



## Political chimeras

### The uncertainty of the chief's speech in the Upper Xingu

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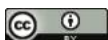
This article deals with the issue of ritual polities in Southern Amazon, and in particular the case of “chieftaincy without power.” Through the analysis of ritual oratory among chiefs in the multiethnic and multilingual system of the Upper Xingu, it considers how the concepts of “ritual condensation” and “chimera” could be useful for the description and analysis of such polities. In the Upper Xingu, certain chiefs are fluent in a verbal genre known as “chiefs’ talk,” composed of formalized speeches directed either to leaders of other groups or to their own people, depending on the context in which they are delivered. Analyzing discourses of the latter kind among the Kalapalo (a Karib-speaking people of the region), the article shows how both the chief and his audience are symbolically constructed as “paradoxical” subjects characterized by contradictory predicates, and discusses how this is related to Kalapalo ideas on kinship and power. By engaging with the concepts of “ritual condensation” and “chimera,” the article resumes the debate on political oratory generated by Pierre Clastres and investigates how *uncertainty*—rather than “authority” or “belief”—can enact an exchange of perspectives through which the identities of the group and the chief are produced.

Keywords: ritual, political oratory, Pierre Clastres, Amerindian politics, Upper Xingu

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The typical image of Amerindian chieftaincy that appears throughout Pierre Clastres’ work is quite well known: the chief should be someone generous with his goods, from whom society expects a great oratory capacity, and who also enjoys the privilege of polygamy.<sup>1</sup> From a gift-theory perspective, he would be a donator of

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goods and words, and a receiver of spouses. Yet, one of Clastres' main arguments is that the bond between the chief and the group is only apparently an exchange relationship. To the contrary, he suggests that these gifts would be excluded from their specific exchange circuits, and goods and words could never count as retributions for the women the chief receives from the group. The gifts that circulate from the chief to the group (goods and words), or from the group to the chief (wives), would always follow a unilateral direction, and would never be compensated.

The chieftaincy would, as such, be a place of “nonexchange” (Lanna 2005: 427), in which signs are deprived of their circulation value and reciprocity is denied under the demand that society make visible the foundations of power (a break with the structures of reciprocity that tie social life together), maintaining them under the control of the collective body. The chieftaincy, excluded from the main circuits of exchange that structure social life, would thus be transformed into an empty function, and power would be deprived of a means of being put to use. Primitive society, placed in the creditor position of its chiefs, would imprison power and assume control of the place where it could emerge—it would be a society against the state (Clastres 1990b).

In the multiethnic and multilingual complex of the Upper Xingu (Southern Amazon), ritual sponsoring accounts for both the production of chieftaincy and social life at the local level, and the articulation of a large, multicentric, regional network of persons and groups. This open-ended regional system can be considered a “ritual polity,” in which public rituals are the main motor of collective life. Most of the qualities attributed to chiefs are linked to their participation in such rituals, which, via several artistic means (such as music, bodily painting, verbal arts), make the chiefly condition “visible.” By being endowed with a conventional form (an aesthetics), chieftaincy is also endowed with its proper efficacy. Politics is art.

How is the idea of chieftaincy produced and transmitted in ritual? Houseman and Severi (1998) have argued that ritual actions have a common characteristic, which they call “ritual condensation.” According to Houseman (2004: 76), ritual condensation is “the simultaneous enactment of nominally contrary modes of relationship: affirmations of identity are at the same time testimonies of difference, displays of authority are also demonstrations of subordination, the presence of persons or other beings is at once corroborated and denied, secrets are simultaneously dissimulated and revealed, and so forth.” This combination of contradictions creates a distinctive context of communication, in which the very conditions of ritual efficacy are generated. Applying these ideas to the analysis of different iconographic traditions, Severi (2015) developed the concept of “chimera,” which proved a useful means of understanding the ritual efficacy of images and objects, their relation to mnemonic technologies, and the relations between images and words. Could the production of ritual images also play a role in indigenous modes of understanding power and dealing with it? Could these concepts be useful for

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understanding Amerindian politics in particular, and maybe the relations between ritual and politics in other cases?

For Severi (2013: 45), one could call a chimera “every image that, by designating a plural being by means of a single representation, mobilizes its invisible parts, by purely optical means or by a set of inferences.” A chimerical image associates, in a single visual form, “indexes from different beings (a bird and a human being, a serpent and a jaguar, a wolf and a sea lion . . .),” provoking “a projection by the eye, which gives rise to an image implying *at the same time* the presence of these different beings” (Severi and Lagrou 2013: 11). What is presented to the observer necessarily evokes something that is implicit or absent. From a logical point of view, chimerical images present a “specific link between iconic representation (by imitation and convention) and indexical indication (visual, tactile or other) of a presence whose mode of existence, especially mental, is not realized materially” (Severi 2013: 46).

This peculiar game between perception and projection, iconic representation and indexical indication, is responsible for an intensification of the efficacy of chimeric images. By capturing the observer’s eye, they also capture his or her imagination, and demand that he or she, by projection, mentally “complete” the image. According to Peirce (1955), indexical signs have a causal, or spatiotemporal, contiguity with what they signify. Thus, the missing parts of a chimeric image mentally projected by the observer are also made present in the context of its perception.

In a recent book on chimeras in Amazonia, Severi and Lagrou call attention to the “synesthetic” character of the relation between different artistic means in interlinked contexts of ritual action and artistic creation. They argue that “relations, correspondences and transformations between music, rhythm, movement and graphism” appear to be especially relevant in Amerindian ritual contexts (Severi and Lagrou 2013: 12). Taking this argument as a point of departure, I would like to explore the possibility of thinking about Xinguano images of chieftaincy, as they are produced through ritual action, as a kind of chimeric image—not, though, as an exclusively (and not even mainly) visual one, but as a “mental image” produced by the combination of linguistic and extralinguistic media in ritual performance (Severi 2015: 201). According to Michael Silverstein (2003: 15), the combining of indexical signs in communication acts produces “a kind of poetry of identities-in-motion,” capable of projecting complex images of a nonvisual kind. In his words, “image is not necessarily visual; it is an abstract portrait of identity fashioned out of cumulating patterns of congruence across all manner of indexical signs—including visual ones—that addressees and audiences can imaginatively experience, like a hologram.” It is in this sense that I propose to discuss Kalapalo political oratory as presenting a certain “image” of Xinguano chieftaincy.

If chimerical representation is an “art of ambiguity” (Severi and Lagrou 2013: 14), it could be related to a classic issue of Amazonian ethnology: the “dualism in perpetual disequilibrium” discussed by Lévi-Strauss (1991) in *The story of Lynx*, which may account for the “pendular movement” of Amerindian politics, combining centripetal forces of centralization with centrifugal forces of dispersion (Perrone-Moisés 2012). Taking forward Severi and Lagrou’s proposal of identifying the forms that chimeras may assume by combining different aesthetic resources, this concept could help us to understand the complex relations between hierarchy

and counterhierarchy, power and counterpower, in the so-called “societies against the state,” such as made perceptible/comprehensible by indigenous knowledge practices. I also intend to suggest how Kalapalo ritual speeches could be compared to other forms of political oratory. As Silverstein (2003, 2005) discusses, the mark of political oratory, modern and nonmodern, is not necessarily the conveyance of “meaning,” but the relation between poetics and the production of identities. I hope this comparison can be seen as an effort to produce a more symmetrical understanding of Amerindian politics in relation to other political forms.

### Language, politics, and ritual

Language has a special place among the three exchange circuits explored by Clastres. He notes that “talent as a speaker is both a condition and instrument of political power” (Clastres 1990c: 31), and “it would seem, then, that power and speech cannot be conceived of separately, since their clearly metahistorical bond is no less indissoluble in primitive societies than in formations with a State” (Clastres 1990a: 152). The difference is that in state societies the word would be a *right* to power that may be used to command, while in societies against the state the word would be a *duty* of the chief (ibid.: 153; 1990c: 41): an indigenous leader must be capable of offering society the words that *it demands*.

