõ*’, disregarding their sex. In fact, the rationale behind it has no direct

as a product of an ancient fission that separated a *Mebengokré* group from the other(s) - were not enough to dissolve the common understanding between them.

⁵⁴ I mean by this that both ‘styles’ are deployed as performances. The meaning of such ‘performativity’ will be discussed in this thesis.

relation to the gender of the speaker, but to different kinds of movement: ‘*t~e*’ refers to a faster, direct, straight movement from one point to another, while ‘*mõ*’ refers to any kind of non-direct, vacillating, slower, less direct movement. Men usually walk unaccompanied while in the village, straight from one point to another - men actually cross the village circle when going to a point on the other side of it, while women tend to go around it, to avoid proximity with the men’s house, it seems. So men usually ‘*t~e*’. Women, who walk with their small children and usually in groups while doing their everyday chores, ‘*mõ*’. In the same vein, older men ‘*mõ*’, because they do not walk fast any longer, as well as a snake, which does not goes straight from one point to another but sneaks around, ‘*mõ*’. Larger groups of people always ‘*mõ*’, disregarding their gender, implying that their movement is slower, less direct, prone to interruptions and changes of direction⁵⁶.

Longer journeys are also referred to by the term ‘*mõ*’, implying here the generally slow pace and the several stops involved in such movement. Journeys by bus or by plane are always ‘*mõ*’, thus, not only because people do not apparently move, being seated most of the time, but also because it takes long to get to the final destiny. The terms ‘*mõ*’ and ‘*t~e*’, thus, may also denote the duration of the movement, along

⁵⁵ Both styles are highly performatic. People do not deploy them all the time, but only when there is an audience involved – that is, when one is, or intends to be, the object of public attention – and even so, not every time.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, the several forms for the sentence referring to ‘going to the garden’:

puru-mã ne ba t~e (1st person, singular)

puru-mã ne ga t~e (2nd person, singular)

puru-mã ne bari [banh] t~e (1st person, plural, exclusive, small group)

puru-mã ne ba mõ (1st person, plural, exclusive, large group)

puru-mã ne ba m~e mõ (1st person, plural, exclusive, very large group)

puru-mã ne gari t~e (2nd person, plural, inclusive, small group)

puru-mã ne gari mõ (2nd person, plural, inclusive, large group)

puru-mã ne ga mõ (2nd person, plural, inclusive, very large group)

As one can see, the size of the group described determines the use of the term. Larger groups, which usually take more time to go from one point to another and do not walk in a straight fashion, always *mõ* instead of *t~e*.

with its characteristics and the size of the group performing it. As a 'marker of sex', the use of the term '*mõ*' to describe women's movement (by themselves and also by males) means only that women move about both slower than men and in larger groups. This is what fits well to them, as they – and also men - tend to do both things in conformity with linguistic usage.

Presently most of the *Mebengokré* also speak Portuguese, with varying degrees of proficiency. In villages where the contact with the rest of national society has been going on for longer, as is the case of *Gorotire* village, male non-elder population tends to bilingualism. In villages where contact happened later in this century, like the two *Xikrin* villages of Cateté river where I did my fieldwork, only the younger (and some mature) men speak Portuguese with some frequency and fluency. Women generally do not speak Portuguese, although they do usually understand it quite well. The fact that the contact with national society - indeed with the rest of the world outside the borders of *Mebengokré* world - is seen as a mainly male affair contributes to this effect.

The history of *Mebengokré* territorial occupation in this century is somewhat *sui generis* in the national scenario in Brazil (and the Americas in general): it is not only extremely successful, but also has taken place largely after the first contacts with national society. It was after contact that they came to occupy, or to consolidate territorially their previous occupation of, the territory they live in now. More importantly, it is a history that tells as much about their social organisation as it does of their origins and whereabouts. In fact, as will be seen in the following brief excursion through the history of their territorial occupation, *Mebengokré* society has in factionalism and village fissioning a major 'total social fact'. During their known history, *Mebengokré* society has not only undergone many village fissions. It has also

occupied its present territory by means of them. A quick survey through the literature will show us that the *Mebengokré* have had, as registered through their oral tradition as well as in reports about them and contemporary anthropological studies, at least 35 major village fissions in the past two centuries (not counting the temporary, non-permanent ones). These fissions generally lead to the formation of new villages. Alternatively, the group leaving joined other, already existent villages, contributing to the *Mebengokré's* historical trend of inter-village migration⁵⁷. Such major village splits almost always had to do with internal strife, usually to be 'translated' as a personal conflict between two leaders, with people taking sides according to their personal connections with one of them (including here those that happened between people from different age-grades). When they occurred usually either one group left the village and fled to the most distant place available, or both groups left at the same time, completely abandoning the village site. Even nowadays, as *Mebengokré* became settled in their villages due to medical care and education services provided to them by public agents, splits still occur, and people still move to another site to start new villages⁵⁸.

This characteristic must be taken into account if one is to understand *Mebengokré* social organisation. It suggests that *Mebengokré* villages have a temporal, diachronic dimension, somehow linked to relations between individual people that have

⁵⁷ The data were collected by myself in my master's thesis (de Oliveira 1995), from the literature on the *Mebengokré*. Major village fissions are accounted for from the beginning of 19th century until more or less the end of 1980s. From then on, many others have taken place. See appended charts of territorial occupation in the past two centuries for further information.

⁵⁸ T. Turner (1991: 08-16) would have it that factionalism is a trend caused by the presence of national society. While my own description below seems to show some evidence to this effect, I would not reduce it to a 'foreign' trend' in *Mebengokré* social organisation - because I do not conceive of their social organisation as something 'pristine', 'pure', to be 'corrupted' by contact or by anything else. I am interested in the way they live today, and leave speculations on the way they lived before the presence of national society to others.

the ability to catalyse other people around them when they move out of a village⁵⁹. I will thus give a quick overview of the factional/territorial history of the *Mebengokré*, which is indispensable to understanding where they are, and how they are there - and why.

Mebengokré unanimously claim to have originated from places to the East of where they are now. Some researchers identify the *Mebengokré* as the so-called *Norocajés*, people that inhabited the region between the Araguaia and the Tocantins rivers until the XIX century. In 1810, a merchant built a small village on the right bank of the Tocantins and tried to establish good relations with the *Norocajés*, bringing back to their village two women who had been captured during a *Krahó* raid. This same merchant availed himself of *Krahó* help to attack other indigenous groups in the region, capturing their members to sell as slaves in the state of Piauí. *Mebengokré* oral tradition⁶⁰ has it that their ancestral village was visited several times by white men, who returned two women prisoners back to them. This seems to establish a connection between present-day *Mebengokré* and the XIX century *Norocajés*. The word '*nhyrkwa*' (from where the name *Norocajé* most probably comes) can be either *Mebengokré* or *Timbira* (with slight variations), having the same meaning in both languages: house, dwelling.

Mebengokré stories about the first contact with white men tell of their fear of firearms. They also tell about the way they looked for a new place for their village, in a distant place, 'there where there are no white men'. A place where they would not again be struck by the strange diseases that white men brought with them and that killed so

⁵⁹ de Oliveira (1995).

⁶⁰ From some of their villages.

many of their people. The stories⁶¹ tell how this place was searched for to the West of where they lived. Other stories tell about the conflict between the leaders of two different *Mebengokré* villages that ended with the death of one of them and the flight to the west of his followers, crossing the great *Kôkati* river in the way. They were followed afterwards by people from the other village, who also crossed the *Kôkati*⁶². This river would be the Araguaia-Tocantins⁶³.

The *Mebengokré* originated probably some 400 years ago, from the fission of an earlier group from which also came the contemporary *Apinayé* and *Suyá*⁶⁴. Historical evidence has it that, as far as it is known, the *Mebengokré* inhabited both the region between the Araguaia and the Tocantins rivers, and that to the west of the Araguaia by the beginning of XIX century. It is there that Cunha Mattos, in 1824, localised the so-called *Gradaús*, calling them for the first time ‘*Kayapó*’. According to this author, the *Gradaús* inhabited not only the *sertão* between both rivers, but also the region of the left bank of the Araguaia, to the north of the village of Santa Maria do Araguaia. Before that time they would have lived by the banks of the river; but, afraid of the arrival of white men, they had gone to a region to the west, away from the margins of the great river. ⁶⁵

⁶¹ Wilbert (1978), Banner (1957), Dreyfus (1963), Verswijver (1985), Vidal (1977) have collected/edited such stories (‘myths’ or otherwise), which I used in my reconstruction of *Mebengokré* history.

⁶² The *Xikrin*, among whom I did my fieldwork, call it *Byti*.

⁶³ The Araguaia and the Tocantins rivers are the Easternmost of the Amazon basin. They run parallel to each other for a long way, until the Tocantins meets the Araguaia. From the confluence on, the river is called Tocantins by a historical mistake, since the Araguaia has the greater volume of water.

⁶⁴ Turner 1991. The author based this statement in glotochronological research. In case this estimate is right, the *Mebengokré*, *Apinayé* and *Suyá* came to existence a little before the Portuguese began the exploration of that part of Brazil, departing from the lower course of the Tocantins. The *Mebengokré* would probably be living in that region in 1665 when father Cristovão de Lisboa explored the Tocantins up until its first rapids, writing the first known text about that region (Moraes Jardim 1915: 14).

⁶⁵ Cunha Mattos 1875: 18-19. This town is Santa Maria Velha, some 50 km. away from present-day Conceição do Araguaia, in southern Pará.

Migrating to the West: Occupation of the Araguaia-Tocantins and the First Contacts

The history of the occupation and consolidation of present-day *Mebengokré* territory is connected to the factional fissions of villages that were on-going over the last two hundred years. The first ones to move away were certainly the ancestors of the *Xikrin Mebengokré*. *Mekragnoti* oral tradition speaks of such fission, which happened in the context of the changing of *Mebengokré* villages to the left margin of the Araguaia⁶⁶. After this fission, the *Mebengokré* that remained by the Araguaia installed themselves in two different villages, which become united again when the leader of one of them died (Verswijver 1985: 24-25). Meanwhile, the ancestors of the present-day *Xikrin* moved up north, establishing themselves first in a region of savannah, and later in the forest, to the west of the Vermelho river in the Itacaiunas river basin. They would split again along the first half of XIX century, continuing a more or less constant war against other *Mebengokré*.⁶⁷

In 1844, Castelnau revealed the existence of villages of the *Gradahós* in the left bank of the Araguaia river. This people had been pushed up north by the coming of Brazilian settlers to the region, settling in a series of small villages between the Araguaia and the Xingu. A year before, Prince Adalbert of Prussia, travelling through the region, had obtained from the *Juruna* Indians information concerning the *Ticuapamoin*, a name given by the *Juruna* to the *Mebengokré*, later to be popularised as *Txucarramãe*. They lived then near the middle course of the Xingu. The beginning of the decade of 1840 thus encountered the *Mebengokré* already established in the Xingu

⁶⁶ (Vidal 1977: 25). Frikel (1962: 145-46; 1968: 07) maintained that the *Xikrin* were *Gorotire* from the Xingu before they split and migrated to the Tocantins region. But Vidal, who has more reliable data, maintains that the *Xikrin* split from an ancestral group from which the present-day *Gorotire* also came. This group would be also called *Gorotire*. Verswijver (1985: 29-30) *speculates* that the split of the 'proto-*Xikrin*' group occurred around 1800, before the split that originated the Xingu *Mebengokré*.

⁶⁷ See chart 1 in appendix.

basin. These *Mebengokré* groups are those that were to be later known by the name *Gorotire*, living then in the village of *Pykatoti*⁶⁸. Those who remained in the Araguaia region were then called by the others *Iraamraire*, or ‘those who walk in the clear’, a name that has to do with the fact that they remained in a region of open fields and not in the closed forest.

The migration of a part of the *Mebengokré* to the region of the Xingu basin, as well as the earlier migration to the Tocantins basin, is directly related to the occupation of the region by colonial and national societies. The occupation of the margins of the Araguaia River by Brazilian settlers, already under way in the 17th century in an incipient form, was reinforced in 1806 by D. Francisco de Assis Mascarenhas, colonial Governor of the province of Goiás, who built several ships in the port of Santa Rita at the Vermelho River⁶⁹, farther down south, sending them to Pará in May of that year. He sought thereby to establish the navigation of that river on a regular basis. Together with this enterprise, the Governor conceded official favours to those who founded agricultural establishments along the margins of the Araguaia. Those measures, however, were not enough to create viable economic activity in the area, or, indeed, the proper navigation of the river. Thus the region within a few years became once more economically stagnant. It remained so, at least from the point of view of the colonial economic and colonising enterprise, until the mid-1840s, at which time it gained new impetus from the re-establishment of commerce with the state of Pará, through the Araguaia River. In 1847 and 1848, another expedition went along its waters to transport

⁶⁸ *Pykatôti* is the ancestral village of all Xingu *Mebengokré* groups.

⁶⁹ This is not the same Vermelho river where the *Xikrin* were establishing themselves by that time, but a tributary of the Araguaia.

merchandise between Goiás and Pará⁷⁰. We can see that the moments of greater colonising effort on the part of the national society roughly corresponded to the fission of the *Mebengokré* village along the Araguaia River and their territorial expansion to the Northwest into the Tocantins basin, and to the West into the Xingu Basin.

The results of the commercial expedition of 1847-48 combined to strengthen the projects of regular navigation of the Araguaia River, having in sight the commerce with Pará. Nevertheless, they were jeopardised when, in the following years, the Tocantins River displayed itself as a more reliable channel for such enterprise. The advantages offered by the latter river were due basically to the region being occupied by a pastoral ‘colonising wave’ coming from the State of Maranhão, creating settlements much more prosperous than the rather squalid one that existed along the Araguaia. The latter had against its success the great difficulty of navigating large ships along certain of its courses. So, while the Northeastern pastoral ‘wave’ quickly occupied the region between the Araguaia and the Tocantins Rivers, the colonisation of the margins of the Araguaia River, coming basically from the south of Goiás, was barely able to occupy the margins of the river, the settlers in fact preferring to occupy the right margin of the river.⁷¹ Thus the migration of the *Mebengokré* to the left margin of the Araguaia placed them for some time safely away from the national expansion in the region. The 1847-48 expedition placed the *Gradahús* on the left margin of the Araguaia, three days’ march to the West of the confluence of the *Gradaus* stream with the Araguaia. They were, thus, placed safely away from the national expansion in the region for some more

⁷⁰ Moraes Jardim 1915: 421; 1880: 05.

⁷¹ Moraes Jardim 1880: 06-08. The Araguaia River is the natural limit between the (then) provinces of Goiás and Mato Grosso in this place. The colonists remained preferentially on the right bank.

time⁷².

While the colonisation enterprise came and went according to the tide of colonial policies towards the region, the *Mebengokré* underwent several transformations. In the Paraopebas Forest, where the *Xikrin* had established themselves, the group then inhabiting the village of *Kokorekré* fissioned, giving birth to the so-called *Djóre*. The *Djóre* moved to the region of Vermelho River (re-labelled since then by the *Mebengokré* as "*Djóre nhõ ngô*", or the 'River of the *Djóre*') With this move, the *Djóre* became the easternmost of the *Mebengokré* groups of the time. Making a similar choice as had been made by other *Mebengokré* groups of the region (the *Kokorekré* and the *Pyt-karôt*), the *Djóre* established themselves within the tropical forest, and not the savannah.

The relation between *Xikrin* groups were at that time in a state of intense conflict, warfare that was extended to the *Gorotire* (who dwelt in the Xingu Basin) and the *Irãamráire* (who dwelt in the Araguaia Basin). By this same time, the *Gorotire* had re-established their war against the *Irãamráire*, and also, in order to acquire firearms, began to attack the few settlements of non-Indians which existed in the region of the Xingu (Verswijver 1982: 306).

During the same period, between 1870 and 1880, the above-mentioned *Gorotire* established pacific relations with the *Juruna*, in an attempt to acquire glass beads from them. The *Gorotire* no longer had access to beads from the *Irãamráire*, because they had become engaged in war with them. This new alliance of the *Gorotire* with the *Juruna*, with whom they had previously been in conflict led to pacific relations

⁷² Table 1 in appendix shows the territorial expansion of the *Mebengokré* during the XIX century. Rivers and mountain ranges that are mentioned in this chapter have been stressed in blue.

between the two groups until the first decades of the XX century (Verswijver 1982: 306).

During this same time frame, the *Irãamráire* were to suffer profound transformations. In 1859, during the first attempt of the Capuchin missionaries to establish the mission in Santa Maria in the Araguaia region, contacts had been made with the *Irãamráire*, who then had a village on the left bank of the river⁷³, close to the recently created mission. At that time, the *Irãamráire* were involved in a war against the *Karajá*, a group allied with the *Xikrin* against them⁷⁴. After a particularly successful attack of the *Karajá* against the *Irãamráire* village, the *Irãamráire* abandoned their settlement to migrate slowly into the interior of the country, moving southwest, close to the Arraias Stream (Coudreau 1897: 136-37, 196; Krause 1911: 162). In 1868, steam navigation on the Araguaia was established between Leopoldina and Santa Maria (a trajectory of 960 km without obstacles) by Couto de Magalhães, Governor of Goiás (Turner 1991: 09-10). This journey crossed *Irãamráire* territory.

Little or no information is to be obtained on the *Irãamráire* of this period. In the beginning they seem to have had no trouble with their ‘civilised’ neighbours. During his journey to the region in 1863, Couto de Magalhães persuaded the *Irãamráire* to send some of their children to the school founded there by him (Turner 1991: 10). In 1878, the commander of the military garrison of the fort of Santa Maria gave them a couple of pigs, and they were soon transformed into pig farmers. As domesticators of pigs, the *Irãamráire* became inserted into the local economic life through the selling of their pigs to colonists in exchange for tools and other metal products (Coudreau 1897: 138). The

⁷³ In its middle course, the Araguaia is the limit between the (then) provinces of Pará and Goiás; in the lower course, between Maranhão and Pará.

Brazilian explorer, Joaquim Rodrigues de Moraes Jardim, who navigated the Araguaia down to Santa Maria, related that the *Irãamráire* lived close to the village, but a few kilometres inland. He also reported that, after a period during which the *Irãamráire* maintained good relations with the colonists, they began instead to engage in some skirmishes with the settlers, and were then trying once again to establish good relations with the village of Santa Maria (Moraes Jardim 1880: 34). At that time, the increase in the navigation of the river and the colonisation of its margins could only have funereal consequences for the *Mebengokré*. In 1882, after being attacked by a group of colonists to the south, in the region of the Claro river, the *Irãamráire* moved to a site fifty kilometers away to the northwest, between the Pau d'Arco and Arraias Rivers⁷⁵.

At the turn of the century, the *Mekragnoti* made their first appearance as a people who had fissioned from the *Gorotire* village in the Xingu. In their consequent migration to the western margin of the Xingu River they continued the *Mebengokré* march to the west, and away from the centres of colonisation by the national society. The *Irãamráire*, in their turn, were at this same time fully affected by the 'pastoral colonising wave' forthcoming from the Brazilian Northeast (Moreira Neto 1960: 09-10, 13-16). The first non-Indian village, Barreira de Santana, situated in the left margin of the Araguaia River in that region, was built close to one of the *Irãamráire* villages. The *Irãamráire* already spoke Portuguese and had already become accustomed to the presence of white people, due to the presence of the mission of Santa Maria, which was

⁷⁴ Coudreau 1897: 136-37. Turner (1991: 09) states that the *Irãamráire* were by then repelling a joint attack by the *Xikrin* and the *Karajá*, but he does not indicate where he got the information.

⁷⁵ Turner 1991: 07-08. The insistence in the colonisation along the banks of the Araguaia was due not only to commercial but also to strategic interests. The Araguaia would be a way to allow access to the Northern provinces of the country through the interior, always useful in the case of a war against a foreign power that could block coastal navigation (Moraes Jardim 1880: 19-29). This is why Moraes Jardim gave so much importance to the establishment of colonising nuclei along the banks of the river.

situated on the other side of the river. In fact, a few months before the arrival of the first colonists in the region of Barreira de Santana the work of the mission had been increased through the efforts of Father Gil de Villanova who had arrived in 1891. The *Irãamráire*, who had previously lived within a single village, had split into several smaller ones. These splits coincided with the restart of their war against the *Gorotire* (CEDI 1987: K/02-03).

The Western segment of the pastoral ‘wave’ of colonisation from the Brazilian Northeast that reached the *Irãamráire* had a peculiarity. This was the virtual absence of a market on the left margin of the Araguaia (and the right margin of the Tocantins) for cattle. This irregularity contributed to the rapid occupation of the natural grazing fields on the margins of the Pau d’Arco and Arraias Rivers by ever-present hordes of cattle. The ranchers used the tracks made by the *Irãamráire* as cattle trails, and their villages as posts for their journeys (Moreira Neto 1960: 11-12). Between 1896 and 1897, the French explorer Henri Coudreau journeyed through the Tocantins-Araguaia on a mission for the Brazilian government. He described the fast occupation of the ‘general fields of the Caiapos’, as due to the absence of market for the cattle (Coudreau 1897: 139, 190, 237). Some time after Coudreau’s visit to the colonist village of Barreira de Santana, another site was chosen for it, along with a change of name, Conceição do Araguaia. Close to this new site there was an *Irãamráire* village, whose chief volunteered to open a trail between it and the future town (Coudreau 1897: 64-68, 190, 221-22). In the next few decades, this cohabitation was to prove fatal for all the Araguaia *Mebengokré*.

In 1896, a little before Coudreau’s voyage, the steam navigation of the

He also suggested the creation of another fortress, by the mouth of the das Mortes river (Moraes

Araguaia River finished. In conditions of complete isolation, the pastoral ‘wave’ of colonisation would close in upon itself in the years to come. This was the last breath of the multi-century colonising enterprise that departed from the *sertão* of the Sao Francisco River to occupy a great portion of the country, and which had as its extreme reach the territory of the Araguaia *Mebengokré*. This closure of the colonisation was due to the practical impossibility of transporting cattle to markets. Ironically, this economic stagnation provoked a more rapid colonist occupation of the *Irãamráire* territory, and indeed the extinction of the *Irãamráire* in the first decades of XX century (Coudreau 1897: 139, 190, 237).

The end of the XIX century brought to the fore a new regional economic potentiality, the extractive industry of Brazil nuts and of rubber, the latter having the more deleterious effect of the two. To a certain extent, the history of the *Mebengokré* in the first half of the new century was moulded by the two periods called the ‘rubber booms’, the first beginning at the end of the nineteenth century and lasting until the mid-1920'S, with the second lasting during (and a little after) World War two. It was in the interstitial times between both periods that the *Mebengokré* proceeded to a territorial expansion that has rarely been accomplished by any other Indigenous people at war against national society. Village fissions occurred several times during this endeavour.

Meanwhile the *Irãamráire* continued their ambivalent relationship with national society, with which they engaged in commerce, and by whom they were periodically attacked. During the same time the *Gorotire* split in two groups, with one group (called the *Mekragnoti*) crossing the Xingu River and settling in a site between

Jardim 1880: 34-36).

the Xingu and the Iriri Rivers⁷⁶. In 1908, when the German explorer Kissenberth travelled through the Xingu, the *Gorotire* were installed along a tributary on the right margin of Fresco River. Later, in that same year, they moved westwards, to establish themselves between the Riosinho and the Vermelho Rivers. They had lived up to then in relative peace with the Brazilian settlers, but that very same year they had their first conflict with rubber-gatherers who were beginning to occupy the region. The *Gorotire* were attacked twice by the ‘caucheiro’⁷⁷ Antonio Firmino and his men. In the second raid, the village and gardens of the *Gorotire* were burned down to the ground, and they then moved above the Fumaça Waterfall in Riosinho, arriving back to the site of their ancestral village in the Xingu region (Nimuendaju 1952: 428).

The *Xikrin* of the *Kokorekré* village, along the River Branco, were also contacted by non-Indian settlers who had come upriver. With this contact, the *Xikrin* were infected with several illnesses, which diminished their population to a dangerous point. In 1910, during a particularly dry year, they established a camp along the River Branco, and were there physically attacked by a seringalista. After this massacre, their remnants left to rejoin one of the other *Xikrin* groups (Vidal 1977: 27).

By the mid-1910s, the drop in the price of rubber in the international market had already broken the thrust of the extractive enterprise along the middle course of the Xingu River. The *Gorotire* began then to extend the range of their own expeditions, widening the scope of their attacks to *seringueiros* and to other Indigenous peoples. At the time the region still had several thousands of non-Indians working in its *seringais*.

⁷⁶ Verswijver 1982: 311-12.

⁷⁷ There are two different ways to extract rubber in the region. One is from caucho, which has to be chopped down in order to extract it. The other is from the seringueira, which is scratched in its bark and the latex that pours out gathered in a small tin fastened to the tree. A caucheiro is someone who

Owners of *seringais* had small private armies to protect their enterprises (Nimuendaju 1952: 429, 436). The *Mekragnoti* also began to extend the range of their attacks against settlers along the Irii Novo River in the beginning of the decade of 1910. They inhabited then the region between the Irii Novo and the Jarina Rivers, on the left margin of the Xingu, where the Brazilian ethnographer Curt Nimuendaju represents them in his ethno-historical map of Indian peoples. (Verswijver 1985: 165-68).

The *Xicrin* also moved during this period, due to repeated attacks from the *Gorotire*. In 1926, they settled in the Pacaja River, to the north of their original area. Just after this migration, a group split from the new village and returned to the previous. In 1928, a punitive expedition composed by some sixty settlers attacked the group which returned to its former village, reducing its population to half. The *Xikrin* then took refuge on the border of the forest, close to the open fields, in the site of the (then abandoned) old village of *Kokorekré*. They remained for several years⁷⁸ in this place, less harassed by colonists.

In the beginning of 1930s the Pau d'Arco region was inhabited by a single village of the *Irãamráire*, described by Ribeiro da Silva in 1932 as having a 'mixed population' (Ribeiro da Silva 1935: 193-203). Meanwhile, in the region of the Xingu River, new defections occurred in the *Gorotire* village (which was close to the site of the old *Pykatôti* ancestral village). A group called *Kararaô*, tried to join the *Mekragnoti*. The bellicose disposition of its leader, though, had travelled before him. Having encountered a group of *Mekragnoti* trekking for game and joining them, the *Kararaô*

explores caucho; the equivalent for the seringueira is a seringueiro. The seringalista is the owner of a seringal (or rather, the holder of a concession to explore it).

⁷⁸ Vidal 1977: 30-36; Turner 1991: I/19; Frikel 1968: 146-48. While the *Pyt-Karôt* retracted to the border of the forest, close to open fields, to stay away from the extractivist expansion, the *Mekragnoti*

leader was murdered during the night by the *Mekragnoti*. His group fled to the north and built a village between the rivers Iri and Curuá (a tributary of the former), where they remained for many years⁷⁹. The defections from Gorotire village continued throughout that decade, not due to the presence of white settlers in the region but to internal strife, inevitable in that huge village. The following year another group left the *Gorotire* village to head South, away from white settlers. This group succeeded in joining the *Mekragnoti*, who then built another village to accommodate the newcomers together with them (Verswijver 1985: 177-78). A little after their departure from the *Gorotire* village of *Pykatoti*, it split again with one of the resulting groups trying to establish contact with the nearby town of Nova Olinda, building a camp in front of it (Arnaud 1987: 85). In 1938, the American Protestant missionary, Horace Banner, built his mission along the confluence of the Riosinho, and the group that was camped in front of Nova Olindabegan to go there, moving away from the town. One year after that, a group left the mission due to bad health conditions there, moving eastwards, to the Araguaia grazing fields, only to be there attacked by settlers, and thus losing most of their population. The survivors returned to the mission (Verswijver 1985: 179; Turner 1991: II/05; Nimuendaju 1952: 430-31).

The *Kararaô* also split in two different groups, shortly after having established themselves between the Iri and the Curuá rivers. One of the groups headed North, crossing the Iri and going down the Jaraucu River to the place called Furo do Aquiri, at the confluence with the Amazon river as it flows through the region of the Lower Xingu, between the towns of Altamira and Porto de Moz. The other group of *Kararaô*

attacked by the *Kren-Akrôre* (*Panará*). This was relatively new in recent *Mebengokré* history. So far, they had been attacked only by other *Mebengokré*.

⁷⁹ Verswijver 1985: 177; Turner 1991: II/04; CEDI 1982: KAR/01. For many years, the *Kararaô* were occasionally mistaken for other *Mebengokré* groups in the region.

remained where it was. At the end of the 1930s, members of the first group settled in the margins of the Penetecaua River, trying to establish peaceful contacts with white settlers. Shortly after that, the Mayor of Porto de Moz, together with the SPI (the Indian Protection Service), tried to bring this group of *Kararaô* closer to the town. This moved provoked an epidemic where most of the *Kararaô* perished. The survivors, reduced to a small group, fled to the forest but returned, pacifically, into Itapinima, on the left bank of the Xingu, where they made a temporary camp. After some time there the *Kararaô* returned to the forest (CEDI 1982:KAR/03-04; Turner 1991:II/22; Nimuendaju 1952: 431).

The 1940s began with the occupation of the Xingu region by seringueiros, but much less disastrously than had been the case in previous years. However, the town of Conceição do Araguaia did begin to promote the occupation of the grazing fields of the Pau d'Arco and Arraias rivers by cattle, as a form of compensation for the decline of the extractive industry. This was the territory previously occupied by the *Irãamráire*, who had arrived at the year of 1940 with only forty individuals. In the same epoch, the inhabitants of the town of Conceição do Araguaia were 4715, seventy percent of which dwelt in the rural area. It is significant that in some ten to fifteen years there were over 20,000 cattle occupying the grazing fields, and not a single *Irãamráire* to be seen (Arnaud 1987: 72, 75-76, 83; Moreira Neto 1960: 16; Nimuendaju 1952: 436-37, 439-42).

In the beginning of that same decade, a dozen *Kararaô* survivors of the Penetecaua River epidemics camped near Altamira, trying to establish peaceful relations with the settlers. In the beginning nothing happened to them. Afterwards, though, when the *Mebengokré* thought they had gained the confidence of the population, disaster hit

when they tried to go to Porto da Vitoria, another nearby town. On the way they were attacked by seringalistas and labourers of the road that was being opened in the region. Only one of the Altamira *Mebengokré* escaped alive: all others were gunned down and their bodies burned to ashes with gasoline. When this happened to the *Kararaô* in Altamira, the *Kararaô* group that had remained between the Iriri and the Curua rivers split into several smaller groups, which scattered all over the region. These groups were contacted, with great difficulty, During the next decades. At least one of these groups, however, has never been seen again (Turner 1991: II/22).

Still in the beginning of the 1940s, the *Mekragnoti* (among whom there had also been a split) were attacked by the *Kubenkrankegn* and moved north, dividing themselves in two groups. One of them attacked seringueiros to obtain weapons and ammunition, while the other settled temporarily in the Cachimbo hills, moving afterwards to the Jamanxim river. The purpose of the new move was the same as that of the other group: to obtain weapons and ammunition. Attacks against white settlers were becoming more frequent, not only due to the increase of the seringueiro population, but also because of the never ending need of the *Mebengokré*, who were involved at that time in inter-group conflicts of which firearms already played a part (Verswijver 1985: 185-87, 259).

In 1942, the group at the Riosinho mission, the *Djudjêtykti*, had settled in A place called Sobreiro, provisionally ceded to them by the government of Pará state. They participated in the local labour market in the extraction of caucho and Brazil nuts. Their internal disputes, though, remained intense, which provoked the death of several persons within the village. Equally strong were the internal disputes among the *Kubenkrankegn*, even though their village divided into several smaller groups during

most of the year in order to attack white settlers in various neighbouring places. In the mid-forties, a new, more permanent split occurred in this group (Arnaud 1987: 87-88).

More or less in the same epoch the *Mekragnoti* split into several groups, after a period of violent internal conflict. According to them, one of these groups were never seen again and would be living up to now, in the forests of Altamira, west of the lower Xingu region (Arnaud 1971: 08; Verswijver 1985: 188-89; Turner 1991: II/08-09). The two larger groups settled on opposite banks of the Xingu River. Internal strife within the group on the left bank led to yet another split, with the fissioning group, a small one, settling in the region of the Tapajós river. The group on the right bank of the Xingu river, established itself along the Irii Novo river, where they proceeded to attack neighbouring seringueiros – while being attacked, in turn, by *Kren-Akrôre* Indians⁸⁰. Although these *Mekragnoti* continued to attack the other *Mekragnoti* on the right bank of the Xingu, the two groups eventually rejoined. Nevertheless their internal strife did not end. Thus, the village quickly fissioned yet again, this time definitively. One of the groups headed north, to the region know as *Mba'`y*, or Baú, in Portuguese (Verswijver 1985: 190-95; CEDI 1982: J/08-09; Turner 1991:II/10-11).

The end of the 1940s found the *Mekragnoti* inhabiting a village on the West bank of the Xingu, near the Irii Novo River. The *Djudjêtykti*, on their part, had been transferred by the SPI, with help of the missionary Horace Banner, to the (non-Indian) village of Novo Horizonte, by then deserted. This was the last of a series of transfers of the *Mebengokré* in that region (that is, the *Gorotire*, the *Djudjêtykti*, and the *Kubenkrankegn* see 2 in appendix), made by either State agency of SPI or missionary. Such transfers had formerly all been motivated by the inevitable epidemics that had

erupted among the Indians. By the end of the 1940'S these *Mebengokré*, the *Djudjêtykti*, were reduced to 89 individuals. They were settled in this new site as a 'regional village', that is, with a 'street' of houses instead of the traditional round village. As this site was relatively distant from other non-Indian villages, the *Kubenkrankegn* (who tried then to remain away from the presence of white people) became their frequent visitors (Verswijver 1985: 190-98; Arnaud 1971: 06-12, 1987: 88; Turner 1991: II/05-06).

The beginning of the 1950s is marked by the appearance of another *Mebengokré* group: the *Kokraimôro*, who emerged through the fission of the *Kubenkrankegn* village. It split into two groups for the purposes of attacking white settlers along the courses of both the Xingu and the Irii rivers. When they got back together, internal strife led both groups to once again fission. The *Kokraimoro* left to build a village along the Irii river, west of the Xingu, close to the confluence with the Xinxin river. They attacked their former villagers, the *Kubenkrankegn*, in the rainy season of the following year, driving the latter (then some 400 people) to seek refuge with the *Gorotire* in Novo Horizonte, who then had a population of between 90 and 100 people (CEDI 1982: K/15-16; Verswijver 1985: 229-30; Turner 1991: II/22-23).

In the *Gorotire* village, assisted by the missionary Banner, the population grew rapidly, thanks to his medical care. However, during this time, the political life of the *Gorotire* suffered from the external intervention of both the missionary and the SPI. The missionary even set fire to the men's house (a political and ceremonial institution⁸¹.) The officer in charge of SPI's 'Posto Indigena' meddled by 'impeaching' one of the young leaders of the *Gorotire* in 1950 after the latter murdered a man. The agent also

⁸⁰ *Kren-Akrore* is the name the *Mebengokre* give to the *Panara*.

⁸¹ The meanings of these terms ('political' and 'ceremonial') will be the central object of discussion in this thesis.

chose two successors for the 'post'. Both initiatives by these outside agents had no continuity, for the men's house was re-built and the two new leaders followed the 'traditional' style of leadership⁸².

During the dry season of 1953, the *Mekragnoti* were again divided into two different villages, one near the Von Martius waterfalls and the other to the North, close to the left bank of the Xingu. In that season, they were united again in an old village's site. Thios union, however, did not last long: in the following dry season there were flu epidemics which led the village to split again. These groups, later united, did not remain so, splitting again a few months afterwards. One of the groups then moved to the region of the Igarapé Galça, between the Xixê River (of which the Galça is a tributary) and the Curuaés river (Verswijver 1985: 208-09).

In the beginning of that same decade, the *Xikrin*, who had been installed for over two decades in the region of the *Kokorekré* village, waging war against the invaders of their territory, were contacted by the SPI. This happened in 1952, when a group of young warriors, after a feud with the older leader of the village, came abruptly to the Las Casas Post of the SPI. At that time, the *Kokorekré* village was waging war against the Pacajá *Xikrin*, and was isolated from other *Mebengokré* villages. Some time after the defection of the warrior group, a group of older warriors from their former village came to the post, led by its older leader, *Bep-Karoti*, who was the father of *Bemoti*, one of the young leaders who had earlier left the *Kokorekré* village. This older warrior harangued the group, persuading them to return to the village. He did this to prevent the young warriors from attacking them. All of the young warriors returned together, and along the way were joined by a group of *Xikrin* refugees from the Pacajá.

⁸² Banner 1952; Turner 1991:ii/22. Banner's article narrates the burning of the men's house.

But instability persisted, as the same group of young warriors left again to return to the Las Casas post. The older group moved south trying to recover the dissidents, but epidemics at the post led them to move on to the site of an old village. Some twenty *Xicrin* remained in the place, being transferred later to the *Gorotire* village in Novo Horizonte (Frikel 1968: 148; Arnaud 1971: 10; Vidal 1977: 36-37). These *Xikrin* would return to Las Casas region later, in 1997, establishing themselves there, now a deserted place, and claiming it as Indian Land⁸³.

The *Kokrainôro* also fissioned in the mid-fifties, due to internal strife caused by an adultery case, involving people from internal groups that already had experienced a long history of mutual feuding. One of the resulting groups left in the rainy season of 1954 to move South to the upper Xinxin River region. The two villages continued their hostile relations afterwards (Verswijver 1985: 232).

1950s: The Pacification Years

In 1952 the federal government began a ‘concentrated effort’ to contact those Indian peoples who remained hostile to the non-Indian population in Southern Para. This governmental initiative was developed due to pressure from seringalistas of the Xingu region. In 1954, the SPI officer Hilmar Kluck visited both of the *Xikrin* villages in the Cateté region, in the company of some of the *Xikrin* who had remained in Las Casas and then transferred to the *Gorotire* village. In that same year, the brothers Villas-Boas ‘pacified’ the *Mentyktire* in the upper Xingu region. During the same year, the *Kubenkrankegn* of the Fumaça waterfalls were contacted. In the following year, the work of the SPI group in charge of attracting other *Mebengokré* (and other Indian) groups was interrupted due to lack of funds, with the result being *Mebengokré* groups

⁸³ The administrative process to identify the Las Casas Indian Land (or *Tekredjâtire* Indian Land, as they seem to want it to be called so far) is presently (April 2003) under way.

more to the west intensified their attacks against seringueiros. This was as a response to the advance of the seringueiros into their territory. This new wave of attacks was responsible for the continuity of the 'attraction' program by the SPI. In 1957, four other *Mebengokré* groups were contacted, with funereal consequences for all. The history is as follows. The *Kokrainôro* were contacted near the Preto stream, and these people then helped the SPI team to contact another group during the rainy season of that same year. The two groups - with 97 and 137 people respectively - were joined by SPI into a single village, in the middle Xingu, during the dry season of the following year. After the transfer, the total population of the village added up to only 117 people, the others having died of epidemics before and during the journey. In 1959 the *Kokrainôro* village was transferred further away from the town of São Felix do Xingu, and remained there up to the 1980s. The new village was built in the form of a 'street', in keeping with the local non-Indian villages, on an island that was periodically inundated by the rains. It was also a meeting point for seringueiros (Dreyfus 1963: 20; Arnaud 1971: 14; CEDI 1982: K/15-16; Verswijver 1985: 233-34; Turner 1991: II/23-24).

Still in 1957, the same SPI team contacted in the Igarapé Limão one of the *Kararaô* groups that had split in 1940. Shortly after the contact, three *Kararaô*, including their leader, accompanied the team to the *Mekragnoti* village along the Bom Futuro stream, an affluent of the Curuá River. This village, with some 150 people, had already been object of a pacific approach from a group of local settlers in the previous year, and as a result fled into the forest. This time, though, contact was made with its leader being convinced by the team to bring his group to the Curuá Indian Post in the middle course of the river of the same name, some 80 km away from the present-day P.I. Baú, and close to the town of Bom Futuro. There was, however, a tremendous lack

of planning for the journey on the part of the attraction team. They were moving the *Mekragnoti* to a place full of white settlers. In this new area they also lacked gardens, which should have been available to them at that time of the year. Thus, due to both hunger and the inevitable epidemics, the migrating group of *Mekragnoti* became rapidly depopulated.

Between 1958 and 1959, the *Kararaô* that had been contacted previously were joined with the *Mekragnoti* at the Curuá Indian post. These *Kakaraô* were some thirty-odd individuals, who were the sole survivors of epidemics, forthcoming from the contact. Together they formed some 75 people, who were again to be transferred in the following year to P.I. Baú. This move was due to political pressure upon the SPI made by seringueiros and other settlers, who did not want them in their area (Dreyfus 1963: 21-22; Verswijver 1985: 198; Arnaud 1987: 108; Turner 1991: II/11).

In mid-1958, the SPI began a new ‘pacification’ expedition, having as its main objective contact with one of the *Mekragnoti* groups, which was then installed in the village of *Pi’y djam*. At least at the start, this contact did not greatly change the everyday life of the village. The *Mekragnoti* received many ‘gifts’⁸⁴, including firearms and ammunitions, which were distributed on the supposition that the attacks upon white settlers, the main purpose of which being to acquire firearms and ammunition, would then cease. However, during the rains of 1959, the village suffered an attack by the *Kren-Akrôre*. The *Mekragnoti* retaliated, and then moved to the SPI’s ‘attraction Post’ on the Candoca stream. There were, however, no medicines or medical assistance in that Post, and during their wait for medicine, a nurse and more presents from the SPI,

⁸⁴ Gift-giving was a form of ‘attraction’ of Indian groups by the SPI (and later, FUNAI). As I will discuss in this thesis, both ‘gift’ and ‘giving’ have different meanings for *Mebengokré*, as they are part of a moral and aesthetic configuration of values quite different from Western ones.

many older people and children died after a few weeks from contact epidemics. Those who remained at the Post began to gather Brazil nuts, handing their production over to the officer in charge of the Post, who then gave them medicine and ammunition as payment. In 1960, they returned to the village where they had been contacted, moving again in that same year to another location along the Iriri Novo river⁸⁵.

At the end of the decade, the influence of contact was to be felt also by the *Xikrin* of the Cateté and Pacajá rivers. In 1959, the year of the last wars between these two groups, the Pacajá *Xikrin* were contacted near the Golosa stream, close to the embankment of the Pacajá river itself. Shortly after the contact, an epidemic killed many, and forced the survivors to return to the area of their old villages in the Itacaiunas valley. They were contacted there again by another of the SPI attraction teams, which installed them in the region of the Carapanã stream, on the right bank of the Pacajá river.

The 1960s were a decade of intense inter-village migration. These were facilitated, of course, by the peace brought about with the cessation of wars between the Mebengokré groups engendered through the process of contact and pacification. The migratory flux came basically from the *Mekragnoti* and the *Xikrin*, who had only recently been contacted, and had as destiny the villages of the *Djudjêtykti* and the *Kokraimôro*. By the mid-1960s the majority of the population of these villages was composed of in-coming migrants, i.e. of *Mekragnoti* and *Xikrin*.⁸⁶ In 1965, the *Kararaô* of the region of the Guajará River were contacted along the Penetecaua stream. They were immediately transferred to an Indian Post that was built at the confluence of the

⁸⁵ CEDI 1982: K/12; Verswijver 1985: 210; Turner 1991: II/11. A few people remained in Pi'y Djam village, although both leaders had left.

Jaraucu and Penetecaua rivers. Some time afterwards, they were hit by an epidemic of flu, which killed many and debilitated the survivors to such an extent that they were unable to either hunt or garden. They managed to then return to the site of their old village, where they lived from the remnants of their old gardens. When they were sufficiently recovered, the *Kararaô* headed back to the P.I. However, the story goes on. In 1967, a new epidemic, this time of measles, killed almost all of the survivors. Only eight people remained, and they were transferred to the region of the middle Pacaja. In 1970, they were divided between the two *Xikrin* villages of Cateté and Pacajá (CEDI 1982: KAR15-16; Arnaud 1987: 110; 1971: 06; Arnaud & Alves 1974: 09).

Among the *Xikrin* and the *Mekragnoti*, who sat at the opposite pole of the migratory movement (the *Xikrin* being the Northermost, and the *Mekragnoti*, the Southernmost), contact resulted in new schisms and migrations. Shortly after the visit of Brazilian anthropologist, Protasio Frikel, to the Cateté village of the *Xikrin*, a group of young men travelled to the confluence of the Cateté with the Itacaiunas, founding the village of Boca⁸⁷. They did not build houses in the traditional circular pattern but in a straight line, with half a dozen shabby huts sitting alongside the river. Unfortunately, this location had a continuous traffic of non-Indians, and thus two epidemics ensued, killing over a dozen people. In 1965, the inhabitants of this village were convinced by the catholic missionary in the Cateté village to return. Their village still remains (roughly) in the same spot⁸⁸. In the same year, the Pacajá village was re-built in its present site.

⁸⁶ Arnaud 1971: 12. In 1962, the population of P.I. *Gorotire* was some 200 people, more than half of them coming from *Kokrainôro*, *Mekragnoti*, and *Pyt-karôt*.

⁸⁷ Boca: 'mouth' in Portuguese. The term is used to designate the confluence of two rivers.

⁸⁸ Actually, as it will be seen later in this chapter, two other kri or village circles were built since then, each just beside the old one.

In the *Mekragnoti* village, the creation of the Xingu National Park in 1961 also precipitated a series of migrations and village fissions. One of the *Mekragnoti* villages remained outside the Park's borders, and the brothers Villas-Boas convinced its inhabitants to move to another spot to the south of Jarina river, within the limits of the Park. In 1962 their village was built, and began to attract *Mebengokré* from other villages, in part due to the high reputation (and to the direct agency as well, as he visited several villages inviting people to join his own) of one of its chiefs, *Rop-ni* (Verswijver 1978: 63).

Similar luck was not to be that of the *Menokané* of P.I. Baú. In 1968 they were reduced to 32 people, a small group that had given up any attempt at ceremonial activity. So bad was their situation that they no longer considered themselves to be a 'real' village. In that same year, one of the groups that had split from the *Mekragnoti* years before was contacted and installed in the P.I. Baú. However, one year after that, seven of them had perished. After this last epidemic, during which the leader of the village also died, the group began to once again increase in number, albeit slowly.

The building of roads during this period also had their effect upon migrations. In 1969-1970, a road that was being built in southern Para (BR-80) had its original route changed to cross the Xingu National Park, to pass between the P.I. Diauarum and the *Mekragnoti* village of *Porori*. The road, then, became the new limit of the park. Tension grew within the *Mekragnoti* village, due to the expectation that the village would be within the limits of the Park. The village then fissioned into several groups. One set of people moved away from the Park to a region to the North, called *Kapôt*, along the middle Jarina River. Another group, lead by *Rop-ni*, moved further south, so as to be within the new limits of the park. Yet a third group tried to remain *in situ* in order to

attack the labourers building the road, though this was with small success. In 1972 this third group joined those who had moved south with the leader *Rop-ni* (Turner 1991:II/16; Verswijver 1985: 220-21; CEDI 1982: K/13-14).

1970's: The 'Golden Age' and Its Drawbacks

From the beginning of the 1970s on, with the building of roads crossing the region, the Indians of Southern Pará 'suffered' the increase of economic activity in the area, which resulted in an immense influx of Brazilian settlers from other states into Southern Pará. A major incentive for such migration were the discoveries of extensive new sources of gold and other minerals, and the growth of the extraction of mahogany. Gold-mining spread all over the region. The unhappy *Mekragnoti* reacted with vigour to this new invasion of their territory, and in 1972 and 1973 several conflicts with workers of the BR-161 road and also with settlers resulted in many deaths. During the same period, the attacks of the *Mekragnoti* within the limits of the Xingu National Park against those who entered it illegally became frequent. Both 'anti-colonisation fronts' continued throughout the decade, and were so successful that by 1981 no white man was to be found within the limits of the Park. From then on, the two *Mekragnoti* villages in the region enjoyed a new period of prosperity. Such wealth and health was not only due to the medical assistance of FUNAI⁸⁹, but also to the *Mekragnoti* having expelled all the white settlers of the area. In 1984, the part of the Xingu National Park that had been left outside the limit due to the building of BR-161 was returned to them and in the same year the *Kapôt* Indian Land was incorporated into the traditional territory of the *Mekragnoti* (Turner 1991: II/17; Verswijver 1978: 10-15; 1985: 215, 221).

By 1970, The Gorotire village began to enjoy increases in its population. The

⁸⁹ FUNAI, the National Indian Foundation, replaced SPI as the federal agency for Indigenous affairs.

main factors encouraging such a trend were the continued work of the FUNAI medical team and the immigration of other *Mebengokré* into it. The village contained only 265 people in 1963, but by 1976 the village numbered more than 600 people, with all of them being in good health. At the end of the 1970'S, a new circular 'section' was built in the village, which had until then the non-traditional plan of two crossing 'streets'. This return to a former style of village building did have its consequences, for in the next couple of years a conflict erupted between the leader who had initiated the return to the circular village structure with another leader. The result was that the former left the village, along with his 'followers'. This group initially moved into the *Kubenkrankegn* village, and later to a place called *Kikretum*, in the vicinity of the confluence of Fresco river and of Riosinho, near the town of Tucumã. This region was near several large gold-mining fields. Deciding to take advantage of the fact, the leader (known as Tutu Pombo, or *Tut*, in *Mebengokré* language⁹⁰) reached an agreement with gold-miners to explore gold in the lands of the *Mebengokré*. This pact began a rather pernicious relation that continued until the 1990s, when all *Gorotire* (including here those from *Kikretum* village) expelled the gold-diggers from their lands which by then were heavily contaminated with chemicals. However, in the beginning of the 1980s, the affluence of the village of *Kikretum*, due to the 'tax' charged by them on (illegal) gold production, attracted several immigrants, mainly coming from the *Kokrainôro* village. The population of *Kikretum* increased in 1984 to 270 people, 170% more than its original population when they had left *Gorotire*. Two years later, in 1986, the village of *Kikretum* had grown to 316 inhabitants.

The *Gorotire* village, similarly involved throughout the 1980's with gold

⁹⁰ *Tut* means dove, or pombo in Portuguese.

extraction, and also with (illegal) timbering of mahogany on their lands, experienced, as well, a populational increase, despite the factional split that had led to the creation of *Kikretum*. In 1981, after the defection of *Tut* and his followers, the village had 541 inhabitants. Their numbers increased to 655 by 1986. By February, 1987, the *Gorotire* village had grown to 693 people, which were divided into 96 dwellings. It had become by far the largest of the *Mebengokré* villages.

The *Kubenkrankegn*, who were similarly in an area of gold-mining and mahogany exploitation, also experienced a sharp increase of population, one that had begun in the early 1970's. However, in 1979 a group split from the village, to found the village of *A'ykre*, on the right bank of the Fresco River. Its population grew throughout the next decade, but at the expense of the population growth of the *Kubenkrankegn* village. In 1982, *A'ykre* already had 112 inhabitants, and by 1984, they had increased to 165 people. The population of the *Kubenkrankegn* village, on the other hand, had diminished from 263 to 185 individuals. Three years after that, *A'ykre* had 250 people, with the *Kubenkrankegn* village comprising half of that number (Turner 1991: II/24-25; CEDI 1982: K/05-06; Arnaud 1971: 123-24).

The *Xikrin* of the Cateté river began the 1970s in a village containing 32 nuclear families, and a total population of 126 inhabitants. By 1972, the population had reached 140 individuals, living in 13 separate dwellings. In 1976, with by then a population of 187 people, one group began building a new village in a place called *Kamkrokró*, which was 20 to 30 km south of their Cateté village (CEDI 1982: XC/10; Vidal 1977). This group, composed mainly of people who had historically come from the village on the Pacajá river many years before, did move to their newly built village, where they had already been growing their gardens, but a malaria epidemic, in which

one person died, lead them to return to the village along the Cateté, where they would have access to medical assistance. For awhile, a group of unmarried men occupied the site of the new village, but soon returned to the Cateté village.

Meanwhile, another change affected the physical space of the village of Cateté. Its village circle was ‘moved’ to a place a few hundred metres away from the previous one. Another physical ‘move’ was to occur in 1991, when CVRD, the giant mining company that explores minerals in the *Xikrin* traditional land, built several brick houses for them just beside the new village circle. The population of the village continued to grow steadily, coming to 262 individuals in 1982. The village of Cateté split once again in 1993, giving rise to the village of *Djudjekô*, 18 Km away from the former.

The Last Contacts – So Far

In 1971, during the works on the Transamazonica highway, some of the *Kararaô* groups that had split in 1940 from the ‘parent’ village were contacted in the region of the Igarapé Mossoró and Igarapé Bem-Bom, both tributaries of the Iriri, some 230 km from Altamira. When they had split, they numbered 17 men with their families, and they had moved up North into the forest out of fear of the attacks from other Indians in the region. When contacted by the FUNAI team, they were 29 people altogether, who lived within a single house. They had also married within their own (matri-lateral) family, something that is not supposed to happen among the *Mebengokré*. Shortly after the contact, they were joined by a *Mekragnoti* man who had lived among the (non-*Mebengokré*) *Kamayurá* (and was called by that name), who eventually became the leader of the group when the old leader died, taking seven of their women as spouses. Due to the contact, all of these people were transferred - with the exception of two young men, who preferred to go to P.I. Baú, with the intent of finding women to marry - to a place that was then called P.I. *Kararaô*, built for them by FUNAI at the confluence

of the Iriri with the Xingu River. In 1982, this latter group moved to the *Xikrin* village along the Cateté, having returned (almost all of them) back to their original place in the region of the Iriri River. In 1981, they numbered 22 people, a number increased to 25 by 1984.

In May, 1981, a second *Kararaô* group was contacted in the county of Prainha, near the town of Porto de Moz, when its members were trying to abduct a young woman. This group was formed exclusively by young male teenagers, between 16 and 18 years old, who were originally part of a *Kararaô* group living along the banks of the Jaraucu river. They had become lost in the forest as children, and wandered now in search of women to marry. They were transferred to the P.I. *Kararaô* (Arnaud & Alves 1974: 03; Verswijver 1985: 200; Arnaud 1987: 110-11). Up to now, this was the last *Mebengokré* group to be contacted. However, the existence of at least two further *Kararaô* groups is taken as certain by FUNAI and by the *Mebengokré* themselves, as well as that of two other *Mekragnoti* groups. Some attempts to contact them have been periodically put forward, mainly by the renowned *Mebengokré* leader, *Rob-ni*.

Since their territories came to be recognised as Indian Lands by the state, several other *Mebengokré* villages have been created over the past fifteen to twenty years. The population dynamics of today appears to privilege smaller populational nuclei, in contrast to the enormous villages of old, of which *Pykatôti*, the ancestral village of the Xingu *Mebengokré*, with its three concentric circles of houses and more than 1500 inhabitants, is the best example. A main factor may well be the changes in annual settlement patterns. Nowadays people stay in their villages for most of the year, whereasd formerly they would trek most of the year, coming back to the village only for their massive ceremonies. Today, most *Mebengokré* villages have between 200 and 400

people, with the *Gorotire*, the first to be contacted and ‘settled’ in a single location. having over 1000 inhabitants.

The importance of factional activity is clearly seen in this quick description of the recent history of the *Mebengokré*. There is something to be learned from this. First of all, the very idea that we can speak of an ‘historical’ dimension is interesting, and that we can view the *Mebengokré* as a society with a significant diachronic dimension - by Amazonian standards, at least. This dimension comes not only from the great amount of information amassed by - literally - generations of anthropologists, but from the *Mebengokré* as well, who retain the memory of such events, incorporating them (to some extent, and following their own order of relevances) to the narratives that compose their collective memory. Another thing is the role of personal agency in the building of a village. History has shown that villages are born out of a particular leader’s agency. It is he who gathers different people around himself, making each village a conglomerate of people who are sometimes poorly, if at all, related to some of its other co-habitants.

When questioned by the anthropologist where they have lived, the memory of their growing with their friends of the same age-grade - especially, if male, of fellow *menoronyre* (unmarried men). It is against this background that one’s reminiscences of the history of one’s whereabouts are set: the place one has undergone the ceremonies for his introduction into the men’s house, or when such and such nomination ceremony was held for a specific person; and, taking this as a clue for other recollections, as an index of other facts that happened during that time. People’s memories – men’s memories at any rate – stress the significance of the village for people’s lives. One remarkable characteristic of *Mebengokré* social life (as well as that other *Gê*-speakers)

is that it is spent, for most of the year, in a village where not everybody relates - in the wider sense of the term - to everybody else. This placed the *Gê*-speakers in stark contrast to other Amazonian peoples. A village is a concrete entity which seems to have ontological precedence in *Mebengokré* thought over the family - the most intimate group - in their reflections upon social life *per se*, in the sense of what it is like to live with other people in a distinctively *Mebengokré* way. It is village life, with all its 'consequences' (of which the most frequently mentioned, by far, is the possibility of realising ceremonies), that defines what is it to be a *Mebengokré*. Theirs is a rather Aristotelian concept of living in the *polis* that allows for the realisation of the potential humanity within them. However, as will be discussed in the next chapters, it is not through the taming of passions by their submission to reason that this humanity is brought about within *Mebengokré* village life. Rather, it is through the harmonisation of passions and appetites by means of emotional knowledge, of social affectivity (which, as will be seen, coincides with personal well-being).

From the Part to the Whole: Fieldwork Settings

Gadamer (1988) says that every interpretation is dependent upon the history of past interpretations of the same phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are interpretations and interpretations. Whitaker (1996: 08) takes an important step towards an anthropological approach to interpretation when he makes the distinction between different kinds of interpretation, according to the interests that generate them. But, although interest is so obviously important for the interpretive task, not much has been written about how interests are formed, and questioned (by the anthropologist himself or by his/her 'natives', or both). I have already given an account, in the introduction of this thesis, of how *Mebengokré* questioning me changed my interests and perspective about my

research subject. I would like here to say a few words about my own self-questioning concerning my research interests, and its consequences for my research as a whole.

When I arrived at Cateté Indian village for my first fieldwork term⁹¹, I intended to do research somehow related to *Mebengokré* factionalism, a subject which had been the focus of my Masters thesis⁹². But reality proved itself impermeable to my attempts. What I had called “factionalism” was in fact a non-issue, and but a shadow image – and as such, one devoid of reality – of village conviviality. I realised that to talk of “factionalism” amounted in fact to attribute some sort of ‘positive’ reality to something that was itself defined as pure negativity: as the lack of conviviality, that is, of the skills that make life in the village possible and desirable.

That “factionalism” was pure negativity was made obvious to me by people’s reaction whenever I talked to them about the village fission that had led to the origin, a few years before, of the village of *Djudjekô*, 18 Km away from Cateté. No such thing as a ‘village split’ had occurred, according to people I talked to. It was simply a question of some people wishing to move away, due to several different reasons. The village started as a garden site, plotted further away from Cateté village than usual for the gardens in that village. The garden was made by *Boitié*, an old leader who was highly critical of the ‘ways of the young’, specially of their playing football in the village rather than working in their gardens, as *Boitié* frequently complained. Some of *Boitié*’s companions of his age-grade followed him and plotted their gardens in the same place, out of companionship. They all built a single hut, where they spent days on end during

⁹¹ My research lasted during (roughly) 9-10 months, which I spent in two fieldwork terms, in 1998 (around 5 months) and 1999 (around 4 months).

