



A Ritual Aesthetics of Loss and Memory among the Boe (Bororo)

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This thesis is submitted for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Social Anthropology

June 2025

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for any degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

The Boe people of Central Brazil, widely known in the ethnographic record as Bororo, live today in small forested reserves amidst a vast landscape of cattle farms and soya plantations. Despite dramatic transformations in their physical and human surroundings, the Boe continue to practise intricate and extended mortuary ritual cycles. Alongside mourning deceased kin, these funerals evoke another perceived loss: the decline of ritual life itself, also equated with ‘culture’ as such. This thesis examines how Boe ritual practice shapes personal experiences of time, memory, and affect, while also turning those experiences into a reflexive awareness of how people collectively situate themselves in time. I document how the created sense of collective loss is not a matter of longing for abandoned practices or forgotten tradition, but is internally generated in rituals that recursively frame themselves as diminished echoes of a once-vibrant past.

This study thus approaches the Boe mortuary cycle as a technology of memory, tracing how senses of loss, nostalgia, compassion, and broader experiences of time are both evoked and shaped through its aesthetic forms. While such experiences are intimately tied to the making and remaking of a particular form of kinship with the dead as figures of pastness, they also generate far-reaching effects among the living. I trace how these affective states are not merely passive or melancholic, but generatively transform persons and relationships, and ground reflexive reassessments of how one ought to live as Boe today. Loss and nostalgia are shown not to prompt a retreat from the present, but to actively shape it and open pathways to possible futures — revealing a subtle entanglement between mourning and futurity. Boe mortuary ceremonies are therefore woven into the fabric of contemporary life, being driving forces of how people live, grieve, and relate in the present.

I unfold this argument across five chapters. Chapter One situates Boe mortuary ceremonies within the broader spatial, historical, and political context of Tadarimana village, where my fieldwork was carried out. Chapter Two introduces a key Boe ritual pairing of the affects of compassion and longing, by examining the feeding relationship between the lead mourner (known as ‘mother of souls’) and the deceased’s soul.

Chapter Three carries this analysis outward into a wider relational aesthetics between performers and audience at large, construed as the living and the dead. Overall, this aesthetics defines how everyone ought to relate to and remember the dead. Chapter Four explores the pervasive sense of loss evoked by Boe ritual, focusing on ritual singing and wailing as these are practiced and reflected upon in the context of the emergence of a new generation of male ritual specialists. The final chapter considers how the adoption of the Christian Heaven in Boe eschatology, traced through ritual practice, history, cosmology, and mythology, expresses a specific form of historicity.

In Memoriam

Moacir Coguiepa

Aije Kurireu

Acknowledgements

Countless encounters leave their imprint on any ethnographic work, but the most significant are shaped by the trust, words, and worlds of one's interlocutors. I am deeply grateful to Majur Traitowu, Jurema Adugo Oro, Raimundo Itogoga, Marcelo Coguiépa, Erotildes Oredo, Bosco Marido Kurireu, Maria Borobó, Diana Kiga, Antônio Jukuriakireu, Cícero Kudoropa, Ismael Atugoreu, and all the Boe people of Tadarimana and Córrego Grande villages. I am also grateful to Sônia Bocardt and Mario Bordignon for their support throughout my fieldwork, and to André Drago and Sylvia Caiuby Novaes, whose guidance first led me to the Boe.

The drafts of this thesis' chapters benefited from the careful reading of many insightful anthropologists — any remaining imprecisions and inconsistencies are, of course, my sole responsibility. I am therefore grateful to Aparecida Vilaça, Alexandrine Royer, Françoise Barbira-Freedman, Carlos Fausto, Christie van Tinteren, Clara Fortes Brandão, Daniel Kraus-Vollert, Éléonore Kissel, Emmanuel De Vienne, Gal Kramarski, Joel Robbins, Leandro Varison, Luiz Costa, Luiz Paulo Bittencourt, Marilyn Strathern, Maria Bonomo, Natalia Buitron, Niklas Hartmann, Olivier Allard, Rachel Everett-Fry, Rosanna Dent, Sian Lazar, Sylvia Caiuby Novaes, Virginia Amaral, Angela Giattino, Sasha Flatau, and Tomás Tancredi. I am also thankful to all those who offered valuable comments on versions of this work presented at the writing-up seminars of the Department of Social Anthropology in Cambridge, at the Laboratory for the Anthropology of Ritual, Art, and Memory (LARMe) at the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, and at the Seminar of the EREA (Teaching and Research in Amerindian Ethnology) at the University of Paris Nanterre.

I am especially grateful for the always thoughtful guidance of my supervisor, Rupert Stasch. His ability to render the most sophisticated ideas seem clear and approachable taught me the invaluable lesson that any anthropological work is, ultimately, a form of communication — a lesson I hope will guide my work for many years to come.

I am grateful to the Gates Cambridge Trust for making my PhD training in Cambridge possible, as well as to the William Wyse Fund and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences Fieldwork Fund for their generous support of my fieldwork.

A special thanks to all my friends in Cambridge, who helped make this city a home.

My deepest thanks go to my parents, Aline Kelmer and Lauro Born, for their constant love and support, and to my wife, Maria Luisa Lucas, who helped shape this work — during and after fieldwork — through her tender, unwavering support, her brilliant insights, and her clear-sighted insistence on confronting the imbalances and inequalities that inevitably underlie the kind of research we do.

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Note on Language Conventions

Throughout this thesis, I refer to the Boe language as Bororo. The Bororoan language family, now represented solely by Bororo, has been shown to be an isolate within Indigenous lowland South America, unrelated to the region's major macro-families (Nikulin 2020). Words in Bororo appear in this thesis in italics, while Portuguese words are underlined>. The orthographic conventions adopted for Bororo require only brief clarification. The vowels *e* and *o* are consistently open, corresponding to /ɛ/ (as in 'bed') and /ɔ/ (as in 'more'), respectively, even when they occur in sequence — as in *boe* ['bɔɛ]. I use *c* to represent the affricate /tʃ/ (as in '**ch**air'), thereby simplifying the more common transcription *č*. All Bororo words are stressed on the penultimate syllable. For a detailed phonological description, I refer the reader to Crowell (1979) and Nonato (2008).

Introduction — Mourning Culture

“*We are orphans*,” I often heard my interlocutors say to one another. In 2023, the two most elderly and respected ritual chiefs among the Boe were frail and in declining health. As they stepped back from overseeing ritual activities, a pervasive sense of early grief took hold. These elders had long presided over the mortuary ceremonies that sustain Boe ritual life, and their knowledge was seen as the very condition through which mourning could be collectively expressed and elaborated. Their own impending demise, therefore, took on an amplified significance: it was experienced as the fading of ‘culture’ itself.

The motto — *we are orphans* — echoed through collective gatherings, especially among an emerging generation of ritual leaders who suddenly found themselves tasked with replacing their ailing masters. As elsewhere in Indigenous lowland South America, orphanhood, in a general sense of helplessness and impoverished kinship, is not merely a passive state but an invitation for compassionate action. The motto was, therefore, an exhortation. Though they felt ill-suited to replace those regarded as the ultimate bearers of legitimate knowledge, a generation of ‘orphaned leaders’ emerged, sparking a learning boom.

These circumstances reflect the specific historical moment in which my fieldwork unfolded, while also pointing to fundamental features of time, memory, and affect in Boe ritual life. Written at the intersection of a pervasive sense of crisis and the enduring ritual forms through which the Boe address loss and grief, this thesis explores how mortuary ceremonies reshape time and memory through the prism of mourning. In tracing these ritual processes, I show how persons and relationships are transformed, and how present life is reflexively reimagined between pasts and futures that are both envisioned and enacted.

I first arrived in Tadarimana in July 2022, one of the five Indigenous Reserves where the Boe people now live in southern Mato Grosso. It became the primary site of my research, and a funeral was already underway upon my arrival. As I already knew at the time from available ethnographic literature, Boe funerals are the centre of gravity of their ritual life, and a full mortuary cycle involves an elaborate series of ceremonies

that could extend for months. The resilience of these practices is striking: the Boe are the only Central Brazilian people who still perform secondary burial. Yet, life in Boe territories is far from any romanticised image of a ‘pristine’ Amazonian people. With one of the longest histories of conflict and alliance with non-Indigenous settlers in Central Brazil — dating back to the 1600s — the Boe saw their once vast territory reduced to a handful of small, state-demarcated reserves. Tadarimana, an enclave nestled between Mato Grosso’s third-largest city and the surrounding cattle farms, soy, and maize plantations, appears from above as a sharply defined dark-green patch. On its western edge, it meets a similarly sized light-grey expanse — the urban footprint of Rondonópolis. The village ceremonial plaza, where one of South America’s most elaborate ritual cycles unfolds, lies less than an hour’s drive from the heart of one of Brazil’s busiest agribusiness capitals.

Less than a month after my arrival, another death occurred in Tadarimana, and two bodies now lay side by side in provisional graves in the village’s central plaza. With the consent of the mourning families and ritual specialists, I closely followed the ceremonial activities of this double funeral. Initially, I sought to be as unobtrusive as possible, refraining from carrying a camera or recorder. However, I soon realised that documenting the rituals was precisely what was expected of me. Some men were already recording sessions of ritual singing on their phones to later memorise the songs. For these aspiring singers, this effort could carry a strong sense of shame, as they had to approach older masters and sometimes ask for permission to place their phones before them. I was thus positioned as a convenient mediator in the production and circulation of these recordings. Moreover, phones have short lifespans among the Boe, whereas non-indigenous recordings are immediately associated with an extraordinary durability. In this manner, my research soon became intertwined with the aspirations and concerns of a new generation of ritual singers.

Singing is the ultimate display of male knowledge and being a singer is synonymous with being a chief — a *boe eimijera*, literally, ‘Boe/people’s leader’. Even a brief stay among the Boe during times of mourning reveals the centrality of singing in ritual life: virtually every ceremony begins with a sung prelude, and so the silence of the mourning village is frequently cut by the sharp hiss of the singers’ rattles. A task reserved for a few experienced elders, leading singing sessions is often regarded by

younger men as an extraordinary display of skill and knowledge that lies beyond their reach. The younger generation of singers — mostly men in their forties, elders in the making — had to resort to new technologies to memorise the vast repertoire: for them, a notebook and a phone became as indispensable as a pair of rattles.

In these circumstances, my research, utilising similar technologies, was captured by this generation's sense of urgency before the decline of Aije Kurireu and Raimundo Itogoga, their older masters. As the months passed and their health deteriorated, other deaths followed, setting off an almost uninterrupted sequence of mortuary rituals, something Tadarimana had not witnessed in a long time. Meanwhile, the closer I grew to the new generation of singers, the more I became entangled in the challenges they faced. This happened despite my initial intention to keep my research on mortuary ceremonies separate from their struggles of succession: their concerns about cultural loss echoed past ethnographers' claims that Boe culture was on the verge of vanishing — a narrative I was determined not to replicate.

"The old ways of life are disappearing", remarked Z. Levak (1971: 3) based on his fieldwork among the Boe of Pobojaru in the 1960s. The ethnographic literature on the Boe is saturated with what Sahlins (1997) termed a "sentimental pessimism" about the impending disappearance of their culture (for a summary, see Caiuby Novaes 1993). Having been trained at a time when such views were regarded as remnants of an era when anthropology conceived of cultures as atomistic monads identical to themselves, I initially found their echoes in my interlocutors' own nostalgic pessimism unsettling. In my early months in the field, I too hastily dismissed it as a possible by-product of the politics of multiculturalism, failing to recognise its deeper entanglement with Boe ritual life. As a result, I treated my involvement with questions of knowledge transmission as peripheral — simply the background to my attempt to understand mortuary ritual — assuming, mistakenly, that the two could be kept apart.

At first, I thought that to understand the ceremonies I had to dive into the content of the songs. With this in mind, I hired Bosco Marido Kurireu, a singer in the making, to meet me every morning at the village school, where we worked on transcriptions and took the first steps in translating the songs. Later, he would transfer our work into his notebook, for his own use. Together, we often interviewed his grandfather, the respected singer-chief Aije Kurireu, about the cryptic metaphors

woven into the songs. I also spent a significant time living in Apido Paru, the satellite village where resides Raimundo Itogoga, another elderly singer-chief. There I interviewed him at length about the intricate meanings and mythic foundations of verses and names in songs. My expectations, however, were constantly frustrated. Interpretations diverged radically between the two masters; my translation efforts yielded only small, unconnected fragments within a vast repertoire; and, most importantly, none of it seemed to bring me closer to understanding why those extremely long mortuary cycles were so central to contemporary Boe life.

For most younger singers, understanding the esoteric aspects of a song's content was of little importance. Many had little knowledge of such nuances and appeared more focused on accurately reproducing the performance, even when the words they sang eluded them. I initially thought this simply stemmed from their sense of urgency and difficulty in the face of the decline of Aije and Raimundo — something I had unthinkingly dismissed as circumstantial. However, a seemingly minor detail in the singers' performances eventually caught my attention and ultimately shifted my outlook.

Soon after a singing session begins, it is common for tears to stream down the singer's face. As my interlocutors explained, singers' sorrow is not driven by the immediate loss commemorated in the funeral taking place, but rather by the memory of their deceased masters, those who once sang the same song in the same setting. While calling forth their presence, the performance simultaneously asserts their absence, eliciting grief. The older the singer, the deeper his sorrow is said to be, as his memories extend further into the past. From the moment I first heard this explanation, I recognised it as something fundamental. It expressed a specific entanglement of grief, memory, and time that lay at the core of why singing matters in the first place, contradicting my initial approach. As I would come to realise, the key to understanding singing lay less in the songs' content than in the time- and affect-laden relationships the act itself foregrounds.

Most Boe people claim to 'know nothing' about ritual matters, readily directing the ethnographer to the specialists. Yet, while the esoteric analyses offered by those considered the most knowledgeable sometimes provided valuable insights into the workings of ritual life, they alone could not fully address broader and more crucial

questions: why does this ritual cycle remain so vital to contemporary Boe life? What drives dozens of families from across Boe territories to travel great distances to witness and participate in ceremonies whose deeper meanings they are said to barely comprehend? And, finally, why does the new generation of singers feel compelled to keep singing?

In the singers' sorrow, I began to find the answers. The challenge of generational transition faced by my aspiring-singer interlocutors could not be separated from the act of singing itself. This act inherently makes palpable the passage of intergenerational time. In doing so, it elicits a sudden awareness of its irreversibility — one that, in turn, gives rise to grief. A ritual act thus brings its past iterations into the present, and with them come the ruptured ties to deceased masters and the image of the past embodied by them. This is not merely an effect of singing; it is also its cause and purpose. Men sing out of 'nostalgia' (*kiarigodu*) and 'compassion' (*maidodu, ogudu*) for their deceased or ailing masters. Yet, the idea of fully replacing them is inconceivable. Every performance is experienced as a faded echo of a past regarded as the source of true knowledge, thus casting the present as a time of decline. The orphaned state of the current generation was not merely circumstantial. All singers are orphans, for they sing because their masters can no longer do so.

This logic of memory and time extends well beyond singing. Recognising it profoundly reshaped my understanding of the other themes I had been pursuing in my fieldwork. I became attuned to my interlocutors' experience that every ritual act within a mortuary cycle contains echoes of its past iterations, effectively turning each funeral into a cascade of previous losses and transforming a particular family's grief into an image of all prior sorrow. In this process, time is drawn into the present through the prism of grief — not simply as something commemorated, but as a past experienced as irretrievably lost. The loss (actual or anticipated) of great singer-chiefs and knowledgeable women is especially significant: seen as embodiments of cultura itself, their passing converts mourning into nostalgia, for they personify *boeness* as a form of collective sociality. Consequently, in mourning these magnified people, one also mourns 'culture.'

This thesis is therefore an ethnography of the Boe mortuary ritual as a technology of time and memory. It explores how ritual, by elaborating time-saturated

relationships between the living and the dead, shapes personhood, transforms kinship relations, and serves as a reflexive device for the ongoing negotiation of how one should live together. Much like the call “we are orphans,” the nostalgic experience of time within the Boe ritual universe is here not as a state of passive or purely contemplative pessimism; rather, it functions as an active force in the shaping of present life.



Figure 1. Ismael Atugoreu, the leader of the ‘orphaned generation’, a few moments before performing in a ceremony. July 2023.

The ‘Bororo’ (and their ritual) in anthropology

Having endured rapid population decline and territorial reduction throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the contemporary Boe people now live in five small reserves in southern Mato Grosso, Brazil. Ecologically, this region is as a transition zone between the Cerrado, the Central Brazilian savannah, and the Pantanal, the world’s largest wetland. Today, the landscape is largely dominated by plantations and cattle farms, the expansion of which has been restricted only by the towering rock scarps carved by the erosion of the Central Brazilian Plateau. The Boe are widely recognised

in anthropological literature and in their own region as ‘Bororo’ — a term that refers to the ceremonial plaza at the centre of their traditionally circular village. Over time, the original historical misunderstanding was solidified in the term’s usage as an ethnonym. In the part of their territory where I conduct research, Boe people have long adopted the use of “Bororo” to refer to themselves when speaking Portuguese — often interchangeably with “Boe,” which simply means “people” or “humans.” I have opted to use Boe to refer to the people throughout this thesis, while referring to their language as Bororo.

By the mid-1980s, the Boe were among the most extensively studied Indigenous peoples in South America. Their prominence in Lévi-Strauss’ work (1979, 1992) further contributed to their recognition among a wider scholarly audience. The intricacy of their social organisation and the exceptional philosophical depth of their cosmology fostered such esoteric debates among ethnographers that Viveiros de Castro (1991) described “bororology”, not without irony, as “almost a subdiscipline of Americanism.” However, from the mid-1980s, anthropological focus shifted from Central Brazil to Amazonia, and a few or no new contributions to Boe studies based on long-term fieldwork were made until two unpublished theses completed in the 2010s (Drago 2018; Kremer 2014)¹.

If intricacies of onomastics and social organisation have been the most debated topics in the classic Boe literature, the centrality of their mortuary cycle in ritual life still made it an indispensable subject for ethnographers. Outline treatment of the topic by Steinen (1894) even found its way into early foundational works on death in the social sciences, such as Hertz’s (1905) famous essay. In the classic Boe literature, the mortuary ritual has largely been used to illustrate certain aspects of Boe social organisation, particularly intra- and inter-clan dynamics (Crocker 1967; Levak 1971; Viertler 1972), and cosmology (Crocker 1985). However, Caiuby Novaes (1986, 1994,

¹ Hartmann, in her 1967 dissertation on Boe ethnobotany remarks: “More than any other tribal group in Brazil, the Bororo of Mato Grosso have given rise to a bibliography comprising over a hundred works dedicated partially or entirely to their culture (...) covering a period of just over two hundred years” (Hartmann 1967). A simple list of references up to this date would span several pages. I direct the interested reader to my master’s dissertation (Kelmer 2021), where I present and explore the available literature in greater depth.

2006) and Viertler (1991) have produced insightful works either wholly or partially dedicated to the interpretation of the ritual cycle, and which directly aided my capacity to navigate the ceremonies in my fieldwork.

J. C. Crocker's *Vital Souls* (Crocker 1985), based on his fieldwork in the 1960s, remains the most influential ethnography on the Boe to date. The book examines Boe shamanism through a dialectic of being and becoming embodied by two distinct classes of beings: the *bope* — predatory spirits associated with death, fertility, and time — and the *aroe* — beautifully adorned doubles of humans, animals, and other named entities, who embody form, continuity, and space. While *Vital Souls* mostly centres on the *bope* dimension of Boe shamanism and cosmology, Crocker announced a second volume that would address the *aroe* and the mortuary cycle, but this second book was never published.

This thesis takes as its focus precisely those aspects of Boe ritual and cosmology that would have been the subject of Crocker's unpublished volume. Yet my approach diverges significantly from his. Rather than reconstructing a model of Boe philosophy, I concentrate on the experiential and pragmatic dimensions of ritual. While drawing on Crocker's valuable insights, my analysis departs from the kind of cosmological systematisation that he and his shaman interlocutors favoured. This difference, I believe, stems from my emphasis, throughout this thesis, on the dimensions of ritual shared by specialists and ordinary Boe alike.

The analytical approach of this thesis, which foregrounds time and memory as dimensions of Boe ritual performances, is largely absent from earlier ethnographic literature. Consequently, I do not engage with that literature on an explicit level — a task I have undertaken elsewhere, guided by different concerns (Kelmer 2021, 2024). But even though this thesis is not written as a contribution to 'bororology', like all other professional ethnographers who do or have done research in Boe villages, my work has constantly benefited from the exceptionally high-quality literature available. Although not explicitly positioned against previous works, my account inevitably carries the imprint of what I have learned from other ethnographers and their interlocutors.

Selecting the right magnifying glass for the description of a complex, months-long ritual cycle, and thus determining the optimal level of detail to convey, is a demanding task. It inevitably exposes a disquieting feature of ethnographic writing: at

every level of magnification, one encounters the same degree of complexity. This characteristic becomes all the more pronounced in ceremonies. Rituals, to borrow from Lévi-Strauss' (1981: 674), tend to exhibit a “maniacal urge to discover the smallest constituent units of lived experience by fragmentation and to multiply them by repetition.”

I have chosen to approach ritual through a synthetic lens. Rather than immersing deeply into the atmosphere of specific ceremonies, I provide frameworks for understanding the Boe mortuary cycle as a cohesive ritual endeavour. Ceremonies are thus analysed *in relation to one another* rather than through an in-depth examination of their internal features. This option, I must acknowledge, implies an effort that goes against my interlocutors' own concerns. The macro-structures of ritual life indeed hold little interest for them compared to its chromatism. It is the proliferation of micro-variations within and between ceremonies that drives Boe ritual imagination. This thesis thus contributes only very modestly to the documentation of Boe practices. My more significant effort in that regard has been the development of what I am calling the Roia Archive (*roia* meaning ‘songs’ in Bororo), an online audio database of ritual songs so far accessible only to the Boe. The archive has proven popular, and I intend to expand it to encompass other forms of immaterial knowledge in the future.

The next section presents a concise, chronological overview of the Boe mortuary cycle's progression. This will help the reader navigate the subsequent chapters, which are organised thematically rather than following the sequential unfolding of the ceremonies they examine.

The mortuary cycle: an overview

A complete Boe mortuary cycle can be performed for any deceased person, regardless of status, gender, or clan belonging. The ritual is set in motion on the day of death when a close female relative of the deceased — usually an older, experienced woman — cuts her hair short as a sign of mourning. From this moment on, she must lead other mourners as the ‘mother of the soul’ (*aroe uce* [sing.]). Her grief-driven act compels her immediate family (mostly women) to follow suit, triggering the ritual process. Once the family commits to mourning, the male singer-chiefs must create the necessary

conditions for the ceremonies to unfold. As the mourners withdraw into seclusion within a sealed house, the singer-chiefs take on the responsibility of overseeing all ritual proceedings.

Shortly after death, the body is brought to the large men's house, located at the centre of the traditional circular village, where it is prepared for provisional burial. The body is undressed, washed, and wrapped in woven-straw mats before being carried to the central plaza, west of the men's house. There, at its centre, it is buried in a provisional grave, approximately a metre deep. These preparations are carried out by two men selected to serve as 'the recent souls' (*aroe maiwuge*), alternatively known as 'their [the deceased's] others' (*uiadumage*). Besides handling the body throughout the ritual cycle, they will personify the deceased's soul in ceremonies. Ideally chosen from the clans of the deceased's father and spouse, they become living doubles of the dead person².

At this point, a brief introduction to Boe sociology is necessary. The traditional circular layout of a Boe village famously inscribes socio-cosmological orderings into space. The houses forming the periphery of the circle — encircling the inner plaza and the men's house — are divided into eight named and spatially defined sections. These are referred to in the ethnographic literature as *clans*, a term I retain in the absence of a concise alternative. A person belongs to a clan by virtue of being given a name-title drawn from that clan's exclusive repertoire. Since these names are ideally bestowed upon infants of both sexes by one of their mother's close clansmen, clan belonging tends to show a matrilineal profile.

A Boe clan is defined by its distinct repertoire of names, ornaments, songs, and ceremonies. Such ritual wealth originates from the form and behaviour of the clan's *iedagamage*, more-than-human 'name-givers' (translated into Portuguese as *tios*, 'uncles'), which include animals, plants, and landscape features that impart their *ro* ('way,' 'habit,' or 'culture') to the human members of the clan. The notion of 'clan' and the kind of language it suggests can be misleading here. A 'clan's wealth', as well as its

² In the past, as abundantly registered in the literature, a single *recent soul* carried out this role. However, in recent decades, it has been decided that the task must be shared by two men, as my interlocutors explain that contemporary Boe men are no longer equipped to endure it alone.

more-than-human ‘totems’, are not understood by the Boe as emblems tied to a preexisting sociopolitical unit (its human collective); instead, a clan is coextensive with this repertoire of distinct forms and behaviours inscribed in the bodies and voiced in the names of both its human and more-than-human collectives. There is no Boe word for “clan”: there are only eight names (with many internal segments each) that group together qualities of the lived world.

Holding a name-title from a particular clan grants nominal primacy over that clans’ ritual wealth; its ornaments, names, songs, and ceremonies. In times of severe population decline, however, adjustments and strategic adaptations in name-giving were common (see Levak 1971; Viertler 1972), ensuring that all eight clans and, ideally, their main subdivisions remained present in the village, allowing ritual life to properly unfold. Today, with population growth, this is less commonly a concern. Nevertheless, ritual mechanisms and latent bilaterality continue to enable non-matrilineal claims of clan wealth. Also, belonging to one clan does not exclude belonging to others, and clan affiliations can be accumulated, leading to a person’s ritual and political magnification.

The eight clans are further grouped into two moieties: the *Ecerae*, whose houses occupy the northern half of the circle, and the *Tugarege*, who reside in the southern half. These are nominally exogamous — an expectation now seldom enforced. The *recent souls*, those responsible for handling a deceased’s body, must be selected from the opposite moiety of the deceased. Again, this is ideally from their father’s and spouse’s clans, but only if these belonged to the opposite moiety.

From the outset, a funeral therefore opposes the close family of the deceased and their affines (actual or virtual), members of the moiety of the deceased’s father and spouse. While the close kin remain secluded and visually separated from the village centre — as mourners who must not gaze towards the grave — the affines occupy a position of proximity and virtual identification with the deceased in the central plaza, handling the corpse and performing as the dead persons. Overseen by the singer-chiefs, a funeral unfolds across the severed relationship between the *mother of the soul* — the lead mourner — and the *recent souls*, doubles of the deceased.

A body is only buried in the village centre once the *mother of the soul* and the *recent souls* assume their roles. During the first month, to accelerate decomposition, the *recent souls* must remove the earth covering the grave and pour water over the straw-

wrapped body a couple of times a week after sunrise. After the first month, the straw mats are opened to evaluate the progress of decomposition. From that point onward, the grave is covered only with bamboo or wooden planks and a pile of straw previously used in ceremonies. The pace of decomposition dictates the progression of the funeral, with a complete mortuary cycle lasting anywhere from one to, in exceptional cases, eight months. As long as the body remains unready for exhumation, feasts for the dead and clan-sponsored ceremonies take place weekly.

Before and after every ceremony within the broader mortuary cycle, the dead must be fed. The opening feasts typically occur in the secrecy of the men's house, whereas the concluding ones take place in the central plaza, with all women and young children secluded in their houses. The central and most intricate aspect of a feast lies in the offerings sent by the *mother of the soul* to the *recent souls*. However, mothering souls is a lifelong duty; consequently, all women who have previously led a group of mourners in a village's past funerals must send offerings to the men-as-souls in a present funeral. All former *recent souls* are also expected to attend such feasts. The relationship between the new mourners and the deceased thus prompts the resurfacing of all past relationships of the same kind.

In times of mourning, the ceremonies that are bookended by such feasts tend to happen once a week in Tadarimana. The most central of these ceremonies are displays of ornamented 'dancers' sponsored by specific clans. During a funeral, any clan may sponsor ceremonies, regardless of the deceased's clan belonging. In these rituals, men-as-souls parade their ornamented bodies around the grave in the central plaza, embodying the animals, plants, and mythical heroes associated with the sponsoring clan. Additionally, those who performed as *recent souls* in past funerals wear feather headdresses that index specific deceased they personify. On the periphery of houses, other people — including the *mothers of souls*, all those who once led a group of mourners — experience these performances as reenactments of past losses. Overcome by grief, onlookers sometimes burst into tears and wail. The mourners, however, remain secluded throughout the period of decomposition: at this stage, the presence of the dead is an aural experience for them. Their visual isolation persists until the moment of exhumation.

When the flesh begins to separate effortlessly from the bones, the body is deemed ready for exhumation. Once all feathers, resin, dye, and straw needed for reconstructing the deceased's new skin have been gathered, the closing ceremonies can be arranged. These last for two and a half days, amounting to approximately fifty hours of almost uninterrupted rituals. Women and children must remain secluded for a full day, from the first to the second sunset. Within this period, the extraordinarily dangerous *aije* spirits, mediators between the realms of the living and the dead, take over the village. Over the course of these last days of ritual, nine long suites of songs must be performed, along with additional singing sessions and multiple rounds of feasts. All of this is interwoven with a myriad of rituals focused on preparing the body and the large mortuary basket that will house it³.



Figure 2. The recent souls adjust the mortuary basket's first layer of ornamentation. September 2022.

³ More granular overviews of the complicated procedures involved in the closing ceremonies can be found in Albisetti & Venturelli 1962; Caiuby 1986: 195-223; Viertler 1991.

These preparations aim to create a new body for the deceased, replacing decaying flesh and skin with the scent of resin and annatto dye and a mosaic of vibrant macaw feathers carefully arranged over the skull. The process reaches its climax when the mourners, emerging from their period of seclusion in a surge of grief, come face to face with this new body — the ornamented skull. After months of visual separation from the deceased, what is unveiled before them is the defining image of the dead among the Boe — an *aroe*. This term designates the category of beings to which the dead belong and within whose realm they must settle — a notion I provisionally gloss as ‘souls’, exploring it in greater depth in Chapter Three. On this final day of collective ceremonies, at sunset, the bones are placed in the mortuary basket, which remains in the mourners’ house for two days before being transported to its secondary burial site — in Tadarimana, a small cemetery just beyond the village⁴.

