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## Bororo Funerals: Images of the Refacement of the World

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## Bororo Funerals: Images of the Refacement of the World

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Boe was born to complicate. Born by naming, his lip is punctured if he is male. It's the same when he dies. Dying should end everything, but everything begins again, because there still is the small gourd. Boe doesn't want to end.

—José Carlos, Bororo chief

*“Boe”* is the term that the Bororo use to refer to themselves. The above words were said to me by a famous Bororo chief from the village of Garças. It sums up in a clear way the grand processes of transformation present in the Bororo conceptions of society and the individual, conceptions that are dramatized and made visible throughout their numerous funerary rituals.

Of all the events that mark the life cycle among Bororo people, death is certainly the most celebrated. There is no life without death in this society. It is during funerals that the souls of their ancestors and cultural heroes are evoked. During the many rites that compose the funerary cycle—that can last up to three months, from a person's death to the final burial of their bones—the young are familiarized with the values upon which this dual society is founded. Through these rites Bororo are reminded of the rules of reciprocity and effectively initiated into adult life. Bororo funerals are therefore important moments of production and diffusion of knowledge. This mode of knowledge, as we shall see, is produced and perceived in very specific ways. The songs sung during these rituals are crucial, for instance, in the transmission of the accumulated knowledge of this society. They recall the deeds of cultural heroes such as Bakororo and Itubore, founders of the rules of social life, as well as their disputes and the way they were resolved. The songs also recall the most important landmarks in Bororo territory, its fauna and flora, as well as the techniques of hunting and fishing (see Caiuby Novaes 1998, for more details on Bororo songs). As the authors of the Bororo Encyclopedia assert in Volume III, dedicated to songs: “The songs are the codes of the deeds of the legendary heroes,

of the institutions, the ornaments, the celebrated acts of some members of the tribe, which are intimately connected with their totem" (Albisetti and Venturelli 1976:02). Given the importance associated with ritual songs, it is vital that singers make no errors. Thus, if a young person is responsible for the ritual singing, there will always be someone behind him who knows the songs, in case he needs help.

Numerous transformations take place after a sudden rupture such as that triggered by death. It is therefore indispensable to restore the equilibrium threatened by the death of a person. To achieve this end, chiefs convoke the entire Bororo society. Death unites the society of the living with that of the dead. Male and female relatives from different villages come together for the funeral of a person. During these celebrations all dead people are remembered by their living relatives. The Bororo rituals do not exclude humor and laughter, as is also the case among the Kaxinawá analyzed by Elsjé Lagrou (*intra*). The grotesque prevails in many of these rituals. Lagrou asserts that power provokes laughter, whereas laughter has a power of its own. It is precisely in moments of sudden ruptures such as death that laughter finds its place.

There are various analytical perspectives for understanding rituals in general, and Bororo funerals in particular. Such perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Viertler (1991) suggests, Bororo funerals have cultural, political, economic, and adaptational functions. In my opinion funerals are also very special times for Bororo society. They are moments of great aesthetic expression through the songs, dances, and ornaments worn during such occasions. As Overing (1991) suggests, they are events during which the productive and aesthetic knowledge of this society are renewed, thus providing the creative force for its continuity and ensuring its reproduction. Apart from songs and dances, Bororo funerals involve collective activities such as hunting, fishing, and gathering. These tasks also constitute moments of "inspired activity" (Overing 1991), insofar as they reinforce the sense of community.

Mary Douglas (1966) affirmed in *Purity and Danger* that if words are capable of creating thoughts, then rituals can create perceptions. But how should we understand these perceptions? Douglas showed that ritual "provides a focusing mechanism, a method of mnemonics, and a control for experience" (1966:63). It is focused on the body and has a creative power in terms of performance. Death is the extinction of the vital breath. The ritual activities that take place after this event always focus upon the defacement and refacement of the bodies. Focus is on the dead person and his or her representative, and on the vital breath that was extinguished and is recreated in the mortuary gourd that is played by the deceased's

representative. Funerary rituals involve the defacement of the corpse of the one who died, as well as the refacement of the body of the young boys who will be initiated during them. They involve knowledge in the making and unmaking of bodies. As Santos-Granero (*intra*) states regarding the Yanasha, “instead of being the cause of knowledge [...] bodies are caused by knowledge.” Ritual makes internal states visible as external signs. It is as if the values attached to the world went through the bodily senses. This perspective is useful for understanding the implications of funerals among the Bororo, either as processes of social continuity, or in terms of their singular aesthetic force, which is always a source of pride for Bororo people.

