

EATING WITH YOUR FAVOURITE MOTHER: TIME AND SOCIALITY IN A BRAZILIAN AMERINDIAN COMMUNITY

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This article is based on an ethnographic account of parent-child relations in a Caboclo-Indian community of south Bahia, Brazil. Raising a child by providing care and food is valued to such an extent that a child's mother may be the woman the child has chosen to be its mother. Choice is not understood as an act of free will, but as a time-frame in the sense that choosing one's mother is a way of emphasizing the possibility of the unmaking or reversibility of parent-child links. The article suggests a 'sociality of becoming a being-in-the-world' as an alternative not only to the notion of socialization but also to the theoretical link between kinship and society.

The Kid has changed the world and myself.
Not in the beginning
But bit by bit,
As I became attached to him
Andrei Tarkovskij, *The sacrifice*

At the beginning of Andrei Tarkovskij's film, *The sacrifice*, a father tells a story to his child, who is dumb, in which he says that, according to ancient Japanese wisdom, human beings may change the world by constantly repeating the same gestures every single day. Later on, the same character confesses that the world, as experienced by him, has changed immensely because of his young son and that this change did not take place from one day to the next. It resulted from the constant daily relationship between father and child over the weeks, months, and years in which they were together.

This story serves as an introduction to ideas about time and sociality which are familiar to anthropology. The first is that becoming a 'being-in-the-world' cannot happen in a single day: it is both a process made of history and a way of making history. This article takes as its theoretical inspiration the idea that it is through the analyses of 'how children bring themselves into being' that it becomes possible to approach this history in the making (cf. Toren 1993; 1999a: 266; 1999b: 1-21). As opposed to the concept of socialization where society is thought of as the universe of adults, in this article children are seen as part of the intersubjective relationships that constitute the making of kinship through history, that is to say, as the process

whereby children become aware of themselves through their relations with others (cf. Gow 1997: 39; 2000: 51; Toren 1993; 1999a).¹

The second idea concerning time suggested by Tarkovskij's film is that the attachment between parent and children becomes meaningful not only because events of significant content are taking place, but also because the same actions are continually repeated every day. In the ethnographic context analysed here, kin links are seen as relationships that need to be constantly reiterated by daily feeding and being cared for. In the social sciences, sharing food has been widely seen as a way of establishing solidarity at least since Max Weber's analyses of sacrifice. Weber maintained that sharing food makes people and god members of the same 'communion', so that 'the ceremony of eating together serves to produce a brotherly community between the sacrificers and the god' (Weber 1978: 423 in Ramos 1995: 43). These ideas have also been explored in anthropological debates on kinship for some time and in different ethnographic settings. In the South Amerindian context (the Sanumá Yanomami), Alcida Rita Ramos shows that sharing food is a way of making kin links, so that the definition of kin peers may be based on ideas of being 'my co-eaters' (Ramos 1995: 43). While sharing food and eating together have been widely seen as a primary basis of attachment in social life, the importance of feeding and being fed as a way of making kinship and creating relatedness is increasingly discussed in general anthropological debate (e.g. Bloch 1993; 1998; Carsten 1995; 1997; Gow 1989; 1991: 159; McCallum 1991: 417; 1998; Pina-Cabral 1991; Stafford 1995: 79-111; 2000).

Although the purpose of this article could be defined as the analysis of the process of becoming kin through feeding and caring in the context of an 'anthropology of the everyday' (Overing & Passes 2000: 7; Carsten 1997: 7), its final scope is considerably wider than that. I argue that by focusing on the intersubjective relations whereby kinship is constituted, time as a dimension of sociality becomes apparent. Time is explored in this article from two ethnographic perspectives. I show, first, that, in order to become kin, people need to keep on repeating small acts such as dressing or feeding, both daily and on a continuous basis over days, weeks, and months, and, secondly, that people can turn others into kin by performing such acts. But the latter makes even clearer the importance of this daily re-enactment with relation to the forming of kin links. It shows that people are deeply aware of the fact that, if they stop performing these acts, the link between parents and children is weakened, and may even be severed altogether. Caring and feeding relationships, so often defined as the basis of kinship in the South Amerindian context (e.g. Gow 1989; 1991; McCallum 1991; 2001; Seeger, Viveiros de Castro & Matta 1979; Viveiros de Castro 1996: 130-1), are emphasized in this article in relation to the notion of the potential unmaking of kin links, if actions of feeding and caring should stop taking place.

One of the implications of the work of Meyer Fortes is that kin relationships are irrevocable and are not in need of reiteration. Arguing that the moral character of kinship, at least amongst the Tallensi, is based on its being 'unconditional and without term' (Fortes 1969: 78), Fortes conceived the temporal nature of kin ties to be fixed and irreversible, except in the case of ties of affinity (cf. Bloch 1973: 77-8). While discussing this idea with regard to the Merina of Madagascar, Maurice Bloch argued that relations between 'real kinsmen' are also seen as unconditional or irrevocable. As a result, people related by kin ties do not feel that they need to reiterate their relationships on a daily basis in order to maintain those links (Bloch 1973: 79).²

In fact, an approach to the study of kinship that has received greater acclaim over the past two decades is one based on the notion that kin ties are constituted through a process rather than in a system. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that there are not many ethnographies which have explored the implications of conceiving kin ties as not only constituted over time but as social ties that can be effectively unmade or reversed. One of the few exceptions is the recent ethnography of Bodenhorn (2000) about the revocability of kin ties amongst the Iñupiat of Alaska. Bodenhorn argues that, in the context of the Iñupiat, this notion of the revocability of kinship is related to the fact that children are considered autonomous beings who may 'choose' their own parents – an idea that Bodenhorn shows to be consistent with the frequency of adoptions amongst the Iñupiat, and with the Iñupiat notion that children get born by themselves and not as a direct result of a couple's procreative act (Bodenhorn 2000: 139–41). One consequence of the revocability of kin ties amongst the Iñupiat, Bodenhorn argues, is that kinship is regarded as a context in which relations need to be re-enacted daily, depending directly upon 'the work of being related – rather than the labour of giving birth or the "fact" of shared substance' and, as a result, 'permanence [of kin ties] lies in the ever-present potential for revivifying dormant relations' (Bodenhorn 2000: 143).