Throughout this thesis, I aim to show how the aesthetic transformations produced throughout this extended process are, in themselves, the reshaping of memories and relationships, leaving lasting marks on those who engage in them. This transformation transcends the production of a singular *aroe* body, as it summons all other dead within living memory in the form of further *aroe* bodies, thus reawakening past grief. Rather than being absorbed into a generalised collective of ancestors, death is de-singularised through the proliferation of particularised memories of loss. A singular death is thus turned into an image of virtually all past losses. Yet, this is not solely about a relationship between the living and the dead. In the *aroe*-making process, persons and relationships among the living are also reshaped. By transforming their relationships with the time-saturated dead, the living reimagine themselves by redrawing the line between past, present, and future.

⁴ Ideally, mourning is considered fully resolved only after a large predator, preferably a jaguar, is killed to avenge the deceased. The animal’s teeth, skin, and claws are fashioned into ornaments, which are then kept by the deceased’s family as keepsakes. This achievement is marked by a ritual and later acknowledged through an end-of-mourning ceremony, during which the avenger is compensated with names, ornaments, songs, and food. I have witnessed the initial commemoration of a revenge hunt on two occasions, as well as simplified compensations offered to hunters of smaller predators; however, I have never observed the ‘jaguar’s feast’ (*adugo ekedodu*) — the ceremony that concludes this cycle of prestations. This aspect of Boe mortuary practices is not included in this thesis, as I intend to examine it separately once I have the opportunity to witness the full cycle.

The living and the dead in lowland South America

The relationship between the living and the dead is among the most classic themes in the anthropology of Indigenous lowland South America. Indeed, the very construction of the region's distinctive anthropological framework in the 1970s and 1980s — its conceptual invention — was grounded in a critique of models of intergenerational continuity between the living and the dead: lowland South America was the region where, as Carneiro da Cunha (1978: 142) puts it in reference to the Krahô, “there is no place in the society of the living where ancestors can fit.”

Genealogical continuity with the dead, the argument goes, must be severed, as death transforms kin into an affinal Others rather than ancestral (or consanguineal) (other) selves: the dead are thus enemies against which the living are dialectically defined, rendering death a “passage to the adverse field, if not treason” (Carneiro da Cunha 1978: 119). Broadly speaking, this paradigm of anti-ancestrality can be traced back by Overing Kaplan's (1977) programmatic symposium at the XLII International Congress of Americanists in 1976 and was consolidated in monographic form through Carneiro da Cunha's (1978) ethnography of the Krahô. However, it was Viveiros de Castro's (1992) influential intervention that left a more profound imprint on the field.

Unlike the dialectical manner in which the dead “circumscribe the living” among the Krahô (Carneiro da Cunha 1978: 145), Viveiros de Castro (1986: 26) — drawing on H. Clastres (1995) and Deleuzian notions of ‘becoming’ — contends that, for Tupi-Guarani peoples such as the Araweté, the “Other is not a mirror for man, but a destiny.” In the relationship between the Araweté and the *maï*, a class of celestial beings whom the living join after death, the process of *becoming* rather than *opposing* the Other was key, laying the groundwork for the broader otherness-centred paradigm in lowland South America.

In more recent literature, the more orthodox interpretations of the dead-as-others paradigm has been widely reassessed, prompting calls for a more nuanced approach (Chaumeil 2007; Déléage 2010; Graham 1995; Guerreiro 2015; Heckenberger 2007). For instance, in a recent monograph on Krahô verbal arts — a people long considered a paradigmatic case of the dead's otherness — Packer (2020: 37) contrasts the use of the otherness-charged notion of *carõ* (‘soul’, ‘image’) with the

kinship-oriented expression *mẽ quêtjê* ('forebears'), concluding that the relationship between the living and the dead is marked by "both centrifugal movements of distancing and forgetting and centripetal movements of rapprochement and remembrance."

With regards to memory and grief, descriptions of mourning in lowland South America traditionally centre on its negative features, underscoring its salient *discipline of forgetting* and the erasing of the deceased's traces. Still, Taylor (1993), Conklin (2001), and Allard (2010) shifted the focus of these same phenomena to the memory-transforming aims of mourning practices: death calls for the conversion of the memory of a living person — closely tied to the mutuality of kinship — into that of a dead one both through introspective discipline and ritual elaboration. The result of such transformation retains, as Taylor (1993: 655) puts it, the dead's place as 'social partners':

The deceased must disappear as persons, since, although in the mind they 'look' like the living, they are bereft of the essential attribute of life; but at the same time they must remain thinkable in social terms, that is to say as socialized, communicative beings.

The Boe ascribe a striking significance to the dead as 'socialised, communicative beings'. Attempts to interpret this through a binary understanding of otherness and sameness, or by mapping them onto a simplified opposition between affinity and consanguinity, are of little analytical use here. The Boe's highly elaborate, death-oriented ritual life serve as a technology for reconstituting ties with the dead, shaping a parallel form of kinship that endures for as long as the memory of the deceased lingers among the living.

As I argue throughout this thesis, this form of kinship is marked by carefully crafted *disjunctive relations*. For instance, whereas everyday kinship entails intimate proximity through acts like feeding and commensality, in the aesthetics of kinship with the dead these relational media become disjunctive: feeding the dead requires concealment and spatial separation — one must *either* feed the dead in concealed feasts *or* see them in ritual displays, never both at once. In logical terms, we have here an exclusive disjunction, an 'either/or' relation in which both terms — in this case, *seeing*

and *feeding* as relational media — cannot coexist simultaneously⁵. Collapsing the separation between kinship among the living and kinship with the dead results in crossing into the realm of the dead. As we shall see, this emphasis on disjunctive relating produces figures such as *mothers of souls* who, to borrow Houseman & Severi's (1998) terms, ritually “condense” contradictory features, enacting a form of motherhood conflated with the behaviours of a hyper-mother-in-law⁶.

Yet the language of disjunction can be extended beyond a single domain. It also helps describe how memory and time are shaped, structuring ties between present and pastness — via the dead as repositories of past-saturated cultura — and between present and futurity — through white-becoming enactments. The result, introduced in the following section, is the emergence of what may be called, in more than one sense, a *disjunctive present* — one that tangibly shapes the temporal, spatial, affective, and political life of contemporary Tadarimana.

Times of joy, times of sorrow

In the past, as my interlocutors recall, traditional rituals ‘of joy’ (de alegria) were as frequent as ceremonies held in times of sorrow. Crocker (1985: 29), for instance, describes weekly ritual hunting and fishing expeditions in Córrego Grande village during the 1960s — about the same frequency with which ritual activities take place in times of mourning today. In contemporary Tadarimana, however, most such rituals of joy have been replaced by collective activities associated with the Barae, ‘non-indigenous people’: primarily football championships and parties. However, when a death occurs, these activities must cease. On a collective level, as one interlocutor put it, ‘living as Barae’ is then replaced by ‘living as Boe’. This entails a multi-dimensional shift in village life, which includes socio-political reconfigurations. While in times of joy, younger leaders known as *caciques* take the lead in mediating the relationship between the Boe and the Barae, in times of sorrow, the traditional singer-chiefs have

⁵ I draw inspiration here from Stasch's (2009) treatment of the transformation of relational media in Korowai mourning in West Papua.

⁶ Ambivalent condensations of ‘ancestrality’ and affinity can be found elsewhere in lowland South America (see Erikson 2007).

precedence. These also employ mediation skills, though in this case, between the living and the dead.

As we shall see in detail in Chapter One, among the many dimensions of these alternating regimes are distinct temporal orientations — collective activities in times of joy being forward-looking and in times of sorrow past-oriented — and shifting spatial configurations. From the 2000s onwards, Tadarimana village expanded southward beyond its original circular layout, with the traditional village now forming a small northern section within a larger settlement. At the heart of the settlement now stand the football pitch, school, health centre, and party hall — spaces where collective activities linked to *baraeness* and times of joy unfold. When mourning begins, the party hall and football pitch grow silent, left nearly abandoned as dust settles and grass grows unchecked. Conversely, during prolonged periods of joy, it is the traditional village, plaza, and men's house that fall into stillness, with most of the houses in the traditional village kept as secondary homes, occupied only during *aroe*-related rituals. Tadarimana village, to borrow Mauss' (2013) classic expression, operates within a “dual morphology”: it is through these alternating regimes embodied in time, space, affect, and leadership that village life unfolds.

I conducted thirteen months of fieldwork in Tadarimana between July 2022 and December 2024, during which an exceptionally long sequence of mortuary cycles unfolded. Over this period, I witnessed seven different funerals — attending the closing ceremonies of six and following two from the moment of death through to the second and final burial. Ten of my thirteen months of fieldwork unfolded amidst times of sorrow⁷.

⁷ One of the funerals whose closing ceremonies I attended took place in Córrego Grande village, located within the Tereza Cristina Reserve, about a three-hour drive from Tadarimana. During my fieldwork, a few other deaths occurred in Tadarimana that were not followed by full mortuary cycles, often due to the absence of a kinswoman of the deceased who considered herself fit to lead a group of mourners.



Figure 3. Timeline of ‘times of joy’ and ‘times of sorrow’ in Tadarimana between 2022 and 2025; overlaps between funerals are indicated accordingly.

It was two months into my fieldwork that I first saw a shift into times of joy. I remember returning from the cemetery early in the morning to find the village suddenly transformed. Children dashed around, music blasted from the houses, voices got louder, and everyone’s posture felt lighter. It felt as though I no longer recognised the people with whom I had shared my days for the past few months. I had come to take life in times of sorrow for granted.

I do not intend for this thesis to have the same effect on the reader. In focusing mostly on the collective rituals that take place in times of sorrow, it does not aim at offering a totalising account of contemporary Boe life. What is more, as we will see in Chapter One, the sorrow/joy alternation is itself not totalising: in other areas of the Boe territory, death rituals have mostly faded, no longer playing a defining role in collective life. The association of sorrow with *boeness* and joy with *baraeness* is a relatively recent historical development that occurred in a particular part of the territory, shaped by ongoing negotiations over how to live together in a world profoundly shaped by non-indigenous agency. The regimes of memory and temporality analysed in this thesis should not, therefore, be understood merely as products of

passive adherence to ceremonial conventions. Instead, they embody an active and ongoing reflection on how collective life ought to be lived.

Far from being a mere residue of ‘tradition,’ ritual forms are deeply embedded in contemporary Boe life. Reflexive ideas of *boeness* and *baraeness* are intertwined with ritual life — not as fixed cultural attributes of self-identical groups, but as virtual “states of imagined sociality” (Taylor 2007) that can be enacted. When performing mortuary rituals, the Boe reflexively frame their actions through a tacit question: *what if we lived like the ancients?* In contrast, times of joy are framed by an opposing question: *what if we lived like the Barae?* What would collective life look like then? Drawing on imaginaries and enactments of both pastness and futurity, these questions serve to reassess what it means to live *in the present*, by rendering tangible the limits of alternative forms of collective life. They do so by alternately experimenting with these virtual socialities. Echoing Buitron’s (2022: 28) insights on the effectiveness of the “what if scenarios” created in Shuar festivals, the Boe case thus brings to light an intimate connection between the reflexive and experimental dimensions of ritual (Handelman 1998; Stausberg 2006; Turner 1979) and the active and creative reimagining of collective life (Fausto et al. 2016; Graeber & Wengrow 2021). What emerges from such an analysis is the embedding of ritual *in time*, and the simultaneous shaping of time *through ritual*.

By challenging simplified invocations of what Strathern (1992) calls the “twin ideas” of continuity and change, my interlocutors’ performative experiments in times of joy and sorrow assemble the present as a disjunctive composition. Yet in doing so, these contrasting ritual temporalities, as we will see, ultimately circumscribe the irreducibility of the present — one that cannot, and must not, be fully subsumed under either *baraeness* or *boeness*.

Memory, affect, and time

I emphasise in this thesis how forms of personal and collective reflexivity are immanent to ritual elaborations of time, memory, and emotion. As noted earlier, attuning myself to these dimensions of ritual life marked a turning point in my fieldwork, as it enabled me to identify a shared plane where the experiences of elder specialists and performers

intersect with those of ordinary people and onlookers. This shared ground, I suggest, lies in the intimate and generative connection between memory, performance, and grief.

When speaking of ritual life, my interlocutors' vocabulary frequently drew on matters of memory and emotion. They spoke of remembering (*bia butu*; lembrar), longing (*kiarigodu*; saudade), compassion (*maidodu*, *ogudu*; dó), and suffering (*roreru*; *sofrimento*, judiar). These were such straightforward, everyday notions that for months I took them for granted, overshadowed by the complexity of the very spectacle they sought to explain. I had assumed such superlative funerals were about *more* than grief; in truth, it was the Boe experience of grief that held *more* meaning than I had been able to grasp.

Shifting the focus to my interlocutors' memory- and affect-saturated notions led me to explore the broader *motivations* and *effects* behind engaging with the dead. My interlocutors did not partake in ritual acts merely due to, say, a nearly forgotten mythical alliance between clans; rather, their actions stemmed from a form of *compassionate longing*, a way of transforming memories of loss into meaningful, generative action towards others. In turning remembrance into kinship-making, time and emotion into relationships, they give rise to a crucial affective mechanism in Boe ritual: experiencing the grief of others as one's own.

As noted in relation to singing, the conventional character of most ritual acts allows them to evoke all their previous iterations. However, a funeral does not merely summon memories; it shapes them in its own image. The aesthetics of the mortuary ceremonies — their visual, aural, tactile and olfactory dimensions — become etched into the surface of one's memories of loss. In an evocative passage about similar mechanisms regarding Wari' keening, Conklin (2001: 104) conveys how powerful such form of ritual aesthetics can be:

The sound of the death keening is another powerful stimulus to memory, evoking other times when one has keened one's own sorrow. The conventionality of the keening — the fact that it is done the same way every time — connects each new episode of keening to each one that has gone before. It is both a response to the immediacy of a present reality (the death that has just occurred) and an evocative embodiment of a series of similar acts in the past. Death and mourning take a community out of normal time, and the sense of this as a liminal

moment is most palpable in the haunting melody whose high, sorrowful tone links generations of Wari' in their sorrow.

Among the Boe, recognising one's own losses in those of others prompts ritual engagement. Burdensome ritual obligations and the reawakening of painful memories are driven by *dó* ('pity' or 'compassion') when faced with the sorrow of others. Yet these very acts are themselves seen as forms of suffering and helplessness, thereby eliciting further gestures of compassion. This form of relational contagion, which converts memory into compassionate action, and action back into memory, is the driving force of Boe ritual life — indeed, one of the ways the Boe refer to 'times of sorrow' is by saying, "we are in [times of] compassion" (*paedure maidoduia keje*).

The use of the notion of 'memory' requires some clarification. Lambek (2003: 210) identifies a central bifurcation in modern conceptions of memory: on one side, memory is treated as "a natural object or process available to the gaze of experts"; on the other, as "the means and substance of unique, private, deep, ambiguous, unpredictable, yet essential subjective experience". This subjectivised view may also extend to the collective or 'public' scale — "the individuated private writ large" (Lambek 2003: 212). In both perspectives, memory serves as the "locus and ground for some posited essential identity" (*ibid.*: 210). Even Halbwachs' (1980: 64) classic notion of collective memory as "living history" both roots memory in group identity and actively constitutes it. In sum, in the social sciences, memory often signifies a subjectivised form of history — whether personal or collective — anchored in continuity and the articulation of identity (see also Berliner 2005).

The phenomena I examine in this thesis have little to do with subjective introspection or the assertion of essentialised identities. What I refer to as memory is not an inner possession but a quality of performances — an experience that operates as a relational event between performer and audience. In other words, memory is *witnessed* rather than possessed, even when it emerges as what we might term 'mental images'. It is in the physical, aural, visual, tactile, and olfactory experience of both performers and spectators that memory is experienced and crafted, and thus finds its *locus*. A sense of pastness, in turn, emerges as ritual aesthetics evoke its past iterations and thus "portray present moments' noncontemporaneity with themselves" (Stasch 2009: 254). One of this thesis' central contributions is to provide a detailed

ethnographic account of performative memory as it unfolds within the aesthetic dimensions of Boe ritual.

Moreover, the acts of ‘remembering’ and ‘longing’ described by my interlocutors — as participants or observers — are not grounded in nor aimed at the formation of identity but rather in processes of alteration. In ritual, they reflexively experiment with living as the ‘ancients’ (*mariguduwuge*), yet the gap between past and present remains irreducible — at once mourned and affirmed in their laments over the loss of ‘culture.’ ‘Living like the ancients’ is thus not a romanticised homage to heritage, but a generative experiment in self and collective becoming — one that ultimately draws a line between the present and the past.

If the notion of memory invites unwanted assumptions, why foreground it at all? Because it allows us to conceive of the past as embedded in the present — lived rather than merely known. Echoing Halbwachs (1980) and Nora’s (1999) contrast between memory and history, Lambek’s (2003: 212) description of memory as “history embodied, imagined, enacted, enlivened” is particularly apt. By linking past and present, memory conveys the active, effective way the past reshapes and reflexively situates the present among the Boe.

Furthermore, memory here is indissociable from affect. This conflation is expressed in the grief-saturated notion of ‘longing’ and its connection to ‘compassion’. I show such affects throughout this thesis to be relational and pragmatic in nature. Drawing on Bateson’s (1963) early insights and Berthomé & Houseman’s (2010: 65) discussion of the affective dimensions of ritual, I approach emotions not as expressions of inner states, but as “sensate qualities of relationships”. A singer’s tears, for instance, are bound to the sudden realisation of a relational inversion: no longer part of the audience watching his masters, he now stands as a performer — a living image of their absence. Yet, beyond their relational *form*, I must emphasise here the *force* of such affects, as they move people to set personal and collective transformations and repositioning in motion (see Rosaldo 1989). Indeed, it is a singer’s strong desire to mourn his master’s absence that ultimately leads him to sing, setting off collective ritual processes.

We have seen that the Boe mourn not only persons as such but also culture, which is imbued with the quality of pastness. Yet a conflation of mourning and

nostalgia is not self-evident. The contrast between these affects, I suggest, parallels the difference between grieving for ordinary persons and for magnified figures as singer-chiefs and *mothers of souls*⁸. These extraordinary persons are constructed as personifications of *boeness*: their knowledge and skills make possible the collective rituals that have come to embody cultura. This knowledge is seen to stem from their past copresence with the ‘ancients’ (*mariguduwuge*), making them personifications of (past) forms of knowledge and sociality. Consequently, the loss and dwindling of these leaders are experienced as the shrinking of an entire form of collective life, thereby conflating grief and nostalgia. Throughout this thesis, we will trace the making and unmaking of such extraordinary persons, along with the nostalgic sensibilities and generative potentials these processes entail.

Boe ritual nostalgia, I must add, is irreducible to the familiar modern affliction: the passive, defeatist retreat into the past in response to modernity’s disruptive forces, which has shaped certain anthropological sensibilities (see Boym 2011; Fabre 2008; Angé & Berliner 2014; Pickering & Keightley 2006; Rosaldo 1989). First, my interlocutors do not attribute cultural loss to non-Indigenous agency; on the contrary, they often insist that the Boe themselves bear responsibility for their perceived decline. Second, Boe ritual nostalgia prompts action. Far from immobilising, it is a generative force: created within ritual forms, it also propels those forms forward into the future.

By engaging with the generative dimensions of mourning, memory, and nostalgia, I aim to show how the Boe performatively shape the relationship between past, present, and future. This analysis thus resonates with debates on ‘historicity’ (Hartog 2015; Stewart 2016). This notion, in line with the general orientation of this thesis, seeks to move beyond the limitations of historicism — particularly its focus on the past as an absent cause of the present and the related concern with anachronism

⁸ I employ *magnification* in the sense commonly used in Amazonianist literature (see Costa 2017, Fausto 2008, Heckenberger 2004, Sztutman 2009) — which, in turn, draw on Godelier & Strathern (2008) — to describe a form of leadership and prestige-building that does not oppose the group to an individual leader, but rather portrays the magnified person as containing within themselves persons and relationships of the same kind they enact and embody. In other words, it implies a scaling-up of action and personhood that does not entail a difference in the nature of those actions and agents.

(Chakrabarty 2009; Stewart 2017). Yet invoking history-derived concepts to describe Boe ritual temporalities risks suggesting that my interlocutors are engaging with representations of the past that refer to predefined events or historical periods. In contrast, Boe ritual pastness is fundamentally *indeterminate*, inhabiting a threshold space between shared ritual forms and unique biographical memory.

Much like Wari' keening, as described by Conklin (2001), Boe performances operate through iconic evocation of its prior enactments. In doing so, they create a hollowed-out sense of pastness, open to being filled by multiple and unique personal memories. Crucially, the performance itself does not define the past it invokes; that past remains virtual, acquiring shape only *a posteriori* through the recollections and the grief of those who witness it. As such, the Boe practice of summoning the dead should not be conflated with the ethnographic trope of being haunted by specific — often violent — past events (Kwon 2008; Mueggler 2001). Rather than anchoring pastness in events or eras, as in Yvinec's (2024) recent typology of Amerindian regimes of historicity, Boe ritual constructs an open-ended temporal field that bridges the ritual and the biographical, the conventional and the personal, and whose only constant form is a pervasive sense of loss. In this sense, the embedding of life histories within ritual performance takes on a distinctive configuration, setting it apart from more explicit forms documented in lowland South America (Déléage 2008; Oakdale 2005).

In contrast with other lowland South American peoples', the Boe have no shared language for speaking about the past beyond biographical memory and open-ended contrasts between 'now' and 'then'; there is no conventional periodisation, and landmark events are rarely invoked as causal anchors for the present⁹. The sense of pastness at stake here is instead a quality of relationships, expressed through acts of 'longing' and 'remembering' — whether directed toward ordinary deceased kin, magnified chiefs, or more diffuse evocations of the 'ancients' (*mariguduwuge*). Therefore, given that history in the conventional sense does not hold a central place in either my interlocutors' discourse or in ritual memory, I reserve the notion of

⁹ Forms of periodisation that belongs to what Yvinec (2024) recently described as a regime of 'eras' are particularly common in Western Amazonia — often, though not exclusively, structured in a tripartite scheme (see Gow 1991; Taylor 2007; Bonilla 2009; Costa 2017; Lucas 2019).

‘historicity’ specifically for the Christianity-related transformations of Boe ritual, cosmology, and eschatology discussed in Chapter Five — thus setting Boe elaborations of historicity in contrast to the historicist explanations they seem to invite.

Finally, a word on futurity. As both Munn (1992) and Bryant & Knight (2019) have observed, anthropological discussions of time often centre on the past-present relationship, thereby dislodging the future from the temporal triad to which it belongs. Throughout this thesis, I aim to show that memory and pastness are part of performances that entail *temporalisation* in Munn’s (1992) sense: the active construction of relations between past, present, and future, in which the reconfiguration of any one term entails a repositioning of the others. Futurity is therefore intrinsic to Boe elaborations of pastness. I demonstrate this by highlighting both how imagined futures frame performances and how past-oriented practices exert generative force, bringing about possible futures. To borrow Chakrabarty’s (2009: 250–4) vocabulary, the analysis integrates both speculative futures that “will be” and those that exist in people’s actions as futures that “already are”. Whether envisioned or generated, the future thus remains inseparable from reassessments of the present and evocations of the past. This brings us back to the motto that opened this introduction — *we are orphans* — which mobilises the entire temporal triad: it simultaneously invokes a knowledge-saturated past, frames the present as a time of loss, and calls for collective action aimed at crafting a possible future.

A note on fieldwork and language

The fieldwork underpinning this thesis was conducted over three main stays in the Tadarimana Reserve, each lasting between three and four months, between July 2022 and September 2023. These were followed by a few shorter visits and an additional six-week stay in September–October 2024, amounting to a total of thirteen months in the field. For most of this time, I lived in a once nearly-abandoned masonry house between the Tadarimana traditional circle of houses and the village school, a building that had previously hosted Catholic pastoral activities and a short-lived bakery project. From this base, I followed a fairly fixed routine. Most mornings were spent with Bosco Marido Kurireu at the village school, working on transcriptions and translations. During the

hottest hours of the day, I would retreat to the house, before spending the evenings visiting my closest interlocutors. Once back ‘home’, I would turn the notes I had jotted down on my phone throughout the day into a proper entry in my field notes. This routine was occasionally interrupted by trips to the city, ceremonial events or extended visits to Apido Paru — a satellite village 11 kilometres away where I would frequently stay for days or weeks with the elderly chief Raimundo Itogoga and his daughter, Majur Traitowu, a close friend and key interlocutor.

Although I followed a structured routine, this did not translate into an especially active or systematic research stance in relation to my interlocutors. In everyday contexts, I often occupied a more observant and responsive role rather than that of an active inquirer. Outside ceremonial contexts, I rarely carried my recorder. Being in people’s homes, sharing meals and intimate conversations, made the idea of turning an exchange into an ‘interview’ feel intrusive. Nonetheless, my interlocutors were fully aware of the work I was doing. Many had previous experience with anthropologists and would occasionally suggest that I record or write something down, or caution against noting sensitive topics.

I only conducted systematic interviews with the elders Raimundo Itogoga and Aije Kurireu, focusing on esoteric ritual knowledge. Still, the reader will notice the frequent use of direct quotes throughout this thesis. Most of these were transcribed from memory onto my phone immediately after conversations took place — something I routinely did and used to guide my diary entries each night. During the writing process, these quotes became essential mnemonic devices for reconstructing my fieldwork: all chapters began as a list of key statements from interlocutors.

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes were originally in Portuguese. Outside ceremonial contexts, the Boe language is today spoken with considerable code-switching into Portuguese, and virtually all my interlocutors are native speakers of both Portuguese and Bororo. Throughout my fieldwork, I systematically studied Bororo, primarily through daily translation sessions at the village school. By the end of the fieldwork, I was able to conduct interviews with elders in Bororo, transcribe and translate recorded interviews with reasonable accuracy, and follow much of what was being said around me. Still, everyday conversations would rarely begin in Bororo — except occasionally as a kind of test — and initiating them myself while sharing another

language as native speakers always felt somewhat contrived. As a result, my limited exposure to spontaneous speech made my Bororo sound too rigid and slow for extended, fluid conversation. Much of my language learning came from studying recorded narratives told by the elders Aije and Raimundo. I recall once telling a story in Bororo at the request of Suzana, who was eleven years old at the time. When I finished, she looked at me and said, “You speak like an old man!”

Across my time in Tadarimana, one common orientation of Boe people toward me was that of testing. In the early months of fieldwork — when most of my interlocutors remained unconvinced that I was committed to building a long-term, perhaps even life-long relationship — their efforts centred on assessing what kind of Barae-du I was. Various strategies were employed to gauge how I might be useful, often aimed at securing short-term gains. Over time, as my relationships, familiarity with the language, and ritual knowledge deepened, this orientation gradually shifted. The focus became less about extracting short-term benefits and more about testing how far people could go in shaping me into a Boe person. In both phases, what was at stake was people’s capacity to make others act on their behalf, and thus to experiment with and witness the reach of their own agency.

This process, with all its fluctuations, was lived through a deep emotional and personal entanglement. Sharing in moments of grief drew my interlocutors and me closer together and, over time, the aesthetics of mourning seeped into my own experience. After a funeral had ended, I would hear a chair scraping in the village school and, for a moment, mistake it for the sound of an *ika* trumpet; a baby’s cry became the wail of a gourd clarinet; the hum of a fan, the hiss of a rattle. More than once, I woke in the night certain I had heard the cries of souls echoing from the empty men’s house. “It happens to everyone,” my interlocutors reassured me.

The sudden death of Moacir Coguiepa — one of my dearest Boe friends and first interlocutors — infused these experiences with a more intimate, personal grief. To this day, I often return to recordings of the dramatic prelude of the *Roia Mugurewu Meri Jiwu* suite as a way of remembering and mourning him. It makes me recall the day we watched this performance together, when he remarked: “João, it is Akaruio Bokodori who sings; I am Akaruio Bokodori” — invoking the mythical hero who first sang those verses and whose title he bore. Without Moacir’s generosity, insight, and trust, this

research would not have been possible. It is to his memory, alongside that of Aije Kurireu, that this thesis is dedicated.

Even so, I must acknowledge the profound gap between my own experiences of grief among the Boe and those of my interlocutors. As Fabian (1972) and Rosaldo (1989) have reminded us, writing about the grief of others is a delicate task. While this thesis focuses on ritual conventions, I hope it does not obscure the depth and intensity of personal experiences involved — experiences that no ritual can fully shape, and no words can exhaust. I therefore invite readers to bear in mind an irreducible distance: that between the conceptual architecture of this account and the lived realities of loss that continue to shape Boe lives.

Outline of chapters

Chapter One, *Times of Joy, Times of Sorrow: The Affective Temporalities of Village Life*, offers an overview of contemporary life in Tadarimana, the village where my fieldwork was based. It explores how spatial arrangements and patterns of activity materialise several of the analytical concerns outlined above. In particular, the chapter traces the spatial, temporal, political, cultural, and affective dimensions of the alternation between times of sorrow and times of joy. My aim is to situate the mortuary ceremonies — the central focus of the following chapters — within the broader lived world of my interlocutors, and to show how this alternation is both the result of an ongoing reassessment of how life ought to be lived collectively and a device that fosters such collective reflexivity.

Chapter Two, *Mothering the Dead: Kinship and Mourning*, turns to the mortuary rituals themselves, beginning with the figures who initiate the ceremonies and whose enduring grief sustains their memory — the women known as *mothers of souls*. The chapter explores the feeding relationships between these women and the men who embody the dead they mourn. This relation is centrally mediated by small gourd clarinets, carefully kept as materialisations of a woman's commitment to her past losses. Through this subject, the chapter introduces the crucial mechanism of compassionate longing that turns remembrance into kinship, animating ritual action among the Boe.

It shows how this affective force becomes magnified through the prestige of figures such as the *mothers of souls*.

Following this account of the particularised relationships between mothers of souls and their deceased kin, Chapter Three, *An Aesthetics of Memory, or How the Dead are Made to Appear*, traces how these relationships are generalised into broader oppositions — between women-as-mourners and men-as-souls, periphery and centre, audience and performers, present and past. To do this, the chapter focuses on the interplay between display and concealment as fundamental aesthetic operations. These operations structure both singular ritual performances and the broader unfolding of a funeral, shaping the memory of those who participate in the ritual. The chapter thus investigates how an aesthetics of memory is constituted within a Boe mortuary cycle, suggesting that ritual both evokes and shapes remembrance, defining how and when the otherwise menacing dead ought to be safely recalled.