⁹² My Masters thesis was based on the ethnological literature (and other written sources) on the *Mebengokré*. I used them to re-analyse the *Mebengokré* factional process, and to question some of the assumptions of *Ge* ethnology concerning *Mebengokré* social organisation. In fact, some of the insights

the time of the year when the gardens are cleared. In the following years, as their gardens flourished and yielded much produce⁹³, other houses (inhabited by their sons and daughters, and their families) were built in a roughly circular fashion, and the future village of *Djudjekô*, then still called a ‘garden site’ began its history. When *Karangré*, *Boitié*’s son and leader of the married men’s age-grade in the Cateté village, moved to *Djudjekô*, several people of his age-grade also followed him, and the village started to be considered a ‘proper village’ by people from Cateté⁹⁴. *Karangré* had several ‘brothers’⁹⁵ in Cateté, who followed him out of fondness for his company.

That this fondness did include personal interests on the part of each was clear, and no one seemed particularly concerned in hiding it. Actually, individual interests were at the very heart of their description of the formation of the village of *Djudjekô*. There were, in *Mebengokré* accounts of the formation of the village, no groups of people involved that could be called ‘factions’. Village formation was an individual rather than a collective process, a process of individual people moving away from one village and into the other according to their personal interests⁹⁶. There was not ‘a process’ going on but a multitude of individual processes. Far from being a Derridian ‘non-said’, something that is conspicuous by its very absence, ‘factionalism’ was a non-

that I had when analysing the ethnological literature on the *Mebengokré* (and the *Ge*) were very useful for my fieldwork – but are not the central theme of the thesis.

⁹³ Older (*mebengêt*) people are said to cultivate much better gardens than young people – a belief that, as far as I could ascertain, corresponds to fact.

⁹⁴ This can be, of course, a highly political statement, depending on who utters it (and the circumstances of such utterance). A person I met in Cateté, for example, who is on bad terms with both *Karangré* and *Boitié*, used to say that he considered *Djudjekô* to be ‘a garden’, never a village. Many people from Cateté, although not so outspoken as this particular person, used to call *Djudjekô* ‘pé de cobra’, or ‘snake’s foot’, a rather pejorative denomination that appealed to the very impossibility of *Djudjekô* being considered ‘something that existed’ as a village. Nevertheless there is a daily transit of people between villages (as it can be done by foot), and relations between people in both villages are generally good.

⁹⁵ *Kamy kaàk*, or ‘brother facsimilar’. See chapter 2 on the creation of the *kamy kaàk* relationship.

⁹⁶ In fact, according to a certain consensus among the personal interests of the male and female heads of nuclear families.

issue, something that was conspicuous (when I enquired about it, that is) by the sheer absence of its palpable reality.

When I realised the imponderability of my research subject, my first reaction was to try and find a common denominator in the manifold stories concerning the reasons why people had moved to *Djudjekô*. The more stories I collected – and there were many of them, always told in private talks, never when other people were present – the more I realised that, although there was no common denominator, there was certainly a Wittgensteinian ‘family resemblance’ amongst them. The manifold narratives composed a mosaic of village sociability, of how life should be lived in the village, and of how concrete, specific attempts to sociability had failed, leading to individual people leaving the village for another.

I realised, after two or three months of doing fieldwork in both Cateté and *Djudjekô* villages, that ‘sociability’ obviously had the positivity which ‘factionalism’ lacked as a research subject. If village splits were so conspicuous (for the anthropologist, that is) in *Mebengokré* history, it was only because sociability, the skills to relate well with one’s co-villagers, was, like Poe’s purloined letter, too obviously at sight to be conspicuous. My focusing on village conviviality was an approach that was designed to make the ‘obviousness’ (for the *Mebengokré*, that is) of village life visible to anthropologists and other readers. If village life can be understood according to what *Mebengokré* seem (to me) to think of as an issue of conviviality, then inter-village relations (which are always couched, even the conflictive ones, in terms of individual interests and relations) can also be understood as a matter of conviviality – even if it be understood as the failure of conviviality, as in ‘factional processes’.

Life in the village is what this thesis is about, this *polis* that gives a distinctively *Mebengokré* shape to life. When setting foot for the first time into a *Mebengokré* village, the stranger's first impression is that of the fullness, the completeness of it. The *Pykatingrât* (Cateté) village circle was in 1999 composed of 39 brick dwellings (built by Vale do Rio Doce, the mining company that explores mineral ore within *Xikrin* lands), comprising 142 nuclear families and 565 people. *Djudjekô*, the more recent of the two villages, had 22 dwellings in 2000 comprising 50 nuclear families, with 144 people⁹⁷. It is a population that has a degree of heterogeneity, as some of its members have come from the *Xikrin* village of Pacajá and others from the *Gorotire* village. Those coming from the *Gorotire* were originally from the Cateté *Xikrin*, having moved to *Gorotire* shortly after the contact, mainly out of fear of the (then) young leader *Bemoti. Ropkrori*, a renowned shaman who made his career in *Gorotire* was the first to return to Cateté (and to *Djudjekô* afterwards, as he is a 'formal friend', *krabdjw_*, of *Boitié*, the older leader of the *Djudjekô* village) in the mid-1980's, followed a few years later by several other men and their families. They were later followed by several sons-in-law (originally from *Gorotire*) and their respective families.

The choice of where to live, although done according to time and circumstance, is always a matter of individual concern. For example, one chooses whether to follow this or that leader, according to one's personal relations to him, or to her. It is not uncommon for men who married outside their own village to 'bend' the uxorilocal 'residence rule' and bring their wives to live in their own original village. That is, if the wives agree, of course. Those who returned from *Gorotire* generally did so because of their longing for their companions of youth, and for their relatives/friends

⁹⁷ 11 of the nuclear families which I counted, in the year before, as inhabitants of *Pykatingrât* had by 2000 moved to *Djudjekô*. Two other nuclear families had moved to other places.

(*õmbikwá*). This sentiment of ‘longing for’⁹⁸ is tremendously important in the choosing of a village to live. Most of those who returned from *Gorotire* to Cateté, for instance, have moved on to *Djudjekô* due to their own personal attachments to *Boitié*. How does this sentiment of ‘longing for’ come to play such an important role in these individual choices? This was one of the elements upon which I focused in my research, always trying to make explicit the positivity of *Mebengokré* definitions and categories, instead of imposing a ‘sociological’ viewpoint, that would run the risk of explaining away the positivity of what *Mebengokré* themselves found relevant in the ‘factional’ issue.

On the other hand, another reason/motive frequently stated by *Mebengokré* individuals for moving to Cateté (and ultimately to *Djudjekô*) from outside the region⁹⁹ was the sheer affluence of the Cateté River *Xikrin*, both Cateté and *Djudjekô* villages. This affluence was forthcoming from their financial relationships with the mining company that uses their lands. Well-being also comes from the very good medical assistance, and the schooling available to its residents. What is the part played by personal interest in all this processes? How much is personal interest in material matters and how much is personal longing for particular types of affective relationships? These questions framed my approach to *Mebengokré* village life, and through them I was able to uncover the complex of moral and aesthetic ideas that challenged the morality of my own distinction between ‘material interests’ and ‘affective ties’. I thus found in my approach to ‘economic life’ – or rather, in collective endeavours at the level of the village – an important way to analyse questions of utmost importance, I believe, for *Mebengokré* village life.

⁹⁸ See Lagrou (2000) on the sociability of ‘longing’.

⁹⁹ That is from other villages, either at the Xingu basin or from the Bacajá Indian Land.

And, finally, most important of all, my approach led me to the question of how does this mixture of private, individual aims and drives act towards inducing a set of heterogeneous people to live together? How are such aims and drives shaped and steered? It is this multi-layered heterogeneity that typifies the gathering of individual *Mebengokré* into villages that I propose to analyse in this thesis. What are the roots of their differences and the building of their similarities? Such a task entails understanding how people deal with (what we call) their ‘institutional structure’, so as to live with it according to time and circumstance. It also implies understanding what is the nature of this ‘structure’ according to the *Mebengokré*’s views of what it is to live together as *Mebengokré* – that is, as ‘proper’ human beings

This short historical introduction was meant to suggest that individual agency is an important element in the shaping of *Mebengokré* ways of living together, even if in ever-changing ways. A leader’s individual agency is responsible (although not solely responsible, as there are many other agencies involved) for the formation of new villages, of any new ‘*polis*’. But what is behind such a process? What sort of conceptions – and I mean here explicit, self-acknowledged conceptions – drives these different people to join together? It is, I believe, the qualities of individual agency itself that must be understood, the way *Mebengokré* conceive of personal agency, which, as it turns out is at the same time tantamount to understanding what I called in this thesis their social philosophy. *Mebengokré* always stress that, among other things, each and every *Mebengokré* village has its ceremonies and language in common (to different degrees and aspects of communality – this is the discussion of the following chapters). These are the essential elements of life within a *Mebengokré* village. This is something that speaks of that *polis* that moulds them into being – into being *Mebengokré*, or a

‘human’ being. In the next chapters I will analyse some of the aspects and qualities of the processes of ‘shaping into human beings’ that are a part of village life.

Chapter Two

Of Kin and Matters Akin: Village Life as Semiotic or a *Mebengokré* Philosophy of Sensus Communis

After all, kinship is a matter of flesh and blood, the result of sexual passion and maternal affection, of long, intimate daily life and of a host of personal intimate interests. Can all this really be reduced to formulae, symbols, perhaps equations? (...) A very pertinent question can be asked as to whether we should get nearer the family life, the affections and tender cares, or again the dark and mysterious forces which the psycho-analyst banishes into the Unconscious but which often break out with dramatic violence – whether we could come nearer to this, the real core of kinship, by the mere use of mock-algebra

Bronislaw Malinowski, in Man 16-17, 1930

All friendship is desirable in itself, but begins with the necessity of what is useful
Epicure

This chapter is about *Õmbikwa*, the term that *Mebengokré* translate as ‘relative’ (as well as ‘friend’), and its place and relevance for *Mebengokré* life. I want to give a picture of how the notion is an element of a wider *Mebengokré* social/political philosophy that is centred in issues along the lines of what we would call both morality and ethics.

In Amazonia (or lowland South America¹⁰⁰), kinship studies have emerged in a time when the ‘wave’ of kinship studies was already succumbing to criticism in anthropological theory. In effect, as Viveiros de Castro (1995: 7-8, my translation) remarks,

¹⁰⁰ The distinction - or the coincidence - between both terms is apparently a matter of personal choice and is linked to the scope of the approach adopted by researchers. Joanna Overing, for instance, who searches for the similarities between different Amerindian social philosophies, speaks of Amazonia in broader, inclusive terms, not necessarily restricting herself to South America, but including portions of central America as well, that is, the tropical forest area that is a continuation of (South American) Amazonia into Central America; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, by his turn, concerned with ‘Dravidian-type’ kinship terminologies, which do not encounter parallel, for instance, in Central Brazilian *Ge* and *Bororo*-speaking peoples, talks of a lowland South America that comprises ‘Amazonia and Central Brazil’ (Viveiros de Castro 1995: 11, my translation).

(...) *there was mainly a historical mis-encounter between the trajectories of South American Indigenous ethnology and anthropological theory in general. During the time when kinship was the great anthropological issue, good ethnographies were lacking in the region. When, in the seventies and the eighties, there was a massive flourishing of ethnographic research in South America, the diminishing interest on the questions allowed by such research was already beginning to make itself felt. South American kinship systems started to be able to be analysed in all their richness and complexity in a conjuncture where the issue was coming to a theoretical hibernation.*

The ‘rise’ of kinship studies in Amazonia, then, was made in an atmosphere where that critique demanded an answer, which was to be either the reformulation of traditional categories, as mentioned above, or their refinement¹⁰¹.

This chapter intends to question some of the established ways of understanding what is called ‘kin’ and ‘kinship’ for the *Mebengokré*. In order to do so, I will intentionally use ‘kinship’ to speak of different things, something, I contend, which would not sound strange for *Mebengokré* themselves. I will mainly speak of what I call the semiotics of individual relatedness, that is, of the ways the *Mebengokré* see the

¹⁰¹ Viveiros de Castro (1995: 9, my translation) again aptly describes the state of affairs regarding this last option: “(...) the crisis of the classical paradigms of the field [of kinship] - the ‘descent theory’ and the ‘alliance theory’ - has been expressing itself in the sophisticated reformulation of such models, which seek to go beyond the original segmentaristic and mechanistic versions. Beyond the unilineal and the elementary, a whole universe of structures has opened up to us, waiting for conceptualisation. The recent developments on ‘non-elementary’ systems of alliance, which benefit from reflections on the notion of ‘complexity’ coming from other sciences, redefining, among other things, the famous dichotomy between the ‘mechanic’ and the ‘statistic’; the refinement of the analyses of empirical matrimonial networks, aided by computers; the algebraic generalisation of elementary structures of exchange; the elaboration of new graphic notation systems; the production of new analytical categories (as the notion of ‘maison’, last and most decisive contribution of Levi-Strauss to kinship theory); a better comprehension of realities that rebel against traditional segmentary models, like cognatic societies; the rigorous categorisation of terminological configurations, together with the dissolution of simplistic correlations between terminology, norms and matrimonial practices; the incorporation of the concept of strategy into the concept of structure, making room for a non-transcendental functioning of the latter - all that has been giving a new alent to this field of studies, which veritably awakes from its long hibernation.” The refinement of anthropological categories applied to Amazonian settings had as one of its most important steps the volume (Overing 1977) organised with the papers of the

referential relation between ‘kin’ term and its recipients¹⁰². My basic argument here is that *Mebengokré*, far from postulating a unidimensional relation between sign (or relationship term) and referent, have a sophisticated semiotics that posits different forms of similarity between them.

I will build my argument by means of a critique of some approaches to *Mebengokré* and *Ge* kinship, mainly 1) to the analytical cleavage of a ‘public’ and a ‘domestic’ spheres of social relations in *Mebengokré* social life; and 2) to the tendency, manifested in much of the recent discussion on *Mebengokré* kinship, to talk of ‘groups’, ‘grades’, ‘categories’, ‘sets’, ‘houses’, ‘kindred’ etc, without first considering how actual personal relationships are built. I contend that these approaches are not helpful to understand *Mebengokré* social life, marked by a very high degree of individual autonomy in the relationships established in daily life. This autonomy is in fact the other side of the very possibility to establish such relations, since the *Mebengokré* (as all other *Ge*) live in large villages, in which people are not necessarily related to all others. If one considers the description, in the previous chapter of the territorial movements of the *Mebengokré* in the previous centuries, one will notice that the frequent village splits and regroupings have created (or reinforced) a historical trend in which people living in any on village were most probably from different places and backgrounds – having much in common with some of the others, something in common with many, and even little in common with others. The *Mebengokré*, like the other *Ge*, seem to have lived in commonalties for centuries, and still do so. This situation, quite

symposium ‘Social Time and Social Space in Lowland South America’, in the Americanist Congress, Paris 1976.

¹⁰² I am not speaking here of reference terminology as opposed to address terminology, but of the ways the *Mebengokré* use it to create relatedness between individuals.

uncanny in present-day native Amazonian ethnological scenario, is the focal point of my analysis in this chapter.

But before going into this, I will give a rapid retrospect of the state-of-the-art of *Ge-* and *Bororo*-speaking peoples' kinship studies, in order to clarify the background against which I will be placing my own understanding. The field is marked by an ongoing discussion whose very terms, I believe, are misplaced, something that comes from an original mistake represented by the adoption of certain traits of some of these peoples as analytical categories for the understanding of others. This has been particularly harmful for the *Mebengokré*, whose ways of relatedness have been relegated to second plane by a rather byzantine discussion born from this very mistake, and feeding from it.

Genealogy of a War of Categories

Comparative endeavours in anthropology usually pose a subtle, but quite concrete, risk to the anthropologist. Concerned with the diversity and the particularity of individual forms of life, the ethnographic description produces as a result equally singular, individual descriptions that are not commonly intended for 'application' outside the very particularity that gave rise to them. Such descriptions, thus, do not generally produce analytical concepts, that is, which can be generalised to other realities, but rather one could say, substantive *percepta*, or the rendering - always mediated by the anthropologist's eye - of that which is believed to be singular, unique to a particular ethnographic experience. The transit from one to another, from *percepta* to concepts¹⁰³, is not accomplished, if hardly at all, without difficulty, and usually the anthropologist has to focus on the reflection, upon the adequacies of the transit, rather than on the

¹⁰³ Or from "substantive" to "analytical" concepts.

comparative stance that it supposedly makes possible. The reflection involved in the process becomes itself the centre of the stage, being more revealing, and interesting, than the rendering initially intended¹⁰⁴.

This was not the feeling prevailing among the participants of the Harvard-Museu Nacional research project¹⁰⁵, who studied several central Brazilian *Ge*- and *Bororo*-speaking peoples in the 1960s and early 1970s. But our genealogy does not really begin there. It starts several decades earlier, with the works of Curt Nimuendaju, first ethnographer of the *Gê* and one of the founding fathers of Brazilian ethnography. Nimuendaju worked with several of the central Brazilian *Gê*¹⁰⁶, as well as many other Indigenous peoples, while working as a researcher for Museu Goeldi, in Belem do Para, northern Brazil, and for the (then called) Indian Protection Service, the Brazilian agency of Indigenous affairs. He opened up the whole ethnographic area of *Gê* studies to speculation by anthropologists, mainly because of his descriptions of the massive ceremonies (and institutional apparatus in general) that the *Gê* and the *Borôro* seem to produce with so much gusto. This was thought to be incompatible with their highly

¹⁰⁴ Such is Joanna Overing's (1987) notion of 'translation' as creative process: the decentering of the focus of interest to the process of focusing on another life-form, so to speak.

¹⁰⁵ The project, which became known in the English-speaking anthropological community as the Harvard-Central Brazil Research project, was jointly conceived by Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, then from Museu Nacional, and David Maybury-Lewis, from Harvard University, and involved researchers from both institutions. Museu Nacional developed then three different research projects, this being one of them. The other two were the Comparative Study of Brazilian Indigenous Societies and the Areas of Inter-Ethnic Friction, both coordinated by Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira. Researchers participating in the Harvard-Museu Nacional Research Project also participated in one, or both, of the other projects. The Indigenous societies researched in the former were the *Krahó* (Julio César Melatti, who also participated in the other two projects), the *Apinayé* (Roberto da Matta, who also participated in the Comparative Study of Brazilian Indigenous Societies project with research among the *Ge*-speaking Gavião), the *Krikati* (Jean Carter Lave), the *Bororo* (Jon Christopher Crocker), the *Shavante* (David Maybury-Lewis), and the *Mebengokré* (then called *Kayapó*), the latter with two researchers, Terence Turner and Joan Bamberger. Another researcher, William Crocker, had already initiated research among the *Ge*-speaking *Canela*, and became a sort of 'honorary member' of the project later on. For further details on these projects, see Melatti (2002).

¹⁰⁶ He conducted research among the *Sherente*, (central *Gê*), the Eastern *Timbira*, the *Apinayé* (both Northern *Gê*, the later being also classified as Western *Timbira*), and the *Gorotire-Mebengokré*, having also worked among the now-extinct Pau d'Arco *Mebengokré* (the *Mebengokré* are also Northern *Gê*).

‘unsophisticated’ material lives¹⁰⁷. With his studies also emerged a picture of *Ge* kinship, as it was then defined, that puzzled anthropologists. In fact, the *Ge*, and also the *Bororo*, despite displaying a striking similarity in their social life generally, were described by Nimuendaju as having several distinct rules of descent: the central *Ge* (*Shavante* and *Sherente*), and also the *Mebengokré*, would be patrilineal; the northern *Ge*, the *Timbira* and the *Bororo* would be matrilineal, whereas the only western *Timbira* group, the *Apinayé*, would have a parallel descent rule.

Nimuendaju’s description, thus, posed serious ethnological problems. In relation to ‘kinship’ issues, it became one of determining how peoples who are so similar in almost every other respect would have such different systems of descent? And effectively many anthropologists did ask the question, and tried to answer it from Nimuendaju’s data. However, his data were not sufficient to the task, and the mystery remained¹⁰⁸. This was to be dealt with by the researchers of the Harvard-

¹⁰⁷ The Handbook of South American Indians (edited in 1944) represented a reaction to earlier studies that defined the *Ge* by what they lacked: pottery, canoes, agriculture, intoxicants, basketry press, etc., in an evident comparison with the more well-known Tupian peoples. The study on the *Ge* linguistic family, on the volume of the Handbook dedicated to the ‘marginal tribes’, written by Robert Lowie (1946, Vol 1, pp. 477-520), draws extensively on the ethnographies written by Nimuendaju on the *Apinayé* (1939), *Sherente* (1942), and Eastern *Timbira* (1946). Lowie was then able to correct earlier assumptions, as can be seen in the statement that “[c]ontrary to widespread notions, the majority of the *Ge* have been farmers, especially the *Apinayé*, with evidence for extensive manioc plantations going back to 1793. However, all the better known groups described in this article raise bitter and sweet manioc, maize, sweet potatoes, and yams. It is entirely improbable that this is due to Tupi example.” (idem, p. 480). However, a feeling of a certain incongruence between ceremonial/institutional life and material/technical life still obtained among the researchers of the Harvard-Museu Nacional two decades after the Handbook had been released, as may be seen by Maybury-Lewis, remarks in the very beginning of the preface of the volume that summarised the project’s works (1979: 1-2): “How could peoples whose technical ability appeared to be so rudimentary have developed such cultural complexities? Had we underestimated their technology, or perhaps been overimpressed by their social institutions? Perhaps the anomaly could be explained by claiming that the *Ge* and *Bororo* were degenerate remnants of a higher South American civilisation...”. His statement was meant, of course, to be denied, and the contributors to the volume from the Harvard-Museu Nacional Project (Dialectical Societies, published in 1979) duly criticised such a notion. But the concern with the ‘anomaly’ posed by a highly developed ceremonial life and a ‘poorly developed’ material life was present from the very outset, as Maybury-Lewis’ statement shows.

¹⁰⁸ One of the ‘mysteries’, for instance, was the so-called “*Apinayé* anomaly”. Nimuendaju described the *Apinayé* as comprising four exogamous groups, the *kije*, whose members would marry only within another group, so that men from *kije* A would marry women from *kije* B, whose men would marry

Museu Nacional research project, who went to the field having precisely this aim. The project was thus committed from the outset to a comparative approach, and to the answering of the questions posed by Nimuendaju's data, concerned mainly with descent systems and the radical - as it seemed to them - discrepancies between the 'material/technical sphere' and the 'institutional/ceremonial' one. As will be seen throughout this work, the very distinction between the 'material/technical' and the 'ceremonial/institutional' must be questioned if we are to understand *Ge* and *Bororo* social life at all, and thus the musings of previous researchers concerning the subject were misplaced from the outset.

The works of many of the project's researchers had as a common motive the questioning of the 'African models' deployed up to then in the description and analysis of the *Ge* and *Bororo*, in the wake of the revision of kinship studies put forward by anthropologists working in Melanesia¹⁰⁹. Their conclusions were broadly inspired by the conclusions of Melanesianists: they found no descent system among the northern *Ge* (and patrilineal lineages among the central *Ge*). The matrilineal tendency previously accredited to the northern *Ge* by Nimunedaju, according to them, was a result of the cumulative effects of uxorilocality, common to all *Ge* peoples¹¹⁰. Moreover, the exogamous moieties described by Nimuendaju for the northern *Ge* were not exogamous, having nothing to do with the regulation of marriage. Among the central

women from *kije* C and so on. But he also described the *Apinayé* as having a parallel descent rule, which evidently poses a serious problem, as the *kije* in any given generation would be composed of siblings of the *kije* that were supposed to be intermarrying in the previous generation.

¹⁰⁹ Maybury-Lewis himself was concerned with recent developments in British kinship theory by Rodney Needham, which can be seen in his use of the term "relationship system" instead of the more common "kinship system". This usage had also some backing in the so-called *Ge* institution of "formal friendship", which is explicitly posed as a 'non-kinship' one by *Gê*-speaking peoples.

¹¹⁰ See Maybury-Lewis' introduction to the volume *Dialectical Societies* (Maybury-Lewis 1979) for a detailed account of the theoretical strategy adopted by the contributors.

Ge and *Bororo* these moieties were present, but even there the regulation of marriage was related to clans and lineages, and not to the moieties proper¹¹¹.

Thus, the researchers of the project accorded little importance to the notion of descent, which was seen as irrelevant for the understanding of the *Ge*. They focused on the ‘native’ ideologies regarding the institutional life and procreation. The main theme of the whole project was then shifted from descent to the pervading dualism that would obtain as an ideology in all *Ge* societies. But that was not the only shift to occur in their perspective. Another, more subtle one, linked to their concern with dual ideologies and institutions, occurred at the same time. Some of these ideologies, as well as particular configurations of social institutions, were generalised as analytical, comparative concepts, to all *Ge* peoples.

In particular, one notion was to prove dear to the members of the project. This was the radical distinction, described by Melatti for the *Krahó*, between a ‘public’ and a ‘domestic’ spheres, the former associated with ceremonial life and the latter with life within the familial group, that is, respectively, with the centre of the plaza, where all rituals take place, and with the residential segments, the place of abode of uxorilocal families. This division was expressed by the radical distinction between relations derived from the *Krahó* ideology of conception, which poses the familial group as a ‘substance’ unit¹¹², and the conceptions related to the transmission of names, which are

¹¹¹ Among the western *Shavante*, the moiety system actually regulated marriage, according to Maybury-Lewis (1984), because two of the clans that composed that moiety did not exchange wives, but married only in the clan of the opposite moiety. Among the *Bororo* (J. C. Crocker 1976), marriage would be regulated by lineages rather than by moiety.

¹¹² “According to *Krahó* ideas on the subject, both man and woman contribute with substances that form the organism of a new human being. Such substances come from the food ingested by the genitors. (...) Even after birth, up until adult age, every individual keeps a biological link with those who generated him or her. It is as if the organism of the genitors continued in the organisms of those generated by them, in such a way that, if any phenomenon was to harm the genitor’s body, it would harm also the body of his or her child. (...) When an individual becomes gravely infirm or when he or she is bitten by

associated with the ceremonial moieties and to ceremonial life in general (Melatti 1976).

According to Melatti, *Krahó* consanguineal kinship terminology can be divided in two groups. One is composed by the terms for people implied in the procreation, which ego applies to those who generated him or her, or to those that could have done so¹¹³. His/her liaison to the people referred to by these names would be mainly ‘biological’, something which is implied not only by the procreation ideology but by the fact that parents are responsible for ‘... [the] aliment that is needed to feed the children¹¹⁴ (1976: 145). The other group of terms would be constituted by the terms implied in the transmission of names, used by an individual to designate people who have effectively transmitted his/her names, or to those who could have done so¹¹⁵. Other terms are those for ‘brother/sister’, either ‘real’ or ‘classificatory’, which can be included in both classes above, as same-sex siblings can have (but not necessarily) identical nominators and genitors.

The transmission of names entails also, among other things, the transmission of ceremonial roles, as well as the transmission of the affiliation to a pair of moieties concerned with ceremonial life. If the persons involved are males, the transmission also entails the affiliation to another pair of moieties. The nominated also tends to use the

a snake, even being an adult, both the individuals that generated him or her, and those who were generated by at least one of his or her genitors, must follow together certain taboos, mainly alimentary, until the sick person is well again. (...) In sum, each individual, together with his or her genitors and with other individuals generated by at least one of such genitors, form a biological unit.” (Melatti 1976: 144-45)

¹¹³ *Intxu*: F, FB, FZS, etc. *Intxe*: M, MZ, etc. The reciprocal is *ikhra* (Melatti 1976: 145).

¹¹⁴ Melatti (1976: 145). It is interesting to note that *Krahó*’s understanding of this ‘biological’ link also includes the nurturance aspects of the relationship established within the intimate sphere of familial relations.

¹¹⁵ *Keti*: MB, MF, FF, and all the later’s parallel cousins. *Tui*: FZ, FZD, FM, MM, and all the later’s parallel cousins. The reciprocal is *itamtxua*. When one effectively transmits one’s names to his/her *tamtxua*, he/she calls him/her *ipantu* (Melatti 1976: 144-45)

same set of relationship terms used by his nominator to refer to his relatives that are not part of the intimate group defined by substance ties (Melatti 1978: 60). This distinction, though, does not imply that the *Krahó* do not generally recognise their being linked to their relatives in both ways. As Melatti (1976: 145-46, my translation) puts it,

This distinction between the biological and the social is of course somewhat artificial. But it does not mean that the Krahó do not recognise the social ties that link children to their genitors, or the biological ties that link the ipantu [that is, those that receive one's names] to their nominators. The Krahó simply emphasize the image of a bifurcation in the transmission of biological and social ties - although recognising that they are linked by both to their relatives - through the rule that stipulates that it is impossible to be the genitor and the nominator at the same time.

Krahó notions of a clear-cut distinction between both aspects of relatedness were used by da Matta, in whose hands it underwent its first metamorphosis into an analytical tool for the description of other *Ge* peoples. For da Matta, the distinction would be for the *Apinayé* a way to avoid that the relationships present in the 'domestic' domain 'contaminated' those of the formal, 'public' domain (1976: 153). This became part of his explanatory scheme of the bilaterality of the *Apinayé* (and northern *Ge* more generally) 'social system', which was, according to him, more of the Melanesian type than of the African, i.e. lacking descent groups. The original division, then, described by Melatti as part of *Krahó* social thought, became a tool for the discussion of theoretical issues among the participants of the project. It was made into an analytic concept, one that was suited to 'explain' how the northern *Ge* could exist without descent systems. Instead of notions of the building of the person by means of 'substance' links and of names and ceremonial roles, as described by Melatti, there were the dynamics of the functioning of the 'social system'.

For da Matta, the focus of the relationships in the ‘domestic sphere’ is the nuclear family, which is made ‘one’ through a community of substance. These relationships become weaker the more distant one is from the nuclear ‘focus’ of this communality of substance. This biological foundation of social relations has two meanings for da Matta. Firstly, it expresses the gradations between social ties in everyday life, ‘relativising’ the terminological classification through the categorisation *kuoia/kumrendy*¹¹⁶ (1976: 152). Secondly, it bisects the relationship system into two classes: those biologically linked to ego, and those non-biologically linked, in other words, those who have weak, distant ‘blood ties’, but who have ceremonial obligations towards ego, replace the mutual obligations defined by the biological relations. As da Matta (1976: 152) puts it, “ [w]here blood (or the biological dimension) ceases to be fundamental and begins to allow for the establishment of discontinuities in the bilateral network of relationships, a continuity is created by means of public and ceremonial ties.”

This ‘biological distance’ is based on the distance between the generations and the separation of sexes. Contiguous generations are strongly linked. Between non-contiguous generations, the ties become weaker, and those of the parents’ siblings that are of the opposite sex as the parent (FZ and MB) become identified with the grandparents, forming the class of *geti/tui*, opposed, both biologically and socially, to the class of genitors. The *geti/tui* class, biologically distant from ego, give ego their names, becoming thus mediators between ego and the ceremonial sphere. Both dimensions thus allow for the establishment of continuities, in different ways – and

¹¹⁶ These terms were taken by da Matta as applying to ‘fictive’ or ‘classificatory’ and ‘real’ relatives. These terms (*kuoia/kumrendy*) are the *Apinayé* equivalent to the *Mebengokré* terms *kaak/kunrenx*, which will be analysed in this chapter. As the reader will have occasion to appreciate, these terms are (at least for the *Mebengokré*) rather more complex than da Matta’s rendering would suggest.

more than that, in mutually exclusive ways. This dualism in the relationship system prevents the development of unilineal descent groups from the uxori-local residences and the extended families.

One can see here how the idea of kindred became the focal point of the analysis in da Matta's description of *Apinayé* form of relatedness. What had been described for the *Krahó* as an emphasis on different aspects of an idea of a *Krahó* being, had its *Apinayé* equivalent represented as the sorting out of classes of people. Da Matta interprets the idea of 'blood' as a metaphor for social relations, and the whole picture becomes one of the relationship between "classes" of individuals. Matta clearly has the concept of 'descent' in mind when he writes of the *Apinayé* 'divided world'. The two dimensions, as described by him, of *Apinayé* social life break the link between biological and jural relations, common to (African) unilineal descent groups as described by classical kinship theory, where biological affiliation is the element through which rights and duties are transmitted between people. For da Matta, bilaterality avoids unilineality, as the system imposes a distinction of people and groups according to their position within ego's kindred, that is, according to what they transmit to ego: either names or physical substance. The relationship system does not transmit rights and duties as in unilineal groups. It is just an operator of the distinct forms of classification that exist in *Apinayé* ideology. This formulation, of course, begs the question of why the *Apinayé* would 'prevent' a unilineal conception wholly strange to them. But da Matta is speaking here of an internal logic of the *Apinayé* 'social system', which, I believe, is one of the problems at the root of the contemporary imbroglio in which *Ge* kinship studies find themselves.

The transformation of the ‘tune’ of the ethnographical description was still to go a long way. T. Turner, working with the *Mebengokré*, developed one aspect of da Matta’s model into the very centre of a functional-cum-marxist theory of the production and reproduction of society. According to him, *Mebengokré* male elders, married into their wives’ houses, would dominate their sons-in-law and, through their capacity to produce social value, gain status within *Mebengokré* society. Institutional life would be a way to mask the fundamentally hierarchical, asymmetric nature of their society. Moreover, the way this fundamental structuring of society reproduced itself would be through an age-set system and uxori-locality, which made men leave their natal households and move into those of their wives, allowing for elder men (or, in more recent versions, for elder couples) to dominate them¹¹⁷. What was accomplished by uxori-locality at the level of the individual household, was generalised by the plaza institutions, which would thus provide a ‘symbolic’ (in the sense of ‘deceptive’) means of reproducing hierarchy.

T. Turner was highly critical of Maybury-Lewis’ ‘idealism’ in formulating the ‘ideology of dualism’ as the basic principle for the understanding of *Gê* peoples. Maybury-Lewis in fact regarded the dualistic ideology as the central aspect of *Gê* organisational forms, together with uxori-locality. For him, the concept of ‘descent’ had no significance as an analytical category to describe *Gê* peoples. The theoretical controversy initiated by Nimuendaju’s descriptions had been one of how peoples that were so similar in every other aspect could be so different in relation to descent, having

¹¹⁷ T. Turner (1979). Incidentally, he reproduces here an argument by Levi-Strauss, albeit in a different way. Lévi-Strauss (1985) states that *Gê* dualism is nothing more than a way to mask asymmetry and hierarchy, in scenarios where symmetric dualism, essentially represented as non-hierarchical, masks a deeper, concentric dualism. Turner stated the same for the *Mebengokré*, saying that their views of the world as comprising concentric circles having the ngobe, or centre of the plaza, in the middle, and

matriliny, patriliney and parallel descent as descent principles. The research of the participants of the Harvard-Museu Nacional project emphasised that that was not exactly the case; but even so the whole subject of descent was secondary, according to Maybury-Lewis, because deeper organisational features were at work, shaping *Gê* social life. These were an ideology of dualism, the distinction between the ‘public and the private spheres’, and uxori-locality.

Maybury-Lewis’ description of the Central *Gê*¹¹⁸, curiously enough made essentially through the categories of traditional, Africanist ethnology, stated that descent was sociologically less operative than the division between two conceptual, ego-centered fields of *we-them*, which coincided with the division between consanguineal relatives (that is, from the same patrilineage as ego) and affines. He understood exogamy itself to be the expression of a deeper principle of dualism, which he saw as the pervasive theme in *Gê* social structure and social life more generally. The opposition, forthcoming from a dualistic ideology, between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ spheres of social life served then as a structural operator of the specific institutional arrangements of distinct *Gê* peoples. Among the central *Gê*¹¹⁹, a ‘patrilocal’ ideology masked uxori-locality as a principle, through the practice of male sibling groups marrying ‘into’ a same uxori-local household.

According to Maybury-Lewis, among the central *Gê* the real organising principle of social life was the bisection, effected by the use of relationship terminology, between the ego-centered fields of ‘we’ and ‘them’. This would be the specific *Shavante/Sherente* realisation of the dualistic ideology pervasive among the *Gê*.

expanding into the circle of houses and the periphery of the village, towards the forest and the unknown, was a display of a consciousness of concentric dualism among them

¹¹⁸ He did fieldwork among both the *Sherente* and the *Shavante*.

The relationship terminology was taken as the organising element of social life, associated with the distinction between 'public' and 'private', which became thus generalised to all *Ge* through Maybury-Lewis' interpretation of their social life as an expression of such 'driving forces'. Following the work of the researchers of the Harvard-Museu Nacional project, the field of *Ge* studies became 'moulded' by a series of analytical concepts, that were centered in assumptions about human relatedness as having to do with 'classes', 'sets', 'groups', etc, of individuals.

It is precisely because of such past theoretical history, I think, that the question of descent was to come back with a vengeance, as can be seen in the work of Aracy Lopes da Silva (1986) among the *Shavante*. Her work was centered in the investigation of the what could only be defined, given the background of *Ge* studies, as a relation between the different 'spheres' of the social life, as set out by Maybury-Lewis. She investigated how name-givers- who are defined as 'others', being primarily from the mother's lineage - posit themselves between the fields of 'we' and 'others'. Name-givers are not marriageable. Upon nomination, a male name-giver is called 'father', which is the name given to someone from one's own lineage (including the genitor). The relationship between name-giver and name-receiver is always symmetrical. It is also important to note here, that Lopes da Silva dealt with the individual relationship between a person and his name-giver, and not between classes of individuals, in stark contrast with the approach adopted by Maybury-Lewis. Her work thus questioned the radical distinction between the 'social fields' of 'we' and 'others', proposed by Maybury-Lewis for the central *Ge*.

¹¹⁹ The *Shavante* and the *Sherente*.

It is clear that the relation between name-giver and name receiver was described as crossing two different 'domains' of social life because the domains were postulated as a radical, all-pervasive distinction in the first instant. It was not only there, though, but also in her reappraisal of *Shavante* 'lineages', that Lopes da Silva disagreed with Maybury-Lewis' approach. Lineages had been described by Maybury-Lewis as 'fluid' and politically-based, as the kernel of political factions in the village, lacking the permanence that is a characteristic of a corporate group (that is, they are not 'classical' African lineages)¹²⁰. For Lopes da Silva, this was an evidence of the ambiguity in which the term 'lineage' had been applied to the *Shavante* (Lopes da Silva 1986: 169). She described the 'lineage' as based on sets of certain 'wealth', which included ceremonial roles, knowledge, etc. This 'wealth' was recognised as the collective 'property' of the group of that lineage, the members of which used it as a means of exchange, donation and lending between the lineages. There were, according to her, two types of wealth, one set that could be exchanged and another that was inalienable. The former was the means for establishing numerical balance and political alliances between lineages, a process leading to the development of political factions (1986: 177-78).

Lopes da Silva understood the 'flexibility' of the clan system, generated by such traffic of wealth and political alliances, as part of the possibilities allowed for by the structure of society itself. They would be 'institutional' opportunities, structural in themselves, and not part of the 'context', as Maybury-Lewis had described them in his appraisal of the *Shavante* (Lopes da Silva 1986: 171-72).

To be precise Lopes da Silva's discussion can hardly be called a return of 'descent' to the discussion on *Ge* social organisation, insofar as it had never been totally

¹²⁰ Maybury-Lewis (1984) actually described how a man would be able to change his clan affiliation

absent from it. William Crocker, for instance, discussed the idea that the *Canela* were evolving toward matriliney, a process frustrated when contact with national society began to act as a deculturalising factor (W. Crocker 1977: 269). W. Crocker depicts a system for the *Canela* very much similar to that of Lopes da Silva for the *Shavante*. He states that “... an underlying notion of the *Canela* relationship system is that uterine lines, the matriline, continue through time, *their members being equivalent to each other*” (W. Crocker 1977: 266, his italics). ‘Longhouses’ are constituted along lines of females living together. They are ‘balanced’ by lines of males, whose continuity, however becomes broken by other aspects of the social system, in contrast to the matriline, which preserve their continuity.

Some rites are associated with matriline, while others are transmitted to people outside them, through the process of name-giving¹²¹. The term *haakat* refers to ego’s living ascendants (sometimes also to dead ones), but it can also refer to the matriline, the *locus* of ‘ownership’ of a named festival rite. Crocker understood ‘*haakat*’, or ‘*-tsaakat*’ to be close to the notion of ‘matrilineal’ local descent group, which was, according to him, a corporate group, named and (ideally, at least) exogamous. This group also displayed common functions for its members, it was ancestor-orientated (at least to living ‘ancestors’), and had festival ‘property’ in common. But some of the matriline, or even whole longhouses, may not have *haakats*

upon moving to another village.

¹²¹ He sees it as a degenerescence of the incipient ‘matrilineal system’, but even so, “It is of particular importance that some rites (and festival groups and men’s societies) are passed on along name transmission lines (...) and that other rites and festival rites are transmitted within a ‘ritual matrilineal descent group’ (...). The trend, especially among the younger generations, is to pass on rites through the naming process, rather than within ‘lineages’, but the very fact that many rites still have ‘lineage-’ related personnel, houses and village locations and that these are ‘matrilineally’ transmitted within the ‘lineage’, must cause *Ge* specialists to think again about the extensiveness of the matrilineal and male ascendant’s matrilineal kin group - ego’s ‘M’s longhouse’ and ego’s “GM’s/Gc’s longhouses’.” (1977:267).

(1977: 267), that is, they would be '*de facto* matriline' without the distinctive diacritic signs of a 'matriline'.

W. Crocker, however, is clearly uneasy about the exact relevance of the notion of 'descent' with respect to *Canela* society. One can see he is unhappy with (what I have been calling) the metaphysical load of notions of 'group', as implying relations between 'classes' of individuals. His stress on the likeness between people within a same matriline - or, as he puts it, the equivalence between them, a notion that I will seek to expand in my description of *Mebengokré* ways of relatedness - points to a different direction, that is, not to the constitution of 'classes' of individuals but to the constitution of likenesses, or equivalences, between beings. That is, it points not to a sorting out of individuals in classes, but to a semiotics of the creation of individual relatedness.

Another sort of uneasiness, I think, obtains for Vanessa Lea in her picture of the *Mebengokré*. According to her, the *Mebengokré* have Houses, in the Levi-Straussian sense of *personnes morales*, organised along 'uterine ties', as she calls them, thereby avoiding the use of such terms as 'lines'¹²². Houses have, among other characteristics, the 'property' of several types of ceremonial 'wealth', both ritual regalia and ceremonial rights, as well as of personal names, both of which transmitted through the 'uterine line', that is, through women within a House, or from men to their sisters' sons. Such 'transmission' is actually from *ngret/kwatyi* to *tabdjwy*, that is, from people in a category as name-givers to that of name-receivers, (which include not only MB-to-ZS and FZ to BD, but also MM/FF to CC, and 'classificatory' ones). This gives evidence to the existence of a bilateral or cognatic kindred involved in the process of 'transmission' of names. This 'bilateral' aspect has an uneasy relationship with the

‘uterine’ ideology, according to which a name transmitted ‘outside’ the House must return to it in the following generation. According to Lea, the fact that grandparents of both ‘sides’ can transmit their names and *nekrex* to their grandchildren (even if only as a ‘life usufruct’ from the paternal side, as she puts it), softens the tension between both forms of classification (that is, the ‘house-‘ and the ‘kindred-‘ based classifications) (1985: 271-71).

I suspect that the tension I refer to in the previous paragraph is centered in Lea’s use of concepts rather than in their relation to any reality they seek to unfold. Anthropologists studying *Ge* peoples apparently have been *struggling against* implicit notions and the whole metaphysical burden implied by them - as with the notion of ‘descent’, for instance. The same can be said of the notion of ‘social relation’, as implied by these very notions, which are seen as realising themselves through ‘classes’, or ‘groups’ of people.

A related uneasiness, is, I think, expressed by William Fisher in his reappraisal of the (in his terms) flexibility of ‘strategic’ manipulation of kin ties among the *Mebengokré*. He reckons that ‘kin’ is not a useful label to understand “...the specific way people in a village *experience* a common unity or define themselves as a community” (1998: 54, his italics). He proposes to describe this experience of common unity from the point of view that is stressed by the *Mebengokré*, i.e., the importance of achieving certain emotional states as a significant basis for the achievement of community, of living together (1998: 54). Also, according to him,

We cannot assume that the very existence of corporate groups or communal institutions produce something like a shared sense of unity or purpose. The kinds

¹²² Apparently she has lately abandoned the notion of ‘House’ as explicative of *Mebengokré* social organisation (Márcio Goldman, personal communication).

of institutional mechanisms that organize production, reciprocity, ceremony, or the public and domestic domains are not thought to link everybody in the village to one another. (1998:54).

Although Fisher clings to such concepts as ‘kin’, ‘group’, public and private’, to understand *Mebengokré* ways of relatedness, his goal is one of understanding collective ways of creating and managing emotional states from the ‘mould’ provided by the feelings one has for those one shares a similarity in being. As he puts it,

To be effective, group activities must produce combined physical/social states which are correlated to certain emotions. These sentiments are powerful because they are social, public, and collective expression of sentiments that, when experienced in the domestic domain, are felt to be natural outgrowths of feelings of close kin for one another due to their sharing common physical substance. (1998:54)

I propose to do something similar in this thesis. But in contrast to those who have retained the concepts, and the baggage disclosed in this ‘genealogy’, I propose instead a humbler approach, where I will try to convey what I was able to learn about how *Mebengokré* share their existence with those they call their *ōmbikwá*. I intend to unfold this understanding through a description of some specific ways the *Mebengokré* use (some) relatedness terms, as I shall call them. This, not because I assume that this specific trait of social life has some autonomy, or any sort of epistemological or ontological preponderance over other aspects of *Mebengokré* social life, but because I think it useful to disclose some essential aspects of the ways the *Mebengokré* conceive of their relatedness to other people. In sum, they are an excuse to speak of manifold aspects of their form of life.

I will focus in this chapter upon what is usually called ‘classificatory kinship’ – but with stress being upon the way *Mebengokré* create ‘kinship’ among themselves through convivial and discursive practices. Rather than assuming that this kinship is a reflex, or extension, of ‘actual’ genealogical kinship, I shall focus on what I call the semiotics of relatedness involved in the creation of ‘kinship’. I maintain that this practice involves a process essentially similar to the creation of similarities among people living in close intimacy (‘actual kinship’). Similar, but not identical. And the differences are not in the fact that one is an ‘extension’ of the other, but in the different values that the *Mebengokré* attribute to such similarities. The unfolding of such values, which I intend to do in this chapter, amounts to a *Mebengokré* semiotics of relatedness. I will begin, thus, by describing the field situation where I first encountered such a notion, and its explanation by my *Mebengokré* friends.

This happened during a ceremony, during which men sorted themselves out in groups (and I use the word in a loose sense here) of *kamy*, or brothers, in order to collectively hunt down game that was then given to the sponsors of the ceremony (fathers of the children being named in the ceremony, in this specific case). Most ceremonies involve such creation of “*kamy*-ship”, as ceremonies usually include a ceremonial hunting expedition to get game for its culminating point. Ceremonial hunting expeditions involve amassing people who go hunting for their *kamy* in order that the latter may feed the former during the all-day (or all-night) dancing that marks the culminating point of the ceremony. Nowhere were the values of intimacy made clearer to me than during this ceremony, and in the explanations given to me by my friends with whom I became a brother to several of the ceremony’s sponsors. It is in the subtleties of *Mebengokré* evaluation of the similarities between brothers created in

ceremonies and those created by means of togetherness, by means of shared intimacy in a daily basis (as is the case of those who are born from the same mother and have lived together since their early childhood), that their complex social philosophy of similitudes unfolds itself in *Mebengokré* village life. This social philosophy's reflexions are based on the experience of intimacy of the domestic group, as Fisher indicates above. Thus, I believe that a focus on such social philosophy furnishes an adequate vantage point from which one can see the values attached to "kinship" as well, to living together in close intimacy with those one has being raised with.

Of a Kind: A Ceremonial Creation of Togetherness

I came to Cateté Indian village for my first period of fieldwork in May, 1999¹²³. The village was quiet that day, no movement could be seen related to the ceremony which, I was told, was then happening. The elders had decided some time before that they were going to have a *merereméi* women's ceremony. *Merereméi* means literally "important people", and it is a ceremony performed either by all men or by all women of the village, in which female personal names beginning with any ceremonial prefix can be confirmed.

Mebengokré personal names often include a ceremonial prefix that can be either male- or female- specific, or common to both female and male names (depending on the prefix). These are called "beautiful names", and people with such names must undergo a ceremony to have their names confirmed. These names do not entail any special mark of distinction for their bearers, neither do those with names beginning by the same "beautiful" prefix pertain to a group of any sort. Their only "corporate" activity is to dance together in the ceremony related to the ceremonial prefix, something

which is done when their names are confirmed. The percentage of people with “beautiful” names varies from one *Mebengokré* village to another; Lea (1986) states, for instance, that among the *Mekragnoti-Mebengokré* roughly a third of the people have “beautiful” names. Among the *Xicrin-Mebengokré*, every male has a “beautiful” name (with the prefix *Bep-*), and may (and usually do) have many other names, “beautiful” or otherwise. The name by which any person is called in everyday life varies according to the speaker. During a naming ceremony, though, those with names that have the prefix of the ceremony being performed are usually addressed, and referred to, by that name. Also, during the ceremony, those whose names are being confirmed are always addressed and referred to by that name. After the ceremony they may or may not be called by that name by their companions or by others. One of the long-standing puzzles of *Mebengokré* ethnology concerns these “beautiful” names: why are they “beautiful” at all? I expect that this work will provide an answer to that question, by looking into the specific aesthetic and moral dimensions of “beauty” for the *Mebengokré*.

During the days I came to Cateté village, people were busy with their individual and family affairs: men went hunting (individually, or with a companion), and went about choosing the best spot for their wives' garden that year; women were busy harvesting products of their gardens, and children in general were amusing themselves. On arriving at the village in any morning or afternoon of those days, the unaccustomed eye would meet no trace of the ceremony people so vehemently insisted they were performing.

¹²³ I had been there before, in 1996, on a short visit, when I had made the acquaintancy of one of the leaders of the village. As things turned out, he had by 1999 moved to a new village, *Djudjekô*, the year before.

A few days before my arrival, men and women had prepared manioc flour, their staple food without which there is no way of performing any ceremony. As a virtually non-perishable food, manioc flour allows people to go through the months-long performances involved in ceremonies, some of them requiring that people for long periods do not leave the village. During this time there is little opportunity to hunt or even to go to the (at times fairly distant) gardens to get food. Manioc meal is a product in whose preparation both men and women are involved: the latter to dig up the tuber in their gardens and grate it, either back at the village (where there is a 'manioc house') or at the gardens themselves, some of which have their own 'manioc houses'¹²⁴. The women also gather dry wood for the fire, bringing back to the village impressive back-borne baskets filled with heavy loads of both products, the manioc and the wood. The men squeeze the grated manioc in regional-style presses and toast it over the large ovens built for this purpose.

If mornings and afternoons displayed no trace of ceremony, nights and early mornings were filled with it. Every night, around 3 a.m., an elder would come to the men's house in the centre of the village to instruct the sleeping unmarried men (*menoronyre*). In one particular night when I was sleeping in the men's house I remember *Beb-djô*, one of my fathers, coming to speak to us in his loud, powerful voice. The speech was meant to reach the ears of those sleeping at their houses, and as such was delivered in a thundering fashion (the *kri* or residential circle is some 50 metres away from the men's house, located in the centre of the village), awakening even

¹²⁴ A "manioc house" (*casa de farinha*, in Portuguese) is a very common outfit in the interior of Brazil, and was quickly adopted by the *Mebengokré* after contact. It consists of a electricity or diesel-propelled machine to grate the manioc, a press to dry it from its poisonous juice, and open ovens, usually wood-fueled, to transform the dry paste into manioc flour. *Mebengokré* commonly refer to it by its Portuguese name.

the most resistant boys who, although not leaving their hammocks, were all well awake a few minutes after he had started.

A man's prestige is enlarged by his speaking *méx*, or good/well/beautiful, that is, by his possessing oratory skills, talking according to tradition both in form and in content. To do this, a speaker addresses himself directly to a certain audience, while addressing himself indirectly to yet another, which makes his speech to the boys something he displays to the wider (indirect) audience. To the latter, he is not showing - or not only showing at any rate - his lore: he is also demonstrating his teaching of the boys; he is showing himself as one that does what tradition, *me tumre*, says an *abàtari*, an adult, should do. A second-order performance, this 'showing off' to the village exemplifies much of the *Mebengokré* approach to the issue of one's relationship to those in the village at large (instead as only to his close kin): it is the relationship between a performer and an audience, mediated by third elements.

Beb-djô spoke that day in the dark about the old times, people told me in the morning, times when the *Mebengokré* did more than play soccer everyday, all day (an obvious exaggeration, but one that is frequently mentioned by older people). Close to dawn (more or less one hour before it), older women began to arrive, an initial group of some half-dozen before the others. They had come to sing, and sat on the floor at the southern corner of the men's house in a sort of circle, from where they sang for some 1 1/2 hours, until dawn. *Beb-djô* appreciated the 'rehearsal' from his corner of the men's house. He had confided to me that he was very fond of women's singing. Actually most men are, as women's singing is deemed sexually appealing, the same way women in ceremonial dressing - with their garments, their body paintings and all - are the prototype of female beauty. Ceremonies create beauty, and in many different ways. This

is an inherent characteristic of them, explicitly stated by people whenever they talk about ceremonies.

That morning the women sang several short *ngrere*, or songs, always initiated by an older woman and soon followed by the others. Several women alternated in this 'leading role' - from the musical point of view - as various songs were sung by the group, in a sequence involving the performance of an individual song only once before moving to another one, until their repertoire (or one of such repertoires, as I came to know afterwards) was completed. Not all songs were sung in that single night, both because not all women went to the gathering (which is fairly common in such 'rehearsals'), and because the repertoire is always tailored according to the timing, that is, singing invariably stops at sunrise. Specific women are responsible to keep, and to sing, specific songs during ceremonies. These women then teach the songs to their nieces/granddaughters (*tabdjwy*) - as well as to other people, occasionally - and in this way they say they 'own' the song. 'Owning' here implies above all a moral commitment to keeping alive the song, both by performing it on the appropriate occasions and by teaching it to other, younger people, so that it may go on forever being performed. For the ceremony, all women should ideally know all songs, and sing them while dancing together in a single row of dancers, as they do in the initial part of the ceremony, but the real stress on learning is given to a woman's nieces/granddaughters' 'own' songs.

The routine of the ceremony was changed at the beginning of the month. On the morning of June 4th, around 11 a.m., the women cleared the plaza for their ceremony, which would start¹²⁵ that very same evening. Most men had left, having

¹²⁵ That is, the actual performance of the ceremony, as opposed to the 'rehearsals' that had occurred during the previous month and before. *Mebengokré* call both the actual performances and the

gone hunting or fishing specially for the ceremony. Some youngsters, unmarried adolescents *menoronyre* and several children were at the men's house at the centre of the plaza, playing marbles and chatting, and watching the women do their job. The latter finished working in a few minutes, gathering together in one of their houses to rehearse once again the songs which they would sing in the ceremony proper. Around 11:30, a half-dozen women left for their gardens, some of them taking along their small children in their arms, with huge woven baskets held on their backs by means of a wide tree bark string crossing their foreheads. The body and cheeks of all women and children were painted with annato.

The adult men returned that same afternoon. From 6 to 7 p.m., the women danced around the *kri*, the residential circle of houses. These were mostly young women, painted and adorned with bracelets and necklaces made with glass beads, as well as small feather adornments. They went around the men's house in small 'rows' of 4-6 people, each led by a couple of older women. They danced in pairs, each double row leaving from the men's house for its turn around the plaza. The men's house, usually a male space, was taken by women, mostly female children watching the dance. From the front of their houses, a few men watched at a distance. The central plaza had been entirely cleaned, a perfect circle delineated around the men's house. Most men had gone hunting and fishing again, as some game and fish are better hunted in the evening¹²⁶. Several women had also gone collecting wood in the afternoon, to prepare *djwy-kupu*, the cooked manioc paste 'cake'. These women (mostly older, with many children and *tabdjwy*) had come just before the ceremony, bringing wood and banana

'rehearsals' *me toro*, as explained in the introduction, and distinguish the main performance (which actually closes the ceremony), the culminating point of it, with the name *ami aprã*.

leaves to cook and wrap the *djwy-kupu*. Some older couples had also done the same. These – and most older women as well – were the *mekrareremei*, the ‘good/beautiful people with children’, the parents of the children to have their names confirmed in the ceremony. The *djwy-kupu* manioc cakes were meant for the hunting expedition, soon to leave the village.

The *djwy-kupu* is a sort of 'bread', prepared with raw manioc paste and cooked at the *ki* earth oven. It can be prepared with several different fillings, such as game, fish, and green bananas. A *djwy-kupu* that takes only manioc paste is a most characteristically female food, not in terms of its consumption but of its production: only women ever prepare it. This sort of *djwy-kupu* is always made at the village by the women, and is an essential provision for hunting expeditions, as they can be preserved and are edible for several days. The women bring the manioc from their gardens, as well as the wood for the fire of the *ki* (earth oven), grating the manioc and pressing it to squeeze away the poisonous juice. The paste is then 'folded' (*kupu* means 'packet') in a packet of clean banana leaves, two layers of them, and placed on the hot stones of the earth oven to cook. The result is a hard 'brick', easy to transport and ready to eat. They are produced in large amounts and there is always plenty of them on a hunting expedition. A meal by a hunting party in the forest is never complete without some 'shots' exchanged in play by the men with hardened chunks of their *djwy-kupu*. As with meals back in their houses, meat should always be accompanied by the *djwy-kupu* or by any other sort of vegetable food.

¹²⁶ The most used hunting strategy seem to be the ‘waiting’: one finds oneself a place at the bank of a river, where game comes to drink. One then waits until some animal turns up, something that may take most of the evening.

This particular women's ceremony was a naming ceremony, or, more specifically, a ceremony for the confirmation of names that one has received as a baby. Any woman's name – names with any ceremonial prefix – can be confirmed at that ceremony. The *mereremei*, the celebrated children (the name means 'those who are good/beautiful', sometimes translated by them as 'important people'), have ages which range from older children (around 8-9 years old) to pre-pubescent adolescents (12-13 years old).