Although it discusses ideas about time and kinship, this account of the Iñupiat does not elaborate how these ideas are constituted in the intersubjective relationships between parents and children, and the unmaking of kin ties receives little attention. The final aim of this article is to carry out this analysis and to consider the consequences of kin ties being experienced as ties that can be unmade for a 'sociality of becoming a being-in-the-world'. Among other things, this analysis will make us understand the living experience of being a mother and a child through mutual attraction.

Caboclo-Indians

The ethnographic background to this study is an Indian community living in a region of partly depleted Atlantic forest in the south of Bahia, Brazil. The historical constitution of this community in the region is easily traced back to the colonial period when a group of *Tupi* Indians who inhabited the south coast of Bahia were settled in a Jesuit-controlled Indian community in the seventeenth century. This former Jesuit centre is now a town named Olivença. Nowadays, the majority of the indigenous people inhabit a rural area located several kilometres from this urban centre, where they live scattered amongst non-indigenous people in six different localities.³ At the time of my fieldwork, these Indians spoke only Brazilian Portuguese. My fieldwork data indicate the total number of indigenous people who live in this rural region of Olivença to be around three hundred and fifty. My fieldwork was based on one of the six localities where the indigenous people live and which I call 'Jary'.⁴ There were then 133 indigenous people living in Jary in a total population of around two thousand in this locality. The income of the indigenous people derives from the processing of manioc flour and also from working for local 'white' farmers who plant tropical fruit, cocoa, rubber trees, and coconut palm. The farms in Jary are considered locally to be medium- to small-sized concerns. Local living conditions (for example, the lack of running water or electricity and the absence of school facilities) are in stark contrast to those in the city of Ilhéus, 30

kilometres away. As a result, farm-owners do not live on the farms. They prefer to live in the city and have employees to work, and sometimes live, on their farms. This labour force has migrated from dry regions at a great distance from the coast and has been settling in the rural area of Olivença since 1940.

The indigenous people of Jary call themselves *caboclos*⁵ or *índios* (Indians), though they say that the latter term more exactly designates other Indians who live in indigenous reservation areas or Indian villages (*aldeia de índio*) or those from the distant and idealized Amazon.⁶ At the same time, in terms of their self-image in the regional context, they do not differentiate between being *caboclo* or *índio* (Indian). Likewise their sociality is only partially connected to their neighbours' way of life and to the regional population. It is precisely for these reasons that they continue to recognize their difference with respect to non-indigenous people in the region, even though they may socialize and become friends or even relatives by marriage. Therefore, I will use the term 'Caboclo-Indians' to refer to the indigenous population in Jary.

Ideas with regard to the intersubjective process of becoming kin are addressed in this article by focusing on the kin relationships between women and children. Known locally as *filho de criação*, this type of mother-child link may best be translated as 'raised child'.⁷ The verb 'to raise' (*criar*) when applied to a child is also used in a wider sense as 'caring for'. People talk about the situation of being a *filho de criação* (raised child) as opposed to being a *filho legítimo*, 'original child'.⁸ Being an 'original mother' (*mãe legítima*) or an 'original father' (*pai legítimo*) has two intertwined meanings. It is both the social recognition of the physical procreators (the people who are responsible for the physical existence of a person in the world) and the recognition of the man and woman through whom wider kinship relations of descent can be traced. The distinction between a *filho de criação* and a *filho legítimo* is acknowledged even when people have never actually seen their 'original parents' (as is the case of a child whose original mother dies in the act of giving birth), but in no way implies a hierarchy of social values, as I will show here. This is precisely because Caboclo-Indians think that raising and caring are key issues for *filhos de criação* and *filhos legítimos* alike. It is the way in which children become sons or daughters.

Apart from the question of children being 'original' or 'raised', there is also the situation of 'giving a child to raise' (*deu [o filho] para criar*). The main difference between this situation and the first is that the expression 'giving a child to raise' is associated with the idea of giving the child to people who are not relatives of the original parents and who do not live in the rural region, but in the town of Olivença or the city of Ilhéus. The instances of a 'given child' that I have come across have always been the result of some life crisis, such as the death or serious illness of one or both parents, or the breakdown of a marriage. It is only when there is no kin who will take the child as a raised child that the possibility of 'giving a child to raise' is considered, and usually the child will be given to a local white farmer or one of its kin.⁹

But the negative feelings involved in the 'giving of a child' are nothing compared to the horror felt by Caboclo-Indians at the idea of offering a child for adoption.¹⁰ This is because a given child goes to someone who, although of a different social background, is known locally, and this means that contact is still possible. Offering a child for adoption is seen as a way of losing the child forever and is thus an aberration. Only fraud and misinformation would lead Caboclo-Indians in Jary to offer their children for adoption.