Chapter Four, *The Sorrow of the Orphaned Singers: Knowledge and the Poetics of Decline*, explores the sense of loss and decline that is immanent to Boe ritual life. It centres on the struggles of a younger generation of singers as they confront the illnesses of their masters, prompting a reflection on the relationship between intergenerational time and the act of singing. The entanglement of knowledge, grief, and intergenerational time observed in male-led singing is also shown to extend to ritual laments — a genre primarily performed by women and closely tied to singing sessions and other ritual events. This chapter weaves together knowledge, shamanism, intergenerational transmission, and a sense of loss as mutually constitutive dimensions of Boe verbal arts.

Finally, Chapter Five, *The Reverse Side of the Sky: History and Christianity in Boe Eschatology*, examines how Boe eschatology has both been shaped by historical change and serves as a medium for reflecting on it. While retaining the same concerns of previous chapters with how the Boe situate themselves in time, this chapter takes a different approach by reconstructing fragments of ethnohistory and tracing images of Heaven and Christian eschatology across ritual, shamanism, and mythology. Through this analysis, I argue that the Boe have reworked eschatology into a mode of historicity through which they engage with change and articulate their relationships with non-Indigenous others.

Chapter One — Times of Sorrow, Times of Joy: The Affective Temporalities of Village Life

“We are living in [times of] joy” (*paedunure paegare keje*) — this is one way the Boe speak of periods when collective village life revolves around football championships, parties, and other events seen as adopted from the Barae, ‘non-indigenous Brazilians’. In Tadarimana village, the school, party hall, football pitch, and gymnasium transform into lively hubs for communal activities during such times. These times are defined in contrast with periods the Boe, among other expressions, call “living in [times of] compassion” (*paedure maidoduia keje*), referring to extended periods of mourning during funerals. ‘Compassion’ here refers to the behavioural restraints and affective dispositions the village is expected to adopt in response to the helplessness of both the deceased’s soul and the mourners. In such times, the entire village mourns a death over several months, with collective life revolving around a dense calendar of traditional ceremonies, which the Boe may refer to broadly as ‘culture’ (*cultura*). In such times, facilities associated with life in times of joy are left nearly deserted, as collective life gravitates toward the traditional ring-shaped village, at the centre of which lies the provisional grave. This chapter introduces the historical, spatial, and political setting of this research by examining how this alternation between what I call ‘times of joy’, and ‘times of sorrow’ has come to be associated with, in the words of one interlocutor, ‘living as Barae’ and ‘living as Boe’.

Beyond affective states and cultural differences, times of sorrow and times of joy also conceptually and practically coupled with contrasting spaces (village circle and football pitch), temporal orientations (past-oriented and future-facing), political forms (traditional chiefs and *cacique* leaders), and generational divides (elders and youth). Each of these dimensions appear as proxy for all others. In speech, the expressions in the Boe language used to reflexively refer to these alternating states of sociality mentioned above are more associated with formal speech. In everyday conversations, even when speaking in Bororo, it is more common to refer to those ‘times’ using the Portuguese terms *alegria* (happiness) and *tristeza* (sadness).

I argue that what remains constant in these shifting states is the need for the contrasts to persist and alternate, avoiding a drift toward stasis — a prospect feared as cultural homogeneity or amalgamation. Present life in contemporary Tadarimana is thus marked by multidimensional disjunctions. Still, the dual form they have assumed does not constitute a stable or closed system; rather, it is a relatively recent historical development that carries in itself the potential for social experimentation and the reassessment of contemporary Boe life. These alternating states of sociality are thus shown to be both the outcome and the condition for the reflexive assessment of how collective life can and ought to be lived.

As the first step in the broader account developed in this thesis, this chapter seeks to situate the Boe mortuary cycle within the specific place and time where this research was carried out. It does so, however, not by constructing a ‘historical context’, but by suggesting how this ritual is entangled with my interlocutors’ wider concerns with how one must live as Boe in the present — a present that is deeply marked by the pervasive imprint of non-indigenous agency. Conceived in this way, the mortuary cycle should not be seen as an extraordinary event or as a residue of exceptional cultural inertia; rather, it is inextricably woven into the fabric of village space, socio-political forms, temporal orientations, affective states, and modes of cultural reflexivity. It is pivotal even to the articulation of its counterpart, the times of joy. A broader account of contemporary life in Tadarimana is thus shown to necessarily entail an account of mortuary affairs — and vice versa.

Before turning to the characteristics of times of sorrow and times of joy, the following section briefly outlines the historical, geographical, and political dimensions of life in contemporary Tadarimana.

Life in Tadarimana: an overview

Tadarimana Indigenous Land spans ten thousand hectares in the southern region of Mato Grosso, Brazil. It is bordered by the Tadarimana and Vermelho Rivers to the north and east, and by the small Jurigue River to the south. This area is one of the five remaining Boe Lands demarcated by the Brazilian State, a remnant of what was once a vast territory. The Salesians indicate that Bororo-speaking people’s territory could

have spanned 350,000 km², an area roughly the size of the United Kingdom (Colbacchini & Albisetti 1942: 20). Throughout the nineteenth century, the gradual encroachment by colonial settlers first divided the territory into two sections, creating the distinction between the so-called Western and Eastern Bororo, and ultimately leading to the disappearance of the Western Bororo altogether (see Vangelista 2008; Viertler 1990). Following the establishment of peaceful relations with the settlers by the end of the century, the remaining Boe people saw their population continue to decline, reaching approximately 500 individuals by the mid-1960s (Crocker 1967).

Since then, although there has been a significant demographic recovery, the territory continued to shrink, leaving the remaining population confined to five small green enclaves surrounded by a vast plantation landscape. The western edge of contemporary Tadarimana Land is adjacent to Rondonópolis, one of the largest cities in the state. As per the 2022 Brazilian national census, 565 people reside in Tadarimana Land, while approximately 250,000 non-indigenous people live in the encroaching city. In satellite images, the Indigenous Land stands out as a distinctly dark green area, sharply defined against the surrounding expanse of cattle farms, and soybean and maize plantations. The urban expanse of Rondonópolis, a large grey stain when seen from above, now matches the area of the Indigenous Land.



Figure 4. Rondonópolis and Tadarimana Reserve seen from above. Source: Google Maps.

In the memories of my older interlocutors, this area, of what is today the Tadarimana Land, by the mid-twentieth century, was associated with the once-thriving Pobore village, located close to Rondonópolis — at the time, a small non-indigenous settlement. Elderly interlocutors remember visiting Pobore as children, likely in the 1950s. They claim to have never seen a larger village, describing multiple concentric rings of houses surrounding the central plaza and the men's house. However, during a visit in 1965, Crocker (1967: 48) observed a drastically changed scenario, noting that "one may even doubt whether the small population of Bororo living on the site should be considered a village." This decline, which elders associate with alcohol-related issues caused by the proximity to Rondonópolis, led to the disappearance of Pobore in 1977 (Viertler 1990: 115). Its remaining population, along with Boe people from other regions, moved to a new settlement eleven kilometres east of Pobore, on the banks of the Tadarimana River. This relocation was encouraged by the FUNAI — the Brazilian national agency for indigenous affairs — which built a post, a nursery, and a school on the site (Serpa 1988; Viertler 1990: 115).

As a refuge relative to the growing settler city, Tadarimana village was established near the southern bank of the river it was named after. From the 1990s onwards, as population growth began to surge, some families started establishing smaller villages nearby. Today, eight satellite villages exist within Tadarimana Land — Pobore is one of these, having been reoccupied. In Portuguese, Tadarimana village is referred to as the "central village" (aldeia central) or simply "the village" (*ba*; aldeia), while the satellite villages are known as "little villages" (aldeinha). More than half of the population of the Indigenous Land lives in the central village, where the health centre, school, main football pitch, party hall, and men's house are located. This village thus operates as a hub for education, celebrations, healthcare, meetings, and rituals, regularly attracting people from the satellite villages and surrounding territories.

Although this configuration itself remains relatively stable, the population is notably mobile. The network of kinship ties that each person has across many villages and Indigenous Lands provides a constant range of virtual homes, which are often actualised, either temporarily or permanently. Nonetheless, my interlocutors frequently observe that people are less errant than they were in the recent past. Still, the status of

central village as such remains open to challenge; this was evident in the mid-2010s, when important ritual specialists moved to Pobore and built a now-abandoned men's house, where a series of mortuary ceremonies took place (see Drago 2018). My interlocutors recall that while Pobore grew stronger, Tadarimana seemed to have lost its centrality. However, following the death of one ritual specialist and the relocation of the other to a satellite village, Pobore became ritually inactive once more.

There is regular movement between the city of Rondonópolis and the villages. As part of the compensation for a highway expansion near Boe territory, a construction company funds a weekly bus line connecting Tadarimana, Tereza Cristina, and Jarudori Indigenous Lands to Rondonópolis. The journey from Tadarimana takes about an hour and links the central village to a large supermarket near the city centre. In these urban excursions, the Boe, often dressed in their finest attire, usually maintain an air of discretion, as if striving to go unnoticed. However, this discretion alone doesn't explain the profound ignorance of most city dwellers regarding their Indigenous neighbours, whom they typically refer to generically as 'the Indians' and often reduce to the stereotype of being 'drunks'. On the other hand, local fishermen and hunters are generally familiar with the Boe, and some have married Indigenous women.

Trips to Rondonópolis have become essential, as fishing and hunting play a minimal role in subsistence in Tadarimana, with most households lacking guns and ammunition. It is often noted that the reduced amount of game and fish in the region makes the strenuous and often unfruitful effort not worthwhile. Traditional gardens, in turn, have been mostly abandoned. Consequently, virtually all households rely on government allowances for their subsistence, primarily the Bolsa Família ('Family Allowance') program and rural retirement stipends. The contemporary Boe diet in the region is thus barely distinguishable from the local Brazilian one. Rice, beans, pasta, store-bought chicken, and sausages are staples in Tadarimana: traditional food is only prepared on ritual occasions or 'cultural celebrations' organised at the village's school. Only about five per cent of Tadarimana Land's population was employed in 2023, and virtually all of those jobs were at the village's school and health centre: no one maintained steady jobs in Rondonópolis while residing in Tadarimana during my fieldwork. However, most adult men have experience working part-time on farms or ranches. Also, a small number of Boe people live in the city, either for their studies or

for work.

The abandonment of traditional subsistence practices stands in marked contrast to other contexts in lowland South America in which ‘eating like real people’ is precisely what is seen to fundamentally singularise Indigenous people — and their proper modes of kinship-making — against the ways of whites (Gow 1991). While in Amazonia rituals can sometimes become obsolete more readily than subsistence practices, among the Boe it is ritual that has historically served as the *locus* of active and reflexive differentiation. Nevertheless, if what one eats has largely ceased to singularise Boe identity, what one does not eat continues to hold differentiating potential: all Boe systematically avoid a set of animals considered to be the ‘foods of the *bope*’, a class of predatory spirits who bring death upon those who kill, harm, or consume their animals — as well as upon that person’s kin (see Crocker 1985).¹⁰ It is common for non-Indigenous hunters who marry Boe women to be asked to refrain from hunting and consuming these animals — which include some of the largest game in the region, such as tapirs, capybaras, and deer — as a precondition for the bride’s family acceptance of the union.

Given the current dietary practices, resources from the Barae are far from being luxuries; instead, they have become essential for the livelihood of most people in contemporary Tadarimana. As a result, the *caciques*, leaders tasked with mediating relations with the non-indigenous world, hold significant political weight. The *cacique* and *vice-cacique* are elected by popular vote for a four-year mandate.¹¹ These are occasionally referred to as the ‘general *caciques*’ (*caciques gerais*) and oversee the entire Indigenous Land. In contrast, leaders of the satellite villages are typically not elected; instead, they are often chosen within the families who founded the village. This system creates ongoing political tension, as leaders of the satellite villages often accuse the ‘general *cacique*’ of favouring the central village and of having their autonomy questioned. Such tension carries a political potential, particularly for those looking to rally support for the next election. All former ‘general’ *caciques*, we must add, continue

¹⁰ In the past, a specific type of shaman was tasked with pacifying the *bope* by offering selected parts of their animals when killed, thereby rendering them edible. As I discuss in Chapter 5, this form of shamanism faded around two decades ago.

¹¹ Before the 2023 election, the terms in Tadarimana were set for two years: the system is always open to reform.

to hold leadership roles as advisors of sorts, making this political role, in a sense, a permanent position.

The main responsibility of a *cacique* is, as the Boe often put it, to elicit ‘aid’ (*ajuda*) from the Barae to fund or implement ‘improvements’ (*melhorias*) in the villages. As one interlocutor succinctly put it, their essential skill is “knowing to speak with the Barae,” which means being both eloquent in Portuguese and free from *poguru* — the ‘respect-shame’ disposition that often characterises Boe behaviour when interacting with strangers, including when making demands to non-indigenous people. Those who fit this profile are usually men in their forties with extensive experience in the non-indigenous world: many former *caciques* have either studied or worked in nearby cities and have developed ties to local politicians.



Figure 5. Cacique Marcelo Cogueipa is interviewed at the city hall following a meeting with the mayor. March 2023.

The *cacique*, as a political figure, exists alongside another type of leader, the *boe eimijera*, or 'leader of the Boe/people,' also referred to as chefe de cultura ('culture chief')¹². As we will see, the influence of these traditional leaders and ritual specialists is now mostly bound to periods of mourning, when the extended mortuary cycle becomes the central focus of collective life within the Indigenous Land. In contrast with the 'culture chiefs', the political form embodied by the *caciques* is explicitly understood as an adoption of an exogenous political technology, one that is in a permanent state of redesign.



Figure 6. Marcelo Coguiepa, candidate for cacique, shows his vote before casting his ballot. April 2023.

¹² Whether speaking Bororo or Portuguese, the expression *boe eimijera* may be used either in contrast to *caciques* or in a way that includes them, in which case it conveys a broader sense of 'leader'.

Each of these forms of leadership is associated with specific spaces within the village: the school, party hall, football pitch, and health centre fall within the cacique's domain, while the traditional circular village is the sphere of the ritual chiefs. Before turning our attention to the times of joy that define the cacique's realm and its spaces, we now introduce the traditional circular village and the web of relationships inscribed in it.

In the late 1970s, a flood devastated the old Tadarimana village, prompting its relocation a few hundred meters downstream, where a traditional ring-shaped village had already taken shape after a fission a few years earlier (see Serpa 1989; Viertler 1990). Until the late 1990s, the village maintained the Boe traditional circular layout, with each matrilineal clan's house occupying its assigned section. When demographic growth surged, houses began to spread along the road that meets the village ring on its southern side. In the 2000s, as satellite villages began to emerge, the central village adapted to the growing population by gradually expanding southward.

Despite new houses spreading freely, the village circle at the settlement's northern end kept its shape. At the centre of the circle of houses stands the *baimanagejewu*, known in the literature as the 'men's house.' This large house, central to the rituals discussed in this thesis, served as a residence for bachelors in past villages until the early twentieth century (Crocker 1969). Adjacent to the western wall of the men's house, lies the *bororo* — the inner ceremonial plaza from which the Boe's well-known exonym was derived — which is connected by a wide path to the western outer plaza, known as the 'place of *aije* spirits' (*aije muga*). In contemporary Tadarimana, this outer plaza — surrounded by bush and, crucially, not visible from any house — is situated approximately seventy meters west of the ring of houses.



Figure 7. The circular section of Tadarimana during a funeral. January 2025, photo courtesy of Cesar Augusto.

As outlined in the introduction, the space of the Boe circular village once functioned as an almost total map of potential relationships, inscribing clans, moieties, and their intra- and interrelations within its layout. The eight Boe clans, which occupy specific sections of the circle, are classed into a northern and a southern moiety, comprising four clans each. An east-west axis thus splits the village circle in half. In its broader application, all people within the same moiety are regarded as kin (*-obe*) to one another. Across moieties, people relate as ‘ritual allies’ (*iorubadare*), among whom people traditionally find ideal spouses and in-laws. Most Boe rituals involve the cross-moiety circulation of ritual wealth (performances, ornaments, and songs), either temporarily or permanently. A clan’s wealth is therefore primarily displayed through the skin, voice, and movements of its allies rather than through those of its own people. Consequently, these displays of ritual privileges and wealth are less about asserting clan identity and more about making intricate cross-clan and cross-moiety relationships visible. While Boe moieties are also nominally exogamous, this norm seems to have little impact on contemporary marriage choices, being often marked out as something ‘of the past’. Nevertheless, the weight of this dormant (yet not forgotten) norm can occasionally resurface, especially when a marriage is called into question.

This is a painfully simplified picture of what is arguably one of the most sophisticated socio-cosmological and ritual systems known in lowland South America (Viveiros de Castro 1991).¹³ Still, in contemporary Tadarimana, the village circle with its spatial codification of relationships and ritual life has become a section of a larger settlement. To the south, at the centre of the settlement, lie the school, health centre, football pitch, and event hall. An Evangelical church is located at the southern edge of the settlement — as far as possible from the ceremonial men's house — with the houses of the most devoted attendees around it.



Figure 8. Aerial view of Tadarimana Village in January 2025. Photo courtesy of Cesar Augusto.

The spatial inscription of times of sorrow and times of joy, outlined in the chapter's introduction, becomes more apparent here. During the extended mortuary cycles, the village ring, men's house, and plaza become the focal points of collective mobilisation. Conversely, during times of joy, the focus shifts to football championships, parties, and other activities in the facilities located south of the traditional village. This alternation, viewed as a shift between Boe's and Barae's cultura, is accompanied by a parallel shift

¹³ Considerable amounts of ink have been devoted to often highly esoteric debates on Boe 'social organisation'; for an overview, see Coelho de Souza (2002) and Kelmer (2021).

in the political privilege of the *caciques* and that of the ‘culture chiefs’. The combination of these communal spaces defines Tadarimana as the central village, yet the alternation between periods of joy and sorrow, Barae culture and Boe culture, makes it a village that contains in itself contrasting states of collective sociality. We thus now turn to the details of this contrast.

Times of joy

On 12th October 2022, just a few weeks after the end of a five-month-long mortuary cycle, Tadarimana hosted the opening ceremony for its inaugural annual hardcourt football league. The funeral had brought all parties and sporting activities to a halt. The local school’s large multi-sport gymnasium, which had been covered in dust after remaining lifeless for such a long period, was cleaned thoroughly and prepared for the event. Shortly before the beginning of the ceremony, all sixteen Boe teams based in Tadarimana — comprising eight men’s teams and eight women’s — lined up outside the gym, waiting to parade into it when called. Each team donned its distinctive uniform, displaying unique designs, colours, names, and badges, with some also showcasing the names and logos of occasional sponsors.

As teams were called into the gym, the dramatic grandeur of the UEFA Champions League anthem echoed loudly through the space, amplified by a speaker pushed beyond its limits. As each team marched in, some led by a child proudly carrying its flag, a commentator with a microphone announced the team’s name, captain, and trainer. Some of the Boe team names were inspired by well-known clubs, including European ones — for instance, Liverpool emerged as the most successful team during that first weekend of matches. As the commentator introduced each team, a pundit chimed in with remarks about the teams’ and players’ reputations. With all the teams lined up in the court, everyone joined in singing the national anthem as a large Brazilian flag was hoisted. Finally, the ceremony concluded with a dance performance by the local ‘Tik Tok Girls’ group and speeches from the *cacique* and the head of sports, paving the way for the first match.

In times of joy, football tournaments, often accompanied by evening parties, are held almost every weekend in Tadarimana. Although organised and attended

mainly by younger generations, these activities can engage the whole village: women's football enjoys the same popularity as men's, and persons in their forties may play alongside teenagers. Older people, in turn, often join as spectators. A tournament can stretch from around eight in the morning until ten at night, with continuous matches over two consecutive days. As exhaustion has taken its toll on everyone, the finals can sometimes be the least attended. Occasionally, when events involving parties and tournaments take place in other Boe Lands, buses are chartered. As hundreds of people leave for a few days, the village appears almost deserted.

When I watched the opening ceremony for the football league from the stands, I couldn't avoid laughing as the two local teachers began to play the role of commentators, emulating the style of Brazilian TV sports commentary. At that moment, I was convinced I was before a pantomime, a parody of a football championship opening ceremony. But when I glanced around, I realised I was the only one finding any humour in the scene. What I believe triggered my laughter was a sense of excess throughout the ceremony. It was my first time watching a sports event in Tadarimana. While I wasn't anticipating any stereotype of 'indigenised football,' I also did not anticipate the notion of an 'opening ceremony' to be taken that far. The effort to replicate the aesthetics of football was so meticulous it came across as excessive. What stood out to me, crucially, was the somewhat paradoxical impression that what made that ceremony distinctly local was its deliberate attempt to purify it of any trace of cultural specificity.



Figure 9. Anthem and national flag hoisting during the hardcourt football league's opening ceremony. October 2022.

Rollason's (2011: 482) observation about football among the Panapompom in Papua New Guinea may be here extended to the Boe case. He notes that framing it "in terms of native culture obscures exactly what Panapompom people were interested in football: it is a globally recognisable game; as such it mattered profoundly that Panapompom people played *football*" (my emphasis). For the Boe, similarly, football, schooling, parties, and elections are not experienced as having to be adapted to local practices. Quite the opposite. Their significance lies in their capacity to de-indigenise, momentarily erasing local specificity. What is valued, in sum, are their non-Boe singularities, their *baraeness*. On this level, the Boe seem not interested in 'indigenising modernity'; instead, they actively seek to *purify* it as such, thus extracting its creative potential. Their involvement with Barae social, cultural, or political technologies is thus characterised by a meticulous replication of their rites and aesthetics.

The village school is central in the organisation of most of what is seen as non-indigenous activities, with local teachers often responsible for the preparations and overseeing. Working as an extension of two urban schools, a state and a municipal one, Tadarimana school's curriculum follows most of their standards, being thus monolingual in Portuguese. Upon entering the school, the notion of an attempt to purify

baraeness might seem inadequate. Immediately, one notices a series of boards suspended from the ceiling, each bearing the names of the different moieties and clans, mirroring the spatial layout of a Boe circular village and showcasing examples of clan designs. The entrance is further adorned with welcoming messages in the Boe language and a large painted mural depicting the mythical heroes Bakororo and Itubore. However, these displays of indigeneity are mostly confined to the entrance. As the school director once remarked, "I want [non-indigenous] people to walk into the school and think, 'Ah, this is an Indigenous school'."

Seen from a non-indigenous perspective, the school must present itself as 'Indigenous', but its inward facet differs sharply. For most of my interlocutors, including the director himself, its value rests on its capacity to disseminate Barae knowledge, and traces of *boeness* might even be seen as undesirable. Ismael, a respected ceremonial chief and a nursing technician, once shared his thoughts on 'intercultural education': "They shouldn't teach culture at school. School is for learning Barae things. Culture you learn at home." He went on to add that intercultural schooling prevents the few Boe people who went to university from keeping up with the classes in the same way as Barae students, an opinion I heard from many people.

Such views are not confined to schooling. For instance, when complaining about idiosyncrasies of Tadarimana elections, a lady remarked: "If they want to do Barae stuff, they should do it properly." On another occasion, an interlocutor complained about 'cultural strengthening' projects by saying that such workshops should be for "Barae stuff". For her, it made no sense to have the Barae organising a workshop about Boe knowledge. Instead, the "aid" from the Barae is valued in the form of the latter's material, social, and cultural technologies. There is, in sum, a sense of redundancy in making Barae technologies — whose value lies in their exogenous content — into vessels for Boe knowledge. Therefore, within the frame of *baraeness*, traces of cultural specificity emerge as an unwelcome residue.

With a ritual life centred around death and extended periods of mourning, the alternation between times of sorrow and joy, and its vital role in shaping the rhythm of village life, has been an enduring feature of Boe lived world. In fact, the traditional circular village, which once mapped virtually all relationships, also used to encode the alternation between joy and sorrow. The western outer plaza used to stand in contrast

to a temporary eastern outer plaza. The western one is to this day used exclusively for funerals, serving as a ritual counterpart of the village of the dead. Meanwhile, the eastern outer plaza and its path were used as a track for racing competitions, where participants carried large, heavy discs made from tied stems of the *mano* plant (genus *Heliconia*). In the form of a competition, these races could only be played during times of joy. Making explicit the pairing of space and affect, an elder once explained: “*Mano pa* (eastern plaza), joy; *Aije muga* (western plaza), sadness. *Mano pa*, joy; *Aije muga*, sadness,” as he alternately gestured to the east and west. However, these dynamics have gradually transformed over time, incorporating non-indigenous social, cultural, and political technologies that eventually became integral to them.

Since the early ethnographic literature, the mortuary ceremonies have been described as the core of Boe ritual life (Colbacchini & Albisetti 1942; Lévi-Strauss 1936, 1992). Still, times of joy once were just as ritually active as mourning periods are. Wherever ritual specialists were abundant, my older interlocutors recall joyful elegies, known as *Oieigo*, sung weekly as a prelude to ritual hunts and fishing expeditions. The only two rituals of joy still held in Tadarimana are occasional name-giving ceremonies and celebrations related to the killing of jaguars or pumas.¹⁴ The more frequent weekly rituals, as well as the Boe sports such as *mano* races, were replaced by activities explicitly associated with the performance of *baraeness*, mostly centred on football tournaments and parties. Consequently, the performance of *boeness* was displaced to periods of mourning, when sports and celebrations are forbidden.

The alternation between moments of joy and sorrow remains spatially inscribed, but with the traditional village circle as a whole now mostly marked out as a space of mourning, while the areas to the south — party hall, the football pitch, and the gymnasium — are reserved for joy. As each mortuary cycle begins or ends, collective life visibly shifts its focus between these spaces, but the rise of this new configuration is not without its consequences. As an interlocutor once remarked, “People say the Boe only have culture when someone dies. And they’re right.” As “culture” (cultura) became

¹⁴ Rituals of joy are still about dealing with *aroe* dead souls, and they share songs and ornaments with rituals of sorrow; yet, what we could call ‘diacritics of joy’ are added to these performances to distinguish them from moments of grief. Nonetheless, most rituals of joy still engage with their potential connection to the aesthetics of mourning, sometimes incorporating pre-defined moments dedicated to crying for the dead — commonly followed by joyful celebrations of life.

mourning-bound, the gap between times of joy and of grief seems to have widened, and spaces and performances of *boeness* have become closely associated with death — so much so that, in times of joy, *culture* may even be viewed as inauspicious, drawing death towards them.

In a past still within living memory, the line drawn between grief and joy seems to have been more permeable: certain joyful rituals included moments for mourning, and the daily cycle itself had its time of sorrow. To this day, the silence that settles over the *cerrado* savannah at dusk imbues this time with a sense of mourning for the Boe — both quietness and sadness and expressed in the Boe language through a single word, *makodu*. With this enveloping silence-sadness, the village sinks into a state of contemplative, mournful reflection. As recalled by my interlocutors and documented by (Caiuby Novaes 1986: 45) in the 1970s, dusk was once a time of laments: “In the twilight hours, hardly anyone speaks. The silence is only broken when, from one of the houses, a woman, in tears, mourns the loss of her relatives through her ritual lament.” As one interlocutor poignantly remarked, “It was as if the crying brought the night,” and with it, the return of the voices and sounds of village life.

During my fieldwork, however, not even once I heard a lament being performed in times of joy. In the past, besides twilight grief, they would also be performed over (or by) injured people, and, as in most Amerindian cases, as a ‘welcome of tears.’ On one occasion, a bee stung the lip of a woman who happened to master Boe ritual wailing. She did not cry but later confessed: “I wanted so much to cry, but I held it because people would think that someone died.” On other occasions, laments were said to be seen as ominous: the grief-like atmosphere they create could attract death.

Spaces such as the central plaza and men's house in the traditional village, once lively hubs for collective expressions of both joy and grief, also gradually became ‘sacralised’ and mourning-bound as the gap between times of joy and of sorrow grew. In March 2024, as workers from the city of Rondonópolis were renovating the village’s football pitch, discussions began about the possibility of playing football in the traditional central plaza. This plaza, it should be remembered, is where funerary ceremonies are held and bodies are temporarily buried — yet in the past it was also the space for weekly rituals of joy. The leader advocating for this solution pointed out that, before the pitch was built in the late 1990s, people used to play football in the plaza —

implicitly invoking the authority of the prestigious ritual specialists who were alive back then. However, his argument fell short. His younger brother, leading a much larger group opposed to the idea, eventually established a provisional pitch southwest of the village. In the end, no competition was held in the central plaza. The overlap of grief and joy it would have entailed was deemed unacceptable by most. As one woman remarked, “So much blood [from ritual scarification] and tears have been shed in that place; how could anyone play on it?”.¹⁵

Language has also become partially caught in the alternating times of joy and sorrow. During my fieldwork, most children under the age of ten are monolingual in Portuguese. Those between ten and their mid-twenties, in turn, generally understand the Boe language well but never speak it, neither among themselves nor with older kin. Among middle-aged couples, domestic conversation is characterised by rapid code-switching between Portuguese and Bororo, sometimes alternating more than once within a single sentence. However, this tendency towards code-switching is often restrained in collective settings. In the men’s house or during gatherings in the central plaza, middle-aged and older men tend to ‘purify’ their speech, favouring a more consistent use of Bororo. Similarly, women of the same age group also lean towards using a more stable form of the language when speaking among themselves during funerals. In contrast, in celebrations and football tournaments, the Bororo language is seldom heard, even among the older generation.

In developing the alternation between times of joy and times of sorrow as a reflexive tool for navigating what they perceive as two opposed modes of living, the Boe of Tadarimana have progressively purified the domains of *boeness* and *baraeness*. This alternating affective temporality has thus become a means of both severing these ‘cultures’ and *living* them through time. Opposing village spaces, affective dispositions, cultural specificities, sociopolitical forms, among other dimensions have been progressively mapped onto each other. Yet this is not merely a matter of conceptualization; it is a mode of action, a pragmatics of cultural difference. As Stasch (2013) notes in relation to the opposition between village and forest among the

¹⁵ Symetrically, gatherings in the football pitch and party hall during times of grief are a source of frequent complaints in the village’s online group chat and community meetings.

Korowai of West Papua, persons “use spatial heterogeneity not just to cognize the relation of whole alternative social orders taxonomically but also to live that relation” (:567; emphasis in the original). Movement, in space *and time*, is also essential for the Boe, and what triggers it is the event of death and the affective state of grief.