### **BORORO FUNERALS: POSSIBILITY OF AN ETHNOGRAPHY THROUGH TEXT AND IMAGE**

Much has been written about Bororo funerals, and I myself have published several articles about this topic (see Caiuby Novaes 1983, 1994, 1998; Crocker 1985; and Viertler 1991). This literature, however, has always left me with a feeling of incompleteness. Texts may explain, debate, analyze, and interpret. Yet, unless they are poetry, they do not reveal that which is most present in Bororo funerals: the emotion, the aesthetics, and the collective catharsis which impregnates the society during the different stages of the funerary cycle. Rereading my fieldwork diaries, I realized that I filled pages about everyday life in the village and the way that I felt and reacted every day. Yet, I hardly ever made any comments about funerals. I suppose that I just could not find the words to describe what I felt. On the other hand, my collection of fieldwork photographs includes a great number of images taken during the different stages of the funerary cycle. In previous articles, I have described, commented upon, interpreted, and analyzed different aspects of Bororo funerals. But I have almost never included images. My aim in this article is to bring together the record produced by the sensitivity of my photographic eye and the reflections that I have developed over thirty years of research among the Bororo.

By looking at these images with a more discerning eye, I was able to deepen my insights regarding the relationship between funerary and naming rituals. Images allow us to see that which is not immediately visible, because they can be viewed at various times (something impossible during fieldwork), and also because they record sensitive elements only the photographic eye can perceive. The photographs included in this article have been selected and ordered so as to enable the reader to visualize

the concepts that Bororo people express through their funerary rituals. They reveal, better than words, the relationships between body, ritual, and knowledge: bodies that are gradually defaced when watered in their temporary graves; bodies refaced in the *aroe-maiwu* ritual; and the scarified bodies of the mourners. I was present at many funerals during my thirty years of research. Although I have never seen a complete funerary cycle, I have witnessed all the different stages of the cycle, from the announcement of a person's death, to the final burial of his or her bones in a bay.

There remained one question to ask: how to present images taken over a long period of time and covering a wide variety of funerals? My decision was guided by what the Bororo claim takes place during their funerals: an encounter between the living and the dead. At each funeral, all the dead are remembered by their living relatives and their ritual representatives. Through the small mortuary gourd played by ritual representatives they are all present at the funeral. This seemed a possible strategy to me. I have thus ordered the images in terms of the chronology of a model funeral rite, creating a synchrony for my collection of photos. The images included present different views at different moments during my research. Nonetheless, they provide a visual record of key moments in the funerary ritual sequence.

What contribution do these photos make toward our understanding of what funerals mean to the Bororo? What can this collection of images reveal that words are unable to tell? Taussig's work on mimesis (1993) and defacement (1999) can help explain what I would like to present in this paper.

Through his rereading of the works of Frazer and Benjamin, Taussig (1993) attempts to construct what he describes as a particular "history of the senses," placing special emphasis on the issues of alterity and mimesis. Inspired by the art and power of the cuckold, Taussig examines to what extent the symbolically constructed is real. In the Bororo context the question shifts. It becomes: how do we deal with the refacement of that which is no longer a human being but has become a soul? The soul and the social representative of the deceased should be understood as realities that are carefully constructed and elaborated by the Bororo during the funerary cycle through symbolic processes involving contact and mimesis.

In the first pages of *Mimesis and Alterity*, Taussig (1993) defines mimesis as the nature that culture uses to construct a second nature, the facility to imitate, copy, and create models, to explore differences, to give one's self, and to turn one's self into the Other. Taussig says that: "The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby representation may even assume

that character and power” (1993:XIII). Drawing on Frazer’s work on sympathetic magic to understand contemporary issues, Taussig (1993:21) proposes that contact and copying are steps in the same process. To see or to hear something is to be in contact with that something. “In many, if not in the overwhelming majority of cases of magical practices in which the Law of Similarity or Imitation is important,” Taussig suggests, “*it is in fact combined with the Law of Contact*” (1993:55; emphasis in original).