Residential arrangements

Indian people do not live isolated from their non-indigenous neighbours either in demographic terms or in their habits of sociability. However, they do live and make residential arrangements differently from these non-indigenous neighbours who are incoming migrants to the region, and live in small 'compounds' consisting of several houses of an extended family. Compounds are locally known as *lugares* (literally 'places') and each *lugar* is known by the name of its founder. This is usually the husband, but it could also be the wife, of the first couple to establish the compound. This couple takes on a central role in the residential arrangements. Their leadership may be evaluated by their capacity to persuade their children to live with them after they marry.

Each compound is located close to a stream, which is used on a communal basis by all of its inhabitants. Ideally, it should also have a storehouse to process manioc flour. Each compound in Jary consists of one to six buildings, but the number is constantly changing for various significant reasons. One is that buildings are viewed as ephemeral structures to be destroyed and rebuilt in short periods of time; another is that death often functions as an invitation to abandon a building.¹¹ However, as far as the present article is concerned, the most important reason is that of post-marital residential arrangements. In fact, matrimonial relationships are formed through the practice of a sequence of acts which involve women leaving their parental homes and moving into the compound of their husband's parents. Such a virilocal tendency has a definite effect on the way parent-child links are produced. One of these consequences is the intimate relationship established between a child and the kinswomen on the father's side who inhabit the same compound. This has direct effects on the mother-child link, as will be seen below.

In Jary there are nine such compounds, eight of which belong to Caboclo-Indians. Only a few people from the Caboclo-Indian community live in farmhouses, known locally as *viver em fazenda fechada* (living on a closed farm). This is considered the hardest and most undesirable way of life. Living in a compound is currently not only the commonest residential arrangement for Caboclo-Indians but also the one which is preferred.

Being born in one of these compounds has several implications for the way a child becomes a being-in-the-world. Until she or he is around 6 years old, its daily life will be mostly restricted to the area around its house inside the compound. Visits to other compounds are limited to an occasional event. One of these is the monthly meeting organized by a Catholic charitable foundation known as *Pastoral da Criança* (Pastoral Care for Children). The first time I met most of the women and children who live in Jary was at one of these meetings. My field notes contain reflections on the behaviour of children during these meetings as they clung to their mother's skirts as if the world beyond her body was strange and frightening, and looked at other children with open-mouthed wonder.

Later on, I realized that children did not play with each other at these meetings because their everyday sociability was confined to their own compound. It is only when they are between the ages of 9 and 12 that sociability between young boys and girls extends more widely to the social space outside the compound. On Sundays, boys and girls make long journeys, separately, to watch regional football games. Generally, girls marry between the ages of 12 and 16, while boys often marry later, from the age of 20 and above.

As my fieldwork progressed, I found myself in a number of situations where this lack of daily interaction between children was clearly apparent. Children aged between 2 and 8 years from the compound where I was living insisted on joining me on my regular visits to the surrounding compounds. Although they were related by kin ties and lived a ten-minute walk away, I realized that in some of the compounds neither their peers nor the adults recognized them easily. Difficulty in recognizing the children arose mainly among adults who did not regularly visit the compound where we lived. People would ask me who the children belonged to and would look at them with curiosity. On the other hand, one of the children I once took with me assured me that she had never before been to one of the compounds we visited. Although she may have merely forgotten prior visits, I knew that what she said was true at least with regard to the year of my fieldwork.

On one occasion the interaction between the children I had brought with me (a 4-year-old boy and his 5-year-old sister) and those at the compound we were visiting revealed clearly the lack of familiarity between children who inhabit different compounds, especially those that are not contiguous. On that day, when we arrived, the children stayed outside the house while I talked with three women who were inside. The conversation was protracted and slow as is always the case among Caboclo-Indians in Jary. The compound children had clustered together in a corner at the back of the house and kept aloof from the two children, their cousins, who had come with me. At first, these two would look through a hole that served as window in the clay wall of the house where the adult conversation was taking place. The 4-year-old boy began to make faces and blow his cheeks out in a startling manner. As soon as he saw us look at him, he would run away and hide. As if this behaviour was insufficient to attract the attention of both the compound children and us adults, the brother and sister began to play about with the clay of the house wall. It was very dry and crumbled, and they were plainly destroying part of the wall. The women watched what was happening. However, as they were our hosts and as a sign of their lack of familiarity with the children, they were waiting for me to take the initiative and ask the children to stop behaving so badly. But the fact was that, by then, the brother and sister were no longer worried about being stopped because they had already achieved what they had set out to do: the children of the host compound forgot their shyness and were laughing with a sense of complicity with their visiting peers.

These situations made me even more aware of the fact that young children who live in different compounds seldom come into contact with each other. Their daily life is marked by constant and intense interaction with their peers who live in the same compound and the same house, and with the women of the compound who remain there on a more regular daily basis.

Mother-child links

The daily interaction between a child and the women who live in the same compound does not make mothers of them all. The balance between the links with the women of the compound and with a child's own mother must be understood first of all in reference to the early months of a child's life.