In old times people used to have their 'beautiful' names confirmed earlier in their lives, around 4 to 8 years old, a pattern closer to that of the Xingú *Mebengokré*. The change came in the last decades, when contact made the *Xikrin* population so small that they had to give up for a while performing their ceremonies altogether. When ceremonial life began to be performed again, during the stabilisation of their situation as 'contacted' Indians, the generation of youngsters that had not had their ceremonial names confirmed was introduced at a later age to the ceremonial system, and the habit was kept from then on to celebrate children's names at that older age.

Another important alteration due to depopulation was the concentration of ceremonially-prefixed names within a reduced number of name-bearers, something that made of the whole of the male population, for instance, bearers of a *Bep*-prefixed name. In this way, a *Bep-ryr me toro* is a ceremony in which all children of the appropriate age can take part, and in fact do (or almost all of them do anyway). Actually, it is not depopulation as such that is responsible for such contingencies, but a small population, and there is a crucial difference: a small population can be a result of other processes than the loss of people. Small population can be a direct consequence of a factional process, that has lead to the formation of a new, smaller village. The result is that it is

more difficult to perform the more 'specific' ceremonies, like those that celebrate a less common ceremonial prefix, for want of enough sponsors (that is, parents of the celebrated children) to feed the entire village during the celebration.

While singing, the older women are also 'transmitting' their songs to the *mereremei* behind whom they stand (their *tabdjwy*) in the rows of dancing women. *Mebengokré* say the *kwatui* dancing with the *mereremei* sponsors are their FM, while the *ngêt* dancing with their male *mereremei tabdjwy* are their MF. This is a stated preference that is rarely strictly followed due to contingencies, either of the 'objective' sort - when, for instance, someone has to transmit one's *kukràdjà* or ceremonial right to someone, and has no one to receive it, something that happened quite frequently in the depopulated Cateté village in the early 1960's - or due to 'subjective' factors - personal preferences of people, for instance, in terms of the transmission - that both delineate a practice more complex and 'anarchic' than that expressed by the *Mebengokré* ideal.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of *Mebengokré* ceremonies is that they always involve an audience. Although they are called 'parties', as the *Mebengokré* usually translate *me toro* into Portuguese ('festas'), there is always a high measure of performance involved that presupposes an audience for whom the dancers perform. The performatic excellence is openly praised – and appraised – by the audience. Performance is intimately related to the creation of joy and of a general elation in the performers and the village at large. In fact, the production of such feelings as those of joy (and, in specific occasions, of *o'amak*, to miss, and others, even of anger) is one of the very *raisons d'être* of ceremonies. People explicitly state that *me toro* are a way to make people happy and gay, and that it is good/beautiful (*méi*), and performance is the way of achieving that status. A ceremony should always have enough food for the

dancers to eat (and also for others at the residential circle, who in a variety of ways get their share of the game hunted for the ceremony), as well as people for whom the dancers dance. These are, of course, the *mereremei*, the good/beautiful people, those for whom the ceremony is being performed. But in another, more subtle sense, the performers have another public in mind: those watching them dance.

When one dances in a ceremony, one has in a certain way a threefold (at least) audience. In concrete terms, the audience is quite simply (and ideally, of course) those who are not dancing. On the other hand, the 'formal' audience (i.e., that openly voiced by the participants of the dance) is composed only by those for whom they are dancing (the dancer's nephews/nieces/grandchildren, the *tabdjwy*, in most ceremonies - but not in all). And, last but not least, there is the audience that is the centre of attention for young performers at any rate, as individuals: the opposite sex. This desire to attract the opposite sex is, of course, a major difference between the approach of younger and of older people to ceremonies. Older people will tend to perform in a 'stronger' way on their *tabdjwy*'s behalf. Younger people also do it, or say they do it, but they are also concerned with causing the right impression on persons of the opposite sex (something much commented upon by young men at the men's house gatherings every evening). Ceremonies are above all occasions when people amuse themselves, and sex is a central part of amusement in *Mebengokré* social life.

The sexual freedom enjoyed by people of both sexes during ceremonies is much stressed during the *ami aprã*, the culminating point of a ceremony, when couples can be seen furtively leaving the *kri* for deserted spots behind the circle of houses. The mothers of the children being celebrated, for whom the *kamy kaàk* of their husband hunted, are held to be sexually accessible to those that hunted for their children during

the ceremony, and in fact they are frequently sexually sought for by men during the dance. If a young woman is dancing (in the women's ceremony, for instance, or when they dance in men's ceremonies), a man would come from behind, dancing, and take her by the arm when close to a deserted, less lit spot in the residential circle. They would leave discreetly for a short stay in the bushes around the village, and subsequently discreetly returning to the dance. Although this is done openly (albeit discreetly), people pretend they do not notice anything - it is never proper to call attention to such matters.

Ceremonies are thus fundamentally performative, in the sense that they have audiences involved. This is essential for the purported reason, or goal, of the ceremony, which is to create joy. It is, among other things, through dancing and singing that people create joy in others and in themselves, and the right way to create joy is not to create solely one's own joy, but but to create it for another. This, as will be seen, is related to the general social theme of giving and getting from others, and a major theme of *Mebengokré* social philosophy.

The next day, in the mid-afternoon, the *mekranyre* (the younger married men's group) brought some meat to the men's house, where it was roasted and eaten by them. The atmosphere was quite relaxed, as the men had played soccer in the morning. The men displayed a remarkable comraderie, always close together, joking and teasing each other. Their physical propinquity would be considered proper, in many Western societies, only between people of different sexes. Friends hold each other's hands while chatting, and hug each other freely, in a very explicit display of closeness. The atmosphere of intimacy and closeness is directly related to the meal, people remark with open smiles: to eat together is *méi*, is good/beautiful. Only friendly people eat together, is what is implied by their remarks. Of course, the archetype of commensality - of the

condition of eating together with other people - is the nuclear family, and people say they are 'like relatives' (a better translation would be fac-similar relatives'), *ōbikwá kaàk*, when they want to stress this friendly atmosphere. The term also translates as 'friend'.

The whole friendly atmosphere is associated with the ceremony itself: 'that's how our 'party' (*me toro*) is', one of the age-class leaders explained to me, referring to the men eating. He was referring both to the friendly atmosphere and to the act of eating, a very important activity indeed among *Mebengokré*. To eat together is a hallmark of one's willingness to live well with others. Ceremonies most evidently relate by similarity those eating together at the men's house and families, groups of people that share food and eat together. *Mebengokré* social philosophy can in this way be 'read' in ceremonies: people that participate in the celebration are as close to each other as those that were brought up together, and to those that raised them.

In the afternoon¹²⁷, around 5 p.m., men painted the Jaguar marks on their faces with black ashes: three vertical lines from the middle of the forehead down, the middle one coming down the nose; and three inclined lines in each cheek, from the lips up to the middle of the cheeks, in line with the ears. They painted their feet with *pý* (annato) and oil¹²⁸. Their *py* body painting made large 'collars' over their chests and backs, with red strips going down from it over the belly and back, and down the arms.

¹²⁷ Between the events described in the last paragraph and those described below several events happened in the village, related to the ceremony. The most important one was the *krabdjwy japrô*, when children are taken by their 'formal friends' (*krabdjwy*) around the village circle, and the latter are fed by the children's parents. I have not included those events in this description, as they are not directly related to the general theme of this chapter.

¹²⁸ The annato is mixed with oil extracted from a small coconut and rubbed against the skin, leaving a bright red colour that is easily washed away

The painted men gathered at the centre of the men's house, in an *ipôk* position (that is, in circle, with the younger ones at the centre), upon the palm leaves that covered the floor, diligently brought in and laid down by the unmarried young men and by children¹²⁹. After listening to a speech from an elder, the group moved to the *me toro djà* the 'place of the party', just beside the men's house, to the west. They sat again in an *ipôk* position, with the children (*me ôk-re*, 'the painted ones') at the centre and the older men around them in concentric circles roughly sorted by age. The leaders of two of the men's groups, the younger married men and the older married men ('those with old sons/daughters'), sat on small banks, on opposite sides of the outer circle.

The men observed the women dancing around the plaza. Small groups of women went dancing around the circle of houses, one group at a time, singing and moving their arms in the characteristic movement of the women's dance: swinging both arms back and forth at once, elbows bent 90°, hands stretched and fingers held close together.¹³⁰

Each time a group of women went around the plaza, the elder who harangued the men earlier called a group of *kamy kaàk* to stand facing the men's house, in front of the group of seated men, for what is called the *mry kadjy djà*, or 'place (of those that) want to go for game'. The *kamy kaàk* ('brother(s)-fac-similar') are formed by those who see themselves as such in relation to a father of one of the celebrated children. Men participate in several of these groups; to stand beside one of the 'sponsors' of the ceremony (*mekrarereméi*) means that one is going to hunt for him, that is, one is going

¹²⁹ During ceremonies these (male) children, as well as those of the same age, being celebrated or not, are called *me ôk-re*, 'the painted ones', a reference to the body paintings they all wear during the ceremonies. One of the stated aims of ceremonies is to promote the beautification of people - to make all people 'beautiful', in different ways.

¹³⁰ This is a characteristic female dance movement; men would do it only when seated, singing.

on the ceremonial hunting expedition to hunt game and give it to his *kamy kaàk*, so that the latter can bring it back to his house where his wife (and daughters, etc) will prepare it¹³¹ as a *djwy-kupu* and feed the dancers after the ceremony. Under the particular system of sharing existent in these ceremonies, people stress that food coming to the men's house after a dance should not be seen as a 'payment' to some but should be shared by all.

Men would stand by several *kamy kaàk* groups when called by the elder. What is at stake here is not that one must be a 'classificatory brother' of the child's father, as conventional anthropological wisdom would put it, but that one chooses to behave towards the *mekrarereméi* as a brother would do. In practice, it is the very act of giving game to the *mekrarereméi* that is the realisation of such 'brother-ship', as well as the general easiness of interpersonal relationship acquired during collective hunting expeditions. When people say that they are going to stand beside a *kamy kaàk* at the *mry kadjy djà* ('the place of those who want to go after game', beside the men's house), they usually point to the building of a relationship, not to the acknowledgement of a pre-existent one.

This can be clearly seen in the way I myself became 'brother-facsimilar' to several of the sponsors of that particular ceremony. When the first sponsor stood there at the *mry kady djà*, one of my friends pulled me by the arm: "let's go become¹³² brothers, *Bep-kadjoroti*¹³³", he said, with a large smile, "he is a nice

¹³¹ Or will conclude the preparation; as it will be seen, men cook the meat in the forest when they hunt it, to preserve it. Traditionally, meat should not enter the village raw. Even nowadays, when custom has been somewhat relaxed, meat (when it is in large amounts, in which case it is shared with others) is carved at the periphery of the village, and distributed among women by a male elder, during ceremonies. In a certain sense, it is considered improper for dead game to enter the village in one piece.

¹³² He actually addressed me in Portuguese, saying "vamos ser irmãos", literally "let's be/become brothers".

guy, good to be brothers with”, he complimented. And there we went, standing in line with the other ‘brother-facsimilars’ not only of that particular individual but of most of the other sponsors too. To stand by someone in this context is more of a statement of an intention, and thus two ‘real’ brothers do not stand by each other at the *mry kady djà*. As two ‘real’ brothers have *piaám*, shame/respect, towards each other, and as the spouses of those men sponsoring the ceremony are to be sexually accessible to his *kamy kaàk*, a man placed in the *kamy kaàk* row of his ‘real’ brother would be a sort of contradiction in terms. The point of the whole ceremony is to create *kaàk*-ships, ‘similarities’ with others, and ‘genealogical kinship’ does not pertain to this context. As one of my friends then put it to me, “what’s the point to be (become) brothers if they are already brothers?”. This clearly shows that what is involved here is not a display of an established relationship but an actual *creation* of one. To stand by the sponsor of a ceremony in this way is to actively create a bond between the sponsor and another man, and even people that already treat each other as ‘brother-facsimilar’ will make it a point to stand by one another in such occasions, as this bond is never a definite one, but is actually created in an on-going way through the conscious intentions of actors.

When a sponsor of a ceremony stands in the plaza and addresses the people at large - that is, the men at the *me toro djà* and people in the village circle, he simply states that he and his ‘brother-facsimilars’ are going to hunt for his child. The statement is simple, but its stating not so: to address the whole village is a heavy performative load, and some men, too shy to speak up, ask one of their brother-facsimilars’ to perform that piece of oratory for them. When the groups of ‘brother-facsimilars’ are called, an

¹³³ Bep-kadjoroti is the name that was given to me by my *Mebengokré* mother the day I came to the

elder instructs the men about how to proceed, if they are too inexperienced. Then the sponsor stands apart from the row of 'brother-facsimilars' and tells the audience that those standing by him are his *kamy kaàk*, who will bring game for him to feed the dancers. Each 'pronouncement' lasts but few seconds. The whole thing lasts only for a few minutes – two or three – for each sponsor and his 'brother-facsimilars'.

Virtually all men participated in more than one *kamy kaàk* group; many men took part in more than half of the groups. The whole ceremony met with a most cheerful mood from the men's part. There was no tension involved: men made jokes all the time, even when harangued by the elder. The women were more solemn, and some bore tired, matter-of-fact faces, without much enthusiasm for their own performance. Younger women stayed at the men's house watching the ceremony. In all, eight brother-facsimilar' groups were delineated from the group of men gathered at the *me toro djà* that evening, one for each sponsor of the ceremony. The general impression - one confirmed by the *Mebengokré* themselves - of the ceremony of the *mry kadjy djà* is one of 'generalised brother-ship', of a situation where all are 'brothers' to each other - an ideal social state that the *Mebengokré* seek, in a certain way, to attain. Not that of people being all brothers to each other, but one where all behave 'like brothers'.

This 'likeness' has very specific meanings that are unraveled by the ceremonies themselves. The main point here seems to be one related to nurturance: 'brother-facsimilars' are in charge of providing food, which is given to the sponsors of the ceremony, brought back to the village by them and the 'brother-facsimilars', who take turns helping them carry food back to the village - and then prepared by the sponsors' wives so as to be served to the dancers. The dancers are themselves the

‘brother-facsimilars’ of the several sponsors, and are dancing for the celebrated children’s sake. There is here a circularity: food is amassed by the ‘brother-facsimilars’, who give it to the sponsors, who bring it to be prepared by their wives, who feed the ‘brother-facsimilars’ (as well as other dancers) who have danced for their children. This circularity gives a clue to another characteristic of ‘*kaàk*-ship’: there is a generalised state of *sharing* involved in the relationship thus created. In fact, people explicitly state that all food ends up by being eaten by all the dancers. The same way the impression of ‘generalised brother-ship’ is created by men becoming brothers of many of the sponsors during the ceremony, an impression of ‘generalised commensality’ is created by the unfolding of the ceremony.

To eat together is an actual part of the ceremony, and not its aftermath, as one could think. I have seen, in other occasions, people refusing to dance in the ‘rehearsal’ performances of a ceremony because there was no food available¹³⁴. Nor is it a matter of exchanging food for performances: when questioned about why not dance if there is no food, the usual reaction of those to whom I asked was to point out the pointlessness of it, and a friend of mine once remarked, “if there is no food to be eaten, it is not a *me toro*”. The culminating point of a ceremony must not only provide an occasion for people to eat together, it must also provide plenty of food, enough for everybody to eat liberally. This is part of the joy created by the ceremony, and people actually have so much food in those occasions that it is not uncommon for one to be hit by projectiles improvised out of potatoes or bits of *djwy-kupu* when eating together with others in the men’s house, in friendly ‘battles’ that add to the general merriment of the occasion.

¹³⁴ Every ‘rehearsal’ of a ceremony - that is, of the actual dancing - is followed by the consuming of some food from the gardens of the sponsors.

The general principle behind ceremonies should be clear by now: people act ‘like brothers’ because they help each other, because they eat together, and because they create joy in each other. Ceremonies create a state where the whole village acts *as if* it were a family. I stress here this ‘as if’, because ceremonies do not actually mirror the state of affairs that obtains within those circles of people that live in the most intimate terms with each other, having been raised together: it creates a state of affairs that is *similar* to it. Similar, but not identical. And it is the specific quality of such similarity that I am going to address in the next section. In order to do so, I will address myself to a contemporary discussion in Amazonian ethnology, where I intend to link my previous critique of analytical strategies utilised in the interpretation of data in *Ge* ethnology with what I call a *Mebengokré* semiotic of relatedness.

The Value of *Mebengokré* Autonomy and Social Life

In an article recently published in JRAI (2002: 347-65), anthropologist Aparecida Vilaça argues that Amazonian kinship cannot be understood without recourse to data on cosmology. Despite the apparent obviousness of the statement, it conceals a theoretical standpoint which bears upon the issues discussed here. Vilaça makes the point that Amazonian kinship studies, concerned with the creation of intimacy and relatedness among people living together, are incomplete because they do not take into consideration the relationship of predation between humans and non-humans (animals, spirits), which are constitutive of peoples’ bodies. Kinship in Amazonia, according to her (following the viewpoint expressed by Seeger, Matta and Viveiros de Castro 1979), has to do with the creation of the human body rather than the creation of social groups. Kinship, she claims, has to do with living together, and the very fact of shared livelihood creates a shared substance among people, who are assimilated into a homogeneous whole. In her words (2002: 352-54),

...this is not a purely formal or terminological assimilation, but a true process of consubstantialisation, generated by proximity, intimate living, commensality, mutual care, and the desire to become kin (...) This 'substance' contains not just memory and affect, but above all agency (...) the important point to note is that this social process of fabricating consubstantiality is strongly valued as a constitutive attribute of humanity and as a site of agency.

Despite stating herself that what is called 'kinship' in Amazonia has to do with the mutual creation of a human nature by those who share a common existence, as the quotation above shows, Vilaça goes on to state that the understanding of Amazonian kinship is hampered by a focus on domestic life at the expense of relations outside the 'inner circle' of those who share an existence. Her analysis actually tends to identify the so-called 'domestic level' with consanguinity, and the 'outside' domain with affinity, thus producing a sort of oxymoron: if social life in Amazonia has to do with the creation of consubstantiality through living together, and with the mutual moulding of human nature by people's agency, and not with the sorting out of people into social groups, the analytical tools that she deploys to criticise the so-called 'equivalence of domestic life to the social universe' (p. 349) seem to me to be rather inappropriate, as they are concerned with relationships between groups/categories and the sorting out of people into social units - something she brushes aside as irrelevant to Amazonian 'kinship'.

This discussion bears upon the general theme of this chapter, as Vilaça identifies the approach that seeks to identify the determinants of social living with 'sociability', and her own approach with 'sociality' (following here M. Strathern's distinction, 1999), the latter being wider as it "...concerns social relations in a general sense, including for example warfare(...)" (p. 362, footnote 10). We are thus left with the rather curious paradox, that in order to understand a social reality of relatedness based on the mutual creation of humanity into individual beings, the anthropologist has

to recourse to an analytical language of social relations, rather than the creation of ontological qualities.

I would like to suggest here that this formalist approach mis-represents the social reality it purports to understand. Vilaça departs from the principle that the recourse to data related to other spheres of 'social life' (her conception of social life, that is) provides a better, more fundamental - and thus more amenable to comparison - understanding of 'native society', as if 'society' could be taken as a sort of universal accessible to the anthropologist and as such providing a transcultural ground for comparison. Her whole 'pan-Amazonian' endeavour seems to me to be guided by this principle, that one can find a safe ground for comparison in a refined, finely tuned set of analytical tools that can extract from diverse social realities the essentials of a general model - maybe an Amazonian ontology in the singular - in relation to which particular social forms could be seen as so many transformations of the model.

Perhaps the term 'understanding' is misplaced here, with its suggestion of an interpretive task, of dialogue with another's conceptions in order to try to grasp its contextual truth. Vilaça's curiously 'arithmetical' interpretative endeavour, adding up predetermined layers of a formally defined 'kinship' to different peoples' conceptions of what it is to live with others, so as to make them amenable to comparison, seems to me to fall in the same category of mistake pointed out by Overing (1985), of taking 'kin' and 'social life' as 'natural kinds', as if they were universals of the human condition. If Amazonian peoples state that 'kin' are those with whom one lives in intimacy, and that this intimacy has to do with the creation of a common substance (and this not necessarily, or exclusively, 'physical' substance) among them (although I

would rather say that this is a creation of similarities) by means of one's agency, it seems to me rather pointless to try to find 'kin' (and social life) elsewhere.

I would like to suggest here that, if any sort of comparison is to be established between the different ways that Amazonian peoples have to experience 'kin' and 'social life', this can be done not by distancing oneself from 'native' conceptions, but by getting closer to them. In my view, the point of departure should be, as in any interpretative endeavour, the examination of the taken-for-granted assumptions lurking in the background of our analytical concepts. This, however, should not be a random endeavour, but rather enacted in relation to those aspects of our assumptions that produce that curious feeling known to many a fieldworker, of *something that is not quite in the place where it should be* when we try to apply them to understand what we experience in the field. It is there, in our experiences of trying to cope with ways of experiencing the world that are different from our own - before it gets transformed into 'native conceptions' in our writing - that one should look for the clues for an interpretation that can aspire to be conversant with other ways of experiencing the world. In Vilaça's article, there is a moment (2002: 352-53) when she expresses such perplexity:

To become kin, it is necessary to desire to be kin and to act as such: for example, by living together, respecting alimentary taboos, not eating dead kin (specifically in the Wari case), calling people by kin terms, and so on. Without doubt, it was this idea that my Wari' father, Paletó, wanted to pass on to me when he asked in a surprised tone, after a two-month stay in my house in Rio de Janeiro, why white people did not simply make themselves into kin, too? He seemed to imply it was enough to want this. I quote him verbatim: 'Among ourselves we are kin. We are not like yourselves - you are related only to your younger brother, Eddie, and to your father and mother. You just like one another for no reason. Why don't you make yourselves into kin as well?'

‘Kin’ has thus to do with individual agency, and one becomes kin out of a desire to relate to others, to live with others in a proper way, because one likes them. These are ideas that echo in a great measure my own experiences in the field, and I would like to develop them from the angle that seems to me to be self-evident: what Vilaça’s father was exposing to her is what are usually called *moral issues* in Western philosophies. And the perplexity felt by one when confronted with such ideas (or the perplexity that I felt during my fieldwork when confronted by issues not at all unlike those described here, at any rate) goes beyond the rather trivial point of whether ‘kinship’ is ‘genealogical’ or not. They touch the very core of anthropological concepts of social life and society, which are not conceived of as moral issues at all. Or are they?

Curiously enough, James Laidlaw, in an article published in the same volume of JRAI as Vilaça’s article (2002: 311-332), makes the point that the difficulty anthropologists have in analysing freedom and moral/ethical issues in general is due to the pervasive influence of Durkheim’s collectivistic conception of society as the moral good *par excellence*. As he states (p. 312-13),

Durkheim’s ‘social’ is effectively, Immanuel Kant’s notion of the moral law, with the all-important change that the concept of human freedom, which was of course central to Kant, has been neatly excised from it. The category of the moral has, accordingly, almost invariably collapsed in the hands of anthropologists into whatever other terms we have been enthusiastically using to explain collectively sanctioned rules, beliefs, and opinions (...) The questions that then get asked are ones that are appropriate for these other concepts. If these are the rules, how and by whom are they formulated? How are they re-inforced and transmitted through time, and how and by whom are they challenged? Who gets to say what counts as a breach of them? And so on. In this situation the concept of moral means everything and nothing.

Laidlaw's point that Durkheim "(...) has left us (...) with Kant with the freedom taken away" (p. 313) is tailored to account for the difficulty that anthropology has to deal with issues of freedom and free will - which we usually term individual agency. But his argument may be pushed to its logical conclusion: that the Durkheimian 'social' is in itself a moral standpoint, one that sees 'society' as a moral being in and by itself, the source, as Durkheim said, of the 'best part of' the individual and therefore felt as an authority over the individuals themselves (p. 313).

I mention these issues here because my own work among the *Mebengokré* calls into question such notions. For *Mebengokré*, human-ness - that is, *Mebengokré*-ness - can only be realised in the village. A village is a concrete entity which seems to have ontological precedence in *Mebengokré* thought over the family - the most intimate group - in their reflections of social life *per se*, in the sense of what it is like to live with other people in a distinctively *Mebengokré* way. It is village life that defines what it is to be a *Mebengokré*. Theirs is a rather Aristotelian concept of living in the *polis* that allows for the realisation of the potential humanity in them. Life at the wider, village level has to be constructed as a fac-simile of the state of affairs that obtains within the circle of people with whom one is in most intimate terms.

Ge-speaking peoples' social life has usually been analysed as bi-sected between a 'domestic' and a 'public' levels, the latter comprising village life in the wider sense. I would like here to propose an alternative explanation that takes into account *Mebengokré*'s moral outlook as to what it is to live together with other people.

When asked about who is the epitome of the *ōmbikwá*, or friend/relative, a *Mebengokré* man will usually answer it is one's sister (*kanikwynh*). Asked about the rationale of such statement, he will point out that she will always feed him whenever he

needs it. In fact, there is hardly a day in the village that one does not see small children going to and fro carrying food, from their mother's house to where the child's *ngêt* (uncle/grandfather) lives. It is also fairly common to see men going to their sister's houses (as people live mostly uxorilocally, one's sister's house is also the house where one's parents live, if they are alive) to eat there¹³⁵. The notion of living together implies first and foremost to feed each other and to eat together, and it is not surprising, considering this context, that one of the 'markers' of relatedness among people is the practice of avoidance of certain foods when one's child is ill. As Melatti remarked for the Krahó, there is a notion of a shared common substance behind such practice. But this 'substance' should not be understood solely in physical/physiological terms. A powerful idea of caring for each other is operative here, and that involves more than simply a commonality of physical substance. It also implies a general psychological feeling of elation and well-being - one could as well call it happiness - that obtains within this most intimate circle of conviviality. The hallmark of life in this context is the fact that an *ōmbikwá* does not create ill-feelings in another by his or her acts towards them. Much of the restraint (*piaam*, 'respect/shame') that obtains among male members of a same household can be understood in this context. The idea of commensality, thus, has a strong psychological dimension as well as a physiological one. Togetherness can be seen as both the cause and the effect of feeding and eating with others. The creation of joy, that *Mebengokré* so insistently pose as the *raison d'être* of ceremonies, can be seen as something suitably similar, at village level, to the general state of elation and well-being that should obtain in the relationship of those living in close intimacy.

¹³⁵ Lea (1986) actually states that among the *Mekragnoti-Mebengokré* where she did her fieldwork, it is more common for a man to be fed by his sister than by his wife.

The sharing of food thus bears a direct relationship with the creation of similarities among people, among the *Mebengokré* as elsewhere¹³⁶. It should be clear by now that *Mebengokré* ceremonies are concerned with the creation of an all-inclusive, village level similarity between people by means of reproducing at that level an appearance of the state of affairs that (ideally) obtains within the circle of people living together in close intimacy. But the former only *appears to be* like the latter: there is no identity between both states of affairs. Eating together in the men's house only looks like eating with one's close relatives; brothers-*kaàk* only seem to be like brothers-*kumrentx*. What is the status of such likeness? What sort of equivalence can be said to obtain between both terms? This thesis will be mainly concerned with answering these questions with respect to several different spheres of *Mebengokré* life. In order to do so, I shall deal now with what it means to establish a “*kaàk*-ship” with someone. Ethnographic descriptions of kin relationship usually lapse into focusing upon the ‘thing’ to which the kinship term refers. I suggest here that it would be more profitable to investigate how the sign signifies.

A *Mebengokré* Semiotics of Likenesses

The term *kaàk* is only one of a set of terms that are used by *Mebengokré* to denote a likeness between two or more things, persons, events or states of affairs. These terms are *kaàk*, *kaigó*, and *kakrit*. each one establishes a likeness, but in different senses. All three terms can be said to be the opposite of *katàt* (or *kumrentx*, or sometimes *djwynh*, although the latter has some slightly different connotations, being more a sort of emphatic assertion of the something). *Katàt* is usually translated as ‘real’, although there are, to my knowledge, no ontological connotations involved in this assertion.

¹³⁶ See Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo (1992) for a through review of the role of commensality in the creation of equivalences and similarities between people.

Katát, and the three terms that are opposed to it are not forms of classification either: something can be either one of these terms, depending on the perspective one wants to stress when using them. They define *qualities*, rather than *classes* of things and events. Furthermore, whereas the first term denotes a quality of a thing/being/event in itself, the other three denote a quality of a thing/being/event in comparison with another. In this comparison, that to which the thing/being/event is being compared with is invariably *katàt*, and it is in this sense that *kaàk*, *kaigó*, and *kakrit* are opposed to it.

Katàt expresses the possession, by the thing, being or event to which it is applied, of the full qualities relevant to it in a given situation. One of the best examples I got of the meaning of *katàt* was when, coming to my second fieldwork stint, I brought back some money for my brother *kaàk* who had given me some ceremonial adornments (he is a ceremonial specialist, and as such he is also an expert adornment-maker) to sell in my home-city. These adornments can be sold for a much higher price in faraway places than in the towns closer to the *Mebengokré's* Cateté Indian Land, or even than in Belém, where FUNAI¹³⁷ keeps a shop that sells handcrafts made by Indigenous peoples of the region¹³⁸. In spite of that, *Mebengokré*, as well as most Indigenous peoples in the region and elsewhere, do not usually ask other people to sell their artefacts because it is unlikely that they will ever see the money back, or when they do receive it, they always suspect that the person has sold it at a much higher price and kept most of the money for oneself. I felt thus quite honoured when my kamy asked me to sell his artefacts, and obviously brought back to the village all the money that I had got from the selling of the pieces. It proved to be a fairly large amount of money by *Mebengokré* standards. As it

¹³⁷ National Indian Foundation, the federal bureau of Indigenous affairs.

¹³⁸ ARTÍNDIA, FUNAI's shops, display the artefacts sent to them by Indigenous artists, paying them the exact price reached by the artefact when sold.

turned out, he had forgotten that he had given me those artifacts to sell, and was really astonished that I gave him so much money ‘for nothing’. When he got his money, he exclaimed, astonished, addressing those with him: *kamy katàt ne ja! Panh kê! Kamy katàt!* “A real brother! No exchange! A real brother!”.

The meaning of what it is to display the full qualities (*katàt*) of a brother (*kamy*) were made quite clear on that occasion, when my brother explained minutely, as is his fashion, what had happened. A brother is one that will give and not ask anything back in exchange for the thing given. This is the full quality of a brother, as well as of any close relative/friend, *bikwá katàt*. another facet of this full quality was taught to me in further occasions, when I learned that *katàt* relatives/friends can - and are actually expected to - get things from one another without creating any ill-feeling among them.

Katàt is also translated as ‘simple’, or ‘in a simple way’, and this meaning becomes clear when we consider how the terms *kaàk*, *kaigó* and *kakrit* are opposed to it.

Kaàk expresses an equivalence. Something *kaàk* can replace that which it is being compared to. *Kaàk* is a fac-similar, or a simile, of its referent. In the same way that a fax can be taken as the thing faxed for some purposes, a ‘*kaàk*’ can be in the place of its referent for some purposes. If we think of a picture, say, Leonardo’s Mona Lisa, a *kaàk* could be a poster of it, that is, something that, although evidently not the picture itself, can be hung on a wall and appreciated as correspondent to the original in relation to the image depicted, for instance. *Kaàk* thus denotes something which has some of the qualities of the ‘original’ (*katàt*), in a context where those qualities are deemed relevant for the comparison being established between them.

Keeping to the same example, a *kaigó* object would be a fake picture of the Mona Lisa: something that pretends to be taken as the original, but is not it. It is a simulacrum. Both *kaàk* and *kaigó*, thus, are not the original, but while *kaàk* implies a likeness of different things taken in the positive sense, meaning that one can replace the other for specific purposes, *kaigó* implies a likeness in the negative sense, a likeness that does not entitle one to replace the other for any purpose. *Kakrit*, in its turn, implies a comparison that is made only to be denied. Something *kakrit* is not quite comparable to the original, although presenting some resemblance to it. The *Mebengokré* usually translate *kakrit* as ‘not serious’, meaning that the comparison implied by it cannot be taken seriously. Sticking to the example above, a *kakrit* of the Mona Lisa would be, for instance, a poster of it with a goatee beard: a grotesquerie, an aberration. A *kakrit* is something whose qualities being considered approximate those of the thing to which it is being compared, but not quite so.

It is thus understandable that *kat`at* be also translated as ‘simple’: the likeness here is complete, a point-to-point correspondence, implying that there aren’t different facets to be considered in the comparison. Both *kaàk* and *kaigó*, as well as *kakrit*, imply a sort of correspondence where specific qualities are singled out for comparison, making it a complex, selective process. *Katàt*, by its turn, as a comparison, is much simpler, as there are no different qualities to be singled out for comparison.

Comparisons established by this set of terms can be either between sensible qualities in the Lockean sense, or else between intangible qualities, like moral and aesthetical ones. In both cases, the singling out of qualities is contextual, and do not define bounded ‘classes’. An example of this was given to me when discussing these matters with my *Mebengokré* friends. One of my friends pointed to a tuft of a herb used

to make herbal infusions, which had been brought by a nurse to the village and planted near the infirmary. *Mebengokré* did not know the plant before. “We call it *bon* (grass) *kaàk*”, my friend told me, “or *bon kaigó*”. And explained: “see how it looks like grass? But it doesn’t spread out everywhere, like grass”. The plant actually looks like giant blades of grass, but grows in a tuff. *Kaàk* and *kaigó* are applied here, respectively, to the similarity between the plant and common grass (its blades look like grass blades) and to their dissimilarity (it doesn’t spread).

Another example, related to intangible qualities, sheds light on the theme discussed in this chapter, namely, the moral dimension of food-sharing and eating. *Mebengokré* usually qualify game as either *mr`y kumrentx*¹³⁹ or *mr`y kakrit*. A *kumrentx* game is a large one, which is usually divided between several people¹⁴⁰. Small game, which is not shared with anybody (or only with closest relatives) is deemed *kakrit*, that is, “not serious game”, as it was translated to me sometimes. *Mr`y kakrit* also applies to non-edible game, the general meaning of the term being thus one of ‘animals that are not seriously hunted’. The same applies to other edible things. Small, forest fruits are called *pidj`y kakrit*¹⁴¹, as they do not easily fill one’s stomach. *Bà kam djw`y kakrit* is the term applied to edibles that are not from the garden, that is, forest edibles. *Djw`y kakrit* is also applied to industrialised food that is not very nutritious, like cream crackers (*bà kam* means ‘from the forest’).

¹³⁹ This term is used more commonly than *katàt* in this context. *Djwynh* is also used, especially in exclamations.

¹⁴⁰ Some parts of specific game are held to be the *kukradjà* (‘wealth’, or ‘knowledge’). The term, in this case, refers to a ‘right’ certain people have in relation to specific parts of the dead game. This is usually, albeit not necessarily, followed by hunters, who upon hunting down a large animal would call people to go get their portions from the animal. There is, of course, a pragmatic side to this practice as well as a moral one: large game, like tapir, or wild pig, or even the forest deer, cannot be transported back to the village by one (or even two) people alone, as hunting spots are usually fairly distant from the village. Historically, the game that has the most defined repartition of *kukradjà* parts is the largest

Applied to food, *kakrit* seems to denote a low capacity of nurturance, both in the physiological sense (non-nutritious food, or food which is not enough to nurture one), and in the social sense, of food that is not enough to be shared. The use of *kakrit* to designate food that does not come from the garden is quite revealing, as gardens are the prototypical basis of nurturance. *Kakrit* can also be used interchangeably with *kaàk* in some contexts, especially those involving the qualification of inanimate things: a home-made broomstick, for instance, made by *Mebengokré* with forest materials can be said to be either a *kapõn djà kakrit* or a *kapõn djà kaàk*. In the first sense it implies that it is just a grotesque imitation of the ‘real thing’ (industrialised broomsticks, which came to be known by *Mebengokré* before home-made ones in the villages where I did my fieldwork); in the second case, it denotes something that keeps a resemblance to the ‘real thing’ so that it can be used in its stead. *Kaàk* (and *kaigó*, depending on the context of the comparison) can be used for objects instead of *kakrit*, but *kakrit* is seldom, if ever, used in place of *kaàk* (or *kaigó*) when applied to people. Or at least to people with whom one maintains some sort of contact. Non-*Mebengokré* Indians who have adopted the ways of whitemen are called *kuben kakrit*¹⁴².

In terms of people’s relationships, *kaàk*, *kaigó*, and *kakrit* denote a comparison with those relationships that obtain within the circle of people with whom is in most

of all, the tapir. Nowadays, even the relatively small deer (which was held to be an alimentary taboo for men in old times) has its kukradjà parts.

¹⁴¹ Pidj`y is a general term for fruit (pi means ‘tree’ or ‘wood’).

¹⁴² Kuben is a term used to denote all non-*Mebengokré*, including other Indigenous peoples, as long as they do not resemble *Mebengokré* in their ways of living, aesthetics, etc. With the intensification of contact with the national society, though, the term came to be applied primarily (although not exclusively) to whitemen. It is used also to denote those peoples a particular *Mebengokré* group is at odds with, and in this sense it has been applied by some of the *Mebengokré* groups to other, enemy *Mebengokré* (the *Mebengokré-Mekragnoti*, for instance, used to be called Kubenkragnoti by their enemies *Mebengokré-Gorotire*, during their internecine wars until the 1960s). Today the term is applied, unqualified, to whitemen more than to other Indigenous peoples (black people are called *kuben t`yk*, after the word for ‘blue-black’, and white foreigners - usually European or North American,

intimate terms. The qualities being compared are those of sociability, i.e., basically the capacity to nurture one another and the capacity to live with each other without creating any unsuitable emotional state. In one sentence, they are compared in terms of the capacity to live well together, in *Mebengokré* terms. Accordingly, the qualification attributed to any particular person by another will change according to the state of their mutual relationship. One of my friends once referred to a *bikwá* of his (a *ngêt*, or ‘uncle/grandfather’) as an *ombikwá kaigó*. He explained to me that his family had fought with him, because of a love affair between his sister’s husband and the man’s daughter. When my friend’s sister found about the affair she beat the other woman up, and the latter’s mother retaliated by cutting her fingers with a machete. Retaliation brought more retaliation, and my friend’s family moved to the other village. “I used to call him my *ngêt*”, my friend explained me, “but not any longer. He is *kaigó*, he is *punure* (bad/ugly). He is not my true (*kumrentx*) *ngêt*, he is a *ngêt kaigó*”. A *ngêt* should be convivial in certain ways; once this particular *ngêt* ceased to be convivial, he became a *kaigó*. The term *kaigó* is used in the case of relationships between people in a highly pejorative sense.

Another important aspect of such qualifications is related to giving and getting things from each other. Vidal (1977: 54-55, my translation), who did research in Cateté village from 1969 to 1972, says that:

The adjective kumren, ‘true’, has also another connotation. Kumren relatives are those that give, ‘kaok relatives do not give anything’, they exchange (aben-payn). Thus, a man will consider a classificatory sister, kanikwoi kaok (by opposition to a ‘real’ sister, kanikwoi djuoy) as a kanikwoi kumren, true sister, when she gives him beiju and bananas and applies to him fumigations in case of sickness.

Vidal points here to a fundamental characteristic of *Mebengokré* sociality: to be a *kumrentx* relative/friend is to be able to give and to get things from one another. One important aspect of giving and getting things from other *kumrentx* relatives/friends is that the person who thus behaves wants to show to other people either one's generosity or one's access to other people's material things. One gets from another not because one has given to him/her, but to show that one is on good terms with that person¹⁴³. This was illustrated to me by children in Cateté village, always looking for something for me to give to them, no matter what, as an expression of affect - even if it was something I had just thrown away, something perfectly useless, both to me and to them. They would get this perfect useless object, and bring it back to me so that I could give it to them. Then they would proclaim to the whole village that I liked them so much - and would throw the object away.

Despite those distinctions, *õmbikwá* can be used as an all-inclusive qualification: in its most inclusive use, all *Mebengokré* (even those that live in faraway villages, with whom one has no contact) are *õmbikwá* to one another. At this level, it denotes the theoretical possibility of conviviality with all people that knows, at least *in potentia*, how to live with one another (that is, all *Mebengokré*)¹⁴⁴. A less inclusive use has as *õmbikwá* all those living in the two *Mebengokré* villages of Cateté and *Djudjêkô*. The term here expresses a concrete possibility of conviviality, as people are always moving back and forth between both villages, and are always engaged in activities (ceremonial and otherwise) involving their inhabitants. Those with whom one is in friendly terms - that is, with whom one is able to get things in exchange for others - are

distinctive aesthetics and ways of living are frequently called *Mebengokré* kaàk.

¹⁴³ It goes without saying that this is besides one's desire for the thing itself being gotten.

õmbikwá in a stronger sense, and for those the term *õmbikwá kaàk* is more frequently used: they are ‘like *õmbikwá*’. But ‘real’ (*kumrentx, katàt*) *õmbikwá* are those with whom one does not exchange, but rather gives, and gets from, without creating any ill-feeling between them. This is, as people would stress repeatedly, the ‘true way’ of being human - that is, of being *Mebengokré*. To strive for humanity is to create conviviality, and in this respect, *Mebengokré* political philosophy can be aptly described as one whose main concern is to create a unity out of people that are not ‘real’ *õmbikwá* but who find a way to live together by creating a state of affairs that is suitably similar to ‘the real thing’. One can say that the central political issue is to create a single group out of a multitude of smaller, familial groups. The group thus created, that is, the village, ‘looks like’ the familial groups that compose it. The village is conceived as an icon of familial groups, as well as composed by it: it is a fractal of the familial groups that are comprised by it. The same way that, at village level, relations between people are continuously created by people’s agency, the village itself has to be continuously created, and ceremonies are a way to do so. This is, I believe, why *Mebengokré* ‘ceremonial season’ tends to expand so as to encompass the whole time that people actually live together in the same village. Through ceremonies, people create a state of affairs at village level that, although qualitatively different from the conviviality within familial groups, can stand in its place for all intents and purposes of village life.

Mebengokré semiotics of relatedness - or kinship, if one wants to use this rather self-contradictory term - thus goes against Lévi-Strauss’ notion that it is the possibility of exchange that establishes and expresses relations between groups of people. As Vilaça (2002, and before her Overing 1996, and others) has stated, agency is

¹⁴⁴ Those with whom one has not even the theoretical possibility of conviviality - such as other

an essential component of kinship, in the sense that people may become kin by engaging in certain sorts of relations with another. Relations performed in the context of *Mebengokré* ceremonies involve feeding each other, acting together with others, amusing one another - in other words, acting towards one another in a way that's suitably similar to that which obtains within the domestic group. The *Mebengokré* state that 'kin' (*ombikwá*, also meaning 'friend') should be able to get things freely from each other, without causing any sort of undesirable feeling. This is usually the practice among those that have been brought up together. At the level of 'fac-similar' relations, though, what is expected is that people act towards each other not in the same way - which would be unrealistic - but in a suitably similar way. Thus, an *ombikwá kaàk* ('fac-similar' *ombikwá*) will be able to get things from another, but will give away things in the place of those he or she got. This classical 'reciprocal' relation is considered suitably similar to the 'real thing' that obtains among *ombikwá katàt*, not because it places something in the place of the thing got by one, but because one is able to get things in this way from people that one has not been brought up with, people that are not from one's circle of intimacy. In sum, this is morally and aesthetically 'good/beautiful' (and also useful, the three notions coming together in *Mebengokré* thought) not because it involves reciprocity but in spite of it.

But there is another, more subtle aspect to this dialectics between familial and village convivialities. *Mebengokré* stress that ceremonies are the kernel (or rather one of the kernels, together with names and language - both of which are related to ceremonies) of *Mebengokré*-ness, or human-ness. It is because they have ceremonies that they are fully human, and ceremonies are essential for the continuous production

Indigenous peoples - are sometimes referred to, jokingly, as *ōmbikwá kakrit*: a grotesque of the *ōmbikwá*.

and reproduction of such humanity in people. Village life is essential for the ongoing production of humanity, and without villages *Mebengokré* humanity would slowly drift away towards non-*Mebengokré* forms of life, which, as such, are not fully human¹⁴⁵. One's humanity is no safe haven. If village life is but a fractal of multiple familial groups, and village conviviality but a suitable substitute for familial conviviality, it is nevertheless village life that allows for the continued existence of familial groups. The former may be a *kaàk* of the latter, but it is one without which the latter would not be *katàt*. In other words, 'kinship' would not exist without 'polity', even though the latter cannot be distinguished from a morality and aesthetics: the morality and aesthetics of living together. In order to understand kinship, one needs to understand, first and foremost, *Mebengokré* political philosophy.

Ceremonies, and the relationships they establish, constitute icons of the relationships that obtain within the circle of people in most intimate terms with each other. But, as is always the case with icons, the elements of the latter that are picked up as similar to the former are a particular choice among many possible alternatives. In this sense - and only in this sense - ceremonies can be said to be a comment on the relatedness between individuals in intimate terms with each other. This 'comment' is not intellectual abstraction but social practice, in the form of performance. There is a distinctive element of performance in *kaàk* relations as constituted and expressed in ceremonies. Ceremonies provide moments when familial-like relatedness prevail in the village, something which is expressed in the pervasive drive towards harmony that are *me toro*, from bodily and vocal rhythm (songs and dances) to the harmonisation of

¹⁴⁵ In this sense I think that Viveiros de Castro's () opposition between human, animal and spirit beings, if applied to *Mebengokré*, would mis-represent the process of ongoing creation of humanity propitiated by ceremonies, as it does not contemplate the flux-like aspect of humanity, portraying

individual efforts into collective tasks. In this sense, ceremonies are a blueprint for everyday sociality. Using Nelson Goodman's (1967) discussion on denotation, one can say that ceremonies effect a transit from label-denotation to sample-denotation.

Now, if the anthropologist looks at this relationship through the analytical lens of reciprocity theories, and by means of analytical cleveages such as that between the 'domestic' and the 'public', s/he will be able to build a very tidy, neat theory of sociality from the data - and will also be missing the important point about it. This is not that reciprocity should obtain in social relations, but that the relations should not cause ill-feeling in the individuals involved. *Mebengokré* social philosophy is a social psychology, in the sense that relations between individuals are thought of from the point of view of the feelings and emotions involved. They do not relinquish their individual autonomy for the sake of a 'common good' epitomised in social relations involving reciprocity. Rather, they develop technologies (of speech, etc) to harmonise their drives and appetites in order to realise them - individually. Relations between persons, in sum, are not social but individual. But the feelings and emotions involved in them are collective, and are moulded as such, as it will be seen in the following chapters. This is the concern of their ceremonial life. And to be able to perform ceremonies together with other people is a synonym with living in the same village with other people. The emphasis of their philosophy is not on the individual will to evaluate and decide based on one's apprehension of the world, but on ways to make one's aims, drives, and appetites resonant with others', in order to accomplish each individual aim, drive and appetite. In this sense, reciprocity, the way we anthropologists understand it, would be considered morally (and aesthetically) 'bad', as there is no common good to appeal to.

'human', animal', and 'spirit' as definite ontological categories. *Mebengokré* see human-ness as a process, for whose achievement one has to strive restlessly, or else drift away towards non-humanity.

No rational social contract is involved in the creation of social life, but the search for technologies that educate one's emotions, feelings, and sentiments towards others so that they can find life with others enjoyable and beneficial. This whole process is one of becoming *Mebengokré*, that is, of becoming fully human. Emotions, feelings and sentiments, thus, are the object of technologies which build them in a collective whole. As such, they can not be distinguished from thought and cognition: they are the stuff *Mebengokré* social philosophy is made of, a *techné* of socialisation of affect.

Life at the village level is thus seen as a fac-similar of life among the most intimate group of conviviality: something that, for some intents and purposes at least, can be in the place of the original state of affairs that obtain within this most intimate circle of people. One can see here how misleading a distinction between the 'domestic' and the 'public' can be in this context. *Mebengokré* conceive life at the village 'level' as a fractal of that within each individual's most intimate group. Village life is ideally an icon of life within the manifold intimate groups that compose it. A whole that resembles (in many ways) the manifold wholes 'of lesser order' that are comprised in it.

It should be clear that the picture I have tried to show here can only be arrived at by taking into consideration the specific value of *Mebengokré* individual autonomy and conceptions of 'the social state', and by confronting it with our anthropological concepts, permeated as they are by the Machiavellian cleavage between morality and polity. By using a set of analytical categories that do not reflect the specific values of Amazonian socialities, Vilaça (quoted in the beginning of this section) has actually relegated her own data to the outskirts of her analysis, as if she was in fact addressing the concerns of anthropologists rather than Amazonian peoples'. The theory thus constructed can be rather coherent according to anthropological theory, that is, if

Amazonian peoples' concerns are not played out dialogically against anthropological theories as philosophies in their own right, but simply regarded as representations discernible through the analytical lens of the anthropologist. The problem here, of course, is that such coherence does not necessarily translate itself into relevance for the 'subjects' of the analysis. If one is in search of the latter, one has to concern oneself with the specific hue of Amazonian social lives - with the values they accord to living together, and with ways to make them conversant with our anthropological theories.

Chapter Three

Public Mourning and O'amak: Creating Relatedness Through Emotion

The knowledge of good and bad is simply the emotion of joy [laetitia] or sadness [tristitia], in so far as we are conscious of it.

A true knowledge of good and bad cannot, in so far as it is true, restrain any emotion; it can do so only in so far as it is considered as an emotion.
Spinoza, Ethics, part IV, props. 8 & 14

A Performance of Sadness

While the men are dancing, the ngêt ('grandfathers/uncles') of the children being celebrated in the ceremony go to the men's house, soon followed by the latter's mothers, who are now beginning to paint the children for the female ceremony. It is about lunchtime, and the dancing rows of men already show the strain of several hours' dancing in quick pace. Now, most women, old and young, go to the men's house as well, wearing their anatto body paintings, and arm- and leg-bands. They are all painted red with urucu, their bodies covered with orenōkré (the tick layer of white fibre that covers the kernel of some palms) and their heads white with àk àrà (white vulture's down). They bring now their nekrei (ceremonial regalia) to the men's house to adorn their daughters for the dance. While the celebrated children are getting ready, diligently adorned by their mothers with a profusion of feathers and urucu, the older women sit in the floor in a circle and sing several songs, one after the other. They sing for some ten to fifteen minutes, and now Bemoti, the old ceremonial leader, who has been sitting on the men's house's wall, appreciating the women's songs, rouses as if to speak - and starts to cry. He does so in the high-pitched tune characteristic of women and elders, a pungent lament during which he mentions several people that are long dead. Almost instantly, the older women, loosely gathered in the men's house, start crying with him, and some younger women follow them. The high-pitched wailing fills the silent plaza, where all men have already stopped dancing and approached the men's house. They do not cry; nevertheless they are all greatly touched by the collective show of grief, most of them bearing faces visibly on the verge of tears. They all stay still, as the younger women do, each one of them avoiding eye contact with others. No other sound is to be heard in the plaza, as indeed in the whole village, which seems to be all here, in the centre, each person grieving one's dead. This goes on for some quarter of an hour, during which many a man discretely sweeps away the tears that flow down his face. They now stop and the older women, a deep sorrow stamped in their faces, sing again their songs, which seem to ring more sad this time. After some ten minutes, when they stop, Bemoti stands again in the centre of the men's house, his powerful voice, now in its usual baritone pitch, filling the plaza with a ceremonial discourse. He spoke for some time, addressing the women now and then about practical matters of the

ceremony. He also addressed people at large occasionally. He spent some 2 hours in that.

The extract above, taken from my field notes, displays both the ethnographic and the theoretical subjects I will explore within this chapter. It aims at describing the way emotions - and more specifically 'grief' and 'longing' - are created and managed among the *Mebengokré*, along with discussing the issue of legitimacy in the anthropological appreciation of what we call *Mebengokré* emotions/feelings/sentiments/moods. In relation to the former, ethnographic issue, I will argue that it is through this process, and others similar to it, that bonds are established among people, something that, I contend, is conversant with their conceptions of what we would call 'the social', or society. It focuses on the public wailing for dead relatives, something that occurs during the chain of ceremonies they perform every year, and is an integral part to them. The lament described above is only one instance among the several ways the *Mebengokré* have to create and maintain emotional states that are collective in nature. Their ceremonial life is actually very much concerned in explicitly creating such emotional states, which are seen as links binding autonomous individuals to each other.

The legitimacy issue I want to discuss in this chapter is also closely related to the one above. I shall maintain that the *Mebengokré* material unfolded here provides the basis for a critique of traditional anthropological approaches to ritual which dismiss emotion as a private, internal reality which is to be opposed to the external enactment of ritual. This position, to my knowledge, springs from Durkheim, for whom "...mourning is not a natural movement of private feeling, wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group... It is a ritual attitude, which [one] is forced to adopt out of

respect for custom, but which is, in a large measure, independent of his affective state” (Durkheim 1915: 397). A similar position can be seen in Victor Turner’s opposition between inward, sensory and outward, behavioural ‘poles’ of the ritual symbol, of which only the latter is relevant for anthropological analysis.¹⁴⁶ The core assumption of these approaches, to my view, is that ‘duty’, ‘custom’, ‘obligation’ are the basic stuff of which the social state is made of, so to speak - and that they are both distinct and (relatively, at least) independent of ‘internal’ emotional states.

I will argue here that, although Durkheim’s, and Turner’s (and, generally speaking, most ritual theorists’) insights on the close relation between people’s emotional states and social states in the enactment of ritual are in principle applicable to *Mebengokré* data, analyses based in their theoretical outlook are seriously hampered by the metaphysical background (both moral and aesthetic) of those theories. They have as their cornerstone twin ontological notions of human being and of society, which are heavily dependent on each other. On one side we find ‘human beings’ who are bounded universes of inner experience; on the other side, we find ‘societies’ that are, in the classical Durkheimian definition, ‘outside and above’ the individuals that constitute it, and which sets and reinforces rules for their (outer) behaviour.

¹⁴⁶ Turner (1967: 28; 33; 36-37). Levy (1982: 216) elaborates on this point, stating that, according to Turner, for the anthropologist analysing rituals “ (...) it is enough that the symbols should evoke emotion. [Turner] is interested in the fact that emotion is evoked and not in the specific qualities of its constituents (...) In other words, the anthropologist treats the sensory pole of meaning as a constant, and the social and ideological aspects as variables whose interdependencies he seeks to explain.” Turner himself (1967: 33) is clear enough about the (supposedly) universal referential relation of ritual symbols to ‘society’, when he states that for the anthropologist “(...) the ritual symbol is primarily a factor in group dynamics, and, as such, its references to groups, relationships, values, norms, and beliefs of a society are his principal item of study”. As it will be seen in this chapter, I contest this statement in full, beginning with the notion that ‘society’ has necessarily to do with such things as ‘groups’, ‘relationships’, etc. down to the very referential relationship between ‘symbols’ and ‘society’.

To my view, this distinction is nowhere trickier than when it is applied to the experience and expression of emotions in ritual. Here it establishes a sort of schizophrenia between inner and outer, experience and expression, feeling and performance, which, when brought together in the enactment of ritual, produce 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim) or 'communitas' (Turner), characteristically temporary states (not unlike schizophrenic fits) when both terms of the equation are brought together to their further mutual reinforcement.

In the light of what I was able to learn in my fieldwork, both 'universals' ('human beings' and 'society') seem rather unsatisfactory as such, and nowhere this has become clearer to me than in the ceremonial enactment of emotion, which I describe in this chapter. I had my attention called to it due not only to the obvious importance that *Mebengokré* accord to it - as their ceremonies are explicitly about creating emotional states - but also due to the strangeness that this specific part of the ceremony - the ceremonial show of sadness - provoked on me. After all, although fieldworkers usually start their fieldwork (in a cultural setting different from one's own, that is) more or less expecting to find strangeness in the general field of cognition and intellect, having been trained for years to expect it (and sometimes inoculated against it by their training), one more or less expects one's emotions to be conversant with those of other people, even though both their causes and their outcomes may differ. But the time I spent with the *Mebengokré* taught me otherwise. They have taught me that both *Mebengokré* 'individual' and *Mebengokré* 'society' cannot be taken for granted as ontological realities, the way we usually take them to be. I believe that the contact with *Mebengokré* world of emotions was fundamental to my grasping this diverse reality. As I said before, one can be reasonably inoculated against the strangeness of other's thoughts by

anthropological theory, to the point of easily finding place for it in one's analytical chest of drawers. But this is much harder in relation to emotions. In this chapter I will describe the result of my being confronted with the strangeness of *Mebengokré* feelings, emotions, and sentiments, trying to convey, in the form of theoretical critique, those glimpses of *Mebengokré* humanness and sociality that I was able to achieve in the field.

I deliberately chose not to expose it as an existential journey because - as every anthropologist who has done fieldwork in a cultural setting different from one's own more or less intuitively knows - the journey from one's feeling of strangeness to its description is not accomplished solely on the road of feeling and experience. This is a two-way road, and one needs to go back and forth in it, through both lanes of feeling and of intellect, of experience and of cognition, from oneself to others, as many times as necessary to be able to grasp some of the significance and distinctiveness of the road itself. Experience is no more one's own experience, divorced from one's engagement with the world and with people in the world, than being is in itself, without the world with which this being engages itself. As anthropologist, a large part of my experience of the strangeness that I described above consisted of my questioning key theoretical presuppositions of the discipline. No narrative of such experience would be honest if it did not include such questioning. To represent it as a purely 'existential' quest in the narrowest sense of the term - that which posits an 'existence' divorced from the world in which such existence exists: for instance, my existence as an abstract human being divorced from the fact that this human being happens to be an anthropologist doing fieldwork, concerned with matters such as anthropological theory, and actively engaged in a quest for the understanding of another people's ways of being in the world - does not enrich one's description. Rather, it makes it poorer.

I mention these issues here not (only) as a theoretical *parti-pris*, but (also) because it bears strongly on the matter being dealt herewith. What I am set to question in the following pages is the universal ontological status of human experience of emotions, feelings, moods, and sentiments. I will do so neither by means of a wide-range comparison drawing from bibliographical ethnographic sources, nor by playing different theoretical sources against each other. The comparison affected here is that one constituent of fieldwork as such, where one tries to engage one's existential outlook (in the broadest sense of the term) with another's'. This is a process motivated by one's sensation of displacement related to some particular aspect of one's engagement into an unfamiliar world, and propelled by one's desire of coming to terms with such displacement, in the form of a quest for the understanding of the strangeness behind such displacement. The way I have conceived for my particular quest involved the questioning of Western theories on the status of emotions, feelings, and sentiments. It is in this sense that I have introduced such discussion below. My intention is not to compare 'non-Western folk theories' on emotion with 'Western specialised theories' on the same subject. Rather, it is to convey for an anthropological audience how I came to understand something about *Mebengokré* emotions, sentiments, and feelings. This process involved a re-examination of my own 'folk' presuppositions concerning emotions, as well as a critique of current theories on the subject, and it is in this sense that I want them to be understood in the discussion below. In fact, the terms of the above opposition are rather ill-defined. *Mebengokré* emotions are object of highly specialised knowledge - ceremonial knowledge like that described in this chapter being essentially complex *tekné* for the production of emotions - and the degree to which Western 'folk' and 'specialised' knowledges on emotions can be distinguished (and even the very unity of 'Western' knowledges on the subject, be they 'folk'

or 'specialised') is rather obscure. Both points should become clear in the discussion below.