Mimesis is part of the process of giving one’s self to the Other and becoming the Other. This power, which in specific situations (Taussig analyzed colonial contexts) is intrinsic to mimesis and alterity, can be a destructive force, as well as a curative one. The life and death situation lived in Bororo funerals can be seen as a liminal situation where chaos could take over. In such a context, various kinds of alterities are dramatized. The re-establishment of the order broken by the death of a person depends, to a certain extent, on the dramatization of these alterities—alterities that oppose the living and the dead, the Ecerae and the Tugarege (the two moieties that make up the Bororo village), the child and the adult, but also the Boe (the Bororo) and the Brae (a term referring to non-Indians or “civilizados” as they translate it into Portuguese).

According to Taussig (1993:86), mimesis, as the act that articulates the real with the constructed, is a process without which no society could exist. The mimetic art is part of public secrecy, something inherent to all social institutions. Taussig (1999) develops this topic in greater depth in his book *Defacement*, where he refers to defacement as that which takes place when something precious is taken away from us. By bringing the depths to the surface, defacement reveals hidden mysteries and draws us closer to the sacred. Like Benjamin, Taussig asserts that there is a relationship between the sacred and truth. According to Taussig, “Truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it (1999:2). According to Taussig, public secrecy, that which everybody knows but should not, is the most important form of social knowledge. Public secrecy is that which is known but cannot be articulated. It is this notion that has prompted me to combine text and images in order to reveal that which is difficult to articulate with respect to Bororo funerals.

## THE FIRST BURIAL

Taussig’s (1999) various meanings of the notion of “defacement” are useful for understanding what takes place during the Bororo funerary cycle. As mentioned, death sets off a long cycle of transformations. These



transformations need to be ritually controlled by the Bororo. According to Taussig (1999), one of the meanings of defacement is to destroy the surface or appearance of something that existed previously. It is therefore important to reface that which will be defaced. The most visible marks of clan identity are clearly placed on the “agonizing” body. For example, the hair is cut in the traditional manner, the body is painted with red *urucum*, the face is painted with designs, and feather ornaments are placed on the head in accordance with the style of the clan to which the dead person belongs. It is vital that the body be clearly identified since it will be defaced after death.



**Figure 1.** Rolled in a mat, the corpse of the deceased is buried in a shallow grave in the central plaza of the village.

The loss of vital breath is the sign of death. From the moment that it is agreed that the vital breath of a person has disappeared, the face of the deceased, already transformed into *aroe* (soul), is covered by a straw tray, so that it cannot be seen by the women and children. This is the first in a long series of transformations set off by death. The body of the deceased is subsequently rolled in a mat and buried in a shallow grave in the central plaza of the village (see Figure 1). This act starts the process of defacement in the sense of destroying the surface or appearance of something that previously existed. The decomposition of the flesh of the deceased, whose grave is watered daily to speed up the process, is

accompanied by other proceedings, also resulting in defacement, this time in the sense of reducing the utility, value, or influence of something. The belongings of the deceased are ritually burned or destroyed by other means (since ceramic objects and other objects cannot be destroyed by fire). The deceased's perishable elements, from the flesh of the body to the things that were possessed, should be destroyed after death. None of these things have value or utility after death, nor can they be transmitted or inherited.

According to the Bororo, the flesh of unborn children is strengthened by the continual input of semen resulting from frequent sexual relations during the gestation period. Mirroring this process, corpses are buried and in shallow graves dug by the women. Corpses gradually decompose, helped by the frequent watering of the grave by men belonging to the deceased's opposite clan. Whereas children are named while facing the point in the horizon where the sun rises, the dead are buried facing the point where the sun sets.

From time to time, the grave is opened to examine the state of the body and the smell the odors it emits. The rotting odor (*jerimaga*) is one of the signs that *bope*, the spirit to whom grand natural transformations are accredited, is still there, satisfying itself with the body of the dead. *Bope* is a lover of raw flesh, blood, stench, and carrion.

Throughout the funerary cycle, and until the final burial of the bones, participants sing many songs. Singing takes place in the house of the deceased, in the men's house, or in the central plaza. When moving from one place to another, singers walk in line, always led by someone playing flutes or rattles, or carrying some kind of ritual food for the souls.