It was when Jary people reflected on birth and the post-partum period that they showed most clearly that the attachment of children to their *mãe legítima* had the

greatest strength and significance for them. Caboclo-Indians in Jary believe that the placenta and the umbilical cord are the parts of the baby's body that are bonded with part of the mother. When a child is born in the Caboclo-Indian community the father and the woman who assists with the birth need to bury this 'mixed body' of the placenta and umbilical cord. It is said that one of the disadvantages of giving birth in hospitals is that people lose control over the destiny of this mixed part of both the mother's and child's body. The main reason to bury this 'mixed body' is to avoid 'leaving it vulnerable to random chance' (*enterra para não deixar à toa*) and prevent it from being carried away by domestic animals (*para bicho não carregar*) – especially dogs and chickens. If either animal were to dig up the umbilical cord or the placenta, they would undoubtedly tear at them and scatter the pieces around.¹² What is most feared is not so much the scattering of the mixed body in itself but the fact that it would most certainly be dragged away to the woods (*o mato*) where carrion birds of prey (*urubus*) and mice live. As these animals are known to relish the eating of dead flesh, people expect that they will find and devour these parts of the mixed body of a new-born baby and its mother. This 'mixed body' is considered human dead flesh and people sometimes explicitly compare it with corpses.

Likewise significant is what people say about the destiny of the three or four inches of stump left on a baby's navel (the part of the umbilical cord that is attached to the baby's body for several days after the postpartum period). After it has shrivelled and dropped away, the mother keeps it and uses it to make medicine for the child. She may keep the stump for years or until the child has grown up. Then it is buried in a place considered safe. This ensures (just as in the case of the umbilical cord and placenta) that it is not 'left to chance' (*para não deixar à toa*). I was once told that the safest place to bury the stump is in the cemetery in the nearby town of Olivença. The associations between the burial of corpses and the burial of parts of the body that are expelled in the act of giving birth are thus further emphasized.

These ideas have been presented here in order to show that notions of a bodily connection between a mother and a child (related to the act of being born/giving birth) are given great importance by Jary people. Mothers express this connection when they argue that giving birth is an act that can only be done by each woman 'alone with God'. The idea that someone helps a mother-to-be and baby at child-birth is strongly rejected. This means that, independently of any real assistance by other women at the act of delivery, mothers see the mother-child relationship as the only effective one at the act of giving birth.¹³

In the post-partum period this idea about the mother and the new-born baby being 'mixed bodies' is further stressed. The mother is taken away from her former network of relationships in a process that implies a notion of seclusion. This process is known locally as *resguardo* and lasts about one month. Mothers are considered to be incapable of taking care of their other children and of house management during this period. It is this incapacity that justifies the fact that she should not do the washing, gather firewood, cook at the fireplace outside the house, or bathe her other children in the stream, which means that she becomes temporarily the mother of only one child who is the new-born baby. As fathers are not supposed to take on household tasks and their jobs usually stop them from doing so anyway, this means that mothers need assistance from other women as temporary substitutes. As a result of the post-marital virilocal tendency mentioned earlier, the woman who assists a

mother in this postpartum period is usually her mother-in-law, whose house is located in the same compound. This assistance involves feeding and bathing her older children, dressing them and washing their clothes, cooking, and, at other times, simply lighting the household fire. From a child's point of view they become 'mother-like' because these substitutions are repeated throughout childhood on a regular basis. They occur not only in the post-partum period, but also on many different occasions, such as when a mother needs to go to town or to work for a day, or when she is sick and does not have an older child to take care of the house. This means that although 'original mothers' do create a strong link with their children through the act of giving birth and the exclusiveness of feeding the new-born, after the first months or year of its existence a child is also attached in a particular way to certain women from the compound who temporarily become substitutes for their mother. From a child's point of view they become 'mother-like'.

These ideas of substitution of women as mothers must be understood in the wider context of gender ideas. As I have argued elsewhere, gender notions divide female agency into two categories (cf. Viegas 2000*a*). These categories can be qualified as being either 'wife-like' or 'mother-like'.¹⁴ Being 'wife-like' is being a 'runaway' woman. Divorces inform these ideas. It is said that when a marriage breaks down, it is the wife and not the husband who goes away and leaves the children behind to be cared for by their father and his female relatives. Being 'mother-like' is being fixed to one's home and compound, with daily life restricted to activities related to taking care of one's house and children. Grandmothers from the founding house in the compound end up playing a central role as these mother-like types in the dwelling arrangements. I call them 'focal mothers' (cf. Viegas 2000*a*). Focal mothers may occasionally be seen lighting a son's household fire or feeding grandchildren who live in their compound. When a son divorces, these focal mothers tend to give him support and even take one of his children home and make it a raised child.

In short, being fed, washed, and carried about by the mother is part of the way in which children become beings-in-the-world. They are attached by mixed-body links to the woman who gives birth to them and then by exclusive relations of feeding that can last for months. But as time passes, this exclusiveness becomes weaker, and temporary substitutions for one's mother by the focal mother in the compound make both children and their care-givers constantly aware of the importance of providing care on a daily basis as a way of forming kin links.

Being fed and becoming a raised child

It is important to stress that, although parental roles can be substituted for temporarily, they are not supposed to be shared between women from different houses in a compound. At any given moment of its life, a child belongs to one single house and one single mother, even though the child may call its grandmother 'mother', thus recognizing that she is mother-like. Leaving the mother's arms and joining siblings who live in the same house, as well as peers who live in the same compound, carries further the process of growing up. Children living in the same compound can be seen going back and forth along the paths that connect each house. They play together and become associates, but the house to which they belong is the one in which they have a mother who feeds them. It is in this subjective field of rela-

tionships within the compound that the decision about who eats in which house is of central importance.