To put it in a nutshell, I intend here to question the universality of the idea that 'to feel' and 'to express' emotions are distinct processes, linked by a privileged relation which establishes the authenticity of the emotion being expressed. I maintain that this idea is linked to a large number of diverse (and not always mutually consistent) metaphysical presuppositions, both moral and aesthetic, that are typical to Western ways of thinking. I contend that for *Mebengokré*, experience and performance of emotions should not be analytically distinguished, lest one intentionally misrepresent *Mebengokré* ways of being-in-the-world to suit one's own ways of being-in-the-world. As performance, *Mebengokré* experience of emotions is primarily a collective affair, shaped into meaningfulness (in the strong sense of being made available to one's existential grounds as both authentic and relevant) by ceremonies, by which reason ceremonies constitute a privileged way of access to *Mebengokré* emotions. Different from the 'classical' Durkheimian approach to the issue, though, performances of emotions in ceremonies do not constitute indexes of a being called 'society', both distinct from and above individuals, but icons of individual relationships, interwoven so as to create (quite explicitly) a feeling of encompassing elation amongst those participating in the ceremony. Thus, inverting the Durkheimian paradigm, I maintain that relationships between people involved in the ceremonies are individual, whereas the emotions involved are social.

I am well aware that I am diving into muddy waters here, and that there are a few easy ways out of them. The reasons why I chose this specific way to convey what I have learned about *Mebengokré* emotions will be made clear throughout this chapter.

On the other hand, it may not be altogether clear for the reader the reasons why I have not chosen one of the easier ways out of such discussion. Accordingly, I will briefly sketch a few arguments concerning two of these most obvious ways out before starting off my main argument.

Probably the easiest way out of this discussion would be to silence about the collective quality of *Mebengokré* emotion and focus solely on its individual side. True enough, as the experience/expression of emotions presuppose individuals that experience/express them, one could easily describe them from the point of view of the individual alone. One could thus produce a truthful description of them, but such description would be lacking relevance. One cannot ignore the tremendous importance that the collective shaping of emotions has for *Mebengokré* social life. Ceremonies are explicitly described both by ceremonial specialists and by *Mebengokré* in general as dealing with the production of collective emotional states. A description of *Mebengokré* emotions that deliberately ignored this point would not be a honest account of the phenomenon.

Another way out would be to treat *Mebengokré*'s descriptions of emotions and their connection with ceremonies as 'local representations' of a universal phenomenon whose truth would be given by Western theories of emotions, and compare them with other 'folk theories' on the subject (Western or otherwise). This project would meet with a myriad of serious objections, not the least of them being the critique of such representational artifice as a modernist device that prevents the engagement in real dialogue with other peoples' worlds¹⁴⁷. This approach is also likely to fall into a Wittgensteinian-like bug-in-the-box trap, since it would have to define previously (or at

least to presuppose the possibility of such definition) what is an emotion in itself, independent of the language(s) that describes it (I expand on this topic in the discussion below).

It should be clear by now that my concern here is not ‘what are emotions’, or ‘feelings’, or ‘thoughts’, or ‘moods’, or ‘sentiments’, or any other Western category related to the issue. To start with such definition is to attribute to these categories a form of universality, an strategy which is always risky in an ethnography. The issue of whether, or to what extent, these categories can be said to hold true universally - or in relation to some non-Western peoples at any rate - does not concern me here. What concerns me is how a *Mebengokré* notion such as *o’amak* , the longing for an absent relative/friend, can be accessed by means of a discussion of the Western categories previously described, that is, how one set of notions can be conversant (or not) with the other. In my fieldwork, I have assumed that what the *Mebengokré* held to be the manifestations of *o’amak* are, loosely speaking, ‘emotions/sentiments/feelings/moods’. The *Mebengokré* themselves usually deployed the latter in relation to my own emotional states. But, as both the *Mebengokré* and myself frequently noticed, the correspondence was not an unproblematical one. It is in the discussion of the minutiae of such correspondences that I hope to convey a sense of what it is to be (or to have) *o’amak* . This, I believe, can only be (meaningfully) done by means of a description of the use of such notion in the situations where it arises.

¹⁴⁷ See McGrane (1989: 133-29) for a through critique of these rhetorical strategies.

Wearing their Hearts on their Sleeves: A Topology of Authenticity

Anthropologists and philosophers alike have increasingly questioned the received wisdom of both philosophy and psychology which sees emotion as something that is to be understood only in relation to the individual's internal disposition. The mainstream critique has been mainly concerned with the 'cultural' - that is, the 'constructed', as opposed to the 'innate' - character of emotions (Strathern 1977; Rosaldo 1982; Lutz 1988), the distinction and interrelation between emotions and cognition/thought (Solomon 1978, 1982; Greenspan 1980; Levy 1982; Leavitt 1996); and the linguistic expression of emotions (Rosaldo 1982b; Irvine 1993; Channell 1997). But very little or no thought has been given (to my knowledge) to actual processes of the social construction of emotions¹⁴⁸. I maintain that, for the *Mebengokré*, the process of creation and maintenance of emotions is, at the same time, a process of creation and maintenance of social life. For them, there does not seem to exist any opposition, or indeed difference between what we call by the names 'emotion' and 'social relations'. Furthermore, I shall argue that the issue is a moral/aesthetical one for the *Mebengokré*, which again sheds light on anthropology's own conceptions of 'social organisation' as based upon specific, Western moral outlooks. Indeed, it was through the analysis of *Mebengokré* aesthetics and ethics of emotion that I came to see the Durkheimian emphasis on 'role', 'duty', 'obligation', etc - which has become embedded in British social anthropology though Radcliffe-Brown's appropriation of Durkheimian thought - as related to a Kantian-style deontology, which has been emptied of its moral content but whose categories and basic notions - that is 'rules and obligations', basically - have been maintained by generations of anthropologists as the basic stuff of sociality.

¹⁴⁸ Harrison (2001) discusses seasonal patterns of mood and their significance against the background of Papua New Guinean Indigenous cosmology, although he does not describe the actual processes of creation of such seasonal moods,

Such approaches are dependent upon a (cultural) theory of emotion which is based on a distinction between inner experience and outer manifestation, relegating the former to the realm of physiology. Solomon (1982: 235), in his critique of the so-called Jamesian theory of emotions, makes the point that, according to this theory, “[t]he interpretation of emotions (including the basic interpretive act of naming and identifying one’s emotion) is quite distinct from the emotion itself, thus leaving the emotion proper outside the realm of anthropology.” One can see reflections of this theory both in Durkheim’s appraisal of mourning as a social constraint, and in Victor Turner’s conception of the bi-polarity of symbols, with the sensory pole characterised by emotional states, also outside easy reach of -and indeed not of interest for - anthropological analysis. Both approaches thus seem to be dependent upon an assumption that does not hold true for the *Mebengokré*.

In fact, I became interested in this subject in the field, when I realised how important it is for the *Mebengokré* to make clear, all the time, their emotional rapport to each other and to other, non-*Mebengokré* people. Although I come myself from a place where emotions are very easily expressed in everyday life, I was impressed by the extent to which the *Mebengokré* wear them on their sleeves. Emotional rapport is present in everyday talk and attitudes, such as in smiling, laughing together, holding another’s hand while speaking, showing concern for the other’s emotional states. Whenever I expressed longing for my daughters in the field, for instance, my friends would gather around me, ceaselessly elaborating through emotion talk my state of longing: how sad I was for being away from them, how long I had been without seeing them, how happy I would be when I met them. People would counsel me to bring them with me when I came back to the village, so as not to miss them so much, or that I

should bring more pictures of them (I had a couple of them, which I had difficulty to hold on to, as most people wanted to have them).

Mebengokré attitudes were easily noticed by those non-Indians working in the village, who would comment derisively that the *Mebengokré* were like children, always begging for emotion, for emotion is always at the surface of their social life, shown in facial and bodily expression, as well as in everyday discourse. A connection was usually established (by the non-Indian staff) between such ‘superficiality’ and the (frequent) sudden lapses in the friendly mood of *Mebengokré* in their relations with the non-Indian staff, caused whenever something coveted by the former was denied to them by the latter. Here the issue of authenticity would always be brought in, the *Mebengokré* being deemed ‘false’ and laden with self-regard in their show of emotional rapport towards the non-Indian staff and other *Mebengokré*¹⁴⁹. Outsiders would also comment on the peculiar *Mebengokré* reaction of anger, very familiar to them in general: when any *Mebengokré* happened to be angry with one of the non-Indian staff working in the village, he or she would go to the Indian Post and ‘throw’ his or her anger over one, marching back to the village afterwards. Most of the time, he or she would return to the Indian Post after some time (usually on the same day), behaving in an absolute friendly way towards the object of his or her earlier anger. The general comment by the non-Indian staff about such attitude was that people’s emotions were ‘not really felt deep within’. As similar attitudes were also easily observable in the relationships between the *Mebengokré* themselves, the general conclusion (of the non-Indian staff, that is) was that all *Mebengokré* are inconstant, superficial and false towards everybody, always moved by egoistic reasons.

¹⁴⁹ Similar attitudes could also be observed in their dealings with other *Mebengokré*.

By defining *Mebengokré* emotional reactions as ‘superficial’, the non-Indian staff in the village were engaging in their own folk psychology that distinguishes between an inner experience of emotion and its outer expression. According to this folk psychology, there exists an ‘inner self’ that is the seat of ‘authentic’ emotional experience. The distinction between experience and expression is a key feature of such a folk psychology, where authenticity becomes a specific relation between both domains, one in which there is an overt indexical correspondence between inner experience and outer manifestation of such emotion. Emotive reacting, being an expression of an ‘inner self’, is also viewed as an expression of self-interests, and as such morally reproachable. One can easily find here, lurking in the background of such folk psychology, an assumption with regard to the inappropriateness of the display of emotions in social exchange, although this was sometimes controversial in their appreciation of their own relations with the *Mebengokré*.

The judgements of authenticity put forward by the non-*Mebengokré* staff of the Indian post connected the issue of the display of emotions with issues of morality. Indeed, not only their ‘folk’ theories of emotions connect the issue to moral outlooks. The connection between Western notions of emotion and moral judgements has been noted by Lutz (1988: 70, emphasis omitted):

To say of individuals that they are acting emotionally is to say that they are acting on the basis of a personal interest which is inconsistent with the wider interest they ought to consider (...) Emotion (...) blinds the individual to judgements that she or he ought to make, causing thereby both a failure of perception and potential social disruption. As bias pushes individuals to pursue goals that accord only with their own views, the emotional, subjective person may thwart the attainment of more global, social, objectively determined, and valid goals.

In this conception, ‘to be emotional’ - i.e., ‘subjective’ - is to act on individual interest. One ought to act regardless of one’s own interests and aims, if one is to live in society. Individual goals are less valid than social ones. Impersonal goals are more objective, and thus more valid, than private ones. All these assumptions are in stark contrast to *Mebengokré* views of both emotions and morality. For them, sociality can only be attained if one pursues one’s individual goals. One acts when moved by one’s desires and cravings, in order to satisfy one’s appetites, and only if this is (ideally) achieved for each individual can the state of sociality be attained. Emotion, as a collective state, indicates individual desires and drives aim towards identical goals individually pursued by all, which are pursued not because one ought to, but because one so desires or craves to do so. There is no common goal as such in this metaphysics - or, in other words, no ‘common good’ towards whose accomplishment one ought to act regardless of one’s individual goals. The measure of communality between individuals is provided by the emotions themselves, and it is not surprising that the creation and management of emotions is seen as the primary goal of *Mebengokré* ceremonies, and not as their by-product.

There is yet another Western popular view of emotion/affect, which deems its centrality to morality, being in this sense opposed to the deontological view exposed above. Quoting Lutz (1988: 77) again, according to this Western view (forthcoming from romanticism), “[t]he centrality of affect to morality derives from the role of feelings in indexing the true self. If one’s heart is in the right place, one’s behaviour (however damaging to others) can be portrayed as justifiable and moral”. This romantic view suggests again the problem of authenticity in *Mebengokré* emotions, being in fact exactly the same expressed by the non-Indian staff in the village. According to the

latter, it is because *Mebengokré* lack a (causal) connection with an ‘inner experience’ - that is, because their emotions lie ‘at the surface’ of the self, and not ‘deep within’ it - that such emotions are ‘inauthentic’. The problem here is the location of the authenticity of emotion in the indexical relation with an inner state. I want to argue in this chapter that this location misses the point of the authenticity of *Mebengokré* emotion, which should be seen from the point of view of performance rather than that of inner experience. As such, it makes no sense for the *Mebengokré* to place authenticity in a relation with an ‘inner self’, the same way that it makes no sense to require from an actor, as a measure of the authenticity of his or her performance, that he or she indexed the performance in his or her inner experience of what is being performed. Which, of course, does not mean that they are not ‘felt’. Rather, one could say that their affective life is felt through performance - or, inverting the terms, that their performance of emotions is felt. But authenticity lies in the performance itself.

Authenticity does not need to be located in the indexical relation with an inner state, as can be seen in the role of the *Wolof* griot in expressing another person’s emotions (Irvine 1993: 154-55):

In the Wolof communicative system, the displayer of affect (or the person who expresses an idea) need not be the same person who supposedly possesses it. A griot may display emotion on behalf of a noble, to whom the emotion is attributed but who sits by impassively (...) the songs and wailing of the griots who serve as public mourners when an important person dies also expresses the family’s feelings in the same way (...) Again, although the discourse is charged with high affect, the speaker’s own feelings are not the ones being expressed (...)

In Irvine’s example, the disjunction between expression and experience - the one who expresses is not the one who feels - does not emasculate the authenticity of the display. The equation ‘self = inner’ does not hold for the assessment of the authenticity

of emotions in the *Wolof* griot case, as an indexical relation between inner and outer self is *not relevant at all* for such assessment.

This equation is common to both moral standpoints in the folk psychology of the non-Indian staff in the village. Whereas the deontological standpoint stresses the *inauthenticity* of moral action as index of *self*-interests, the sensationalist one stresses the *authenticity* of moral action as index of *inner* feelings. From this comparison a second opposition obtains, between *reasoned* interests and *experienced* feelings. This brings to light a second sense in which *Mebengokré* emotions were deemed ‘false’ by the non-Indian staff in the village. In their view, it is not only because *Mebengokré* expression of emotions did not index internal experiences that they were ‘false’; it is also because they indexed (reasoned) self-interests. The absence of an indexation to inner experience (‘superficiality’) was in itself an index of their indexation to reasoned self-interests (‘egoism’). I want to call attention here to the heavy metaphysical burden present in them, which among other things presuppose a whole Western conception of self in order to be stated.

I want to show here that, for the *Mebengokré*, what we would call ‘the surface’ expression of emotions, understanding it as an index of inner experience, is in fact much more complex - ‘deeper’, as it were - than our folk psychology would be willing to accept¹⁵⁰. This ‘surface’, which is in fact what is perceived by the observer in others, as well as what is shown by one to an observer, is, I believe, an index of the intersubjective relationship between individuals and that of the individual-in-the-collectivity. They presuppose as background a specific aesthetic as well as an ethic. The same way we would represent someone having an emotion as someone experiencing it within, for the

Mebengokré, I believe, such representation would be of one performing the emotion for an audience. In fact, we should not speak here of ‘expression of emotion’, as this representation presupposes an expression that is an index of an inner experience; and therefore I will refer to it as simply ‘emotion’ from now on.

Western conceptions of emotion and self pose considerable problems to the ethnographic description of *Mebengokré* emotional life, which, I maintain, is akin to what is usually called in anthropology their ‘social organisation’. Emotions are seen, in Western societies, not only as internal to individuals but also as not very controllable by them. One is prey to one’s emotions, as the latter happen more or less independent of one’s will. To describe emotions as created and maintained successfully at will could sound strange against the background of Western theories on the issue¹⁵¹. One of the main points of strangeness here has to do with the implicit value of emotions as more authentic than other forms of interaction, something that springs from the very conception of emotions as a non-controllable manifestation of the individual’s internal life. The analyst tends here to split the phenomenon into an internal experience and its external manifestation, attributing maximum authenticity to the former while putting the latter under suspicion, because tinted by reason and will and, as such, less authentic¹⁵². What is at stake here is the (Western) analytical distinction between ‘inner experience’ and ‘expression’, where the latter is viewed as (potentially) less authentic than the

¹⁵⁰ I owe this point, and others in the past paragraphs, to a discussion with Mark Harris on a previous version of this chapter.

¹⁵¹ Westerners, in fact, seem to have a folk notion of such control (which, to my - rather impressionistic - knowledge, is much more articulated in Anglo-Saxon countries than in Latin ones), which is not handled well on the theory side.

¹⁵² Again, this is actually very strong in British ‘folk’ notions of emotion and authenticity, but not only so: one has only to remember that the whole of psychoanalytic therapy is based on the access to unreasoned external indexes of inner emotional and affective processes. ‘Rationalisation’ in psychoanalysis is synonym to inauthenticity.

former¹⁵³. Lutz (1988: 56), in her analysis of Western understandings of ‘emotion’ and ‘thought’, notices that

...the essence of both emotion and thought are to be found within the boundaries of the person; they are features of individuals, rather than of situations, relationships, or moral positions (...) thought and emotion also share the quality of being viewed as more authentic realities and more truly the repository of the self in comparison with the relative inauthenticity of speaking and other forms of interaction.

One can see here how the issue of authenticity is closely connected with that of conceptions of the individual and the self. Both emotions and thoughts are seen as more authentic because they are internal to the individual. The ‘inner self’ is regarded as a source of authenticity, in opposition to expressive forms, which are subjected to one’s volition and thus open to manipulations and to falsehood. The problem here is that this division does not apply to the *Mebengokré*, who seem to conceive of emotions as that which is shown to the eye of the beholder. Emotions, for the *Mebengokré*, are a primarily aesthetic phenomenon, not in the sense that they are neo-platonically roused (from the inner self, as it were) by the contemplation of beauty, but because ‘to feel’ is ‘to express’ to the eyes of others¹⁵⁴.

It is important to note here that such an aesthetic outlook also implies a moral judgement for the *Mebengokré*: The display of longing (*o’amak*) is also morally good (*méx*), and this is an important aspect of the authenticity of the ceremonial lament/wailing. It is moral precisely because it shows itself as such. This is in stark contrast to common Western conceptions (both ‘folk’ and philosophical conceptions) of

¹⁵³ Lévi-Straus, of course, has a completely opposed view on this issue.

¹⁵⁴ Michelle Rosaldo (1982:142) seems to make a similar point in relation to the Illongot of the Philippines, when she states that, for them, there is no distinction between an autonomous inner life as opposed to life in-the-world.

the authenticity of moral agency, whereby the moral character is preferentially attributed to actions that do not display the intent of being primarily moral in themselves. The philosopher Flint Schier (1987: 123) makes this point clearly:

In fact we display a marked preference for what we might call 'natural' moral beauty, for the display of excellent character as an unintended side-effect of actions with other aims (artistic, moral or whatever). Indeed the key feature in the appreciation of moral excellence is admiration for the motive displayed in the act. So inevitably the perception of histrionic intent dilutes rather than strengthens our aesthetic delight. An act can hardly be, for example, an expression of benevolence if its main purpose is to dazzle the onlooker with the actor's benevolence.

This appreciation offers a happy double contrast with the *Mebengokré* outlook of the aesthetics of the moral agency, as, I believe, it is precisely because their aesthetic perception of the display of emotions is not based on the contemplation of beauty of the act as unintended (in terms of the display of morality), but rather on the appreciation of the showing of 'goodness' itself in the act - in Schier's rather biased terms, not on its 'naturalness' but on the 'histrionics' of it - that the *locus* of its authenticity is not in the relation with an inner experience but on the propriety - one might say, on the seemliness - of its performance as an example of 'goodness'. In Schier's understanding, a moral action must be one that is performed without regard for the agent's private aims. Thus, moral beauty can only be aesthetically contemplated in agency when the latter is not intended as a show of such moral quality. Aesthetic contemplation comes from seeing such moral quality as an outer, unintended manifestation of an inner moral character that do not show itself in the action but rather reveals itself (unintentionally, as it were) through it. Thus, if the explicit intention of the agent is to display morality in the action, the action cannot be, *ab definitio*, a moral one. Contrariwise, in *Mebengokré* aesthetic of moral agency, a moral action is beautiful because it explicitly shows itself as such, in an

effective way¹⁵⁵. Morality here is not seen as an index of qualities of the inner self, but rather as performance, that is, it is placed within the display itself. Authenticity is thus not in this indexical relation to an ‘inner self’, but in one’s intention to display the morally good, as well as the aesthetically beautiful, in one’s performance.

This is present not only in the display of what we call ‘emotions/feelings/sentiments/moods’ but is a pervasive quality of the aesthetics and morality of agency in *Mebengokré* social life. Upon arriving in a *Mebengokré* village one is immediately impacted with the ‘performatic’ character of *Mebengokré* everyday life. Apart from the intimacy of family dwellings, actions are, as it were, enacted for an audience, in a non-stop string of performances that dazzles the outsider by its insistence and recurrence. It is as if one’s whole life, at the village level, was not only lived but played out. In this sense, ceremonies (*me toro*) are an epitome of social life, or, to use philosopher Nelson Goodman’s jargon, exemplars of everyday life, as they are actively and explicitly performed for audiences.

Goodman (1976: 53) defines exemplification as the possession of a property plus a reference to what is being exemplified. Exemplification differs from simple denotation by being a two-way process, implying reciprocal reference between the example and that of which it is an example (1976: 59). I think this applies nicely to *Mebengokré* ceremonies as examples of sociality. When enacted, ceremonies not only

¹⁵⁵ Jamieson (2000: 92, footnote 25) states that for the Kakabila inhabitants of whom he describes a ceremonial wailing, what is important in the lament is the production of an appropriate aesthetics. He then goes on to state that, in the performance, the performers are aware that it is a performance, although they don’t show it to the audience. I will develop this point further below in this chapter in my discussion of Urban, but I would say here that, for the *Mebengokré*, although they are aware that the lament is a performance, they do not need to show it to others, as everybody is equally aware if it. Furthermore, as will be made explicit below, this does not imply that the performance is less authentic as an emotional experience because of that. I would nevertheless agree with Jamieson, for slightly different reasons, that what is important (for *Mebengokré* ceremonial wailing at any rate) is to produce an appropriate aesthetic manifestation. This will become clear below.

refer to a moral good in terms of the way people should live together with each other; they also are referred by it, as this very same social state is created by ceremonies. To understand *Mebengokré* ceremonies, one has to dive into what they exemplify, instead of simply into what they denote.

Ceremonies are over-beautifications, as well as over-‘moralisations’ of an state of everyday being-in-the-world , attained both by a maximisation of aesthetic agency (visual and auditive) in the form of adornments, songs and dances; and by the maximisation of moral agency, in the form of the acting out of the moral performances of giving and getting. As such, they create the very reality they exemplify. It is in this frame, I believe, that the intensification of the moral/aesthetic performance of emotions should be understood.

Emotion and Reference: From Ontology to Language

I would like to make clear here that my use of the term ‘emotion’ does not intend to assume the universality of the phenomenon. Rather, it is an easy way to identify what is being talked about, both by myself here and by the *Mebengokré* when we discussed the issue. Leavitt (1996: 516-17) touches this point when he states that

Anthropologists (...) sometimes criticise what they see as the Western concept of emotion (...) but, interestingly, they do not cease to use the word or the concept itself (...) While anthropologists in their role as theorists have tended to produce models that assimilate emotion to either feeling or meaning, anthropologists as practising ethnographers continue to rely on the unstated assumptions of everyday usage. While it goes against the hyperreflexivity of recent years, this may not be a bad thing.

The real interest of such identification, in my case, is to let *Mebengokré* lived experience pose challenges to the theoretical standpoints of anthropological (and philosophical, and psychological) theory. Going back to my main point here, how can

we understand ‘emotion’ as conflating experience (for oneself) and performance (for others)? In keeping with this conception, the main focus here will be on the visible, aesthetic aspects of the creation of *o’amak*, or longing, in collective mourning, and I will make some considerations related to their ‘authenticity’, as I think the very issue, as it is put in Western thought, does not make sense to the *Mebengokré*. I believe that, for the *Mebengokré*, a true emotion is one that is truly displayed. In this sense, emotion is performance, and it is as such that public mourning will be treated here. There is implicit here the idea that the authenticity of the emotion is in the authenticity of its performance, an idea that also involves moral notions related to the ‘goodness’ of the emotion, that is, to the moral value of the emotional performance. Moreover, collective *o’amak* has a constructive side to it. As Leavitt (1996: 527) states, “affective or felt associations, like semantic ones, are collective as well as individual; they operate through common or similar experience among members of a group living in similar circumstances, through cultural stereotyping of experience, and through shared expectations, memories, and fantasies”. For *Mebengokré*, collectively felt *o’amak* actually creates the group that feels - that is, that performs - together, by means of shared memories, experiences, and emotion itself.

The point here is that , to my view, the terms we use to describe ‘emotion’ are not vocabularies applied, as descriptive terms, to ‘something out there’ (or ‘within there’). This latter is an approach which is itself connected with Western metaphysical views of the self. Making the issue one of referentiality in this sense, implies the assumption of a cultural model of emotions and of the self. One example of this is Needham’s (quoted in Lutz 1988:67) view of ‘vocabularies of emotion’ as inherently wrong about the way they describe them, because emotions are ‘natural’ (and thus

‘universal’), being unaffected by culture-specific descriptions. His statement is dependent upon an ontology of the self which attributes to emotions an ontological reality in and of itself (‘natural and universal’), independent of the ‘culture-specific’ notions used to ‘describe’ them¹⁵⁶. The English writer, Aldous Huxley (1953: 131-33), has expressed (more elegantly) essentially the same view when he takes ‘love’ as a descriptive term applied to internal realities:

...people will write in the existing language, and their writing will be, in consequence, more or less completely misunderstood by most of their readers. Inevitably, because the words they use don't correspond to the things they are talking about. Most of them are words taken from everyday language (...) Let's take the commonest word in all religious literature: 'love'. Love on the human level means - what? Practically everything from Mother to the Marquis de Sade (...) We don't even make the simple Greek distinction between eras and philo, eros and agape. With us everything is just love, whether it's self-sacrificing or possessive, whether it's friendship or lust or homicidal lunacy. It's all just love (...) Idiotic word! Even on the human level it's hopelessly ambiguous. And when you begin using it in the level of eternity - well, it's simply disastrous. 'The love of God'. 'God's love for us'. 'The saint's love for his fellows'. What does the word stand for in such phases? And in what way is this related to what it stands for when it's applied to a young mother suckling her baby? or to Romeo climbing into Juliet's bedroom? or to Othello as he strangles Desdemona? or to the research worker who loves his science? or to the patriot who is ready to die for his country - to die and, in the meantime, to kill, steal, lie, swindle and torture for it? Is there really anything in common between what the word stands for in these contexts and what it stands for when one talks, let us say, of the Buddha's love for all sentient beings? Obviously, the answer is: No, there isn't. On the human level, the word stands for a great many different states of mind and ways of behaving. Dissimilar in many respects, but alike at least in this: they're all accompanied by emotional excitement and they all contain an element of craving.

¹⁵⁶ Lutz (1988: 68-69) says, about what she calls the romantic conception of emotion, that “... the natural (including emotion) is depicted as synonymous with the uncorrupted, the pure, the honest, the original. Nature and emotion are seen as fountains of high truths, while culture, conscious thought, and disengagement are all viewed as disguise, artifice, or vice (...) When emotion is seen as natural in this positive sense, thought and its offshoot, social speech, come to be seen as less authentic and less ‘really real’ (...) It is only uncognised, unexpressed emotion that is truly natural, then, as it has not been reached and disturbed or warped by cultural conventions for the conscious experience or display of emotion.” Thus, in this version of the Western conception of emotions, they are authentic because, different from speech (and expression), they are placed in the inner self, being closely associated with nature. To express emotion is to ‘corrupt’ its naturalness with cultural codes: that’s why the expression of emotions is suspect, because it misrepresents something that is out of itself: an inner reality. It is clear here that such conception - Needham’s conception in a nutshell - only makes sense against the metaphysical background of Western conceptions of self, as possessing an inner reality closely associated with nature, and thus presupposing an experience that is different from its expression in speech, that is, a ‘thing’ that is different from the ways words are used to describe it.

As with Huxley's character, perpetually in search for a 'clear language' rid of the ambiguities of everyday language, approaches that intend to get clear definitions of emotion terms do so only to the extent that they distance themselves from everyday uses of these notions, towards abstract notions that, precisely because far away from the everyday, reflect poorly the richness of their multiple usages, which may actually include ambiguousness as a characteristic trait. The search for 'clear' definitions is also prone to end up with the analyst establishing his or her own linguistic categories as the yardstick against which other peoples' notions are measured. Levy (1982: 219), for instance, treats emotions as 'concepts' and finds that some peoples have no unambiguous terms to 'represent' them, which he calls 'hypocognised emotions'. According to him, "[o]ne of the consequences of hypocognition is that ...[the feeling] can be interpreted both by the one who experiences them and by others around him as something other than 'emotion'". It is clear in his argument that English language - contemporary English language - is being used to provide a set of unambiguous categories (or 'concepts') to describe some 'thing' external to it (or rather, internal: 'internal experiences') as 'emotions'. He poses 'emotion' as an ontological reality independent of language, a reality which is clear and rid of contradictions, and 'language' (in fact, his own language) as a tool to describe one's 'awareness' (that is, cognition of an internal process with an ontological reality of its own) of one's emotions. Now, when other peoples' notions are found to be different from his (Levy's) own, they are either 'hypo-' or hyper-cognised', that is, either one's culture has too much 'culturally provided schemata for interpreting and dealing with it', or it has too little. The point here is that, by distinguishing between 'emotional feeling' and 'emotional response', Levy is able to deal with the latter as culturally constructed, while

he himself (culturally) constructs the former as universal/biological, that is, as a process with an ontological reality of its own, independent of language.

To see emotion *in* language (in the wider sense), instead of *through* language, implies here to part with the idea that it refers to something other that has an ontological reality in itself, independent of language. It is nothing else than criticising the tendency that we ('Westerners', also in the broader sense) have to represent emotional experience as a reference to a state of things within ourselves, as noted by German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in his well known statement that 'joy designates nothing at all, neither any inward nor any outward things' (1967, § 487)¹⁵⁷. His argument does not deny that 'joy' has some content; rather the emphasis is in the fact that 'joy' does not 'designate something', that is, that it does not refer to inner states, be they 'mental' or 'emotional' events. According to Wittgenstein, emotions are not 'caused by' (or, in other words, are not 'an index of') internal states/experiences. Emotions are not understandable through causal concepts of this sort. As Miyashita (1978: 451-52) puts it, Wittgenstein's core theory of emotion is one that states that

(...) an emotion is no inner process and (...) the most essential feature of an emotion is that it has a characteristic expression. He [Wittgenstein] thinks that, since an emotion is not anything like a physical object or a sensation, it has to be expressed in some form of human activity in order that it can enter into a language-game (...) [Wittgenstein] contends: 'I can find no answer if I try to settle the question 'What I am referring to' when I say 'I'm frightened?', and that 'the question is : In what sort of context does it occur?' And the context, in turn, is decided by the relation of the object to the person concerned, as he says, 'the language-game 'I'm afraid' already contains the object'. This is how the object of an emotion is regarded as essential by Wittgenstein, while he rejects the attempt to introduce causality into the explanation of mental events (...) Wittgenstein attacks the cartesian view that relates sensation to physical objects. he does the same in relation to emotion, when he denies that 'causes' may define emotions, suggesting that the grammar of emotion is in the 'phenomenon of human life'

¹⁵⁷ Following the tradition in quoting Wittgenstein, I will give here the paragraph to which the quotation belongs, instead of page number.

Many anthropologists and philosophers have dealt with this issue, but the result is usually a fallback in a referential approach to emotions, seen as expression of inner states. The opposition itself, as I mentioned earlier, is bound to produce the very effect that they try to avoid in their approaches, namely the return - through the back door, as it were - of the ontological categories that lie at the core of (some) Western folk psychologies. Solomon, for instance, despite stating his suspicions about the distinction between 'emotion' and its interpretation (1982: 239), states further on in his article (1982: 241) that

The names of emotions clearly vary from culture to culture (...) But this obvious point hides a subtle and troublesome one; how do we know whether it is only the names (i.e. phonetic sequences) that vary rather than their reference? The problem here is what W.T.O Quine calls 'radical intranslatability': do the words 'anger' in English and riri in Tahitian refer to 'the same' emotion? How would we tell? Even if the causes are commensurable and the behaviour seems to be similar, how do we gauge the similarity of emotions? Names of emotions are clearly cultural artifacts, even 'arbitrary' (...) But the identities of the phenomena that those names name are yet an open question, not obviously the same references for quaintly different vocabularies but clearly not entirely different either. We are, after all, identifying a shared reference to something. (...) A similar point can be made about the various expressions of emotion. Clearly some expressions at least differ from culture to culture as learned gestures and more or less 'spontaneous' actions (...) And the verbal expression of emotions vary not only along with the language (of course) but also according to the familiar images and metaphors of cultures (...) [T]he more fundamental question - of what are these expressions expressive? - will have to wait for an account of the emotions themselves.

Solomon here poses the problem as one of referentiality: names of emotions refer to something 'out there', that is, outside language itself. But this 'something' cannot be accessed intersubjectively, so there is no way to know whether two names in different languages refer to the same emotion (i.e. to the same ontological reality). He seems to slip here into the same point he criticised before: by presupposing a distinction

between 'emotion' and its expression, he has to accord to 'emotion' an ontological status, that is, a 'thing out there'¹⁵⁸ rather than social practice. Solomon is concerned here with criticising the distinction between 'emotion' and 'cognition', that is, he is dealing with general categories and the way they are seen - or not - in other peoples' lives. See, for instance, his critique of Rosaldo, who, according to him, "(...) has argued that Briggs [writing on *Utka* Eskimos] confuses lack of anger with fear of anger, the sense (...) that anger is dangerous and can even destroy a society. But here again, we meet that suspicious and too neat distinction between the essence of the emotion and the talk *about* emotion, as if it can be assumed that the emotion remains more or less constant while our thoughts and feelings about the emotion alter its expression and its representation." (1982: 244-45; his emphasis). The problem here, I think, is not that a distinction between 'emotion' and cognition' is being postulated, but rather that he (and Rosaldo, apparently) are speaking of 'emotion' in general (that is as a universal category), which has an essence, a materiality of its own, instead of social practices in speech and agency.

Solomon's characterisation of 'emotion' as not a feeling but an interpretation (1982: 248), transposing it from the 'felt' to the 'cognitive pole', in my view, does not render it more approachable or easier to understand, exactly because he assumes the ontological reality of emotion as something outside social practice, that is, as distinct from the happenings that give people the sense of it. A good question here would be: what makes such different 'things' as those that alter one's physiology; those that create a specific disposition towards the world; those that configure specific qualities of relationship towards people; those that alter one's attitude towards oneself; etc - what

¹⁵⁸ In fact, judging from his description of 'naming an emotion' as a 'rudimentary psychological

kind of similarity makes us give to all those distinct happenings similar/related names, of emotions/feelings/moods/sentiments? The central point is, of course, that it is *us* who attribute to such things a similarity, and not the ‘things in themselves’ that are similar. One’s concern here should be not whether ‘emotion’ is observable, but *how it is construed* - as ‘inner experience’ or otherwise.

Although Solomon’s conclusions, referring as they do to ‘emotion’ as a universal medium, do not interest me here, either as a ‘system of concepts and attitudes’ or otherwise, his assumption that most of such ‘system’ “ (...) is built right into our immediate perception and conception of the world, seeing things, events, people, and actions as ugly or odious, offensive or enviable, lovable or admirable”(1982: 252) is interesting, as it pairs aesthetic and moral judgements with emotions. The interest here is not, of course, that *all are judgments* - something that, I suppose, is to be found (or not) in each specific ethnographic case, and not posited *a priori* - but that *they can be paired at all*. The first step here is to recognise that we are not dealing with a reflexion on the universality of ‘emotions’ (as cognitions or otherwise), but with a Western discourse which tries to overcome a (Western) distinction between ‘reason’ and ‘emotion’. My interest here is how such discussions can be made to dialogue with *Mebengokré* theories of ‘emotion’, that is, how they can be used to shed light on what I have been calling the conflation between experience and performance.

With these considerations in mind I shall now return to the description of the ceremonial lament which opened this chapter, and situate it both within the context of the discussion and of a general picture of *Mebengokré* social life and ceremonial.

activity’ (1982: 242), he seems to accord them the status of an inner (‘psychological’) experience, thus going back to Western representations of ‘emotion’ as inner processes.

The public mourning I witnessed happened during a *Mereremei* female naming ceremony. This ceremony, like many others, last for several months, during which people gather to dance every sunrise and sunset. As most ceremonies, it has a culminating point, or *ami aprã*, when (in the case of this specific ceremony) the women dance throughout the whole night until sunrise. In the afternoon of that day, while the celebrated children were getting ready for dancing, the older women sat on the floor in a circle and sang several songs. After they ended, *Bemoti*, the old ceremonial leader of Catete village, who was there seated on the men's house's wall facing the women, listening to the songs, roused as if to speak _ and started to cry.

One point worth stressing here is that this happened during a ceremony which, like other ceremonies among the *Mebengokré* is supposed to bring joy, merriment and general elation, for those participating in it and those watching it alike. How is it to be understood within this context? For our own cultural conception of emotions hold that joy and sadness are antithetical and are kept separated in any 'true' expression of emotion¹⁵⁹. William Fisher (1998, 2001) has noted this general character of elation to be expected from *Mebengokré* ceremonies, and has also puzzled over this strange mixture of joy and sadness (2001: 27):

Ritual conjoins the memory of family and deceased ones (the ones one longs for - "ô'ama") with the feelings of well-being felt by all participants. Friedrich (...) points out that mood may be employed as a trope. Happiness and experience of beauty are not merely the products of a ritual successfully performed but this mood is itself thought to be an expression or index of a certain social state [footnote 11: I am tempted to go further and describe the modal trope in this case as a juxtaposition of moods, the proximity and segregation of elation/sadness indexing not only the presence/separation of the dead and the living but also

¹⁵⁹ To be sure, this 'mixture' is not completely strange to (some) Western conceptions of 'legitimate' expression of emotion. For instance, in Northeastern Brazil, as well as in traditional Ireland, a party would follow a funeral, with liberal consumption of spirits. But mainstream Western folk conceptions do segregate the spaces and times of merriment and sadness.

representing the basic irresolvable tension necessarily created by the requirements of sociality]

His interpretation of the mixture of joy and sadness is a referential one: emotions are indexes of social states that are external to the emotions themselves. As ceremonies involve the presence of the deceased as well as the living - and as the former's presence is at the same time a segregation, because the dead do not participate in a communion with the living - sadness would be an index of the presence of the dead, and joy, of the communion with the living. But this interpretation falls short of giving an account of the legitimacy of such emotion, as displayed during the ceremony. I proposed that such may be seen in the ethical and aesthetic character of emotions: in the fact that they are meant to be displayed as such, that is, in their seemliness. If we consider who participates in the ceremony, who watches it, and how, this point becomes clear.

During the *ami aprã*, the culminating point of the ceremony, women dance all night in a long queue around the central plaza, watched by all others (that is, men and children, even female ones, when they are too young to dance themselves) in the village. The general atmosphere is one of intense merriment, something I hope to convey through my fieldnotes of the ceremony, from the moment the activities related to the ceremonial lament finished until the end of the dance (but not of the ceremony):

After eating, around 2 p.m., they danced within the ngobe. Two rows of women were formed alongside the ngobe: on the eastern side stood the merememéi, all with their big krokroktire head adornments, all with their face adorned with grounded atoroti eggshell. on the western side, the other, older women faced the celebrated ones. The general feeling among them is one of merry excitation, specially among the young celebrated ones, who are dancing fully adorned for the first time. They are all smiles and excitation, some of them frowning with intense concentration. The women in both groups turned synchronically north and south

in their two-step, syncopated dance, while singing several songs. After some 10-15 min. proceeding in this way, the older women got behind the celebrated ones, forming a not-so-ordered third row. They danced some 15 min. more in this way, after which they left the ngobe through the Southern entry in a single row, going around the plaza. They went around it for some time, then concentrated on the eastern side of the men's house (that is, outside it, opposite to the metoro djà, or 'place of ceremonies'). From there, groups of women left to dance around the plaza, the celebrated ones going in front of each row. The younger went in front; the older, behind. The older ones held their arms over the heads of the younger ones, in a sort of 'roman greeting'. Each woman had both arms held over the head of the younger woman in front of her, and that one, by her turn, had her own arms held over the head of the celebrated one in front of her. They were not in an ordered row, as the dancers had been up to then. Now, they gathered in a loosely ordered group of people, sorted out by age. In this way, several groups went around the plaza, singing. The women behind the celebrated ones are their kwatui, that is, their 'aunts/grandmothers', and were ceremonially teaching the celebrated ones the songs they would now sing in women's ceremonies from then on. After all groups had gone around the plaza at least twice (some went more times), they gathered again on the same spot outside the men's house, leaving in a single row to dance together around the plaza. They started close to Bemoti's (the old ceremonial specialist) house. His house is in the position of the village circle behind which the sun raises, and this is a ceremonially significant place, where many ceremonies start, or finish, or have significant stops. The celebrated ones, easily distinguished from the other women due to their more elaborate make-up and adornments, mingled in the row, going in front of their own kwatui. It was already getting dark, and men had made fires in front of their houses, from where they appreciated the performance. Some had brought mattresses, and some others served coffee, food and drink to the women who individually stopped close by. The village looked strangely beautiful, a circle of fires under the moonlight. I installed myself at the men's house, from where I watched the women dance and sing all night long. Some 6 or 7 unmarried men, as well as some recently married ones, did the same, and all commented about the performance and how the young celebrated ones (and other women) looked beautiful and sexually appealing. One of my friends, recently married (he has two small children), commented gaily that he was going to 'sleep away' that night, and made clear what others seemed to me to be implicitly assuming: that this was a night to enjoy oneself, also in terms of sex. Actually, there was a merry coming and going of men from the men's house as well as from the audience around the plaza during all night. I noticed that some men - and some women - disappeared for some time in the spaces between the houses, where there was less light. Upon their return, their comments on the beauty of the women dancing was redoubled. Individual women did not dance the whole night, stopping now and then to get coffee, food and water (and occasionally 'disappearing for some time') while the row of dancers went on. In this way, the women as a group danced the whole night until sunrise, around 06:30 in the morning. They stopped 15 min. after sunrise, already under full daylight and heat.

All this joy and merriment followed suit, immediately after the procedures that ended the lament. It was, as in all ceremonies, meant to be shown as such, that is, as creating joy and merriment, to the audience as it is to the dancers themselves. The audience was a mixed one, though: the deceased also watched it, from within the houses or (in other accounts) from the outskirts of the forest¹⁶⁰. Some would say that they were also watching the lament; some wouldn't. But the performance itself was also meant for them, as well as for each other. The pervasive seemliness of the emotional performance, the fact that it is made for the eye of the beholder (who, in this specific case of the lament, is also a participant, at least the living one) is nevertheless clear here as well as in the dance itself. They cry to show each other their longing for their departed ones, and in this sense it is not at all contradictory to state, as they do, that although joy and merriment is the very point of the ceremonies they perform, the display of grief in the lament itself is *mex*, 'good/beautiful'. This is because, among other things, the very form of the moral and aesthetical agency implies its display for an audience. As with the Homeric *kalós*, it implies an aesthetic judgement as well as a moral one, which are interwoven in a single judgement. They are pleasant to look at, and so they are good in the moral sense. But the analogy goes further, as also in the *Mebengokré* case the 'good' implies some usefulness¹⁶¹ in the object or situation thus characterised. We shall now look closely into this usefulness in the case of the lament.

Public wailing is done by people when mourning a dead relative, or when acknowledging the arrival of a long absent one. People also mourn those who are going

¹⁶⁰ See Lea (1986) and Fisher (2001).

¹⁶¹ For a discussion of the moral and aesthetical aspects of *kalós* among the Homeric Greeks, see Yamagata (1994;225-238). I took from him the use of 'seemly' and 'unseemly' to characterise the moral/aesthetical attitude among the *Mebengokré*. Yamagata also notes (1995: 227) that this same characterisation can be applied for the sense of hearing for the Homeric Greeks as well as to the sense of sight, but not to other senses. This is also the case among the *Mebengokré*.

away in a journey, when they intend to stay away for a long time, or when their health condition is bad, as in the case of those going to town for health treatment¹⁶². The wailing is an acknowledgement of the intimate relationship between the one that mourns and the mourned. Sons, daughters, parents, brothers, sisters, grandchildren and spouses are usually mourned in this way, as well as formal friends (*krabdjwy*) and old friends in general (for a man, they would mostly be called *kamy*, or ‘brother’, anyway). Also people called by ‘affinal’ terms can be mourned. The point here is not one of structural positions but one of friendship: people with whom one has shared life experiences in the past, of whom one has fond memories of close personal attachment are liable to be wailed in this way.

Public wailing is directly related to ceremonial life through *o'amak*. This is a feeling of longing, which the *Mebengokré* show freely during ceremonies. Ceremonies provide occasions when it is common to see women, young and new, mourning their parents, brothers and sisters, children, or husbands¹⁶³. Wailing is less common among men – at least, young, adult men. Male elders show their *o'amak* in a much freer manner. But it is much more a female form of vocal expression than a male one. Women would cry, loudly, from their houses when they see a long-gone relative entering the village circle again. This is always done in a public manner, that is, for an audience. Urban (1988: 392) would have it different for the Southern Ge-speaker *Shokleng*:

¹⁶² The general scope of *Mebengokré* lament seems to be broadly similar similar to Urban's (1988: 391) account of lament among the Southern Ge-speaking *Shokleng*, as well as to Graham's (1986: 87) account of wailing among the Central Ge-speaking *Shavante*. For the Northern Ge-speaking *Canela*, though, Crocker (1990: 301-02) maintains that the lament is intended basically for deceased people.

¹⁶³ They do so as they remember them wearing the same adornments, and dancing and singing the songs and dances of the ceremony being performed.

Wailing is a process of making public the feelings of the person who is wailing. It is intended not to be heard, in the ordinary linguistic sense, but rather to be overheard. Ritual wailing purports overtly not to engage an addressee, but to allow anyone within earshot access to something that would otherwise be private.

Whereas I would agree with Urban that wailing is not a one-to-one linguistic exchange (or rather a linguistic transmission, as the one being wailed does not answer linguistically to it), I maintain that for the *Mebengokré* at least wailing is not to be *overheard* by others but primarily to be heard (and seen) by them. Urban states that it is to be ‘overheard’ by people at large *because* it is ‘something that otherwise would be private’; but the reasoning does not make sense in the *Mebengokré* case. One wails in public only; there is no sense in wailing when there is no one to witness. ‘Private crying’ is not confounded with public wailing. The form of the wailing itself bears testimony of this primarily aesthetic character: while crying in a high-pitched tone, the mourner speaks – rather, shouts – about (for instance) how long the wailed one has been absent; on (for instance) how close they were when they were children, when they grew up together; on the *o'amak* the wailer has had all this time. It is a rather touching discourse, and indeed some of those present to the mourning (those that are more intimate to both the wailer and the wailed) are visibly moved by it. The wailed one, if present, stands not far away from the wailer, silent, eyes turned down, for as long as the wailing goes on. I have seen more than one adult man being brought to the verge of tears (and sometimes to actual crying) in this way. Wailing does more than profess the relationship, publicised as *o'amak*, between two people (or some people): it also creates an emotional response in those that are the subject of it, as well as in some of the listeners. A group (in the loose sense, here) of people that feel *o'amak* for each other is clearly delineated in these occasions, as people that were brought up in intimate

relationship. When I asked one of my research assistants about this, he replied by pointing out to me how *o'amak* was 'transmitted' from a mother to her sons and daughters, i.e., those living together in the most intimate way.

Wailing is held by the *Mebengokré* to be *caused by*, or *a part of o'amak*. They point out the the presence of the person who is the 'repository' of *o'amak* is not the cause of wailing, only a sort of 'catalyst' for the unleash of *o'amak* that comes when they are seen by their loved ones, after a long absence, for instance. In this sense, wailing is an index of *o'amak* for the *Mebengokré*. If one wails, it is because one has *o'amak*. If one has *o'amak*, one will wail on the appropriate occasion. This implies that if one doesn't wail, one does not feel *o'amak*. The connection between wailing and *o'amak* is not one between an 'outer' expression and an 'inner' feeling: *o'amak* is in the performance itself, so to speak, in the sense that the actual display of *o'amak* is the cultural way to feel it. Urban (1988: 392) makes a distinction that, I believe, cannot be applied to *Mebengokré o'amak*, between 'overt' and 'actual' function of ritual wailing:

The overt or represented function of ritual wailing, however, must be differentiated from its actual function for the person who engages in the wailing. The purpose of the individual's action is understandably communicative - to let other members of the community know that the individual has the proper orientation to the dead person, visitor, or whatever life situation occasions the wailing - whether or not it is expressive. In other words there is a disjuncture between how the ritual wailing represents itself and how it is actually being used. It is a kind of calculated accident, or action designed to appear spontaneous.

Urban's remarks bring to the fore again the question of authenticity of emotion. For him, ceremonial wailing 'shows itself' to be the expression of ('inner') emotions, but 'in fact' it is used to show one's orientations towards the one being wailed. He expresses here a conception reminiscent of Durkheim's vision that mourning is a duty

imposed by the group, not a 'natural movement of private feelings'. The problem with this conception is that it does not make sense, in the case of *o'amak*, to speak of emotional experience divorced from emotional performance. Whether or not the feeling is private is not the point here. The point is that its legitimacy comes from its aesthetical character, that is, from the fact that it is performed for an audience, and not from claims that the performance corresponds to anything 'inner' to the wailer. Urban seems to see a contradiction here between experience and performance, one being private while the other, public. 'Expression' - what I call here 'performance' - seems to be the crux of the dilemma for him: either it is the expression of inner feelings or it is an expression for an audience - but not both. I propose that the difficulty here is created by the application of a model that holds that feelings are inner experiences, being thus distinct from their outer manifestation.

The distinction has actually propelled Urban to postulate a 'desire for sociability' (very much in the volitional sense, it seems to me) as the drive behind the public wailing, in opposition to the feelings that are 'private' to the individual (and thus not social). This would constitute a meta-signalling behind the signaling of individual feeling in the performance of wailing, indexing one's desire to act in the socially correct way (Urban 1988: 396-99). As he puts it (1988: 386-93):

(...) ritual wailing contains within it the secret of social order, how culture comes to exercise control over affective processes. The secret is in the alchemy whereby affect becomes 'meta-affect'. That is to say, one emotion (sadness) points to or 'comments upon' another emotion (the desire for social acceptance). Seen in the context of social action, ritual wailing involves the signaling by one actor of a feeling of grief. But the signal is emitted in a way that other actors consider appropriate. Hence the sadness itself is rendered intelligible, and it is through this intelligible sadness that the basic intelligibility and acceptability of the social actor emerges. Thus, an actor's own affect must be controlled as a means of signalling who one is. In short, affect becomes meta-affect (...) It may be proposed that ritual wailing represents not simply the feeling of loss but, in a more complex way, the desire for sociability that is the inverse side of loss. Loss occasions the

wish to overcome loss through sociability, and it is this sociability that is signalled through adherence to a culturally specific form of expression of grief. One wishes to signal to others that one has the socially correct feelings at the socially prescribed times

Now, there are several problems with this definition. First, it conceives of 'affective processes' as independent from culture, or as external to it. Second, a 'substantive' character is accorded to a supposed 'desire for social acceptance', as if it were an emotion in the same plane as 'sadness', for instance. Third, it presupposes the possibility of an un-intelligible emotion - that is, one that is displayed in ways in which it would be not recognised as such, which is contrasensual - while at the same time maintaining that emotions are fully cognisable; and fourth, in stating that one's affect is controlled in order for one to show who one is, he is establishing a universal mode of legitimacy in which 'expression' must gain control over 'experience' in order to 'mean'. In his interpretation, death is accompanied by 'deep' feelings of loss - but feelings of loss do not necessarily need to be signalled to others. As the feelings of loss in the ritual wailing are definitely signalled to others, there must be something else involved. The problem with this reasoning is that it assumes that feelings of loss are a private experience everywhere - one may choose to show them or not. Thus he proposes that there is a 'desire for sociability' which is distinct from the expression of grief, as if it were superimposed upon it. It is clear that the 'desire of sociability' is conceived as a separate entity because he needs to find a justification for the fact that grief is publicly expressed, and not the other way round. All these difficulties spring, most evidently, from the distinction between 'inner experience' and 'outer expression', which also in Urban's case reflect an specific moral outlook (1988: 398-99):

The function of the meta-signals ought not to be discussed or put into words, lest their force be diminished. Bringing them into the arena of reflection would make them appear less genuine, more contrived as part of a strategy. Despite the fact that actors in some sense 'know' what they are doing, they must not let on that they know (...) For an actor - whose interests lie in getting along with other actors - interpreting the signal through its meta-signals, the question of genuineness or falseness of the underlying expression of affect becomes irrelevant, since the meta-signal itself simultaneously indexes another subjective state: the desire to do or to show the socially correct thing. In short, the meta-signal itself indicates a desire for sociability. Whether or not the underlying 'falseness' is detected, therefore, there is a truth about the meta-signal that is more important to the interpreter.

It is easy to see here that the 'desire for sociability' was postulated as an attempt to come to grips with the contradiction posed by the use of a 'folk theory' of emotions, based in the 'inner experience-outer expression' distinction, to understand ritual wailing. To acknowledge a pragmatic aspect in the expression of 'feeling' is to challenge its authenticity. This is the point where 'expression' and morality touch each other. The distinction between 'inner experience' and 'outer expression' parallels that other distinction between altruistic and egoistic agency, in the sense that wailing, as expression of 'inner feeling', implies (for Western morality, that is) forgetting oneself in the grief for the other, whereas wailing as expression for an audience implies centering in oneself - in one's self, actually - as that which is to be shown to the audience. The former implies affect; the latter, calculation. The distinction that Urban tries to draw here does not apply to the *Mebengokré* case, for whom there is no opposition between individual goals and sociality - or, in this case, between pragmatic performance and emotional experience. For Urban, what matters socially is the non-emotional aspect of the expression (as distinguished by him): the desire for sociability. This is precisely the

distinction that the *Mebengokré* do not do, as for them ‘to do the socially correct thing’ in terms of emotions *is* to feel - that is, to perform - them¹⁶⁴.

But emotion - *o’amak*, in this case - do have a ‘pragmatic’ character for the *Mebengokré*. In order to access it, a few other aspects of it have to be mentioned here. *O’amak* is also at the base of the act of naming itself. A young couple has their children named by their parents. When people get older, they begin to name their children themselves. By that time, their parents are likely to be dead, and the couple ‘keep in mind’ (the expression is used by the *Mebengokré* themselves) their parents’ names to transmit to their children – because they have *o’amak* for them. One usually has *o’amak* for one’s children, for one’s uterine relatives, for one’s parents, for one’s grandchildren, for one’s spouse. One has also *o’amak* for one’s friends and companions of the same age, specially those with whom, as an unmarried youngster, one has shared many experiences in the past. The unmarried men (*menõrõryre*) have a life oriented towards collective affairs and activities, in a way that is not kept when they get married and settle to live (usually) in their father-in-law’s house.

O’amak ‘covers’, in a sense, a variety of Western feelings. When young people refer to having *o’amak* for their spouses, they usually translate it as ‘to be in love’, or to long for in a sexual way, to have sexual craving for. A child would have *o’amak* for its parents; an unmarried youngster, either male or female, would have more *o’amak* for his mother than for his father. *O’amak* is not necessarily coextensive to the uxori-local household: one has no *o’amak* of one’s mother’s sister, unless she created him as a son.

¹⁶⁴ M. Strathern (1979: 243) seems to be stating something similar when she says that the New Guinean Hageners “(...) do not believe that decorating the body hides the inner self. I would argue that the physical body is disguised in decorations precisely because the self is one of their messages”. Here she argues that ‘the self’ is actually ‘in the surface’, and not in an ‘inner being’. In the same way, I argue

In such case, the *o'amak* would be that of a *nā kaàk* (a 'mother fac-similar') who is in the place of the *nā kumrenhh*. *O'amak* is thus related to the people one lives or has lived with in the most intimate way, and who have not been immediately present for some time.

Public wailing is a display of *o'amak*, as the *Mebengokré* state themselves. One wails because one has seen someone one has not seen for long; one wails because one is witnessing the departure of someone; one wails because one has been remembered a dead person, usually in the context of ceremonies but not in the least restricted to them. It goes without saying, of course, that this 'someone' must be a suitable 'subject' – in the sense of 'repository' - of *o'amak*. But the ceremonial lament described here, as a display of *o'amak*, has a distinctive characteristic: it engages people at large - virtually every adult - in similar displays. In the ceremonial lament I witnessed, this engagement was propitiated by the agency of *Bemoti*, the old ceremonial leader.

Bemoti wailed for several people, as he is an *ōbikwá* ('relative' as well as 'friend') of many a dead ancestor of most people in the village. But he didn't wail alone: most women gathered at the centre of the men's house – that is, most of the older women in the village – and some of the young ones cried together with him, each one for their own dead. *Bemoti*'s wailing seemed to 'trigger' the women's wailing, to unleash a bulk of *o'amak* from them¹⁶⁵. Their high-pitched cries, repeatedly mentioning their relationship to the mourned, filled the silent plaza. Around the men's house in a

that *Mebengokré* emotion (and in some measure, their self as well) is in the performance, and not 'behind' it, in an 'inner self'.

¹⁶⁵ Irvine (1993: 154-55) mentions the role of the Wolof griot in relaying other's emotions, acting thus as a sort of 'channel' through which these emotions can be voiced. This is not the case here, where *Bemoti* himself mourned people he himself felt *o'amak* for; but he did act as a 'catalyser' of other people's *o'amak*. The interesting point here is that in both cases emotions were not seen as inauthentic, even though they were voiced by other than the one feeling them (in the Wolof case) or although they were 'catalysed' by someone else's agency.

less central place, some younger women also mourned their dead, in a more silent way and without the high-pitched cries that characterise old people's crying. Indeed, the high pitch is a characteristic of the elders' way of crying, something that is jokingly commented by youngsters. Elders are the mourners *par excellence*, as young people would be too 'ashamed' to call attention upon themselves by mourning someone publicly.