Times of sorrow

Loud, high-pitched cries of grief, laments, and sobbing echo throughout the village as the first sign of a recent death. Nowadays, most deaths occur at the hospital in the nearby city, with the news spreading through phone calls and messages. Even before the body returns to the village, speculation begins about whether a full mortuary ritual will be held. This decision rests with the female relatives of the deceased, with elder women from the deceased’s clan having precedence on such matters. One of these women must step forward to lead the mourners, taking on the ritual responsibility of *aroe uce*, the ‘mother of the deceased’s soul’. She does this by being the first to cut her hair short in a sign of mourning, an act expected to be followed by the deceased’s close female kin. Once her decision is conveyed to the male ritual specialist in charge, he has no choice but to initiate preparations for the mortuary cycle.

A ritual specialist’s first act is to choose a man from the opposite moiety of the deceased as the *aroe maiwu*, the ‘recent soul’, also referred to as the *iadu*, ‘the [deceased’s] other’; nowadays, a second person is also chosen to help the lead *recent soul*. The job, which one cannot refuse, entails both handling the deceased’s body and personifying their soul in ceremonies. The relationship of adoptive filiation between the mother of the soul and the pair of *recent souls* — they must call and refer to each other as mother and son — is the core of the mortuary ceremonies and will endure for as long as they live, being re-enacted at every new funeral. As the *recent souls*, helped by their clansman, fill in the grave at the central plaza, the door of the mourners’ house is shut. From this point until the body has fully decomposed, the mourners will remain secluded in their house, and, most significantly, visually separated from the plaza.

It is between the mourning house and the plaza that ceremonies unfold. In all seven funerals I witnessed, the mourning house was set up in the lead mourner clan’s section of the traditional village circle. Most Boe houses are rectangular in shape, with

thatched gable roofs, dirt floors, and walls woven from palm sprouts. While they nowadays typically house a nuclear family, it is common for extended matrifocal families to live in clusters of houses that share the same clearing. When a house is prepared to accommodate mourners, most of the usual furniture, such as beds, TV sets, racks, and couches, is either cleared away or relocated, creating an open space where the mourners will remain for most of their stay. This space, usually a section or half of the house, is covered with old mats, blankets, canvases, and straw mats, as mourners are expected to forgo the comfort of beds, sitting and sleeping directly on the ground. Worn sections of the woven straw walls are repaired to close any gaps or holes. Doors and windows are carefully sealed, and in one instance I observed, a blanket was hung over the inside of the house's front wall. This was done explicitly to prevent mourners from accidentally seeing the village centre through the straw walls, as looking toward the centre — where the grave lies — can be too painful for them. When they join ceremonies, whether sitting in the plaza or in the men's house, they turn their backs to the grave or the mainstay. This visual disjunction is only overcome by ritual food exchanges between the mourners and the *recent souls*.

Only five of the eleven houses (or house clusters) that shaped the circle in September 2023 were permanent homes. The remaining six houses belonged to women who resided outside the circle or in nearby satellite villages — a Boe house is explicitly associated with its eldest female resident and her clan. Placed in their clan's designated section of the circular village, these temporary houses are maintained mainly for attending funerals. This sometimes means keeping both a non-indigenous style house and a 'traditional' one — in one case, in the same village. All these six women and two of the five heads of families who lived in the circle were *aroe etujemage*, mothers of souls. Having previously led groups of mourners, they are expected to attend all Boe funerals to feed the dead they tend to. The other three were daughters or sisters' daughters of mothers of souls who would move in during rituals, assuming as the head of the household. The village circle, almost deserted and covered with overgrown bushes in prolonged times of joy, is thus re-populated during a mortuary cycle, emerging once again as the centre of collective life. A month into a funeral, it is the deserted football pitch, with grass growing wild, that now starts to appear abandoned.

The mourners are easily recognised by their hair, cut short at the moment of

death and then left to grow wildly. In the past, the hair would be plucked off after dipping the fingers into a hearth's ashes, the same technique used to remove bird plumes and down. Older interlocutors would often underline how painful the procedure was, identifying it with the pain of loss — sudden scalp spasms or chills are still seen as an omen of looming death. Old, dirty, often ripped clothes and darkened skin are also marks of mourners, who must avoid bathing outside ritually defined occasions, when it is expected that the Recent Souls' clanswomen will perform this act. Laughing or even smiling is strictly avoided, and one must speak little and quietly, move slowly, and keep the head down, eyes downcast. The mother of the soul, in turn, is expected not to speak at all. Further, women with newborns and young children should ideally be kept away from the mourners' space. In an evocative image, an interlocutor remarked that if a tear of grief happens to fall upon a baby, it could bring them bad luck: babies' unstable bodies are easy prey for both resentful *aroe* and the necrophagous *bope* spirits who lurk over the living in times of sorrow.

It is possible to differentiate varying levels of mourning behaviour. First, those I simply call 'the mourners' form what can be considered the innermost circle of grief. In all five mourning houses I visited, this core group, in addition to the mother of the deceased's soul, was composed of two or three close female relatives, such as mothers, daughters, granddaughters, sisters, or wives. While men may also join in mourning, my interlocutors noted that this typically occurs only upon the death of a child, and most often when they are still married to the child's mother.

In their ripped clothes, darkened skin, and hairs growing untamed, the core mourners cultivate a state of anti-ornamentation. They must avoid patterned clothes, sheets, and blankets, in sum, anything that evokes adornment. Based on their early 20th century observations, Salesian missionaries observed about mourners: "Some, to show their great love for a loved one, go to the extreme of violently tearing off their earrings, thus shattering their earlobes to indicate that they never want to adorn themselves again" (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962: 561). Nowadays, mourners also tend to favour dark clothing, which is avoided during times of joy as it is considered inauspicious. The rejection of ornamentation is further highlighted by the visual severance between the mourners, secluded in their sealed house, and the displays of adorned bodies that, away from their sight, mark the ritual activities in the central

plaza.

As one moves towards the outer circle of mourning, other close relatives are expected to either stay in the mourners' house or visit frequently, assisting the core mourners with tasks such as cooking, making small repairs, gathering palm sprouts for baskets and mats, and going to the city for groceries. They may also join the mourners by sitting quietly on the ground, particularly during singing sessions held in the house. Stepping further away from the inner circle, clanspeople and more distant kin may also join the mourners, especially during the final ceremonies of a mortuary cycle. For most of the time, only the three or four core mourners can be seen sitting in the mourning house or plaza during these ceremonies. However, as the funeral approaches its conclusion, non-resident kin who travel to attend the closing ceremonies may also join in. In the cases I witnessed, this group could expand to as many as fifteen people on these occasions.

The restrained behaviour expected of the mourners radiates from the mourning house to the entire village. All voices must be kept low, and TVs are watched at an almost inaudible level. The deceased's name is also avoided during the funeral and, though less consistently, also afterwards. The two most strict interdictions are playing with a ball and listening to music, as these directly evoke the collective activities that define times of joy, parties and football championships. Such interdictions and expected behaviour constraints that emerge during a funeral are maintained as a form of 'respect-shame' (*poguru*) and 'compassion' (*maidodu*, *-ogudu*; *dó*) towards the mourners and the deceased. Therefore, they get increasingly loose as one moves further away from the central plaza and the mourning house, not extending to the satellite villages — yet collective activities of joy, such as football tournaments and parties, must not be held anywhere in the Indigenous Land. The level of restraint observed by the mourners, we must add, also varies between families and from one funeral to another. When it does not align with expectations, it can influence the entire village's behaviour. When commenting on a lead mourner who was seen going to the city for groceries, an interlocutor said: "We, Boe, first look at the mourners. If they are respecting [the funeral], we also respect it. If they are not, we lose our shyness".

A gradual loosening of such expectations naturally occurs over the weeks or months of a funeral's unfolding. The mourners slowly change their behaviour, speaking

more often and less quietly, beginning to tell stories spontaneously and, sometimes, even smiling. The whole village also reflects this. In the initial days following a death, complete stillness envelops the village. However, as the funeral approaches its final stages, the sounds and movements of village life gradually return. Two days after the major outpouring of grief that marks the closing days of ceremonies, the mortuary basket containing the deceased's bones is taken to the cemetery for the second and final burial. For mourners, of course, the conclusion of a ritual cycle does not mark the end of personal grief, and restrained behaviour may continue for months or years, but the shift in collective life is both immediate and palpable. Once the basket leaves the village, children begin to play freely, and laughter and music fill the air once again in an astonishing shift in the atmosphere. As an interlocutor eloquently put it, "it's like you've been walking through dense bush and suddenly reach a wide-open clearing."



Figure 10. The group of mourners, enlarged by visiting kin, sits in the plaza at the closing stages of a funeral. In the background, the bonfire burns the deceased's belongings. March 2023.

One evening at dusk, as the voice and rattles of a singer resonated through the village from the mourning house, an eight-year-old girl, giggling, sprinted into her grandmother's home. In a hushed voice, the grandmother gently scolded her in Bororo:

“When they [the men-as-*aroe* dancers] are at the centre of the village, we watch and remember (*pawia buture*). When they sing, we listen and long (*pagiarigodure*) for our father, our mother, our grandfather, our grandmother. We don’t run around laughing.” In this context, “remembering” and “longing” express the open-ended, grief-tinged nostalgia that Boe ceremonies deliberately evoke in those who witness them: times of sorrow are also times of remembrance and yearning.

Mortuary ceremonies are held on most weekends throughout a funeral, invariably involving the summoning of all *aroe* dead souls within living memory. Embodied by men concealed within the men’s house, the dead must be fed by the women who now mother them — the same women who, during the funeral, led the mourners and first fed the deceased’s soul. On the day after the weekly feast for the dead, the men-as-*aroe* may either embark on a ritual fishing expedition or display their ornamented bodies in ‘dances’ at the central plaza. Throughout these performances, the deceased’s family never grieves alone: every past loss is rekindled, resurfacing in a collective re-enactment of grief. Every Boe funeral is experienced in its iconic connection to all previous funerals, reactivating memories of past losses. The memory of earlier deaths resurfaces with each new loss, steeping time in grief: the past is mourned as lost, and the present perceived as a time of decline.

Times of sorrow are, finally, times of ‘culture’. The Boe use the term *cultura*, in Portuguese, to refer primarily to their ritual life and, more broadly, to what distinguishes the Boe from the Barae and other Indigenous peoples. This term is used interchangeably with the Boe concept of *ro*, which designates the specificities of a being — what makes a body and its bundle of habits, abilities, and dispositions, stand out as unique. As a differentiation marker, it closely aligns with Viveiros de Castro’s (1998: 478) now-classic definition of a body in Amazonia as “an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*” (author’s emphasis). As a verb, *ro* simply means ‘to do’, reflecting the notion that the specificities of beings are often emphasised through their ways of acting, their behaviour — a body’s appearance, as Viveiros de Castro (ibid) also noted, functioning as an index of such dispositions and capacities.¹⁶ Still, even

¹⁶ Besides, *ro* serves as the word for ‘smell’ in general, with tasty things also simply described as ‘having *ro*’ (*ro-re*); here, again, it denotes qualities that *stand out*.

when translated into Portuguese as cultura, the concept applies to both humans and non-humans, animate and inanimate. To clarify if their use of the Portuguese term was consistent with the Boe one, I asked my interlocutors, in Portuguese, whether rocks and animals had cultura. My question was always met with a look of surprise and a tone that implied its obviousness: “Of course, everything lives in a certain way,” one man responded.¹⁷

In specific contexts, particularly in ceremonial ones, Boe *e-ro* may also be translated as “the law” (a lei), or “Boe’s law” (lei de Bororo). Here it underscores how things *should* be done, highlighting a key aspect of Boe ritual life, namely, its orthodoxy. Ceremonies must be carried out as closely as possible to how the *mariguduwuge*, the “ancient ones,” performed them, and are thus often regarded as ideally immutable — and, consequentially, as having to be, to an extent, purified of traces of *baraeness*. Elders, therefore, hold full legitimacy in criticising ritual practices, as their memories are seen as stretching further back to a time when they personally witnessed ‘the law’ of the ancient ones. As we will see throughout this thesis, the perceived immutability of ritual procedures is essential to the narrowing of the gap between past and present achieved in Boe rituals. Through ritual repetition, each ritual act becomes an icon of all its previous iterations, turning every fragment of a song, movement of a body, or sound of an instrument into a time-laden and potentially grief-evoking image for both performers and spectators. In sum, times of sorrow are oriented towards the past, even though, as we shall see, it also casts possible futures.

Time and cultural disjunction

So far, we have shown how contemporary life in Tadarimana village is shaped by a series of overlapping dualities — sorrow and joy, northern and southern sections of the

¹⁷ The Boe *ro* is close, for instance, to the Kuikuro notion of *ügühütü* (Fausto 2011) and, more crucially, to the Xikrin term *kukràdjà* (Gordon 2006: 371-373). The latter, besides denoting a unique bundle of features and dispositions, also refers to the ritual wealth that ritually differentiates Xikrin Houses. The Boe notion is similar. Boe *e-ro*, employed with an inalienable possessive pronoun, means ‘Boe’s particularities or culture’. When prefixed with an alienable possessive pronoun, Boe *eno roe*, it primarily denotes their clan-specific ritual paraphernalia and ornaments and, more broadly, all Boe material culture.

village, tradition and innovation — which together form a multilayered reflexive tool for making the difference between *boeness* and *barae* both thinkable and, crucially, actionable. I emphasise the reflexive character of this alternating duality, as it serves as a meta-cultural device enacted through space, affect, time, among other dimensions. What underpins this device is the imperative to differentiate Boe and Barae ways, preventing the collapse of the distinction.

To non-indigenous sensibilities, life in a Boe village might seem like a remarkable *blend* of, say, the traditional and the modern. Still, this tendency to see it as a cultural amalgam is distant from my interlocutors' reflexive models of themselves: at every instance where something may tend towards an amalgam, they reintroduce differentiation, preventing juxtaposition from solidifying into fusion. Everything — from significant communal events to the most intimate emotions and desires — can be potentially marked as either endogenous or exogenous, Boe or Barae, with images of hybridity rarely allowed.

For example, a woman once shared that her tendency to plan for the long term was a Barae trait, something she had learned from her late husband who had lived in the city: "For the Boe, it's only when you finish a meal that you think about the next one," she remarked. People often speak of Barae culture and Boe culture as distinct repertoires of behaviours, each to be drawn upon as the situation demands. Recalling her prayers during a powerful storm that shook her house, another woman told me, "In those moments, I turn to the Barae side." On a separate occasion, a ritual specialist observed: "There are good things and bad things in Barae culture and in Boe culture, so I pick what I want [from each]." The exogenous and the endogenous, Barae 'culture' and Boe 'culture', must remain separate yet within reach.

For my interlocutors, the hidden risks of these composites fall into two equally undesired forms of cultural stasis or homogeneity. On the one hand, a merger into an amalgam and, on the other, an irreversible shift to one pole of the duality. Elders often highlight this through generational contrasts: "Young people," a respected elder once lamented, "want to become Barae. But they don't become Barae; they are neither Boe nor Barae. I don't know what they are." During a conversation in front of the men's house after a ceremony, a traditional chief voiced his concern about the youth's indifference to *cultura*: "I also like Barae *e-ro* ['culture']; but there's a time for that.

They want to replace one with the other."

The refusal to collapse dualities into a single entity, neutralising the potential for otherness-becoming, is a well-studied aspect of the Amerindian dealings with alterity. In terms of Indigenous classifications of otherness, this is often associated with the well-studied North and Western Amazonian emphasis on 'becoming white', 'civilized', or other similar notions, commonly against the backdrop of 'wildness' (Costa 2016; Gow 1991; Kelly 2005). My formulations here are not far from Kelly's (2016) most recent articulation of the issue, which frames it as a contrast between the "neither-nor" operator of *mestizaje* (in the Venezuelan context) and the Indigenous "and" logic of what he terms anti-*mestizaje*. However, my primary focus is to shed light on some of the less commonly explored aspects of these dynamics as experienced by my interlocutors — particularly, their time-saturated characteristics and how they foster creative social experimentation.

Alongside the interconnections among the spatial, affective, political, and ritual layers of the alternation between times of sorrow and times of joy, time itself emerges as a key dimension. Still, like all other dimensions, it is only visible *within* such connections. As a first example, we may foreground the affective plane, where grief and joy are closely paired with past-oriented and forward-facing dispositions. As noted, the kind of knowledge that underpins mortuary rituals is explicitly seen as emanating from the past. When brought to the present in ceremonies, such knowledge is experienced as a faint echo of a once vibrant past, casting an image of cultural decline upon present life. This is a grief-infused nostalgia directly tied to (and triggered by) the memory of the dead. For instance, in the elaborate poetics of Boe laments, the wailer seamlessly transition from crying for dead kin to grieving culture's decline.

However, this sense of 'cultural' loss does not arise from the idea that *boeness* is gradually transforming into, or blending with, *baraeness* in a process akin to *mestizaje*. On the contrary, elements seen as Barae within Boe rituals are often overlooked or reworked to fit Boe aesthetic norms. Ritual orthodoxy actively absorbs and reframes such loss: perceived decline in ritual practice is almost always interpreted as dwindling or disappearance, never as adaptation or innovation. This includes even deliberate changes — skipping a ritual or part of one is considered preferable to performing it incorrectly.

In contrast, the collective performances of Barae ‘culture’ during times of joy are future-oriented. Activities like village elections, football tournaments, and schooling are often seen as a form of preparation or rehearsal, hinting at a future where parity with the Barae becomes attainable. When criticising the merging represented by intercultural schooling, one interlocutor was unequivocal about this temporal orientation: “I say that with the future in mind.” Implicitly, she speaks here of an imagined future in which the Boe will have fully mastered Barae skills and knowledge. On another occasion, an interlocutor proudly observed that, in certain respects, the Boe take Barae ‘culture’ more seriously than the Barae themselves. He then referenced the *compadrio* relationship between a child’s parents and godparents following Catholic baptism — a ritual likewise bound to times of joy. We may here borrow Buitron’s (2022: 36) words about Shuar festivals, where performances of ‘whiteness’ are “a way of competing with absent others, thereby actualizing a positive version of the Shuar collective future”. Still, as with Boe ceremonies, these performances mostly fall short of expectations, perceived as still distant from their model and source: purified *baraeness* — an ideal that, rather than lying in an irretrievable past, resides in an as-yet-unattained future.

Still, as Munn (1992: 115) reminded us, “the past-present-future relation (...) is intrinsic to all temporalizations irrespective of focus”, and therefore “ways of attending to the past also create modes of apprehending certain future” — and, we may add, vice-versa. The opposing orientations discussed here cannot be reduced to performative temporalities that face solely either the past or the future; rather, each orientation entail a complementary image of an undesirable form of either pastness and futurity — the reverse side of the temporal horizons created in ritual performance.

On the one hand, the forward-facing temporality associated with performances of *baraeness* tends to cast the past as a time of “suffering”, when the Boe lived without the support of non-indigenous technology and were compelled to devote long hours to demanding subsistence activities such as gardening, hunting, and fishing. Accordingly, the future enacted through activities of joy and promised in cacique-style politics is one in which the Boe are liberated from the burdens of life without Barae technology and assistance. On the other hand, within the nostalgic orientation of ritual orthodoxy, if the present is seen as a time of decline, the future emerges as a horizon of cultural

extinction.

These temporal frames tend to be associated with ‘traditionalist’ and ‘innovative’ registers of discourse, both of which are contextually bound. They are often activated by the broader frames of *boeness* and *baraeness* that emerge in activities associated with sorrow and joy. Yet, in less collective settings, persons may shift between these registers as fluidly as they alternate between languages, depending on the interlocutor or the intended effects of the discourse. On one occasion, during a conversation with Raimundo Itogoga — an elderly and highly orthodox ritual specialist — he adopted an emphatically radical stance, angrily proclaiming that everything around him, from lightbulbs to clothes, chairs, pans, and pots, should be returned to “you” (the Barae), since they were not traditional “Boe things.” Only minutes later, as we walked together towards the river, he pointed to the very centre of his satellite village and said: “you should tell them to open an Evangelical church right there.” This somewhat extreme example of register switching illustrates how it is not strictly bound to the opposition between times of sorrow and joy or to types of leadership. In this instance, it was my presence as a Barae-du anthropologist that prompted him to move seamlessly from a ‘cultural decline’ to an ‘aid’ register.

Another image of *baraeness* and *boeness as time* appears in generational difference. During exceptionally long mourning periods, younger people tend to leave temporarily to stay with kin in other villages, where parties and football are permitted. In contrast, the older population tends to move in the opposite direction, travelling from other villages and territories toward the village where the funeral is taking place to relive their past griefs, particularly in a funeral’s beginning and closing stages. In times of mourning, as we have seen, the knowledge sustaining Boe collective life is anchored in the exceptional depth of the nostalgia-coloured memories of elders; by contrast, the younger generation’s intimacy with Barae ‘culture’ shapes activities in times of joy. While elders might interpret this divergence as a sign of the irreversible decline of Boe ‘culture’, a closer examination of their life stories, alongside the transitions seen in the middle-aged generation, reveals a more nuanced picture.

A shift from a focus on *baraeness* to *boeness* is a fundamental aspect of the Boe life cycle. The accumulation of experiences of grief draws middle-aged people gradually into the memory-driven ceremonial life, encouraging a reflexive re-engagement with

memories of deceased kin. This Boe ‘middle-age crisis’ nurtures a nostalgic sensibility that takes a collective form in ceremonies. Thereby, grief-infused memory becomes a transformative force in personhood, and, reinforced through ceremonial engagement, it magnifies one’s kinship network, influence, and prestige.

Generational differences, serving as a proxy for the broader oppositions discussed here, can become subjects of heated debate in village life. However, they have never crystallised into factional tensions at the political level, as occurred in other contexts where intergenerational dynamics became central. In this sense, the Boe case aligns more closely with High’s (2015a) portrayal of Waorani narratives and performances of the past as shifting with generational differences, than with Ewart’s (2020) account of the Panará, where a former moiety structure gave way to intergenerational factionalism. Although Boe caciques and traditional leaders may be broadly associated with the interests of younger and older generations respectively — and may at times criticise each other in private — their grievances typically concern a perceived lack of complementarity. These leaders and the political forms they embody are not regarded as representing conflicting visions of collective life.

In contemporary Boe diarchy, the two leadership figures, the *caciques* and the *boe eimijerage*, embody all the temporal dimensions presented so far. The *boe eimijerage* are typically older, experienced leaders whose legitimacy stems from their exceptional command of ritual knowledge — an expertise, as we have noted, rooted in remarkable memory. As we will see in Chapter Four, this memory is tied to the careful memorisation of ritual songs and lore, which testify to one’s past intimacy with the *mariguduwuge*, the ‘ancient ones’, seen as the ultimate source of knowledge. The *caciques*, in contrast, are distinguished by their exceptional ability to ensure that the non-indigenous people provide aid (*ajuda*) to the Boe, overshadowing the often-mentioned deceitful nature of the Barae. These two figures embody the mediation they are expected to achieve: whereas the *boe eimijera* bridges the ‘ancient ones’ and the present, the *cacique* is often seen as living in-between the Barae and the Boe. Cícero Kudoropa, the middle-aged *cacique* at the end of my fieldwork and the most electorally successful in the past decade, is himself the son of a once influential white landowner from the region, who was assassinated as part of a land dispute. Two of his non-indigenous half-brothers are prominent politicians, one of whom once held the position of federal deputy. In

contrast, Aije Kurireu, the ritual chief in charge when I began my fieldwork — who later fell ill, triggering a crisis analysed in Chapter Four — could barely speak Portuguese.

Still, the roles of *cacique* and *boe eimijera* are not mutually exclusive. By the end of my fieldwork, the vice-cacique was training to become a *boe eimijera* himself, and, when younger, Raimundo Itogoga, the most respected elder ritual specialist, had served for many years as both an elected cacique and a prestigious ritual leader in more than one village. Nevertheless, these two forms of political action remain distinct, even when embodied by the same person.

As such, a *cacique* has no say in the organising of ceremonial matters in times of sorrow. Throughout a funeral, decisions are made and communicated among the *boe eimijera*, the traditional chiefs, in the men's house or during evening conversations by the plaza. Daily spaces of collective decision-making in the past, these have now also become funeral-bound. Still, during funerals, the *caciques* are expected to assist the *boe eimijera* in securing aid from nearby farmers, politicians, and other Barae or in organising transport to bring people from distant villages. Out of funeral times, the *boe eimijera* are no different from anyone else in the village, with the *caciques* stepping into prominence through the raising of funds for parties, and the organisation of transport, tournaments, and the like. The authority of the *caciques* is ultimately seen as stemming from their ability to extract benefits from their relationship with the Barae.

During rituals, such dynamics of authority might turn on its head. During a name-giving ceremony in October 2022, a FUNAI employee stood among the crowd of onlookers by the plaza. It was election day in Brazil, and the military had accompanied the delivery of ballots to the village school. Moacir Coguiepa, a respected elder and former *cacique* known for his 'harsh-loud speaking' (*mako rakare*), paused the ceremony and addressed the FUNAI representative with a loud, commanding voice. He demanded the military to come and witness the ritual: "Tell them to come here, now!". Shouting with his deep voice, he continued, "Now [during the ceremony], we rule the village, not the Barae. You can go back to ruling when we are done."¹⁸

In focusing here mostly on time, I have simply foregrounded one particular

¹⁸ Viertler (1991: 181-2) had already remarked such reversal of authority in 1980s Tadarimana funerals.

dimension of the Boe alternating reflexive device. As noted, what characterises this system is that each dimension serves as a proxy for all others. Generational difference renders temporal orientations visible; these, in turn, index affective states that materialise in village space, and so forth. Nonetheless, *alternation*, as another kind of temporal dimension, is central. It constitutes an underlying schema — a condition of possibility for such a collective life sustained through the cultivation of cultural heterogeneity. Yet, as I will explore in the following section, alternation is also what opens this system to reassessment and change.

Reassessing collective life

My account so far might lead the reader to envision the times of sorrow/times of joy dynamics as a stable and cyclical dualism that encompasses the contemporary Boe lived world. This, however, couldn't be more distant from what I intend to convey here. The multilayered inter-figuration of time, space, culture, affect and political form presented here do not hold the status of a stable 'social organisation' of sorts, nor does it represent a set of norms dictating how things *should* be carried out. Instead, I suggest that what my interlocutors experience is best understood as an experimentation with social forms.

Firstly, we might recall that this form of village life is bound to a particular place and time. Focused on Tadarimana Land, this account could probably be extended to their close-knit ceremonial partners from Korogedu Paru village, located in the Tereza Cristina Land. However, nearly half of the Boe population, residing in the Meruri Salesian mission, its neighbouring settlements, and the small Perigara Land in the Pantanal wetlands, have followed different historical trajectories; their lives today are no longer marked by long ceremonial periods of mourning. Even within Tadarimana Land, this account cannot hope to be all-encompassing. A minority, having entirely embraced Evangelical Christianity and settled around a small church at the southern end of the central village, often refuse to participate in Boe ceremonies, even holding separate events during mourning periods. They have, therefore, actively chosen a path that intersects with but cannot be subsumed by the alternating rhythms of life as described here. My account thus depicts a contingent state of affairs, the result of years of deliberate, reflective negotiation and transformation of collective life. The coherence

and apparent stability it portrays are merely artefacts of the limited temporal scope of my field research; they offer only a glimpse into what is, in reality, an ongoing negotiation.

Each period of mourning and joy is thus experienced not simply as a repetition of a cycle but rather as a fresh trial of a particular way of living — one that simultaneously places its opposite into perspective. At each new funeral and period of joy, the Boe collective life is framed by implicit questions: *What would life be like if we lived as the ancients did?* Or; *what if we lived as the Barae?* In doing so, they open up avenues for slow-paced, chromatic reforms, enacting “objective possibilities” (Fausto et al. 2016: 63) of living together. Closer to the event than to the system, this “institutional flexibility”, as Graeber and Wengrow (2021: 111) remark when revisiting classic works on seasonality, “comes the capacity to step outside the boundaries of any given structure and reflect; to both make and unmake the political worlds we live in.”

On the side of joy, reassessment may come through an openness to innovation. These deliberations often unfold in online group chats and organised meetings, instead of traditional gatherings in the plaza or men’s house. For instance, during my fieldwork, the process of language loss among the younger generation and the dwindling of ritual specialists have fostered a sense of fatigue with the current system. People have become increasingly aware of a generational disconnection, exacerbated by the over-compartmentalising of *boeness* in today’s alternating way of life. By the end of my fieldwork, the realisation that a lack of spaces for knowledge transmission lay at the heart of the issue had prompted concrete discussions and plans for revitalising Boe rituals of joy.

During funerals, on the other hand, grief-laden nostalgia often folds in on itself, and someone invariably laments: “this is the last Boe funeral.” This sense of a tradition teetering on the brink of disappearance makes the start of a new funeral arrive almost as a surprise — an event, rather than the repetition of a norm. As noted, in times of sorrow, reassessments of ritual life reflect its orthodoxy: the leeway for transformation is bound to the tropes of loss (and active abandonment) or revitalisation. Still, as we will see throughout this thesis, nostalgia and a sense of loss does not hinder Boe ritual action; rather, it functions as its driving force. What is more, even when faced with a sense of decline, the Boe assert their ultimate agency: my interlocutors often expressed

that if culture is ending, they are the ones to blame. While in times of joy they fully engage with Barae social innovations, non-indigenous agency is eclipsed in times of sorrow, allowing the Boe to bear witness to and act as agents of their enduring forms of making persons and relationships. Each time, they put these possibilities in perspective, reassessing them as contrasting forms of living together.

Nonetheless, it would be misleading to attribute to my interlocutors a sense that all change is deliberate and that Barae agency is fully eclipsed by Boe rituals and subordinated to cacique-style politics. It is precisely the awareness that the current form of life is not enough to fully counteract the power and the trickery embodied by non-indigenous people that makes permanent experimentation a necessity. In making Boe and Barae a place, a time, a political practice, an affect, and a ritual form, Tadarimana people attempt to draw Barae ruthless ‘history-making’ within the scope of their agency. Borrowing again from Stasch’s (2013: 567) remarks about Korowai movement between village and forest, we could say that Tadarimana’s alternating forms of sociality are also “a powerful model for a wider experience of living amidst a surrounding field of givens that exceed people’s choices or awareness but toward which people also form attachments and alienations and which are susceptible to creation and modification.”