A mother is someone who cooks for the inhabitants of her house in order to please and attract them to her (*agradar*), thereby arousing feelings of fondness. As a result, feeding is not only seen as a way of providing nourishment, but also as a way of nurturing. Cooking involves several tasks including fetching water from the river, so that the house ‘won’t dry up’ (*para a casa não ficar seca*), gathering firewood for the fire, and keeping the house clean. These acts are part of the intersubjective relationships of becoming kin, independently of being *filho legítimo* or *filho de criação* (original child or raised child). However, in order to become a raised child, a child must be taken into the home and fed by the woman to whom she or he will belong.¹⁵

In one of the compounds in Jary I witnessed a male baby who was only around 4 months old and still suckling become the raised child of his father’s mother, who was in the position of what I described as the focal mother. This baby’s *mãe legítima* went away as her marriage broke down and she left three children with her husband. I learned about this situation ten days after the departure of the *mãe legítima*. The baby’s father’s mother had taken him into her home in order to take care of him. Now, she was bottle-feeding him, rocking him in his hammock to get him to sleep, and holding him in her arms whenever he awoke. As a mother she maintained that the baby never missed or felt the need for his *mãe legítima* or suckling at her breasts. She argued that she was taking care of him properly and he was happy. She also assured me that the baby had not cried since his *mãe legítima* had gone away and that he was always smiling at everyone around him.

This mother-to-be statement should not be understood as an egotistical account of her grandson’s feelings. She was just rephrasing the idea that through repeated enactment of caring and feeding she would become a mother. She knows that this is not an easy task because, as the ideas about giving birth and the post-partum period make clear, mother-child links are strong during the first period of a baby’s existence. In fact, when a marriage breaks down people expect children to become attached to their ‘mother-like’, but transforming that attachment into motherhood is considered neither easy nor self-evident.

When a mother goes away as a result of divorce, fathers often point out how quickly their children forget their mother. They do this in order to erase the memory of former mother relationships and to emphasize the power of the daily responsibility of feeding and caring in the making of kinship. This does not mean that erasing a link between a *mãe legítima* and her *filho legítimo* is thought of as a genuine possibility. People know that children will always talk about their *pais legítimos* (original parents). Nevertheless, affective memory will end up choosing only one mother and father and it is recognized that this choice depends mostly on the caring relationships sustained in daily acts of feeding. Moreover, *filhos legítimos* and *filhos de criação* who are cared for in the same household and by the same mother also consider themselves linked as siblings through these acts of caring.

The implications of being taken into a home and cared for through feeding and its relation to the daily life of both mother and child may be understood further by looking at other situations, described below.

I was living in a house where there was a focal mother, her husband, a 4-year-old boy and four girls with whom I shared a room. The oldest, an unmarried woman of 26 who still lives with her parents, is a *filha legítima* born to the couple. Hers is

an unusual story for a Caboclo-Indian girl in Jary. She is a teacher in Jary but is also attending a special secondary school for rural people in the nearby city of Ilhéus, where she stays for fifteen days each month.

The second girl with whom I shared the room is an 11-year-old girl, who is now (though this has not always been the case) considered the raised child of the couple who owns the house. She is their granddaughter (the original daughter of one of the couple's sons) and the niece of the teacher mentioned above. Her *mãe legítima* went away when her marriage broke down and her baby was only 40 days old and thus the girl became a raised child in the house. Although they are an original and a raised daughter of the couple's, they have the same domestic duties, such as fetching water from the river, gathering firewood, sweeping the patio, washing clothes and dishes, or helping the mother to prepare meals.

The other two young girls with whom I shared the room are also granddaughters of the couple, but they are not considered to be their raised children. This means that although they sleep in the house they never eat there, nor even have their early morning coffee there. They wake up, roll up their mats, and go straight to their mother's home – a house located 100 metres away in the same compound. They are using their grandmother's house to sleep in because of lack of space in their mother's house. Although in their teens during my time there, they would never help in any task related to cooking in the grandmother's house.

The contrast between the obligations of the three young girls, all of whom are granddaughters of the same couple, with regard to food preparation and eating, further highlights the strong relationship between feeding and the process of becoming a daughter. Whilst the only granddaughter who is a raised child (the 11-year-old girl) is involved in domestic tasks and eats every day in the house, the other two granddaughters of the same age clearly avoid eating there. This is because young girls eat and help in their own mother's house and in no other.

Eating with your favourite mother: the making and unmaking of social relationships

In the larger South Amerindian context, such as amongst the Piro (Gow 1991: 158), the Cashinahua (McCallum 1991: 416) or the Kalapalo (Basso 1973), where the acts of mutual caring and pleasing of one person by another are seen as creating kinship, the relationship between feeding and belonging is also significant. With reference to the Kalapalo, Ellen Basso makes a significant point in relation to the connection between feeding and pleasing a child:

A parent is expected to be both nurturer and teacher to his children. The most important task of the parents, especially the mother, during the early years (that is, before puberty seclusion) is to provide food for their offspring. As a child grows it is particularly important that it be fed whenever it asks for something to eat, not only to keep it strong but to prevent it from becoming dissatisfied with its parents. The *Kalapalo* believe a child capable of suicidal revenge after it has been denied food. Children who are rejected in this way are said to wander off into the forest, thereby attracting jaguars that devour them (Basso 1973: 82, also quoted in Gow 1991: 161).