Women did not seat at the centre of the men's house, they were more to the southern side, seated on the floor, *Bemoti* facing them from the wall where he sat. Many women were outside the men's house, preparing their grandsons or simply watching the older ones. Many sat on the wall like *Bemoti*, around the women on the floor. The men that were present sat on the northern side, away from the women, except for *Bemoti* himself and by the 'painters' of the young celebrated children, the latter sitting on the floor, closer to the old women. Except for *Bemoti*, men did not cry. Nevertheless, they were greatly touched by the collective mourning, most of them visibly on the verge of tears. While the mourning went on, no other sound was to be heard in the plaza. Men and (younger) women stood still, avoiding eye contact, each one concerned with one's own *o'amak*. In this way, the 'collective mourning' was 'collective' only in the sense that it was enacted in a group. At that particular time at least, *o'amak* was an individual performance to be played out collectively.

But the joint performance of these individual *o'amak* has another, more subtle effect: it creates a commonality of emotion/sentiment, not by including all subjects of individual *o'amak* in a single group, mourned by all, but by interlacing the repositories of *o'amak* (that is, dead people in this case) in such a way in the actual mournings of individual people that, albeit two people do not mourn the same dead, they tend to

mourn some of them in common; albeit no one is mourned by all, every one is mourned by some, or by several. They are interlaced in such a way as to delineate individual sets of repositories of *o'amak*, composed each one of them of several elements, that find no point-to-point correspondence with similars¹⁶⁶, but who are not completely strange to others as well, finding fragmentary correspondences with other, specific such sets, which by their turn find other correspondences with other sets and so on. This synchronisation of individual emotional states accords them a collective, social status, which is explicit recognised by the *Mebengokré*. As Harrison (2001: 259) puts it,

One way (...) in which an anthropological approach to the understanding of everyday moods might be developed is by focusing on the way in which these moods can acquire shared, interpersonal temporal patternings through their engagement with social processes. Synchronicity, in short, represents a distinctive way in which moods can become social phenomena and, potentially, thereby be amenable to anthropological study as any other sort of social behaviour. Mood dynamics strongly synchronised and shared collectively in this way are perhaps also especially likely to be cognised culturally and explicitly recognised.

The interesting point here is not only how they are synchronised but also why they are so. Emotions/sentiments, the *Mebengokré* contend, are the expected outcome of ceremonies. On the whole, although people are not brought all together by any encompassing familial feelings, a veritably Wittgensteinian *air de famille* obtains between people at large, as the effect of collective *o'amak*. *O'amak* was the expected outcome of *Bemoti*'s intervention, an emotion that builds an ethos of commonality in the ceremonial context. The comprehension of *Mebengokré* feeling is thus more of a sociology than a psychology: one needs a sociology – and an aesthetics – of emotions in order to understand *Mebengokré* manifestations of feeling and sentiment.

¹⁶⁶ Except for full siblings that were brought up together, who may even so feel *o'amak* for different people.

This point was made by Fisher (2001: 28-9), but he insists - contrary to *Mebengokré's* own statements, I believe - that such sentiments are indexes of social states:

For the Kayapó, among whom sentiments are symptoms of social states (that is, an indissociable expression of the state of affairs they represent), disharmony can falsify the truth affirmed in ritual. That is to say that the feelings of participants may impede the successful realisation of ritual in quite a different sense than the way a disgruntled congregation can always prevent a service from taking place through desultory non-cooperation and foot dragging. One can say that, for the Kayapó, emotions themselves are reflections of what is held to be a canonical order. (his emphasis)

Fisher is concerned with the analysis of *Mebengokré* ceremonial as a way to promote the differentiation between what he calls members of a group of substance (2001: 29). This perception - that ceremonial differentiates people - arises, I think, from his deploying Western metaphysical views of sociality as based in group-building and the establishment of 'social ties' which imply the presence of a system of rules and obligations to sort out and bind together their members. Curiously, though, the (explicit) emphasis of *Mebengokré* social philosophy is in the *creation of similarities* between people, by means of song and dance and the building of shared emotional states. Musical harmony is an apt description for such attempt, and the *Mebengokré* state so themselves: people should get similar to each other in the same way as they dance and sing in harmony. The very ceremonial process in fact creates such harmony by means of shared emotional states, as noted by Fisher himself. I would propose that, for the *Mebengokré*, emotional states are not symptoms - that is, indexes - of a canonical order, but that they are the canonical order itself. If rituals can be falsified when they do not create a suitable collective emotional state, it is because ceremonies are meant to create sociality, and sociality itself is seen as a shared emotional state. Ceremonies are

thought of as beautiful/good by the *Mebengokré* precisely because they create such states, that is, because they create sociality. I mentioned earlier that for *Mebengokré* moral agency, 'good' has the double meaning of morally good and useful for some purpose. Ceremonies are useful in creating a social state that is seen as a shared, collective emotion. This is why, I think, *Mebengokré* social philosophy stresses the creation of similarities, even though if seen 'from the outside', one may say that such creation implies a differentiation within the 'domestic group'. The problem is that to see it as such, one has to apply a whole Western metaphysical notions of sociality to *Mebengokré* reality. My own attempt here, of course, is quite the opposite. I want to discuss *Mebengokré's* own metaphysics of sociality, to convey some of its sense and meaning. Thus, instead of hypostasising a supposedly universal metaphysics of sociality as group- and duty-based, I will delve at the end of this chapter on the very nature of the relation between people according to the *Mebengokré*. This, I think, reveals itself also in the ceremonial mourning.

What is the nature of the bond between people in ceremonial mourning? There is clearly an intimacy issue here, as the *Mebengokré* state themselves. *O'amak* is the performance of longing for an intimate one who is, or has been, absent. Ceremonial mourning, the public sharing of *o'amak*, also creates a bond between those who participate in it. It is the nature of such bond that I want to analyse here. In order to do so, I'm going to rely on the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance. Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance was developed against the notion of an 'essence' hypostasised as the basis for determining the elements of a logical class, or kind. The German philosopher, Karl-Otto Apel (1980: 18-19) maintains that, for

Wittgenstein, the idea of an 'essence' shared by all elements of a logical class or kind is superfluous to the understanding of class/kind terms:

It is quite sufficient that a 'family resemblance' exists between the numerous 'ways of using' a word [in this case, a term describing a class or kind], which are determined by the situational context.

Thus, 'family resemblance' is a way of determining a class/kind, which denies the hypostasation of an 'essence', the similarity with which is an attribute of its individuals. In Wittgenstein's words:

67. I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than 'family resemblance'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: built, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc, etc, overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: 'games' form a family...

In the same vein it can be said that the people gathered at the men's house that afternoon had a 'family resemblance' in this sense, that a togetherness was built amongst them as the outcome of individual mourning enacted collectively. Those that were mourned were either friends or 'brothers', 'sisters' 'uncles/grandfathers', 'aunts/grandmothers', or formal friends (*krabdjwy*), or those with whom one grew up. The relationship between those wailing and those being wailed is based in the emotional ties linking them, and not in any 'social role'. In this sense, these relationships are pretty much individual, that is, they depend on the emotional state shared by any two people. It is important to note here that this does not imply a notion of 'group', or of 'duties/obligations/social role' as the metaphysical stuff behind such notion. In the same way as those being wailed were linked to the wailers in a variety of (individual) ways, those that wailed them were not what received anthropological wisdom would call a 'kin group', or even a 'group' of any sort, both terms ('kin' and 'group') being highly ineffective to characterise them. But they were 'of a kind' in the Wittgensteinian sense. Or rather they were being made 'of a kind' by collective mourning. A 'kind' whose

individuality is not based upon a shared essence (as genealogical relations would determine the essence of a 'kin group', for example). They were made 'of a kind' by means of the continuous overlapping and criss-crossing of individual emotional links to people remembered by the collective mourning.

O'amak acts here as a way to creating a similarity among people mourning together. It is not an index of relationships among the living, although it is an index of individual relationships with those that are mourned. The sharing of o'amak among those mourning together constitutes itself into an icon of the very same intimacy that obtained between individual mourners and those mourned by them. By mourning together they produce among themselves a quality of togetherness that resembles, in a positive way, that which obtains among people with whom one is (individually) intimate with. It is this production of togetherness through collective emotional performance that, in my opinion, is deemed 'good/beautiful/useful' by the *Mebengokré*. By collectively acting out an emotion that indexes their individual intimacy with the deceased, they create among the living an icon of this very same intimacy, and this is morally and pragmatically good, as well as aesthetically beautiful, because it creates by means of performance a desirable state of togetherness among the living. *O'amak*, as experienced/expressed *in performance*, is thus simultaneously an index of intimacy (with the dead) and an icon of it (among the living). There is no need to postulate an individual 'desire for sociability', of which wailing is an index, as Urban does, as *o'amak* in fact creates something that is similar to that intimacy between mourner and mourned. Its authenticity comes from this iconical relation, that is, from the wailing's success in creating a *suitable* similarity to such intimacy in terms of collective togetherness. This is why Fisher (in the quotation above) insists - correctly, in my

opinion - that the feelings of the participants may impede the successful realisation of a ceremony. Where he is wrong, I think, is in viewing feelings as indexes ('symptoms') of social order. Ceremonies can be seen as 'tools' to transform feelings, from individual indexes into collective icons of intimacy. When they fail to produce such iconicity, the ceremony has failed (that is, the collective emotional state is not 'legitimate'). One sees here how the moral, aesthetic and utilitarian aspects of ceremonies cannot be distinguished. This is one of the meanings of *Mebengokré's* statement that the ceremonial wailing, and ceremonies in general, are *mex*.

I meant this chapter as an effort to make more concrete the descriptions of 'social groups' for the *Mebengokré*, which, at this level, finds similarities in many other Amazonian peoples, and possibly elsewhere. The very assumption of 'social groups' as the basis of sociality, among the *Mebengokré* as well as among other Amazonian peoples, is so over-charged with Western metaphysical assumptions - mainly with the assumption of an 'essence' as the defining element of such 'groups' - as to render itself suspect, at the very least, of misrepresenting what it purports to describe. For the *Mebengokré*, emotion links between people create similarities among them, conducting to togetherness, to their being-in-the-world together. This similarity itself resembles that which exists among people that are in the most intimate terms with each other - primarily (but not exclusively) those that were brought up together. Ceremonial, in several different ways, produce and enhance such emotional states, thus creating a state of sociality. That is why ceremonies - and the ceremonial mourning itself - are held to be *mex*, a notion that, as we have seen, implies an aesthetic appreciation as well as an ethic/moral one. It is moral, moreover, because it has usefulness, and this utility is the

very creation of the social state among those who wail - and who are made happy - together.

What has been widely called, in different ways, the ‘fluidity of social structures’ in Amazonia can be attributed, I think, to the misrepresentation mentioned above. That is, that there is an ‘essence’ behind sociality, and that it is a ‘kin’ one (usually meaning ‘genealogical’). When confronted with such metaphysical assumptions, Amazonian worlds of relatedness yield poor results, being thus described as ‘fluid’. One needs here to give concrete expression to such realities of relatedness, which in the *Mebengokré* case are based in the creation and enhancing of emotional states and sentiments. *Mebengokré* relationships are very much individual-based, in the sense that one relates to another not because they pertain to ‘social groups’, but because of the context of the individual history of their personal relationships. But emotions are very much social. They are ‘the social state’ itself.

Chapter Four

It's All a Bit Fishy: An Aesthetic of Collective Production, or How to Get Fish with Dancing

Song before speech
Verse before prose
Flute before blowpipe
Lyre before bow
William Golding, Clonk Clonk

Love is joy [laetitia], with the accompaniment of the idea of an external cause
Spinoza, Ethics, prop. 6

This chapter concerns the distinctive ways in which the *Mebengoké* organise collective production (primarily) of foodstuffs. During the ceremony of *ngôre kam me toro*, the *Mebengokré* move into a forest glade close to a small river (by Amazonian standards) and use the poisonous vine *akrô* to gather large amounts of fish. These fish are later consumed back in their village as part of the ceremony, the culminating point of which is the reason for the fishing. As will be seen, *Mebengokré* do not conceive of this as ‘work’, but as *me toro*, or a ‘collective¹⁶⁷ dance’, and *ngrer*, a song, which are conceived and experienced primarily as a way of having fun.¹⁶⁸ As I will argue, joy is an essential, defining component of collective endeavours among *Mebengokré*. It is the element that binds people together. This is in keeping with a ‘political’ theory - which, as will be seen, cannot be distinguished from their morality - which holds that people, in the sense of individuals, should not be submitted to any sort of authority, but must individually find it agreeable and enjoyable to work (and live) together.

¹⁶⁷ The particle *me* is an all-inclusive collective. This does not mean, though, that every single person participates in the activities thus characterised, but that everyone sharing a similar quality does so, or tends to.

¹⁶⁸ I refer specifically to the *ngore kam me toro* here. After its occurrence each year, men bash several times the *akro*, either collectively or individually (the latter on a smaller scale, in ponds and small streams). In 1999, in Cateté village, men did the *akro ka’oinh* in groups (of younger and older people) in different places in a sort of friendly ‘competition’, several times each.

Furthermore, I will argue that their idea of the *ngore kam me toro* (the specific ceremony of the *akrô ka' oi*, or fishing with *akrô* poisonous vine) as producing fish poses a problem to some anthropological theories on ritual, which posit a radical, analytical distinction between 'technical' and 'ceremonial' aspects of social action. Thus, in keeping with my title, I will argue that there is something distinctively fishy about this analytical distinction when contrasted with the way that, I believe, the *Mebengokré* conceive their ceremonies. In what follows I will try to provide an alternative account of the specific *Mebengokré* moral agency as involving the creation of joy by being together in a way they call *mex*. *Mex* signifies both 'the beautiful' and 'the good', a notion that is reminiscent in some respects to the ancient Greek moral standpoint of *kalós kágathos*, which also signifies 'the beautiful and the good'. It is a concept that implies that something is both beautiful to look at and manifests goodness in action or in use.¹⁶⁹ But the aesthetic element in the *Mebengokré* case is not submerged in the moral one.¹⁷⁰ *Me toro*, as *mex*, involves equally the creation of beauty and of goodness.

This chapter relies heavily upon the interpretation of a set of songs, as well as the discourse produced by a ceremonial specialist during the *me toro*. For anthropology, much of what was sung and said would usually be called 'myth', a term that I prefer to avoid, since the *Mebengokré* do not seem to make distinctions between 'myth', 'story',

¹⁶⁹ Dover 1974: 41.

¹⁷⁰ For instance, always according to Dover (1974: 42), the abstract term *kalokagatia*, which expresses a moral standpoint; or the addition of 'in (bodily) form' to the expression *kalos kagatos* to give the meaning of 'handsome', in Aiskhines. But see Yamagata (1994: 225), who in his analysis of Homeric morality (and we must keep in mind here that the expression *kalos kagatos* becomes common in later, polis Greece) renders *kalos* as something that looks good, appealing to the eye, while *agatos* is what is profitable, useful and/or satisfactory (1994: 190). But *kalos* is also used to describe the usefulness of tools (1994: 227): "Persons, animals and material objects described as 'kalos' are, all in all, pleasant figures to look at, and at the same time expected to function well. In other words, good appearance is generally taken as a hallmark of good quality... *Kalos* denotes primarily agreeable in appearance, and

and ‘history’. In a sense, all these *metumre*, or ‘things of old’ (sometimes translated by *Mebengokré* as ‘tradition’), could be likened to the Herodotos’ notion of *historié*, as ‘following steps’ into the past. But *metumre* does not restrict itself to the past, being realised in the present through the action of (among others) ceremonial specialists, who sing their words of old back to present-day life, as will be seen. It is usual in ethnology to derive the meaning of events from mythical narratives. The status of such an operation, though, is not as frequently made clear as would be desirable. This chapter is intended as an ethnography of *how* this *corpus* of knowledge called *metumre* is made to relate to present-day events.

The account I will give here is that of the *ngore kam me toro* (literally ‘dancing by the small water’) performed by the *Xicrin-Mebengokré* of the Catete village in 1999, which I both witnessed and participated in. This *me toro* was performed at the peak of the dry season, when the whole village moved to *Kamkukei* (‘the place of the *kukei*¹⁷¹’). A large track had been cleared by the *menoronyre*, the young, unmarried men, for this sole purpose. Much wider than the tracks usually made by men when hunting, this one was cleared to allow access to the river for all the villagers, every man, woman, and child. In fact, only a few people remained in the village, due to sickness. The *Mebengokré* stressed that all would join the *me toro*, not out of what we would perhaps call ‘a sense of duty’ (a ceremonial obligation or something of the like), but because they all wanted to eat the huge amount of fish that would be produced as a part of the *me toro* during the *akrô ka'ôinh*, the collective fishing.

Nurturance, or the act of providing another with food, is a central aspect of

the indication of quality only to a limited extent”. Both senses of the term cohere with the *Mebengokré* use of the term *mex*, although in the latter case they should be taken in equal stand.

¹⁷¹ *kukei*: a small rodent, the size of a large rabbit or hare.

Mebengokré sociality. To provide one with food is an essentially moral act. Food is the archetype of human desire, and no individual *Mebengokré* would conceive of not desiring it at any moment. To have one's appetite satiated is, obviously enough, a transient state. What seems not to be so obvious, though, is that this is also the model they use to represent their relation to other human beings (that is, other *Mebengokré*). One should never deny food¹⁷² to one's *bikwá katàt* (also called *bikwá djwynh*, or *bikwá kumrenx*), something they render into Portuguese as 'real relatives'. However, *bikwá* is also a term also used for 'friend'. This is understandable when we see that to be a friend (*bikwá*) is to act towards a person in a way that, although not identical, is suitably similar to that which occurs between a group of people who live together in close contact, that is, what is usually called in anthropological theory the 'domestic group'¹⁷³.

Mebengokré social theory poses that social life is to be constructed in accordance to a paradigm of nurturance. In this sense, *Me toro* is primarily about eating. It is about eating together, sharing food with those one wants to be *bikwa*, friends/relative with. Nurturance becomes a paradigm within a moral philosophy that poses that people should both be able to give to, and to get from, other people. Indeed, not only food, but most things that can be taken as suitable objects of individual desire should be so given and gotten. How to live with other people, doing what one wishes whilst also not constraining what others may wish, is a central issue in our own,

¹⁷² It is usually stressed that a *bikwa kat`at* can get one's belongings of any sort (with some important exceptions, mostly related to ceremonial life) and not produce any sort of 'bad' emotional state in one. Food is usually regarded as a sort of 'archetypical' stuff of such acts of giving and getting. To be able to get something from someone is a basic moral quality.

¹⁷³ I stress the use of quotation marks here, not because I question its 'domestic' quality, but because I believe the very idea of a 'group', the way we conceive of it, is quite strange to *Mebengokré* philosophy, as argued in previous chapters.

Western moral philosophy. The *Mebengokré*, I believe, would offer a solution to this question, posing that one may wish, and get, the objects of one's desire, as long as these same objects (and others) remain accessible to other people. The Hobbesian question, of why a man should do different than to pursue one's own self-interest, does not pose itself as a significant question for the *Mebengokré*. For them, there is no real opposition, in the way we conceive of it, between altruism and selfishness - one can be altruistic while pursuing one's own ends. To achieve one's own ends and desires is essential to the maintenance of an enjoyable social life, because such satisfaction is viewed as essential to individual happiness.

If we understood *Mebengokré* morality through such a notion as 'happiness' as the outcome of moral action (another central concern of Western moral philosophy), we would find it resonant with the *Mebengokré* way of conceiving the morality of personal agency. Their notion of 'happiness', I think, would share some characteristics with the ancient Greek moral notion of *eudeimonia*, in the sense that it not only refers to an inner emotional or mental state, but has also to do with the acquisition of one's own ends. As mentioned above, this is not necessarily incongruent with the ends that others may wish to achieve. Against the background of *Mebengokré* moral philosophy, to achieve one's ends is to place them in the position of being also achieved by others. Thus, what one wishes, that is, the objects of one's desires, is also what one should entitle others to legitimately wish for, and even achieve.

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1967: 190) has stated that "... for many who have never heard of philosophy, (...) morality is roughly what Kant said it was". If he is right, and the Kantian categorical imperative is today the basic form of Western conceptions of moral action, then our way of conceiving moral agency could not be

seen as any other than alien to *Mebengokré* thought. The Kantian notion of moral freedom, as the ability to exercise the categorical imperative, that is, of acting independent of one's individual desires and of one's appreciation of the probable outcome of the action, is not conversant with *Mebengokré* morality. From the Kantian standpoint, a moral action is one that is grounded in individual reason and one performed for its own sake. For an action to be moral, it must be represented by the faculty of reason as one that can be posed as a universal law, applicable to all human beings. For the *Mebengokré*, on the other hand, 'moral freedom' would imply the possibility of realising one's own inclinations, and its 'test' would not be conducted by the faculty of reason alone, but also by the capacity of creating suitable emotions, that is, primarily of those emotions conducive to joy - to having fun.

Mebengokré moral philosophy is one about how to have fun together, and that is what *Me toro* , as well as collective work, are about. Their morality focuses on the outcome of actions. Thus, pleasure and individual advantage gained by performing a certain action is the essence of their morality. For them, to be able to give and to be able to get is 'good', or is *a* good, in the moral sense. They approve of an action as *mex* - that is, as good and beautiful, as opposed to 'bad', 'ugly' (*punure*)- not because it is 'felt to be proper', as many foreign to their moral standpoint would take it, but by its finality and by the desire of the one who realises it, as it enhances the give-and-get of the dynamics that creates the moral way of living – that which creates 'human nature', or *Mebengokré*-ness. Only by being able to realise one's ends (both emotionally and materially) is one able to give and to get. *Me toro* is a way of realising a moral life, because of its material side, as well as its communicative and affective aspects.

After this long preamble on *Mebengokré* morality, already discussed in

previous chapters, let me move on to describe the *Me toro* as a means through which they make manifest moral philosophy in social practice. Because *Mebengokré* moral philosophy is not only about reflection, but also action, it is concerned not only with the representation of a moral way of living, but with the active, ongoing creation of it. Ingold (2001), in an analysis of the graphic Western representation of relatedness as genealogical connections, makes the point that the genealogical model misses the dynamic aspect of the relations themselves, freezing them, so to speak. This emphasis on the ongoing, dynamic aspects of close relatedness holds true for the *Mebengokré*, and also, I think, for other *Ge*-speaking peoples. Their most intimate relations, those which obtain for people who are in daily close contact with each other are to be actively created by nurturance, and through physical, bodily contact itself. The relations between people that live together in a village must be created by open individual agency, in a way that is not identical with, but suitably similar to the relations between people that live close together. *Me toro* is one instrument through which such ties are created.

Me toro, and similar ritual manifestations in the social lives of *Ge*-speaking peoples, are usually understood in the literature as intellectual ‘devices’, that is, as primarily engendering *meanings*, or as institutional ‘devices’, producing individual or non-individual accomplishments in relation to structural roles played out by individuals and groups. I believe that for the *Mebengokré*, *Me toro* primarily engender emotional states, something that is at the base of their notions of ‘social’. The connection between sociality and the creation of emotional states has been noted by Fisher (1998) for the Pacaja river *Xicrin-Mebengokré*. I intend to go one step further and propose that *Me toro* is a tool for such creation, and one forthcoming from a form of reflection that is also a form of action, that is, moral/aesthetical action. The lived experience of *Me toro*

for the *Mebengokré* can be conceived as moral/aesthetical philosophy in application.

Singing their Way to Happiness - and to Fish

As already developed in previous chapters, the *ngore kam Me toro* is performed as part of a series of *Me toro*, which are performed every year. These occur in succession, so that when one ends another begins, and together those *Me toro* lasted a total of nine months in the first year I witnessed them. The day before leaving for *Kamkukei*, people performed the *ngo kadjy Me toro*. In this *Me toro*, they expressed to an audience composed of the whole village their intention of going fishing together using the poisonous *akro* vine. This was done by means of dancing ('*kadjy*' is a term that refers to express intention, and thus the name is translated usually as 'wanting to go to the shallow waters', that is, to go fishing with the *akro* vine). A row of dancers crossed the village circle several times from east to west and back, emitting bird-like sounds, the sounds of the macaw, so I was told. The term that translates as macaw, *myt*, is also used to name the sun, which crosses the sky following a path similar to that followed by the men during their dance. Such a journey is an expression of the flux of time, and of the unfolding of *Mebengokré* history.¹⁷⁴ Accordingly the next 'step' of the *me toro* involved an account of the *metumre*, the ways of living of people of old, taught by means of song and discourse. The row of dancers was led by one of the ceremonial specialists, who was afterwards to teach the young men, by singing to them.

This was done during the ceremony of *kore kam me ku'e*, a preparation for the *akro ka'oi*, or collective fishing with the *akro* vine. The term '*me ku'e*' refers to the act of people getting together by the fire, and the event is marked by younger, unmarried

men and young people with small children¹⁷⁵ spending the night in the centre of the plaza, by a bonfire, listening to the stories and to the songs (*ngrer*), told and sung by a ceremonial specialist (the *ngrer djwynh*, or ‘the one who really knows the *ngrer*’). The ceremonial specialist spoke and sang the whole night, while everyone else was supposed to remain awake listening to him, as *me toro* is recognised as pedagogical in character. In fact, some people did fall asleep there, in the plaza, under the stars that night, trying to listen to him.

He sang songs ‘of old’, accompanied by the story of the song, and by other stories relating past fishing expeditions and events connected to it.. His stories told his listeners about the details of the ceremony, what they were supposed to do in it, and what it means to do it that particular way. This narrative started with the saga of *Bep-jareti*, a warrior who went with several men to attack another people. He was bitten by a snake and became a *wajanga*, a powerful shaman who transforms himself into a bat and sings to the men, teaching them the *ngore kam me toro*. The song was more than mere teaching about the practice of the *me toro*, it also aimed to convince people to change their minds about going to war, and to instead go and perform the *me toro* - that is, to go on a fishing expedition:

Mebakratum Bep-jareti na kube yry me omonh
Our grandfather Bep-jareti (brought the warriors) all to go after kube [i.e., to fight the kube, or ‘strangers’]

nhym me aryp nym kanga nidji ne kube^ pongri
And there was the snake, called pongri

nidji ne kube^ pongri
(Its) name was pongri

nhym aryp kunganh
Then (the snake) bit him

¹⁷⁴ Vidal (1977: 191-93) has noticed this relation.

¹⁷⁵ As well as some older men, most of whom retired to their houses at some point during the night, returning at sunrise, or shortly before it.

kanga nidji ne kube^ pongri
The snake's name was pongri

Bep-jareti na kanga kuna
Bep-jareti was bitten by the snake

nyhm kam ta ami ja ngrer jakre jarenh
Then he sang, all by himself

ne kam kum aryp we me kube yry monh
I think they were going after kubenh

nhym me aryp kango kunha nym me aryp omonh
Then all were already going (following Bep-jareti)

aryp ami monhrori ta kube^ nhep ne ara o kikre to : tuc, tuc, tuc... anhyry o wajet
(He fell on the ground and) transformed himself into a bat, and lifted himself up above
(the place where he was himself), beating his wings in the house (and making noise): toc,
toc, toc..., hanging on the top

Bep-jareti became a shaman (*wajanga*), by being bitten by the snake. One becomes a shaman in consequence of this kind of attack, or of some other sort of violent physical trauma, which releases one's double (*karō*, part of one's self, resembling a doppelganger of European mythology) to wander in the non-*Mebengokré* world, from whence he usually achieves some sort of knowledge to bring back home. In this case, it seems *Bep-jareti* has created the song he was singing 'by himself', that is, without being taught¹⁷⁶.

nhyn me me o benget no aryp ne me monhrokumei. Me monhr kumei
Then, I think, an elder woke up, (and heard) many people crying, crying a lot.

nhym aryp mebakraturum aryp we ta pyka be aminh kaba

¹⁷⁶ There is a story related to the origin of the fishing ceremony itself (*ngore kam me toro*), in which it is attributed to a child captured from the bat people (Vidal 1977: 254). The theme of the bat-people is widespread among the Northern *Ge* at least (Wilbert 1978: 325-32; Melatti 1970; Nimuendaju 1940: 177-78; Lea 1986: 197), and the *Apinayé*, probably the closest related people to the *Mebengokré*, hold that their very language was taught by this people (Giraldin 2000: 121-25. But see Wilbert 1978: 325-28 for different versions). There is a close relation between the *ngore kam me toro* and the *kore kam me ku'e*, described here. As explained before, they can be seen either as two different *me toro* or as parts of a larger whole, and this link of origin approximates them, establishing a similarity between them.

and then, I think, our grandfather took himself off the ground .

Bep-jareti was bitten by the snake and fell on the ground. Many were around him, crying, when he transformed himself into a bat and took off from the ground. The transformation here is a bodily one, and is expressive of his new condition as a shaman, one who is able to transform oneself into animal and, in this form, to communicate with them.

ne aryp, aryp ne me aben kukam nor
Then all went to sleep, in turns

The men are on a war expedition against strangers. During such expeditions, which could last for months while men made their way to the enemy's village, they followed a strict discipline. The camp was never left unguarded, by day or night. Men took turns to sleep, or to bathe in the river, etc.

Kati. Aryp ne me aijkre kumex
No. They stayed in deep silence

Aryp umari punu::re kumex
(They were) all already thinking really bad /ugly things

They were thinking bad/ugly things: they were sad, lamenting the (apparent)loss of their leader *Bep-jareti*. *Punure*, the opposite of *mex*,¹⁷⁷ is used in this context to refer to an emotional/sentimental state, which is seen as opposed to amusement, or joy. Being sad (*kaprinh*) is regarded by the *Mebengokré* as something to worry about, both because the sad person is not well and because (s)he is not bringing joy to others. To be sad is, in this sense, to be anti-social. During a *Me toro*, it is held that people should always feel gay, that is, should be engaged in making others

¹⁷⁷ the '::' are used here to indicate the elongation of the vowel, expressing intensity or duration.

Aryp ab~up monhr mā amimp krā onhy
(They were) already inviting (themselves) to return [that is, they were all seated, talking to each other, already thinking of going back to the village]

abu~p ami kra onhy, nhym aryp Bep-jareti k`ai ma monh
(they were) inviting themselves (that is deciding between them) to return, and then Bep-jareti went upwards [he flew, taking off from the ground, as a bat]

me aer be we ami monhrore: pu, pu, pu... anhyry o wajet
And I think they were astonished, (because Bep-jareti) took off the ground and hung himself up there (beating his wings): pu, pu, pu...

Nhym me o benget kum amu wa~ai aryp am`ainget n^ere ku'a t'o {
Then some elder told someone (to go) there and make fire beside 'your father-in-law'

Am`ai nget is the indirect reference term used by a person speaking to his/her *kra* (children) about the former's father-in-law¹⁷⁹. At this point, the *ngrer djwynh*, the ceremonial specialist telling the story, begins to talk in indirect speech, assuming the role of the elder in the story. This is a recurrent rhetorical device in story telling, which resembles that of the 'collapsing' of the ancestor's experience of persuading people to go to the *Me toro*.

nhep dj`a akatanh ta'
'The bat is going to suck (the blood of) your brother'

¹⁷⁸ W. Crocker (1990: 186) describes the *Canela* (an Eastern *Timbira* people) in similar terms: "Sadness and introspection is the opposite of amusement. An individual is not allowed to sit alone and worry about her- or himself or to think introspectively (...)The *Canela* value a constructive, outgoing disposition that is involved with others. To be inward-thinking is associated with being stingy, angry (...), and selfish (...), all anti-social characteristics from the *Canela* point of view." See also Overing & Passess (2000) on 'being sad' as a non-convivial state (specially articles by Lagrou, Gow, and Ales), and, more generally, on the management of high morale to produce conviviality.

¹⁷⁹ The term implies a relation between the speaker and those to whom he addresses himself, made explicit by means of the person referred to. The ceremonial specialist addresses the audience using different such terms, sometimes in succession, in a way resembling that, more stylised one, of ceremonial discourse(*ben diri*). An 'air de familie' obtains among people here, through the use of the vocal form of storytelling.

Akatanh is the indirect reference term used by a *nget* talking to his *tabdjwy*¹⁸⁰ about the latter's brother. The terms are used when the ceremonial specialist changes to indirect speech. The character here addresses more than one person, as in his first intervention he addressed a *kra*¹⁸¹, not a *tabdjwy*. Elder people speaking in public are always keen to use indirect reference terms in profusion, addressing themselves to several people and at the same time making explicit their relations to them, as indirect reference terms express a relation between both the addressed and the referred persons, in relation to the speaker.

Nhym me aryp nhym am'ainget kum ku' ^a a ma k^o
Then (there was) already someone blowing the fire (beside) your father-in-law
Nhym me aryp me o ku'^a a t'o buw nhym por nhym por nhym, mebakr~atum kam
am`ainget
Then already someone was blowing the fire, blowing, and blowing and blowing (the fire
beside) our grandfather who is your father-in-law

* *nhym my-re pongri::re*
(The snake) is called pongri

* *te:: ne box*
(Bep-jareti, turned into a shaman) is going to come

* *Nhym my-re pongri::re*

* *Te:: ne box*

* *kruwa djwa my dj'a*
The (place where) the arrow 's [i.e., the snake's] teeth (have bitten, has a) scar

* *kam myna::*
(The place (where he was bitten, there was) the scar

* *ngo rarara kam apox*
The noise of the water is coming off [that is, people can hear the noise made by the
running water in the river]

The song, quite simple in terms of melody, depends mostly on the rhythm of

¹⁸⁰ *Nget*: usually described genealogically as MB, MF, FF, FZH, MBS, MBSS, etc. *Tabdjwynh*: reciprocal term to the previous, described genealogically as ZC, FZC, SC, DC, WBC, etc (Vidal 1977: 52). But see chapter 2 for a description of the usage of such terms.

the enunciation of the parts of the words. The last sentence incorporates a metaphor, or ‘other words’ (*me kaben òdjwy* : words other than those usually deployed to name things and events). The snake is called *kruwa*, arrow, and its teeth (the arrow’s teeth, a dead metaphor) left a scar where they bit *Bep-jareti*. Different from the dead metaphor, of the *kruwa*’s teeth (arrow’s ends are called so), the transformation of the snake into an arrow is made to the amusement of the audience, due to the introduction of an element of beauty in the speech. Noise (and song) is represented as emerging from the thing or person producing it. In this way, when a person is heard singing one says *aryp ngrer kator*, ‘the song is already emerging from (him)’

* *kruwa djw’a mudj`a kam myna*
A scar remained at the place (where he was) bitten, a scar remained

* *ngo rarar kam apo::x*

* *na me a^e:: ne*
All were startled

* *na me a ^a::*
They were going

* *na me a ^a: ne monh ne*
All were going

* *monh w^ara-ri g’a me monh*
what are you all going to do (asks Bep-jareti to the men)¹⁸²

* *guwaj kuby monh*
Lets go back [Bep-jareti stood up and called the men to go back with him]

* *ij`a t`a bary*
I’m already going ¹⁸³

* *i’a t’a bary m`y ba gu me*
I’m already going, come all with me

181 *Kra*: usually described in genealogical terms as S, D, BC, FBSC, etc (Vidal 1977: 52). But see previous footnote.

182 *War-ri*, I was told, is actually a form of *myr-ri* or *myi yry-re* (‘what do you want?’ ‘What have you come to get?’) The particle *-yry* denotes intention, or purposefulness in the accomplishment of an action.

183 *bary*: *ba aryp*, ‘I (am) already’. The normal order of the elements of the sentence is altered here, mainly for reasons of metric . This is another beautifying procedure, associated with rhythm.

An important element of morality is expressed here. *Bep-jareti* sings to the men, in order to induce them to accompany him back to a place where the fishing with *akro* vine, *akro ka'oinh* is going to happen. His persuasion here is based on singing, on the beautifying of speech. His persuasion is seductive, inebriating the senses by the song. This is a sample of the 'decision-making' process. *Bep-jareti* firstly set himself into action, and then invited all to follow him. The song expands his agency vis-a-vis the other men, as it not only poses them a choice but actually makes them do something - it inducts agency into them.

** kruwa nimr^o kra jak`ar-`a-re ja*
The arrow's tail (is like) the head with the hair cut short

The snake's tail is short as the hair in a recently-shaved head. That is, the snake is small. *Mebengokré* describe snakes as having only a head and a tail as their external parts. This is a highly elaborate mixed metaphor, which the translators found exceedingly beautiful. Curiously, mixed metaphors are held (by Western scholars) to be universally of bad taste. In this case, the beauty of it comes from the rhythm it allows, as well as from the meaning, I was told.

** me wa kut^ep-^e*
I'm waiting for you all [me wa: me ba; me ba kut^ep: I wait for you]

** imonhr t'o wajet-^e*
I'm hanging (up here), crying [i.e.,singing]

Ami monhr-ri jet ngrer jakr'e
(He stood there,) above (the place he was) himself, hanging (from the ceiling), and tried the ngrer

ami a ngrer jakre jarenh
(He) sung himself, counseling (the men)

Bep-jareti ‘tried’ the song, that is, he wanted to see whether it ‘worked’. He sang it to see if people would be seduced into doing what is proposed in the song. The translator commented, about this expression: ‘he sang the song, to see whether it was right, whether it was *mex* (good/beautiful)’. *Jakre* can be translated as ‘to counsel’. *Bep-jareti* wanted to convince people to go on a fishing expedition, instead of going to war. He tried the song of the fishing ceremony to see if it was right/good/beautiful, that is, if it could convince the men. The moral character is dependent on the outcome of the action of singing. If he succeeds, both his singing and his song are *mex*. The quality described here by the term ‘*mex*’ is purposefulness or usefulness. This is part of the moral/aesthetical judgement itself. To be good/beautiful is to have a certain type of agency - or a certain type of effect - in the world.

The ceremonial specialist then sings the whole song again, and concludes:

Nhym me... w^o::

Then all went ... w^o:: [sound of people rushing]

That is, all went to the fishing ceremony. The song ‘worked’. ‘Song’ (*ngrer*) here is portrayed as an agency-inducer for collective activities. If the song is *mex*, is right/good/beautiful, it makes people do something together. A song is also *mex* because it is morally correct, and it is so also because it works. Addressed to an audience, song purports to move it into action. Songs not only persuade, for they also create the disposition to perform the action. The whole process here is less one of ‘decision-making’ than one of ‘agency-inducement, and the ‘*mex*-ness’ of the song has to do with this ‘inducement’ purpose.

Nhym at'e na am`ainget-^e Beprinpa

There is also (the episode of) your father-in-law Beprinpa

Beprinpa is the ceremonial specialist's father-in-law. There is a transition here, between (the 'mythical') *Bep-jareti*, who wasn't personally known by any of the living *Mebengokré*, and *Beprinpa*, who died a generation ago. *Beprinpa* had taught the ceremonial specialist who recorded the song for me.¹⁸⁴

na umari a djwy kute
Something else Beprinpa knows

k^ore kam me ngrer ja
It is the k^ore kam me ngrer [another song, sung by the fire]

jarenh 'o ku'^e me kraix 'o ku'^e
(He) spoke by the fire (and) all began (to come) by the fire [that is, people would gather by the fire to listen to him]

k'ot b`ar`am mebakr~atum me na ^ant me kraix 'o ku'^e
I think maybe our grandfathers [Bep-jareti and Beprinpa, that is] (sang) together and all (people) would come by the fire

nha kam adjwydjwy k`ai ma bat
now, he is also standing (by the fire) [that is, Beprinpa also stands by the fire, together with Bep-jareti, and sings to people]

adjwydjwy k`ai ma bat
(He is) also standing (by the fire)

ngrer ja, kore kam me ku'^e ja jarenh 'o'^e
This is the song, this is the kore kam me ku'^e (which he is) singing

adjwydjwy jarenh
(he is) singing too [both sing their respective songs together]

There is here a 'collapsing' of the experiences of *Bep-jareti* into those of *Beprinpa*, as they are represented as singing each other's songs.

¹⁸⁴ The teaching of *ngrer*, as well as the transmission of other ceremonial elements, can be done from father-in-law to son-in-law, something quite common, according to my informants. Also Vidal (1977: 114-115 [footnote 38]; 141) has described the same, something which is held by Lea (1985) to be highly incongruent with her data on the Southernmost *Mekragnoti-Mebengokré*. This could be understood as a result of the drastic depopulation of the *Xikrin-Mebengokré* of the Cateté River, two generations ago. But I would suggest that, given their importance, the transmission itself of songs

** nhym mydj`a ngradj`a k^o nhiaru mu (2X)*
Who is coming from the place where the ngradj`a k^o (grows)?

Ngradj`a k^o is a kind of palm tree typical of the fields, and not of the forest. The *Mebengokré* hold that they came from the East, from a region of fields beyond the forest. The reference to *ngradj`a k^o*, as well as several other references to both vegetable and animal species in their songs and stories, relates to this past. In this way, their oral literature constitutes a historical narrative.

** kukryt tam^a-re ja pymj^ar tam^a to monh kukryt k~i jabje*
Carry the tapir, leave (it to rest, and then carry it again), the tapir (with the) long hair

** ne ja pymjar to monh ne kumanh wajet je ne*
Go (resting along the way, not all at once) carrying (the tapir) for you, hung (on your back)

That is, the singer tells someone to carry the tapir that has been hunted. When game is hunted in the forest by a hunting party, it is never carried by the one who killed it, but passed to another of the party to do so. This is in itself an attitude related to the moral standpoint that, although one should give, ‘giving’ is not an unqualified act. To let another one participate in an activity is to find a way to give them something. Also, activities should not be tiresome, but on the contrary should not involve a great effort to execute. So, men carrying heavy game (and loads in general) never do so in a single stage, but stop to rest at regular intervals. Two of the central aspects of the *mex*-ness of an activity can be seen here: it should be done with others in order to allow for giving and getting; and it should be done in a leisurely way. A moral action involves participation while at the same time excluding drudgery. This is even more stressed in

through the generations is far more important than the ways in which this transmission is accomplished.

ceremonial hunting expeditions (for naming ceremonies and some others), when those who are - or become - brothers (*kamy*, in this case referring to 'classificatory' brothers, that is, to people one has grown up with in the same house) of the celebrated child's father will carry all game back to the village for him.

Such consideration for workload is something that obtains for other collective activities as well. For example, during my fieldwork, I participated in four clearings of garden spots, made collectively in each of them by friends of one of the participants. At any moment during it, men would stop in order to hunt an armadillo, a paca or any other game that presented itself to them. Short periods of work were followed by long moments of rest, when chatting and laughter (and occasional singing and story telling, mostly in the case of older men) would fill the time. Men participating in such activities are usually of the same age, and thus are long-time companions¹⁸⁵, and the general atmosphere during such activities is extremely relaxed¹⁸⁶. As the new garden plot is commonly cleared close to the old garden, fruits and manioc or sweet potatoes are given to the participants by the 'owner' of the garden (actually, the husband of the 'owner', as gardens are 'owned' by women). The 'owner', and those that live in the same household as he does, do not eat such food themselves, something that has led Fisher (1991: 145) to describe it as a 'transaction', a 'payment' made by the garden's 'owner' to those working in it. Actually, what is stressed here is, I think, the moral form of the act of giving, by which one makes that which is his own accessible to others. In the same way, it is the joy of being together, and not the work itself (i.e., what we would isolate as 'labour'), which is highlighted in these collective tasks. This was easily seen in the

¹⁸⁵ Not all men of the same age participate in them, but only the closest friends of any man who needs to have a spot cleared for a garden.

outcome of two of the ‘working parties’ I participated in. They were being held by *mekrare*, men with children (but without grandchildren, that is, men roughly of the same age as myself). After working some three to four hours (including long periods of rest), both parties ended at the river beach close to Catete village by mid-afternoon, when it was deserted. There they played football and bathed in the river until sunset. This made their day much more ‘fun’ than ‘work’, as they actually spent more time socialising than working. These two aspects are actually not distinguishable, and collective activities are primarily conceived of as fun, an important moral point among the *Mebengokré*.

**nhym mydj`a ngradj`a k^o nhiaru munh*

** kukryt tam^a-re ja pymj^ar tam^a to monh kukryt k~i jabje*

**ne ja pymjar to monh ne k~um~ajet je ne*

** me anikr^e, me anikr^e*
Quiet, all; quiet all

** bame wa ma*
for us all

** kukryt-t kak^o-re*
I will sing the song of the tapir

** ma na jerenh ne i-ma*
I will sing

** me anikr^e*

** ba me wa ma*

** kukryt-t kak^o-re*

** ma na jarenh ne i-ma*

** ge ron nhintire dj^o me*
he takes the fruits of the babassu palmtree with long spines

There is here once again, a reference to the fields region beyond the forest.

186 See Overing (2000) and Pases (2000) on the rhythm of work among, respectively, the *Piaroa* and the

Babassu palm trees are typical of that region. Also, the hummingbird (*nhuinhinti*) is said to be typically at home in the fields.

** ge nhui nhinti jar`a me*
he takes the feathers of the nhui nhinti [a type of large hummingbird]

** r`yp`yre dj^o me*
(he takes) the fruit of the r`yp`yre [the tree from which the Mebengokré extract the resin to paint the sides of the children's shaved part of the head]

** dj^o krikrit-ti ne*
(and the) fruits (collide with each other making the noise) krikrit, do they not? [that is, one takes the fruits of the r`yp`yre into a basket, and they collide with each other while one is walking back, carrying the basket]

O wa ne!
So it is! [expression used to end of a story or song].

This description tells of a trekking expedition to the region of the fields south of their present site. In these treks, men used to gather (and still do, to a lesser extent) things such as resin and babassu, both used in *me toro*. Babassu is used to make the oil that men and women spread on their bodies to fix the red anatto body painting, as well as to make their hair and body shiny, something that is held to be extremely beautiful.

mebakra~atum Kr~ajakatingre, Tuktukre, Bekr~adj^opre
Our grandfather Kr~ajakatingre, Tuktukre, Bekr~adj^opre

He quotes here the several names of the grandfather. It has been noticed (Lea 1986) that women act as repositories of the stock of personal names. Here is an example of how the memory of names, embedded in oral literature, is also kept by men. In this case, the enunciation of the personal names of the grandfather has a legitimising character: the ceremonial specialist shows he was intimate with the one who taught him the song. Clearly, 'learning' here is not simply a cognitive process. Knowledge

transmission presupposes a certain intimacy between the participants involved. Some form of intimacy is a precondition for the giving or getting of knowledge. One may be fully aware of the content of a song, for instance, but that does not qualify one as ‘knowing’ that song. It is only through a process of transmission, which involves giving and getting as, for instance, specific types of food to the person who is teaching, that knowledge becomes legitimately present in the recipient.¹⁸⁷ This becomes easily understandable if one considers that knowledge is *mex* only when it is acquired in *mex* ways, that is, by means of giving and getting. This is not a sufficient condition to acquire legitimate knowledge, but it is a necessary one.

ne umari janh
he knew (the song)

‘ok’^e me kraix o ku’^e
all began to come by the fire and to stay there (while he sang)

The men begin to gather by the fire. This is an statement concerning the *mex*-ness of *Bep-jareti*’s song. It actually moved people to gather together in order to listen and to enjoy it. Due to their persuasive nature, songs are listened to by people both in the sense that they make an effort to hear it, and in the sense of them allowing themselves to be persuaded by it. Enjoyment is crucial in both senses¹⁸⁸, as will become clear in what follows.

¹⁸⁷ Verswijver (1985: 140) remarks that the status of ‘having knowledge’ must be acquired through a suitable transmission. One may know the words of a song, for instance, and yet not be the bearer of that knowledge; in this case, one will be said not to know the song, or to have a ‘mock knowledge’, *mari bitxaer*, of it.

¹⁸⁸ Overing (2000) makes very much the same point when she stresses both the role of play and the ludic in the constitution of native Amazonian conviviality, and the fact that such conviviality has to be actively created by means of individual agency: “It is my argument that it is precisely through these ludic skills that the leader enables collectivity among an otherwise vehemently anarchic people. It is the leader who, in large part through his skills for merriment, for jesting, clowning, and dancing, provides the impetus, and even possibility, for these people to fulfil their desire for collective togetherness, or union.” (2000: 08. *her italics*)

Nhym at'e na...
Then, (there is) another (story)

mranhnh am`ainget-^e Beprinpa na adjwydjwy kute
your father-in-law Beprinpa was also together (with Bep-jareti, singing)

** aj'a:: h'i::*
[no meaning]

** aja ja ^e aja mmmm...*
[no meaning]

** aja ^e aja ^e aja ja...*
[no meaning, just rhythmical sounds]

** ra: g^e djuninh*
He (is my) father [djuni: djunwa]

** box:: ga::*
you have come

** kumanh jarenh*
tell him

** ge: box-'o-box ne ipy t'a*
he really came, (and) did not let (the enemies get close)

** ra: ge djuninh*

**box:: ga::*

**ge:: k'ot-'o-box*
he came after [something?]

** ne ipy t'a*

o wa ne

** `Ak ng^oanh~i kriti::-re*
The bird [ak ngoanhinh: a species of large bird, with many different feathers]

** `ak ngoanhinh kriti:re na kute im~a*
The bird has taught me ['passed me'] (the song)

** mry:re kamr^o*
meat's blood

Another story has begun here, related to the transmission of a song from the
`ak ngoanhinh bird. The last sentence describes visually the bird attacking its prey, by

means of a metonymy where the blood stands for the whole scene of the hunting.¹⁸⁹

* *t'o amin[^]e dj`a kam[^]a*
(The bird takes its prey) to its place

r`yp`yr-ri
[the tree described above, from which the resin is taken to delineate the contours of the children's shaved part of the head]

* *kutxer n~e*
(It is) behind [the bird's place is behind the *r`yp`yr* tree]

* *`Ak ng[^]oanh~i kriti::~-re*

* *`ak ng[^]o anh~i kriti:re na kute im~a*

* *mry:re kamr[^]o*

* *t'o amin[^]e dj`a kam[^]a*

* *r`yp`yr-ri*

* *kutxere n~e*

* *on~i nh~a ng[^]o koror kam[^]a*
Far away, (where the) river is not deep [this is the place where the *`ak* took its prey]

* *mry n~o*
(the) game (is) laying [or 'laying game', that is, hunting]

ba amainget-[^]e n~a kute kore kam me ku'[^]e iaj anh ngrer o wanhynhr:
Our father-in-law sings the kore kam me ku'[^]e this way:

* *`Ak ng[^]oanh~i kriti::~-re*

* *`ak ng[^]o anh~i kriti:re na kute im~a*

* *mry:re kamr[^]o*

* *t'o amin[^]e dj`a kam[^]a*

* *r`yp`yr-ri*

* *kutxere n~e*

* *`Ak ng[^]oanh~inh kriti::~-re*

* *`ak ng[^]o anh~inh kriti:re na kute im~a*

* *mry:re kamr[^]o*

* *t'o amin[^]e dj`a kam[^]a*

¹⁸⁹ I was not able to verify whether there is a word, or expression, to designate such a trope in *Mebengokré* language.

* *r`yp`yr-ri*

* *kutxere n~e*

* *oninh janh ng^o koror kam^a*

* *mry n~o*

Mebakr~atum kute kore kam me ku'^e ^ant kute me kraix djwynh

Both our grandfathers always began (to sing) the kore kam me ku'^e [that is, it was really they who sang it]

nhym me me kraix, me kraix o ku'e

and then all, all began to gather by the fire (to listen to them)

anh kore kam me ku'^e ija, me kraix o ku'^e

for the kore kam me ku'^e, they all gathered by the fire

I was told at this point that men gathered by the fire to listen to the *kore kam me ku'e*, because it is *mex*. What the ceremonial specialist is stressing here is the capacity of both his antecedents to promote the gathering of people to listen to them. In this case, *mex* as a predicate refers both to the content of the song and to the success achieved by it in bringing people together. 'Effectiveness' and 'seemliness' are fused in this moral/aesthetical judgement.

nhym mebakr~atum Bep-jareti na adjwy kute:

Then our grandfather Bep-jareti also sang this way¹⁹⁰

The two ceremonial specialists sang each other's songs by the fire and they were *mex*, as all came by the fire to hear them. This action was *mex* because of its outcome, that is, because it moved people to hear - and to listen. A parallel is traced here between the situation of the audience in the story and the situation of the audience in the *me toro*, listening to the story. Both are coming to the fire to hear the song and stories of the ceremonial specialist. In both cases, they will head to the collective fishing

¹⁹⁰ The ceremonial specialist sings *Beprinpa's* song

afterwards. This parallel is emphasised by the ceremonial specialist himself, who tells the men his own relationship to the knowledge acquired through his father-in-law. The knowledge is *mex* because it is efficient, that is, because it does make people gather around the fire to listen to the song. Both points, the connection of the specialist with the one who produced the song (and, through the later, with *Bep-jareti* himself) and the efficacy of it, are stressed in the ceremonial specialist's speech.

nhy ate we, am`ainget-^e wa ~anwe t^am na kruwa jabjeti, prenobakati,
Then, there is another story, (that of) your fathers-in-law Kruwa-jabjeti, Prenobakati,

n~am am`aing^et-^e kam, bakr~atum, atuk^a,
There was your father-in-law, our grandfather, your father,

kam aminh m`yr- ri j^et anh na ngrer 'o waijet
he lifted himself (off the ground) and sang, hovering (above the place where he was before)

anh na ngrer odja
(he) sang the song, standing up ['odja' marks the bodily position of the person performing the action, in this case, standing, that is, not seated or lying down anywhere]

ne kam arinhk kute kruwa-jabjeti
(it was) similar (to that of) Kruwa-jabjeti

nam aminh m`yr, kubenget na aminh m`yr jabje
Then he lifted off the ground, the elder lifted off the ground

aminh m`yr-ri pr~o to ~am anh na ngrer jakre
(he) lifted off the ground and flew fast, trying (teaching) the song

ne me a kub`y monhr ~i ~na anh ngre
he tries (teaches) a song for them to come back, happy/laughing

nhym ~a Bep-jareti djumari a ne
Then (thus) Bep-jareti conceived (the song)

a by me aryp mebenget-^e aryp kumex
Back they went, and already the elders were crying so much

ne aryp nh~iarop wabe aryp a by mör m~a am~ip kr^a onhy kumex
already they had runny noses [that is, they were crying], and (were) all inviting each other to come back

am`ainget-e me a^er be ngrer j~a kaba
No one knew (that) your father-in-law were going to sing

n~e ... ngrer kato
... and he sang [Bepripa's song 'came off' him]

Nhym me ... w^o::!

And then, all ... (got ready to leave) [the sound is that of people standing up to leave. Men are coming back, to the fishing expedition]

Song is portrayed here as bringing joy. This is also an example of ‘decision-making’, and I would like to call attention to its form. Song (*ngrer*) is seen as a tool to move people to action. It is an agency-inducer, and it makes people act in ‘right ways’. *Bep-jareti* ‘tries’ the song on people and it ‘works’, both in the sense that it made people happy, gay, and in the sense that it persuaded them - or actually, seduced them, as it involved a play with desire, rather than rational argument, inducing them to perform the *akro ka’oinh*, the collective fishing expedition. These meanings are not dissociated: the way to move people to act is to make them happy, gay. They become moved to act in that way. Agency-inducement is synonym to gaiety-inducement. Persuasion here becomes essentially the inebriation of the senses with joy and with the promise of joy.

nam ~a mebakr~atum umari j~a ngrer jakre jarenh am~i monhr-ri kub^e nh^ep n~e pr~o t’o: o, to, to, to, ...

Then the grandfather conceived of trying the song, and then he lifted off the ground (as) a bat, and (flew) fast: to, to, to, to, ... [sound of the bat’s wings]

nhym me o benget n’o t^ox ranh anh a monh arimanh mranh mebakr~atum n^er kuto
And then an elder, not yet asleep, (told someone:) ‘You go (there) for me, to make fire, beside the grandfather’. [the fire is lit in order to shoo the bat away]

aryp na nh^ep dj`a ib^e kuta

There is a bat here, and it wants to bite me [says the elder who asked for the fire to be lit]

nhym me ku’^a ~a to: b^o::

then all lit the fire: b^o:: [sound of the fire].

nhym am`aing^et ibe ngrer kaba

Then your father-in-law sang the song (took the song from within him)

~a ngrer j~a jarenh o ku’^e

(then he) sang this song by the fire

nhym me ~o ~a aryp ajte kinh ne

Then they all changed their minds, becoming again gay/happy/liking

aryp ne mebakr~atum ajte nhym mengrer kaba nhym me aryp kinh ne
our grandfather sang again the songs (took them from within him) and people became
gay/happy again

~o ~o aite ... wo, wo, wo ...
(then they) changed their minds again, (going) wo, wo, wo ... [they shout, happily].

The song speaks of the feat of *Bep-jareti*, who created it and also induced people to like it, that is, he brought happiness, joy to the people, by making them want to go on the fishing expedition. People are moved *in consequence* of their being made joyful and happy (*kinh*), by the song. As stated, to create joy - a suitable emotional state - is to move people into action. *Bep-jareti* performed the action of singing, but it was the song that made people joyful, and moved them, in consequence, to the action of the fishing expedition. The capacity to induct agency is in the song, not within the people singing it, although *Bep-jareti* was only able to create it because he was made into a shaman, a *wajanga*, through the biting of the snake. But the whole story unfolds as an stochastic process, whose outcome is dependent on more than the art of singing itself, that is, on the correct, and appropriate utterance of the song. This is because a song, or a singer is *mex* only if he acquires its ends. Thus we can see that the notion of *ngrer* involves a conception of social agency that is both moral and aesthetic.

Song, desire, agency

This complex of song, desire and agency does not sit well with the bulk of speech act theory, which is usually centred around notions of discursive statements and rational persuasion. However, M. Rosaldo (1982: 203) strongly made the point that speech utterances cannot be understood apart from notions of human agency and personhood. This was the critique of Searle's view of speech acts as the embodiment of universal goals and needs present in human speakers (1982: 211). In Rosaldo's view, Searle tends

to reify a metaphysical model of the Western autonomous individual, acting out of his/her own volition. Searle's example of 'promise' as a speech act, according to Rosaldo, "... leads us to think of meaning as a thing derived from inner life. A world of promise appears as one where privacy, not community, is what gives rise to talk" (1982: 211). Searle would thus be generalising culture-specific notions of human agency, and in so doing missing the point that local practice shapes both agency and its meaning (1982: 212).

Whereas I entirely agree with Rosaldo's conclusions, the *Mebengokré* context of 'doing things with (sung) words' goes in a different direction from the Ilongot case. For the *Mebengokré*, songs come from within an individual and play with people's desires, creating interest in the action proposed by the song. It is what we would call their aesthetic quality that is effective, i.e., that has illocutionary force, as it seduces people into acting together by making them enjoy it. Rhythm, the central *mex* aspect of *Me toro*, is stressed by the *Mebengokré* as equally beautiful and good. The first sense is stressed in the very teaching of a *Me toro* to young people, a process that involves the collective coordination of bodily movement in dance. The second sense involves the collective coordination of bodily movement in what we call productive activities. Behind this picture, there is a conception of being both as autonomous and in search of its own ends. It is against such a background that *ngrer* must be understood, as a *tekne*¹⁹¹ for harmonising ends and means among autonomous individuals (as opposed, for instance, to Rosaldo's 'community').

¹⁹¹ I use the term here in the sense it is deployed by Ingold (2000: 356), following Aristotle's classification.