According to Clastres, the chief’s speech, despite being demanded by society, would be directed toward an audience that has neither the obligation, nor even the interest, to hear it or respond to it: the Amerindian chief “is a voice preaching in the wilderness” (Clastres 1990c: 31), since his speech “is not spoken in order to be listened to” (Clastres 1990a: 153). The chief also wouldn’t say anything that is really worth hearing anyway, “since the chief, for all his prolixity, literally says nothing. His discourse basically consists of a celebration, repeated many times, of the norms of traditional life” (ibid.). Limiting himself to exalting the community to live according to correct ancestral customs, the chief’s speech would only be a repetition of what Clastres (1990c: 31) calls “edifying discourse.” In the same way that the lack of reciprocity in the field of goods and women would cause them to lose their exchange value, the chief’s words would be deviated from the “function of communication that is immanent to language” (ibid.: 46). Deprived of this function, the chief’s speech is transformed into pure value and, “in its solitude, recalls the speech of a poet for whom words are values before they are signs” (ibid.: 47). Clastres also defines language as the inverse of one of the most striking facets of coercive power: violence. A man who has the privilege of speaking to others, who are obliged to hear him out, is endowed with the power to coerce, while he who must speak to an “anti-audience,” is deprived of this possibility: “The duty of the chief’s speech, that steady flow of empty speech that he *owes* the tribe, is his infinite debt, the guarantee that prevents the man of speech becoming a man of power” (Clastres 1990a: 155).

Clastres asks himself: “What does the chief say? What is the word of a chief like?” (ibid.: 153). He argues it is a “ritualized act,” *instead of* an act of communication. Is Clastres suggesting that ritual action doesn’t communicate anything? Or, still, might language not be used as a mode of action, contrary to literature on ritual language as well as pragmatics (Austin 1975; Tambiah 1985; Silverstein 1997)? As



Magnus Course says, Clastres' model "presupposes an understanding of language as primarily 'symbolic' and in which speech is firmly rooted in its speaker's intention, a model rooted in Western, not Amerindian, language ideology" (Course 2012: 20). Focusing on the referential or denotative function of language, Clastres' perspective leaves aside its pragmatic aspects, that is, elements of enunciation (oral or not) that may produce effects on the enunciator as well as on his or her audience (Silverstein 1997).

Silverstein (2005: 1) argues that what is called politics, "the dynamic arrangement and rearrangement of people as subjects within structures of actual and potential action of all sorts," always comprises a poetics, because everything experienced as effective "practice" is formed semiotically—that is, through signs. As he states, "political events . . . reach whatever effectiveness they have only in a semiotic—a sign-mediated—order or they don't reach any effectiveness at all qua sociocultural fact" (ibid.: 3). Conversely, communication forms are also able to "create social arrangements as consequences of using these forms" (Silverstein 2003: 10–11). Political oratory, rather than "informing" the "content" of a message, would use poetical resources that allow interlocutors to have their identities mutually constructed by means of indexical signs that connect the message's form to extralinguistic contextual facts. It would be possible, in this way, to "inhabit" a message: "a really powerful 'message' ascribes to me—as opposed to describes—my reality" (ibid.: 16).

If, as Clastres notes, the chief's speech is a "ritualized act," it should be treated as such. The first step in doing so is assuming that its referential meaning must be understood in relation to other functions characterizing ritual oratory. The symbolic procedures that separate ritual speech from ordinary interactions are not necessarily intended to "mean something," but—as Malinowski ([1935] 2002) had already noticed in relation to Trobriand magic—to *do* something. As Severi (2004: 816) suggests, when we focus on ritual speech acts, it is necessary "to reconstruct the pragmatic conditions that define the kind of 'language game' in which they are used." In his study on political oratory, Bloch (1975: 22) argues that formalization (the reduction of combinatory and creative possibilities of language by the use of formulas, archaic vocabulary, syntactic and stylistic patterns), by distancing the discourse from its semantic content, draws attention to its context and performance, endowing the speech with the capacity of producing effects.

There are plenty of works discussing ritual speech in indigenous South America (Graham 1986; Urban 1986; McCallum 1990; Gow 1991; Santos-Granero 1991; Belaunde 1992; Franchetto 1993; Farage 1997; Passes 1998; Beier, Michael, and Sherzer 2002; Rubio 2004; Ball 2007), and it would be impossible to review all of them here. However, it's important to note that certain authors claim that Amerindian chiefs' speech has, through its aesthetic and moral dimension, a politically relevant role in the production of sociality. As Cecilia McCallum (1990: 416) says about the Kaxinawa, a leader's speech "can be understood as a force in the production of persons, on the one hand, and of communities, on the other."

But how is the meaning of a supposedly meaningless speech created, and what role could it play in social relations? According to Severi (2002: 28), ritual action usually focuses on what he calls "reflexivity," or the "definition of its own meaning and effectiveness *within* the context of ritual communication." In this sense, we should investigate how the chief's speech produces its own context and meanings,

and how its “efficacy” could be generated in such conditions of action, and not by external causes (such as “authority,” “morality,” or the “refusal of the state”). In what follows, I will analyze a set of two pieces of ritual oratory among the Kalapalo. By analyzing elements of its performative and poetic structure, I will demonstrate how these oral performances simultaneously construct an image of the chief as a “consanguine kin” and a potentially dangerous enemy/affine, and how the identification of his fellows both as his children and as his prey could be related to the production of kinship.

According to Houseman and Severi (1998), one of the clues for understanding ritual communication is to analyze how ritual defines a special form of interaction, characterized by ritual condensation, by means of which the identities of the participants are constructed. The intentional contradictions frequently used in ritual speech create what Severi (2004) calls a “complex enunciator,” someone whose identity is defined by contradictory predicates. The Kalapalo chiefs seem to be enunciators of this kind. In the Kalapalo case we find a “paradox,” two contradictory statements related by a logical link, such as: “As I am your enemy and affine, I am your protector and consanguine.” My intention is to understand both the ontological ground that demands such paradoxical construction of identities, and how it is symbolically achieved by the ritual use of language. I argue that, instead of relying on external notions of “authority,” “consensus,” or “reciprocity,” as some visions of political oratory suggest (see Bloch 1975), the key for understanding the chief’s speech is its own ambiguity, and that the duality generated by gestural and verbal aspects of such performances indeed imposes an exchange between speaker and addressee—not of words, in Clastres’ sense, but of perspectives—through which their identities emerge. Such ritual performances involve the perception of fragmentary signs that suggest the presence of their counterparts to the hearers, as in a chimerical representation: when the chief speaks as a consanguine/father, his performance “points to” (*indexes*) an occult affine/enemy quality; when the signs of his alterity/enmity become visible, they index his conditions of father/protector. This alternation makes chieftaincy effective to different observers, bringing either hierarchy or symmetry to the foreground. This, I suggest, would allow us to talk about “political chimeras” in the Xinguano context, and possibly elsewhere.

### ***Akitsene: The chiefs’ ritual oratory***

The Upper Xingu is a multiethnic and multilingual society, articulated by the circulation of people, objects, and participation in regional rituals. This sociocultural complex is made up of ten peoples, who speak languages pertaining to different linguistic branches and families, located at the south of the Indigenous Park of Xingu, in Midwestern Brazil. There live Arawak (Mehináku, Wauja, and Yawalapíti), Karib<sup>2</sup> (Kalapalo, Kuikuro, Matipu, and Nahukwá), and Tupi (Kamayurá and Aweti) speakers, besides the Trumái, who speak an isolated language. The Kalapalo population reaches almost seven hundred people distributed mainly in ten villages,

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2. All Karib words used in this article have been written according to the orthography developed by Bruna Franchetto together with indigenous teachers.

almost all of which located along the course of the Culue River, the main affluent of the Xingu River.