The basis of the intersubjective links created by feeding practices is clearly demonstrated in the Kalapalo case, leading to the idea that a parent must nurture a child

in order to prevent it from becoming dissatisfied. Among the Caboclo-Indians of Jary, what parents fear if they stop feeding their children is not suicidal revenge, but the unmaking or reversibility of parent-child links and, particularly, of the mother-child link. Feeding is seen not only as a way of sharing but as a practice and experience which forms kinship only through regular daily re-enactment. This means eating systematically in one particular house rather than another.

The daily practice of another raised child, the 4-year-old boy mentioned above who slept in the room next to mine, is particularly meaningful with respect not only to the making but also to the unmaking of links through being fed and cared for or not. He is a raised child of his grandmother (the focal mother of the compound), so he calls himself her son. His situation is not very common because, unlike the cases described above, his original parents – the *mãe legítima*, as well as the *pai legítimo* – and his siblings live in a house in the same compound in a building located just 50 metres from the raised mother's house where he belongs and where he now sleeps and eats. As a result, each morning, this boy runs along the paths that link his raised mother's house to his 'original mother's house', after asking for his mother's and grandfather's blessings. In his 'original mother's house' he gets together with his siblings and talks and plays with them. However, he invariably comes back after a while and joins his mother for breakfast. He is always dressed and washed by his mother and rarely meets up with his brother and sisters at bath-time. He eats on a regular basis at the house where he belongs, where he is fed by his raised mother.

The boy's relatives and the boy himself say that the current situation is the result of the boy's personal choice. I was told that his father's mother took him as *filho de criação* because 'he chose her'. When he made this decision he was only 2 years old, but he has not gone back on his choice.

Let us consider the idea that children choose their own parents carefully. As a result of living in the same compound as both his *mãe legítima* and his *mãe de criação*, this boy is able to move between their houses. I have described him going to his 'original mother's house' early in the morning and coming back to his mother's house for breakfast. And it was on one of these occasions that I gained a clearer insight into how the choice was made of which house and mother to belong to. One morning he brought a large pan filled with maize from his 'original mother's house' and approached the house of his mother, bursting with happiness because he was bringing 'Maize for our house, for us. It is for Mamãe (Mama) and you', he told me. This was an important statement about his choice: he was saying that the house where he belongs is the one where he shares food. However, this choice would not have had much meaning if it had been an unusual case, not integrated into the daily choice of the place where he is fed. As he spends a great deal of time playing with his siblings at his original mother's house, he sometimes fails to come back for lunch at his mother's house, although she always prepares food for him. But, unlike other occasions when he is punished for not coming home for lunch, he is never scolded when he has eaten at his 'original mother's house'. His mother tells others that she feels hurt and that his original mother is giving him food in order to attract and 'please him' (*agradar*).

In short, by following the general principle that a child eats at the house of its mother, whenever the boy happens to eat at his 'original mother's house', it is feared that the latter is attempting to attract the child, making him go back on the choice he made, by feeding him regularly. This situation makes the meaning of choice in this

context clear. First, it shows that choosing one's mother is a way of emphasizing the possibility of unmaking parent-child links. With this idea in mind, people are always aware of the fact that re-enactment in daily life is essential to the maintenance of sociality. The second significant idea about choice is that eating with one's favourite mother cannot be confused with or restricted to an act of volition solely dependent upon the following of one's rational free will. The question of affect is here important, for as the case of the young boy makes particularly clear, choice depends on the inter-subjective relationships between adults and children based on pleasing and attraction, an idea expressed through the local notion of *agradar*. In other words, affect, or pleasing and attraction, feed into specific acts of volition. Choice is part of the process by which children make their own distinctive meaning of the world.

From an adult point of view, relations towards their own parents are not chosen but selected in affective memory. Adults who early in their lives had been taken to become raised children state clearly that the situation had never displeased them. They maintain that they belong to the woman who cared for or raised them, and it is to her that they want their children to grow attached. Although they recognize who their *pais legítimos* are, it is those who have cared for a person for a longer period of their childhood that are considered mother and father. It is in this sense that kinship is constituted as memory of being related through caring and feeding, along the lines developed in large part by Peter Gow and within other South Amerindian contexts (cf. Gow 1991: 164, 167; see also McCallum 1999; 2001: 7). After a child marries and becomes an adult, he or she will keep in touch with his or her parents, visiting them regularly and even joining them for a meal when they live far away from each other. Although these visits are not experienced as ways of making kin links, what the description of children's experience of kinship makes us realize is that kin ties are still lived by the same adults as revocable in their own experience as care-givers. It is when they experience the processes by which their own children become beings-in-the world that they become aware and are reminded of the fact that parent-child links can be unmade. This is what happened to the *mãe legítima* and *mãe de criação* of the young boy mentioned above, each trying to attract him by means of everyday caring relationships. The boy both participates in and engages adults in his own process of becoming (cf. Toren 1999a: 267; 1999b: 8).

The case of the 11-year-old girl mentioned above allows us to take this idea even further to show how mother-child links can stop, change, or even revert, and how this becomes noticeable in both children and adults as care-givers. I mentioned that this girl has been raised in the same house since she was only 40 days old and still suckling. But I did not specify who had been her raising mother when she was a baby. Although we became friends and lived together for almost a year, no one had told me that when this young girl was a baby her raising mother was not her grandmother but was, in fact, her aunt (the teacher mentioned above). It was not until one of my subsequent trips to Jary, and then only as a result of my repeated enquiries (I was already writing this article and felt I needed the detailed life story of this young girl) that her aunt told me the full story about the time when her niece was really her own raising child. Chatting to me while she was washing clothes in the stream, she filled me in on the details. It transpired that when her brother's wife left, she had offered to take care of her brother's child. Through caring for her on a daily basis, she became her niece's mother. She told me about the time when she and this young girl were considered mother and daughter by the people in Jary.