Upon finishing the story, the ceremonial specialist sang a part of *Beprinpa*'s song again (its last part), as a means of holding people's attention to the sequel to his narrative. He followed the song with this narration:

Itabdjwy na arib^e: 'ng^et^e go pa ar~ik~i me kukr`adj'a jarenh'
My tabdjwy [grandson, ref.] came (and said): ng^et^e [grandfather, int. treat.], tell us a story

ba kum~e: kr~any godja me djam idjwy a-piaap ket ne me kute ang^et ant~o kute ibe ngore kadjy am~a ngrer jarenh ga je idjwa odjam m~a
and I said: kr~any [grandson, ad.], if you have no shame (to sing) together with your ng^et [grandfather, ref.] (then I will tell you the ngore kadjy me ngrer [the song of those wanting to go to the small water] for you to sing like I do

nam anget aribe ~im monhr kati jarenh ~a ba o iba
then your grandfather came and sang the monhr kati (song) for me

ne im~a: ba kwatyi ari monhr kati dja ba am~a jarenh ba kum aj!
(then he said) TO me: I'll tell you the song of our grandmother

nhym anget ibe im~a:
Then your grandfather told me (the song):

The ceremonial specialist told the men about his learning of the songs, i.e., how they were transmitted to him by his grandfather (*nget*), who taught not only his own song, but that of their grandmother (*kwatui*). *Mebengokré* songs are gender-specific, but the Catete *Xicrin* have seen times when those songs had to be transmitted inter-gender, in order to preserve them for future generations, as I was told by several older men in the village. This is probably the case here. A point that must be stressed is the reference to shame (*piaap*, *piaam*). *Piaap* is a sentiment of 'restraint-unseemliness'¹⁹², related to the performative aspect of *Mebengokré* sociality, that is, to its way of performing for an audience. *Piaap*, in a sense, opposes performance.

** ba djore kangro::*
I (am) a hot bee [djore: a particularly ferocious bee]

** nh~y to monh*
(the bee (I) take/go [nh~y: 'bee']

¹⁹² I mean 'unseemliness' here as 'impropriety', related to a strong visual (and audictive) component. See Riviere (2000) for a description of a similar concept among the Trio of the Guiana region.

* *ikrapri am~i wyr*
I'm sad, paying attention (to the way)

* *r~iti to*
watching (the way I walk)

* *am~i wyr*

* *ba djore kangro*

* *r~iti to*

* *ami wyr*

Dajm mengrer godga ar~ik arenh o t~e
You try yourself to sing the song

akro owakjer ne me kumpr~i mei no oba
all sing the akro o'akjer (dj`akjer) slowly, (and it is) beautiful

Akro djakjer means literally 'carrying the vine (*akro*)'¹⁹³. It is sung when men return from the gathering of *akro* in the forest, when they bring it to the outskirts of the forest camp. The ceremonial specialist instructs the young men about the *me toro*, stressing the aesthetic character of the activity.

* *adjyma mrym ma ^e*
wait, (there is an) ant nest t(here)

* *adjyma mrym ma ^e*

* *be:: ~un~ukw~a-re ngr^aninh*
(whose) house (the ants') (we) put down

* *m~a m~o::*
(we) go (put down the ant nest)

Mrym ma'e is a kind of ant-nest that is built in trees, very common in those trees where the *akro* is found. When one pulls the *akro* vine down a tree that has such ant nest, one is likely to find oneself under a 'rain' of ants, whose bite is mildly painful.

¹⁹³ *Djakjer* is used for the game load brought to a ceremony by the hunting party, when it can be specified according to the ceremony being performed. Thus, '*bep dj`akjer*', for instance (which is also the name of a song performed on the occasion of the corresponding ceremony) is the *`akjer* for the *bep* ceremony, and so on. The same name is given to the food produced in a garden, which is to be destined

This song instructs people how to recognise and avoid such dangers of collective fishing, and to pull down an ant nest is unfortunately something one frequently does when gathering the *akro* vine.

* *adjyma mr~ym m~a ^e*

* *b^e:: un~ukw^a ngr^aninh*

* *he:: ma monh::*

* *adjyma mr~ym m~a ^e*

* *b^e:: un~ukw^a ngr^aninh*

* *he:: ma monh::*

me kute ngore ok'^e kam ne me
all are at the ngore dance (ngore ok'^e)

meokre, menoronyre
[older children and unmarried men]

me ~a itepor~a narin na
all (are in a) long queue

nhym me akro ok'jer oba
then all (are) bringing the akro on (their) backs

o aben kokjer omranh
(all are) walking, mixed up (i.e., alternate)

mekratum me, mekrany me
[i.e., older men and men with young children]

ngrer o me ma monhr kati oba
all go singing and carrying (the akro)

nhym me aben kojjer omranh
they are all walking, mixed up

When people finish making their large *akro* packs, they bring them to the *atyk*, the small clearing outside the camp. People of all ages walk in a single queue, 'mixed up', that is, with an older man in the first position, followed by a younger one, who is followed by an older one and so on. The men wait in the track for others to come, and all go back together to the camp, singing the *akro* songs. The insistence upon the

for a ceremony. These gardens are grown by those sponsoring such ceremonies, that is, those whose children will undergo the ceremony.

‘mixed up’ aspect of the activity is due to its conspicuousness. During most of their lives, *Mebengokré* men have as companions people of the same age when performing collective activities. Dances are also performed by men of all ages, but either the queue of dancers is sorted out by age, the older going in front (or beside) of it, or they oppose people of different ages, as in the dance of the manioc’s juice (*kwyr kango me toro*).¹⁹⁴ People of different ages will gather at the men’s house, but will talk mainly with those of the same age. Hunting and fishing expeditions¹⁹⁵ are planned and executed by people of the same age, that is, those they feel more comfortable with. The *akro ka’oinh* actually teaches people that there can also be joy in ‘mixed up’ gatherings, as will be shown below:

Me ma akro o’akjer jarenh onhy nhym me ~a aben nory itep oba
All (older men) stay seated singing the akro o’akjer song, (while) all (young ones) are
bringing (the akro), mixed up in the queue.

** O:: ja o::*

Narratives of a formal sort always interpose some rhythmical divide, a singing without words between parts of the speech, to beautify it. It makes people pay attention to it, I was told.

ne o aben nhory nhym me...
(the younger ones are) at the queue, mixed up...

be: me o aryp ngrer oba
and already (there is) someone bringing forth the song:

** o:: wo-o:: ngo nor nhiarymunh*
o:: wo-o:: the river sleeps far away

** na ba tep-e kaak-re...*
I (got) fish as if ..

** to ikukryt-ty*
carrying (a) tapir

**ne me wa wyr hy mia^a~a to monh*

¹⁹⁴ *Kwyr kango me toro*: ‘dance of the manioc’s juice’.

¹⁹⁵ With the exception of those all-inclusive (male) ones, meant for the culminating point of a ceremony.

(and) all (are) taking, carrying, going, stopping

** o:: ngo nor ma rym munh
going to the river that sleeps far away*

** naba tep-e kaak-re
I got fish as if*

** to ikukryt ne me ba wry
we were taking tapir*

** hy mi^ar to monh
stopping, taking and going*

This passage describes how men get loads of fish back to the village. The reference to tapir is because it is the heaviest game in the forest. It means that men will bring back such heavy loads of fish, which are to be compared with the tapir: to get fish as if it were tapir. The term used, *kaak*, implies here a likeness in weight. Men take their heavy loads, carry it for some time and then rest for some time, something done particularly when the load is heavy and the destination far away.

*Angrer ma aprinh mex ne omonh
You (should) sing slowly, well/beautifully, as you go*

*djam me ngrer mrenh godga?
is it not really for yourself, this song?*

*mranhnh akro ok'jer na me kumprinh mex no ba
all are walking, slowly singing (the song), carrying the akro (and it is) good/beautiful*

*o wa ne k'ai ma o'a^e monh
This way, pick it up, they go saying [I.E., the older men tell to the young ones, explaining how to do it]*

*k'ai ma im~ok~a o'a^e monh
(and they) go, (bringing the akro pile) upwards, up to the top*

**djam apijet-te-ti-re kudjy-re
and (about) this smelly large armadillo?¹⁹⁶*

**djam apijet-te-ti-re kudjy-re*

**djam apijet-te-ti-re kudjy-re*

** meba wa jabe je te ir^o toky::wy
running in zig-zag, looking for us all*

¹⁹⁶ *Apjeti*: A species of large armadillo, whose meat is held to be smelly (an opinion that I agree with).

** kum abikrenh j~a iry*
stay quiet, far (from the armadillo)

**djam apijet-te-ti-re kudjy-re*

**djam apijet-te-ti-re kudjy-re*

**djam apijet-te-ti-re kudjy-re*

** meba wa jabe je te ir^o toky::wy*

** kum abikrenh j~a iry*

** u ja wo::*

o wa ne
[and so it is]

Nhym ate dja ga...
And now you will (arrive)...

nhym me arup no ok ar~ik no kamrek ne
then all (women) will have painted their eyes red

na arup ngo kadjy ami ja ik n~o kamrek
(all) already want to go to the river, painting red around their mandibles...

ne aryp aben me no krax aka me omunh txo kumex
and already begin to look insistently at each other's whites of the eyes

The right way to carry the *akro* is singing, slowly, at the same pace that the queue enters the camp. This is held to be extremely beautiful, and this is what the song emphasises. The older men show the younger the way to do it. The *akro* pile, made by the bank of the river, will grow fast when the men bring their load of *akro*. On the way back to the camp, men may stop to hunt some game that presents itself to them, or to fish in some stream - for the whole activity is performed quite leisurely. There is a general atmosphere of celebration about, and men, especially the younger ones, are quite enthusiastic about it. It is this joyful atmosphere that is evoked by the ceremonial specialist's remarks on the slowness of singing and walking, on the opportunity of doing some hunting with one's mates. The women would be all beautifully painted, and so would the men, who will paint around their mandibles, all anxiously expecting the

me toro. The mention of looking into each other's whites of the eyes refers to this anticipation.

*Nhym ate at~o djwynh, `ak jaj ngore...
Then your brother, `ak jaj ngore... [the ceremonial specialist assumes again the voice of the character of his story]*

*godja adjwydjwy
he too...*

*inget ant monhr kati
(from) my nget the song (I will sing)*

*rop monhr kati j~a omunh
the song of the jaguar is (the song your are about to) hear¹⁹⁷*

*Mrenh akro uja o::
bringing the akro: (Older men shout like that when they are close to the camp, bringing the akro)*

*ka, ka, ka
[this is not a ngrer, a song, but and ungr~or, a 'shout']*

*ne menorony na me tuw kyr ~a katat
and the unmarried men [menorony] shout in a simpler way*

hu-wa:: [again a ungr~or]

*nhym mekrare na me ... o wa ne
Then the married men [mekrare] (shout) in this way:*

ka, ka, ka

*nhym menorony ma me...
then the unmarried men all (shout)...*

hu-wa:: kakakakaka::

*o wa ne. Nhym mekrare na me be kyr-~a kat`at
so it is. Then the married men all shout in the simpler way*

*na o wa ne
and so it is*

*ajte me aryp akro kumex ne
and all (go) gathering a lot of akro [that is, after these stories are told all night, the men go gathering akro for the fishing ceremony]*

¹⁹⁷ This song, and others whose content is not directly related to the ceremony, will not be transcribed here for reasons of space. They are all sung one after another, always interpolating something of the description of the incoming *me toro* between the songs. These will be retained in this description. These songs, like the others, are sung and a story is told, about the origin of the song. The story as well as the song is meant as a form of amusement. The reference to 'seeing' the song seems to be usual in the Mebengokre language. It could be because songs are not thought of as distinct from their actual performance; it could also be because the expression has no particular ambiguity in their language. I have not got enough linguistic data to decide which alternative should be the case.

*aryp w~a ab^e nhym aryp...
already all are seated. Already...*

*aryp akro onhy djam meba kukam~a kije kute ng^o-'o kr~i ka, kam k~i kati, ket ne jam
~o aben by--a monhr got...
already seated beside the akro, did our older ones [meba kukam~a kije: 'those that were
beside our first born'] not seat by the water, so happy, no one leaving (the place)? [a
rhetorical question, a device frequently used in formal speech]*

*na me arek akro kam ngryk-'o
already all had become serious, by the akro*

*kuka kamrek-re kute me ~o jak`ar
a fish [kuka kamrek; a species of fish that eats raw meat, bit someone]*

*we mex na me ~o odja nhym we kukakamrek-re we nox ne
I think someone was taking honey, when the fish jumped*

*nhym k`ai m~a monh nhym tedjek to ... prik!
then he stood up (that is, stood up in the river) and had his heel... prik! (bitten by the
fish)*

*kunh~y nhym k`ai ma m~o nhym tedjek t'o ... prik!
(he) was seated and when (he) stood up (he had his heel... prik!*

*tam na m~a me aben m~a jarenh, angmer!
all remember it (and) tell (the story), young ones!*

*kr^a, ikr~atum, ikra-ri, idjuwydjwy-ari, tam na me m~a aben m~a ngo kam ngryk...
(my) kra`abdjwy [formal friend, add.], my grandfathers, my sons, my brothers-in-law, all
remember how everybody became serious by the water (when that happened)*

*aben jam kaikep, na aminh kam tep djwa mex pyma
nobody left (for the water), all were afraid of the fish with good (sharp) teeth*

*p~i krax. Ngo kam p~i krax kaminh
stick. Afraid of (sharp) sticks under water (i.e., sharp sticks where people can hurt their
feet)*

*kang~a kute me ~o kungrinh na me aben m~a jarenh
all remember , and tell when a snake did wind around someone*

*ngo kan ngryk-'o aben janh ngo kam ngryk 'o kr~i
(all were) serious by the water, all (stayed) together, serious, seated by the water*

*nhym be ate na gari at~oi-re me a kanga mranhnh
(and) you and your brothers played all the time*

*am~imp ngo jadjyr kat~a a kanga
we fenced the river to bash (the akro) (and) you played*

*ngo jadjyr kat`a akanga mranhnh
we fenced the river, and you played*

*kikre kot akanga mranhnh
you played by the shelters*

nhym kati nam kukam~a tuw ngo kam ngryk

then the ancestors said they really became serious by the river

*nhym be ate na gar at`o-re me a kanga mranhnh
(and) you and your brothers played all the time*

*am~ip ngo jadjyr kat~a a kanga
we fenced the river to bash the (akro) (and) you played*

*ngo jadjyr kat~a a kanga: mranhnh
we fenced the river, and you played*

*kikre kot a kanga mranhnh
you played by the shelters*

*nhym kati n^am kukam`a kije tuw ngo kam ngryk
then the ancestors said they really became serious, by the river*

*ne aryp we mewwe aryp ngo, ngo me ngo ~o onhynh
then all were already coming to sit by the river bank*

*nhym aryp me o ant kadjy ku'^e
then some of them wanted (to gather by) the fire*

*mebokr~atum ant kukr`adj`a janh dja me gume ngo kadjy to nhy ant ~o
this is the custom of our ancestors, we dance the ngo kadjy ('wanting to go to the water',
lit.), and then, seated, and then ... [he didn't finish the sentence]*

*akat~a ibe idjwa odja
your brother is doing (becoming) like me*

*n~e k`ai ma monh
standing up, right?*

The seriousness of the ancestors is said here to make people come and sit by the water, and listen to the songs of the ceremony, by the bonfire. To adopt the same attitude of the ancestors is to become like them. *Me toro* is meant to produce such a likeness. The term *ngryk* actually has a visual referent, being used to describe these 'shut' facial expressions, which may convey a myriad of sentiments ranging from plain formality to anger. The use of the expression in the passage above conveys more, I think, than simply the 'seriousness of the matter'. Usually people, when amongst only those similar to themselves, are not *ngryk*. 'Open' faces and smiles are the rule on such occasions, and it is usually then when good laughter can be heard. This is not so say, though, that they only enjoy themselves when segregated from the rest, as the boundaries of such intimacy, always contextual, are set in many different ways. Thus,

people will enjoy themselves when dancing, for instance, as those of the same age dance together in the same dancing row, create a togetherness of similars that is at the base of fun and enjoyment.¹⁹⁸ The teaching of the older men in this passage is, I think, that of the appropriate¹⁹⁹ attitude that is properly used when in presence of those who are not similar to oneself

It could be said, thus, that in the same way that *Mebengokré* laughter is ‘ethical’²⁰⁰, in the sense that it indicates the similarity of those embraced by its range, while the absence of laughter can also be ethical, indicating a ‘mixing’ of different qualities of people and thus laughter’s unseemliness in such environments. It should be noted that this is an essentially male issue, as throughout their life men face more changes of social environment, engaging with non-similar people, in a way that is not so much experienced by women. Interestingly, there is a story related to the fishing ceremony²⁰¹, which tells how the first human laughter was produced. It is a variation of the story of the origin of the fishing ceremony, taught by a captured child of the bat-people. It tells how a man remained working in his garden while the others had gone hunting, and met a *kuben-nhepre*, a creature with the body of a man, and the wings and feet of a bat. This creature, who did not know human speech (i.e., *Mebengokré kaben*), tickled the man in a friendly way, making him laugh, which was the first laughter ever expressed by a human being. The man was taken by the bat-man (*kuben-nhepre*) to a

¹⁹⁸ According to Vidal (1977: 123), “... the individuals of an age-group call themselves ‘companions’, *me ro anh abatori* (those who grew together) or *aben pydji* (those that for a single one, that is, an age category). The ‘companions’ are those with whom one can speak freely; they have no shame (*piaam*) of one another. The *me ro anh abatori* are like relatives (*ombikwa*), because they are together every day, work together and have fun together.”

¹⁹⁹ Again, ‘seemly’ would be the appropriate term here, because of its strongly visual character. One of the meanings of *mex* is ‘proper to look at’.

²⁰⁰ I use the term here in the same sense that it was used by Beudet (1996).

²⁰¹ This story was collected by Banner (1957), among the *Mebengokre-Gorotire*. I have not heard it myself in the field, neither have I specifically asked them about it.

cave where it lived, and there he was tickled until exhausted by it, at the hands of his captor and other batmen. He thus was unable to run away. The other *Mebengokré*, learning the fate of their companion, rescued him, along with a small bat-boy, from the cave. From this day, the story goes, the *Mebengokre* do not appreciate laughter, considering it undignified for men and, like tickling itself, appropriate only for women and children.

There are some elements in the story which would render it more intelligible if taken into consideration. Firstly, it should be noted that the tickled man was among non-similar people. It would be unseemly for a *Mebengokré* to laugh in such a situation, as one should then be *ngryk*, that is, bear a 'serious' face. In the same way, this assertion only makes sense in relation to men, as women (and children) do not usually face the problem of producing togetherness while among non-similar people. Thus the story, as well as the one told by the ceremonial specialist (above), tells of the ethical character of the gathering of non-similar men on friendly grounds. It tells of how different qualities of people can co-perform an activity, while at the same time being able to produce a type of togetherness, that is, being able to have fun among dissimilars in the midst of an all-inclusive task. This helps to understand the stress put by the ceremonial specialist on the 'mixed' quality of those performing the *akro ka'oinh*. It is the ethical, as well as the technical and the aesthetic character of the activity that is being taught by him. Many strangers not accustomed to *Mebengokré* ways have the distinct impression that they are a people that do not laugh, the very epitome of seriousness. To anyone who sees a *Mebengokré* outside his or her own ambiance (especially among non-Indians), the idea that laughter can be a common sociality device among them may sound quite strange. But the mistake is in taking such laughter as a non-contextualised expression of mood,

as if it had to do solely with an individual's disposition. Laughter here is a social device, and a very important one indeed, as it brings people together and makes possible a whole series of activities that would not be feasible otherwise . This is not to say that laughter in these contexts is not an expression of joy; only that it is something that is consciously, explicitly used to create togetherness among non-similar people. It is an element of a highly developed technology of conviviality. And it is far from being the only element of such technology. For instance, there is also an active need for being *ngryk*, 'serious', among non-similar in certain contexts, and this is also part of the *Mebengokré* ethics of conviviality. After all, it is only on some occasions that non-similar people should gather together to realise the same activities.

** Iweru k`ai-w^e we::*

the akro, slowly [k'ai we: k'ai be. Slowly, softly. That is: 'the akro (is to be beaten) softly']

** iweru, iweru, iweru::*

** iweru ma ma tx`a he:: hum::*

going to the akro, (startled?)

** iweru: iweru ma k`ai w^e we::*

** iweru, iweru, iweru*

** iweru ma ma tx`a h^e: hum::*

** iweru::*

** wewe te je wowe te janh*

These are the butterfly's legs (?)

** wewe te je wowe te janh*

** omunh janh omunh janh, ky re:*

going, going, running (the fish 'run' because of the akro? ky: to run, used for large bodies)

** omunh janh, omunh janh, ky re:*

** omunh janh, omunh janh, ky:*

** omunh janh, omunh janh, ky-re:*

** omunh janh, omunh janh, ky:*

** p^an p^an re hy hy re, hy, hy re:*

small fish (pacu, a species of fish), burn, burn [the akro's poison 'burns' the fish that looks like the female sexual organ. This specific part is sung turning front and backwards in short jumps, shaking the body up and down, as the fish is supposed to do]

** hy re a'^e*

** p^an p^an re hy hy re, hy, hy re:*

** hy re a'^e*

** p^an p^an re hy hy re, hy, hy re:*

** hy re a'^e*

Nhym ate mranhnh g'atenk ...

Then I think (it was) your son ... [g'atenk: your son, who is my tabdjwy ('grandson', 'nephew)]

ibe am'ainget-^e ngrer janh gop ja idwja

this is the song that your nget [my father-in-law] showed me

kujwa gop ja odja. N~e ...

as I showed you. E ...

** w^a kam m~a ir^om~a je*

jump, right there

** w^a kam m~a ir^om~a je*

** w^a kam m~a ir^om~a je*

** w^a kam m~a ir^om~a je*

** adjy-wy-re, adjy-wy-re ...*

Afterwards! afterwards! [one speaks like that when one is angry]

** in~a w`a kam iran h*

is it clear there?

** djam w~a kam m~a iran h m~a dj`a*

let's go there, where is clear?

Nhym ate dja' m~e ...

then all go ...

onhonh ngo dja gu m~e onhynh

then all (of us) go to the akro me toro [onhonh ngo: the akro me toro]

The instructions related to the 'technical' aspect of the activity are given to the young men as *suggestions*. This coheres with the passage above, where young men are portrayed as doing what they want - i.e., 'playing' by the shelters, instead of being engaged in the activities related to the ceremony. The activity is portrayed as

aesthetically pleasurable: it is a song to be enjoyed, not a task to be executed. The whole idea being expressed here to the young men is that the activity is not a duty, but a pleasure.

nhym me aryp me o ant ...
then people ...

k`ax m~a ba
standing up (to dance)

o'^e:: nenh owak`a
dance (until they) stop

nhym aryp gume ngo
then (we) all go to the river

aryp myt janh t~e, nhynh. Gume aryp ngo ~a
then the sun is already going [i.e., the sun has already risen]. (The men) sit [i.e., they stop dancing]. We are all already in the river

aryp nhym me akro o' box pa
then (they) finish bringing the akro

nhym m~e ~o k`ax m~a toro dj`a no jaret
then someone stands up dancing, inviting all (to go to the river)

** h~a m~a na ba im~a kinh im~a ja be*
I like (the akro ka'oinh) for me [this literal translation actually means that one wants the akrô ka'ôinh for oneself. 'To like', in this sense, is equivalent to want something for oneself because one likes it. It is an expression of desire.]

This part is a straightforward description of the *me toro* to come. The whole activity is represented as an aesthetic one, incorporating dance and song into the gathering of *akrô*, its preparation, transport to the camp, and the actual bashing of *akrô* in the water. The ceremonial specialist's song describes the activity and men's attitudes towards it: they participate in it on their own accord, because it is beautiful/good. As stated in the last sentence, what is important here is to like it, to be happy with it, to want it for oneself.

This passage must be understood from the viewpoint of some elements of *Mebengokré* morality that are embedded in it. One central element is that men do it

because they like, because it makes them happy. The idea of happiness, or something equivalent to it, is expressed by the term *kinh*, usually translated as joy or contentment. In the transitive form *ma kinh*, it is rendered in Portuguese as ‘gostar’, ‘to like’²⁰². But there are some specificities to this liking. When applied to things or events, it indicates a desire to possess, to get hold of them. Thus, *ba inhma kinh* is usually rendered as ‘I like (this) for me’. It is an expression of desire, rather than volition, and is used to express that the speaker wants to have the object or event for himself. Another verb, *pram*, is used to express want, but this, to my knowledge, expresses either volition or necessity. Thus, *inhma pram*, ‘I’m hungry’, that is, ‘I need food’, is different from *inhma omronh kinh* (‘I want some food’). In our own way of thinking, we oppose volition and necessity as central concerns for our moral philosophies (or for most of them, at least). But desire is singled out as the focus of *Mebengokré* philosophy, as an element both moral and aesthetic, and as such is opposed both to volition and to necessity (thus necessarily lumping the latter two together). When one says, in relation to a thing or event, *ba inhma kinh kumex* (the last word here being an intensifier, making the expression an hyperbolic one), or, literally, ‘I like it very much for me’, one is actually telling the person one is addressing that one desires that thing/event for himself.

This becomes clear when we consider the expression *kinh kaigo*, used to denote what we would call a ‘purely aesthetic’ appreciation of something. *Kinh kaigo* is a simulacrum of *kinh*, something that purports to be like *kinh*, but isn’t. And it isn’t because it is only appreciation, suggesting a lack of desire to possess the thing to which it refers. *Kinh*, similar to the ancient Greek notion of *eudaimonia* (which is also usually

²⁰² The postposition marks the subject and the object is prefixed to the verb. Thus, *i-ma a-kinh*, ‘I like

translated as ‘happiness’), refers to the acquisition of material, concrete things, as well as to inner emotional states. Actually, they are one and the same thing for the *Mebengokré*, as to acquire the objects of one’s desires is to become content, satiated, and happy.

It has to be stressed here that the logic implied in the song described above is one of desire. The object of desire itself is invariably qualified as *mex kumrenhx*, as ‘very/truly good/beautiful’. The same logic applies to the description of the *me toro* above. It is not volition that is stressed here, but desire. People are portrayed as moved by their desire, that is, as made to like something ‘for themselves’, and to feel irresistibly attracted by it. This desire is individual, and the very art of the song - and of *me toro* as a whole - is to create such desire. The description of the whole activity by the ceremonial specialist reveals itself as a moral/aesthetic pursuit, one that seeks to realise a state where people’s individual desires are to be collectively achieved.

** ar rere ja my*
[no meaning]

** manh nibum k`ai monhr to*
going beating in the back (of the akro?)

** bep-e kw^ai w`arix 0 re*
pulling/taking akro [‘bep kw^ai’is a name for akro]

** amunh aryp*
(It’s) going

** n^a ba pa w`arix o re*
I took it myself

** nibum kaingor ti*
the back very designed [the heavy akro load leaves deep marks ON people’s backs]

** bep e kw^ai warix o ni ro::*
taking (collecting) the bent akro

** ge areketi re t^o*
he is going (to gather) trees’ bark [arerekti is a name for trees’ bark]

* *t^o kadj^o kadj^o*
to tear, to tear (the bark from the tree: to peel off)

* *monhrinh kapran n~a re n~a*
look at the land turtle!

* *bep e kw^ai w`ari pari be kwyr*
walking under the akro

* *ge arink inh kwyr to abe*
it (the land turtle) keeps walking

* *ba kumrenhx -txi bep e kw^ai w`ari x o niro*
I'm firstly going to take the akro

* *ge arink inh ti re: to kadj^o kadj^o-o:*
he is going to tear, to tear the trees' bark

* *monhre kapran na re bep-e kw^ai w`ari pari be kwyr ge aring inh kw`y:*
there are deer and land turtle running around, non-stop, under the akro

Land turtles are among the favourite foods for the *Mebengokré*²⁰³, while deer, formerly an object of dietary restriction for men, are today very much appreciated. There is an expression of plenty in this passage, as it was explained to me by the translator. The situation is portrayed as a wholly pleasurable one, where one can have the opportunity of achieving more than a single object of desire (food is the paradigm for such objects). The description as a whole refers to the technical steps of bending the *akro*, which is then beaten to peel off its outer bark, and then folded into 'packs' tied with strips of tree's bark.

* *pydji ranh re ti m~a na kang^o mex i n~e*
only the akro with lots of juice is good to make foam [the usual order of the sentence would be: pydjy ranh re ti imanh kango mex.]

* *manh ne ga-i wir-re-e*
did you understand? [usual order: djam ne ga ma?]

* *ranh re txi manh ne kango prek-e-re*
the akro that has juice has a stronger flower ['flower': a metaphor for the foam exuded by the akro]

²⁰³ They are in fact more than that, being the food consumed during most ceremonies, because they can last for a long time without needing any care. They are a ready supply of meat for periods when people cannot go hunting everyday.

* *manh ne ga-i wir-re-e*
did you understand?

* *ngo ja katanh me wadja w^a k`a*
in the banks of the river, we walked/walk

* *dja k`ak hinh-inh ngo ja k`a tanh*
at the bank of the river, we shout

* *n^a ba dja k`ak*
yes, I shout

* *ngo ja katanh na ba dja k`ak dj`a ka`k ^e::*
I shout by the bank of the river

* *n^a rax i manh ne ga ngo prek-e nenh manh na ga*
you really went to the deep river

* *wir re ngo nhy re dj^a na ni tok o re*
got it? (when one stays) in the cold water, the belly swells

* *kruwa ni kanhinhx re ngo nhy re*
the arrow bends in the cold water

* *dja na ninh to ko re kruwa ninh kanhinhx - re-e:*
in the place where the belly swells, the arrow bends

* *dja na ninh to ko re kruwa ninh kanhinhx - re-e:*

* *ngo nhy re dja na aninh to ko re kruwa ninh kanhinhx i re*
the cold water fills your belly, bends the arrow

* *ngo nhy re dja ne ga ninh to ko re*
the cold water fills your belly

* *adja adja bep e kw^ai w`ari na bep e kw^ai w`ari kudj^a: y nenh*
the roots, the roots of the aw`ari [Buriti palm tree] smell strongly

* *adja, adja*
the roots, the roots

* *adja adja bep e kw^ai w`ari na bep e kw^ai w`ari kudj^a: y nenh*
the roots, the roots of the aw`ari [Buriti palm tree] smell strongly

* *adja, adja*
the roots, the roots

* *adjy manh me i monhnh*
they are going, afterwards

* *adjy manh me i monhnh*

* *w`ari ti dj^o na bep e kw^ai w`ari kudji*
the aw`ari tree left a large fruit

* *^o nenh txa adja adja*
leave it now, leave it

** n abep e kw[^]ai w`ari na bep e kw[^]ai w`ari kudji :e*
the aw`ari tree smells a lot

** nenh adja adja:*
leave it now, leave it

** adjymanh me i monhnh*
they are going afterwards

** o nenh dja monhnh: te dja ga me monhnh tdjori omonhnh nenh:*
going now, again you go. Are you going? [i.e., the akro's foam, going to the middle of the river]

** monhnh tx[^]a ka na*
(the foam) is going (to the) fish [tx[^]a ka na: a kind of fish]

** nibum anh txo ti amonhnh nenh*
(there is) the dorsal fin, going [a metonym for the fish, here]

** djam i pyrna, djam i pyrna ri*
is there anyone afraid? Is there anyone afraid?

** to djam na me monhnh*
are they going? [referring to the fish]

** to djam na me wa monhnh*

** minh k`a k`a ti re anhu ti re ja*
this is the alligator with long tail

** minh k`a k`a ti re anhu ti re ja*

** dja biri dja aminh panh txi tanh*
by the place to go up [i.e., the place where one leaves the river; the river bank] you will pay me [in the figurative sense here: the bep e kw[^]ai w`ari tells the fish that they will set up scores by the bank of the river]

** bep e kw[^]ai w`ari te kupranh ranh manh monhr manh*
the aw`ari (tree) is going to exterminate the fish

** apari manh monhr manh*
(it) is going down (the river)

** te djwa b[^]o nenh ik`ak`a nhinh re*
the bee ik`ak`a [kind of native bee] goes slowly

** nhy re dja t[^]o:: re*
a few bees

** nh[^]a jarenh nhinh to*
telling [the aw`ari tells the bees?]

** nh[^]a jarenh nhinh to*

** nh[^]a jarenh nhinh to*

** onh b`ari txe txo pranh ranh nenh*
the fruit of the tree is high above

** onh b`ari txe txo ni:ronh onh nenh
the tree is loaded with pending fruits*

** djam na renh ni to
are you taking?*

** djam na renh ni to*

** djam na renh ni to*

** onh aw`ari txe txo pranh ranh nenh
(until) (you) take all the aw`ari's fruits?*

** onh aw`ari txe nironh : onh nenh
the aw`ari (tree) has many fruits*

** djam na renh ninh to
are you picking?*

** djam na renh ninh to*

** djam na renh ninh to*

** onh aw`ari txe dj^o pranh ranh nenh
(until) picking all the fruits from the aw`ari tree)?*

** onh aw`ari txe nironh i onh nenh
the aw`ari (tree) has many fruits pending (from it)*

** t^o o' tok^o re dj^a na renh ninh tok^o re
(the fruit is) falling down, are you picking?*

** t^o o' tok^o re dj^a na renh ninh tok^o re*

** t^o o' tok^o re dj^a na renh ninh tok^o re*

** onh aw`ari txe djo kupranh ranh nenh
the fruits in the aw`ari (tree's) branches have finished*

The song goes on, talking of the bashing of *akro* into the water. It is sung by men while actually doing it, and goes on for several hours, the whole duration of the fishing. While the reference to the roots of the tree seem to imply a comparison between it and the *akro* itself, the reference to the tree's fruits is reminiscent of the 'picking' of fish during the activity.

Songs have a twofold significance for the *Mebengokré*. By listening to a song, one is seduced into desiring what is proposed in the song, as it continuously stresses the joy and the plenty that are created through it. The *Me toro* is thus portrayed as a model

moral action, allowing both for the creation of joy among different qualities of people and for the realisation of the prototypical individual wish, that is, to acquire food. Moreover, the food acquired is also destined to be collectively eaten in another *Me toro* back in the village, thus fulfilling all the prerequisites of moral action, that is, the creation of an emotional state conducive to the possibility of people giving and getting food.

As the teaching went on, the ceremonial specialist began to sing the song created by his father-in-law, *Beprinpa*, who had taught him. The song is accompanied by a description of the activities that the younger men would perform for the first time. These activities include looking for the *akrô*, pulling it down from the tree and preparing it, and afterwards bringing it back to the fishing camp, singing the *akrô djakjer*, the song of the *akrô*, and finally beating it in the water. The ceremonial specialist also spoke of events that happened during past *Me toro*, of the dangers of being stung by sting-ray fish, of cutting one's foot on sharp tree trunks under the water, of being attacked by piranha fish, alligators and other such dangers. People were instructed in what we would call the 'technical' aspects of fishing at the same time as being seduced into performing it by the expectation of the great fun and the massive amount of fish to be had, that is, by *me toro*'s beauty and goodness.

Beprinpa is represented as having sung together with the shaman *Bep-jareti*. They sang together and people came around the fire to listen to them. A link is thus provided between ancient happenings (*Bep-jareti* is called *mebakraturum*, or 'everybody's grandfather/uncle') and the personal experience of the singer. Both *Bep-jareti*'s and *Beprinpa*'s individual experiences become song through their capacity for moving people into moral agency. The song stresses the individual agency of the singers in

shaping people's morality, that is, both teaching them the ways of realising it and moving them to actually doing it. *Ngrer* , 'song', becomes thus an agency-inducement for collective activities. As stated earlier, it is *mex* , that is, beautiful and good, because it moves people to do things together, because it both creates the possibility and places people in the position of giving and getting food from each other, and because it does all this by means of making people joyful. What moves people is not a notion of duty or social rule, but rather the expectation of joy. They are seduced to gather together by the beauty and goodness of the activity - that is, by its efficacy and seemliness. People should not be constrained or imposed upon, as this would be *punure*, bad/ugly. *Mebengokré* social philosophy is one of autonomous individuals who create a social state by having fun together.

Enjoying Oneself in the Water: the Ceremony and its Outcome

People started leaving for *Kamkukei*, 'the place of the *cotia*' (where the fishing ceremony was performed), at sunrise. The men sang once again one of the songs of the incoming *me toro* by the river. They started leaving the village around 9 a.m., each family going individually. Some of the older children, or *mebengodjyre*, went together with their *nget* and *kwatui* ('uncle/grandfather'/aunt/grandmother'), who were transporting manioc meal, (and also the raw, pressed manioc paste to prepare the *tep kupu*, or fish 'wrap', made in the same way as with game), potatoes, pans, electric torches and batteries, plastic covers for provisional tents at the camp (provided by the leaders, who brought huge rolls of thick, black plastic to cut to the size of reasonable individual tent covers to distribute among the men), all taken through the clear, large track opened by the unmarried men (*menoronyre*) to the spot close by the river. Before long, many shelters had been carved out of the forest. The track was well-made and the village was close, easily reached by a two to three hour walk at a steady pace. This

made it easy for many men to go on a second trip to the village to fetch more of such things as coffee, sugar, rice, manioc, potatoes, packs of crackers ... An amazing amount of food was brought to the 'dry river' camp, mainly in the expectation of a large yield of fish. Much of it was to be consumed on the spot, cooked in pans on the fire, or hot-smoked over the bonfires made in every shelter especially for this purpose.

At the spot along the curved bank of the river, several shelters of thin, soft wood had been erected by the men of each family individually, while the women prepared fires to make coffee and earth ovens to cook potatoes. Most people had left the village between 9 and 10 in the morning, and they kept arriving at *Kamkukei* throughout the whole afternoon. Most people were decorated with body paintings, beautifying themselves for the *me toro*. It was a high time, as some friends told me, to eat as many fish as one could, and to bring back loads of them to the village as *kupu* 'pies'. The adornments that the young, unmarried men (*menoronyre*) would wear later during the dance could be seen hanging in the branches of trees by the shelters or on the stakes of the houses themselves. This sight was meant to make people joyful in the expectation of the dance, and of the fishing itself.

That afternoon, the young *menoronyre* and the newly-married men (*mekranyre*) danced and sang in the morning as they had been doing during the *Me toro* at the village, but now at the plaza that had begun to be cleared the day before by the unmarried men and the younger married men, a job to be finished by several women²⁰⁴. The plaza was made close to the banks of the river, which at that point turns sharply to the left, while shelters were scattered along the banks of the river and

²⁰⁴ I was told that they were the mothers of those celebrated at the *bep-yrv me toro*, the ceremony whose culminating point would be performed back in the village. I have not been able to check such a statement myself.

between the plaza and the forest. The place itself, *Kamkukei*, was chosen because there the river runs slower, a necessary condition for this type of fishing. In timbo fishing, huge amounts of the vine have to be beaten in the water, so that the quantity of poison released is enough to affect the fish's respiratory system. Fish then come to the surface, where they can be speared or caught by hand or by net.

I stated above that the men danced and sang. But it was not song and dance in the way they had been performing in the village. Indeed, it could scarcely be called more than the creation of a rhythm by means of sound and movement, and the creation of harmony, by synchronisation between them. Men shouted rhythmically, producing a series of three short cries, followed by a long one, in the 'descending' tune that is common to the *finale* of their songs. The sequence was followed by another, similar but produced in a higher pitch, then followed by a third series, in the same pitch as the first. The dance, different from the usual dance in the village, displayed a different series of 'steps'²⁰⁵, while the men did not actually move from their places. After the dance, *Beb-djare*, one of the leaders of the village and the one who is knowledgeable in this *me toro*, talked for a long time to the audience of men gathered at the centre of the plaza. He spoke about what would follow once the fishing started. The men listened to him in a cheerful mood, the excitement of the *me toro* visible on their faces while they chatted to each other.

²⁰⁵ One of the 'steps' had the right leg stomping on the ground, to the front and slightly to the side (as men were not to move from their positions), followed by a short step with the left foot and by the right one stomping strongly on the ground again. This latter is followed by a large step with the left foot, to the front and back again to the same place. Another 'step' was composed by a series of very short 'jumps' to the side (3-4 jumps), and back in the same way to the original place. Both 'steps' are used in the ceremony prior to their going to the river (the *ngo-yry me toro*), as I was explained. The directional particle *-yry* indicates an action performed with an specific intention. To dance and get something from the water, that's an adequate description of the dance.

Around a quarter to seven, the *menoronyre* covered the ground of the centre of the plaza, or *ngobe*, with *rik* inaja palm leaves, as they had done the day before, and sat. They all had short (60-100 cms) sticks that were going to be used the next day to beat the *akrô* vine. One elder, *Kenpoti*, who is a *ngrenhondjwynh*, a ceremonial specialist, addressed the men for some time. After his harangue, the men prepared to dance. They moved in a compact group to the left and to the right, four steps each side, turning to the opposite side after the third step and stomping the right foot on the ground on the fourth step. An old woman accompanied them, her privilege (*kukradja*). The ‘dance’ lasted for a few minutes, after which the men performed the *ben diri*, which is not sung, but spoken. The men made a circle, the circumference of which was divided in sections according to their age. These groups of younger and of older men remained opposite to each other in the centre of the plaza, and a man from the younger group detached himself from it and came to the older men, addressing them in a formalised way, the words spoken emphatically while the man kept his eyes turned to the ground. The older *mekratumre* men answered his words with a long vocal sign of agreement, while another young man went to the middle of the plaza and spoke in the same formalised way. The younger men circled him, all turned inwards to him, now in the centre of a circle, and ‘danced’, moving circularly around themselves, brushing the ground with their feet. They then sat again, and were addressed by Bemoti, the old *ngrenhodjwynh*, who for a while harangued them on the ceremony.

People slept early that day, scattered through the area occupied by the temporary shelters, using their poles and the larger trees between them to tie their hammocks. Fires were made under the hammocks, to keep them comfortable in the cold of the night.

The day after, in the middle of the morning while the younger married men and the unmarried ones were enlarging the *karer*, or clearing that was being used as plaza for the *me toro*, older men left for the forest to gather *akrô*. *Akrô* is a long, thick vine, divided in three tubular sections. It is pulled down in long pieces from trees, it is then folded two or three times over itself, until the resulting 'pack' is between 1 and 1,5 metres long. Men usually took the care of folding each piece of the liana down to the same approximate size, as they were going to be bound together to form a huge pack of roughly the same length. The more homogeneous the packs the easy to carry, and some of them were fairly heavy. They were to be transported in the traditional *Mebengokré* way, by means of a strip of tree's bark tied to both ends of the pack and crossed over one's forehead.

After being folded, each bunch of *akrô* was beaten against a fallen tree trunk, with the short sticks that the men had fashioned for themselves, until the *akro*'s external, green bark was peeled off. The result was a semi-flexible heap of fibrous, red-brown vine, bound together with others, forming a pack of some 20 kg.²⁰⁶ These were left in some chosen spots, while men moved elsewhere to gather more *akro*. The gathering was done mostly individually, the men scattering themselves over a wide tract of forest up to one hour's walk from the camp. While men were gathering *akro*, women were preparing food, which they brought to the men by mid-day.

The packs of *akro* were brought back to the *atyk*, a small clearing some fifty metres away from the sheds and the plaza. The men sang while they walked back. As I was told, every one (or most people, by any account) has their own song, to be sung

²⁰⁶ Older men take pride in making larger 'packs', which are more beautiful, as they say, and they can easily be recognised from those made by younger men.

while carrying the *akro* back to the camp. In the old times, the use of another person's song is reputed to have usually ended up in fights. These are the *akro djakjer*, a term used also to refer to the food that is brought back to the village in order for a *me toro*.s culminating point to be performed.

The *akrô* was left in different spots near the plaza (*atyk*), covered by *rik* inaja palm leaves. It was still before mid-afternoon, and many men went back to their shelters, some of them to prepare adornments for their 'nephews'/'grandsons' (*tabdjwy*), or their children. Several were making bows out of red, semi-soft wood. These *djudje kamrek* are quite fragile, as my 'father' *Roma*, who was making one for his son-in-law, explained to me. Feathers of macaw (*myt*) and *kaingoroti* bird were used to fashion the arrows, which would be used for the fishing. Nowadays, the *Mebengokré* rarely use bow and arrow, but a *me toro* is always pedagogic, and so several men were preparing bows and arrows to be used by young lads during the actual fishing.

By the end of the afternoon, the *menoronyre* had cleared a place in the plaza (*atyk*), close to where the *akro* had been deposited. Men painted their faces red with anatto around their mouths, and gathered at the *atyk*, where *Bemoti* started singing. He was soon to be abruptly interrupted by *Beb-djare*, who addressed him in the same formalised way that was used in the ceremonial speech *ben diri*. All men stood up, picking up as they did so a piece of *rik*-o, or inaja palm leaf, that was covering the floor and using it as if it were a 'tail', circling *Bemoti* - who remained seated - and making 'monkey-like' sounds, leaving then for the centre of the plaza. There they repeated the same performance as previously, dancing around the small plaza, using the three different 'steps' as before. This is called *me ungror oba* (*me ungronr monhr*, when

people are already dancing). *Ungror* means ‘cry’, ‘shout’. The staging is a part of the ceremonial speech (*ben diri*).

After the dance, people divided again in two groups of men in the clearing outside the main part of the camp (which they call *ngobe*) . There really was an audience: the eyes of all the village were focused upon the dancers, from the edge of the clearing to the hammocks in the shelters nearby, all seemed to be watching them. Again, one of the younger men’s group came in front of the line of older men and repeated the same kind of formalised discourse, followed by a collective sign of approval from the latter:

baikranh tum ge arinhk ngore ne ja be
grandfather (baikraturum), he does not want to leave the water

n^a. Na ga ngore amanh uja be no kati
Yes, The water is doing him no harm.

nonhr kam ga guba je ngore kam ba ngryk ga ngore kam angryk onhynh kam aben diri
We are by the water, and you said [ben diri] that you are seated, serious, by the water.

onh wa nenh
That’s it.

n^a. To na ba ngore kam ngryk onhynh ba iben diri
Yes. I said that I am here, seated by the water, serious

onh wa nenh
that’s it

This was the ceremonial speech *ngo anh ben diri*, or *ben diri* of the water. But it did not finish then, as the young man went on repeating the same discourse, changing the relationship term used, from ‘uncle/grandfather’ (*baikraturum*) to ‘father’ (*djunu*), ‘father-in-law’ (*idumrenget*), ‘formal friend’ (*kra*), ‘brother-in-law’ (both *idumre* and *idjudjuwy*), brother (*kamy*), ‘nephew/grandson’ (*tabdjwy*). It is a formalised ‘consulting’: men are asking each other whether they should go fishing or wait. Each

speaker addressed the opposite line several times, using different relationship terms. Several speakers did the same, contributing to and creating an atmosphere of overarching and encompassing relatedness, as the same ‘question’ met always with the same collective assent of the men of the opposite line. The different groups of men stood as individuals to each other, stressing the manifold relations between them. It is relatedness itself that seems to be stressed by the *ben diri* ceremonial speech. These statements are made so that people will go fishing. The next two ceremonial statements, *kube ne otenh* and *kutanh no jaret.*, are said so that, after fishing, they will return to the village. The last ceremonial expression, as I was told, can be understood as ‘looking deeply into each others’ eyes²⁰⁷. Both speeches, the *kube ne otenh* and the *kutanh no jaret*, are said at the same time, by four men in the middle of the plaza, their backs turned to each other. The *kutanh no jaret* goes as follows:

baikranh tum ge arinhk ngore nonhr ja be
Grandfather, he does not want to leave the water

tam na ja. Ngore kam ngryk onhynh ba kutanh ino jaret
so it is, we are seated by the water, serious, staring at each other’s eyes [kutanh no jaret]

O wa nenh
That’s it

To stare into each others’ eyes is an image used to describe a group of people that do not know what to do next, and who are in a state of expectation about what to do²⁰⁸. The structure of the two ceremonial speeches is similar, a comparison that holds equally well for other *ben*, such as the ceremonial speech, *amiy anh ben diri*, spoken when the young *menoronyre* (unmarried men) go to chop down a wasp’s nest. The *ben diri* speech announces to an audience what the men are going to do next. It is a marker

²⁰⁷ *Jaret* means to bury in a hole on the ground, while *kutanh* is a term implying movement coming to a point from opposite directions.

²⁰⁸ For this same reason, it is also translated as ‘to invite’, as in the end of the *kore kam me kw’e* ceremony transcribed above.

of action, and precisely because of that, it also beautifies action, making it an aesthetic act.

Another *me toro* followed the ceremonial speech. The *panh me toro* is a confirmation ceremony for female names that have the prefix *panh-*, and people in Catete and *Djudjeko* have not made it for many years. This was a short ceremony, where *panh-* women (that is, women, one of whose personal names has a *panh-* ceremonial prefix) fully adorned (but not wearing the huge *krokroktire* head adornments, nor the *atoroti* eggs' shell's facial make up) congregated in a double line (with the older women at the back), squatting within the plaza by the river, facing the spectators - that is, away from the river - and sang a short song, which lasted no more than ten minutes. This ceremony is always performed during the *ngore kam me toro ceremony*, being yet one more in the string of *me toro* that forms what I am calling here the *Mebengokré* ceremonial season. As I was told, it is but a part of a longer female *panh-* ceremonial cycle, which has not been performed for many years in these villages. This (short) ceremony was conducted by *Nhak-py*, the the old ceremonial specialist's wife, who also bears a *panh-* name.

Upon finishing, the men brought the *akrô* vine packs to the plaza, placing them in a huge pile by the river. Each man would carry a pack - any pack, not necessarily the one he himself beat in the forest. Men stood awake the whole night at the plaza, talking and sometimes singing. Two men, wearing *kruwapu* head adornments, and standing at the borders of the plaza, facing the *akro* pile, sang for some time as an introduction to the *bep-yry me toro* ceremony, which was to be celebrated when the men got back to the village. Then the men gathered at the plaza and listened to one of the ceremonial specialists, who addressed the men several times during the night. Once again the men

were supposed to stay awake all night, and most of them did, talking excitedly to each other about the events of fishing the next day.

Before sunrise, at around 5 a.m., the men closed the section of the river immediately in front of the plaza. They did this using palm leaves loosely tied together in a structure of light palm branches. The men sang again and got into the water, each one embracing an *akro* pack, and started to bash it. In order to do so, one stays at the bank of the river, with the water reaching a little above the waistline, and bends one's knee, placing the foot over the opposite leg, holding the *akro* pack over the bent one, while simultaneously holding it against one's body with one arm around it. The pack is then beaten with the stick in the other hand. The beating is done rhythmically, to correspond to the song they sing while beating. After it is beaten some time, the *akro* pack - held more or less on the water line - is washed, as they say, being immersed into the water four times. The last time the pack is immersed, it is pushed gently towards the middle of the river, to make the foam that exudes from it gather there. It is the concentration of poison in the middle of the river, achieved through the coordination of people's movements by means of singing, which makes the whole scheme operational. Rhythm acts here as a powerful coordinator of collective effort.

The men divided in three groups, one in front of the plaza, more or less midway between both barriers in the river, and another close to the barrier upriver. A third group, smaller, stood in the opposite margin to the camp. They bashed steadily from 5:50 until around 7:20, observed by the women and the children, who did not go into the water. The three groups of men were quite far away from each other, but the song could be heard even from people further up the river. At specific parts of the song, men washed their *akro* packs in the water, and the dark, reddish foam coming from

them could be seen gathering slowly in the middle of the river. After some forty minutes, fish started to come to the surface. The women, who stood on the river banks, bringing coffee, milk, and some food to the men, were given the fish the men could lay their hands on while at the same time beating. The older men, who were out of the water, sang to teach those in the water, while warning them, all the time, that they should synchronise their beating. Fifteen minutes later, fish started to come up to the surface in larger amounts, and many men stopped beating and began fishing, or gathering fish, as they put it. For nearly one and a half hours, fish came to the surface in large amounts, and many men gathered substantial amounts of them, which they handed over to their wives, sisters and mothers. Many a young woman, and also children, came into the water, taking fish out of the nets that had been placed in the river, and with their own hands from the river, as the concentration of the poison in the water made the fish easier to gather.

Fish do not die with the *akro*: they stay half-paralysed, floating on the surface, belly up, but as soon as they are touched, they can submerge again, eventually floating in order to gulp some air. Men fished them with nets, arrows, the sticks themselves, or simply caught them with their bare hands. Outside the water, women collected the fish and prepared the ‘fish pies’ that were to be consumed back in the village. Much of the fish was cooked, dried or smoked over the fire, and consumed on the spot.

The ceremony is thus a very effective tool for fishing, but that is not all. Fishing with poison (*akrô ka'oinh*) means, above all, a great time for all those participating. The joyous mood created by the activity is an integral ASPECT of its meaning, as the men stress themselves. Fishing with poison is *mex*, beautiful/good, because it generates joy, as well as fish. As proper moral action, it is *mex* both because

it creates joy among people, and because it has the efficacy satisfying one's appetites in the most literal sense.

As the day went on, some people, mainly the younger ones, continued to bash the vine packs, while others left their *akro* packs to gather fish. Some people would come back to the fish poisoning activity for a while, which diminished steadily. By 11:30 a.m., the remaining ones beating the *akrô* gave up. Fish-gathering went on until 1 pm, by which time most men had stopped. Men, and in fact all the people, then dedicated themselves to eating, something that was leisurely done until night time. But they did not only eat. Women would send chosen bits of fish to other, *bikwa* (that is, relative, friend) women ; men would go from house to house, eating at all of them. The cheerful atmosphere of eating rivalled that of the *akro* bashing itself. Again, this was *mex* action, as many spontaneously expressed to me that evening. 'One eats here, and there, and over there as well', a friend explained me, 'everybody has fish'. This statement probably sounds strange to the reader - after all, if everybody has plenty of the same thing, what meaning would there be in going about eating each others' food? Such on-going commensality is, however quite paradigmatic of *Mebengokré* morality. Because one has a lot, one is able to give, and if everybody has plenty, then one is also able to get from others. This 'generalised giving and getting' is sharing in its purest form, where everybody has plenty of the same thing, and this thing is highly desirable to everybody.

Within the agency of *akro ka'oinh* the ethic, the aesthetic, and the technical are indistinguishable. In this way, this agency may be identified with the arts of conviviality itself, of how to live together with others in a moral way. It is a moral endeavour for individuals who pursue their own ends, and it does not restrain these ends, but, on the

contrary, it has their realisation as a basis for itself. It is because it creates sociality, not by imposing any sort of external limit, but by harmonising individual ends in a complex whole, through rhythm, through song and spoken word. There is no contradiction between individual liberty and social life, this old philosophical problem of Western society, as *Mebengokré* philosophy connects these as essential conditions to each other's realisation, through the joy of being together. There is no place in *Mebengokré* philosophy for such notions as manipulation of manpower, and the ceremony of *ngore kam me toro* definitely does not fit into the picture of a ritual expert utilising rites as 'triggering mechanisms for the sustained conduct of practical operations'²⁰⁹.

These seemingly innocent, leisurely moral activities of the *Mebengokré* actually pose a serious problem for those anthropological approaches based on a radical distinction between action and reflection, reason and emotion, between the moral and the utilitarian, the technical and the aesthetic. One such approach is that of Tambiah (1990), and as he discusses issues that are closely connected to those I describe here, I will try to speak to his interpretation of human agency and show the problem of applying it to *Mebengokré* moral agency.

In one of his Morgan lectures, Tambiah (1990:111-139) poses himself the traditional questions of rationality and relativism, and commensurability and translation between cultures (Tambiah 1990: 111-139). Discussing the possibility of comparison between cultures, Tambiah comes to '... the vexed question of how to achieve a satisfactory translation between cultures in order to make a meaningful comparison' (Ibid: 132). At this point, he finds a problem in relation to what he calls 'matters moral and social'. Systems of morality yield more commensurability problems in comparisons, because they do not deal with the relation between man and nature, but

²⁰⁹ I take the sentence from Tambiah's (1990: 73) comment on Malinowski's interpretation of *kula* canoe-building as related to magic.

with the relations between people. Technique relates men to nature, whereas ritual relates man to man. Different sets of opposed terms are derived from this distinction: the instrumental versus the performative, in relation to finality of social action; the causal versus the communicative, in relation to the logic behind the action; the technical-causal versus the expressive-performative features of action; and causality and participation, in relation to modality of action.

The world of agency thus becomes split between two poles, one related to man's action upon nature, and the other related to man's action upon man. These spheres of agency seem to hold in common only the bodily movement which constitutes the physical basis for all human agency. What becomes then of such activities as the *me toro* described above, which are both efficient and expressive, actions that involve both causality and participation? Tambiah's response is to state that, although moralities, as dealing with man-to-man relations, are more incommensurable, the 'technical' side of ritual (when it is there) is more easily commensurable, because it involves relations whose efficacy, or truth, can be measured in a form that makes it comparable to other techniques.

Tambiah is speaking here of transcultural judgements, but the same issue applies to transcultural understanding in general. As I have said before, in the introduction to my thesis, my aim is to produce an interpretation of 'the social' that is conversant with the *Mebengokré* view on the subject. To do so is to promote a dialogue between anthropological conceptions and what I could learn with the *Mebengokré* about their own conceptions. What would a *Mebengokré* philosopher, if one could be bothered to deal with such foreign intricacies, say about Tambiah's conception of social action? I believe that the first remark of such a hypothetical philosopher would be that Tambiah's notion of two distinct analytical types of action an empty, *kaigo* one, that is, it is a simulacrum. They are clearly meant to be comparable but they lack similar qualities to

be compared with each other. Moreover, both types of action are *punure*, bad/ugly, as one lacks goodness, in the sense of the possibility of satisfying one's desires, and the other lacks beauty, in the sense of conducting to joy.

In fact, Tambiah's ritual theory implies assumptions regarding human action that are based in Western metaphysical notions of morality. If we now return to his definition of ritual, as implying "... formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)", we are left with the strong impression that its form is that of a deontology, a doctrine of duties and obligations as the base of moral action, regardless of its consequences. But it is a form devoid of its content, an empty shell that disguises itself in the form of a set of analytical concepts. As such, it is not conversant with *Mebengokré* moral philosophy, which is based not on duty and obligation, but on the creation of joy. *Mebengokré* philosophy is one about how to have fun together, that is, about how one can be happy (*kinh*) through the acquisition of the objects of one's desires (*kinh*). This is accomplished through *me toro*, that is, through the collective production of rhythm and harmony. Herodotos, in a passage of his work, describes the island of Naxos as *kalos kagathos*, meaning both that it is good to look at and productive. The same reasoning applies to *Me toro*. It is both beautiful, involving dance, song, body adornments and painting, etc, and productive. And here lies another difference between Tambiah's and *Mebengokre*'s conceptions of morality. For the latter, the stuff itself of what we would call 'technical activity' is moral, to the extent that it yields material goods and as such is capable of satisfying people's desires, of achieving their individual ends.