### *TIMBÓ*

Many of the funerary rituals involve almost the entire village and their guests. According to Viertler (1991), the *bope*, to whom death is attributed, are "lords of the animals," associated with hunting rituals and the blessings of the *bari* (the Bororo shaman). The most prestigious among these rituals involve collective hunting and fishing activities, among which fishing with *timbó* is the most important. These group activities are exclusively male. They are always preceded by singing, which can last until the early hours, when it is time to leave for the hunt. These activities entail an enormous amount of cooperation between participants, strengthening, as Overing (1991) has suggested, the sense and feeling of collectivity.

Bororo people assert that while hunting, fishing, and dancing in the context of funerary rituals, they are not ordinary beings, but *aroe* souls.



The collective and ritual aspects of these activities are fundamental insofar as they allow Bororo people to perceive the society to which they belong, as well as the specific mode of this belonging. As among the Muinane of Colombian Amazonia described by Londoño Sulkin (*intra*), these rituals reveal how “real people were made, shaped, or healed, to ensure their health and sociability.” Turned into *aroe*, the men that participate in these rituals spend whole days hunting, fishing with *timbó*, or setting traps to catch fish (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Fish traps are made by the Bororo during collective hunting and fishing expeditions.

## BODY PAINTING

Funerary rituals are a means of reconstructing Bororo society after the destabilization caused by the death of one of its members. This ritual reconstruction is achieved through singing and dancing. Funerals reaffirm the relation of opposition and complementarity between the two moieties into which Bororo villages, and Bororo society, are divided—the *Ecerae* and the *Tugarege*, each half consisting of four clans. Each clan is characterized by the possession of a set of names, songs, dances, body ornaments, and ritual representations. The clan that “owns” a given ritual is responsible for making or obtaining all that is necessary to perform it: the *urucum*, *jenipapo*, and *tabatinga* that are needed to make the red, black, and white body paints; the straw to make the skirts; the feathers

to make headdresses; and the ornaments that the participants will wear during the ritual. But it is the opposite clan (to the one owning the ritual) that is responsible for the representation of the ritual. At the end of the representation all ritual ornaments are placed on the grave as a form of tribute paid to the deceased that is believed to ease the passage of the soul of the deceased into the village of the dead. From this point of view, funerary rituals do not only express abstract ideas about Bororo society and attempt to reconstruct it. They also produce effects upon this world and, as such, they can be conceived of as well-executed tasks (see Parkin 1992, for more about rituals as effective acts upon the world).

### *Bakororo and Itubore*

Bakororo and Itubore are two of the most important Bororo mythical heroes. They are also described as being *aroe*. The ritual representation of these two mythical heroes recreates the constituting act of Bororo society. This explains why these mythical beings are represented during funerals. Bakororo, the more important of the two personages, belongs to the Aroroe cobugiwuge clan. He looks after the western side of the village of the dead, which is organized in a similar fashion as the villages of the living Bororo. This *aroe* always plays an *ika* or large flute. He is big and strong, and paints his body with red and black stripes. Red is the color of *raka*, the vital force. Black is the color of another force, a destructive one that transforms through degeneration (see Crocker 1985:183). It is Bakororo's responsibility to announce the parties, the meals, and dances relating to the souls of the dead.

Itubore belongs to the Apiborege cebegiwuge clan. He looks after the eastern side of the village of the dead. He also plays a wind instrument consisting of three gourds joined by resin and ornamented with stripes covered with white down. Likewise, Itubore decorates his body with long stripes bordered with white down. He is the one who announces the hunting and fishing expeditions of souls. Together, Itubore and Bakororo greet the souls of the deceased when they arrive in the village (see Figure 3). Two other mythical heroes, Bokwojeba and Bure Ikabeo, also pay tribute to the deceased. Bokwojeba paints his entire body with black charcoal paint, decorated with spots made with white mud (*tabatinga*). He wears *babaçu* palm shoots tied to his head, waist, biceps, wrists, as well as below the knees and ankles. Bure Ikabeo covers his hair, face, and body with a red paste made from *urucum*. He paints his arms and legs, down to his calves, with black charcoal decorated with white marks. He is also similarly adorned from face to chest. As with Bokwojeba, Bure Ikabeo ties *babaçu* shoots all over his body (see Figure 4).



**Figure 3.** Bakororo and Itubore are the two main mythical heroes who created everything that is important in Bororo society. In this ritual the Bororo recreate their creation act.



**Figure 4.** During funerary rituals the Bororo paint themselves as mythical heroes. These rituals are part of their effort to recreate their society.