Finally, she explained how the situation had changed. It all happened because she had moved temporarily to the city when the child was 6 years old. She found herself in a situation where she could no longer take care of her child on a daily basis. This is why they changed their relationship back from mother-daughter to aunt-niece. From this time onwards, the girl stopped calling her by the term 'mother' and now relates to her as to an aunt. On a day-to-day basis, the 11-year-old girl chose the intimacy of bedroom conversations with her two cousins temporarily living in the same house, and it was to them and not her aunt that she would talk about her boyfriends and love life. She and her aunt shared a room as well as walks with other women and bathing in the river, but she was also scolded by her on a number of occasions for not helping out enough in the house. This fact, clearly connected to their difference in age and to the fact that the aunt was not a constant presence at home, indicates how, when the mother-child link ended, they reverted to the original link that had existed before as a matter of course. It is interesting to note that they did not forge sisterly ties, even though this usually happens when two women are raised in the same home.

From the moment when her aunt left home temporarily, it was her grandmother who fed her every day, took care that she had clean clothes to put on after her bath, and was always waiting for her when she returned from school. This explains how, as time went by, the little girl 'chose' her grandmother (the woman who has always lived in the house and was also taking daily care of her) to be her own mother.

During my fieldwork, the day-to-day closeness between the grandmother (who was now the mother) and the 11-year-old girl incorporated a kind of mutual caring customary to mother-child relationships in a later phase of childhood. Although certain household tasks – such as fetching water from the river – are part of the daily life of any female child's life from the age of 3, from the age of 8 her relationship with her mother grew increasingly one of mutual care, washing clothes, helping prepare meals, sweeping the crumbled clay from the doorway, and even helping the father process manioc flour. This last task was a regular one and it was the mother who frequently required her 11-year-old daughter to make certain sacrifices such as getting up in the middle of the night or alternatively remaining in the *Casa de Farinha* (where the flour is processed) until after dark. But these sacrifices were part of the daily sharing of mutual care and constructed her memory of lived experiences of kin ties.

This case reveals even more clearly the power of caring for, attraction, and pleasing in the formation of subjective relations of kinship, showing how they are made and unmade when women, men, and children become connected through a specific time-frame of daily interaction, making kinship revocable and reversible.

Conclusion: the sociality of becoming a being-in-the-world

In a recent volume on sociality in the Amazonian context, Overing and Passes (2000) argue that great importance is placed on 'conviviality' in the Amazon, which implies, amongst other things, an ethical intent to base everyday social life on both affection and reason. The connection between time and the achievement of this kind of sociality is also asserted in this volume, where it is argued that sociality 'is

never a given, or a gift: it must be daily and precariously achieved through the careful actions of reasoning, practising human beings' (Overing & Passes 2000: 12). Furthermore, Overing and Passes also state that 'As the peoples of Amazonia recognise, these matters of affect require constant work, vigilance, and even suffering to maintain' (Overing & Passes 2000: 24; cf. Overing 1991: 30).

The Caboclo-Indians of Jary would probably never think of comparing their everyday life to the Indians in the Amazon, whom they think of as *índios legítimos* (real Indians) – living in the forest and apart from non-Indian people. There is no doubt, however, that for the Caboclo-Indians the achievement of intimate and enduring social relationships, such as the mother-child link, is never taken for granted (it is 'never a given or a gift'). It depends on vigilant daily re-enactment of caring and feeding. It is in this wider sense of comparability that the sociality of the Jary Caboclo-Indians described in this article can contribute to the wider understanding of Amerindian socialities. To this end, I conclude with a systematization of three statements that result from the way in which time, as a constitutive dimension of kinship, informs ideas on sociality. I would like to call this the 'sociality of becoming a being-in-the-world'.

The first statement is that 'sociality is something one must strive for', through feeding and caring. This becomes clear when a woman takes a 4-month-old baby into her home to care for it. She knows that she must please the baby, because she recognizes that the former physical bond between the baby and its *mãe legítima* is strong and important, as the notions on birth make clear. However, she also believes that the baby may overcome that link if she persists in feeding and caring for it, making it her child 'bit by bit' (as in the lines taken from the Tarkovskij film), which means that their kin link needs to be forged over a long period of time. In this sense, persistence also becomes a key quality of social life.

The second statement, which overlaps the first, is that 'becoming a being-in-the-world is to become aware that social relationships may reverse'. This does not mean that they may be literally unmade back to a zero point. But it means that there is a strong emphasis on the fact that social relations are not made once and for all. They can actually revert when the daily care of a child's needs stops. Among other things, this indicates the enormous significance of daily life relationships to the construction of sociality among the Caboclo-Indians in Jary and it stresses the revocable and conditional nature of kin ties.

A third and last statement is that 'sociality is accomplished through attraction'. This is what the title of this article – 'Eating with your favourite mothers' – is intended to signify. The ethnography presented here shows that Caboclo-Indian children in Jary might in fact find themselves in a position of choosing their own mother. But at the same time, it is also clear that choice is part of a matrix of social relationships which can only be accomplished by the forging of intersubjective relationships of attraction over time.

NOTES

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¹ For a critique of the concept of socialization and of 'society' as an abstraction removed from lived experience, see Overing and Passes (2000: 8), Overing and Rapport (2000: 340), Strathern (1988: 3; 1996: 66), and Toren (1996: 74-5).