The Kalapalo refer to certain men and women as *anetü* and *itankgo*, “male chief” and “female chief,” respectively, and equivalent terms exist among all groups in the region. It is a condition simultaneously inherited and developed throughout life: it is not enough to be the son or grandson of an *anetü* in order to be one as well, but rather one must develop a beautiful and strong body, serene and generous behavior, and linguistic abilities. Chiefs are the objects of intense mythical, aesthetic, and ritual elaboration, but they have no power to command and are described as having two great responsibilities: on the one hand, they must take care of their people, guiding them with “good speech,” feeding them, and pleasing them by sponsoring rituals; on the other, they must welcome messengers from other peoples and conduct their group to rituals sponsored by other villages.

Both of these activities demand ritual uses of speech, which, as has been widely observed, is one of the main characteristics of the chiefly condition (Basso 1973: 135; Viveiros de Castro 1977: 218; Franchetto 1986, 1993, 2000; Ball 2007). Certain oral *anetü* performances are part of a “singing speech” style known as *anetü itaginhu*, “chiefs’ speech” or “chiefs’ talk,” a formal genre characterized by the successive chanting of monotone lines organized according to a parallelistic style (Franchetto 2000). There are different sets of discourses appropriate for each situation, with diversified contents, and they employ specific vocabularies and stylistic resources.

This speech genre is marked by the use of a “figurative, metaphorical, and erudite language that is typical of a very special register and restricted to few specialists” (Franchetto 1986: 365). The Kalapalo say that many words and expressions used in the *anetü itaginhu* are “ancients’ language” (*ngiholo akisü*) or “chiefs’ language” (*anetü akisü*), and as such are not fully understood by people who do not know it. The use of such formal style would confirm the tie between those speaking it—living chiefs—and earlier *anetü*, to whom they are considered as substitutes (*itiüpohongo*). Bruna Franchetto (1986: 366) observes that a chief’s interest in learning the *anetü itaginhu* “is the consequence of a conscientious intention to achieve and guarantee the recognition of power and cohesion of their domestic group and allies. The apprentice makes explicit his determination to perpetuate a tradition that ties him to the chieftaincy’s lineage.”

It’s possible to divide Kalapalo ritual speeches into two groups: those delivered to foreigners, and those delivered to fellow villagers. In the first case are those groups of discourses used in each regional ritual, designated by the name of the ritual followed by the nominal word *itagimbakitoho* (“made in order to greet”), such as, for example, *egitsü<sup>3</sup> itagimbakitoho* (“made in order to greet in *egitsü*”). There are also discourses used to receive messengers from other villages, called *etinhü itagimbakitoho* (“made in order to greet messengers”), that present variations according to the ritual for which the village has been invited.

In the second group (speeches for fellow villagers—*akitsene*, in Kalapalo), may be found what Franchetto calls “political oratory,” a nonceremonial public speech tied to village politics, which may only be pronounced by chiefs and elders. This kind of oratory deals with events in the life of the village, and the speaker “constructs

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3. A feast in homage to deceased chiefs, known as “Quarup” (see Guerreiro 2012).

his discourse by taking advantage of a relative creativity in order to advance his own proposals in a particular context” (Franchetto 1986: 378). In consequence, “the language of this oratory is less differentiated from common registries than the ceremonial language” (ibid.: 382), and the fact that it is less ritualized is made evident by the prolongation of verses and the reduction of parallelisms and repetition.

At least among the Kalapalo, there are also two formal speeches that may be framed in the subgenre of political oratory, yet are more formalized and their execution is restricted to great chiefs. Their content is fixed and their form constant, approximating them to the *itagimbakitoho*, and it is these two speeches that will be discussed in this article.

In the village of Aiha, Ageu is the only chief familiar with these speeches. He learned them from his father, but never actually delivered them in public. The Kalapalo say that in the last few decades these speeches have been used by fewer chiefs, and seem to be disappearing from all villages. In Aiha, it is said that they have not been heard since the 1980s. This absence does not bother the Kalapalo too much, but they do think it is a sign that they may be “becoming white” (I will return to this point later).

These discourses are associated with two animals considered as their “owners,” a kind of small hawk (*ugonhi*, or *kakahuëgü*) and the jaguar<sup>4</sup> (*ekege*). *Ugonhi* is, together with other birds of prey (among which the most important is the harpy), the bird chief, while the jaguar is the head chief of land-based animals. Both occupy these positions because of their hunting skills, since any chief is, when among other peoples, represented as a beast of prey and a potential enemy. The speeches form an ordered (*tinapisinhü*) group, in which the hawk’s speech is considered as the “first” (*ihotugu*; lit. point, prow, beak), and the jaguar’s discourse “second” (*isotohongo*; lit. “its other equal”).

I documented the versions transcribed here together with Ageu, while he was teaching them to his maternal nephew. The transcriptions and translations were made together with a group of different Kalapalo collaborators.<sup>5</sup>

### *Ugonhi akitsu*: The Hawk’s Speech

The Hawk’s Speech should be pronounced before dawn. This is when the *ugonhi* wakes up and starts singing—that is, proffering his speech, since what humans perceive as bird chanting is actually the hawk-chief’s speech according to the birds’ point of view. The chief must deliver this speech in the center of the village, standing up and with his body facing east. He doesn’t need any adornment, but if he wishes he may use his *akitsoho* (“made to discourse”), a set consisting of a bow and arrow worn by chiefs when they appear in public in rituals and deliver speeches. The bow should be a *majahi*, the largest and most resistant bow in the Upper Xingu; the arrow should be a “winged arrow,” with a hawk feather and a scarlet macaw feather.

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4. According to a female chief, this discourse is “owned” by Enitsuëgü, the jaguar-father of the twins who created humanity.

5. I would especially like to thank Ugise, Teue, Orlandinho, and Kayauta for their help.





These instruments are indexes of chiefly status, since they are related to mythical chiefs: the *majahi* is the jaguar's hunting bow, and it appears in the origin myth as the weapon of Enitsuëgü, the jaguar-father of the twins Taügi (Sun) and Aulukumã (Moon); the hawk feather refers to the bird chief; and the scarlet macaw feather is linked to Aulukumã, from whose blood that bird was created.

Unlike the speeches that chiefs deliver to each other during ritual meetings, in a low tone, this one should be pronounced in a loud voice, so as to wake the whole village up. Ageu explained it was directed to the boys' parents, and its purpose was "to guide his people." He calls his audience *ukandagü*, "our folks" or "our people." *Andagü* is the possessed form of *anda*, a word that's difficult to translate and doesn't seem to apply outside of the chieftaincy context. It has no plural, and refers to a group of people. It only appears in its relational and possessive form, preceded by the name of someone and followed by the relational suffix *-gü* ("X *andagü*," with X being a chief). The expression indicates, thus, an asymmetrical relationship between a denominated (individualized) person and an undifferentiated collective—in this case, between someone possessing the words to guide a people, and those who need guiding.

In the transcriptions that follow, each numerated line corresponds to a melodic unit. There aren't, in almost any of them, any complete sentences, since the enunciations are broken down into parallel verses. There are certain exceptions, in which various "lines in potential" were agglutinated by the speaker in one single melodic unit (enunciated in the same tone with no pauses to breath), but whose structure (preceded by an expletive—*ah*—and followed by a regular set of particles) suggests they could be executed as discrete melodic units.

Because there are few lexical elements in each melodic unit, it is difficult to translate the speeches. These elements are followed by several grammatical particles of complex meaning, with regular and formalized use. There are even lines formed only by an expletive and a set of particles, with no lexical element. The inferiorizing particle *muke* is one of the most recurrent, and makes up self-derogatory forms of speech. It reduces the importance of what the speaker says, producing what Ellen Basso (2009: 246) calls a "humbling effect." Another element used quite frequently is the deictic *ige*, an evidential particle that indicates proximity/presence/existence, fixed to the copula *-i* (Franchetto 2000: 492). The particle *gitse* may also be frequently found, which would mean, according to Basso (2009), "poorly," "incomplete." Franchetto (2000) defines it as a "devaluating particle." It's always used by chiefs when they speak of the present, or when they use the imperative—as if the present were imperfect, and the imperative needed to be softened or devalued. Finally, the adverb *gele* ("still") abounds, as does the emphatic suffix *-ha* (ibid.: 492–503).