This ritual representation brings to life the great ancestors who established the basis of Bororo social organization in which death calls to be recreated. This recreation is also an aesthetic reconstruction of the world. It is this specific aesthetic that marks and distinguishes Bororo from other Amerindian societies. Bakororo and Itubore established the *modus operandi* of Bororo social organization, defining the relationships between the two moieties of which it is made up, placing humankind as a central pivot in the dynamic balance between the principles of *aroe* and *bope*, and reaffirming the symbolic power of society over natural events. Humans die and this is a natural event. But the deceased's representative, who the Bororo call *aroe-maiwu*, "new soul," continues to hunt and provide game to his ritual fathers. This illustrates the continued presence of the dead in the community of the living (see Crocker 1985:280).

### *Mano, Iwodu, Baraedu Ku Kuri*

The decision as to which rites will be celebrated during the funerary cycle depends on the clan of the deceased and the availability of materials to carry them out. During my fieldwork I have witnessed a variety of these rituals: the *buriti* log run, or *mano* run, as the Bororo call it; the ritual of Iwodu, in which men cover their bodies with leaves (from a large tree called *tatajuba*); and the Baraedu Ku Kuri, a pantomime about "civilized people." Through this pantomime the Bororo parody the "civilized world," populated by potbellied people, who are heavy, clumsy, and speak and gesticulate in excess (see Figure 5). The Bororo recognize the power of the civilized world, but it is through its excesses that they represent it in their funerary rituals. As among the Kaxinawá and Piaroa depicted by Lagrou and Overing (*intra*), grotesque humor prevails in this pantomime. Temporarily and in a teasing manner, the Bororo become the civilized Other, an alterity that is so central to their way of being. This parody of the civilized man provides a stark contrast with the ritual where the new souls, light and splendid, enter into the village.

In these ritual representations (*aroe etawujedu*) the Bororo are *aroe*. They personify their mythical ancestors and, as with the *aroe* of mythical times, it is up to them to reconstruct Bororo society. If death defaces it, then the world needs to be refaced. To confront the chaos generated by death, dances, songs, and ritual objects must be recreated. This is especially true of the beautiful feather ornaments (*pariko*), for it is believed that souls hide within them. It is in this sense that the *aroe etawujedu* can be conceived as representations that unite the living and the dead, the ancestral souls that are present and dancing to the sound of the rattles. Convoked by the songs

and dances, these ancestors:

... return to visit the village of the living. They walk around the grave, carrying their walking sticks, digging sticks, bamboos sticks, or other objects, letting out characteristic cries, re-living ceremonially their wars and battles against mortal enemies ... The dancers do not speak, they only cry or shout, their circular movements round the grave controlled by the beat of the gourd shakers of the Roia Epa (Viertler 1991:92-3).

At the end of the representation, the feather ornaments, leaves, and skirts are placed on the grave of the deceased. According to Viertler, "It is hoped that these tributes please the deceased so that, receiving all that could be given to them (adornments, dances, songs, food and drink of the souls), stop threatening the living" (1991:94).



Figure 5. "Civilized men" are enacted by the Bororo as clumsy, pot-bellied people.

### *Aroe Maiwu*

All that a person leaves behind after dying is his or her social position. In the funerary cycle, this position is represented by the *aroe maiwu* (the "new soul"), who is chosen by the village's oldest men after the death of a person. This new soul should be someone from the moiety opposite to that of the deceased. The latter also receives ritual parents, who treat the *aroe maiwu* as their son. The choice of the *aroe maiwu* is a men's business, involving mainly the oldest men of the clan of the deceased. As



with all the big transformations that take place throughout the Bororo funerary cycle, the symbolic construction of the new soul is a secret that women and children should not know. In the men's house, ritual assistants cover the body of the *aroe maiwu* with down and feathers (see Figure 6). It is considered vital to cover all those parts that might allow people to recognize him: hands, arms, feet, and especially his face. Thus, the face is covered not only with the *pariko* (a beautiful feather headdress), but also with a visor made from the yellow feathers of the *japu* bird. While many people know who the representative of the deceased is, this information is treated as a big secret.



**Figure 6.** The man chosen to be the representative of the deceased is dressed in the men's house. His whole body is covered with down, feathers, and a straw skirt so that nobody will recognize him.