² Bloch (1973) discusses this idea using a contrast between two different categories of kin among the Merina: the 'real' and the 'artificial'. I omit those categories because they would raise questions beyond the scope of this article such as the relation between permanence or 'long-term relationships' and authenticity. For discussion of this point, see Bodenhorn (2000: 141-3).

³ It should be further noted that these people do not live in an indigenous reservation area. For a further development of this historical context, see Viegas (2000b; forthcoming).

⁴ Continuous fieldwork in the region of Olivença was from August 1997 to August 1998. This was supplemented by subsequent visits in September 1999 and April 2000. Although of short duration, these visits turned out to be very important in collecting the empirical data presented here. During fieldwork I was based alternately in a family house in one of the compounds in Jary, and in an apartment in the nearby town of Olivença.

⁵ The term *caboclo* may have been first coined by the Jesuit missionaries to describe Amerindians whom they regarded as civilized, meaning specifically those who had converted to Christianity (cf. Machado 1977). Nowadays, *caboclo* is a common term all over Brazil and has many different meanings. In the northeast region of Brazil, it is commonly used to refer to mixed-blood people of Indian descent. Usually the term is used to distinguish Indians who live separately from non-indigenous people from those (the *caboclo*) who live amongst them. *Caboclo* societies in the Amazon context are different in sociological and historical terms. For an overview of that social context and its debate in social sciences, see Harris (1998).

⁶ I have discussed elsewhere the meaning of *aldeias* and notions of belonging to territory in the contemporary regional context of the south Bahia Indians (Viegas 2000b).

⁷ Significant problems arise in the translation of the phrase *filho de criação* as 'adoptive children', as Mark Harris (2000) makes clear in his recent ethnography of the riverine people in the Parus, Amazon. He argues that *filho de criação* 'translates badly as "adopted child"' and calls for a better understanding of ideas about parenting involved in the notion of *filhos de criação* (Harris 2000: 91, 96).

⁸ In Jary, the meaning of the expression *filho legítimo* (literally 'legitimate child') has no connection to its historic meaning: a child who is born to parents who are legally married to each other. The Portuguese word *legítimo* has come to assume a very different meaning in colloquial Brazilian. In its local Jary usage, it has lost its original legal reference to the registered marriage of the parents and has acquired a meaning akin to 'original', 'formal', 'pragmatic'. Thus, in this use of the expression *filho legítimo*, no reference is being made to the marriage of the parents, but to the fact that this is the 'original', 'formal', or 'pragmatic' form of filiation. I have never come across any direct connection between being a *filho legítimo* and the notion of blood ties, as is the case for the Amazon riverine people of Parus (Harris 2000: 89). Thus, in the remainder of this article I have chosen to translate it as 'original child'.

⁹ This situation of 'giving a child to raise' can then be described through Esther Goody's concept of 'crisis fostering' (cf. Goody 1982: 3). Because children are often fostered by local farmers, or their relatives, it regularly takes the form of what she calls 'service fostering' (1982: 256).

¹⁰ I use the meaning of 'adoption' suggested by Esther Goody (1982). As she explicitly asserts, what is at issue in adoption situations is the transference of 'total parenthood' (1982: 31) or 'a whole child' (1982: 33) as a 'jural' person, from their natural parents to another couple. As a comparative device, the notion of adoption should only be used in this specific and restricted sense. On problems concerning the use of the term 'adoption' as a comparative device, see also Pina-Cabral (forthcoming).

¹¹ For details on abandonment of houses as a result of death, see Viegas (forthcoming). For a comparative perspective on this idea in a Tupi context, see Viveiros de Castro (1992: 51).

¹² The association between chickens and the spreading of things informs several situations in local life. For instance, when people suffer a wound, they avoid eating chicken because it is believed that

its tendency to scatter things would function mimetically inside the body and, as a result, it would make the wound spread, instead of healing by diminishing and vanishing.

¹³Peter Gow, on the other hand, reports a comparable idea among the Piro, who conceive the foetus as the agent of its own birth (1997: 47).

¹⁴The two ideas of female agency contained in the expressions 'wife-like' and 'mother-like' are clearly stated in social practice, but they are not exegetically named. As a result, they must be understood here as heuristic devices.

¹⁵The link between a home and food is present in other situations, of which I name two. The first is that the symbol which people show when they recall a place where they once had a house-building is a fruit tree with several nutritional associations. The second is when people talk of becoming independent by inhabiting a separate building (a very common comment by old people who live with their daughter or son). This idea of the independence of living in a house is often described as having a *minha comidinha* (one's own food). For a similar notion in the Malay context, see Carsten (1997).

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Manger avec votre mère préférée: le temps et la socialité dans une communauté amérindienne du Brésil

Resumé

Cet article est basé sur un rapport ethnographique des relations entre parents et enfants dans une communauté Caboclo-Indienne au sud de Bahia au Brésil. Élever un enfant en lui donnant soins et nourriture est valorisé à tel point que la mère d'un enfant peut bien être la femme que l'enfant a choisi pour mère. Un tel choix n'est pas interprété comme acte de libre arbitre, mais comme un cadre temporel au sens où se choisir une mère est une façon de faire ressortir la possibilité de dénouer ou d'annuler les relations entre parents et enfants. L'article suggère une 'socialité du devenir un être-dans-le-monde' comme contre-proposition tant à la notion de socialisation qu'à la relation théorique entre les rapports de parenté et la société.