The speech starts as follows:

1	<i>Kamaĩ, Kamaĩ, Kamaĩ, Kamaĩ,</i> <i>Kamaĩ, Kamaĩ</i>	My brother, my brother, my brother, my brother, my brother, my brother
	<i>Ah, luale muke ataitsange</i>	Ah, please, let it be so
	<i>Ah, etijipügüha gitse itakeingakeha</i> <i>gitse</i>	Ah, take your children from their hammocks

	<i>Ah, kutaūpūāō muke geleha gitse, ah, uitunguki muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, from the sleep, ah, of our grandparents
5	<i>Etijipūgūha gitse itakeingakeha gitse</i>	Take your children from their hammocks
	<i>Inke ande ehisuūdaō itsa</i>	Look, here are your brothers
	<i>Ah, itsasūha engihisatanūmingo</i>	Ah, they will deal with their work
	<i>Ah, kingakeha gitse etijipūgū hekeha gitse</i>	Ah, always tell your children
	<i>Ah, muke geleha gitse<sup>6</sup></i>	–
10	<i>Ah, igehunguki muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, this way
	<i>Ah, kutengatanini muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, all of us are moving on
	<i>Ah, isekalu tohoila muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, without making any noise
	<i>Ah, itseke tologu heke muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, the spirits' bird
	<i>Ah, kutekaginetatanini muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, it's scaring all of us

Starting from line 3, we may see that the devaluating particle *gitse* ends almost every line, forming a block of parallel verses in which the chief gives advice and comments on the present situation of his people. The chief opens his speech referring to his audience as *kamaī*, which means “my brother” in “the ancients’ language,” and in this context it’s a synonym for *anetū*. So, the orator speaks to his peers, other chiefs, whom he requests to wake up their children. The use of the imperative-hortative mood is characteristic, but the recurrence of *gitse* makes the speech sound more like a piece of advice, or a humble suggestion, than an order.

According to the interpretation of a Matipu chief, the children mentioned in the discourse are chiefs’ children, youth preparing to master the art of Xinguano ritual-sportive wrestling (*ikindene*). It used to be that youth preparing to become *ikindene* champions would be woken very early, and spend hours and hours sitting on their hammocks in silence thinking about the wrestling, their behavior, and listening to their father’s advice. According to the Matipu chief, this was so that these champions could become strong and fast messengers (*ngengoku*<sup>7</sup>) for other chiefs when there were rituals to be performed.

In lines 11 and 12, the chief takes up a recurrent subject in other speeches, the lack of “noise” in his village. “All of us are moving on/Without making any noise” means that rituals are no longer performed, which is why people are living sadly. (The Kalapalo emphasize that one of the aims of the rituals is to produce beauty and joy.) “The spirits’ bird,” mentioned in line 13, is the chicken, and the spirits are, according to the orator, the Whites. This passage also seems to be tied to the lack

6. Typical formulaic phrase of *anetū itaginhu*, with no lexical content.

7. In the context of regional rituals, *ngengoku* is translated as “messenger,” but the Kalapalo generally translate it as “employee.”

of “noise” and rituals. In times of festivities, from way before the sun rises, it’s common for men to emit long high-pitched and melodic screams as soon as they wake up, which are responded to by others in their own homes, in order to wake the whole village up with joy. The message the chief conveys is that, unfortunately, his people no longer wake up with joy, but scared of the chanting of the “spirits’ bird.”

The following passage embodies a central concept of Kalapalo chieftaincy—*akihekugene*, or “the practice of true/good words”:

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 15 | <i>Ah, kutaūpūaōko muke ata hale igei ūāke</i>  | Ah, but our grandparents                                     |
|    | <i>Akihekugeneki higei ūāke, etiji-pūgūko muke ata hale igei ūāke, ihijū heke muke ata hale igei ūāke</i> | By practicing the true words, on their children, they worked |
|    | <i>Ah, üngelepe entanūgū muke gele higei ūāke</i>   | Ah, those who have already died would come                   |
|    | <i>Akihekugeneki higei ūāke</i>   | By practicing the true words                                 |
|    | <i>Ah, tihisatūhūgū muke gele higei ūāke</i>  | Ah, [to do] what they were taught                            |
| 20 | <i>Ah, tüülüinha muke gele higei ūāke</i>   | Ah, to do  |
|    | <i>Ah, tüädagū muke gele higei ūāke</i>   | Ah, for their people   |
|    | <i>Ah, upetegijūinha muke gele higei ūāke</i>   | Ah, to guide   |
|    | <i>Akihekugeneki higei ūāke</i>   | By practicing the true words                                 |
|    | <i>Ah, tihisatūhūgū tüülüinha muke gele higei ūāke</i>  | Ah, by doing what they were taught to do                     |
| 25 | <i>Ah, kutaūpūaōko muke ata hale igei ūāke</i>  | Ah, our grandparents   |
|    | <i>Akihekugeneki higei ūāke</i>   | By practicing the true words                                 |
|    | <i>Tetijipūgūko hijū heke muke ata hale igei ūāke</i>   | They worked on their children                                |

In contrast with the first block, all lines of this passage end with the epistemic marker *ūāke*. It is used in affirmations about the past, and indicates that the speaker has authority over his speech (Franchetto 2000: 492), whether by direct knowledge or, as is the case here, by having received the information from people with the authority to transmit it—that is, previous chiefs. The passage is about past chiefs, called “our grandfathers” or by the anaphoric pronoun *üngelepe*, which I have translated as “those who have already died.” The anaphoric *üngele* (that) and *ünago* (those) are indirect forms of saying “chief(s)” throughout the *anetü itaginhu*.

*Akihekugene* is what I have translated as the “the practice of true words,” a term formed from *aki* (word), *hekugu* (true/good), and the nominative suffix *-ne* (Santos 2007). The general meaning of the expression *aki hekugu*, “true word,” describes any good, lovely, calm, peace-bringing, or incentivizing speech, and those recognized for speaking the truth and being good people are called *akiheku*, or *takihekuginhū*

(“whose words are true/good”). Yet its specific meaning refers to chiefs’ speech-making, who by definition must have been trained to be well behaved and have great rhetorical skills, capable of guiding their people in a calm and humble way (“to do what they were taught to do”). *Akíhekugene* is the Kalapalo version of Clastres’ “edifying discourse.”

Regarding past chiefs, it is said that they did what they were taught, “worked” on their children by using the true speech. “To work” here is a way of saying “making,” and the relationship between parents and children is indeed conceived as a relationship of fabrication, in which children are the result of the father’s intentional and continuous effort. This is not only a description of the past, but rather a complex resource through which the past serves as an example because it contrasts with the present—such as the contrasting use of *hale* in lines 15, 16, 25, and 27 makes clear. The chief constructs an opposition between past and present, in which the latter is nothing more than an impoverished form of a previous age idealized as grandiose: there were chiefs who, with their good speech, “worked” on their children, but such is no longer true nowadays.

However, this is exactly what the chief is doing, despite denying it in his speech. Moreover, the chief can only do it *by denying it*: in order to act like a chief, to “work on his children” like an ancestor, he must state that he could never do so. By acting in this way he demonstrates how a chief should behave: as the most humble of persons. Denying his position, diminishing himself in front of past chiefs, he displays the behavior expected of a genuine *anetü*.

Discussing Kuna shamanism, Severi (2004) argues that what allows the shaman to lend his voice to invisible beings and heal his patients are the symbolic connections between the world of ordinary life and the supernatural world, which are achieved by a common linguistic resource: parallelism. Through the enchainment of repeated verses and themes, the shaman is symbolically identified as a paradoxical character, at one time human and nonhuman, here and there, in the present time and in the mythic time. As Stanley Tambiah (1968) had already shown, parallelism may establish a chain of analogies that, more than just “comparing” different subjects or objects, may transfer properties from one being to another.