The *aroe maiwu* is therefore someone without a face. Transformed by the ritual into a representative of the deceased, the new soul is responsible for various tasks. One of the most important is that of hunting a big jaguar, whose pelt and teeth is offered to the family of the deceased as a revenge for the loss they have suffered. The *aroe maiwu* emerges in a specific ritual during the funerary cycle. While dancing in the central plaza, none of his body—now completely adorned and covered with paint, straw skirts, and an enormous feather headdress—should be seen or recognized, especially by the women. Following Walter Benjamin, Taussig asserts that “Truth is



not a form of presentation which destroys the secret, but a revelation that does justice to it" (1999:epigraph). However, for the Bororo, this truth is not exactly a private or personal secret, but a "public secret," because everyone knows that which they should not, that which cannot be said. Thus, the name of the deceased is not uttered after his or her death. This is one of the many traces of the deceased's life that should disappear.

As Taussig suggests, these secrets, shared by all, are the basis of social institutions, the workplace, the family, and the state. The defacement that takes place during funerals reveals the mystery behind life and death in Bororo society. Death destabilizes the cosmos. Considerable collective effort is required to get life back on track again. The defacement is complete, involving not only the deceased's body, but also their names and possessions. The representative of the deceased plays an active part in defacing and refacing the dead person. Apart from dancing and singing, it is he who is in charge of cleaning the bones of the deceased, so that once decorated they can be rearranged, placed in a large basket, and buried. All the activities regarding the corpse require much ritual knowledge. It is in this sense that bodies are ritually produced by knowledge, as Santos-Granero (*intra*) states with regards to the Yanasha. These are perceived to be dangerous tasks. For this reason, the new soul receives numerous ornaments from the deceased's family, including a ritual bow, names, and the possibility of marrying one of the women belonging to the deceased's clan. The greater the prestige of the deceased, the more carefully the representative is chosen. This is so that he might carry out his tasks satisfactorily and thereby bring the mourning to a close.

The ritual defacement of the dead person is thus followed by a process of refacement. According to Taussig, "Defacement is favored amongst the magic arts because it offers the quickest route to the mimetic component of sympathetic magic, in which the representative is transformed into what it represents, so that the other can die" (1999:4). While dancing in the central plaza, the *aroe maiwu* carries an object that belonged to the deceased and that in some way is identified with him or her: a bow to represent a man; a straw basket or tray to represent a woman; and a toy to represent a child. The relationship of contiguity between the object and its previous owner, and the contact between the representative and the person represented through this object, embodied in one single element, given that all others have been destroyed, is enough to establish the linkages in the long chain of transformations triggered by death. If death causes defacement in the literal sense of the word, it also enables a refacement or a remasking, to use Taussig's term.

The *aroe maiwu* is now the true representative of the deceased. To do justice to the secret that he represents, he emerges into the central plaza

of the village splendidly decorated like the sun, dancing with graceful movements, and driven on by a man playing the rattles (see Figure 7). By participating in the funerary rites all men are *aroe*, the mythical heroes that gave Bororo society their sociocultural features. They do not become *aroe*, they are *aroe*. There is a surreal nature in the real, or, as some might assert, a supernatural in the natural.



**Figure 7.** The *aroe-maiwu* (“new soul”) is now ready. As the true representative of the deceased, he appears in a ritual that takes place in the central plaza of the village.

### THE RITUAL OF THE *AIJE-DOGE AROE*

The dance of the new soul finishes in a clearing near the village, called *aije muga*. This clearing is situated in the east, the realm of Bakororo, the grand chief of the souls and of this part of the village of the dead. There the representative of the deceased is received by men whose bodies are covered with white clay and who agitate the *aije* bullroarers, which are repainted and restored. Some of the men bear animal skulls on their heads. Their faces are painted with a black *genipapo* "X," the sign of the *aije*, which mirrors the features of a jaguar.

While the flesh of the deceased is being transformed through decomposition, a process that entails a change from being *boe* (people) to being *aroe* (soul), the male youths that will be initiated during the funerary cycle are also transformed, changing from children into young adults. The initiation rituals always take place during this stage of the funeral. It is during the *aije* ritual that youths are invited by their *iedaga* ("godfathers") to see for the first time the *aroe* and the bullroarers, phallic objects that women and children are forbidden to see. This initiation permits access to the secrets of the ancestral world, which should not be known by women and children. It is only after initiation that young boys, transformed into adults through the *aije* ritual, might marry a woman from the opposite moiety with whom they will bear children.