The Boe mortuary cycle, the main subject of this thesis, is thus inseparable from a certain mode of historical awareness. As I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter, this ritual does not merely exist within a particular place and time — a historical context — but also reflexively comments on the contemporary Boe condition. In the chapter that follows, we dive into an ethnography of the Boe mortuary ceremonies. As an introduction, this chapter sets the tone for understanding what follows not only as a rigid set of ritual norms, but also as a reflexive space where the Boe negotiate what it means — and what it takes — to live as Boe in time.

Chapter Two — Mothering the Dead: Kinship and Mourning

From our vantage point behind a house on the outskirts of the circular village, we could hear occasional high-pitch cries rising from the men’s house in the central plaza. These were *aroe ekudu*, ‘the souls’ cries’ — a feast for the dead was underway. I had been in the field for only a couple of months and was sitting by the fire with Orodo, a 58-year-old woman who would later become one of my closest interlocutors. As we talked, her husband arrived, carrying a straw tray with a ball of red thread, some black resin (both industrialised), three cigarettes, and three small gourds. Moacir, Orodo’s husband, picked up each gourd in turn and said, “Here is my father, my sister, and my sister’s son.” Without hesitation, Orodo fetched a marker pen and wrote the initials of their Brazilian names on the respective gourds. As she did so, the couple recalled the clans to which the fathers of these three deceased persons had belonged.



Figure 11: A baku straw tray with three marked gourds and other materials. July 2022.

Shortly after marking the gourds, Moacir, carrying the tray of materials, walked from his wife’s house at the periphery to the village centre. There, he entered the men’s

house and handed the tray to Aije Kurireu, the ceremonial chief in charge, to whom he recited the names of each deceased and their fathers' clans. The chief then summoned three men, each from one of these clans, and gave them the gourds and cigars, providing instructions on how to proceed. As they smoked the cigars, these men would transform the gourds into what the Boe call *aroe ekuie powari* (literally, “the soul’s gourd necklaces”), small clarinets kept as one of the few material indexes of a deceased person, preserved after all belongings are burned in the final stages of the funeral.



Figure 12.A bundle of *aroe ekuie powari* clarinets. March 2023.

Once ready, the gourd clarinets were brought back to Orodo's house. Upon receiving them from her husband, she cradled the straw tray and carried it to her bed. There, she sat and wept, gently pressing the tray with her hands in a consoling massage, a conventional gesture to convey compassion. From that moment, Orodo became the mother of those *aroe* — the category of beings to which the dead belong — embodied in the gourd clarinets and the men who crafted them.

This chapter examines the relationship between the women known as ‘mothers of souls’ (*aroe etuje-mage* [pl.]) and the deceased people under their care. This

relationship forms the backbone of the Boe mortuary cycle, which is, in fact, set in motion by the actions of the *mothers of souls* themselves. This bond between the *mothers of souls* and their deceased ‘children’ offers a particularly revealing point of departure, upon which foundations later chapters will build to explore broader questions.

For a Boe funeral to take place, an ideally matrilineal kinswoman of the deceased must step forward as a ‘mother of the soul’ (*aroe uce* [sing.]), leading the group of mourners while the body of the deceased decomposes in a temporary grave at the village’s central plaza. During the final stages of the funeral, an *aroe ekuie powari* clarinet is crafted and handed over to her, embodying the memory of that specific deceased. From that moment, she is responsible for preparing offerings to feed the deceased’s soul (*aroe*). This ritual duty extends well beyond the period of mourning and becomes a lifelong responsibility, expected to be passed to her eldest daughter upon her own death. I argue in this chapter that the enduring commitment of this group of former mourners to the dead is central to the Boe mortuary complex as a technology of memory: any funeral is set off by their acts, and its memory endures through their grief.

The *aroe ekuie powari* clarinets embody a dilated, everlasting image of grief: all deceased persons embodied in these instruments must be fed at every mortuary cycle, intermittently reenacting the lead mourner’s past role. Such a prolonged temporality of mourning is fundamental to the de-singularisation of death in Boe ritual, with each funeral carrying the echoes of all previous ones, transforming a single death into a collective resurfacing of past grief that draws people from across Boe territories. The *mothers of souls* serve as the cornerstones of this ritual commitment to past losses — their own and those of others. In Tadarimana village in August 2023, seventeen mothers of souls kept between two and more than a dozen gourd clarinets each.

Their duty is often seen as a heavy burden, a source of profound suffering; yet it is precisely this that makes it an extraordinary act of compassion. In exploring the figure of the mother of souls, we also encounter a central feature of Boe ritual life that runs throughout this thesis. I call this *compassionate longing* — the reflexive quality of ritual acts that transform personal loss into action towards others, to turn pastness into kinship. As we will see, the *mothers of souls*’ duties are viewed as a magnified enactment

of the compassionate longing experienced by many others — both encompassing the grief of others and making its expression possible. Consequently, these women are prestigious figures, as they become points of convergence for extraordinarily vast kinship networks, in scope and in temporal depth. In sum, to grasp how a funeral becomes an expanded technology of memory and kinship, producing images of the past as it reshapes the present, we must first turn to the *mothers of souls*.

Living the grief of others

The arms and legs of most older Boe women, as well as some men, are visibly covered with parallel lines of scars — some delicate and faint, others broader and ridged. A few times throughout a Boe funeral, women, amidst a powerful outburst of grief, voluntarily undergo a series of scarification sessions in which they scratch their legs, arms, and, less commonly, faces with glass shards. Men also scarify, but usually in smaller groups, less vigorously, and in a single session — they also graze their skin horizontally, whereas women do it vertically. Anyone may join these cathartic expressions of sorrow, reawakening the memory of past losses. As a result, one's past grief and remembrance become indelible marks etched into the skin.

For most, the first experience of joining a scarification session is intimately linked to one's first time mourning the death of a close kin. Secluded in a sealed mourning house on the periphery of the circular village, mourners are kept visually separated from the body, which lies in the central plaza. Gazing towards the place where the deceased rests happens only during designated ritual moments, each accompanied by an eruption of grief and scarification.¹⁹ Current mourners are always expected to undergo voluntary scarification. After that first experience, for most men, scarification will be only repeated upon the loss of kin. In contrast, for women, after their first experience, it often becomes a recurrent practice, sometimes repeated at all funerals, including those of non-kin. When asked about the reasons for repeatedly undertaking this painful act, my female interlocutors many times connected the

¹⁹ Scarification take place in three separate moments during a funeral: once over the grave after the initial inspection of the corpse, and twice more in the men's house during the final ceremonies when the deceased's ornamented bones are revealed. Further details are provided in Chapter 3.

resurfacing of their own grief to another emotion central to Boe mortuary affairs, namely, ‘compassion’ (dó; Bororo: *maidodu* or *-ogudu*). They speak of a feeling of compassion directed at the mourners, yet one that stems from their own memory of past losses. An interlocutor in her forties once explained why she always scarify: “Now, they [the mourners] are the ones there, but I’ve been there too.” The grief of others merges with one’s own past losses. She went on to add that if she didn’t join, it would feel “as though I wasn’t truly there.”

Indeed, those who attend a funeral without displaying compassion by actively participating and sharing in the grief of others can be contemptuously said to have come “bringing only their eyes” (*tuoku tabo tu je*). In September 2024, during the closing ceremonies of a funeral, a fight erupted among a group of young men behind a house within the traditional village ring. Amidst the shouting and accusations, one man remarked that people from Pobore village only come to Tadarimana to “mess around” (bagunçar). An elderly *mother of souls* from Pobore, overhearing the remark, took it as a personal affront, joined the heated argument, and ultimately succeeded in dispersing the group. Once tempers had cooled, she sat among her younger female relatives and explained why she had taken offense: “I don’t come here to mess around;” Rolling up her sleeves to reveal the scars over her arms, she switched to Bororo and continued, employing a form of parallelism typical of Boe formal discourse, “Look at my arms, at my skin. I come here for my kin who went into the earth, into the river.”

Virtually every ritual act in a Boe funeral — such as scarification, the performance of songs, the preparation of offerings, among many others — is understood as both an act of compassion and, as the Boe express it in Portuguese, of sofrimento (suffering)²⁰. A compassionate act is seen as a solitary commitment to others, which is itself a source of suffering and, therefore, invites further acts of compassion. The mourners, for example, undergo solitary seclusion out of compassion

²⁰ In the Boe language, the expression used for ‘suffering’ derives from *roreru*, a verb the Boe translate into Portuguese as judiar (‘to mistreat’). It is employed in this form when someone actively draws another into burdensome ritual matters. To ‘suffer’, in turn, is phrased reflexively in Bororo as ‘to mistreat myself’ (*i-roreru-re i*).

for the deceased, eliciting the same affect in the singer-chiefs who, out of compassion for the mourners, set the ritual cycle in motion. In turn, these singer-chiefs, when performing long and sorrowful suites, are comforted by the compassionate gestures of women who fan them and, during scarification sessions, massage their shoulders and heads. The isolation of those who act out of a selfless sense of compassion renders them, in certain contexts, akin to “orphans” or “the helpless” (*marenaru*) — the quintessential condition for eliciting compassionate acts. Thus, the pragmatics of compassion and helplessness, the same dynamic Gow (2000: 47) describes among the Yine as “the affective precondition of humanity and its intrinsic sociability”, serves as the catalyst of ritual life in times of mourning.

In the Boe context, this mode of relation — the very atom of Boe ritual action — manifests as compassionate longing: each ritual act of compassion and suffering is simultaneously directed towards another and reflexively folded onto itself, propelled by one’s own memories of past losses. It is in this double movement that the link between the transformation of kinship with the dead and the forging of new bonds among the living is to be found. The mothers of souls occupy a pivotal position in this process.

The compassionate longing of the *mothers of souls* stands in contrast to ordinary acts of compassion and longing through its extraordinary scope and duration. As noted, these figures, who are typically older, widely respected women, take on the burden of leading a group of mourners. Younger women are seldom permitted to assume this role, as their older female kin, driven by deep compassion for their younger relatives, often choose to shoulder the collective mourning duties of the entire extended family. Mothering a deceased is burdensome since it demands lifelong commitment and entails great risks. Even the smallest mistake in fulfilling one’s duties, as we will see, can provoke resentment from the dead souls under her care, potentially leading them to harm or even kill the mother of souls or her kin. To fulfil these duties, these women must attend every funeral, sending offerings to placate the capricious nature of the dead in their care. Their acts of compassion are thus twofold: on the one hand, they are directed at the helplessness of the souls they tend and, on the other, aimed at protecting their family from potential harm and the weight of a life devoted to soothing unsettled souls.

One dimension that distinguishes a mother of souls from other mourners is the fact that, for her, mourning has no definite end in sight. The state of anti-ornamentation characteristic of Boe mourning, for instance, becomes a permanent condition for a mother of souls. Early in my fieldwork, I was asked to assist in recording an institutional video featuring a mother of souls who also works as a nursing assistant at the village healthcare centre. When a non-Indigenous colleague suggested she adorn herself for the video, she refused. She explained that those who care for the dead must not dye their skin with annatto, wear facial designs, or display feather ornaments. The only Boe adornments permitted for mothers of souls, she noted, are trophies made from the teeth and claws of large predators killed in vengeance for the deceased — objects that embody the memory of specific dead persons. In the past, I was later told, once a woman became a mother of souls, she would never again cut her hair in the traditional Boe style. Like a mourner, her hair would be left to grow untamed, with only occasional, careless trimming. Also like a mourner, they must invariably scarify at all funerals. Instead of red dye and feathers, their bodies must only display the scars of their past griefs.

A mother of souls' enduring suffering is an image of her extraordinary compassion. By assuming the mourning duties of her entire extended family and shielding them from the associated pain, she scales up the logic of embracing the grief of others as one's own. A lament, designed for wailing during scarification sessions, underscores this theme. It evokes the trope — as interpreted by Majur Traitowu, who taught me this lament — of the elderly mother of souls conducting scarification as though she were cutting a path through razor grass, protecting her younger kin who follow in her wake:

Iwarudo paoro, iwarudo merire boe
Paoro razor grass, merire boe razor grass

Uwa jokare, bara jokare ino korodomage, ino korimage tagumia keje, tania keje
 Does not graze you, does not cut you, my younger female kin, my younger male kin

Mare tagia jamedugodu, tawara jamedugodu uwa tabore, bara tabore

Yet it is for all of you, all of you [her younger kin]

Ikiare, iwarare ikia butui iwugeje, iwara butui iwugeje

That I let it fall [the razor grass] upon myself, I let it fall upon me

Mothers of souls are magnified persons, bearing on their bodies and in their actions not only their own grief and responsibilities but also those of many others. In other words, their compassionate acts are *at once* theirs and those of her younger kin, embodying a singular image of multiple persons and the relationships between them and their deceased kin. As we will see, their magnification also establishes the ritual space where all losses can be experienced. Their ability to shoulder such an immense burden is regarded as an extraordinary act of compassion and, as a result, command equally remarkable respect.

These women's burden, as well as their prestige, rests on their duty to ritually feed the dead for whom they care. In the following section, I turn to the ritual setting where this takes place: the feast of souls.

A feast for the dead

As noted in the previous chapter, when a woman steps forward as the “mother of the soul” (sing. *aroe uce*) following the news of a death, the male ritual specialist must appoint a man to fulfil the complementary role of *aroe maiwu*, or the “recent soul.” In the past, this role — which involves both handling the deceased's body and embodying their *aroe* throughout the mortuary cycle's ceremonies — was undertaken by one man, regardless of the deceased's gender. However, over the past two decades, a secondary *recent soul* has been chosen for each funeral. As a result, the *recent souls* now exist as a pair: my interlocutors explain that contemporary Boe men can no longer endure the level of suffering one once withstood alone. The *recent souls* are ideally selected from the clans of the deceased's father and spouse. However, in the case of intra-moiety marriages, an alternative clan must be chosen, as the recent souls must always belong to the opposite moiety of the deceased. In the past, their identity was concealed from

women during the ceremonies, only being disclosed afterwards. Today, however, as a man remarked, “they are the first to know.”

The mourning ‘mother of the soul’ (*aroe uce* [sing.]), with her darkened skin and torn, muted clothing, remains secluded at the mourning house in the village periphery. In contrast, the *recent souls*’ prototypical place during ceremonies is at the men’s house, by the mainstay. Adorned with the quintessential Boe ornament, the colourful *pariko* feather headdress, their skin is often ceremonially washed during rituals. Such a striking aesthetic and spatial divide between a mother of souls and the recent souls becomes one between the living and the dead: it is across such severance that Boe mortuary ceremonies unfold, bridged through sound and offerings of *aroe eke*, the ‘food of souls’.

Weekly ceremonies are conducted throughout the period during which a body decomposes in the central plaza — in present-day Tadarimana, rituals are scheduled on weekends. A ceremonial weekend usually begins on Friday evening with a singing session by the grave, calling the *aroe* into the village. On Saturday, men embodying the dead gather in the men’s house for a feast, receiving offerings from all the mothers of souls. This feast serves as a prelude to Sunday’s ceremony, featuring a display of ornamented bodies in the central plaza. These displays — referred to as ‘dances’ by the Boe in Portuguese — are drawn from the ritual repertoire of specific clans who sponsor the event. For instance, the *iwodu* tree belongs to the Iwagudu clan, and thus the dance in which men, adorned with this tree’s leaves, embody its *aroe* double is sponsored by that same clan. The Boe repertoire of such displays is vast, and some performances are deemed canonical, required at all funerals and performed in a specific sequence prior to the exhumation. The rhythm and structure of a Boe funeral are thus marked by these displays of ornamented bodies. These will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter; here, I will focus on the feast that typically precedes these dances, as it most vividly illustrates the feeding relationship between the mothers of souls and the *recent souls*. To do so, we must return to a Friday evening in Tadarimana during times of sorrow.

Soon after the sound of the singer’s rattles fills the air, the mourners exit their house through the front door, weeping as they make their way to the centre of the village; their eyes remain fixed on the ground, and their steps are slow and heavy. The

mother of the soul carries a small pot containing a sweet liquid offering. The meal aims at luring the deceased, attracting them to the pot positioned between the lead singer and the grave — where a small straw mat holding some of the deceased's belongings, such as pieces of clothing, is also laid out. Alongside the deceased's soul, all other *aroe* within living memory will also draw near. Once the singing comes to an end, the women leave without looking back, while the men — embodying the *aroe* — consume the offerings placed by the grave.

The next morning, the men-as-*aroe* gather in the men's house, their high-pitch, glottal 'cries of souls' (*aroe ekudu*) announcing their presence — *Kau! Kau! Kau!* At this point, the offerings may be brought forward. All *mothers of souls* in Tadarimana Land are expected to attend and provide offerings. While any initiated man may partake in the feast, the presence of all who once held the position of *recent soul* is expected. These are the very individuals (unless replaced after their own deaths) who were once responsible for the body of the deceased that the local mothers of souls will now feed. Still, at centre stage is the relationship between the current *recent souls* and the mourners. While most men sit by the western wall of the men's house during a feast, current *recent souls* sit near the mainstay, where they await the offerings that come from the mourning *mother of the soul*. From time to time, they rise to perform brief 'dances', each followed by powerful, collective *aroe* cries in unison that echo throughout the village.

Offerings are brought to the men's house by the husbands of these women, who are referred to as *fathers of souls* (*aroe etuomage*). These offerings are delivered through the door of the men's house associated with that particular *mother of souls'* moiety; they must be received and consumed first by the men of the opposite moiety — as noted, the relationship between the *mothers of souls* and the *recent souls* is always a cross-moiety one. By the act of the offerings being consumed collectively, the position of the former *recent soul* or 'ritual son' is extended on these occasions to encompass all men within a given moiety.

Fish and meat — traditionally the male contribution to a meal — are never included in offerings during feasts. Instead, most items considered 'souls' food' (*aroe eke*) belong to the 'sweet water' category (*água doce*), encompassing industrialised

juices, soft drinks, and water sweetened with honey²¹. Additional liquids often included are Brazilian *cachaça* rum, beer, coffee, fermented rice porridge or drink, and, on rare occasions, *iworo*, a traditional fermented palm beer. Solid offerings range from industrial biscuits, bread, and cakes to fruits and pounded rice cakes. A *mother of souls* once observed that, “just like with babies”, the newly dead must be initially fed with a liquid diet, then gradually transitioning to more solid offerings as they adapt to the realm of the dead. Offerings are typically presented on straw trays or in metal buckets reserved exclusively for feeding the souls, kept separate from other crockery in the *mother of souls*’ house — the tools for making kin with the dead must be carefully separated from those used in everyday kinship among the living.

Throughout the morning and afternoon, offerings arrive in no particular order and are consumed amidst light-hearted conversations, joking, and storytelling. There is no overt ceremonialism in the realm of *men-as-aroe*. Instead, the ritual norms governing the delivery and consumption of offerings, which is crucial to avoid angering the *aroe*, are subtly embedded in the process, rendered nearly invisible by the relaxed and convivial atmosphere. As one interlocutor remarked after mocking someone for violating the norms: “We may joke, but it’s serious.” However, the dynamic is more univocally serious within the space of the mourning house, from which the offerings travel.

The offering sent by the current mother of the soul to those embodying the recent souls by the mainstay undergoes an added layer of ritual refinement. Placed before the space designated for the deceased’s belongings in the mourning house, the offering must be sung over by male ritual singers both prior to its departure and upon the return of the empty pots and occasional straw trays. During these moments, the already somber and weighted atmosphere of the mourning house deepens further. Mourners sit silently on the floor, heads bowed, facing the wall in a display of sorrow.

When the offering leaves the house, the father of souls joins a procession in

²¹ These are also known in Bororo as *noa kuru* (‘white clay juice’), a traditional mixture of water and white clay that was once considered the prototypical food of souls. My interlocutors, however, note that the mixture is not sweet to the taste.

single file toward the men's house. The procession is heralded by the sound of the *ika* trumpet, the instrument of Bakororo, the chief *aroe* of the western village of the dead, played by the man at the front. Its resonant tones alert the recent souls in the men's house, prompting them to perform the 'dance' that greets the offerings at the door. By the mainstay, two *ika* trumpets then announce to the entire village, with a distinctive call, that the deceased is now consuming the offering sent by the mourners. Only after this moment can the feast of souls reach its conclusion.

The type of feast described here is known as *aroe emugu*, the souls' 'staying' or 'sitting'. This notion of 'staying' contrasts with ceremonies where the *aroe* leave the village for collective souls' fishing (*aroe ewogu*) and hunting (*aroe emeru*) expeditions led by the recent souls. During these expeditions, the men-as-*aroe* bring back fish or game for the mothers of souls and are rewarded with a feast. Feasts, generally referred to as *aroe eke butu*, 'the fall of souls' food', virtually always serve as both preludes and closing acts for Boe ceremonies. While they may occur under various circumstances, they are always held out of sight of women. The *aroe* 'staying' or 'sitting' ceremony summarised here represents the most extended form of feast. In the next chapter, we will analyse in greater detail the place of such acts of feeding both in the sequence of operations that characterise Boe ceremonies and in the broader unfolding of a mortuary cycle. Here, I wished to underscore the enactment of the relationship between a *mother of souls* and the *recent souls* that underpins such ritual matters.

After a funeral, this relationship persists, evolving into one of adoptive filiation, with the parties calling each other "mother" and "son" indefinitely. The longevity of this bond is intrinsically linked to the collectivisation of death and mourning that occurs during a Boe funeral. A mortuary cycle is not merely about managing the physical remains, soul, and memory of a particular deceased person; rather, it achieves the conversion of a singular death into an image of all past deaths, and a specific funeral into an echo of all preceding ones, prompting collective memory and grief. This principle applies at every level of Boe mortuary aesthetics, from the overall structure of a funeral to the subtlest ritual detail — such as a specific verse in a song that recalls its previous performances by a deceased singer. The enduring nature of the *mother of souls/recent soul* relationship has a pivotal place in such a memory regime. The emergence of a new ritual mother-son bond — initiated through an inaugural act of

feeding on the day of death — evokes the memory and prompts the re-enactment of all prior such relationships. A feast of the souls enacts a collective resurfacing of grief, reactivating feeding relationships that draw on the cumulative experiences of mourning and loss within living memory. The *aroe*, my interlocutors often remark, “never wander alone.”

As a man from the opposite moiety, the *recent soul* transitions from a potential husband — or, given the typical age gap, a potential son-in-law — to a terminological position of ‘son’. A former recent soul thereby becomes a living double of a deceased person. For instance, the children of the mother of souls will refer to her ritual son as an elder or younger sibling depending on the deceased’s age relative to them (not the age of the living double). Still, this relationship diverges significantly from the relaxed dynamic typical of a Boe mother-son bond. This ease, often characterised as a lack of respect-shame (*poguru*), usually allows for joking, gossiping, and a general sense of comfort in the interaction. In contrast, the relationship between a mother of souls and her ritual sons is one of the most infused with respect-shame, demanding deference and a significant degree of avoidance. In this sense, the mother of souls resembles not a mother but rather a hyper mother-in-law.²² This echoes the uniqueness of posthumous mothering. The acts of care it demands must be performed without compromising the fundamental separation between the living and the dead. Rather than intimate sharing, such an aesthetics of care entails radical visual and spatial severance, the breach of which could be life-threatening.

Loss and mnemoclasm

Throughout a Boe funeral, the absence of the deceased manifests not as a lack but rather as an *excess*, an unbounded presence that may permeate memories, spaces, and objects. This presence is perilous. In times of sorrow, careless behaviour can invite

²² In the past, when the *recent soul* fulfilled its final task, killing a large predator to avenge the deceased, he would be offered a woman from his ritual mother’s family in marriage, thus effectively turning a *mother of souls* into a mother-in-law (Kremer 2014: 135; Levak 1971: 82; Viertler 1972: 68).

illness or even death, generating a pervasive sense of danger that envelops the entire village. Moreover, the corpse's decay in the central plaza is attributed to the treacherous *bope* spirits, embodiments of death-dealing forces and antagonists of the *aroe* souls who are said to devour the body. These spirits, whose eerie presence looms over the living, are at their most menacing during funerals. Such concerns weigh especially heavily on the deceased's immediate family. Breaches in proper ritual behaviour may anger the *aroe* and cause harm to anyone; however, it is memory and longing that pose the greatest danger to mourners and close kin. The deceased is said to miss their family, and any traces or reminders of the dead that might capture the family's gaze and evoke their memory are considered perilous. Indexes of their mutual kinship *as living persons* must be replaced by appropriate forms of relationship *between the living and the dead*. Therefore, all of the deceased's belongings are burned in a large firepit in the central plaza during the final stages of the funeral. Until then, while the body is still decomposing, these items are kept in the mourning house, awaiting their eventual destruction.

Within the mourning house, beside the main door, two bamboo poles lean against the front wall, draped with blankets to form a tent-like structure. This space shelters the deceased's belongings — their mattress, blankets, bags, and backpacks filled with clothes and other personal items. If a coffin was used to transport the body to the village, it is also placed here. This structure is called *bai ia*, or 'the round house,' a term that is metonymically extended to refer to the mourning house as a whole.²³ Not only is the deceased's *aroe* said to be drawn to and inhabit the tent during the funeral, but also he or she is also joined by a crowd of anonymous dead souls.

When the time comes to destroy the deceased's belongings, personal items that cannot be burned — a perfume flask, for example — are placed in the mortuary basket alongside the deceased's feather ornaments and bones. In some instances, an entire house may be burned. Such was the case following the shocking and sudden death of Moacir Coguiepa in a car crash in December 2022. His wife, Orodo, set fire to their

²³ The term *bai ia* is also applied to other temporary tents or straw coverings made to attract and shelter souls in specific ceremonies. My interlocutors could not explain why it is called "round," as its layout is typically square. However, when similar structures are built in the central plaza using straw, they are indeed round. I surmise that the square ones made with blankets or canvases may have been round in the past when these materials were unavailable.

house shortly thereafter. This was no ordinary house but a large Barae-style one, as she often emphasised, constructed of masonry and wood in her family's satellite village. The house was burned with all its furniture, including the fridge, stove, and TV. Afterwards, her close kin and in-laws dismantled the remaining masonry. Only the concrete floor and the outline of the house traced by the remnants of the walls were left visible.

Orodo then moved to her clan's section of the circle surrounding the ceremonial plaza in the central village. There, she assumed the role of *mother of the soul* for her late husband, leading the group of mourners. Reflecting on the house's destruction, she often spoke of the labour she and her husband had shared in building it, highlighting how the space encapsulated their hopes for the future: "I used to picture us growing old on that balcony." For her, it was impossible, she remarked, "not to see him" whenever she looked at the house. Even when a house is not actively destroyed, mourning families often relocate to a different village or another section of their own to achieve a similar effect. As a result, older people's autobiographical accounts are frequently marked by events of loss-driven displacement.

In January 2023, while seated in the house reserved for mourners, Orodo explained to me that the deceased's double (*u-wari*) "stays" with their belongings, and lingering too long near these items or even gazing at them excessively can cause illness. Elaborating, she noted that Moacir particularly enjoyed watching TV. For this reason, while their TV was burned along with the house, one of their granddaughters chose to sell hers, as she and Moacir often watched it together during his visits.

During the funeral, one of Moacir's dogs began displaying unsettling behaviour, frequently coming to the *bai ia* tent, lying near it, or sniffing and rubbing against his deceased owner's belongings. One day, the dog was seen sniffing at Moacir's grave. Orodo remarked that it is not uncommon for dogs to succumb to sudden and mysterious illnesses after behaving this way. To prevent this, she instructed her granddaughter to buy proper dog food and actively feed the animal (instead of just throwing leftovers), encouraging it to forget its deceased owner.

These patterns are not unique to Boe mourning practices. Portrayal of Indigenous mourning as a *discipline of forgetting* centred on erasing both the material and immaterial traces of the deceased has become a cliché of sorts in Amazonianist

anthropology. Yet, what we could call Amerindian mnemoclasm, does not imply the erasure of a relationship. Rather, as Taylor (1993: 655) puts it, it implies the potentially contradictory processes of “forgetting the dead as familiar persons, on the one hand, while still being able to think of them as social partners, on the other”. There is here an emphasis on the ubiquity of ‘social relations’ in the mourning process. Indeed, to invoke another lowland commonplace, this time of Wagnerian inspiration (Wagner 1975), in a world where all relations are essentially social — meaning they can only connect *persons* — people’s actions focus on differentiating one form of relationship from another. As Taylor (ibid) also remarks, in mourning, the image of the deceased as *a living person* stubbornly lingers in one’s memory and thus must be transformed into that of *a dead person* (see also Allard 2010; Conklin 2001).

Memory here, again, is not mere contemplation but a potentially harmful encounter with the dead. Instead of erasing a relationship, this act of differentiation reconfigures it into a new form. What is more, as Chaumeil (2007) demonstrated, lowland South American peoples’ technologies of grief extend beyond mere destruction or erasure. Material images of the dead in the form of objects and unperishable remains such as bones were once widespread, prolonging the afterlife of the images of specific deceased *as dead people*. These material mementoes project into the future the potential for a nostalgic re-enactment of grief: they “retain the capacity to evoke exceptional grief” while simultaneously keeping the dangers of “constant grief” at bay, as Allard (2010: 179) puts it. The afterlife of the dead as “social partners” is thereby prolonged.

This is crucial for the Boe case. However, to keep engaging with the dead as ‘social partners’, the Boe produce a ritual transformation of the memory of that relationship through aesthetic media. Destruction is still part of such transformation. I was told, for instance, that a couple of years before my fieldwork began, after the death of a young man who played for one of Tadarimana’s football teams, the entire team burned their uniforms and commissioned new ones, adopting a different design and colour scheme to sever the aesthetic connection with the deceased. However, these acts of unmaking the image of the deceased are accompanied by a ritual investment in the creation of a new image — what I refer to as an *aroe* body. As discussed in this and the following chapter, the *aroe* body is composed through multiple aesthetic media, including objects, sounds, smells, spaces, and materials. These alternative media give

rise to distinct relational forms, enabling a disjunction between the aesthetics of kinship among the living and those between the living and the dead. In the following sections, I illustrate this process by examining a specific object: the *aroe ekuie powari* clarinets, which function as material indexes of the dead and are crafted to endure beyond the destruction of all other possessions. I also show how these objects are intimately linked to posthumous mothering and thus to the particular modes through which the Boe forge kin relations with the dead.