In the chief’s speech, we may consider that there is not only a formal parallelism between verses and blocks, but also a “performative parallelism” between the actual chief and those before him. The present time and the chief who speaks, despite the emphasized contrast, replicate the past in his performance. In the chief’s speech, persons and times are contrasted, but in his actions the difference between past and present is attenuated, and his actions and those of ancient chiefs are made parallel to one another. He speaks *about ancestors, as an ancestor* (using their language), and *on ancestors’ behalf* (since they are gone).

The Kalapalo say that the contrast between past and present is supposed to provoke “shame” in the listeners, who feel compelled to act as the ancient chiefs’ *own children*. We could say, then, that the antonymic affirmations in the speech have something similar to what Austin (1975) calls “illocutionary force,” which gives the chief the capacity to perform an act in saying something. Hyperbole and contrast are the means by which the audience could be aesthetically and morally compelled to act in some way, as in what Austin called “perlocutionary acts.”



- Ah, luale muke ataitsüha* Ah, please, let it be so  
*Ah, etijipügüko tehugu igakanügü* Ah, set aside food for your children's  
*muke ataitsüe kangamuke hekeni* bellies, children  
*muke*
- 30 *Ah, luale muke ataitsüha* Ah, please, this is how it should be  
*Ah, etijipügüko tehugu igakanügü* Ah, set aside food for your children's  
*muka tsitsü ehekeni* bellies  
*Ah, ukugepeki manga igei üäke* Ah, it was with that which had once  
 been human  
*Angaüpüaōko muke gele igei üäke* That your grandparents  
*Etuatanügü muke gele igei üäke* They got exhausted
- 35 *Ah, ukugepeki higei üäke* Ah, it was with that which had once  
 been human  
*Angaüpüaōko muke gele higei üäke* That your grandparents  
*Etuatanügü muke gele higei üäke* They got exhausted  
*Ah, kohinhanduhüngüki, ah, kumin-* Ah, with that which isn't bush, ah,  
*hangokiha uketuanalü* with our food we get exhausted

This passage is about the importance of cultivating corn, called “that which had once been human” (line 35) in reference to the mythical human origin of the plant. Corn cultivation used to be important during the rainy season, when manioc isn't harvested. In the old days, Xinguano peoples weren't always able to stock large quantities of manioc starch for the rainy season, and corn fields were very important. Nowadays, with bagging, it has become possible to store enough starch and, as such, few people plant corn.

The final part of the Hawk's Speech is about cultivating another plant crucial to Xinguano diet—manioc—and the dangers of witchcraft:

- Ahütü muke ataitsüha* You shouldn't
- 40 *Ah, engihitsügüko ukukijila ehekeni* Ah, rub that which you have worked  
 with  
*Ah, ingike muke niha gitse* Ah, look  
*Ah, tekundipüngühüngü ekutanügü* Ah, it's not inedible food this that we  
*muke geleha gitse kupeheni muke* are eating  
*geleha gitse*
- Ah, muke geleha gitse* –
- Ah, ighunguki muke geleha gitse* Ah, as such we're all moving on  
*kutengatanini muke geleha gitse*
- 45 *Ah, isekalu tohoila muke geleha gitse* Ah, without making any noise  
*Ah, kutengatanini muke geleha gitse* Ah, we're all moving on  
*Ahütü ataitsü* You shouldn't

	<i>Ah, engihitsügüko ukukijila ekeni, kangamuke</i>	Ah, rub that which you have worked with, children
	<i>Ingike muke niha gitse</i>	Look
50	<i>Ah, ande tekundipüngühüngü eku-tanügü kupeheni muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, it's not inedible food this that we are eating

In lines 40 and 48, *ukukijila*, a negative form of *ukukijü*, “to rub against,” is a metaphor for “bewitch.” *Engihitsügüko*, in the same lines, means “what was worked on,” and it refers to manioc leaves cut off from the plants. A spell on these leaves may destroy someone’s manioc crops, and this is the danger the passage is talking about. “It’s not inedible food this that we are eating” (lines 42 and 50), says the chief, but it’s clear that this is a risk in the case of witchcraft—a risk that the chief’s speech has the aim of avoiding. The Kalapalo say that if there is a lot of witchcraft in the village, it’s because the chiefs are not giving good advice to their people. Ideally, wherever chiefs are respected, people don’t seek to harm others or cast spells that may destroy a whole village. Yet when the chief is weakened, the danger of witchcraft is greater, since with no guidance, people tend to be more egoistic, “go crazy,” and *forget about their relatives*—the first step in producing a witch.

The succession of parallel verses ending with the same particles produces an antithetic parallelism of blocks that oppose each other: blocks formed by verses ended in *gitse* refer to the present, and those formed by verses ended in *üäke* refer to the past. We may note a poetic structure in this speech: (1) an opening line; (2) counseling, with verses ending in *gitse* (lines 2–14); (3) contrast between past and present, with verses ending in *üäke* (lines 15–27); (4) counseling, with no special mark on verses (lines 28–31); (5) contrast between past and present, with verses ending in *üäke* (lines 32–37); counseling, with verses ending in *gitse* (lines 38–50).

The key themes of the Hawk’s Speech are the foundations of kinship: generating and raising children, producing food, and avoiding witchcraft (i.e., *thinking about kin*, instead of forgetting them). It’s as if the chief’s speech led the fabrication of kin’s bodies on another scale, fomenting the fabrication of a *collective body* of kin, organized around a metaphoric relationship of filiation between chiefs and their people (I’ll return to corporality later). The chief’s rhetoric, by pointing out the imperfections of the present as well as an ideal of social life, is supposed to encourage people to behave like kin, a kind of behavior that needs to be actively produced in face of desegregating forces such as lack of rituals and witchcraft. (Gow [1991: 226–27] develops a similar argument about the Piro.)

Nothing in this speech may characterize it as an authoritarian discourse; to the contrary, the chief humbly requests, advises, but, as Allan Passes says about Pa’ikwené leaders’ rhetoric, this is precisely why such words “hold within them the positive moral and creative element of power; and contain meaningfulness, value, artistry and affective mass” (Passes 1998: 138). Or, as Fernando Santos-Granero (1991: 302) suggests, “the speech of the Amerindian leaders carries the weight of an order without appearing as such, for it is grounded in moral considerations shared by both leaders and followers.” Maybe we could add that, together with such moral considerations (and without focusing only on “authority” or “power”), the formal



use of antonymic affirmations and parallelism is a piece of artistry which redefines the chief's identity and that of his people, creating, at least for a brief moment, a world where the difference between chiefs and nonchiefs can be effective. And, as in rituals for spirits or in shamanism, the world that brings together different subjects comes into being only for a short period, but its effects are expected to endure.

### *Ekege akitsu: The Jaguar's Speech*

The Jaguar's Speech should also be delivered in a loud voice in the center of the village, but after sunset. The chief should also be turned toward the east, but now he needs to speak crouched down and looking toward the ground—as if he were facing a foreign chief, in a respectful/ashamed position. The difference in positions refers to body postures of the animals that own the speeches: in the morning, the body must be positioned just like a resting hawk—standing on a tree branch—and at night like a jaguar. The time of day when each speech is given also refers to these animals' active periods: the hawk hunts during the daytime, while the jaguar is a mainly crepuscular-nocturnal animal. Speaking is part of a complete performance involving the chief's body, and, as in other Amerindian rituals, to “act like” other beings is to become something like them, activating their own bodily—and thus subjective—capacities.

This speech has a pessimistic tone; when the day is over, the chief lectures on the difficulties of the present time—the lack of chiefs to guide their people, and the deaths provoked by spirits and the Whites. If the sunrise speech is about the process of kinship and life, its sunset counterpart speaks not as much about death, but rather about the uncertainties of the future and the importance of the chiefs in giving continuity to collective life (i.e., the very condition of kinship).