If the pantomime of the civilized world is characterized by grotesque humor, the *aije* initiation ritual is marked by the universe of sexuality. According to Ukewai, a famous Bororo leader, "The *aije* said that women and children were not allowed to see him. If this happened the women would get their bellies swollen, their legs would be slow, they would be crawling on the floor." Women who challenge this interdiction get "swollen bellies," a clear sign that they are not autonomous to decide over their sexual lives. The swollen belly, an unwanted pregnancy, is accompanied by typical sensations: tired legs that seem slow and the weight of the baby that gives the woman the feeling that she is crawling. Such unwanted pregnancy is the result of not following the rules through which Bororo society decides how to reproduce itself.

The initiates also receive from their godfathers (who always belong to the moiety opposite to that of the initiate) a penis sheath called *ba*, a term also meaning "house." It is important to remember that when a Bororo man gets married he moves into his wife's house. At the end of this ritual the men, painted in white, embrace and rub themselves in an atmosphere of sensual joy. Thus, initiation not only defines the moment after which youths might have a sexual and prolific life, but also who are their adequate partners. Oppositions such as mature/immature, forbidden/prescribed,

man/woman and life/death find expression in this ritual. The ritual is thus composed of a set of articulated meanings that generate models of behavior that, in a sense, are inscribed on the participants' bodies. It ends when the man from the Aroroe clan beats a rolled up mat on the ground in the central plaza of the village. This is the signal indicating that the women and children may come out of their houses.

At the end of this ritual, the deceased's possessions that have not yet been destroyed are collected in the central plaza and burnt on a large bonfire. According to Viertler, "after the burning of the objects of the Aroe, at the end of the *aije-doge aroe*, the soul of the deceased loses its cultural and anthropomorphic characteristics" (1991:138).<sup>1</sup> Only two things remain from the deceased: his or her bones, which will be decorated after being cleaned; and the social category to which he or she belonged, which is now made visible by the *aroe maiwu*.

### THE DECORATION OF THE BONES

The day after the *aije* ritual, the bones of the deceased are taken to the river where they are carefully cleaned. Once cleaned, the bones are carried back to the village in a basket. Here, they are greeted by the ritual mother of the deceased, who carries the basket with the bones to the men's house. The decoration of the bones takes place in an enclosure made of straw walls built within the men's house. This activity causes the transformation of the bones into soul. For this reason, it is a secret that should not be witnessed by women and children, and this is why it takes place inside the men's house. The *aroe maiwu*, the deceased's representative, is responsible for dyeing the skull and largest bones with red *urucum*. The skull receives special attention, being painted not only with *urucum*, but also covered in feathers in the style of the clan of the deceased. The decoration of the bones is accompanied by singing, ritual crying, and the scarification of women. It is the most solemn moment of the funeral, a moment of truly collective catharsis.

Once decorated, the bones are placed on a straw tray and given to the deceased's relatives, who, crying heavily and scarifying themselves, carry the bones as if they were a baby. All the bones, now painted and decorated, are placed in a large basket, the *aroe j'aro*, in an order that aims to reproduce the anatomical configuration of the body. An experienced singer, the *aroe etawari are* (or "shaman of the souls") calls upon the soul of the deceased to take up its new home, a basket especially prepared for this purpose. He also convokes all the other souls to help the deceased enter into the village of the dead.

## THE FINAL BURIAL

The big basket containing the decorated bones is sewn up around the edges. It is tied with braids made of the hair of relatives of a dead person whom the deceased once represented. A fiber rope is attached to the basket so that it can be transported. The ritual mother of the deceased carries this basket to the men's house. Later on, she takes the basket to the central plaza, going around the whole circle of houses in the village. This route follows the inverse direction to that taken by a mother carrying her child after it has received its name. Similarly, whereas the presentation of a recently named child takes place in the early morning, the presentation of the deceased—this time as an *aroe*—takes place when the sun sets. After finishing this circuit, the ritual mother of the deceased takes the basket to her house. There, the bones are left to rest for a few days. The final burial, which takes place in the early morning, is the responsibility of the *aroe maiwu*. The new soul takes the basket containing the bones of the deceased to a bay, punctures it so that water can enter easily and sink into the river (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. Painted and arranged in a big basket, the bones of the deceased are taken to a bay and sunk into the water.