Mothering the dead

For the deceased to be fed during a feast, they must be materialised through a gourd clarinet, cared for by a *mother of souls*. Crafted on the day a deceased's body is exhumed, an *aroe ekuie powari* clarinet takes shape amidst a men's house abuzz with preparations. The materials are brought from the mourners' house and given by the *father of souls* — the *mother of souls*' husband — to the recent souls, who must then craft it. Once completed, the gourd clarinet is suspended from the centre of the newly adorned mortuary basket, which rests against the mainstay. It is usually played for the first time that same day, shortly before the final appearance of the *recent souls*, who personify the deceased's *aroe* in a 'dance' at the central plaza. The most experienced chief — ideally, an *aroe* shaman — then approaches the recent souls and play it for the first time. He then hands it over to the leading *recent soul*. In doing so, he names that particular clarinet, associating it with a particular melody: "Here is your *buriti* palm gourd necklace" (*'akuie powari marido barireo'*), for instance.



Figure 13. Aije Kurireu tests a gourd clarinet. July 2023.

Each Boe clan has its own unique and highly esoteric repertoire of gourd clarinet melodies. Even from the most knowledgeable ritual specialists, I could hardly elicit more than four melodies for each clan — although this probably only reflects how dull such elicitations can be. These melodies derive from (and are communicated in the form of) onomatopoeia based on the sounds associated with animals and spirits recognised as a clan's *iedaga-mage* ('name-givers'/'elderly or knowledgeable matrilineal male kin'), referred to as 'uncles' when speaking Portuguese. The gourds and associated melodies are named 'X *bari*', with X being the name of the animal or spirit. None of my interlocutors, however, could offer me a gloss for the word *bari* in this context.²⁴

As explained in Chapter 1, virtually all that there is in the world, from animals and plants to objects and landscape features, can be associated with one of the eight

²⁴ Nonetheless, a couple of hypotheses can be proposed. In *Enciclopédia Bororo Vol. 1* (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962), *bari* is translated as 'lung'. Considering that the clarinets embody the voice or breath of the deceased (Crocker 1985), this interpretation would be coherent. However, there is another possibility. The root *-bari* refers to a person's or thing's 'double' or 'soul', as seen in *u-wari* ('his double-soul') or *i-wari* ('my double-soul'). It also denotes a shaman's auxiliary spirits, also his *u-wari*. This root can likely be connected to the term for the *bope* shaman, which is also *bari*, as it shares with the word for 'double' a highly irregular plural form: *baire/-waire*.

Boe clans. However, the animal or plant itself is not the source of the relationship: a clan's 'name-givers' are *aroe* doubles of such beings found in the realm of the dead. These *aroe* are anthropomorphic condensations of the particularities of beings — their capacities, appearance, sound, body, name, etc — from which a clan extracts its specificities in the form of its exclusive material and immaterial wealth: body ornaments, objects, songs, ritual displays, and names. Therefore, the gourd clarinet melodies are simply one among many elements in this ritual machine of differentiation.²⁵

The sound of a gourd clarinet serves as a potent trigger for memory and grief. When the clarinet is handed to the recent souls, they must repeat the melody. These instruments produce a nasal, gritty sound — eerily reminiscent of a baby's whine — created by blowing through a small bamboo reed inserted into the gourd resonator. The themes have nearly no pitch variation, differentiated through rhythmic patterns and vibrato. If and when the sound of the clarinet reaches the mourning house, it provokes loud, piercing shrieks of grief. Reflecting on the grief-stirring memory these aerophones' sound evokes in any circumstance, a mother of souls observed: "It's very sad. It feels like they [the deceased] can see you, but you can't see them."

Besides *aroe* shamans and certain men-as-*aroe* performing in the plaza, the only ones allowed to play these clarinets are the *recent souls* connected to them. For instance, during a *Marido aroe* ("buriti palm's soul") dance — an *aroe* display or 'dance' considered particularly dangerous, which I did not witness during my fieldwork — all past recent souls must play the clarinets in the central plaza, followed by their ritual mothers in tears. This ceremony is said to be the saddest of all: "It feels like the person has just died," an interlocutor remarked. In the past, gourd clarinets were also given to ritual sons as they departed the village for *aroe* collective fishing and hunting expeditions, and were then worn as necklaces. However, I have never witnessed this practice. When asked, women express concern that the men might drink too much and mishandle their cherished clarinets, potentially enraging the *aroe* and bringing harm to the *mothers of souls* and their families.

²⁵ Certain clans have distinct clarinets, crafted with unique features — some larger, others with lateral openings, for example. These are tied to specific melodies, such as the *arigao bari*, the dogs' clarinet of the Iwagudu clan. Though still remembered, such clarinets are rarely made today.

After a funeral, the gourd clarinet is entrusted for life to the mourning mother of the soul, embodying her unbreakable commitment to that particular deceased person. A woman's gourd clarinets are seldom seen. Carefully stored in bags, boxes, or backpacks, they are usually kept out of sight. Nevertheless, they must always remain close to their mother and never be left behind when travelling. On one occasion, I noticed Orodo's large bundle of clarinets unusually displayed on the wall. Observing my curiosity, she explained that the gourds appreciate a little breeze in hot weather. On colder nights, she added, they should be tucked under a blanket for warmth. Caring for the clarinets is often likened to mothering a child: for instance, when receiving a new clarinet — as described in this chapter's opening vignette — the act of holding it is conventionally compared to cradling a baby. At the same time, when well cared for, the gourds may offer protection. A daughter of a mother of souls once shared with me that during thunderstorms, she often sees her mother placing the clarinets on her lap, blowing tobacco smoke over them, and asking for their help in dispelling the bad weather.

Taking good care of the clarinets and properly upholding their responsibilities is part of settling the deceased in the realm of the dead. Helpless, abandoned souls are not only sorrowful and orphaned (*marenaru*) but also unsettled, angry, and vengeful. Feeding, the quintessential act of posthumous care, soothes them, promoting gradual acceptance of their fate and, consequently, shielding the living from their volatile nature. Each clarinet is paired with a shell that functions as a spoon, used by the *men-as-aroë* to eat porridge during feasts. A woman who, for instance, cares for ten deceased individuals must maintain an equivalent number of shell spoons, typically stored alongside the clarinets in small straw baskets or metal buckets. The offerings, while limited to what is considered *aroë* food, are carefully selected to reflect the preferences and peculiarities of the deceased individuals under a mother of souls' care — those they had in life. Although offerings are generally not directed to specific deceased persons, mothers of souls avoid items disliked by one or more of them, such as certain soft drinks or fruits. This ensures the offerings will likely please many among one's deceased 'children'. Occasionally, however, the focus narrows to a singular person. For instance, a *mother of souls* once recounted how her late husband appeared in an elder ritual specialist's dream, requesting specific offerings. He longed for the homemade

passionfruit juice she used to prepare for him — insisting it must not be store-bought — and asked for the commercial cigarettes he preferred over the handmade ones typically offered to the souls.

Feeding the dead is a delicate, dangerous task. Although it frequently happens, the mothers should ideally not miss feasts during funerals. I was often told that when a feast is held in a village, and a mother from that region is absent, the soul comes to the men's house and watches all the others eat while waiting in vain for their share. Humiliated before the others, the soul must beg for leftovers here and there like a *marenaru*, a helpless, orphaned person. This can enrage them, who may then harm their living mother or her kin in revenge.

Even when the offering is delivered, some caution is required. The mother should avoid talking while preparing it, as saying something negative, like censuring a child, might be mistaken for an insult by the souls. When receiving fish or game after collective fishing and hunting expeditions of the souls, they must never complain about the quantity or quality of the gift. One of them once told me that, after letting slip her dissatisfaction, a bit of straw she was weaving to make a tray for the soul's catch hit her eye. It got swollen and only got better after using plant medicine (*jorubo*) prepared by a specialist. In yet another example, a *mother of souls* fell ill and was taken to the hospital, where she told her daughter that an eerie sound of a gourd clarinet and an *ika* trumpet that only she could hear was disturbing her sleep. Once the story reached the village, it set off speculation. Some interlocutors recalled how she had recently stopped another mother of souls' offering of *cachaça* before it reached the men's house to try to control men's drunkenness. Some concluded that preventing the *aroe* from being fed might have enraged them.

I have registered many such anecdotes. In times of funeral, any misfortunes or illnesses that strike suddenly or seem to resist medical treatment trigger speculation about the involvement of the *aroe*, especially when concerning a person who has assumed ritual duties. Through gossip or self-inspection, this is done by meticulously recalling one's conduct in ritual matters. One such situation usually evokes the memory of similar events, prompting people to pile pedagogical examples of the terrifying consequences of drifting away from proper ritual conduct — usually around the attentive ears of younger kin.

The burning of one's belongings and replacement for a gourd clarinet allows a previously unbounded and potentially harmful memory to be captured by the aesthetics of *aroeness*. The potentially harmful images of the deceased *as a living person* that infuses mourners experience of grief is replaced by a single object, one that embodies a new form of relationship, that which pairs feeding and visual and spatial severance. The memories of kinship among the living are thereby converted into memories of kinship with the dead. Still, soothing potentially unsettled souls is a chronically unfinished effort with no definite endpoint. Acts of feeding are not cumulative; they do not build toward a progressive integration in the afterlife. Rather, each act, while eclipsing the souls' capacity for harm, simultaneously underscores the enduring presence of that potential. This is the burden borne by the *mothers of souls*. Yet, as we have observed, they endure suffering so that others may be spared, creating the conditions for younger kin to grieve without exposing themselves to the volatility of the *aroe*. Mothering souls, then, is not simply an act of compassion towards the dead, but a gesture that simultaneously severs and connects two modes of kinship-making — soothing the dead while caring for the living. This is how a *mother of souls* figure becomes magnified. In the following sections, we explore the specifics of this transformation, along with the temporal and mnemonic dynamics it entails. To this end, we centre our discussion on the case of a particular *mother of souls*, Erotildes Orodo.

Posthumous adoption

Ideally, the dead should be cared for by *mothers of souls* of their own clans, thus keeping the clarinets within a particular clan's boundaries. However, it is rare to find a mother of souls who cares only for the deceased of her own clan. This is not seen as a breach of any norm. Instead, a woman's capacity to accumulate clarinets across clan and moiety boundaries is a fundamental part of her magnification as a *mother of souls*. This makes her compassionate acts of care exceptionally far-reaching. It is mourning on behalf of others, after all, that defines a *mother of souls*' role.

The memory of such acts of care may surpass a particular *mother of souls*' lifespan. Clarinets, along with the relationships they embody, can be passed down to

one's eldest daughter. In this way, a mother of souls may carry not only her own commitment to addressing the losses of others but also the responsibilities inherited from her mother before her. The case of Orodo, examined in this and the following section, serves as a compelling illustration of this dynamic.

In September 2023, Erotildes Orodo cared for sixteen dead, materialised in a large bundle of mortuary clarinets. Five years earlier, in 2018, Orodo had led the mourners during the funeral of her mother, Beatriz Kiga. As is customary in the final stages of the funeral of a mother of souls like Beatriz, her clarinets were carefully feathered and handed over to be placed in the funerary basket alongside her bones, ornaments, and any belongings that the fire could not consume. During Beatriz's funeral and in subsequent rituals, Orodo gathered materials for new gourds and gave them to the *men-as-aroe* so that her mother's clarinets could be remade. Over the five years that followed, Orodo added another eight clarinets to those inherited from her mother, forming the group of sixteen dead she was caring for in September 2023.

Among these, eight embody dead people who do not belong to her clan, the clan of Orodo and Beatriz. These 'departures' from the matrilineal ideal illustrate three forms of what we might call the 'posthumous adoption' of clarinets from other clans. The *first*, exemplified by two of Orodo's clarinets, is the decision to lead the mourners at the funeral of a relative from another clan or of a non-relative. Two of the seven funerals I witnessed were led by a *mother of souls* from a clan different from that of the deceased. This was the case with the funeral of Moacir Coguiepa, Orodo's husband. As my interlocutors confirmed, it is common for a respected *mother of souls* to choose to take on the burden of providing posthumous care for her deceased husband. For this same reason, it is not unusual to find women who have inherited from their mothers the clarinets of their own fathers. In such cases, wide recognition of a woman's dedication to her dead leads those who would ordinarily have precedence in such a role — the deceased's female relatives — to not claim that right. Their silence signals the legitimacy of the wife's decision.

The *second* and less common mode of posthumous adoption is exemplified by only one of Orodo's clarinets: the transfer of a clarinet to another person. In the case in question, one of Orodo's sons-in-law asked his 'aunt' — an older woman from his clan who cared for his mother's clarinet — to hand it over to his mother-in-law, thus

keeping it closer to himself. Finally, the *third* mode — the most common among Orodo's clarinets, appearing in five cases — brings us back to the vignette that opened this article: the making of clarinets to appease the dead who, for whatever reason, did not receive complete mortuary treatment. Once the clarinets have been made, these dead can then be fed during all funerals.

In these latter two forms, male mediation was, in most cases, crucial. Although the care for the dead, centred on the mothers of souls, is considered a “woman's service” (*areme emaragodae*) — and therefore ought to remain free from male interference — in the absence of female relatives willing to “take the lead,” as the Boe say, a man who is a close relative of the deceased may take the initiative. In many cases, this involves the decision of the *father of souls*, the husband of a mother of souls who may suggest to his wife that she makes clarinets for his relatives. In Orodo's case, this resulted in four clarinets under her care that materialise deceased affinal kin, as well as one made by her mother at the request of her stepfather.

If the compassionate act of *mourning on behalf of others* is what defines the figure of the *mother of souls*, doing so for members of other clans — that is, far beyond what is expected of her — is its most powerful expression. As we have also seen, caring for the dead is simultaneously an act of compassion directed at the living. Such acts not only reaffirm pre-existing kin ties; they also forge and expand them. To care for the dead of another clan is to become, as the Boe say, “a mother to” those outside one's own. In return, it is common for a *mother of souls* to be granted permission to craft exclusive ornaments of that clan for her younger relatives and, in certain cases, for those kin to take on ritual responsibilities associated with that clan.

The respect and legitimacy that stem from caring for one's own clan's dead is the very condition that allows mothers of souls to take on clarinets from other clans — most often those of affinal kin or from their paternal clan. This gives rise to a process through which such women, as mediators between the living and the dead, become focal points in increasingly expansive kinship networks. The expansion of a *mother of souls'* prestige and relational ties among the living is anchored in the shared memory of the dead, sedimented and legitimised through public (i.e., ritual) acts of compassion. To weep for, feed, and care for the dead of others alongside one's own — to enact compassion on behalf of others — not only builds and strengthens shared relations, but

also generates new memories of collective mourning that, in time, may be invoked as grounds for mutual obligation.

As a result, beyond ceremonial roles, *mothers of souls* often serve as the gravitational centre of large groups of co-resident kin. These elderly women have an extraordinary ability to transform both close and distant kinship ties into co-residence and conviviality. Most satellite villages in Tadarimana were founded by and continue to revolve around such women. I recall sitting once in front of the house of Jurema Adugo, a *mother of souls*, in her satellite village. As we looked out, children darted about giggling, while dozens of dogs, cats, chickens, and ducks scavenged for scraps, and a macaw and a parrot watched from nearby — birds she often feeds with care. In the background stood the homes of nephews, grandsons, and other kin who came daily to eat at her house. She looked on and said, “You can see. I suffer a lot. Many people come to me, I feed them, and little is left for me. But it’s because I have too much pity (dó).”

Those who orbit Jurema’s kinship sphere are precisely the ones who will be spared the burdens of mothering the dead, should any loss befall the family. At the same time, this residential arrangement carries the effects of past griefs: many of the distant kin and non-kin who lived in the village belonged to the Iwagudu clan, for whom she, a Badojeba woman, had previously mourned and whose gourd clarinets she still cared for. In recognition of Jurema’s care for Iwagudu dead, her daughter was even granted a name-title from this clan — the highest form of clan adoption. By reactivating their ties with her, the Iwagudu-doge know they will always encounter new acts of compassion.

Jurema’s satellite village, Apido Paru, had been abandoned in the late 1990s after the death of her adoptive father. In 2018–19, once time had transformed overwhelming grief into nostalgia — and in Jurema’s case, almost melancholia — she decided to reopen the village to resettle near the place where her father died, gathering a large extended family around her. In multiple ways, such configurations of co-residence around magnified women reflect the long-term aftershocks of prior mourning cycles, which continue to shape the configurations of kinship and co-residence.

Repetition and reflexivity

Inheriting one's mother's clarinets duties toward the dead is not simply the outcome of an abstract norm of transmission, but rather an active decision on the part of the daughter. Upon her mother's death, she faces a choice of whether to remake the clarinets and, with them, take on her mother's ritual obligations. Yet it is exceedingly rare to find clarinets linked to persons from the generation of a *mother of souls'* grandparents, beyond her own maternal grandmother. When I asked Orodo about how clarinets disappear over the course of generations, she explained that she had personally known each of the dead under her care, even those inherited from her mother. She then noted one exception, saying she had no memory of her maternal grandmother, whose clarinet she now cared for; but she added: "I don't remember her, but I know she held me in her arms. So, it's not in vain."

The notion of "in vain" or "pointless" (*paga*) — a term with great expressive power in both Boe and local Portuguese — underscores here that caring for the dead is not a purely normative or thoughtless act, but a response to memories of being cared for. For example, in a message, another *mother of souls*, while explaining how offerings are chosen, remarked in Bororo: "That's how it is. *The offerings are not in vain*. We, the Boe, care for the dead (*cewororore*) because we miss each other (*pagiarigodure koia puwogai*)." The clarinets, then, fade away in the same measure that, with the passing of generations, the memories of care that sustain them fall into oblivion.

As we have seen, feeding the dead is, in itself, a way of remembering the particularities of deceased relatives. As a response to memories of care, it echoes Gow's (1991: 168) definition of close kinship among the Bajo Urubamba in Peru as "the memory of past acts of caring". Much like Gow's interlocutors, mine invariably drew on memories of care in childhood — or the absence thereof — when making kinship ties explicit. When this kind of memory takes the form of posthumous care, its content becomes, recursively, identical to the very acts it prompts: a woman feeds and cares for deceased kin who once fed and cared for herself. It is this reversal in the direction of care that renders such actions expressions of mourning, indexes of the irreversible displacement of the prior relationship: holding one's own mother-as-clarinet in one's

arms like a baby is a powerful image of the relational inversion that shapes kinship with the dead.

This image implies something further. In caring for the gourd clarinets, a woman replaces her mother. Beyond inversion, her actions also involve repetition or substitution. This makes the act of caring for the dead a powerful life cycle marker, and mourning an experience saturated with temporality. The bond between mother and daughter lies at the heart of the condition of the *mother of souls* and, as a form of succession, contains yet another kind of recursive memory: to care for the dead is to remember how one's own mother did so. Orodo often remarked that her mother never taught her anything directly. To properly fulfil her role as a mother of souls, she says she relies entirely on the careful reconstruction of her memory of Beatriz. When speaking about her condition as a *mother of souls*, Orodo often — if not invariably — remembers and refers to her mother. She recalls the loss of Beatriz by performing the very way her mother remembered her dead in a meta-memory of sorts, a mode of temporal reflexivity that reposition oneself in time by evoking and displacing someone else's presence. Still, such reflexive repositioning entails a sense of rupture and thus mourning: the role of *mother of souls* becomes necessary precisely because one's own mother can no longer carry it out. Every act of a *mother of souls* carries an image of the absence of her own mother — the one whose compassion, for decades, shielded her from such a burden.

This repositioning is also perceived as signalling a decline in ritual competence: the image of loss embodied in a mother of souls' responsibilities is simultaneously the image of the loss of cultura. This sense of loss can take on an active form: it is not uncommon for mothers of souls, as well as certain renowned singer-chiefs, to voice to their families a desire not to receive a traditional funeral. This is the case of Orodo herself, who made it clear to her granddaughters that she does not want them to follow in her footsteps as a *mother of souls*. In mid-2023, while explaining her decision, Orodo reflexively recalled more than once how she had gone through the various stages of a woman's initiation into the Boe ritual world before reaching the position of mother of souls — something her granddaughters, according to her, have not done. In her view, they are not prepared for the delicate task of caring for the dead — a task which, if done carelessly or incompetently, could place the entire family at risk. From this

perspective, her decision expresses a desire to extend her compassion beyond death, to continue protecting her younger kin from the burden of mourning even after her departure; a refusal, therefore, to reverse the direction of care — which would mean being cared for by one of her granddaughters in the form of a gourd clarinet.

There is, however, another dimension to her decision. Orodo's discourse — which highlights her extensive ritual experience in contrast to her granddaughters' supposed ignorance regarding cultura — is delivered with a tone of pride. Beyond an expression of compassion for her younger kin, it is also a refusal to relinquish a position of prestige. A similar logic can be found among certain knowledgeable men, often renowned singer-chiefs, who reject a traditional funeral because they do not accept the idea of less experienced singers "singing over" their bodies or leading the ceremonies. The ambiguity in Orodo's discourse, however, is entirely coherent: compassionate longing and the construction of prestige are closely intertwined in Boe ritual life.

Boe nostalgia pairs memories and relationships and powerful images of severance — not only from those irretrievably elsewhere (the dead) but also from a time irrecoverably past. Yet, it is precisely a nostalgia-driven determination to remember and make kin with the dead, coupled with a compassion-fueled resolve to soothe the helplessness of the living, that compels people to keep on embracing and enduring the burdens of ritual life.



Figure 14: Orodo caresses the clarinet of her deceased husband. December 2024.

Compassion and memory-making

I have mentioned how Gow's (1991) definition of kinship as memory echoes the relationships between the mothers of souls and the *aroe*. However, he also argues that, in the Bajo Urubamba, "life is predicated on the refusal of a specific kind of memory, that of the dead. The living can only go on living if they reject the claims of the dead to their attention" (: 263). In other words, making kin with the living would hinge on denying kinship with the dead. The Boe mothers of souls seem to transform such a proposition. As noted before, the aesthetics of kinship among the living and between the living and the dead must indeed be sharply differentiated. Still, the memory of the

dead, from time to time re-enacted within the bounds of proper ritual behaviour, has a crucial generative potential. Not only does it nostalgically evoke the past, but it also effectively transforms persons in the present, the mothers of souls being both the effect and one of the key mediators of such transformations.

One's experience of grief and ageing leads to a gradual attuning to the losses of others. Through ritual engagement, this process is converted into prestige as it is turned outward through collective displays of compassion. Across various contexts within the Boe mortuary complex, this shift from personal, reflexive longing to the other-oriented, compassionate act generates the space where ritual life unfolds. In the case of the *mothers of souls*, through an accumulation of collective losses through acts of care and feeding, they become, during a ritual, images of the condition of the living *in general and as mourners*. As we will see in detail in the next chapter, as figureheads for all women and children, *mothers of souls* delineate the pole of the living in opposition to men, who embody the pole of the dead. It is across this divide that all losses are re-lived in times of sorrow, with the mothers of souls acting as a fundamental condition for its possibility.

We saw how, in Boe ritual, the suffering-compassion displayed by others in the present transforms them into images of helplessness, prompting further compassionate acts — a dynamic that also operates across time. A *mother of souls'* actions are themselves responses to earlier acts of care performed by her now-deceased kin, who, as helpless *aroe*, depend on her. Whether consciously or not, such gestures may also be understood as containing an immanent futurity: a form of memory-making that sustains and projects ritual life into the future. A concrete example will help to clarify this point.

In September 2024, Orodo's pessimism concerning the suitability of her granddaughters to replace her had given way to a hopeful investment in her relationship with Suzana, her 11-year-old great-granddaughter. About a year earlier, Orodo had expressed great enthusiasm for Suzana's dedication and skill during her performance of a dance belonging to their clan — a dance often used to introduce young girls to deeper ritual involvement. After the performance, Orodo mentioned to me that she planned to gather feathers to craft ornaments for Suzana, a typical gesture of recognition and encouragement for children and young people who show interest

and commitment. A year later, Orodo was entrusted with weaving the mortuary basket for another funeral, a responsibility that falls to the family of the main *recent soul*. Along with this role comes the privilege of selecting a girl from within her family to perform the basket dance during the closing ceremonies. This dangerous and strenuous dance holds the highest prestige among female ritual duties, second only to mothering souls; yet any misstep risks provoking the wrath of the *aroe*. Still, Orodo insisted on choosing Suzana. By today's standards, she was far too young to take such risks, and Orodo's decision drew harsh criticism from many. In the past, I was told, girls were stronger and protective plant medicines more potent. Nevertheless, Orodo stood firm in her decision. Reflecting on it all, she intertwined her memories of Beatriz with her forward-facing dedication to Suzana:

I remember watching my mom [her commitment as a mother of souls] and wondering how she could endure so much suffering. And now, here I am, following in her footsteps (*o rastro dela*, 'her trail'). I was twelve when I first danced with the basket; Suzana is eleven, and I want her to do the same. When I look at her, I think, 'at least one Orodo has to remain in this world after I'm gone'.



Figure 15. Sobbing, Orodo guides Suzana through the dance moves. September 2024.

Chapter Three — An Aesthetics of Memory, or How the Dead are Made to Appear

Throughout the mortuary cycle, the Boe seek to shape the presence of the dead in a particular way, familiarising their otherwise unsettled nature. The category that encapsulates these efforts is *aroe*, which, in the absence of a more precise term, I have translated as ‘soul’. Discussions of personhood in lowland South America consistently evoke some version of the body-soul duality (see Descola 2013; Riviere 1974; Taylor 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2001). However, in these accounts, the notion of ‘soul’ never manifests as an immaterial essence that ensures unity and identity; rather, it appears as *another body* — whether an external double, an internal component, or a concealed inner form — usually oscillating between these manifestations (Fausto 2020). A soul functions by de-unifying, destabilising identity; it gestures toward an Other, either contained within or virtually projected outward.

The Boe notion of *aroe* doesn’t seem to fit many of the shared characteristics of other Indigenous categories translated as ‘soul’. Although vaguely associated with one’s breath, it does not overlap with the semantic fields of such categories elsewhere, which typically “cover [...] both *anima* (breath, vital principle, animacy, spirit) and *imago* (copy, double, shadow, reflection, ghost, imitation)” (Fausto 2020: 14). One key distinction is that *aroe* cannot be preceded by a possessive pronoun; it is ungrammatical to say ‘my *aroe*’. In contrast, another term — *-bari* — more closely resembles an Amazonian notion of ‘soul’. This term is always preceded by a possessive pronoun and denotes a someone’s or something’s double. In the case of living things, one’s *u-wari* manifests when the living body is inactive. Here, I draw on Vilaça’s (2002: 361) definition of the Wari’ notion of *jam*: “the soul (*jam*) only exists when the body is in some way absent (as inert): in dreams, in serious illness (and the shaman is therefore chronically ill), and at death. There is no soul linked to the body [...]. The soul is above all a potency, related to the capacity to produce another body.” In the Boe case, the *-bari* is a virtual double whose nature is unspecified. It may be an *aroe*, manifesting in one’s dreams of the dead, or it may be *bope*, predatory spirits, like the *u-wari* of a dead

jaguar whose heavy breath a hunter may hear trailing him through the bush as he carries the predator's lifeless body.

If *-bari* is a double whose ontological status remains undefined, the process of making it into an *aroe* involves its stabilization through specific material and aesthetic transformations. As Crocker (1985) has demonstrated, an *aroe* is characterised by distinct qualities — coldness, lightness, a meatless diet, vivid colouring or whiteness among others — expressed through particular materials such as feathers, down, resin, and annatto dye, all drawn from a bestiary of *aroe*-like beings. These qualities and materials not only shape *aroeness* but also inscribe loss and memory into ritual aesthetics. The Boe mortuary cycle is, in essence, a process of crafting an *aroe* body for the deceased — replacing decaying flesh and skin with the fragrance of resin and the weightlessness of feathers. In the process, countless other *aroe* bodies are created out of living ones (performers), their images bearing witness to all losses held in living memory. The making of *aroe* bodies is the shaping of memory.

This chapter explores the properties of *aroeness* by focusing on the experience of its presence as generated in ritual settings. The making of *aroe* bodies always entails a sequence of aesthetic operations: the men-as-*aroe* are first fed while concealed from women and children, then revealed in their ornamented form. Finally, they are once again concealed for a closing feast before being sent away. As I aim to demonstrate, this sequence structures the many smaller ceremonies that mark a mortuary cycle, during which men display their ornamented bodies personifying past deceased persons. Yet these ceremonies are themselves embedded within an overarching sequence of the same kind: the concealment of the corpse and all other *aroe* from mourners, followed by the revelation of the ornamented skull at the culmination of the cycle. A final hidden feast ensues, after which the remains are taken to a second burial — a final act of concealment. In sum, every display of *aroe* that punctuates times of sorrow appears as a scaled-down iteration of the aesthetic sequence that defines the mortuary cycle as a whole. The creation of a new *aroe* body sets the stage for all other *aroe* to have their bodies remade, prompting a wide reawakening of memories of loss among the living.

This chapter builds on the previous one by moving from the singular bond between *mother of souls* and *recent souls* to its collectivisation as a broader relationship between performers-as-*aroe* and audience-as-mourners. The making of an *aroe* body

must be witnessed and thus can only be fully understood within the context of this relational dynamic. This perspective draws inspiration from Melanesian literature that highlights the central and active role of the audience in performances (Schieffelin 1985, 2005; Strathern 1990, 2014). In the Boe case, an *aroe* must be alternately concealed and displayed — thus hidden *from* and seen *by someone*. This someone constitutes the non-*aroe* counterpart in the performance — namely, the mournful living. Within rituals, this opposition is codified in multiple dimensions such as spatial divisions (periphery and centre), transactional positions (feeders and fed), affective states (sorrow and joy), gendered separation (women and men), and, crucially, temporal distinctions (present and past).

The analyses culminate in the outline of an aesthetics of memory — a ritual device that both evokes and contains grief. Through it, memories of the dead are drawn into the aesthetic space of *aroeness* produced in ritual. This process seeks to channel the painful recollection of the dead as once-living persons into the bounded sensory space-time of ritual. By crafting an *aroe* body and domesticating the unsettled dead, Boe ritual technologies simultaneously shape and temper their potentially disruptive presence in the memory of the living.

In summary, this chapter advances three interconnected arguments: (i) that each Boe ceremony constitutes a scaled-down, recursive image of the encompassing mortuary cycle; (ii) that these formal features are articulated through the making of *aroe* bodies via aesthetic operations of concealment and display between performers-as-*aroe* and audience-as-mourners; and (iii) that the making of *aroe* bodies simultaneously constitutes the shaping of memories, seeking to establish how and under what conditions the dead are to be safely remembered.