1	<i>Ah, kangamuke, kangamuke, kangamuke Ah, luale muke ataitsüha gitse Ataipanenatiüeha gitse Ah, tü akisü kaemanga gitse kutengaliiko egea gitse?</i>	Ah, children, children, children Ah, please, let it be so Rejoice Ah, with the speech of whom we have always followed, like so?
5	<i>Ah, ukugetihü akisü kae muke ata hale gitse Ah, kutehotaniünkgo muke ata hale gitse Ah, muke geleha igia kutengatanini muke geleha gitse Tetihoi muke geleha gitse Ah, kutengatanini muke gele higei (gitse)</i>	Ah, with the speech of a chief Ah, we would follow Ah, but even so we still follow With no mainstay Ah, we follow
10	<i>Ah, itseke heke muke gele higei, ah, tünotohokoki muke gele ah ukinahane- tatanini muke</i>	Ah, the spirits, ah with their mortal objects, ah, they are kill- ing us

While the Hawk's Speech starts by exhorting the chief's "brothers," this one starts with the word "children." If, at first, the chief treats his interlocutors in a symmetrical way, now he speaks to them in an asymmetrical way. "Children" is the most common form of address of a chief to his people, to whom he is like an adoptive father. This aspect of the relationship between a chief and his people evokes a set of relations recurrent throughout indigenous South America, centered on the figure of "owners" or "masters." According to a synthesis developed by Carlos Fausto (2008: 330), the concept of owner "designates a position that involves control and/or protection, engenderment and/or possession, and that applies to relationships between people (humans and nonhuman) and between people and things (tangible or not)," generally formulated according to the symbolic language of adoptive affiliation.

A chief's position as an adoptive father is tied to the production of kinship in a village. This is made evident by the use of an interesting term for "chief": *ukugetihü* (line 5). The Kalapalo, trying to segment this word, divide it into *ukuge*, "people," and *(t)ihü*, "trunk/stem" or "body," which would permit translating *ukugetihü* as the "people's trunk-body." The suggested translation gains force when we look at the expression *katote ihü* (or *katotihü*), "trunk-body of all," which can also be used in the same sense. Another form of saying chief is *iho*, which means "mainstay" or "prop"—something made from a tree trunk. In its literal meaning, *iho* refers to the wooden post on which a person ties his or her hammock, but its semantic field is greater, designating a person responsible for giving support to others (a father or owner of a house, for example). A chief is also called *kuge iho*, "people's mainstay," since it is understood that a chief's duty is taking care of his people.

The condition of *iho* is tied to the production of kinship and a collective point of view in the Xinguano system. As elsewhere in the indigenous Amazon, nobody is born completely human. For a baby to become fully human, proper nurturing, protection, and affection must be offered to it, a long process that fabricates the baby's body in the image of its parents'. Becoming a person means becoming someone's kin, and vice-versa (Gow 1997; Coelho de Souza 2002, Vilaça 2002). On the one hand, a child starts to become someone's kin at home, with its parents; on the other, this process is only completed in rituals, since becoming an adult person means coming out of seclusion during a regional ritual. Villages capable of sponsoring rituals are precisely the largest ones, where, according to the Kalapalo, there must be at least one great chief capable of bringing enough people together. In a village—which needs an *iho*/chief to endure—living together, sharing meals, and reciprocity are responsible for producing a generalized kind of kinshiping, transforming a heterogeneous collective of covillagers into a differentiated "we" in the multiethnic Xinguano complex.

In order to produce collectives on varied scales, an asymmetrical relationship is necessary between a body/trunk/mainstay and the people who live around it, and chiefs are the human form of this trunk-body. Despite the passage above saying there isn't *no* mainstay/trunk whose speech the group may follow, the Kalapalo state that the chief is actually "lying a little": he says that there is no one to guide his people, while the truth is that he is obviously doing so (as we have already seen in the Hawk's Speech).





Finally, there's the issue of white people, once more taken as spirits. The mortal objects that the chief speaks of mean Western commodities, long seen as witchcraft. With the epidemics that broke out from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, the Upper Xingu peoples quickly associated white people's objects with diseases and sorcery.

<i>Ah, luale muke ataitsü egekaluko, kangamuke</i>	Ah, please, let it be so, make noise, children
<i>Ataipanenatiie ataitsü hetsange</i>	May you all rejoice
<i>Indegela muke gele akangabaha igei gitse</i>	It's not here
<i>Ah, kuteliiko hata muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, where we follow
15 <i>Ah, kutaüpiaöko muke geleha gitse, ah, engikapügütela leha gitse</i>	Ah, it's not in a place cleared out by our grandparents
<i>Ah, kuteliiko hata muke leha gitse</i>	Ah, where we follow

Once again the chief exhorts his people to make noise and rejoice, since their living conditions don't favor joy—they no longer live in a village cleared out by their grandparents, but in other people's village. It's difficult to interpret this passage. Since they moved to Aiha, the Kalapalo live in Kamayurá territory, and to this day these Tupi provoke them by saying that they no longer inhabit a village where their grandparents are buried. If we interpret the above passage literally, we might be led to think that it refers to this specific situation, which could have been incorporated into the speech at some point in the last fifty years. Yet the situation gets more complicated if we consider that the man who taught this speech to his son had never delivered it in Aiha, but only in the old Kalapalo village, whose region had been densely occupied by the Kalapalo since at least the beginnings of the eighteenth century. In a trip to the region, Ageu referred to that territory as the place “where his grandparents gave their speeches.” The way I see it is that living in a place that hadn't been cleared out by one's ancestors is the same as saying that there are no more chiefs: the antonym is a rhetorical resource chosen to affirm something in a subtle and humble way. By denying a relationship with the land, or his chiefly condition, the speaker is actually *emphasizing* his position as a substitute for all the chiefs who had spoken there before him. He *is* a mainstay, a trunk growing on the land giving support to the production of a collective body of kin—and, thus, he *is* the personification of that body.

<i>Ah, luale muke ataitsü atipanenünkgo, kangamuke</i>	Ah, please, let it be so, rejoice, children
<i>Isekalu tohoila mukeha kutengatani-niha gitse</i>	Without making noise we keep on following
<i>Tü akisü kaemana gitse kutengalükoha gitse</i>	With the words of whom do we follow?

20	<i>Ah, ukugetihü akisü haindipügü kae muke ata hale gitse</i>	Ah, with the speech of a chief, of someone aged
	<i>Ah, kutehotanüinkgo muke ata hale gitse</i>	Ah, we would be following
	<i>Ah, isekalu tohoila muke geleha gitse kutengatanini muke geleha gitse</i>	Ah, without making noise we keep on following
	<i>Ah, luale muke ataitsüha gitse</i>	Ah, please, let it be so
	<i>Ataimpanenatüe</i>	Rejoice

The speech ends by going back to the problem of a lack of “noise” (feasts/joy) and the lack of a chief (hence the hypothetical usage seen in line 21: “we would be following,” *kutehotanüinkgo*). It makes sense that the speech be delivered at sunset: it’s not only the end of a day, but also the (supposed) end of a people who live in sadness, with no chief whose words they may follow, besides their ancestral lands, and also threatened by the mortal objects of the spirits (whether these be acts of witchcraft, or Western commodities). If the sunrise speech focuses on the kinship process itself, the sunset speech points toward the fragile continuity of this process, and the importance that chiefs and their words may have in it.

### Speaking, hearing, transforming

One night, a man sleeping on a hammock near mine got up, picked up a slingshot, and went outside. When he returned and I asked him what he had gone to do, he told me that he had gone out to kill an owl, since he thought that its hoot was similar to the expression *keteha!*, “let’s go!” The animal could be the form taken on by the soul of a deceased relative or friend trying to call him and, were he to clearly hear the owl’s chant just like a human voice, he would soon die and meet up with whoever had been calling out to him. While the owl’s hoot is heard as such, it is seen as a mere animal; when its hoot is perceived as a human voice, this is a sign that whoever hears it is *being transformed into* a being of the same kind as the enunciator. While walking through the woods, people are also in danger of hearing the calls of animals that may sound just like human voices. This implies a process of starting to become “a bit animal like,” starting to live with these beings, developing a body similar to theirs, and *becoming their kin*, which causes disease and possibly death.