In fact, Tambiah is prey to the peculiar configuration of Western (modern) moral philosophy, according to which the world of instrumental agency, as concerned

with the acquisition of practical ends, remains outside the realm of moral agency. Moral judgements can be issued on matters involving technical action, but the stuff of which such agency is made is itself strange to the moral world. Such a conception would not be capable of capturing the meaning that *me toro* has for those who live it, as to understand *me toro* in this way implies understanding it against the background of the morality that it expresses, teaches and realises. Ingold (2001: 416) seems to be trying to overcome similar problems when he writes, about the relation between tool-use and speech, that

By and large, discussions of the relationship between tool-using and speech have adopted the unequivocally 'logocentric' perspective of cognitive science and structural linguistics, whose ontological baseline postulates a rational subject positioned vis-a-vis an objective world. The aim has been to demonstrate a parallel, overlapping or even identity between cognitive structures involved in generating representations, on the one hand, of object assemblies (for execution as tool-using behaviour), and on the other, of word assemblies (for execution as speech). The former are glossed as 'technology', the latter as 'language'. The argument sketched above, however, suggests the possibility of a diametrically opposed approach, which takes as its ontological starting point the inescapable condition of human beings' engagement in the world, and that foregrounds the performative and poetic aspects of speech and tool-use that have been marginalised by rationalism. From the vantage point of this approach, the relationship between tool-using and speech, far from being the surface manifestation of a more fundamental deep-structural connection between technology and language, is really one between the vocal artistry of speech and song, and the technical artistry of craftsmanship. (...) One thinks, for example, of the harvester at work (...), swinging his scythe in a constant, rhythmic, dance like movement and singing as he does so: that, to my mind, is the archetypal situation of human tool-use, not the puzzle-solving scenarios beloved of cognitive psychologists.

The pleasure and leisure to be had from what we would call an 'economic activity' has already been noted elsewhere in Amazonia (Goldman 1966; Overing 1989; Passes 1998). But, in the same way as Passes (2000: 98) has stated for the *Pai'kwene* of

French Guiana, for the *Mebengokré* 'leisure' is not only leisure: it also performatively creates and re-creates the social state itself, as it is conceived of by the *Mebengokré*, that is, as the possibility - and the effectiveness - of being together in a *mex* way, one that involves the production of collective joy as well as the production of material goods. That is, one that is *kinh*, in both senses of the term. As I expect to have shown in this chapter, *me toro* is explicitly concerned with the creation of such a state, and as such it can be said to be both vocal and performative *tekné* or artistry, very much in the sense used by Ingold.

Ingold's conception of the relation between speech and tool-using - between communicative and technical action, as Tambiah would put it - is one that makes it possible to feel the flavour of *Mebengokré* social agency. Artistry is at the base of the relation between *ngrer* and *akrô ka'oinh*, between singing and fishing. And this artistry is an essentially moral endeavour: it is the art of conviviality, of creating enjoyable states of mind as conducive to enjoyable living, whose distinctiveness can only be captured through what Overing (1996) has called the everyday, and Ingold (2001: 416), the dwelling perspective. That is, in the context of actual, practical engagement in the world.

Chapter Five

Word, Agency, and Togetherness: On Speech as a Sociability Skill or, a *Mebengokré* ‘Theory of Language’

Every sign (...) is a construct between socially organised persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, the form of signs is conditioned above all by the social organisation of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction.

V. N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*

In the conclusion of his essay “Beyond Anthropology”, Bernard McGrane (1989) puts forward a powerful critique of anthropological description. In assuming the relativistic stance, he proclaims, anthropological description fundamentally misrepresents what it purports to bring to light, precisely because it takes it as being not a discourse on the world as it is but a representation of the world. This discursive strategy is one fundamental characteristic of modernity, and amounts to silencing those people the anthropologist seeks to understand in order to produce an understanding that is, first and foremost, a modern (that is, Western) understanding of “the other”:

Anthropology never listened to the voices of ‘alien cultures’, it never learned from them, rather it studied them; in fact, studying them, making sense out of them, making a ‘science’ about them, has been the modern method of not listening, of avoiding listening, to them. The Other’s empirical presence as the field and subject matter of anthropological discourse is grounded upon his theoretical absence as interlocutor, as dialogic colleague, as audience (...). In order for modern anthropology to sustain itself, its monologue about alien cultures, those cultures must be kept in analytic silence. The moment when an alien culture is allowed to speak its language, the moment the anthropologist seriously plays with the possibility of the truth and authority of that alien culture, the monologue-based language of anthropology bursts. (1989: 127-28)

McGrane’s critique addresses the core of anthropological description as fundamentally a discourse on the ‘other’, rather than a dialogue with others. And, as such, a fundamentally Western representational strategy. It seems to condemn the whole

of the anthropological enterprise to be compulsively closed in upon itself, as a specific ‘language-game’ that is not, and cannot be, shared by others, in the same way that, if one actually ‘goes native’, one ceases to be an anthropologist, as anthropology ‘... is not within the parameters of membership, not within the form of life (...) of that alien ‘culture’” (1989: 126).

McGrane’s argument seems here to oscillate between two distinct lines. Anthropology is *ab definitio* unable to realise its purported (epistemological) task of understanding others because it is a Western language-game which is not shared by those which are its ‘subjects’, that is, is not part of others’ forms of life. But he seems to equate ‘understanding others’ with ‘becoming other’, as his quotation from Riesman (1972) on that most famous literary example of an anthropologist ‘going native’, Carlos Castañeda, implies:

Our social sciences generally treat the culture and knowledge of other peoples as forms and structures necessary for human life that those people have developed and imposed upon a reality which we know - or at least our scientists know - better than they do. We can therefore study those forms in relation to ‘reality’ and measure how well or ill they are adapted to it. In their studies of the cultures of other people, even those anthropologists who sincerely love the people they study almost never think that they are learning something about the way the world really is. Rather, they conceive of themselves as finding out what other people’s conceptions of the world are. (Mcgrane 1989: 128, quoting Riesman 1972: 14)

Although I entirely agree with McGrane’s critique from the epistemological point of view, it seems to me that his setting of anthropology’s dilemma in grounds that constitute the very core of one’s form of life is not helpful. By this I mean that even though I find his critique of the lack of dialogy in the anthropological approach quite refreshing - and also acknowledge it as a central problem of the discipline, due to its

project of understanding other peoples' worlds - I do not agree with what he seems to be proposing, that the only way out of this epistemological cul-de-sac, the only way to actually understand other peoples' worlds would be to become an 'other' oneself – an ontological 'solution' for an epistemological 'problem'.

McGrane's turn of the screw of the hermeneutic circle in relation to 'relativity' is hardly new. Karl-Otto Apel has expressed it in almost the same terms:

One frequently hears that they have reached the objectively valid factual judgement that the norms which human beings either recognise or follow in practice are, to a large degree, relative to the particular culture of the time, I.E., they are subjective.” (Apel 1980: 229)

McGrane's reading of the paradox of relativism - as Apel puts it, of the paradox of the universality of the relativistic outlook - could actually be turned against himself: if McGrane's view of the inherent 'modernity' (again, in the sense of 'Westernity') of the relativistic point of view can only be understood as an inherent part of modernity (or post-modernity, for that matter), how closer is it to other peoples' worlds? Granted, McGrane himself is the first to stand against relativism, which he sees as a trivialisation of other peoples' worlds. But if there are such thing as other peoples' worlds, then forcibly there are such things as our (anthropologists') worlds, and if these constitute forms of life closed in on themselves, then McGrane's view of the dilemma is also closed in on his (our, anthropologists') own (disciplinary) world, and the hermeneutic wheel is given another turn... and so on and so forth, *ad infinitum*.

It seems clear to me that McGrane's critique is hampered here by his view of cultural worlds as closed in upon themselves, as monads that do not touch each other,

permanently shut and set apart from each other. McGrane's great merit is to provide a refreshing critique of the simplistic notion that 'our' (anthropologists', or Westerners', or liberal society's) worldview, being capable of seeing worldviews as relative, is thus superior to others, being able to encapsulate them within our own more or less in the same way that Western societies are seen as expanding and encapsulating others within its (conceptual, if not geographical) boundaries. As he has amply demonstrated, this view is in itself a characteristic of modernity, and as such is inherently Western. But what he seems to fail to realise is that the very notion of the 'closed in-ness' of worldviews - 'forms of life', if you will - is itself part of the modernistic scene.

Apel (1980), dealing with similar difficulties in relation to Wittgenstein's thought, has used the notion of language-game communication as a way out of this dilemma. According to him, 'dialogy' - the very aim of McGrane's effort - is an entering into a language-game communication with the 'object' of understanding, even if this may be a reflectively detached one (1980: 185). He deals with a matter quite akin to that dealt with by McGrane, namely, the question of whether the rules used by the social scientist to describe behaviour are really followed by those whose behaviour is being described?

Apel is commenting here on the possibility of a social science, but one could read 'anthropologist' here, as this concern with 'the other' is the hallmark of the anthropological discipline more than of any other. Apel goes on: "The answer to such questions can only be derived from a language-game communication with the object, no matter how reflectively detached and indirect this might be."²¹⁰ (1980: 185). For Apel,

²¹⁰ (1980: 185). Apel follows here Wittgenstein's notion: "[T]hese language-games can be characterised in their heuristic conception as units of linguistic usage, life-form and world (situational) interpretation that are constituted by a behavioural rule. [...] It is not only so-called "linguistic usage" in the

it is a fundamental characteristic of the ability to play/perform a language-game, the capacity of critical distancing and sovereign creativity in relation to one's own language-game (1980: 208), that is, the very capacity to engage in dialogue from within one's language-game.

How could these remarks be brought into the discussion of the issue of anthropological description? McGrane's point is that anthropological descriptions of 'others' are prey to an inescapable modernistic bias, synthetised in the relativistic stance. I agree with his critique of the modernist bias expressed in relativism, but I suggest that its supposedly 'inescapable' character is part and parcel of the same bias. One needs here to radicalise McGrane's stance, and assume the possibility of dialogy, of critical distancing from the language-game of anthropological description, as part of the anthropological task - something that he actually does himself, albeit not acknowledging it, in his critique.

Describing the Description

This chapter is intended as an experiment in such critical distancing, and I expect to produce it by means of a relatively unusual (for anthropological descriptions) device. I will present a description of a ceremony, made by a *Mebengokré* ceremonial specialist to young men about to perform it, and use it as a counterpoint to discuss by contrast the character of anthropological descriptions. I will thus not produce a description of the ceremony being described, but a description of a description of a ceremony: a metadescription. My intention is to access some of the characteristics of ceremonies (or

traditional sense that belongs to the "language-game" but also all thought and action which is "interlaced" in some way with linguistic usage. The context of the Philosophical Investigations makes it clear that this includes all human behaviour that involves an "understanding" of "meaning" and is (therefore) itself intelligible. [...] the model of the language game implies both the immediate world (situational) understanding which is an aspect of "meaning something" and, in the narrower sense, the "hermeneutic" understanding of the intentions that reside in the immediate understanding of the world and are expressed in the actions and deeds of human beings." (Apel 1980: 22-4).

the ceremony being performed, at any rate) by means of its description by the ceremonial specialist, through the medium of song. What is the specific relation between song and ceremony, vocal forms and bodily performance for *Mebengokré*? As will be seen, songs do more than describe ceremonies in a purely representational sense. Ceremonial vocal forms, the very epitome of language for *Mebengokré*, are actually sophisticated technologies (in the sense of the Aristotelian *tekne*) of agency inducement, and their moral and aesthetic value comes from this capacity. It moves people in an harmonic way – ‘harmonic’ in many senses, from the coordination of bodily movement in dance to the performance of ‘technical’ tasks in a collective way. What anthropologists would call its ceremonial character is essentially a beautification and ‘moralisation’ of agency, and songs are sung (and stories told) primarily about this fundamental fact. Now, this act of beautification/‘moralisation’, exerted over autonomous agents, is the supreme achievement of *Mebengokré* language: the ceremonial vocal forms - essentially, the songs (*ngrer*) and ceremonial discourses (*ben*) – are considered as the highest form of speech. *Mebengokré* ‘theory of language’ is a theory of agency.

It is something of this specific quality of *Mebengokré* ‘theory of language’ (or, more specifically, ‘theory’ of vocal forms) that I want to unveil in this discussion. It could be said that such ‘theory’ is a theory of language as serving the foundation of *Mebengokré* ‘social state’, but for the fact that this ‘state’ is in fact a process, part of a continuous effort put forward by *Mebengokré* to remain social, a continuous struggle to keep oneself as a human being. Language skills are technologies to produce acceptable forms of living together with others – others who are, in some measure different from oneself and who become not similar, but acceptably different, and who have, in a sense,

their difference domesticated by those skills that embody the individual experience of several people in their dealings with the non-*Mebengokré* world. Songs (or some of them, at any rate) tell about the experience of those who created them, and this experiential character makes them a repository of knowledge that is also a technique to make such knowledge effective. This is in fact a single character, as *Mebengokré* (specialised) knowledge is not only highly individual but also determined by the experiential character of its 'come into knowing'. Ceremonial songs and discourses (the highest form of speech), like any sort of specialised knowledge, are 'right' when they create what they describe. Performances of songs are 'right' also when they (among other things) are performed by people who have some sort of experiential connection with those who had created/sung the song. A song will be *kaigó*, a counterfactual, when its performance does not make it happen. The performance will also be *kaigó* if (among other things) it is performed by someone who, besides knowing the words, has not achieved such knowledge by means of a special relationship with someone who sang it before (and, by extension, the one who originated it). To describe, here, is not only to represent the world in words, but to strive to create what is described. Description is project, as well as the tool for its own realisation. It is this quality of the ceremonial specialist's description that I want to convey in my own description below, which will be a description of how language creates agency and how *Mebengokré's* conceptions of language (of *Mebengokré kaben*, the speech/language/discourse of the *Mebengokré*) as aesthetic technology entails an ethics of living together.

As mentioned before, a ceremonial discourse (and, in some cases, a song as well) is *mex*, good/beautiful both by its form and its content, as well as its efficacy. The Homeric undifferentiation of this triad – the good, the beautiful, and the efficacious -

can be understood from the viewpoint of the fundamentally agential character of these vocal performances. It is not the description/statement of the song/speech that is morally good, or the performative aspect that is aesthetically appealing. It is the act itself of singing/speaking. The act is a project whose performance means the actual striving for the realisation of itself as morally good and aesthetically beautiful. This is why, I think, efficacy is the just measure of the songs/speeches' goodness/beauty. It is the agency of those performing that is the object of aesthetic and moral appreciation, their capacity to actually realise the project present in the songs/speeches. In the songs and speeches analysed in this chapter I show how this agential character is evidenced in the appreciation of *ben* ceremonial speeches as the highest form of *Mebengokré* language, both morally and aesthetically. This is despite the speeches having neither harmony nor rhythm, elements that beautify language in *Mebengokré* 'theory of language'.

A Tale of Agency, Beauty and Joy

The description below was recorded during a ceremonial hunting party, when all (or almost all) men in the village went into the forest in order to hunt game (specially land turtles, the staple food of ceremonies) to be eaten during the *ami aprã*, the culminating point of the ceremony, which would take place as soon as they returned. These expeditions are, however, more than hunting trips. It is during them (although not only then) that men are instructed in the ceremony in which they would take part as dancers and singers. It is also an occasion when ceremonial specialists create an interest in the young men for performing the ceremony, as no one is obliged to do so. Young men have to be moved into performing it, and this is part of the argument of the ceremonial specialist, who sings and tells stories that are both pedagogic - in relation to the 'technical' (as well as the moral and the aesthetic) side of the ceremony - and amusing

(which is part of the persuasiveness of the argument). The description, in this case, is actually a song, the *Kaprã ka'`yr õ me ngrer* or “song of [those] carrying the land turtle”. This song describes the gathering of land turtles for the ceremony, and it is in itself part of the ceremony being performed. It is intermeshed with discourse, the content of which is intended to make men interested in performing the ceremony. It is an explanation of the ceremony.

Seen in this context, the first point of divergence between the anthropological description of a ritual and the *Mebengokré* description becomes immediately clear. Anthropological descriptions (especially of ‘ritual’) tend to be characterised as purely representational devices. There is an ingrained tendency in anthropology to describe textually, as if the description were simply the picturing of ‘something out there’, more or less in the same way that a text is usually seen as an aggregate of words representing ‘something out there’. This tendency bears a strong link to what McGrane criticises as the silencing of the other in anthropological description, because, as Gadamer (1988: 279) remarks in relation to historical understanding,

A person trying to understand a text, whether literary critic or historian, does not, at any rate, apply what it says to himself. He is simply trying to understand what the author is saying, and if he is simply trying to understand, he is not interested in the objective truth of what he says as such, not even if the text itself claims to teach truth.

The fundamental character of the description/song being described here - as, for that matter, of all other (or most other) *Mebengokré* ceremonial lore/teaching - is one of persuasiveness/pedagogy. Actually, these notions do not seem to be distinguished in actual practice. The addressees are not supposed to simply ‘understand’ intellectually what the song/description brings to them, but to actually be moved by it.

Its force involves a play with emotions and sentiments, rather than with ‘mere’ reasonings²¹¹. Thus to understand the specificities of the description below one must focus upon its content. *Mebengokré* ceremonies should be seen as evoking depiction, suggestion, and seduction intertwined, and these in rather specific ways. To uncover these ways is part and parcel of the understanding of its character as description. I will delve into the content of the description, and try to bring to light the character of both depiction and suggestion as it is involved in the act of singing the ‘song of [those] carrying land turtles’ to those listening to it:

** to rire ô*

This is said to be ‘another language’, that is, not understandable. It is sung when hunting is to begin, to tell people at large what sort of game is going to be hunted. It is also sung when a land turtle (*kapran*) is caught in the forest during the hunting process, thus showing what has in fact been successfully hunted.

** Kutu no ngrere mō
carrying and singing*

*kapran ka’`yr ô m~e ngrere
the song of the woven kapran*

Kutu means to carry on the head, something that is usually done by means of a strip of tree bark crossing the forehead. The speech describes how one brings land turtles, in bundles, back to the village for the ceremony, singing all the time when carrying them. *Ka’`yr* means ‘woven thing’, referring to artefacts woven. Here the ceremonial specialist describes how the collected land turtles (*kapran*) are ‘woven’ into

²¹¹ As developed in previous chapters.

a neat pile tied with tree bark strips that weave together the animals' carapaces, so that they can be carried back to the village.

* *Ô:: ô:: ô::*

These shouts (*me ugrõr*) warn people at the village that men are coming back. It also warns women (when sung as the returning hunting party approaches the village) that it is time to start preparing the food, to paint themselves with annato, etc. The male sponsors of the ceremony (*mekrareremetx m`y*) go ahead of the other hunters to tell women to prepare bananas, and the *kupu* 'packs' of cooked manioc paste, etc, as the hunters are coming back with their load of game. The sponsors go regularly back and forth between the village and the forest camp, bringing to the camp the women's food (fruits, vegetables, manioc meal, *kupu*, etc, all of which are garden products) to feed the hunters²¹². On the day when the men are to come back to the village with their load of land turtles (and other game), they paint themselves after eating in the morning, and start to the village so that they can arrive there around noon. This time, noon, was called by my translators *me kinh djà akamàt*, or 'where the sun of joy/happiness stays' (a reference to the time of the day), referring the joy to be achieved from the dance, and also from the food brought back to feed the village. When on the edge of the village circle, the young *me ôk're* ('the painted ones', children being celebrated in the ceremony as well as others of the same age) go ahead of the men carrying the land turtles, entering the village before them.

* *Ikôkô tinaré*
taking the spine off

²¹² They also act as messengers, bringing news from the forest to the village and vice-versa, as well as bring small game to their wives (and a land turtle or two, even though they should ideally be given all to their 'fac-similar brothers' to be consumed only during the culminating point of the ceremony).

The translators mentioned about this passage that “it is almost *Mebengokré kaben*”, that is, almost intelligible, referring to this form of poetic speech that is not easily translatable. The passage describes the heavy load carried by men, the long ‘pile’ of land turtles ‘woven’ around two poles that are carried by men on their backs along the spine, which is unloaded upon arriving to the village.

** Wô:: wô:: tinanarê*

These were called by the translators ‘the sounds of joy’, describing the reaction of people in the village to the arrival of the hunting party.

Nh`ym até õ ninhari ngrere kaba
And then people also sing on the other side

People waiting in the village for the arrival of the hunting party also sing to the hunters when they arrive. It is a song that emerges from several points of the village circle. The expression *ngrere kaba* means ‘to take the song out of [oneself]’. The song goes on:

** Ijô wô riwâ jô mō*

** Ijô wô riwâ jô mō*

** Ijô wô riwâ jô mō*

** Ijô wô riwâ jô mō*

This is also unintelligible speech. *Kapran ka`yr õ me ngrer* has several parts that are not meaningful as words.

Ori m~e mō! Ori me mō!

They are coming! They are coming!

Ô:: ô:: ô::

People at the village warn everybody that the hunting party is coming back. This is done usually by children, who stand at the outskirts of the village waiting for the men. And then they are the first to hear their song as the hunters approach. The ceremonial specialist does both voices here, those of the people at the village and those of the men in the hunting party, describing to the men what is going to happen upon their return. The song is not only descriptive but also pedagogical, and it aims to teach the men the technical and ceremonial skills necessary for hunting and dancing.

Ñym kubengei!

...and the old woman!

tabdjw`y omõ...

she is going with her nephew/grandson...

ari kum t`yr`y norokot p~i!

to get banana leaves or wood!

P~i kokijêr!

to cut wood!

Tuiwa! Tuiwa!

Grandmother! Grandmother!

Ú:: ú::ú::

[the grandmother shouts to the child]

Me ò (`y?) mra jamá!

listen to peoples' shouts!

Djam meboki kam kuté kwatui mã okijêr prâm ngri godga

When one is a boki [that is, a child] one likes to warn one's grandparents, by means of shouts, that something is happening

Ñh`ym kum arêk idjê odjá! Aryp ne ba me â (`y?) mra ma!

then [the grandmother answers]: 'stay where you are! I have already heard the shouts!'

The description here is that of a dialogue between a child and his/her 'grandmother' (or 'aunt'), who go together to fetch wood and banana leaves to prepare

the *kupu* ‘packs’ (which are cooked, wrapped in banana leaves, over the fire), and to prepare the meat brought back to the village by the hunting party. The characters of this description play an important part within the ceremony itself (and in most other ceremonies as well).

** Nh~ym`yre kon tono tono re*
[no meaning]

** Ono kōno okônô ... mō*
[no full meaning. Describes people going (mō), presumably to the village]

** Ori kukr`y ne ije a `yr`y*
[no clear meaning, probably ‘this is a tapir (kukr`yt) that we fetch (`yr`y, a particle that indicates purposefulness in movement)]

Am~i ba kinh adòr mō
I walk joyfully

The passage above describes people making each other joyful when carrying the land turtles back to the village. It is in the reflexive first person (making oneself happy), and is sung by the ceremonial specialist in order to make the men happy. The song shows itself here to be an interactive tool: the suggestion of making oneself happy is taken by those men walking back to the village, and is expected to make them joyful.

Desire and Difference

Ñ`ym ngi~ñ~i ari ar`yp am~i krã kôî o m~e am~i apê `y guba kamama koñ`y
then your women are already adorning their foreheads, and painting (around) their lips, to wait for you

Kuben Krãti ô amí kati kôî kum~e ar`yp mrãi
Wild cacao leaves have already been thrown in the middle (of the women’s group)

Djam mem`y bà kam meni kuté am~i obikijeinh godga
When men go to the forest (to hunt) women adorn themselves and become really beautiful

Arà kam kadjàt djê t`yk ne
(they adorn themselves) with black strings/stripes (crossing) their elbows

Djam meni metx kam ap nú
When women (adorn themselves, they become) beautiful

The mention of wild cacao leaves refers to the leaves worn in the middle of the forehead by those women who are not sponsors of the ceremony being performed. The two sentences beginning with *djam* are rhetorical questions, a frequent discursive device in ceremonial speech.

Ar`yp na me kuben kà ã na me ba gu me abdjw
Now we all have clothes, and hide ourselves (within them)

Ñh`ym irãri me ba kam na me kuté meprinti p`yrak
When they (women) go about in the nude, they look like m~eprinti (that is, they look like young, unmarried women)

Mârâm ngiñi ãnt krâm djwaynh txe (a)pingêj
I think they are your wives

Some men see women, all beautifully adorned, and think that they are young, unmarried women, but then they say, addressing their husbands coming from the forest: “I think they are your wives”. Obviously, the song being sung by the ceremonial specialist has a strong erotic appeal, which is seen as an essential aspect of the joy to be experienced during the ceremony.

Ân n`y wã nãrãj gop kadjàt djê`yk djupijê kam rã~inh am~ikraj mã kadjàt m~e
The young ones place black strings crossing their chest and over the hips

Aminh kam `yr`y djá kam no kré kam p`y kam...
Then they wear grass armbands and paint around the eyes with annato...

...ga rãinh omunh na r`ym rãinh ga até kubê m`yj a ga ije o wabib djuru pram ije...
... and you want them to be something you can hide (only for you)...

kubê katõnk-`y gaije mok`y kam ârâ a ije aminh me b`yr`y a ije wa te pram ije
... and you want them to be like bullets that you can carry in your purse and have close to you

This highly poetic passage plays with men’s desire for women and explicates an important point about the moral background of ceremonies (and *Mebengokré* life in general): what moves people is the possibility of achieving what one desires for oneself

as an individual. It is the idea that what moves people to action is the expectation to satisfy one's appetites (in the case of the above passage, sexual appetites) that is made plain during the teaching of ceremonies as the driving force behind people's willingness to perform it.

Ñh`ym kati amrenhbê ne me ba kukamã kijê kukradà metx. Djori me kam me prinh ò me ò me nã nicó me jodjá ari kati

In the old days our ancestors ['those beside our first-born'] had a good/beautiful heritage [kukradjà]. And children did not go about watching other people's mother's private parts, no they didn't

Me até krã nh`ym me abatàri djwynh me kwâ no ma na me kwâ prinh ne me omunh...

And (children) did not watch. But some of the grown-ups wanted to watch everything (women's parts, that is)...

...kuté me arenh kadj`y

with the intention of telling (everybody) afterwards

Nnh`ym até ne guba no ma kêt ijã

None of us (here, now) watch (nowadays)

ap`yj na guba amijó baba

Each one of us has one's own way of being

Ñh`ym até na me kuté apàt mã amijãnh ma ije krã ija

Some stay with their heads bowed down [as when sitting in the men's house]

kuté me omunh i kêt

They don't glance sideways

Nnh`ym m~e irâri bari na m~e djwá ne apàt-mã kadjàt ã p`y ó am~i nicó ijapê ija rârârâ

When they (the women) bathe in the nude, the annato (painting) runs from their belts onto their genitals, which as a result become orange-coloured [the kadjàt 'belts' painted with annato, a traditional woman's attire, which they don't take off when bathing in the river]

Ne kam metx an~e djam kam âpnú gop. Kati.

And they are beautiful, not ugly at all

kam metx kumrentx

They are very beautiful

Ga kwâ m~e kwâ na m~e m~e ba bê m`yj ija ijâ ijapr`y obá

Some of you, some of them also talk badly about[poke fun at] us [about our ways, our (men's) affairs]

Ó m~e ba ijoâpnú obá

And this is bad for us all

M~e ba kwâ ne gu m~e ba nó obit m~e om~u

Some of us just look, with the eyes [that is, some watch and say bad things, whereas others only watch and say nothing]

M~e ã ba piaam

We all have respect [piaam, piaap: shame/respect]

Ñh`ym m~e kwâ kam tú kam piaâp kê metx ne m`yi a ninh jarenh otá. Kati. Gwaij baije m`yia mari kêt kam ne gwaj ã an~e. Nâ.

Some (people) have no shame/respect and tell everybody (the) things (they see). No. We do not know their (women's) affairs. Yes. [that is, some watch women and tell others about their doings. But men do not really understand women's issues]

At this point the ceremonial specialist is haranguing men on how to relate to women in a convivial way. The discourse, which adopts what we might call a Socratic 'dialogical stance', is punctuated by remarks on women's beauty and desirability, as well as on the dissimilarities between women and men. Again, the theme of similarities and dissimilarities appears as a central issue for conviviality. An interesting aspect of his harangue is related to the sociability of the senses: sight is pictured as a most sociable sense, whereas the spoken word is potentially harmful to the 'quality of life' among different people. To see and keep what one sees to oneself is sociable because it is a purely individual act, this passage suggests. The aesthetic pleasure of seeing (and desiring what one sees for oneself, as mentioned in the previous passage) is a moral good²¹³. To talk to others about what one sees is bad/ugly, as the one who talks in this way does not know what he is talking about. The lack of knowledge is opposed here to moral/aesthetic ways of being. To talk about things one does not know is a childish behaviour (as shown above), a remark specially significant in the context of this narrative, which is meant for people who are about to become grown-ups (that is, to go through a ceremony that will make them unmarried men, who sleep in the men's house, and thus no longer children).

It can be said that the teaching about what is specifically female and male, and how to relate them, is effective both for creating a frame of meaning and a sentiment with regard to (male, in this case) people who undergo the ceremony. The teaching also

²¹³ As discussed in chapter 4.

provides material grounds for instances where the possibility of exercising such relations happens. Both senses are included in *Mebengokré* conceptions of speech and humanity. Speech, the word and its beautiful forms - ceremonial *ben*, songs, stories, all performative forms which imply the creation, in a sense (of realisation) of what is sung/told – are actively engaged in the creation of humanity in the people that use them, and, by the very nature of the forms, in those that hear them (and respond in the way suggested). But being human, a condition allowing for the multiplicity of distinctive forms of *Mebengokré*-ness (for different sexes, ages, but also different experiential histories, for individuals and collectivities), is a moral and aesthetic, rather than ontological issue.

The content of the ceremonial specialist's discourse is explicitly moral: what matters here is to teach young people the first steps towards adulthood. Discourse and song, interwoven with moral teaching, describes a state of affairs that is also a blueprint for people's behaviour. Not in the sense of being normative, but of being seductive: men are being taught that morality is individually desirable and aesthetically appealing, because it appeals to one's desires and appetites, and because it creates opportunities for their realisation²¹⁴.

**Torire ô::*

**Torire ô::*

**Torire ô::*

**Torire ô::*

[no meaning]

Ó botx ne kudá

²¹⁴ This picture of a sense of sight that is essentially sociable shows that the attribution of moral (and aesthetic) qualities to the senses is far more complex than as discussed by Seeger (1980b, 1987) for the *Suyá* and other *Ge*.

Carrying and unloading [men carry their load of land turtles until close to the village, where they stop to adorn themselves]

Ñh`ym m~e õ bam abatàri gop até krá ija be ije rinħ oñ`y
Then, some of the older fathers are looking for their son [that is, among those that are coming to the village]

Ñh`ym bê ne atõ kuté õmõrõ
Where is your brother, who is arriving?

Ñh`ym kum oñinh ija amrenħ omõ
He is already coming, bringing (the land turtles, answers the son)

Háj. M~um imã atõ kutã t~e
All right. Go meet your brother for me (says the father to his other son)

The expression *kutã t~e* is used when one is going to meet another who comes from the opposite direction. *Atõ* means ‘your brother’, an indirect term of reference that associates the speaker to the persons he is addressing by means of a third person, marking their mutual relation to that person (‘your brother who is my son’).

Ar`yp atõ kuté ibê ó ngrere kator
Your brother (who is my son), the song is already coming from him

The father already hears the song sung by his son, announcing that he is coming. Songs are indexes for people, telling both (in this case) that they are arriving and also what they are bringing; the song of the land turtle, sung in this particular ceremony, tells people back in the village that men are bringing this game to them.

Ga amrenħ imã atõ-mã ó ar`ya
You go for me where your brother is and carry (the heavy load of land turtles for him) along the path (the father sends the son to help his brother)

Kuté amijã kapran kamaá kêt
He never before felt (the weight of) land turtles (that is, ‘he is not used to carrying such A heavy load’, says the father to his son)

Godjá omõ ñh`ym té bam abéje ne
(he) is coming, carrying (the land turtles) and the father is looking for him

Haj. Múm imã atõ kutã kraije kuté kapran ont `yr`y kuté kamaá kêt
All right. Go meet your brother for me, (he) never carried (such a heavy load)

Ar`ym atàitx dja ga t~e ót~e ñinhari atõ-mã djá
You are already strong, you go there and bring (the load all that distance for him, that is, carrying it for him for a distance)

Ñh`ym m~e kwâ prõ-ne m~e kutã prõ-ne
Then some people run to meet (the men coming)

As a description of what is going to happen in the ceremony, the narrative sets the moral context of it: a young man should help his brother in such exhausting tasks. Such help is given by the ‘fac-similar brothers’ (*kaàk*) of the sponsors of the ceremony (who bring the land turtles back to the village) along the way. To help one’s *kamy kaàk* who is bringing a load of game for the ceremony is one of the tasks of ‘fac-similar brothers’ during ceremonies (in which this ‘fac-similarity’ is created - see chapter 2). The teaching here is directed to those brothers-facsimilar who are supposed to help the sponsors of the ceremony. It directs them on how brothers should behave. The song seems to suggest the overcoming of the distinction between ‘real’ (*katàt*) and ‘facsimilar’ (*kaàk*) brothers, as the context of its performance clearly refers to the ‘*kaàk*-ship’ (to be) established among those going to the ceremonial hunting party.

In a certain sense this ‘assimilation’ – that is, the stressing of the ‘*kaàk*-ship’ as a suitable simile of the *katàt* relationship that it purports to be iconically associated with²¹⁵ - is the realisation itself of the song . As discussed in chapter 2, this realisation (which involves the creation of a village-wide state of affairs which is suitably similar to that which obtains within circles of people who are on the most intimate terms with each other) is equivalent to the creation of a polity that is iconically related to houses²¹⁶, the smaller-scale units that are part of it.

²¹⁵ That is, an icon of relations that obtain between people on intimate terms with each other, as discussed in chapter 2. See chapter 3 for a discussion of the social aspect of iconicity in *Mebengokré* performances.

²¹⁶ Or clusters of neighbouring houses, related through female inhabitants, as discussed in chapter 1.

One could also say that houses themselves are elements of the (visual) iconic representation of such a polity, as villages are pictured only through the houses that compose it. But there is, I think, a deeper shade to such a motif. Stories tell of the creation of the *Mebengokré* after a deluge flooded the entire earth. One man survived and, from the top of a tree, he throws stones in a circle around himself, creating the first village, as each stone turned into a house (see also, for detailed versions of this myth, Wilbert and Simoneau 1978). The story reflects well what I perceived as a feeling of the ‘ontological precedence’ of the village over the houses, ever-present, it seems to me, in *Mebengokré* everyday life. Such ‘ontological precedence’, if I am right, would make of houses elements in the iconic depiction of the polity. This is not only in the visual sense, as houses, through their intricate ways of differentiating from each other in a complementary way (mainly in ceremonial matters, which means much), would be seen as parts of a larger whole, which at the same time resembles each other in specific ways.

The ceremonial teaching goes on, stressing the aesthetic side of the performance, the beauty of the ‘technical’ (to our view) task being performed:

Mranh dja ga m~e âmkâm dja ga karikwaijnh ga anó katoro kêt
(the place) where you stay, one shall not go to in a hurry

Dja ga kapran-mã aprinh me na omõ
You will carry the land turtles slowly (and this is) good/beautiful

Toc... ngāj... ngāj... ngāj...
(onomatopoeic construction)

Karikwaijnh ga aminhbej kêt m~e nó kam, aminhbej kêt
You shall not go in a hurry, all eyes are upon (you), don’t go in a hurry

Angmér, djam na ga aben nó waikajnh godga!
Men, you are not going to play! (that is, they should take it seriously)

Mne nó kam ar~ik at~e ne at`ym ñh`ym m~e aijanh kangá kadj`y
All eyes are upon (you), (if you) slip and fall down, people will want to talk a lot (about it)

Djam gâm kumaprinh metx ne omõ

You must go slowly, beautifully

M`ya wã ne bitxajler kêt

These things are no play (that is, they are serious)

When they come to the village, the men gather at the men's house, where they remain for a while, singing, before going to their own houses. Men should carry their load in an aesthetically appealing way, calculated to please the eye of the observers in the village. One should go slowly (and the onomatopoeic sounds described above actually show the rhythm of their pace), lest they might slip and fall down, and be the object of people's laughter. This is a highly performative task, aimed at aestheticising one's behaviour (in the sense that it should please the eye), which is tantamount to endowing the performer with moral capabilities (to follow the song's suggestion, as songs are moral instruments *par excellence*). The connection between moral and aesthetic ways, as shown above (and discussed in the previous chapter), continues in the following passage. The sense of sight carries both moral and aesthetic value - in fact, the distinction is not present, morality and the aesthetic are facets of the same phenomenon.

The ceremonial specialist goes on, stressing the beauty of women during the ceremony:

** Ô:: ijã ô::*

**Kôô:: kô`yrâ w`y*

**Ô::*

[a series of rhythmical sounds, not easily intelligible]

Ñh`ym gê printi. Printi katàt godga amijó. Hum!

Then she, the young woman, the real young woman, adorns herself. Hum!

[Printi katàt, 'the real young woman', is an adult (that is, non-child) woman who is still a virgin]

Neinh até tàitx djam m~e kangô apêtx kêtêr

her flesh becomes firm, her liquid does not work (her breasts have no milk, as she is a virgin)

Kam `yr`y dja kam inãjnh ijakrã-ne

(women wear the) kam `yr`y dja (adornment to be worn on the wrists), which makes her arm look short (the arm, tight as befits a young woman, looks short when the kam `yr`y dja is placed on the wrist)

Djam m~e ~i kuté tàitx-i-re kà metx ngri godga. Nâ.

Does their flesh not become really firm, (does) their skin not become really tight?

The passage is obviously an appeal to men's sexual desire. Interwoven with moral/aesthetic teaching, it provides the basis for people's desire to act in a moral/aesthetic way. One notices here that the ceremonial specialist's teaching aims at creating in people, individually, the desire to act towards others in a seemly manner (both morally and aesthetically). His aim is not to impose a normativity, or rules of behaviour sanctioned by custom. 'Custom', *kukradjà*, is presented to people as essentially appealing, rather than compulsory. The narrative teaches people not in the sense of imposing a 'collective rule', but by creating in people the drive (quite libidinal, in the passages above) to act morally/aesthetically. Morality is displayed as beauty, and also as a way to achieve one's objects of desire. Again, the description of the ceremony by the specialist not only creates (and enforces) in men a desire, but also promises its fulfilment through the means of moral/aesthetic behaviour. In this sense, ceremonies must 'succeed', as *Mebengokré* put it: they must make people happy while harmonising their efforts within the ceremony itself. At the same time the gains are material, as material fulfilment is deemed an inherent aspect of individual moral agency.

The description ends with the ceremonial specialist stating his legitimacy as such, by saying he has had a personal experience of the traditional lore:

Ba na Ba je m~e kukradjà m~einh ó ari bári

It is I that (know) the heritage ('culture', 'tradition'/'wealth')

Nâ. N`ym màj

Yes. It is true.

Ba na ba m~einh ó ari bári m~e kukradjà m~unh amã ã idju jarenh odjá. Nâ. Djam m~e kukradjà djwynh kam apnú. Nâ.

It is me who saw personally the heritage (kukradjà), (and I am) telling it to you. Yes. Is the real heritage bad/ugly? This is it [the last sentence is a rhetoric question, meant to be denied].

As shown in chapter 3, this legitimacy is established as a link with the personal experience of the one who created the song/lore being transmitted. This link is important because to have knowledge is not simply to keep its content in one's memory, but to actually have experienced - in some sense or capacity - the events described in the song. Many people know different songs, but their knowledge is seen as 'false' without such a link. As I have shown in the case of the songs of the fishing ceremony (in chapter 4), the ceremonial specialist actually sings/describes the way in which a previous ceremonial specialist, the one who taught the song to him, had 'sung it by the fire' along with the mythical shaman who created the song. The experiential link thus established enables the present ceremonial specialist to re-create the events described in the song, making people desire for themselves an experience similar to that described in the song. To have the words of the song in memory, in short, does not necessarily mean that one possesses the skill to sing it, that is, to produce the expected reality one describes. To be able to sing (and to make ceremonial speeches) is to have the skill to reproduce (or create) not only a vocal production but a fully human one, as these forms of speech are 'good/beautiful' precisely because they do establish (at least *in potentia*) a link between word and agency (or, more precisely, between vocal forms and agency, as rhythm and harmony are essential tools for the harmonisation of individual movements and actions).

Speech as Agency: A Semiotic of Being

What is the status of description in ceremonial songs? They are most obviously performative statements, in the classical Austinian formulation (Austin 1962), but their

perlocutionary effect resides in the ceremonial specialist's capacity to entice people's appetites. Ceremonial descriptions like the one above, through which young men²¹⁷ are taught about the ceremony being performed, effect a production of experiences by means of an "economy of desire". In this sense the description above can be counted as a native interpretation with regard to the specific *Mebengokré* ways in which such 'force' is created, a point that Austin himself was rather vague about. But it is much more than an interpretation, as it fuses a *model of* the ceremony with a *model for* it. In the description, representation is not distinct from instruction. It is a blueprint for action as well as a body of representation. There is here no distinction between reflection and agency, or rather between reflective and practical thought. One could say that *Mebengokré* lore is, in Aristotelian terms, at once theoretical (since metaphysical), practical (since ethical and political), and poetic (since both technical and aesthetic). By means of skilled narration memory becomes project (that is, becomes a blueprint for human moral/aesthetic agency in the fuller sense described here), and description is the vehicle for such metamorphosis. Rather than creating a normativity, description of the 'ways of old' seduces people individually into re-creating such ways²¹⁸.

²¹⁷ I have no data concerning women's ceremonies in this respect, as most of the activities related to them were performed by women only. In fact, the idea that one can get a 'total' picture of (gendered) society by adding 'women's views' to 'men's views' is a rather western one. It departs from the principle that the everyday world of people is non-gendered, in the sense of being a shared space for both genders to exercise ungendered tasks, activities, etc, together or otherwise. I think that for *Mebengokré* this would be a highly absurd conception, as men cannot share in the specificities of women's lives, and vice-versa. This is not only 'worldview' but practice: I was never welcome whenever I tried to follow what women were doing collectively for a ceremony.

²¹⁸ Re-creation is here a continuous transformation, as knowledge (as well as other, material elements, both *kukradjà*) in the form of song and speech, is continuously being brought into the *Mebengokré* world from the outside. One example is that of the shaman (*wajangá*), who enters in contact with other worlds (of the fish, wild pigs, etc) as well as with the worlds of other beings (the Batmen's world, etc) and brings from these worlds lore (songs, speeches) and names which they bestow usually upon their grandsons (*tabdjw`y*) and in this way get inserted into an ever-changing semiotic system which attributes different qualities to different people, creating similarities between them as well as 'domesticating' their differences by making them complementary to each other in ceremonial life. An analysis of the dynamics between the production of suitable differences (from the point of view of individual family groups) and the production of suitable similarities (from the point of view of village-

Mebengokré state that language is one of the distinctive features of ‘*Mebengokré*-ness’, or human-ness. This statement should not be taken naively as if it were the establishment of ‘cultural boundaries’. As the song above shows, language is a tool for social agency, meaning here the production of conviviality between people. Conviviality, the creation of a social state amongst people, implies a morality that is not distinguishable from a polity, and whose concrete aspect is seen in *Mebengokré* technologies for the production of similarities between people (meaning here different forms of iconic relations). Now, it seems to me that this production of similarities – which is a lifetime process, a continuum rather than a moment – is more than simply the building up of so many covers, masks superimposed over one’s basic being. They *are* one’s being, in the sense that ‘*Mebengokré*-ness’ is the actual result of this ongoing process of establishing similarities: to be *Mebengokré* is to live in round villages (with specific characteristics), to have (certain) ceremonies and songs and ceremonial speeches, to speak the language, that is, to take active part in this process of producing the social state while producing oneself as capable of establishing similarities with others. ‘Being’ is a semiotic issue rather than an ontological one, as the establishment of similarities presupposes iconicity rather than *analogia entis*. Furthermore, ‘being’ would be a moral and aesthetic process rather than an ontological state, as *Mebengokré* morality/aesthetics is the foundation of this process of establishing similarities between people. Since the production of such similarities is what we would call ‘the social state’ for the *Mebengokré*, and since language (vocal forms, rather) is a self-acknowledged tool for this purpose, one could say that *Mebengokré* theory of language is a political theory, one in which polity is not distinguishable from the issues of morality/aesthetics.

wide life) is beyond the scope of this work, where I limit myself to the description of the complex of ideas involved in the latter.

Skilled ceremonial descriptions are thus political, as well as moral/aesthetic tools, as the emphasis is on moral/aesthetic *skills* rather than values, so to speak.

In fact, *Mebengokré* hold that ceremonial songs are one of the highest form of language, precisely because their descriptions possess this character. This is even clearer in the *ben diri* ceremonial discourse, which is said to be the very epitome of language skill. It is not sung but stated²¹⁹, some of them by a ceremonial specialist, others by some of those performing the ceremony. In the event described above, those returning from the forest with land turtles for the ceremony pronounce the *ben diri* upon arriving in the village, at the place in its centre where people gather to perform songs and dances of a specific ceremony. It goes:

ba ijêj kikré me ba ije kum-ba-ni-rere
we are going to deliver our cargo in our houses...

kub`yt aben w`yr`y ba kator
... and return where the others are gathered

ba ije ba kinh-re mokraj kad`y
[and] we are going to start our happiness/contentment/enjoyment [that is, their celebration]

kad`y ne ba amā i-bendiri. Owan~e
This is what I wanted to tell you. That's it.

As said before, *ben diri* is a sort of 'chancel', or an announcement, of what is going to happen next. From the point of view of information, it is most obviously a pointless one, as everybody knows what is going to happen next. From the performative point of view, it is not intended to move other people to action, as the description of the ceremony in the song, but to declare what those who are speaking will do next. It thus provides a curious inversion in relation to the song: while the latter is a (performed) description of events long past (themselves beautiful/good as 'lore'), the former is a

(performed) declaration of what is going to happen immediately after its performance. While the song is speech beautified by rhythm, tune, and melody, the *ben diri* is simply stated. Seen from this point of view, *ben diri* seems to contradict *Mebengokré* theory of language as an aesthetic activity since, at first sight, it is less ‘beautified’ than songs.

The contradiction fades away, though, when one considers the content of the description provided by the *ben diri*. Men bringing their load of land turtles arrive at the village and state that the happiness/enjoyment/contentment is going to begin. As described before, ceremonies have to do with the satisfaction of one’s appetites, not least their appetite for food. The announcement of the happiness/contentment/enjoyment that is to obtain from the men’s arrival in the village creates its own truth and relevance, as the land turtles (and other game) will be eaten by all people in the ceremony. The announcement in the centre of the village, in the *me toro djà* (the place where people gather to sing and dance, to one side of the men’s house) of the satisfaction of the conditions of possibility for the fulfilment of people’s appetites is a highly moral/aesthetic one, as it is meant to be seen by all (that is, it is seemly, a primary meaning of ‘moral/aesthetic’ for *Mebengokré*), as well as serving to satisfy the desires of all²²⁰.

One can see here the difference in the description provided by the song and that provided by the *ben diri*. The first proposes a project, and the skill of the one who sings is confirmed by the outcome of the song, that is, by his ability to entice people’s desires so that they perform what is proposed by the song. The description provided by

²¹⁹ Some specific *ben* are stated in a falsetto voice. Many others are just spoken loudly or shouted, sometimes by more than one person, as in the case of the *ben* above. It is however never sung.

²²⁰ As shown above, the arrival of the party into the village carrying their load of land turtles for the ceremony is one which is highly stressed in the ceremonial specialist’s description. It is deemed a particularly beautiful moment that must be performed the best men can.

the *ben diri* is the public confirmation of the realisation of such a project. This realisation, the concrete, visible confirmation of the ceremonial specialist's skill, has the effect of producing, automatically so to speak, the content of the utterance. It is in this sense that *ben diri* can be understood as the epitome of speech, embodying in the highest degree the moral/aesthetic qualities (which are also efficacious ones, let's not forget) which are seen by *Mebengokré* as the central element of speech/language. Speech/language is not generally conceived of as representation only, but fundamentally as action. If songs are moral/beautiful because they open up the possibility of shaping people's desires through a description of the distant past, and in so doing producing in the present what they describe, *ben diri* are doubly beautiful because they announce the immediate future not as a possibility but as certainty. *Ben diri* are always performed at key moments of ceremonies, and its character is clearly that of an announcement of things to come. If songs have perlocutionary effects (Austin 1962), *ben diri* has pure illocutionary force. It is this transit between the (potential) perlocutionary effect of the suggestions embodied in song to the illocutionary force of the certainty embodied in *ben diri* which shows the *crescendo* of moral/aesthetic worth between both vocal forms.

We are dealing here with what Goodman (1967) calls exemplarity, the capacity of singling out certain properties or qualities as representative of the whole that is being described. But not only so. Both songs and *ben diri* are ways to transform knowledge in collective performance, of making a sample into the whole it samples, and not only representatives of that whole. In fact, it would be more precise to say that knowledge (*kukradjà*, a term that involves both songs and ceremonial discourses, among other things, including ceremonial adornments) presupposes its own realisation

from content into agency, from memory of past experiences into actual contemporary experience, this being its central condition of felicity in Austinian terms. It is in making explicit how this transit is to be achieved – through the skill of the ceremonial specialist – that *Mebengokré* ‘theory of language’ reveals itself as political theory, based upon the seduction of individual desires and appetites toward the end of achieving village-wide conviviality. The achieved ‘social state’ is seen here as process and agency, as moral, aesthetic and pragmatic, creating *Mebengokré*-ness as a social state, a ‘being-in-the-village’. And, above all, a process that works through suggestion rather than directive, through seduction rather than commandment, a process that is effected upon autonomous beings, seduced by the power of words and the promise of happiness/joy/contentment to harmonise their drives and appetites with those of other people, thereby making themselves, through their shared experiences, similar to each other.

Many recent descriptions of native Amazonian ways of life have insisted on the importance of conviviality, of the plethora of social skills that create easygoing-ness among people, for the understanding of the social organisation of Amazonian peoples²²¹. As these works focus almost invariably on life amongst people that live in the most intimate terms with each other, they are frequently criticised as reducing social life to the ‘domestic level’ (Viveiros de Castro 1995b, 1996; Taylor 1996; Vilaça 2002). I, as others, have already (in chapter 2) criticised this analytical distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ ‘spheres of social life’. The present chapter is meant as a description of the role of language in the process of creating a polity out of so-called ‘domestic’ values, out of intimacy and conviviality, of togetherness as the central issue

²²¹ See Overing and Passes (2000) on this issue.

in social life. I have shown how 'polity' is created as an extension, rather than as a break so to speak, of the form²²² of intimate relationships through the use of language. *Mebengokre* 'Polity', then, can be understood as moral and aesthetic practice that creates icons of intimacy through performance, and thereby talks social beings into existence.

²²² That is, iconically.

Conclusion

Into Behemoth's entrails

I have tried to show in this thesis a picture of *Mebengokré* and of *Ge* ethnology that is quite different from that usually found in studies on the subject. The final result, as the reader may appreciate, bears little resemblance to the blend of social organisation, kinship, ritual, and mythology, which characterises much of *Ge* studies. My intention has been to address an issue that nevertheless fits well into that mixture, but provides it with an alternative, and I hope productive, twist. My argument has been that the perspective and intent of the anthropologist are crucial to any judgement he or she might make with regard to those characteristics to be deemed significant to the blend. And, indeed, the blend does take on a completely different configuration once one simple question is stressed, time and again, namely, just what *does* it mean to live together *for the Mebengokre*? It is because of this particular question that I have dealt with matters concerning ceremonial kinship, ritual, emotion and affect, and language. But how does it all fit together? I intend here to give a picture of my argument, that (not altogether visible) thread that connects all this within a coherent whole. But first of all a word about this whole and that connection

The reader will have noticed that despite the different themes of each chapter, much of the argument repeats itself, although always with the stress on different aspects, nuances, and facets. Perhaps I could say, parodying Lévi-Strauss' metaphor in the *Mythologiques* that my thesis, like a dodecaphonic composition, goes through the whole spectrum of the discussion in each of its parts. This is not due to aesthetic fancy.

though, but is a result of my trying to gain some insight into *Mebengokré* ways of living by discussing *Mebengokré* ways of thinking rather than looking at those units which, anthropological wisdom has it, constitute the cornerstone of social life among “tribal” peoples: domestic groups, kinship structures, etc.

Basically, I have taken seriously what *Mebengokré* say: to be *Mebengokré* is to perform certain ceremonies, to possess certain songs and other ceremonial elements (*kukradjà*); it is to speak a certain language, to live in a certain type of village, to feel towards others in a specific way. I have tried to unveil the significance of some of these elements that are involved (and highly valued) in the creation of a social state for the *Mebengokré*, and in this process I have tried to show something of the specificity of what it is to perform a ceremony, to sing a song, to speak, to have friends and relatives, to have sentiments towards others. And, mainly, how these aspects of *Mebengokré* form of life actually create a space where a specific sort of sociability can be exercised by specific human beings. In this sense, my thesis has several discussions along similar lines in terms of my interest in each one, but loosely connected in terms of the concrete issues at stake. Like threads that interweave without necessarily following the same direction but leaving behind them a pattern which, I hope, allows one to have a glimpse of my original glimpse of what it is to be, to live as, *Mebengokré*. I want here to discuss some implication for *Mebengokré* and *Ge* (and Amazonian, generally) ethnology of this glimpse of a glimpse. I will do so by unfolding the main points of each chapter.

In the first chapter, I have shown how *Mebengokré* villages are born, grow and eventually split, sometimes vanishing completely. This exposition was meant to show something of the historical character (and importance) of this process. Moreover, I also wanted to indicate how the focus on villages as ready-made entities is not helpful to

understand *Mebengokré* village life, as villages are in fact dynamic processes of making and re-making. This processual character, I suggested, must be part and parcel of our understanding of *Mebengokré* social life. But where to look for it? In the rest of the thesis I focus on several facets of this process, suggested by *Mebengokré* themselves as relevant, all related to ceremonies and their preparation and performance. In any case, village life is the very centre of *Mebengokré* sociality, and to understand the latter one has to focus on the significance of living with each other in a village. Different from what seems to happen in other regions in Amazonia (especially the Orinoco region, where communities are small), village life is qualitatively different from, yet similar in certain ways to family life, implying different qualities of relationships that are exercised on a daily basis. It is this qualitative difference that I set on to explore in the rest of the thesis. Village life seemed to me to have a distinctively moral and aesthetic character, self-evident in its pervasive ceremonial and ceremonial-related character. Each chapter can be seen as an argument of why village life should be seen as a moral and aesthetic issue.

In the second chapter, I discussed the significance of becoming a brother to others in the context of ceremonies. The focus here, as in the rest of the thesis, was on the moral aspects of the process, and the significance of it for village-wide conviviality. My argument was centred around the idea that the building of a polity – that is, village-wide social life – is conceived as a moral issue which is similar to the morality of domestic life, but is not to be taken as identical to it. Morality is centred on the notion that people should be free to get things from others without causing ill feeling among people. Sharing, as a paradigm of the proper form of relationship, is most commonly seen as obtaining (potentially, at least) in domestic life, but not in village-wide life. The

latter is seen as an icon of the former, keeping a resemblance with it in the form of what we would call reciprocity as the state-of-affairs between people. This is similar to sharing because it propitiates the opportunity to get things from other people without causing ill feeling – with the addendum that one has to return something for what one got. In sum, this state-of-affairs is morally good in spite of reciprocity, not because of it.

I also stressed the iconic character of this model of polity, and the peculiar relation that it keeps with the units that compose it: *Mebengokré* polity is a fractal of domestic life, a whole that iconically resembles the units that compose it. Finally, I showed how ceremonies, creating opportunities for people to act towards others in a highly moral way (the whole idea of having brothers is set in a context where ceremonies feed people that act towards each other in this way), actually create a polity. This is when ceremonies are ‘successful’, as *Mebengokré* put it, which is conceived as an ongoing process. This process is something that has to be continuously re-created, which cannot be taken for granted. This, I argued, comes together with an idea of being a human being (*Mebengokré*-being, that is), which is posed in moral and aesthetic rather than ontological grounds. To be human is to strive continuously to keep oneself so, and this is a moral/aesthetic process. Ceremonial life, I suggested, is one way (a very important one) to keep oneself human, albeit in specific ways (according to age, sex, origin, etc).

I have stressed similarities in ethnographic descriptions of other *Ge* peoples, suggesting that some sort of pervasive pattern, or rather similar topographies of relevances, obtain in these peoples’ social philosophies concerning the ‘processual’ and moral character of *Mebengokre* ‘being’. These qualities echo what has been written for other ethnographic areas in Amazonia (esp. Overing and Passes 2000). Here however, I

have endeavoured to show the specificity of a process of polity building through the creation of similarities, which involves a refined semiotic. The creation of iconicities seems to me to be central in this process of creating an ongoing ‘fractal polity’, both in theory and in practice.

In chapter three, I described the ceremonial lament for dead relatives/friends²²³, using it as a window to the emotional aspect of *Mebengokré* social life. I described how individual feelings of loss, expressed during that specific part of the ceremonial cycle, are woven in a tapestry of emotional attachments to dead people that creates a family resemblance between the living who are experiencing the lament. This could be expressed in a diagram which is almost the symmetrical opposite to that proposed by Lévi-Strauss for totemism, i.e. as a series of indexical relations (between each individual and his/her deceased ones) that implies the creation of an iconic resemblance between the mourners. I concluded by proposing that, although relationships between individuals are very much individual matters (as shown in the process of creating kin-like ties between people, highly dependent on one’s personal relationships), emotions are very much a collective affair, as they create communality between people. Ceremonies are enacted with this objective in view, that is the creation of collective emotional states suitable for life in the village. It is not surprising that the *Xikrin-Mebengokré*, who are rather affluent by Indigenous Amazonian standards, have striven to extend the ‘ceremonial season’ to encompass some 9 months out of 12 every year – precisely the months in which they live together in the village.

I have used my data to criticise a certain Durkheimian-minded tendency to split emotion into an intimate, psychological experience and a public, ‘sociological’

expression, making the latter an index of something – namely, ‘society’ as a metaphysical entity – which is above and outside individuals. This metaphysical entity would be *ab definitio* forever divorced from the (also *ab definitio*) individual experience of emotion. *Mebengokré* emotion, I contended, is to be seen through the lens of an aesthetic and a sociology rather than of a psychology. This, not only because it is to be performed for other people’s eyes, but also because it involves the creation of resemblances which are valued as such, rather than as indexes of ‘society’. The collective (or supra individual generally) experience/expression of emotions (and I would subsume both under the term *performance*) gains the contours of a sophisticated technology of sociability which creates similarities, and thus affinities (in the more general sense) between people. Emotion here is not a symptom (that is, an index) of the social state but its own creation, the ‘social state’ itself realised as process, so to speak.