An aesthetics of decay

On a cold August morning, only a few months after I had first arrived in the field, I woke up shortly after sunrise. Lying side by side in the centre of the circular village were two provisional graves, both oriented east-west, and each over the half of the circle corresponding to their moieties. An elderly lady had died approximately a month before while another funeral was being carried out. The first inspection of her corpse

was scheduled for that morning.

When I left the house and gazed towards the central plaza, I noticed a group of men already gathered around the graves. Still half-asleep, I wrapped myself in a blanket and headed towards them. I anticipated the sight and smell of an open grave would be deeply unsettling. Yet, my initial reaction was far from what I had imagined. The odour was faint and not overwhelmingly unpleasant. The remains, in turn, were unrecognisable. I couldn't discern a face or any distinctly human form. All distinguishing features had faded away, leaving a dry, amorphous mass. What struck me most was my own relative detachment in that moment. Expecting to confront a distorted yet recognisable human figure, I was instead before a faceless presence, stripped of its singularity. The *recent souls*, as are called the two men responsible for handling the body, started spilling water over that mass, and so the bones began to surface.

During the first month after death, at least twice a week by sunrise, the earth covering the grave is removed, and a first layer of weaved palm sprout around the body is cracked open. It reveals the more densely weaved straw mats that wrap the corpse, which are then washed by pouring several buckets of water to accelerate the decay process. The body itself must only be seen after decomposition has radically transformed it, erasing its features. This moment and its associated ceremony is referred to as 'the cracking of the mats' (*kodo bododu*). It requires the summoning of the *aroe* dead souls for a feast and is crowned by the singing of Roia Kurireu ('The Great Chant') by the grave at sunset, the utmost mortuary suite. During this singing session, the mourners leave their enclosure and face the grave for the first time. Joined by others (mostly women) in a collective outpouring of grief, they crouch around the grave and scarify their arms and legs with glass shards. From then on, the grave will not be covered with earth again but only with bamboo and other leftovers from ornaments used in previous ceremonies. It will now be thoroughly inspected every week during the watering sessions at dawn.

Witnessing the process of decay is 'men's job' (*ime emaragodae*; *serviço de homem*). The *recent souls* and some of their clansmen — from the opposite exogamic moiety of the deceased, and thus virtual brothers-in-law — must attend the grave openings, and the deceased's male kin should also join. Other men, usually those who

handled corpses in the past (past *recent souls*) come to help and witness. Boys and young men rarely do, and even older men sometimes cannot cope with it. Women, in turn, keep their houses' doors shut and their children inside during the grave openings, occasionally reminding men of their concealed presence through cries and laments.

Not all bodies decompose at the same pace. In the first 'cracking of the mat' inspection I witnessed, after only one month in the earth, the corpse was in a very advanced level of decay and assumed to be ready for secondary burial. Yet, the grave lying beside it had been there for four months and was still not ready. A Boe funeral lasts as long as it takes for, as my interlocutors put it, 'the flesh to detach from the bones' so that these can be easily removed and washed for the final ceremonies. Two months before that first inspection, while settled in a satellite village away from the ceremonial centre, I witnessed several people coming from the central village with news about the funeral's progress — which usually came in the form of details of the body's stage of decomposition. They repeatedly reported that what they described as a mass of fat was stubbornly attached to the lower part of the trunk and hips and seemed to remain unchanged at each opening. My hosts received the news with apprehension, and, more than once, the final ceremonies were postponed.

Rapid decay is understood as a sign of the soul's acceptance of death and its successful integration into the afterlife, reflecting the proper performance of rituals by the living. Conversely, slow decay, foul odours, or unusual changes in the body indicate the opposite: an unsettled and potentially angered soul. The process of decay is linked to the actions of the *bope*, a category of necrophagous spirits who are held responsible for all misfortunes, including death. These elusive yet pervasive tricksters are said to devour the corpse, driving its decomposition.

In one version of Boe eschatology, the body's decay among the living is mirrored in the *aroe* realm, where it corresponds to crafting or repairing a new body. Initially concealed in the men's house of the village of the dead, this new body is described as inverted, with limbs bending the wrong way — "like birds," as one interlocutor explained. As funerary ceremonies progress and the corpse decomposes, the *aroe* body is gradually fixed and trained, eventually acquiring the ability to move properly and even run around inside the men's house. The newly deceased is then presented to the community of the *aroe*.

When, in late 2022, the corpse's decomposition reached a plateau, there was widespread speculation that the deceased lady was unwilling to part, leading to rumours and accusations. Some said that the lead mourner, the mother of the soul, was bathing too much and leaving the house too often. Others pointed to the *recent souls* responsible for the body, accusing them of too much drinking and of having sex, which they must avoid during the funeral. An interlocutor, in turn, speculated that the fat could be from an interdicted animal eaten by the deceased, which could have ultimately caused her death. Although some dismissed the concern by attributing it to the antibiotics given to the lady during her stay in the hospital, an atmosphere of apprehension had been installed: a potentially offended deceased poses risks to the entire village.

One day, the main *recent souls*, who, besides handling the body, must personify the deceased's *aroe* in ceremonies, missed a feast. He had gone to a nearby town to buy *cachaça* rum and fell from his motorcycle on his way back, hurting his ankle. On the next mourning, when men gathered in the plaza to prepare for a ceremony, the chief in charge, pointing at his injury, said to the young man: "When you make the *aroe* angry, no one can help you but a shaman (*paié*)" Then, raising his voice and gesturing towards the grave, he said: "This is the old lady's doing!" (*Isso é serviço da velha!*).

The making and unmaking of bodies, as we will see throughout this chapter, intimately connected affective dispositions and emotional responses. As introduced in the previous chapter, proper ritual conduct is often spoken of as acts of 'compassion' towards the deceased and the mourners. In ritual contexts or otherwise, when comforting someone, older Boe people (especially women) display compassion by performing a soothing massage, pressing both hands around another's hands, arms, shoulders, head, and face — or around objects that replace (dead) persons. This is usually done while crying or performing a lament. In a conversation, a lady told me that such a massage must be done first around the hands and face. Besides being the parts that make a person recognisable, she remarked, these are also the first to rot and lose their appearance after death. One must never hit another's hands or face, she added, since it would be the same as wishing for the person's death. When I repeated her words to a male interlocutor who had handled corpses in rituals many times, he added that, when a deceased is angry and the corpse refuses to rot away, the *recent*

souls are instructed to enter the grave during a watering session and, one starting from the head and the other from the toes, perform the same massage on the corpse. He concluded that it helps both soothe the deceased's soul and detach the flesh from the bones.

Opening the grave and scrutinising the corpse's transformation is not simply a matter of determining the pace of ceremonies and the time for the final burial. Witnessing the dissolution of a body's features is a deliberate ritual act that produces an aesthetic impact. This is far from unique in the broader ethnographic landscape of lowland South America. As Conklin (2001) puts it, "Amazonian cultures seem to have a near obsession with emphasizing images of rotting corpses and recounting the details of their progressive disintegration" (: 207) — an 'obsession' connected to widespread memory practices of converting the image of a living person into that of a dead one, which is the equivalent of the transformation of relationships. To borrow Stasch's (2009: 212) words on Korowai mourning in West Papua, "the corpse's disappearance is a central focus too of people's experience of how it is possible for social connections actually to change." In a Boe funeral, this change reaches its culmination with the exhumation of the bones, during which the skull — cleansed and free from any traces of *bope*-induced decay — is adorned with resin, dye, and feathers to be revealed to women and mourners. For the living, these elements — with their fragrance, vibrant colours, and delicate lightness — embody the aesthetic form of an *aroe*, a being that entails other modes of relating.

The unfolding of a Boe mortuary cycle thus hinges on aesthetic operations that link (gendered) acts of concealment to the making of an *aroe*-like body destined for later revelation — a process that is affectively driven and generative of emotional responses. Defined as such, these operations are not exclusive of the macro-level progression of the cycle as a whole; they also shape the structure of the numerous micro-level ceremonies that punctuate the funeral process. While at the macro-level, the deceased's body is at centre stage, in these other ceremonies, the operation is accomplished on a smaller scale through the repeated creation of other *aroe* bodies — not only for a multitude of other dead within living memory but also for the ancient *aroe* of animals, plants, and mythical heroes. Still, the *form* and *effects* of such operations remain constant across scales.

A condition for this movement from concealment to revelation is establishing a separation — between women and men, feeders and fed, onlookers and performers — made into one between the living and the dead. In the sections that follow, we explore how such (disjunctive) relationships evoke images of time and loss, thereby shaping what I call here an aesthetics of memory.



Figure 16. The provisional grave closer to the final stages of a funeral. At the background, the kaiwo (*Syagrus flexuosa*) aroe circle the grave in a display. August 2023.

The dead made visible

In times of sorrow, domestic life for those not fully engaged in mourning continues much as usual, albeit in a quieter and more self-contained manner. The weekly bus to Rondonópolis runs as scheduled, bringing groceries to replenish household supplies; children attend school; and families gather to share meals, talk, and watch television. Except for the Evangelical church, which maintains its services while refraining from the use of loudspeakers, the most noticeable change concerns collective gatherings.

With all activities ‘of joy’ suspended, young people are encouraged to stay home, and the village appears not only quieter but also emptier. Collective activities are thus almost entirely channelled to mortuary ceremonies held over the weekends.

The first stage of a Boe funeral, defined by the presence of the corpse in a provisional grave, is characterised by a sequence of ceremonies in which ornamented men embody the *aroe*. In this context, *aroe* refers both to the recently deceased — those still within reach of living memory — and to the ‘ancient’ *aroe* doubles of more-than-human beings and mythical heroes, known as *iedaga-mage* (‘name-givers’ or ‘knowledgeable elder matrilineal kin’ of specific clans; a clan’s ‘uncles’, in Portuguese). These ceremonies, sponsored by the clans to which the ‘ancient’ *aroe* belong, serve to display the ‘ways’ (*ro*) of these souls. Here, *ro* encompasses their cries, bodily features, designs, and movements — the unique bundle of features it embodies — displayed in the central plaza through ornamented bodies or objects that personify them.

The *aroe* pantheon is vast. The missionaries Albisetti & Venturelli (1962: 120-162), in the *Enciclopédia Bororo Vol. 1*, register ceremonies for sixty-seven different ‘ancient’ souls, a list that is far from exhaustive. If we include the common variations of each *aroe* (e.g. the ‘red,’ the ‘dark,’ and the ‘great’ *okoge* fish *aroe*), the Salesian-registered repertoire would grow to the hundreds. In the seven mortuary cycles I attended, I witnessed fifteen distinct ceremonies in which a total of thirty-five unique ancient *aroe* were displayed. All clans may sponsor ceremonies at any funeral, independently of which of them the deceased belongs to²⁶.

The proliferation of such ceremonies responds to a Boe concern with a meticulous, almost obsessive display of micro-variation, both in the behaviour and appearance of each ‘kind’ of *aroe* and in the proliferation of variants of the same ancient soul. The *toro* palm skirt *aroe*, for instance, can be unfolded into three different ceremonies: the ‘white’ (*kigadurewu*) *toro* skirts, made with babaçu (*Attalea speciosa*) palm sprout; the ‘dark’ (*corewu*) ones, made with the same palm’s fronds; and the ‘stripped’ (*jerarewu*) ones, combining both. Such internal *aroe* variations expand even

²⁶ In the past, each clan was traditionally expected to have a male ritual specialist tasked with announcing and organising its ceremonies. However, during my fieldwork, these responsibilities were often centralised under the authority of the most prestigious specialist, who oversaw all ritual matters. It is also worth noting that certain ceremonies may still be performed specifically for deceased members of particular clans.

further the myriad of slight differences in rattle rhythms, *aroe* cries, and movements performed, making such ceremonies part of a scrupulous *proliferation of specificities*. The Boe draw on such a vast repertoire of particulars, reflexively condensed in the Boe notion of *ro* (see Chapter One), in order to establish differentiation at other levels, such as between and within clans, and to singularise the person through a unique set of personal names, also extracted from the ‘way’ of particular *aroe* animals, plants, ornaments, and ceremonies.

Although clans are not ritually-bound entities, also shaping kinship outside mourning times, it is during ceremonies that they are *made visible*. Yet one must not mistake Boe aesthetic differentiation in rituals for simple tokens of clan identity. What ultimately belongs to a clan is the precedence over the (temporary or total) alienation of ritual wealth extracted from its *aroe* repertoire. Many ornaments, songs, and designs only serve their full ritual purpose when ceded to other clans, usually in the opposite moiety. What ornamentation displays is interclan or intermoiety relationships, not simply identity. In most displays of souls, whereas the party responsible for providing the material and ornamenting the performer is the clan to which an *aroe* belong, the performers themselves belong to other clans in the opposite moiety. In Figure 17, for instance, a Kie man (Ecerae moiety) impress the design of the dark *okoge* fish (*Salminus maxillosus*) — replicating the fish’s distinct striped pattern with black charcoal dye — on the skin of an Iwagudu (Tugarege moiety) man. In sum, the sponsoring clan witness the images of their *aroe* ‘uncles’ — not only ‘ancient’ but also recent, as we will see — in the bodies of their virtual affines.²⁷

²⁷ These issues were addressed with a different emphasis in an article by Crocker (2010).

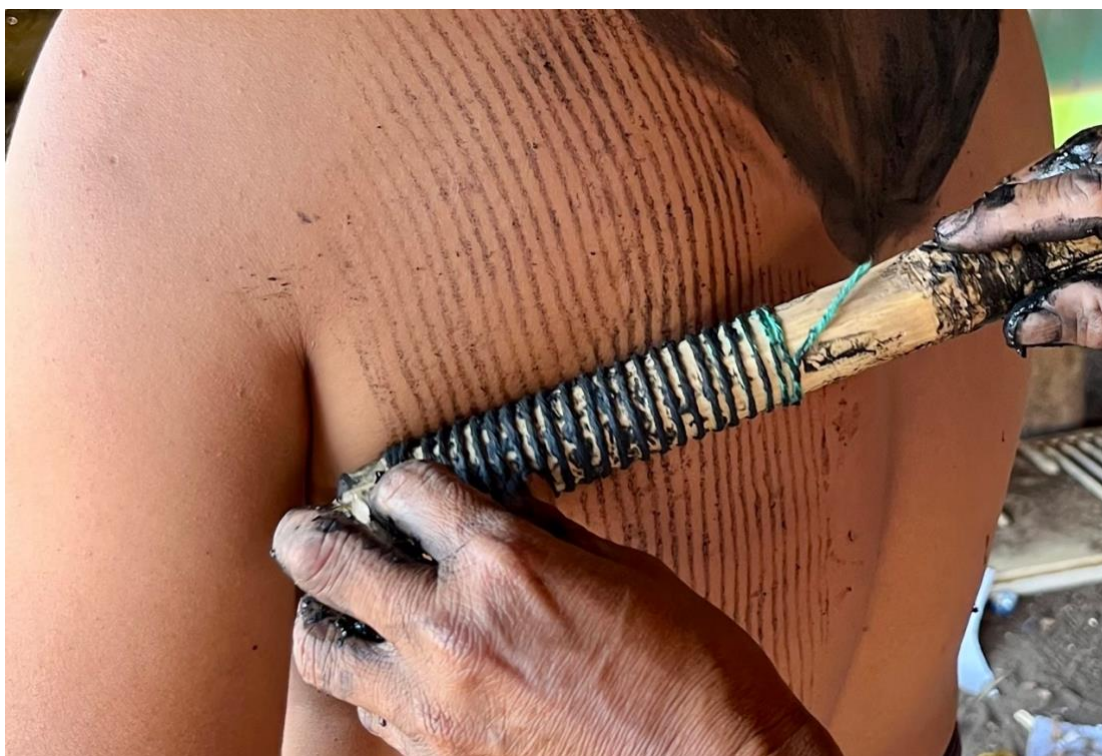


Figure 17. Detail of the ‘dark’ variation of the okoge fish’s design (*Salminus maxillosus*).

Apart from the waterings of the grave, which occur on weekdays, the ceremonial schedule while the body remains in the provisional grave in Tadarimana typically unfolds as follows: on Friday evenings, a singing session summons the souls, followed by an *aroe emugu* feast on Saturdays (see Chapter 2). This, in turn, serves as a prelude to the *aroe* displays on Sundays. If singers are unavailable, or when the catch is particularly abundant, the displays may be replaced by a ceremonial fishing expedition. However, when the body deteriorates rapidly, the ritual schedule may be accelerated, schooling suspended, and ceremonies held on weekdays.²⁸

A sequence of six *aroe* displays is seen by my interlocutors as canonical, in the sense of providing the essential, mandatory framework for the unfolding of a funeral. These are: the *aroe* doubles of *tamigi* birds (*Anhima cornuta*) and the *mano* plant (genus *Heliconia*) from the Aroroe clan, those of *parabara* split bamboo from the Apiborege clan, *toro* palm skirts from the Kie clan, *kaiwo* (*kaidaga* palm [*Syagrus flexuosa*]) from

²⁸ Holding ceremonies on weekends helps avoid conflicts with schooling, which has remained uninterrupted during mourning periods since at least 2010. This weekly schedule, however, dates back to when agricultural work was more common in Tadarimana and other regions.

the Paiwoe clan, and *iwodu* tree (*Licania kunthiana*) from the Iwagududoge clan²⁹. By filling the gaps between these rituals with ceremonies drawn from their broader repertoire, the Boe adjust the ritual calendar to match the pace of the decaying body.

Except for the opening ceremony of the *tamigi* birds — conventionally said to “clear the plaza (or path) of their *aroe* companions ahead of them” (*‘ere tumedage aroedoge ewororo* [or *etawara*] *akudu etododai*) — the other five ceremonies share certain features I want to highlight, even though emphasising these similarities might overshadow my interlocutors’ concern with distinctiveness. All five involve the display of the deceased’s soul, along with those of all dead in living memory, personified by both current and past *recent souls* (or their clansmen). In these ceremonies, the recently dead cared for by the living *mothers of souls* take on the form of the ancient *aroe* being displayed, adorned with its body ornamentation and dancing to the sound of rattles around or near the grave. All men and boys — even non-initiated ones, in some cases — may perform as *aroe*, followed by their kinswomen who dance behind them. Near the ceremony’s conclusion, women retreat to their homes, shutting all doors and windows facing the plaza, so the souls can be fed in an outdoor feast by the grave.

These characteristics, which are not exclusively found in the canonical sequence, contrast with more straightforward ancient *aroe* displays in which only a pair of souls perform, not implying the participation of the recently dead. In these, the audience is usually significantly reduced and sometimes almost entirely absent. These simpler ceremonies are sometimes combined with larger canonical ones, such as in the *parabara* bamboo ritual (see Figure 18). In this canonical display, pairs of ancient *aroe* from seven of the eight Boe clans interact with the souls of the recently dead, who welcome them with the loud clacking of their split bamboo.

²⁹ Many of these ceremonies include the display of other ‘ancient’ *aroe*.



Figure 18. Mythical heroes *Bakororo* and *Itubore* approach the plaza. Girls from their respective clans follow and fan their ‘name-givers’.

In these rituals, the recently dead are differentiated and made visible through a particular object, the *pariko* feather headdress. These cherished ornaments are jealously kept and cared for by *mothers of souls*. Ideally, when leading a group of mourners during a funeral, the *mother of the soul* should sponsor the making of a *pariko* to be kept along the gourd clarinet as a double of that particular deceased. This would, in theory, result in a *pariko* corresponding to each dead she mourned for. However, crafting a *pariko* requires, among other materials, approximately sixty macaw tail feathers, which are hard to get hold of in the region. As a result, most *mothers of souls* in Tadarimana keep only one or two such headdresses, which are then seen as materialising all deceased under their care.

The *pariko* is the quintessential Boe body ornament. It is also arguably the object with the most significant amount of micro-variations in shape and design, enabling each headdress to be associated with specific ranked units within clans (of declining importance nowadays) referred to in the ethnographic literature, among many other terms, as “lineages” (Crocker 1967; Levak 1971). In a monograph dedicated to *pariko* making and differentiation, Dorta (1981) identified 108 unique

headdresses across villages and museum collections.

During funerals, all *mothers of souls* are expected to leave their *pariko* in the mourning house, where these headdresses are suspended above the tent containing the deceased's belongings (see Chapter Two). Shortly before a ceremony, men adorned as souls assemble either in the men's house or in the *aije muga* — the “*aije* spirit's place” — a secondary ceremonial plaza located west of the village's ring and connected to the *bororo*, the central plaza, by a broad, straight path. This connection between the two plazas is, in ritual performances, one between the village of the living and that of the dead, with the latter generally associated with the west (downstream).

The outer ceremonial plaza, surrounded by bush, shares a key characteristic with the men's house: both are hidden from view and avoided by women. In contrast, the inner plaza, encircled by houses, invites visibility and display; it reveals rather than conceals. Within one of these concealed spaces, the *fathers of souls* — the husbands of the *mothers of souls* — approach their ritual sons. These are the men who, in the past, personified and cared for the body of a deceased person for whom their wives mourned. The fathers then tie the *pariko* headdresses around the heads of their ritual sons.

Sliding their feet toward the sound of the rattles and uttering a characteristic muffled glottal sound (Hm! Hm! Hm!), the feather-crowned men approach the singer who stands where the path coming from the external plaza meets the village. Their movements are hesitant; they advance towards the singer, only to abruptly retreat as if startled, before resuming their approach with their eyes firmly fixed on the rattles. Once settled, the *aroe* line up and march into the village, circling the central plaza, where the grave lies at its centre. At this moment, young women and girls, also adorned with ornaments, join the procession of *aroe*, dancing behind them. Women may follow any kin personifying souls, but particular care is given to those wearing their mother's or grandmother's *pariko* headdresses. These men must never be left unattended.



Figure 19. Silvestre Powari attracts the souls of the recently dead towards his in an iwodu tree aroe ceremony. September 2022.

These first sounds and movements announce the arrival of the souls, triggering the memory of those who, sitting in front of the houses that encircle the plaza, stand as an audience to the display of ornamented bodies. Witnessing such performances can set off the memory of past funerals, times when one faced one's own grief. An account of an *aroe* display cannot overlook its audience. The ritual emergence of the dead's presence is achieved in the interplay between performers and the audience, the latter's grief attesting to the effectiveness of the performance. As the *aroe* march into the plaza, the sound of sobs, wails, and painful shrieks of grief may begin to surface around the village ring, usually starting with the confined mourners — for whom the display is a purely aural experience. The sounds of laments typically come from the *mothers of souls*, keepers of the *pariko* headdresses that make visible the presence of their *aroe* children.

For instance, during a *mano akurararewu* ceremony, where the headdresses must be carried on the performers' shoulders, an interlocutor stressed the importance of always placing the headdress on the right shoulder with its front face turned

outward. This ensures that, as the performer circles the grave counter-clockwise, the mothers of souls can see and recognise their *pariko*, thereby recalling their deceased kin. Moreover, the displays of ancient *aroe* that appear in pairs and do not explicitly embody a specific deceased person can also evoke memories. On several occasions, interlocutors recounted how witnessing one of these souls perform their ‘ways’ brought to mind kin who, in life, performed as that particular *aroe*.

When I asked one of my hosts, Majur Traitowu, about the grief evoked in such ceremonies, she replied by teaching me a lament that the spectator may perform when the *aroe* procession approaches the plaza:

Iwarudu aroe ikuie

The soul-like *ikuie* duck

Iwarudu aroe merire

The soul-like *merire* duck

Iwarudu aroe bataroe

The soul-like *bataroe* duck

Komia ekumodugodu

Their glowing beauty

Nonoia ekumodugodu

Like their glowing beauty

Irai ino kori, irai itare

My younger kin, my elder kin

Iedaga cogoduwuge, imana cogoduwuge

My elderly name-givers, my elderly brothers

Eiarewu eiare

They are just like them [the ducks]

Ewararewu eiare

Just like them

Tugiarewu ia to pui

One after the other

Tuwararewu ia to pui

In procession

Aroe tuwororo peragadugodu

[Into] the great plazas of the souls

Arigao Bororo

Arigao Bororo

Toduio Bororo

Toduio Bororo

Kamarari Bororo

Kamarari Bororo

Iarewu ia kae

They proceed

Wararewu ia kae

They make their way

The way ducks move in tandem is compared here to the lined-up *aroe* approaching the central plaza, which is equated to the plazas of ancient mythical villages. The kin mentioned are those who passed, personified by the procession of ornamented bodies before the wailer. Collapsing memory and experience, absence and presence, this lament conveys, through both its semantic content and performative setting, the temporal and spatial inscription of sorrow produced in such ceremonies: the relationship between the central plaza and the village periphery becomes one between the past and the present, the dead and the living.³⁰

³⁰ The village plaza as the place where present and past merge seems to be a broader feature of Central-Brazilian ritual spatiality (Heckenberger 2007: 222; Packer 2020).



Figure 20: Led by Richardo Butore, the line of men-as-souls, followed by their female kin, performs the initial circling of the grave during a *toro coreu* or ‘dark palm skirts’ ceremony in August 2023.

The souls summoned in these ceremonies are said to welcome the deceased into the village of the dead much as the Boe would greet long-awaited travellers, yet the newly dead resist joining the celebrations. In Aije Kurireu’s account, a singer-chief with extraordinary shamanic skills, the newly deceased are said to arrive in the realm of the *aroe* frightened and sorrowful: their grief mirrors that of their living kin. Sitting alone and weeping, the freshly arrived often resist the company of other souls who urge them to join a ‘dance.’ In the world of the dead, the arrival of a new soul is a cause for celebration — as I heard many times, phrased in multiple ways, *the sorrow of the living is the joy of the dead*.

This saying finds its expression in ritual performance. During *aroe* displays in the central plaza, the atmosphere feels far from solemn: men may banter playfully, girls giggle, and the mood is relaxed and cheerful. Yet, as one moves to the periphery, the contrast is striking. Expressions grow sombre, grief becomes more visible, and a heavy gravity fills the air, especially as a funeral approaches its final stages. For those who

recently mourned, this spatial inscription of sorrow extends beyond a mortuary cycle and may be triggered long afterwards. Orodo, after having recently mourned the loss of her son and husband, remarked: “I cannot stand looking towards the centre. *It makes me remember.*”

The two ritual figures introduced in the last chapter lie at the heart of the opposition between centre and periphery, conceived as one between the dead and the living: the *mother of the soul*, who leads the mourners, and the recent souls, living doubles of the deceased. As shown, their condition reactivates all previous relationships of this nature: those who once occupied the role of recent souls are expected to dance with the *pariko* headdresses of their ritual mothers, evoking memories of their losses. This dynamic becomes generalised into a gendered and spatial opposition, mediated through the images of ornamented bodies and the sounds of wailing.

However, as noted earlier, current mourners remain secluded in the mourning house throughout the funeral. At this stage, the presence of the *aroe* is for them an aural experience. As looking towards the centre is a profoundly memory- and grief-saturated act, recent mourners are not yet ready to endure it. Their seclusion ends only with the revelation of the deceased’s ultimate double: the remains transformed into an *aroe* body, made visible through the ornamented skull.

However, the centrality of concealment as an aesthetic operation is not unique to current mourners; it both precedes and follows acts of display in nearly all ceremonies. The following sections explore the features of Boe technologies of concealment.

Concealment and disjunctive feeding

In the canonical ceremonies, when the *aroe* begin their final circling of the grave by sunset, all women and girls accompanying them rush to their houses without a second look. Those who watched from the periphery ensure all children are in and seal all doors and windows. The men-as-souls get agitated, shouting louder and jumping higher than before. Finally, attracted towards the rattle of the singer standing on the east edge of the plaza, they encircle the grave one last time. As in their first summoning, the *aroe* are hesitant, yet they eventually surround the singer (see Figure 21). He then

delivers the last rattle beats, prompting all souls to jump and unleash a resounding, concluding cry. The dead may now be fed.



Figure 21. The aroe surround the singer at the end of a ‘stripped palm skirts’ (*toro jerarewu*) ceremony. June 2023.

The mothers of souls, now secluded in their houses, pass the offerings to their husbands, who carry them to the souls in the plaza. This feast resembles the one conventionally held the day before as a preparation for the display of souls, as described in the previous chapter. However, while the Saturday preliminary feast involves the souls being concealed in the men’s house, after the display, it is the women who retreat into hiding, leaving the plaza to the *aroe*.

At this stage, beyond periphery and centre, sorrow and joy, living and dead, the *mother of souls/recent souls* relationship is scaled up as one between women (encompassing children) and men. Concealment becomes essential once the relationship between these poles shifts from grief-inducing visual display to feeding. Feeding the souls is only possible under conditions of visual severance, which, as noted, distinguishes this act of compassionate kin-making with the dead from the everyday

sharing of food among the living. To gaze at the *aroe* while feeding them would potentially collapse the separation between kinship among the living and with the dead — drawing the former into the realm of the latter.

The aesthetics of concealment is one of sound. Hiding is consistently paired with sound-making, framing the ‘perspective of the feeders’ as an aural one. The coordinated cries of the *aroe* are deliberately performed to be heard by the *mothers of souls* and other women; they serve both to announce the gathering of the *aroe* and, when louder and more synchronised, to signal that an offering has been received. In the final stages of a funeral, these resonant, collective cries can provoke outbursts of grief and wailing from the mourners, which reach the men-as-souls as a testament to their performance’s efficacy.

A common observation, voiced by both men and women, is that when the *aroe* are out of sight — whether in the men’s house or the plaza — their collective cries seem to surpass the number of participants at the feast, suggesting the presence of others among them. In this context, the ‘female perspective’ introduces an additional dimension, marked by an *excess* of presence rather than a deficit, when contrasted with male experience. Men may partially adopt the ‘female perspective,’ but they cannot substitute women in their role as feeders. On one occasion, reflecting on a man’s accidental death, an interlocutor told me how, following a disagreement during a funeral, his wife left alone for another village, and he covertly assumed her role in preparing the offerings, worried that the *aroe* would resent her absence. As a result, I was told, the *aroe* “took him.” By personally preparing and delivering the offerings, he conflated the gendered acts of feeding and seeing.

On some weekends, collective fishing or hunting expeditions replace *aroe* displays as the main ritual activity. In these, men-as-*aroe* bring catch or game to their ritual mothers, who reciprocate with a feast. In Tadarimana, such expeditions occur either as scheduled replacements for *aroe* displays or spontaneously, for instance, when abundant fish move upstream. During my fieldwork, only fishing expeditions took place, as game scarcity discourages *aroe* hunts, though small game is occasionally killed while fishing. The dry season, with lower water levels and more fish, is preferred, allowing large groups to walk through the river with cast nets. Fishermen leave early for a 5–9 km walk through stingray-infested waters to a downstream village, returning

in the afternoon by truck directly to the men's house. Recent souls, whose share of the catch goes to the mourners, must lead the expedition.