Viveiros de Castro argues that, in multinaturalistic ontologies such as those found throughout lowland South America, the positions of human and nonhuman, as well as the circulation between such positions, have a pronominal character. In a world where everyone may occupy the position of *subject/human* in a relation, this position is nonetheless unequally distributed. The reflexive *I* of the subject can relate either to a *He/she*, objectified as part of nature, or to a *You*, encompassing him/her in the point of view of the speaker:

The typical supernatural situation in the Amerindian world is the encounter, in the forest, between a human—always alone—and a being that, firstly *seen* as a mere animal or person, reveals itself as a spirit



or as dead, and *talks* to the man. . . . Whoever answers to a *You* said by a nonhuman accepts the condition of being its “second person,” and by assuming, in turn, the position of *I* he will already do it as a nonhuman. (Viveiros de Castro 2002: 397)

Language for the Kalapalo is taken as a characteristic of the human condition, which, for many Amerindians, is shared by virtually all beings. In such cosmologies, the human soul—the capacity to utter an *I*—is seen as a given, while differences between beings must be actively produced in (and by means of) their bodies (Viveiros de Castro 2002). Creating a common human condition means producing similar bodies, and being able to communicate verbally, besides being a marker of this condition, also seems to be a *force* capable of taking part in its creation, since it implies the differential positioning, through language and communication, of the related parties. As the dangers of hearing the uttering of other beings suggests, language is capable of engendering the mutual bodily assimilation of subjects: hearing what other beings say could make the listener suffer a corporal transformation that attracts it to the enunciator’s point of view.

I suggest that the discourses analyzed here could be taken as part of this same relational matrix. The logic of ritual action in the Upper Xingu (and among Amerindians) is metamorphosis: by producing corporal alterations it becomes possible to transform a person into an agent, allocating this person in the universe of difference and potential affinity the locus of the capacity of agency (Coelho de Souza 2002). Beasts of prey are usually considered the most powerful agents, thus having greater capacity to attract others to their point of view—a hierarchical encompassing movement that may be interpreted from the logic of “familiarizing predation” (Fausto 2008: 335). Chiefs’ ritual speech should be seen according to the same logic: when a chief addresses his audience as *You*, “speaking like” a bird of prey or a hunting cat, he activates the capacities of agency of these beings, occupying the reflexive position of *I*, and thus becoming capable of not only having a point of view, but also attracting others to it by symbolically defining them as his potential prey. The apparent paradox is that, in becoming “prey,” people also become *kin* (both to the chief and to each other).

This surely isn’t an exclusively Xinguano feature, and it evokes Course’s discussion on “excess force” of language as used among the Mapuche. For the author, “speech itself is understood to be saturated with an excess of force (*nwen*) which ultimately distances every utterance from the control of its speaker” (Course 2012: 8), in such a way that language has the capacity to produce effects independently of the speaker’s intentions, as if it were an agent itself. Indeed, Passes (1998: 6–7) had already made a similar observation, arguing that in the Amazon it’s common to attribute power to words, “with utterances being endowed with the cosmogonic power of creation and destruction.” This also becomes clear in the conceptions the Kalapalo maintain on “spells” (*kehege*), words of enchantment capable of “adhering” to objects or persons in order to produce effects.

It seems important that, despite his use of chiefly insignia and his bodily position, the chief has to be *invisible* to his fellow villagers: he speaks either before sunrise, when they are still in their homes, or after sunset, when they have already returned. He speaks loudly in order to be *heard*, but must not be *seen*. The use of

status objects is intended not to be seen by the people, but to activate the capacities of the beings with which those objects are related: the mythic jaguar-chief, and the twins Sun and Moon, who passed on their chiefly condition to some humans. He also needs to be *unspeakable*: the orator disappears from the discourse by opposing himself to past *anetü* and affirming the nonexistence of a present-day chief. A predatory and collectivizing force has to be produced in the chief's body, but it also must be attenuated by his invisibility and absence from discourse. Alterity enables the chief to become "great"—magnified (Sztutman 2012)—and encompass others, but it also brings the risk of transforming him into a complete stranger, an Other.

Following Beatriz Perrone-Moisés (2012), Amerindian chiefs are in a "between-two" position, mediating the relations between the self and the other in a world where alterity is essential to the production of sociality, and limits are never rigid. In this sense, chieftaincy seems closer to shamanism. Such a mediating position is important in a world where its political figures, as Perrone-Moisés says, "are never 'completely' this or that" (ibid.: 10). Amerindian political figures move "in the 'space-relation' between poles, without ever fixing in one of them" (ibid.). They occupy the cosmopolitical space to where different beings must converge in order to become fully human, but this is always a *movement* between identity and difference, and not a *state*. As Perrone-Moisés argues, Amerindian chieftaincy "is located in the interval of the opposition between being and not-being, neither one thing nor the other, nor the sum of the two" (ibid.: 20). Difference cannot be abolished by complete identity, since such inertia would mean the ceasing of social life. As Amerindian cosmogonies emphasize, there can only be perfect stability, identity, and hierarchy among the dead.

What becomes immediately "visible," perceptible, through the chief's speech? Although in a humble way, the speaker defines his identity as a substitute of deceased chiefs. (Everybody understands that the chief is "lying a little" when denying his position.) He also brings the listeners' attention to "indexical signs" that invite the audience to complete the picture with something that is invisible, but is nonetheless part of the performance. Who might be discoursing before dawn or after sunset, and addressing others as his "children"? As is known from myths and ritual performances, the chiefly condition is founded in a predatory bodily quality, which results in the subjective capacity of uniting a plurality of persons in a single body of kin. The act of delivering speeches may suggest to the minds of the audience that the one speaking could be a hawk (who owns the first speech) or a jaguar (owner of the second one). This would be explicit if the audience could see the chief's body. The mental image of the chief would thus be completed by means of the projection of an invisible, but nonetheless necessary, part of it. The ritual performance therefore assembles two contradictory perceptions of the chief, a political agent with a properly chimeric aesthetic.

This argument is reinforced by the Kalapalo idea that, during the Hawk's Speech, a kind of kiskadee bird<sup>8</sup> replies from its home: "You say that you take care of us, but you eat us." There is a "logic of the sensible" underlying this statement: the kiskadee (specially the great kiskadee), despite its modest size, is famous for defending its nest from attacks by birds of prey. The kiskadee's fear can only be understood if

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8. The *bem-te-vi*, in Portuguese.



we suppose that the chief could exert some kind of force over his people through the form of predation. Indeed, chiefs may be dangerous, and they must deliberately be “tamed” so that they behave well with their group. If we see the word as the complete opposite of violence, as Clastres proposes, ritual speech tends to be dissociated from any sort of symbolic efficacy; however, if we see it as a modality of predatory force in a perspectivist ontology, we may understand why the chief’s speech, when aesthetically controlled and moderated, is important, and also what the kiskadee is worried about.

This chimeric composition is reversed in other situations. If in these ritual speeches the predator-quality of the chief is invisible, it is brought to the foreground when chiefs appear to foreigners, presenting visual signs of the jaguar, the harpy, or the anaconda. As I have argued elsewhere (Guerreiro 2011), this ritual confrontation between chiefs who present themselves as enemies or potential affines to each other “cuts” the continuum of the Xinguano regional network, creating the conditions for the emergence of kinship in different collectives. Such duality is constitutive of chiefly persons, and must be made *perceptible* in every situation where such agents are meant to be effective. This relation is never symmetrical, though, but hierarchical. In order for the consanguine aspect to be visible, the affinal/predator one must be invisible; conversely, when the predator-like quality must be shown, its counterpart is kept hidden, but not absent or obliterated: extralinguistic aspects of the chief’s performance point to their quality as enemies/affines, just as the visible jaguar-chief’s aesthetic in front of his people when confronting opposing groups points to his condition as a protector/consanguine.