**Figure 9.** One of the main tasks of the representative of the deceased is to hunt a big jaguar. The pelt is then given to the deceased's relatives.



The mourning only finishes when the deceased is rightfully revenged by his representative. Armed with bow and arrows, and carrying the braids of the mourners tied to his fist, the *aroe maiwu* goes into the forest to hunt a big jaguar. Its teeth, claws and pelt will be given to the deceased's relatives. After killing the jaguar, he traps the animal's vital breath into a small mortuary gourd made by the ritual father of the deceased, which will be played, later on, by the hunter. This is the gourd mentioned by José Carlos in the epigraph of this article.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Bororo, the souls of dead people find shelter in the bodies of animals, where they survive by eating the food of the *bope*. After the hunt, the pelt of the animal is presented to the ritual mother of the deceased, who will then cry ritually. The presentation of the pelt and claws of the feline to the deceased's male relatives and of the jaguar's teeth to the women of the clan of the deceased represent the *mori*, that is, the retribution that the deceased sends to his or her relatives through their representative as a reward for the funerary services they have provided on his behalf (see Figure 9). This ritual ends with a dance between the *aroe maiwu* hunter and the ritual mother of the deceased, a dance that, according to Viertler, "consecrates the reciprocity between ritual 'mothers' and 'sons,' who are sexually prohibited" (1991:142). From then onwards, the deceased's representative, acting as an *aroe* soul, will play the *powari aroe*, or mortuary gourd, in all funerals.

## CONCLUSION

If we were to simplify the various transformations triggered by the death of a person we would have the following sequence. Death is caused by the *bope*—a spirit that eats raw flesh, blood, and carrion. It is the *bope*—an entity responsible for all grand natural transformations (birth, puberty, death)—that begins the process of defacement of the body of the deceased until only the bones are left. These bones should be cleaned, painted, decorated and arranged in a specific order in a large straw basket (*aroe j'aro*) made by the ritual mother of the deceased. The skull is the part of the body that receives the greatest attention. After being painted with *urucum* and decorated with feathers, following the style of the deceased's clan, the skull is placed on a small straw tray (*baku*), which should be placed in the upper part of the mortuary basket. The order in which the bones are placed in the basket reproduces the anatomical order of the body. The scarification of the deceased's relatives during the bone decorating ritual parallels the defacement of the deceased. Just as they shared vital substances with the deceased, the mourners also share in his or her defacement.

Once “refaced” through the arrangement of his or her bones, the deceased is now *aroe*. He or she appears in the world of the living through his representative, the *aroe maiwu* or “new soul.” Whereas the death of a person represents a loss for the world of the living, funerals are also the occasion in which young men are initiated. It is only after being initiated that youths are considered to be adults, and thus they are able to marry, have children, and participate fully in Bororo social life. Although death is a loss, in a certain sense the initiation is a way of making up for this loss, enabling more individuals to continue life.

Finally, the vital breath lost as the result of the death of a person reappears “refaced” when the deceased’s representative plays the small mortuary gourd containing the vital breath of the jaguar he killed. As I have pointed out elsewhere, “The *powari-aroe* is the element that enables us to perceive that social identity only emerges from a concrete individual, with all his or her idiosyncrasies. Every individual is unique in their singularity, like the mortuary gourd which produces its own particular sound and rhythm. Like individuals in the process of biological constitution, the *powari-aroe* is made by a man (the “father” of the *aroe*) and looked after by a woman (the “mother” of the *aroe*). Like Bororo individuals, the mortuary gourd only appears socially through an other, the *aroe-maiwu*, the social representative of the deceased, and should be played at ritual moments” (Caiuby Novaes 1983:311–2). As claimed by Jose Carlos in the epigraph with which I began this text: “Dying should end everything, but everything begins again, because there still is the small gourd.” It is in this sense that Bororo funerals can be conceived of as a sequence of transformations—defacements and refacements; demaskings and remaskings—that reinforce the mysteries surrounding life and death.

## NOTES

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1. See Caiuby Novaes (1994), for more information about this ritual and the bullroarers.

2. See Caiuby Novaes (1983), for more details about the *powari aroe* and other elements of material culture present in the funerals.

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