Mebengokré state that ceremonies are made in order to produce certain pervasive collective emotional states. I show the significance of this statement for the understanding of *Mebengokré* emotions by means of a critique of the tendency of some of the current anthropological approaches to emotion, to essentialise the inner experience/outer expression split characteristic of our (‘Western’, in a broadly general sense) understanding of emotions. I have argued that assumptions of authenticity, which can only make sense within such parameters, tend to taint anthropologists’ approaches to the matter. I also showed how for the *Mebengokré* that the authenticity of emotions is one and the same with the authenticity of its performance, understood here as a conflation of experience and expression. The collective performance of longing in the ceremonial lament transforms individual indexes into collective icons of the intimacy

²²³ As mentioned earlier, the events described in chapters two to five are in chronological order according with the ceremonial ‘season’ that I was describing.

felt by each individual performer towards the one being lamented. The authenticity of the performance is in direct relation with its success in achieving such transformation. To successfully perform the ceremonial lament is to trail over the divide of experience and expression.

Furthermore, the successful performance produces an appearance – an icon – of intimacy which is not meant to be confounded with the intimacy to be obtained among those who actually have shared their lives. It is in fact meant to be an appearance, a positive, suitable one, but not ‘the original’. We are dealing here with another facet of the process of polity building, as production of resemblances by means of induced collective elation. As I have argued before, the whole process dispenses with any Durkheimian-like idea of a supra-individual metaphysical notion such as ‘society’, of which the lament would be the index. Polity building is seen here, again, as an iconic process in its own right, the emotional state created being ‘the social state’ itself rather than the index of something. Here too, the whole is made to resemble, in some specific ways, each individual component part of it. This is, I believe, an important aspect of the significance of the *Mebengokré*’s insistence that to live together with others is to feel toward them in specific ways. This process is morally and aesthetically good/beautiful, as well as efficient (the three senses of moral/aesthetic judgement), as it creates suitable similarities through performance. In a certain sense, to show the social significance of the aesthetic character of emotion is to expose the fallacy of the a priori assumption of the indexical character of emotion (or of its ceremonial expression) as denoting the ascendancy of ‘society’ over ‘the individual’.

This Homeric conflation of moral, aesthetic, and pragmatic qualities of agency is analysed in detail in chapter four. I show it to be related to the transit between theory

and practice and what is involved in it, as well as with the relation between individual goals and collective life. This latter, most sensible issue for many a ('Western') moral theory, is in fact a relatively tranquil issue for *Mebengokré* moral agency, which is based on the very satisfaction of one's appetites and drives by means of their harmonisation, and of the collective mobilisation to cater for the multitude of individual appetites and drives thus harmonised. The teaching and performance of the ceremony described in chapter four reveals the ceremonial specialist as a moral/aesthetic agent *par excellence*, whose greatest quality is to be able to induce agency in other people by means of seduction – that is, by playing with their drives and appetites in order to harmonise them towards a common, collective goal.

It is interesting to note that, in what concerns one's claims to ceremonial knowledge, it is important to stress an indexical relationship with the creator/original holder of such knowledge which amounts to an indexical relationship with the original experience which created the knowledge at issue, rather than the (iconic) appearance of similarity with the knowledge itself²²⁴. To transmit knowledge means, primarily, to share something of the original individual experience of its creator/holder, which gives *Mebengokré* knowledge, like pre-academia European knowledge, a certain hue of individuality and, in a sense, incommunicability as a corpus of data/information that is autonomous and distinct from the experience of its creation/appropriation. If the experience of ceremonial knowledge re-creates an original experience²²⁵, the effect of such indexicality (in the audience) is the creation of (iconic) likenesses between

²²⁴ By this I mean that it is not, say, the ability to reproduce each song and story to the letter which makes one authentically knowledgeable in ceremonial lore, but the claim to a connection with the original experience and/or the original producer of the knowledge being displayed (both connections in fact amount to the very same thing in the ceremony that I analysed).

dissimilar people (through the likening of them to the original group of people that performed the ceremony). The connection established by the ceremonial specialist's agency between the original performance and the contemporary one produces a likeness between people performing it today and those that originally performed it; the production of the latter likeness – that is, the contemporary performance – in itself creates a similarity between performers, who are sharing the experience of being likened together to others. The production of togetherness amounts to a production of likenesses between people.

Again we have here another aspect of a wider, pervasive process of polity building that departs from individual relationships and experiences to propose, not a different entity/state but a state of affairs which is similar to, but not an extension of, the original individual relationships and experiences. As in the previous chapters, what can be seen as polity building, in accord with this specific facet, amounts to a transit between individual indexicalities and collective iconicities. What this facet makes clear is the moral character of such transit, and through it the configuration of the moral agent itself. It is a being which is moved by its drives and appetites, but the latter being amenable to being seduced into harmony with other drives and appetites, so as to achieve them individually through collective means. It can be said that, in the same way that *Mebengokré* emotions reveal aspects of what we would describe as rationality by being amenable to being 'moulded' by ceremonial lore into collective likenesses, *Mebengokré* drives and appetites also reveal a 'rational' aspect under similar circumstances. Indeed, as with emotional states, the 'right' (I mean, good/beautiful/efficient) drives and appetites are in fact created through ceremonial

²²⁵ That is, establishes an indexicality between the present performance of the ceremony and its original performance, through the agency of the ceremonial specialist. I do not mean here an indexicality

performance (that is, through efficient ceremonial performance), and their satisfaction is accomplished through the creation of a general state of joy - or 'happiness', or even 'satisfaction' itself, which would sound redundant in English. This redundancy mirrors another, the one proposed by the ceremonial specialist and accomplished (if he is successful) in the performance itself of the ceremony: People are seduced into agency through the creation of (individual) harmonic drives and appetites, for whose satisfaction the tool of joy/happiness is needed. Such satisfaction, of course, produces (or rather, is) joy/happiness. This not only shows that the achievement of one's private goals is the appropriate form of the moral action; it also shows that such achievement, in its highest moral form (that of ceremonial agency), is accomplished only through collective endeavour. The split between egoistic and altruistic agency does not thus taint the moral agent in what concerns morality. The 'Common Good' is not part of the moral scene here: were it present, it would not be distinguishable from private aims.

How does it leave my polity-building argument? Can polity exist without a 'common good'? The ceremonial teaching that I analyse in this chapter actually addresses itself to this philosophical problem, and gives it a rather unusual – and efficient – solution. A *Mebengokré* moral agent is an autonomous being who does not give up his autonomy in order to achieve a 'social state'. No 'common good' is acknowledged above individual interests. But the likeness - again- of a common interest can be created, based upon the enjoyable character of the collective endeavour involved. Indeed, the very get-together is enjoyable in itself: different qualities of people having fun collectively, becoming like each other (in some respects) through sharing the same moral/aesthetic activity. In order to learn to have fun together in such a way, people learn sophisticated ways of co-ordinating technical tasks (that is, 'technical' as seen by

the anthropologist) by means of song and dance, of harmony and rhythm. The ‘technical task’ itself, ‘moralised/aestheticised’ through the agency of the ceremonial specialist, is efficient precisely because it makes autonomous, unrestrained agents get together for the fun of it, to co-ordinate their bodily movements for the sake of pleasure in a task that otherwise (that is, individually) would not be feasible. In producing food, this joyful togetherness also (re-)produces the moral/aesthetic paradigm of nurturance as the archetypal form of conviviality.

Again, what is produced here is a likeness, under carefully controlled conditions, so to speak: people having the same appetites, freely giving and getting the same thing to, and from, each other in an atmosphere of plenty, and crucially of merriment. The realisation of the moral agency (and it is moral, that is, ‘good/beautiful/useful’, *mex* only if it generates practical, ‘useful’ results) gives to the togetherness involved a powerful likeness with the most intimate relationships one may have, those involving feeding each other through mutual sentiments of fondness present in the relationship. This is, nevertheless, a likeness, and not an identity, as indicated by the suppression, under the ‘controlled conditions’ of the performance (which produces one result, fish), of dissimilarities between what is given to and received from other people²²⁶. It is significant that commensality is the central aspect and general paradigm for conviviality (that is, for moral/aesthetic life), and as such no ceremony can be ‘real’

²²⁶ As an afterthought, I suspect that ‘exchange’ (the ‘placing of something in the place of something else’, as *Mebengokre* would have it) is a rather complicated matter for *Mebengokre*, both philosophically and practically, because the idea of an abstract equivalence between the things coming and going, as well as between those giving and getting them, is a problematic one. Things and persons have distinct qualities, which are related to those of other things/persons in complex ways. I have heard several times from my *Mebengokre* friends veiled comments about things received by them as *kaigo*, as ‘counterfactuals’. I believe now that they were referring not to the thing itself but rather to the comparison proposed by the transaction, between qualities of the things being given and received. Elizabeth Ewart (2000: 167-74) describes similar ‘exchanges’ among the *Ge*-speaking *Panara* in a way that echoes many of my concerns with ‘exchange’ among the *Mebengokre*, as discussed in chapter two.

(*kumrentx*, *katàt*), that is, is not what it is supposed to be as a moral/aesthetic tool, without a collective meal associated with the performance. In this commensal process, seemliness (the aesthetic and moral quality of agency) realises itself as effectiveness, as people do get nurtured by means of the production of iconicity.

What is it, this power that creates these likenesses among autonomous, unrestrained agents, by means of which they find it both enjoyable and desirable to live with each other, and through which they can actually satiate their appetites? This is the query that I address in the fifth (and last) chapter, where I analyse speaking/language as a moral and aesthetic tool. Language reveals itself as an instrument of agency, and valued as such. ‘Power’ here – the power of language – is less a capacity to control than a capacity to bring agency about, to produce in people a drive to perform certain actions (and to acquire certain specific kinds of appetites, even in the literal sense as seen in the fishing ceremony). I show how *ben diri*, or ceremonial discourses, are seen as forms of language higher than ceremonial songs due to their possessing illocutionary force, whereas songs only suggest certain desirable perlocutionary effects (and as such may ‘fail’). It is clearly a question of a gradient of agency ‘bringaboutness’ that is being valued here. Language/discourse brings things about, makes things happen. For it to be effective, it is necessary that those with the linguistic skill for engendering agency in others to have some connection with the primeval experience which originated the piece of linguistic lore in question. This indexical connection is important in bringing about the iconic likeness among people, that is, of creating an appearance of communality among the present-day people who are undergoing the ceremony. This appearance, one can realise by now, is actually ‘the real thing’, the communality itself, an agency enveloped in moral/aesthetic seemliness. Such seemliness is itself the social state, as I

have striven so far to show. It is people showing themselves to be able to live with each other by the most explicit means at hand: by reproducing in their everyday relations the very appearance of an intimacy which is the ideal way to relate to others. Linguistic skill brings about this togetherness – in the beautified and ‘moralised’ form of ceremonial collective agency, which creates enjoyment in the association of people different from each other – through the creation of likenesses among people, likenesses which are moral and beautiful in themselves precisely because they make things and people look like other things and people. Language is a skill to produce sociability (and in fact to produce human-ness itself), and as such it is hardly surprising that *Mebengokré* state so vehemently that language is one of the distinctive features of *Mebengokré*-ness. This does not ‘mean’ the establishment of an ‘ethnic boundary’, but the very means to create people as full human (that is, *Mebengokré*) beings, able to lead a seemly (that is, aesthetic) life among non-similar beings.

‘To look like’ has been the general theme of this thesis, as becomes evident by now. To make relations between people that are not intimate with each other, look like ‘as if’ they were in fact intimate, this is the stuff polity is made of for the *Mebengokré*. It is the creation of an appearance of communality, whose realisation is communality itself. A polity which is built as a fractal, a ‘lookalike’ of family intimacy where people retain their individual autonomy in their social intercourse – in fact, where people are able to keep their individual autonomy precisely because of this social intercourse. It is a polity where people harmonise their private aims through the linguistic skill of some of them. A polity which is not Hobbes’ Leviathan but his Behemoth of anarchy – only that it reveals itself to be an organisational form in itself, rather than the negation of a sociality, the war of all against all.

Amazonian ethnology has been marked since its inception by a tendency to look for the ‘stability’ of a possible social contract that might lurk beneath the ‘fluidity’ and ‘chaos’ of everyday life presenting itself to the anthropologist. Confronted with this ‘fluidity’, the poor ethnologist turned to wherever s/he could find the (supposedly) familiar signs of hierarchy and authority – of ‘society’. *Chercher la structure* has been a sort of diffuse but pervasive *modus operandi* for much of Amazonian ethnology. It looks like Levi-Strauss’ ethnological conjectures about the social contract (mostly evident in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) as the universal cornerstone of human sociality had left an indelible mark on the minds of the Amazonian ethnologists. I hope to have shown how unsatisfactory a tool this approach constitutes if one is interested in understanding the specificity of *Mebengokré* agency. I also hope to have shown how relevant the following are for the building of social life are (apparently ‘unstructured’, ‘formless’): the creation of ‘fictive kinship’, individual emotional/affective attachments, the satisfaction of one’s private appetites, and the practice of linguistic skills. I have striven to show how the very notion of ‘structure’, tainted as it is by an indelible (‘Western’) moral bias, is as little applicable to *Mebengokré* – and, following Overing and Passes’ (2002) argument, probably to Amazonian Indigenous peoples as a whole – as the notion of a universal rational individual who is the source of universally human forms of agency. By unfolding the ‘informality’ of *Mebengokré* ceremonial life, I intended also to show that such ‘informality’ is anything but ‘formless’: it is in fact the very form of social life. Life among others does not need to be understood as an inescapable choice of the Leviathan of the social contract over the Behemoth of chaos and anarchy. And this, not only because the former is not necessarily present in social life, but also because the latter is not necessarily ‘chaos’. *Mebengokré* social life shows

how ‘Behemoth’ can be a very viable option for a social life without the social contract²²⁷.

Following again Overing and Passes’ (2000) reflections on Amazonian sociality, one could say that it is time to change from Leviathan to Behemoth, from the endless search for ‘structures’ that are so elusive because they are probably not there in the first place, to the appreciation of the significance and relevance of forms of creation of sociability in Indigenous Amazonia. This thesis was meant as a guided tour, so to speak, within the Behemoth’s entrails. Overing and Passes’ approach (and those of the authors participating in the volume organised by them) focuses upon the creation of intimacy as a social process. The authors focus on community intimacy and issues related to it, something which has rendered them amenable to critiques (Viveiros de Castro 1995b, 1996; Vilaca 2002) that understand it as a reduction of social life to ‘the domestic sphere’. As I expect to have shown, *Mebengokré* polity building can be understood as a fractal built out of personal intimacies, thus involving itself the creation of forms of intimacy. I believe that what the critiques mentioned above do not apprehend is the radical inappropriateness of the distinction between ‘the domestic sphere’ and ‘polity’ (or ‘social life’) for the understanding of Indigenous Amazonian everyday practice of being-in-the-world together with others.

Considering what I have discussed in this chapter (and in this thesis) so far, the reader will hardly be surprised by the conclusion that an anthropology of moral (and aesthetic) agency for the *Mebengokré* can only be understood as an anthropology of free

²²⁷ A perception of this lack of ‘the social contract’. I think, is behind Fisher’s (1998) statement that *Mebengokre* living in a same village do not think in terms of ‘community’. What he calls ‘community’ here is what I have called ‘the common good’ throughout this thesis. Problems related to the use of our notions of ‘community’ when describing Indigenous Amazonian social organisation have been noted

agency – with all the difficulties that Laidlaw (2002) has already pointed out for such an enterprise. This anthropology of *Mebengokré* free agency involves an anthropology of the specific forms of *Mebengokré* egalitarianism(s) and individualism(s). This thesis, in a certain way, complements Laidlaw's critique of the Durkheimian moral bias of (much of) anthropology. It also proposes a way out of the theoretical conundrum represented by a discipline so deeply tainted with the specificity of its own moral outlook(s), which purports to interpret other peoples' ways of acting freely. What I have wished to unfold in my thesis is the point that if one is to understand the morality and the aesthetics of *Mebengokré* agency, one has to re-organise one's understanding of both 'society' and 'individual' according to the cultural context in which both notions (or notions which can be taken as suitably similar to them) arise. A specific configuration of the self (involving for instance 'reasoned' drives, appetites and emotions) composes the background to such forms of social agency that are based on the aesthetic inebriation of the senses, in seduction rather than reasoning, in harmonisation of individual appetites and creation of collective emotional states rather than authority and power. On the other hand, social agency is 'social' not because it implies 'society' as an abstract metaphysical entity, but precisely because it *does not contain* such an implication: it does not imply renouncing to one's 'egoistic' interests (or to one's drives and appetites) in order to live with others. These others are not in fact 'one's pairs', or 'one's equals' in the political theory sense – not because of disparities in 'power' but because people are non-similes. Issues of 'power', 'rank', or 'hierarchy' are not relevant in *Mebengokre* political thinking. Rather, what is relevant are the differences between concrete people, and the process of creating similarities between people, both individually and collectively. It is this which comprises 'the social state' itself. This theme has a

relatively long history in Amazonian ethnology (Goldman 1963; Overing Kaplan 1975; Clastres 1977; Thomas 1982; Riviere 1984). I hope to have given a contribution to this longstanding debate.

These reflections may help us to appreciate critically some of the recent approaches in anthropology concerning the relevance of one or the other of the metaphysical entities above – ‘society’ or ‘individual’ – for the understanding of social life. I think here specifically of the critique of (mostly French) anthropologists, sociologists, etc, inspired by M.A.U.S.S., the Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales (Anti-Utilitarist Movement in the Social Sciences). According to Alain Caillé (2002: 12), one of the representatives of M.A.U.S.S., the movement is a reaction to the contemporary predominance in the social sciences of such approaches, as methodological individualism and the theory of rational action, which propose that the model of the *Homo Oeconomicus* (based in a reformulation of old liberal economic ideas) as a ‘universal’ of human agency, capable to explain all forms of human behaviour (and not only economic life, as in its previous version). Against such an assumption, intellectuals linked to M.A.U.S.S. have proposed the universalisation of Marcel Mauss’ model of the gift – the ‘obligation of freedom’ to give, to get, and to replicate – as the basic form of human sociality²²⁸. Although I agree with Caillé’s

the critique a little further, by analysing the moral and aesthetic aspects of life together with others.

²²⁸ Caillé’s argument is actually more refined than what I discuss here. He defines Mauss’ gift, with its ambivalent moral dialectics between altruism and self-interest, according to an opposition between four great general motives (‘universals’, as far as I can understand his argument), obligation and freedom, the interest for oneself and the interest for another (Caillé 2002: 17): “I retake the first lines of the ‘The Gift’, when Mauss states that (...) the gift is obligatory, to give is an obligation, but this obligation to give is at the same time an obligation of freedom. He uses this rather curious sentence frequently: one has to know how to give as an obligation and at the same time with freedom (...). To mix obligation and freedom. This is a first opposition between two motives for action: obligation and freedom. (...) But Mauss sees clearly that in the gift relationship there is also interest, obviously, even economic interest, material interest, but this private interest can only be satisfied if one satisfies the interest of the other. To put it in a nutshell: there is a second opposition between two motives for action, an opposition between what I would call an ‘interest for oneself’, and an ‘interest for the other’. The interest for the other, which I propose to call in French *aimance*, something that can be

critique of methodological individualism, I believe that his solution is hampered precisely by the same fundamental mistake of the other approach. Both purport to establish theoretically the universal basis of human life among others without taking into consideration the profound moral bias of the notions involved. Taking the *Mebengokré* case as example, I would contest the relevance of 1) the idea of an individual as a rational entity as defined on ontological grounds ('being'), and, 2) the idea that giving and getting things from others implies a 'common good' distinct and above the limited individual interests. These notions cannot encompass the multitude of practices involved in the ongoing moral and aesthetic process of creating sociability and humanity (both are in fact the same) in people. Which is how *Mebengokré* create their being-together-in-the-world.

I would like to finish this thesis – which is very much about stories told by people to other people and the effect they produce – with a story. It is not a story of mine, but one of the *Mebengokré* stories that are part of the cycle narrated by the ceremonial specialist during the fishing ceremony. As other stories told during this specific part of the ceremony, this one is meant to be enjoyed by people listening to them, who at this point stay awake the whole evening (or at least are expected to do so) until sunrise, when the actual fishing begins. This particular story tells of an event that happened in some unspecified past, during a fishing ceremony. It tells of an ancestor²²⁹ who was a shaman, and how he made a fool of a young man. It was received as hilariously funny by those listening to it. It was narrated by *Roma*, one of the

translated as amity, solidarity, love, etc''. Caillé's discussion is in fact a moral discussion – the opposition between altruism and egoism, and between freedom and obligation as the determinants of the morality of agency. The reader, who has followed an essentially similar discussion along this thesis, will note that what I have purported to do was precisely to show the specificity – that is, the non-universality – of this moral configuration. Nevertheless I do strongly agree with Caillé when he states that the issue of the place of each one of these determinants of the morality of agency in concrete actions is an empirical, rather than speculative, question (2002: 18).

ceremonial specialists who have the knowledge of this specific ceremony, and I have to confess that I could not see the point of the joke when it was told (and translated to me afterwards):

- *“Let’s climb the tree”, said the ancestor, “let’s climb it”.*
 - *Then the ancestor tied a vine to the tree.*
 - *“Someone go up there for me (in my place) to see if there is some sign of smoke to be seen” [he asks someone to go up there, using the vine he had tied to the tree]*
 - *And, as he said it, there was already someone climbing up the tree, when the ancestor cut off the vine.*
 - *And (the person) fell down the tree.*
 - *And he faded, but soon was standing again.*
 - *He went around, limping.*
 - *He was limping around.*
 - *He went to and fro, limping.*
 - *He went again to the ancestor, and the latter produced a kukêi²³⁰ for him to capture.*
 - *‘Let’s see if you are fast enough, let’s see’, said the ancestor.*
 - *“Kill that kukêi for me to see”.*
 - *“Let’s see if you are fast”.*
 - *Then the young man chased the kukêi.*
 - *And he ran, chasing the kukêi, going round and round himself.*
 - *But the ancestor kept moving the kukêi here and there, and the young man could not reach it.*
 - *Every time [that the young man was about to reach it] he hid the kukêi.*
 - *And the young man went round and round himself, until he gave up.*
- (the story goes on, to the general amusement of all – the whole audience roars with laughter).*

This example of apparently pointless humour started making some sense to me when I was analysing the transcriptions of the songs and stories told during the fishing ceremony. As I said before, the central concern of the ceremony, told - literally - in the songs and speeches that are part of it, is how to harmonise individual ends and desires towards a single goal, so that everyone achieves what one wants, and at the same time has an enjoyable time with others. The songs and stories explain to younger men that they should join older people and have a good time fishing (something to be stressed, as people usually spend most of their time with those that are similar to them in age). Songs and stories act toward inducing people to act together. Rhythm and harmony are

²²⁹ I use the term here in the loose sense.

²³⁰ ‘Cotia’ in Portuguese, sort of rodent, somewhat larger than a hare.

the all-encompassing paradigms for such effort. Ceremonies create emotional/affective states, which are ‘the social state’ itself, through creating and directing people’s desires and drives.

The remarkable thing in this story, when considered within such a context, is that it tells explicitly about the realisation of desires. In this case, about the realisation of another person’s desires. It tells about issuing and following orders, about people ‘doing things for’ others. That is, it tells about states of affairs which are the opposite of the whole complex of ideas and practices that are learned and enacted during the fishing ceremony. In fact, the whole story appeared to me in retrospect to revolve around the hilariousness of such contrast. To realise another person’s desire is essentially absurd and pointless, the story seemed to say.

In a ceremony where individual ends, appetites and desires are met through joyous concourse with others who are essentially ‘non-peers’ of one, the idea of the exercise of authority precisely in the context which concerned most the ceremony (the togetherness of younger and older people), reminded me immediately - through one of those curious mental associations which only afterwards can have some sense squeezed out of them – of Mauss’ statement (1925: 77, already quoted elsewhere in this thesis), that “the brutish pursuit of individual ends is harmful to the ends and the peace of all, to the rhythm of their works & joys - and rebounds on the individual himself”. The reason for such an association was obvious in retrospect: here was a piece of a statement that contained, inverted, most of my argument and that of the stories told during the fishing ceremony (and in others). The *Mebengokre*’s was a moral philosophy where the pursuit of individual ends was not brutish but the very form of the moral act: a political philosophy where the ends and peace of all equalled the sum of the ends and peace of

each. It was a moral and aesthetic philosophy which actually posed that collective works and joys could and should become conjoined in people's agency through rhythm and harmony, and that people could actually achieve their (private) ends and the (individual) peace of each through such agency. All these were part of the very process of making oneself human – of making oneself into an autonomous individual able to exercise togetherness with others.

I had actually inverted Mauss' argument, point by point, and that struck me as having an odd parallel with the story of the authoritarian shaman inverting the point of the whole fishing ceremony by ordering people about. It dawned on me that the storyteller was reciting Mauss' argument as a joke, as if it were a sort of dystopia where some hilariously funny relations obtained between people. Relations were being depicted that were not immoral but rather un-moral, cutting the plane of morality perpendicularly, so to speak. In the morally and aesthetically heightened context of the ceremony, such agency was significantly devoid of sense. As such, it was also devoid of any efficacy, as the poor victim of the shaman's eccentricities discovered for himself again and again.²³¹ It was poking fun at Leviathan: an exposition of the absurdity of giving up one's pursuit of one's own private ends, of submitting oneself to another's authority. An argument that, were it couched in the terms of Western moral philosophies, would be a critique of the notion of the 'Common Good' as the necessary affirmation of interests above and outside individuals in order that life together with others may exist. The *Mebengokré*, who do not seem to think in terms of any such

²³¹ In fact, this story resembles strongly the behaviour of a man towards the children of his female formal friend (*krabdjwy*). This sort of banter (which is not restricted to children but performed also with the young adult offspring of one's formal friend) is performed for the amusement of the audience present, as in the story above. It is interesting to notice that when a mother wants to threaten her children with punishment, she usually says that she is going to call her formal friend to discipline them. Here, as in

notion as ‘Common Good’, represent it simply as another’s desire, another’s aims, another’s authority over one. One is reminded here of Clastres’ (1977) argument of the Society against the State, as well as of the manifold critiques addressed to such conception as presupposing what it ‘denied’, that is, the presence of a ‘State’ against which ‘Society’ permanently mobilised itself. Although Clastres can be criticised, in the terms that I develop above, as implying a ‘Common Good’ which is the basis of ‘Society’ itself, the story of the authoritarian shaman seems to suggest a way out of the former critique, by implying that ‘State’ – or rather authority – is actually known and actively, explicitly rejected by *Mebengokré* thinking.²³² The story thus seems to echo wider philosophical concerns, among different Amazonian peoples, related to personal autonomy and freedom of agency. These are concerns that seem to be an expressive part of the weaving of the very fabric of their social lives.

The discovery of Indigenous American peoples by Europeans has left an indelible mark upon Western moral and political philosophy: first in the 16th century where one is immediately reminded here of Montaigne’s dialogue with that celebrated *Tupinambá* in the port of Rouen, and later, precisely by the confrontation of the freedom of ‘the savage’ with the constraints of the rigid European morality and forms of polity. Perhaps Montaigne did find out something highly significant from his *Tupinambá* interlocutor after all. It is something that seems to retain its centrality and importance in Amazonian philosophies. It is time for an anthropology of the specifically Amazonian forms of personal freedom. I have tried in this thesis to provide a few initial

the story of the authoritarian shaman, we find the conjoining of (potential) authority over, and the humorous licence to poke fun at, someone.

²³² I owe this last remark to a comment by Peter Gow on a paper presented by me where I told this story and developed a somewhat extended form of the argument that I provide here. The paper was given in the workshop ‘The Absurdities of the Human Condition’, in St. Andrews, May 2002, organised by Joanna Overing.

steps towards such an anthropology.

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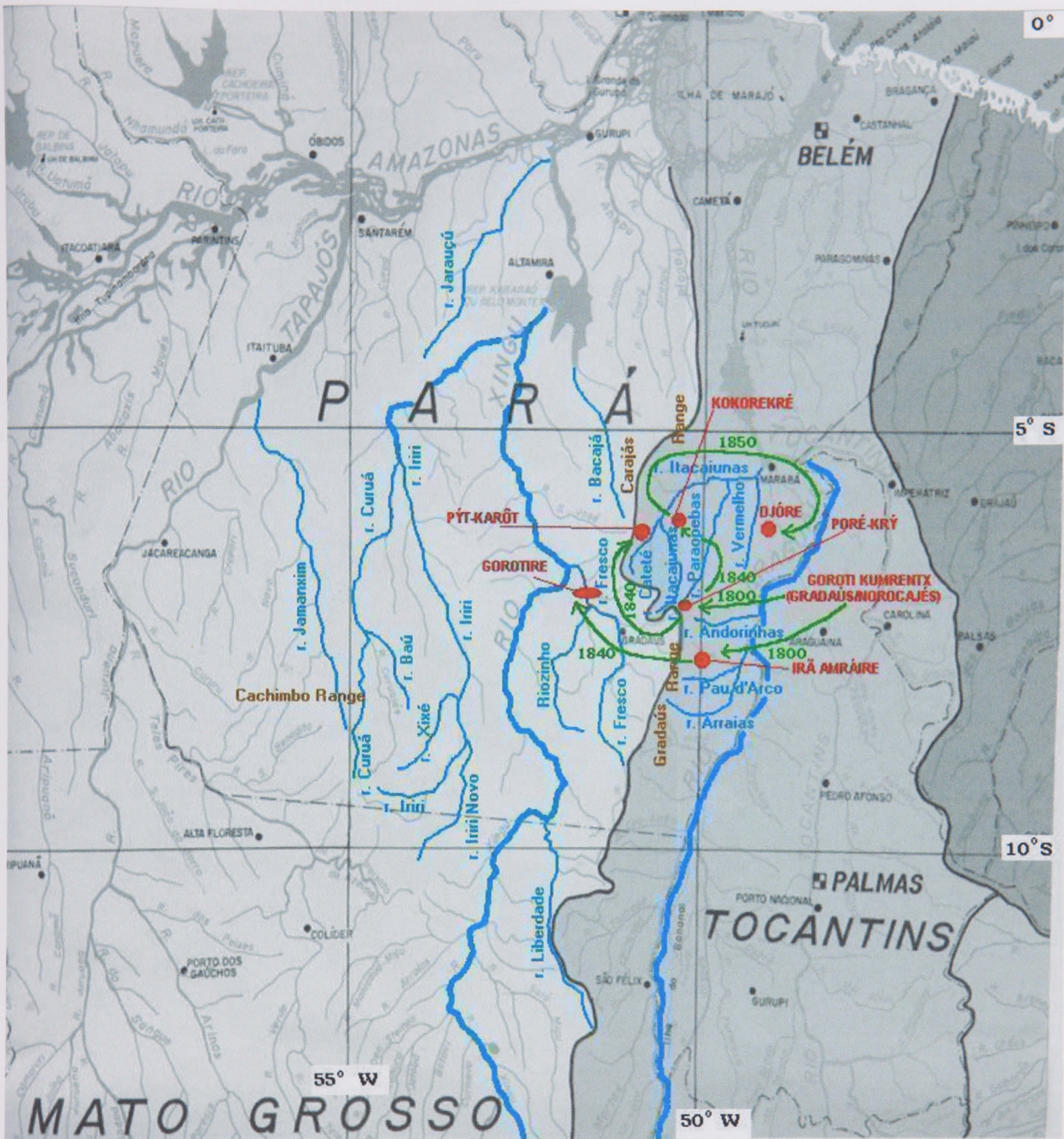
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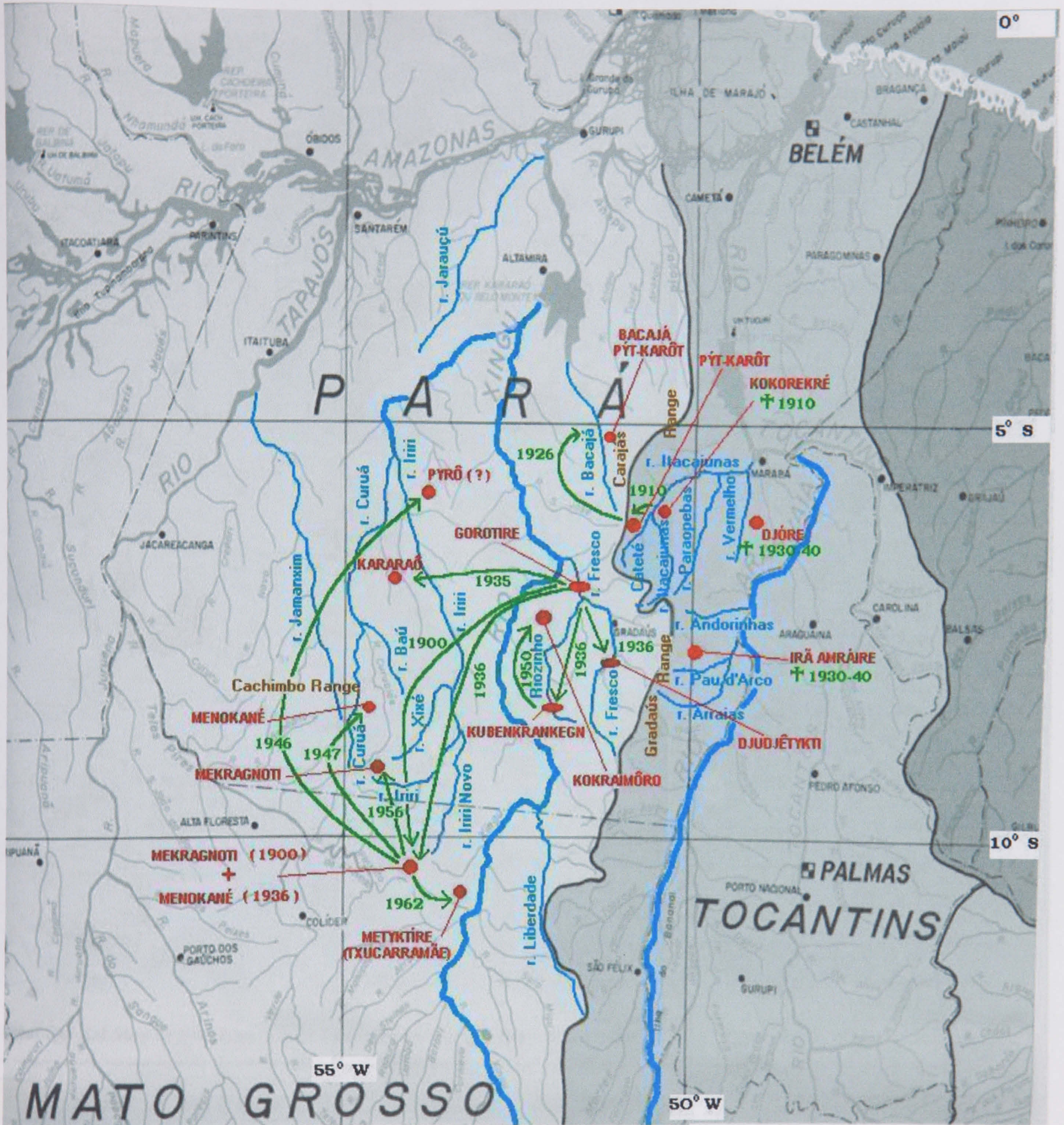
TABLE 1: *MEBENGOKRÉ* TERRITORIAL OCCUPATION DURING THE 19TH CENTURY







-  Rivers (relevant in *Mebengokré* territorial history)
-  Mountains (relevant in *Mebengokré* territorial history)
-  *Mebengokré* "Sub-Groups" (names of "groups" change with time & circumstance)
-  Migrations/Territorial Occupation (with approx. date)

RIVER BASINS:  Amazonas  Tocantins-Araguaia  Northeastern Brazil

TABLE 2: *MEBENGOKRÉ* TERRITORIAL OCCUPATION: 20TH CENTURY (UNTIL 1962)



-  Rivers (relevant in *Mebengokré* territorial history)
-  Mountains (relevant in *Mebengokré* territorial history)
-  *Mebengokré* "Sub-Groups" (names of "groups" change with time & circumstance)
-  Migrations/Territorial Occupation (with approx. date)


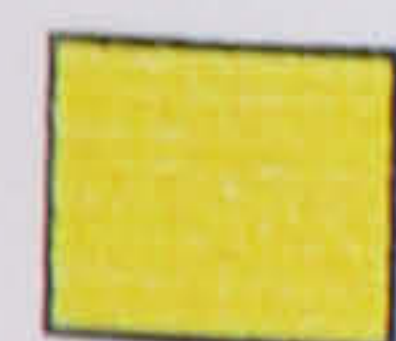
RIVER BASINS:  Amazonas  Tocantins-Araguaia  Northeastern Brazil

TABLE 3: CONTEMPORARY *MEBENGOKRÉ* INDIAN LANDS (2003)



Source: Official Map of Brazilian Indian Lands, FUNAI, 2003 (app. 1:8.000.000)



Xikrin do Rio Cateté Indian Land (fieldwork site, 1999/2000)



other *Mebengokré* Indian Lands

TABLE 4: RELATIONSHIP TERMINOLOGY (MALE EGO)

The following table was meant only as a tool for the reader to follow some passages of the thesis. The “meaning” of the *Mebengokré* terms is in fact highly unsatisfactorily rendered in genealogical terms, as one may see in chapter two. I have used the genealogical rendering only to help the reader. The sign “-#”, which appears in the genealogical rendering of some of the terms below, indicates that speakers may use personal names instead of relationship terminology for that specific person. Terms between brackets following a hyphen (“-*krabdjwy*”) indicate alternative terminological uses.

TERMS		“MEANING”
ADDRESS	REFERENCE	
<i>djá-nhõ</i>	<i>udjwy (idjudjwy)</i>	ZH, DH, FBSW
<i>djunwa, djuný, papai</i> (young children)	<i>bam, papai</i> (young children)	F, FB, MZH
<i>Ikamý (-#)</i>	<i>Kamý</i>	B, MZS, FBS
<i>ikanikwynh(-#)</i>	<i>Kanikwynh</i>	Z, MZD, FBD
<i>imàj, imàjre</i> (when child)	<i>umre (idjumre)</i>	WB, WZS, WFBS, WMZS
<i>Imàjngêt</i>	<i>umrengêt (idjumrengêt)</i>	WF, WFB, WMZH
<i>itabdjwy, krã-ný</i> (when younger than speaker) (-#)	<i>Tabdjwy</i>	ZC, CC
<i>-#</i>	<i>Krá¹</i>	D, S, BD, BS
<i>ngêtwa, ngêt-ê</i> (children)	<i>ngêt</i>	FF, MF, MB, FZH, WFF, WFZH (-#, - <i>bam kaàk, -krabdjwy</i>), WMB (-#), MBS, MBSS
<i>nidwa, mamãe</i> (young children)	<i>nã, mamãe</i> (young children)	M, MZ, FBW, MBD
<i>popãinh</i>	<i>upãijnh (idjupãinh)</i>	BW, FBSW, WZ, WMZD, WFBD, DH, SW
<i>popãinhgêij</i>	<i>upãinhgêij (idjupãinhgêij)</i>	WM, WMZ, WFBW
<i>Tuiwa, tui</i> (when of similar age)	<i>kwatui</i>	FM, MM, FZ, MBW, WFZ (-#), WMBW (-#)
<i>Nenh (-#)</i>	<i>prõ</i>	W

¹ *Kukamã*: Elder; *kutapure*: younger. Vidal (1977: 52-53) gives *kutewa* as ‘elder’, *konetã* as the ‘intermediary’ one, and *kutapure* for the youngest.

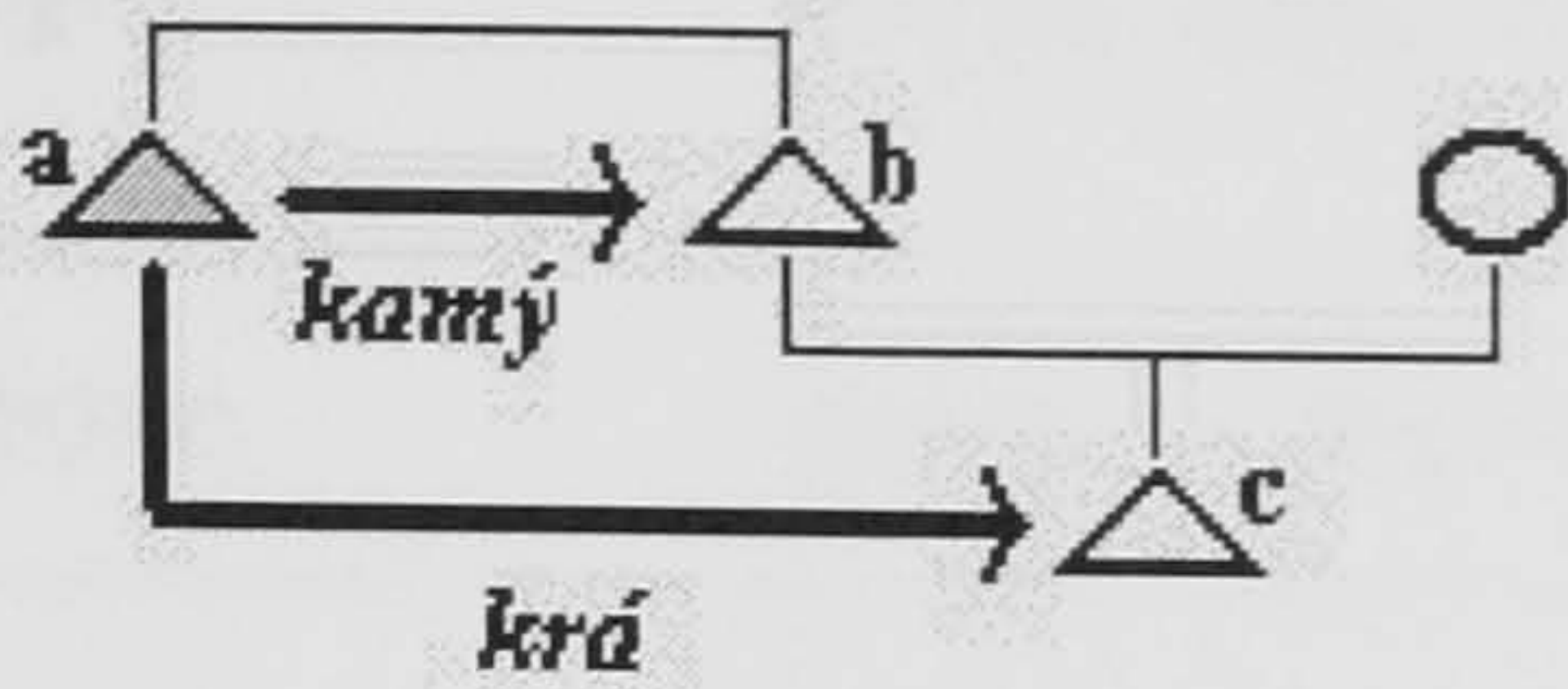
TABLE 5: RELATIONSHIP TERMINOLOGY (FEMALE EGO)

TERMS		“MEANING”
ADDRESS	REFERENCE	
<i>ibiañõ</i>	<i>udjwy (idjudjwy)</i>	ZH, DH, HB
<i>djunwa, djuný, papai</i> (young children)	<i>bam, papai</i> (young children)	F, FB, MZH
<i>Ikamý (-#)</i>	<i>Kamý</i>	B, MZS, FBS, MBDS
<i>ikanikwynh(-#)</i>	<i>Kanikwynh</i>	Z, MZD, FBD
<i>pomre</i>	<i>umre (idjumre)</i>	HZ
<i>pomrengêt</i>	<i>umrengêt (idjumrengêt)</i>	HZ
<i>itabdjwy, angmê¹</i> (when younger than speaker) (-#)	<i>Tabdjwy</i>	SC, BC, DC
<i>-#</i>	<i>Krá</i>	D, S, BC, FBDC, MBDD, MZDC
<i>ngêtwa, ngêt-ê</i> (children)	<i>ngêt</i>	FF, MF, MB, FZH, WFF, WFZH (-#, - <i>bam kaàk, -krabdjwy</i>), WMB (-#), MBS, MBSS
<i>nidwa, mamãe</i> (young children)	<i>nã, mamãe</i> (young children)	M, MZ, FBW, MBD
<i>djwoy</i>	<i>Djwoy (idjudjwoy}</i>	BW, SW
<i>pomrengêij</i>	<i>Umrengêij (idjumrengêij)</i>	HM
<i>Tuiwa, tui</i> (when of similar age)	<i>kwatui</i>	FM, MM, FZ, MBW
<i>Nenh</i> (intimate) (-#)	<i>mijet</i>	H

¹ *Angmê*: Young man. The term is also used by older men to refer to younger men in general in ceremonial contexts (including collective activities such as ceremonial hunting expeditions and collective fishing expeditions, described in this thesis.

TABLE 6: INDIRECT REFERENCE TERMINOLOGY

Indirect reference terminology is used when the speaker (a), the person (b) whom (a) is addressing, and the person (c) referred to by (a) are related. In the example below, the speaker (a) refers to (b) as *kamý*, and to (c) as *krá* (which, in this case, is also the term used by (b) to refer to (c)):



When talking to (b) about (c), the speaker (a) refers to (c) as *akamré*, a term that could be “translated” into Western (genealogical) terminology as “your male child who is my child”.

TERM	SPEAKER (in relation to addressed)	ADDRESSED (by relationship term)	MEANING
<i>adjwyjê</i>	H/W, F, M, B/Z	<i>prõ/mijê</i> t, <i>krá</i> , <i>kamý/kanikwynh</i>	‘your male in-law (who is my in-law)’
<i>akadjwynh</i>	(all) B, Z, H, W	same sex <i>kamý/kanikwynh</i> ; <i>prõ/mijê</i> t	“your female children (who are my children)’
<i>akamré</i>	(all), B, Z, H, W	same sex <i>kamý/kanikwyhn</i> ; <i>prõ/mijê</i> t	‘your male children (who are my children)’
<i>akatã</i>	MB, MF, FF, FZ	<i>tabdjwy</i>	‘your sibling (who is my <i>tabdjwy</i>)’
<i>akôtkijê</i> ¹	H, W	<i>prõ</i> ² , <i>mijê</i> t	‘your sibling (who is my in-law)’
<i>amàdjwyntxê</i>	(all) F	<i>krá</i>	‘your <i>kwatui</i> (who is my in-law)’
<i>amàjngê</i> t	(all) F, M, H	<i>krá</i> , <i>prõ</i>	‘your <i>ngê</i> t (who is my in-law)’
<i>amré</i>	(all) F, M, B /WF	<i>krá</i> , <i>kamý /udjw`y</i> (DH)	‘your male in-law (WB) (who is my in-law/my <i>krá</i>)’
<i>amrengêij</i>	(all) F, M, H	<i>krá</i> (fem.), <i>prõ</i>	‘your mother-in-law (who is my in-law)/(who is my mother)’
<i>anrengê</i> t	(all) W, WM	<i>mijê</i> t, <i>udjw`y</i> (DH)	‘your father-in-law/ <i>umrengê</i> t (who is my <i>bam/mijê</i> t)’
<i>Antkrâm</i>	F, M, B	<i>krá</i> (fem.), <i>kanikwynh</i>	‘your husband (who is my in-law)’
<i>Ântkrâmdjwynhtxê</i>	F, B	<i>krá</i> (male), <i>kamý</i>	‘your wife (who is my in-law)’

¹ Literally, ‘the one at your side’. ‘*Kijê*’ means ‘thigh’.
² When spoken by *prõ*, means ‘your brother (who is my sibling)’.

TABLE 6: INDIRECT REFERENCE TERMINOLOGY

<i>Aõihn</i>	(all) F, M ³	<i>krá</i>	‘your sister (who is my <i>krá</i>)’
<i>Apãihn</i>	(all) F, M, B /W	<i>krá (male), mijêt</i>	‘your <i>upãihn</i> (who is my in-law/my sister)’
<i>Apãihngêij</i>	(all) W, WF	<i>mijêt, udjw`y (DH)</i>	‘your mother-in-law (<i>upãihngêij</i>) (who is my <i>nã/</i> my <i>prõ</i>)’
<i>Aparidjwynh</i>	same as above	same as above	‘your female <i>tabdjwy</i> (who is my <i>tabdjwy</i>)’
<i>Aparijê⁴</i>	B, Z, S, W	<i>bam/nã, kamý/kanikwyhn</i> male <i>krá</i>	‘your male <i>tabdjwy</i> (who is my <i>tabdjwy</i>)’
	F M, H (more distant) S (?)	female <i>krá, prõ bam</i>	‘your male <i>tabdjwy</i> (who is my <i>krá</i>)’
<i>Atõ</i>	(all) F, M ⁵	<i>krá</i>	‘your brother (who is my <i>krá</i>)’
<i>Atukâ</i>	M, MB, MM, MF, H	<i>krá, tabdjwy, prõ, idjumré</i>	‘your father (who is my in-law)’
<i>Gàdjwynhtxê (ngàdjwynhtxê?)</i>	H	<i>prõ, pãihn, amré</i>	‘your mother (who is my in-law)’
<i>Gàtenk (ngátenk?)</i>	F, M, B/Z (of opposite sex)	<i>krá, kamý/kanikwynh</i> (of opposite sex)	‘your <i>krá</i> (who is my <i>tabdjwy</i>)’
<i>Nginhij</i>	(all) F, M, B, Z	<i>krá, bam, kamý</i>	‘your wife (who is my in-law)’

³ *Bam* and *nã* always use this terms when talking to their children; other, ‘classificatory’ kin, may or may not use it.

⁴ Literally, ‘your foot’.

⁵ *Bam* and *nã* always use this terms when talking to their children; other, ‘classificatory’ kin, may or may not use it.

TABLE 7: GLOSSARY OF MEBENGOKRÉ TERMS

<i>Àk're</i> : ‘bird’ ceremonial society
<i>Akrô ka'ôinh</i> : collective fishing ceremony
<i>Amĩ aprã</i> : culminating point of a ceremony
<i>Apijeti</i> : ‘large armadillo’ ceremonial society
<i>Apinayé/Apinajé</i> : northern <i>Gê</i> Indian people (usually classed as ‘western <i>Timbira</i> ’, despite being closer, in linguistic terms, to the <i>Mebengokré</i>)
<i>Apaniekrá</i> : Eastern <i>Timbira</i> Indigenous people (The <i>Apaniekrá</i> and the <i>Ramkokamekrá</i> are also called <i>Canela</i>)
<i>Araweté</i> : <i>Tupi-Guarani</i> Indian people
<i>Aruanã</i> : <i>Karajá</i> ceremony, also performed by the <i>Mebengokré</i>
<i>Atykbe</i> : men’s house, traditionally built at the outskirts of the <i>Xikrin</i> village.
<i>A' `ykre</i> : <i>Mebengokré</i> village
<i>Bekwynh-yr m~e ungrôr</i> : naming ceremony for the ‘holders’ of <i>Bekwynh</i> names.
<i>Bep-yr m~e toro/Benp-yr m~e toro</i> : naming ceremony for ‘holders’ of <i>Bep</i> names.
<i>Ben/ben diri</i> : ceremonial discourse
<i>Bororo</i> : Indian people (of the <i>Umutina</i> linguistic family, part of the Macro- <i>Gê</i> larger linguistic family), sharing many cultural and social traits with the <i>Gê</i> .
<i>Canela</i> : Eastern <i>Timbira</i> Indian people
<i>Djóre</i> : extinct <i>Xikrin-Mebengokré</i> group
<i>Djudjêkô</i> : <i>Xikrin</i> village in Cateté Indian land.
<i>Djwy-kupu</i> : ‘bread’ made of manioc paste.
<i>Gavião</i> : Northern <i>Gê</i> (Eastern <i>Timbira</i>) Indian people.
<i>Gê</i> : linguistic family to which <i>Mebengokré</i> language belongs.
<i>Gorotire</i> : <i>Mebengokré</i> group (also village of the same name).
<i>Gradahus/Gradaús</i> : name given to an Indian group in the 19 th century (possibly a <i>Mebengokré</i> group).
<i>Irã amráire</i> : extinct <i>Mebengokré</i> group, which inhabited the confluence between the Araguaia and the Tocantins Rivers.

TABLE 7: GLOSSARY OF MEBENGOKRÉ TERMS

<i>Juruna</i> :	Tupi Indian people.
<i>Kaàk</i> :	‘fac-similar’ (see thesis for more details)
<i>Kaben</i> :	‘words’; discourse; <i>Mebengokré</i> language (‘ <i>Mebengokré kaben</i> ’).
<i>Kaigó</i> :	‘false’ (see thesis for more details)
<i>Kaingang</i> :	Southern <i>Gê</i> Indian people
<i>Kakrit</i> :	‘false’ (see thesis for details)
<i>Kamayurá</i> :	Indian people inhabiting the Xingu region
<i>Kamkrokró</i> :	old village site of the <i>Xikrin</i>
<i>Kamkukêi</i> :	‘place of the <i>kukêi</i> ’; site of Cateté village collective fishing ceremony
<i>Kapôt</i> :	‘clearing’; ‘savannah’; site of an old <i>Mebengokré</i> village
<i>Karajá</i> :	Indian people of the Macro- <i>Gê</i> linguistic family, inhabiting the margins of the Araguaia River.
<i>Kararaô</i> :	<i>Mebengokré</i> group
<i>Kayapo/Caiapó</i> :	name by which the <i>Mebengokré</i> are usually known.
<i>Kikretum</i> :	old <i>Mebengokré</i> village site; present-day village in <i>Mebengokré Gorotire</i> Indian Land.
<i>Kokorekré</i> :	name of an extinct <i>Xikrin</i> group; ancient village site of the group of the same name.
<i>Kokraimôro</i> :	village site (and also name of a group) in <i>Gorotire</i> Indian land.
<i>Kràbdjwy</i> :	‘formal friend’; a non-‘kin’ relationship
<i>Krahó/Krahô</i> :	Northern <i>Gê</i> (Eastern <i>Timbira</i>) Indian people.
<i>Kren-akrôre</i> :	Name given to the <i>Mebengokré</i> to the <i>Gê</i> -speaking Panará
<i>Krĩ</i> :	the village circle.
<i>Krĩkati</i> :	Northern <i>Gê</i> (Eastern <i>Timbira</i>) Indian people.
<i>Kubenkrankegn</i> :	name of a <i>Mebengokré</i> group (also a village in <i>Gorotire</i> Indian land)
<i>Kukradjà</i> :	‘wealth’; ‘tradition’ (see thesis for more details)
<i>Kumrentx/djwynh/katàt</i> :	‘true’, ‘real’ (see thesis for more details)
<i>Kwryry kangô</i> :	the manioc ceremony (adopted from the <i>Juruna</i>).

TABLE 7: GLOSSARY OF MEBENGOKRÉ TERMS

Mba'y: name of one of the *Mebengokré* Indian lands; site of an ancient *Mebengokré* village

M~ebengêt: ‘the elders’ (see thesis for more details)

M~ebengokré/ Mebengokré: self-denomination of the *Kayapo* (‘those who came from the hole in the middle of the waters’; ‘those who came from the place between the waters’).

M~e bi'ôk: ‘The painted ones’; name given to the children celebrated in a ceremony.

M~e kôt tó: ‘All dancing together’; party; ceremony; festival.

M~ekragnoti/M~ekrãngôti: name of the southernmost *Mebengokré* group.

M~ekranyre: ‘Those with small children’; *Mebengokré* ‘age-grade’.

M~ekrareremex: ‘Those with beautiful children’; name given to the sponsors of a ceremony (that is, to the parents of those children being celebrated in a ceremony).

M~e kutop: *Mebengokré* ceremony for young adult men.

M~enokané: *Mebengokré* group last seen in the 1940s

M~enoronýre: ‘Those who sleep in a new way’; *Mebengokré* ‘age-grade’ composed by older children (after the begin to sleep in the men’s house – hence the name).

M~e rereméx/M~erereméi: ‘those who are beautiful’; naming ceremony in which names beginning with any ceremonial prefix can be celebrated (see thesis for more details).

M~e toro: ‘All dancing’; ceremony; party; festival.

M~etoro dj`a: ‘place of the *m~e toro*’; ‘conceptual’ place at the centre of the village (to the side of the men’s house).

M~e tumre/m~e tum jarenh: ‘words of old’; ‘tradition’.

M~e ungrôr: ‘the cry/shout’; vocal form deployed in some ceremonies (see thesis for more details).

Méx/méi/metx: ‘good/beautiful/useful’ (see thesis for more details).

Mr`y kadj`y dj`a: ‘Place of those who want to hunt/who want meat’; ‘conceptual’ place in the centre of the village, where people gather for ceremonial hunting expeditions (see thesis for more details).

Ngô: ‘water’; ‘river’.

Ngô ratx: ‘Large river’.

Ngôre kam m~e toro: ‘Ceremony/party at the place of the small water/river’; collective fishing ceremony.

Ngre nhõ djwynh: ‘Those who really have the songs’; ceremonial specialist

TABLE 7: GLOSSARY OF MEBENGOKRÉ TERMS

Ngrer: song

Ngrer djuwynh: ‘real singer’; one who is knowledgeable in ceremonial lore.

Norocajés/Nhyrkwayé: name of a 19th century Indian people (probably the present-day *Mebengokré*).

O’amak: ‘longing’

Õmbikwá: ‘relative’; ‘friend’

Õ wa ne: ‘And this is it’; formula that closes a narrative in *Mebengokré* traditional lore.

Panará: *Gê*-speaking Indian people.

Panh m~e toro: ceremony where people (mostly women) with names beginning by the ceremonial prefix ‘*panh*’ are celebrated.

Pia`am/piaap: ‘shame’; ‘respect’.

Pi`y djam: ‘The place of the Brazil nut [tree]’; ancient village site of the *Mebengokré*

Porori: ancient village site of the *Mebengokré*

Punure: ‘bad/ugly/useless’ (see thesis for more details).

P`y: annatto

Pykany: name of a village in *Mekragnoti* Indian land.

Pykatingrât: ‘beach’; name of one of the two *Xikrin* villages in the Cateté Indian land.

Pykatôti: name of the first village of the *Mebengokré* in the Xingu region.

Pyrkatajé: self-denomination of the *Gavião* (Northern *Gê*, Eastern *Timbira*) Indian people.

P`yt karôt: extinct *Mebengokré* group

Ramkokamekrá: one of the *Canela* groups.

Shavante/Xavante: Central *Gê* Indian people

Sherente/Xerente: Central *Gê* Indian people

Shokleng/Xokleng: Southern *Gê* Indian people

Suyá: Northern *Gê* Indian people

Takàk-nhàk: ceremony in which people bearing names beginning by these two ceremonial prefixes are celebrated.

TABLE 7: GLOSSARY OF MEBENGOKRÉ TERMS

Timbira: Name of a group of Northern *Gê* Indian peoples, all speaking the same language (or highly similar ones at any rate).

Txukarramãe: name of one of the southernmost *Mebengokré* groups (denomination given by the *Juruna*).

Xikrin/Shikrin: name of a *Mebengokré* group.