This echoes qualities and effects of Amerindian graphic arts:

In Amazonian art, lines call the attention to what connects and not to what separates distinct bodies and beings, it is an art of between-two: connecting human beings and animals by the quality of having designs, just as the visible and invisible sides. . . . What is drawn is, rather than their form, the relation that connects and constitutes them. (Severi and Lagrou 2013: 14–15)

In the Kalapalo case, it seems that language and the chief’s bodily performance do the same, pointing to the relations between humanity and animality, consanguinity and affinity, hierarchy and symmetry, which constitute chieftaincy and social life.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to discuss how “chimerical images” could be made effective in political rituals. I hope this also contributes toward an ethnography of the verbal genre known as “chiefs’ speech” in the Upper Xingu, and a better understanding, through Kalapalo own “modes of description,” of some relationships between ritual, aesthetics, and politics in Amazonia. As we have seen, by delivering a speech a chief is not merely “preaching in the wilderness.” Besides being a complex verbal art, both refined and quite valued, the chief’s speech is a fine indigenous reflection on both kinship and power, the relations between consanguinity and affinity, identity and difference, symmetry and hierarchy.

Discussing Kuna shamanic chants, Severi (2004: 816) argues that “the enunciation of ‘obscure words’ does not imply the intention to convey a meaningful message to the patient, but tends to construct an acoustic mask, indirectly defining the nature of the shaman-chanter” (see also Severi 2015: 224). He argues that an “acoustic mask” is “a reflexive means to define the ritual identity of the speaker” (Severi 2004: 830–31), evoking the same kind of bodily transformation produced in ritual action among Amerindians, in which masks may bring to presence supernatural beings by the controlled metamorphosis of the person wearing such objects. Kuna chants would produce the shaman-chanter as a “paradoxical enunciator,” which condenses contradictory characteristics and capacities—he would be at the same time a shaman in the past, an actual human shaman, and a spirit—endowing him with the capacity to realize effective symbolic actions.

We see the same kind of symbolic operation in Kalapalo chiefly discourses. The speeches use paradoxical affirmations that define the chief as a substitute of the ancestors, a father, a mainstay—a consanguine—and at the same time his bodily indexes define him as a potential nonhuman predator. His audience’s identity is also produced by paradoxical connotations: they are simultaneously his kin and his prey, a chiefless people and a people with a chief. The audience is the chief’s “second person,” a collective *You* brought to his perspective, but the absence of any answer could also be seen as a resistance to it.

Through discourse, the chief is produced as a complex enunciator, as is his people created as a “complex addressee.” Chiefly oratory is not “about” something, but is intended to produce a set of differences by means of which sociality is created: chief/nonchief, predator/prey, individual/collective, affine/consanguine, hierarchy/equality: the poles of a “dualism in perpetual disequilibrium” that gives movement to social life. Such ritual performances, in their unique form, create a kind of relational situation that exists only through ritual condensation, but provides a background for everyday life. As is clear, while dealing with political oratory we must not appeal to external causes, such as tradition, authority, or belief, to understand its efficacy, but we must understand how meaning and persons are contextually produced through discursive pragmatics.

It’s noteworthy that the symbolic resources used in chiefly speeches to produce the identities of the interlocutors are basically the same found by Silverstein in other forms of political oratory: parallelism and indexical signs. Discussing a male genre of “gossip,” called *talanoa*, in a Fijian village, Silverstein shows that what is at stake in such talk is not the communication of complete and organized stories, but rhythmically coconstructed conversations that, rather than asserting something, only point to known or supposed facts by other participants (Silverstein 2005: 6). The coalition of persons in this discursive coconstructions would point to their social identities as participants of potential political factions (ibid.: 9). The same would apply for speeches given by American politicians that, rather than communicating messages on “political issues,” would use poetics to identify them with a set of such issues, thus making them *inhabit* the message and constructing their identities as different from others.

Apparently, political oratory in “state societies” is just as “empty” as in “societies against the state”: it’s not the referential content of the message that matters, but the effects of the poetics on the participants’ identities. However, there still



are important differences: while the political discourses discussed by Silverstein intend to produce an identity relation between the speaker and his audience (as in the American case), or between the cospeakers (as in the Fijian case), the speeches discussed here seem to introduce a *difference* between the parties. When Kalapalo listeners understand themselves as the chief's children, they are reminded that he is also different, an Other, as a hawk or a jaguar. Also, in order to "inhabit the message" in those cases, one has to create a resonance between oneself and the themes one speaks about. Kalapalo oratory, however, produces *dissonance* when the chief dissociates himself from the message, attributing its "true" form to deceased chiefs. On the one side, such observations may account for specific qualities of Amerindian politics, such as the alternation between hierarchy and symmetry. On the other, our analysis may lead us see Kalapalo ritual speech as closer to other forms of political oratory, in an exercise of anthropological symmetrization.

The ambiguous character of the interlocutors seems central here: the speaker could be just an ordinary man—or not; he could be an ancestor—or not; he could be a predator—or not; he could be human—or not. Such situation is necessary for the chief to occupy an intermediary position between ancestral chiefs and living people, between other peoples and their own, in order to become the mediator whom he is supposed to be. Clastres argued that chiefly discourses denied reciprocity. However, as Marilyn Strathern (1992: 178) suggests, any exchange in gift economies enacts an exchange of perspectives: each person can only become a donor or receptor by assuming the perspective of the other. I think there is something similar in the Kalapalo case. The chief anticipates his people's point of view (as prey) and conceals his predatory nature, while his fellow villagers see each other as kin (and human) while collectively assuming the chief's point of view (recognizing his hidden nature). In this sense, the chief's speech is all about exchange, although not in Clastres' sense.

I've mentioned that such discourses have fallen into disuse in the Upper Xingu. What could be the consequences of this? Obviously, there could be no measurable effects, but the Kalapalo have their theories. Some say that today there is more witchcraft than in the past; others say that people are becoming more egoistic and don't share their food with just anyone; others are exchanging ritual decorations and festivals for Western clothes and music. Isn't it precisely food, caring for relatives, and feasts that the speeches are all about? These speeches reflect (and intend to act) upon the challenges of moving on in the face of the desegregating effects and transformations represented by witchcraft, enemies, and the dangerous spirits who are white people. Clastres was right: the chief's speech doesn't demand or produce laws—but it has a great reflexive capacity, and that's where it gains at least part of its force.

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## Des chimères politiques: L'incertitude dans le discours du chef dans le Haut-Xingu

Résumé : Cet article s'intéresse aux formes de gouvernement rituelles dans le Sud de l'Amazonie, et en particulier au cas des "chefferies sans pouvoir". A l'aide d'une analyse des arts oratoires rituels entre les chefs dans le système multi-ethnique et plurilingue du Haut-Xingu, il montre que les concepts de "condensation rituelle" et de "chimère" peuvent être utiles à la description et l'analyse de telles formes de gouvernement. Dans le Haut-Xingu, certains chefs maîtrisent un registre appelé "langage des chefs", qui consiste en un ensemble de discours conventionnels s'adressant aux chefs d'autres groupes ou à leur propre peuple, selon le contexte dans lequel ils sont prononcés. Cet article analyse des discours de ce registre parmi les Kalapalo (un peuple de cette région parlant une langue caribe) et montre que dans ce registre le chef et le peuple sont évoqués comme des sujets "paradoxaux" caractérisés par des prédicats contradictoires; il considère également comment cet état de fait se rattache à des idées Kalapalo au sujet de la parenté et du pouvoir. En utilisant les



concepts de “condensation rituelle” et de “chimère”, cet article propose de réouvrir le débat sur la rhétorique politique lancé par Pierre Clastres et de s’interroger sur la manière dont l’incertitude—plutôt que l’ “autorité” ou la “conviction”—peut enclencher un échange de perspectives, à travers lequel les identités du groupe et du chef peuvent être reproduites.

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