I only joined one fishing expedition, when a support canoe accompanied fifteen fishermen. Aware that women were not supposed to see them, I asked the recent soul in charge how they would hide upon arrival in the downstream village. His response puzzled me: "We will have already redistributed the fish among us, so there is no problem." Only later did I understand. That evening, while recounting how a man had shot a howler monkey, I inadvertently committed a *faux pas*. Though the women present laughed nervously, an interlocutor later explained that women must not know *who killed what*. Details may be shared, but names must be replaced with *aroe* — the same strategy used in funerals to avoid the deceased's name. Redistribution serves precisely this purpose. Upon arrival, all catch is piled, and a recent soul divides it into portions corresponding to the number of *mothers of souls*. For each portion, a man belonging to the opposite moiety of a particular *mother of souls* is brought forward by another man, who leads him by the wrist in a gesture of deference, to collect the pile destined for her. In this way, the fish is delivered while concealing the identity of the one who made the offering.

We must add that this secrecy surrounding food circulation between the living and the dead is not confined to the ritual contexts described above. During funerals, a portion of any catch or game must be set aside for the mourners, whose close family should ideally not leave the village. A hunter, for instance, must leave this share at a designated spot in the bush or along a trail before entering the village, later providing its location to a man from the mourning family. This intermediary then delivers the food to the mourners while keeping the hunter's identity concealed. In essence, during times of mourning, all fish and game are virtually provided by the souls, and, from the mourners' perspective, every hunter or fisherman becomes, in a sense, an *aroe*³¹.

The characteristics of concealment outlined here — sound communication, food circulation, and depersonalisation through secrecy — find their prototype in the

³¹ In stories about the powerful *aroe* shamans of the past, who could become fully *aroe* themselves, the role of the souls as providers of catch and game was often highlighted. Among their many feats, these shamans are said to transform into a tapir and willingly surrender themselves to hunters, or glide effortlessly along the rivers in canoes without paddles, propelled by fish who, offering themselves up, would leap directly into their drifting boat.

relationship between the mourners and *recent* souls. In the past, it is worth recalling, the identity of the *recent soul* was entirely concealed from mourners. Therefore, when all women are visually severed from the men-as-*aroe* before and after each ceremony, they are effectively cast as *women-as-mourners*. Each ceremony thus reconstitutes the aesthetics of mourning for all *mothers of souls*, once again placing them in visual isolation from depersonalised *aroe* and reaffirming their role as feeders — the very role that originally established them as compassionate caretakers of otherwise helpless souls. Still, it is a new death — and thus a new mother/soul pair and a new *aroe* body to be made — that prompts the resurfacing of all past losses.

Display itself also finds its prototype in the experience of mourners. The complete mortuary cycle, spanning from an initial period of seclusion that begins with the first burial to the definitive concealment of the body in the secondary burial, provides the overarching model for the aesthetic operations of all ceremonies. Its climax is the revelation of the ornamented skull, the *aroe*-body, which attests to the efficacy of months of ritual dedication. The same dynamic applies to the display of ornamented bodies and *pariko* headdresses following the weekly feasts: a phase of seclusion and feeding culminates in a memory-laden revelation of *aroe* bodies, giving way to a final feast. Each Boe mortuary ceremony thus functions as a ‘scaled-down funeral,’ recursively embedded within the broader sequence of aesthetic operations that constitute the complete mortuary cycle — or *the perspective of the mourners*. Past mourners experience the weekly re-enactment of their deceased kin’s revelation as *aroe* bodies. In contrast, current mourners endure a longer, more intricate process whose ultimate resolution marks the closure of an extended period of collective sorrow.

In summary, the blocking of knowledge and sight serves as a proxy for loss, while simultaneously sustaining and reshaping the relationship between the living and the dead through disjunctive feeding. These acts of compassionate longing are also integral to the making of an *aroe* body, as the unmaking of the living body — its decomposition — depends on proper feeding and the fulfilment of ceremonial tasks more broadly.

As discussed in Chapter Two, feeding the dead is a memory- and grief-laden act, evoking past iterations performed by both the mother of souls and previous generations. Yet weekly feasts rarely involve overt displays of sorrow. As the funeral

progresses, ritual engagement, sense of proximity to the *aroe*, and the stakes of ceremonial acts intensify. A week or two before the closing ceremonies, when exhumation occurs, Tadarimana is disturbed by eerie buzzes and whistles from the river, signalling the arrival of the *aije*, creatures who open the deceased's path to the realm of the dead. Women and children avoid venturing out to prevent dangerous encounters. This marks the start of the longest seclusion and feeding period, when the *aije* and a crowd of souls take over the village. During this major 24-hour feast, exhumation and ornamentation of the body take place, and the heightened presence of the dead turns the aural experience into a powerful trigger for grief.

Aije: at the threshold of life and death

Once everything is prepared for the exhumation of the remains — decomposition has progressed sufficiently, the canonical ceremonies have been completed, all necessary feathers and materials have been gathered, and the mortuary basket is ready — the closing ceremonies may begin. The first act involves handing over the still unadorned basket, woven by a woman from the family of the *recent souls*, to the mourners. In their house, it will receive its initial layer of ornamentation. On that same day at sunset, a singing session known as *aije paru* — the 'prelude' or, literally, the 'base' for the *aije* spirits — is performed, summoning the *aije*. These creatures are by far the most feared among the more-than-human presences at a Boe funeral, initiating a strict 24-hour period of seclusion for women and children. My interlocutors' apprehension regarding the *aije* spirits can hardly be overstated. The measures taken to shield women and children from these spirits surpass any other stage of the funeral: houses are refurbished or nearly rebuilt, additional walls and barriers are erected, and children may be sent away to other villages or even the city.

The *aije* are described as limbless, worm-like riverine creatures whose sight is an omen of certain death — either for the observer or their kin. They dwell among rocks in or near rivers, lakes, flooded areas, and unusually deep sections of rivers where the riverbed drops abruptly, forming deep pools. Their hideouts are well-known features of the landscape, and their movements are invoked to explain shifts in water levels, the appearance or disappearance of pools, and changes in the shape of the

riverbanks. These locations, associated with the *aije*, are seen as thresholds between the world of the living and that of the *aroe*. In certain versions of Boe eschatology, the newly dead first encounter a long, straight path lined with *aije* on both sides. It is precisely through a first ritualised encounter with these beings during funerals that boys are initiated, gaining the right to join men in ceremonies concealed from women.

However, when they reveal themselves outside a ritual context, their sight poses a threat to men and women alike. *Aije* spotting narratives are almost a genre of their own. In these stories, the creatures, whose eyes shine “like stars,” are said to be surrounded by a school of fish drawn to them — “like magnets,” as one interlocutor put it. They are said to often appear in pairs, one red and one black, and to expand and shrink at will. In most accounts, the *aije* produce a loud sound and hurling a column of water high into the air, creating large waves as it crashes back down.

Secrecy around the *aije* ceremonies, especially concerning young women, is nearly absolute. Before attending my first funeral, I was told not to share anything about the *aije* or show any photos to women. One woman explained that her husband had to remove pages with *aije* images from the ethnographic books they keep at home, though, as she put it, “you never know how many books there are.” So, she urged me not to add to the existing literature by publishing more images. The details of the *aije* summoning will remain undisclosed in this thesis.

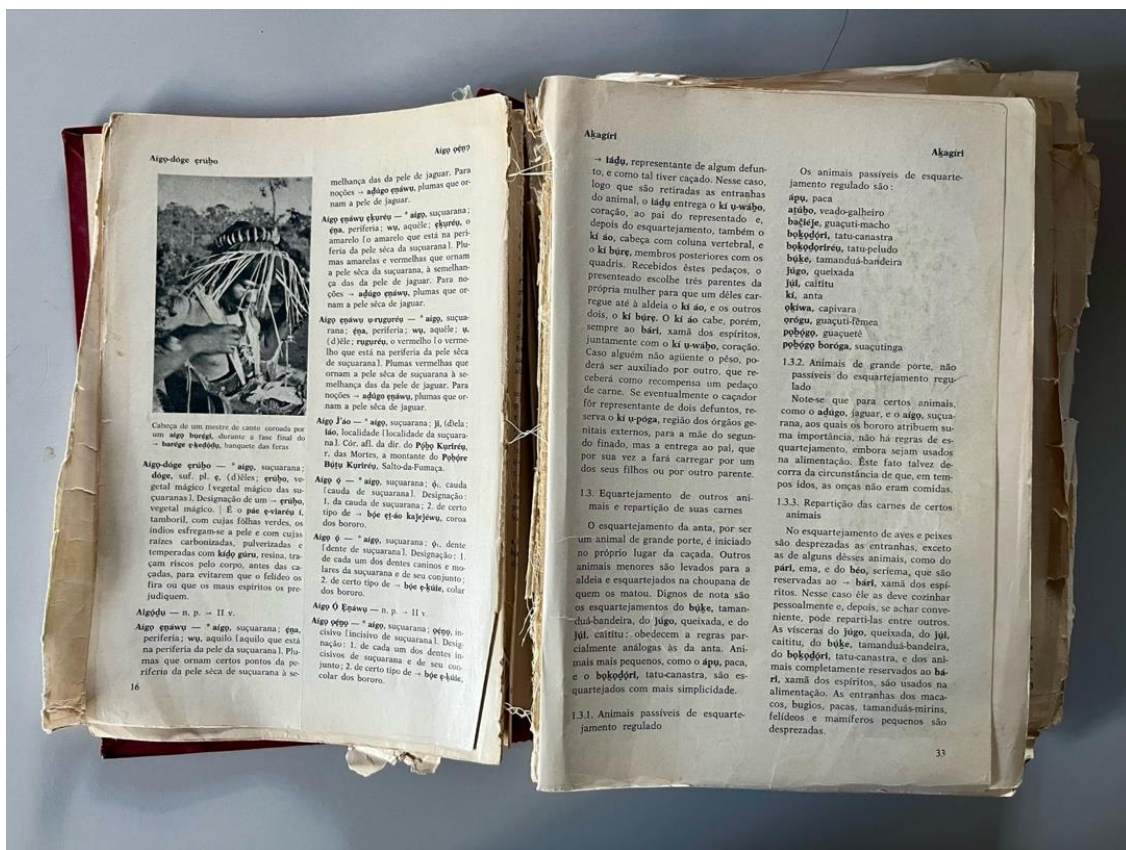


Figure 22. Tadarimana village school's copy of the *Enciclopédia Bororo* vol. 1 (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962) missing the entry on the *aije* spirits; the pages have been torn out.

The culmination of a funeral in Tadarimana is typically scheduled for a weekend, with the *aije* being summoned on Friday evening. By this stage, their deep, undulating hum has been reverberating intermittently from the village outskirts — especially along the river — for at least a week. The singing session, which draws them in, is accompanied by a female choir. Once it concludes, women and non-initiated children withdraw indoors, remaining in seclusion until the following sunset. When they finally emerge, after a closing feast, they find the plaza filled with hundreds of men covered in clay — an unmistakable sign of the riverine creature's passing.

Shortly after the sung prelude concludes, groups of *aije*, accompanied by a crowd of dead souls, arrive in successive waves from the river and the central area of the broader Tadarimana settlement. The *mothers of the souls'* husbands or younger male kin then leave the house, carrying offerings for the procession of *aroe* who join the *aije*. The crowd of souls and *aije* advances towards the traditional ring-shaped village at its northern end, where they encircle the grave at the inner plaza (*bororo*) before

proceeding westward along the path leading to the outer plaza, the ‘*aije* dwelling’ (*aije muga*). There are dozens of named *aije*, each varying in size, with distinctively pitched sounds. Each is formally ceded by the Aroroe clan within the Tugarege moiety — where all *aije* ultimately belong — to a specific subclan in the Ecerae moiety.³²

The *aije* produce an intermittent, loud, and oscillating buzz, ranging from rapid, high-pitched whistles to deep, rumbling tones that seem to resonate within one’s chest. These sounds have no equivalent in the Boe ritual soundscapes. Accompanying them, the large assembly of recently deceased souls adds its own piercing, intermittent cries — distinct from those heard during common feasts. Layered atop this dense cacophony are eight distinct animal calls, from the croaking of frogs to the whistles of capuchin monkeys, emitted by the crowd of *aije akuie*, the ‘*aije*’s pets’. This boisterous procession advances toward the outer plaza, briefly vanishes, and then surges back in waves. The earliest, called ‘the nightly *aije*’ (*aije boe co jiwuge*), begin after the evening singing and may continue through the night. After a morning pause, new waves return, now carrying white clay, which they smear on people, objects, and house walls. The final major wave, *Cibae Etawadu kaewuge* (‘those [moving] towards the Cibae Etawadu song’), approaches the afternoon singing in the mourning house, marking the sequence’s culmination and is considered the most dangerous.

³² For a detailed account of the procedures involved in the *aije* ceremony from men’s perspective, see Caiuby Novaes (1994).



Figure 23. Women look down and cover the peripheral vision when returning home after forming an accompanying chorus for the Cibae Etawadu suite's performance. August 2023.

Aije-related afflictions are common during rituals. Men who ‘wander with the *aije*’ use *aije erubo* (‘*aije* medicines’), plant-based substances usually from riverbanks metonymically linked to the creature, which protect them from its dangerous proximity. For women, however, these same substances are lethal, causing them to perceive the men-as-*aije* as the creature itself. If a woman sees an *aije*, she may quickly become drowsy, struggle to breathe, faint, and ultimately die, unless a man identifies the responsible *aije* and applies the correct antidote. Men exposed to women while ‘with the *aije*’ may suffer identical symptoms. Such collapsing of the gendered disjunction between living and dead bring about an irreversible encounter with the *aije* — in other words, death itself.

Beyond avoiding the sight of the *aije*, women are expected to remain unaware of the male perspective, and most young women do. This ignorance is actively maintained by avoiding discussion and even suppressing thoughts. My understanding comes from rare moments when close female interlocutors spontaneously shared reflections. One night, a few days before an *aije* ceremony, I sat quietly beside a friend in her mid-thirties at the periphery of the circular village. As we both gazed toward the men’s house, she suddenly broke the silence: “I wonder what this creature (bicho) is

like — how big it is, what it looks like.” She admitted to feeling a dangerous curiosity about all male secrets. The image of the decaying body, the nature of the *aije*, and the transformation men undergo when they become *aroe* during rituals haunted her thoughts. “My uncle would return from the men’s house with a strange look in his eyes, as if he weren’t himself,” she confided. Yet, she also spoke of the need to suppress these thoughts, fearing that dwelling on them might lead to unsettling realisations that could make her ill. After death, she speculated, her curiosity might finally be satisfied when she walks the *aije*-infested path of the newly dead toward the afterlife.

Older women are reputed to know more. Senior men claimed their wives and mothers understood that “it is people, not the real monster.” One *mother of souls* told me that most older women gradually piece this together by observing conversations, voices, and subtle signs over many ceremonies, but stressed this knowledge must never be spoken of, even among them. She also mentioned learning more after accidentally seeing videos and photos. Yet, she insisted that if she encountered an *aije* during a ceremony, it would still appear to her as the creature itself — a view shared by my male interlocutors. During another conversation amid an *aije* ceremony, another *mother of souls*, speaking before her young daughter-in-law, offered subtle guidance. When the girl admitted her curiosity, the elder remarked to me, “Some women say it’s just people. But would I go out there and see? Of course not.” Yet she could recognise certain *aije* and their clans by sound.

I witnessed six *aije* ceremonies during my fieldwork. Whereas in the first two, as the Boe say, I “wandered with the *aije*”, in the later ones, I stayed with women and children in the Badojeba clan’s section of the village, right next to the path that leads to the outer plaza. There, the first wave is awaited with apprehension. Since many distant kin from other villages attended the final stages of a funeral, the house was usually crowded, with people sleeping on mats scattered across the floor. During a funeral in August 2023, after some mothers of souls’ husbands left the house with offerings from their wives, a sheet was stretched along the front wall to shield people from any openings in the woven straw that could lead to unintended sights of the *aije*. Women and their children sat on beds and mats, heads down and backs turned towards where the *aije* was expected to come. Utter silence took over. Once the cacophony of animal sounds, *aroe* cries, and *aije* oscillating buzz approached, women covered

children (and sometimes themselves) with blankets. As they drew closer and the noise grew louder, some began to sob beneath the blanket as an older mother of souls wailed a lament.

I later asked Natalia, a 16-year-old girl at the time, what made her cry that night. She told me that it initially reminded her of her recent grief for Moacir's death, her grandfather who raised her as a father. She highlighted that he used to teach her about Boe lore and ceremonies, which made her remember him when the *aije* came. This act of remembrance triggered another memory, that of her first experience of mourning. Beatriz Kiga, Natalia's great-grandmother, died at home in 2018 surrounded by her family, a scene that Natalia recalled that night. At the time, the extended family was mourning another death, so Beatriz passed away during a funeral in a mourning house screened from the outside.

Here, we see crucial features of the Boe ritual technology of memory, yet on a reduced scale, given Natalia's age. The experience of a mortuary ceremony ignites the memory of past grief in a chain reaction: each memory triggers another, unfolding into a series — a chain reaction that is particularly clear in the poetics of Boe laments, as we will see in the next chapter. Further, memory assumes a recursive shape: it tends to be connected to the memory of past ritual events. One does not remember the deceased person in their past everyday life — this is, in fact, what must be avoided — but in the form of the aesthetic media created in ceremonies: the many visual, aural, and olfactory doubles of the *aroe*. These operate as what Munn (1995), in her reading of the *gisalo* ceremony performed by the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea, called 'memory worlds', self-referential mnemonic spaces that shape personal memories into conventional forms and trigger those same memories at each repetition. In an analogy with *gisalo* songs, we could say that grief in Boe ceremonies is produced through a "mnemonic leap across the divide of the memory world into biographical memory, from the conventional details of the song [and many other media, in the Boe case] to the recognised particularity of biography" (: 88).

However, Boe aesthetics of memory do not merely give shape to an absence accessible only through recollection; remembering the dead is an experience of their virtual presence. In these contexts, memory is tied to a *disjunctive encounter*. One that simultaneously asserts presence and casts a *beyond*, an *unseen* and *unknown* that

retreats from the complete reach of the senses.

The sounds that brought Natalia into tears that night, as she perceived them, came from an all too real and dangerous presence of what could be the dead themselves, mere meters from the walls of the house — the presence of *aroe*, not of *boe* ('persons'), and thus only defined in terms of a disjunction. The Aije ceremony is an amplified feast in which the split between the pairings of knowledge-vision and feeding-sound is intensified — heightening the palpable sense of the dead's presence, thus prompting grief. Sorrow and disjunctive presence are often closely paired. Such presence, in addition, tends to be multiple and virtual. As in the Boe saying mentioned in the previous chapter, "the *aroe* never wander alone." This is not a trivial remark, being intimately coupled with the contagious nature of the memory those virtual presences set off: never singular, it overflows into further experiences of grief, one's own and those of others.

In their intimate proximity to and near-identification with the *aroe*, men experience their presence with heightened immediacy. Later that same night, Orodo's 26-year-old grandson, who had been "wandering with the *aije*," entered the house abruptly, tears streaming down his face. He sat on a straw mat beside his grandmother and, between sobs, spoke to her in a hushed, barely audible tone. In response, she began preparing a cigar to be delivered as an offering. A few days later, when I asked her about the reason for his tears, she explained that he had heard his uncle's voice — her deceased son — asking for *cachaça* rum and a cigar, reassuring him that "he will never be alone." The voice had seemed to come from just behind him; yet when he turned, no one was there. He wept that night because he could not see his uncle.

Even from men's perspective, the *aroe* remain beyond the reach of sight. "They see us, but we cannot see them" is a common saying among both men and women. The living can only abduct their presence through signs and traces which assert both presence and disjunction. However, as the next section will briefly introduce, *aroe* shamanism offers the possibility of drawing a step closer to a direct encounter with the dead.

The *recent souls*' last dance

The *aije* remain in the village throughout the morning and afternoon of the second of the three days of a funeral's closing ceremonies. During these periods of intensified ritual danger, the ordinary flow of village life is temporarily suspended or displaced. Yet, in between *aije* waves, domestic life continues behind closed doors: women prepare food, people rest on mats, and conversations happen in hushed voices beneath the weight of ritual tension. Meanwhile, in the men's house, men-as-souls adorn the mortuary basket, prepare boys for initiation, and craft the deceased's gourd clarinet, among other ritual tasks. While older men oversee the preparations in the men's house and young fathers remain at home, closely watching their children, childless men and boys 'wander with the *aije*' outside. During the largest funeral I witnessed, around two hundred people gathered inside the men's house at this stage.

At noon, led by the *recent souls* and their clansmen, the bones are washed and exhumed to the hums of the *aije* and the wails of grief coming from the village's periphery. They are then placed into a provisional basket. These remains will soon replace the *recent souls* themselves as the core double of the deceased in the ceremonies. The day's events culminate near sunset, when the *recent souls* are adorned to dance and be ritually fed in the central plaza — their final embodying of the deceased's soul.

Inside the men's house, their bodies are covered in *mutum* feathers (Cracidae family), particularly around the mouth, hands, and feet, defacing the dancer's singular features (see Caiuby Novaes 2006). The *oiagare boe* feather hairpins, *kiogo aro* headband, and gourd clarinet necklace that adorn the anthropomorphic mortuary basket (see Figure 25) are transferred to the head and neck of the *recent souls* themselves.³³ Dressed in a *pariko* feather headdress, a palm sprout skirt, and any ornaments that belonged to the deceased, the *recent souls* are drawn in by a singer, who offers them 'sweet water' and a cigar sent by the mourners.

They are then led outside the men's house and towards the plaza — out of sight of the still-secluded women — where, among other movements, they circle the grave

³³ The *kiogo aro* is a 'children's ornament' consisting of a cotton cord encircling the forehead, adorned with a cluster of macaw feathers on one side, draping over the back of the neck.

several times. A group of former *recent souls*, also wearing *pariko* headdresses and embodying other deceased individuals, follows them. They are guided by a singer who performs the *aroe eke roia* ('the souls' songs'), a semi-improvised genre. Each time they reach the eastern and western edges of the plaza, the singer signals them to stop and kneel to receive food from a man married to a woman of the deceased's clan. At times, the offering is placed slightly beyond their reach, prompting them to crawl towards the feeder.

After circling the plaza a few times, the singer guides the *recent souls* towards the path leading to the external plaza, where the *aije* await. At this point, in Moacir Coguiépa's funeral, Ismael Atugoreu, guiding the *aroe*, sang as follows:

Icare atumode aijedoge ekoda kae
Now you will follow the *aije*'s trail³⁴

Akaga birido aijedoge ei
Notice the *aije*

Aijedoge ere aparudo marigudu
The *aije* have already prepared you

Arodo duku boeji
Do it cautiously

Aijedoge enogwa jore ai
The *aije* urge you [to join them]

Akaga birido ameduia ipare ei
Notice your young companions

At this point, we reach the external plaza, which is surrounded by young men and boys (mentioned in the last verse) shouting *aroe* cries, some of whom stand in the middle with the resounding *aije*. Among the noise of *aroe* cries, animal sounds, and *aije* hum,

³⁴ All instances of the second person and the imperative in these fragments are singular, addressing the deceased.

the singer begins spinning his rattles continuously, to which the *aroe* respond by approaching and encircling the singer while sliding their feet sideways, eyes fixed on the rattles. Ismael sings:

Arudu aijedoge ei

You see the *aije*

Arudu aije bakoro ji

You see the great *aije*

Arudu aije ukiga ji

You see the horned *aije*

Hahae, hahae

Hahae, hahae

He clatters his rattles four times, which, as in all *aroe* displays, prompts the *aroe* to jump along and perform a resounding joint cry, ending the final performance of the *recent souls*. Now, the boys who will be initiated can be brought to face the *aije* for the first time.

The movement towards the *aije* and the external plaza — the ‘*aije*’s dwelling’ — reenacts the soul’s final settling in the world of the *aroe*. Once this ceremony concludes, the *mutum* feathers glued to the *recent souls*’ bodies are removed and placed into the mortuary basket, along with the deceased’s ornaments and imperishable belongings. The feather hairpins, band, and gourd clarinet once again adorn the exterior of the basket. Afterward, the deceased’s belongings, along with other objects used in the mortuary rites — such as mats, water tanks, and coffins — are cast into a large firepit beside the central plaza by the *recent souls*. This marks the beginning of the grandest of all feasts, drawing hundreds of people. Only after this feast do the women emerge from their seclusion. This is also the final occasion on which the *recent souls* consumed offerings on the deceased’s behalf. On the following day, the skull itself will bear the deceased’s ornaments on its surface and receive the final round of offerings through its mouth.



Figure 24. Boys covered in aije clay after the end of the period of concealment. In the background, women gaze towards the plaza shortly after leaving seclusion. September 2022.



Figure 25. The fully ornamented yet still empty mortuary baskets and other ritual paraphernalia. September 2022.

The revealing of the skull and the last feast

On the morning of the third and last day of closing ceremonies, after an entire night and early morning of singing sessions and other procedures, the mortuary basket's feather ornaments fulfil their final purpose: adorning the deceased's skull. The flesh and skin where the dead's unique features were once inscribed, is replaced by a delicate feather mosaic displaying the *recent souls'* clans' designs. The task, which begins away from women's sight in the men's house, is led by the *recent souls* and their clansmen, but any other men in the opposite moiety of the deceased (that is, the *recent souls'* moiety) may join. Sitting in a close circle, they remove the washed skull from the provisional basket, apply a red annatto dye coating, and lay it over a large straw tray covered with a red cloth and a bed of duck down. To the sound of a ritual specialist singing the Roia Mugurewu Paru, 'Prelude to the Sitting Song', they delicately cover the skull with a first layer of tiny elongated red macaw breast feathers.

Outside the men's house, the sound of the Roia Mugurewu Paru causes an immediate mood change in women, who sense the approaching explosion of grief set to unfold. Only when all bone surface is covered can the *ika* trumpet be played to announce that the *aroe*, fed earlier, are now being sent away — women must not see bare bone. Now to the sound of Iro, the first song of the Roia Mugureu suite, associated with the presence of the mourners, women and mourners may enter the men's house and face the ornamented skull for the first time. Hidden in their closed fists, they bring glass shards.

The multiple scarification sessions that follow, as outlined in the previous chapter, are the most intense outpouring of grief in a Boe funeral. Triggered by the sight of the deceased's skull, mourners and any other women who wish to resurface their past losses agglomerate around the men who continue their task of adornment, now carefully assembling a feather design against the backdrop of red feathers. From the latter's point of view, this is one of the most emotionally demanding ritual services, and grieving women recognise it by performing a 'compassionate massage' on their shoulders, leaving blood stains. For men working on ornamentation, the overwhelming experience is often said to be inscribed in memory through the pungent perfume of *kidoguru*, a resin used to glue the plumes. Used on the *recent souls'* body before their

display, on the skull, and in many other forms of ornamentation, its smell is a key olfactory dimension of *aroeness*. Besides evoking grief, the perfume contrasts with the smell of the decaying body, which also marks a man's experience as *recent souls*. Such an aesthetic transformation — both visual and olfactory — conveys that, now free of the *bope*'s necrophagy, the deceased is close to being settled as an *aroe*.



Figure 26. The *recent souls*, alongside their clansmen, finish the ornamentation of the skull with their own clans' designs.

The final ornamentation of the skull involves placing the *kiogo aro* feather headband and the hairpins. Once adorned, it is then covered with a small arched straw tray known as *je kejewu*, meaning 'that which is over the face' — a term also used more broadly for feather visors and headdresses. This covering serves to further shield the skull from women's sight. It is then positioned before the lead singer, who, facing the mainstay, has been conducting the Roia Mugureu suite. When the singing concludes, one of the *recent souls* ceremonially hands the tray containing the skull to each attendee, one by one. The women who wove the mortuary basket and trays must be the first to receive

it, with the lead mourner being the last. Each person cradles the tray, shedding tears, chanting or wailing a lament — some gently massaging the skull in the characteristic gesture of comfort and compassion.

As noted earlier, the intensity of *aroe* displays escalates with the unfolding of a funeral: the sense of the dead's virtual presence becomes more salient, deepening the expressions of grief. The revealing of the deceased's ornamented skull is the peak of such a process. Next, as in all *aroe* displays, a feast is held. This last feast, called '*pobo makudu*', 'the giving of the water', or *aroe ekududodu*, 'making the souls drink', requires a unique technology of concealment.

A large square canvas tent is set up inside the men's house, measuring approximately five by five meters. It occupies the central portion of the space, stretching from the mainstay to the eastern wall — precisely the area designated for singers during performances. The environment must be as dark and silent as possible to prevent startling the hesitant souls as they approach. Recalling the words of a deceased *aroe etawara* (shaman), an interlocutor explained that the *aroe*, like a school of *lambari* fish (*Astyanax* genus), cautiously approach the tent, poised to scatter at the slightest loud noise, sudden movement, or mistake in the singing — any such disturbance would instantly undo the singers' progress. The lead singer, performing the 'songs of the souls', genre narrates their tentative arrival, his voice echoed by the accompanying singers and male chorus. The singing both narrates and causes the attraction of the *aroe* towards the ornamented skull, where it must settle to be fed. Dozens of small metal buckets filled with offerings are scattered around it.

Being a consistent and experienced singer is not enough to lead such a session. One must have a recognised shamanic skill, which consists in telling whether and when the deceased's *aroe* has entered the skull so that the mourner's offerings can be poured into its mouth. This extraordinary ability provides a minimal definition of a contemporary *aroe* shaman — the *aroe etawara are*, 'master of the souls' path'. Thirty to fifty men, among them the former *recent souls*, gather as a chorus behind the three or four main singers who face the mainstay, all crowded within the tent. A female chorus accompanies them from within the men's house (but outside the tent). Aije Kurireu, the elderly singer seen as the only one able to take on the role of *aroe* shaman during my fieldwork, sits directly in front of the skull. Even after falling ill and

relocating permanently to a health centre in the city, Aije would still be brought back to the village to lead this session.

Beneath the arched straw tray, the skull is oriented towards one of the openings, with the feather hairpins and *kiogo aro* bundle sticking out from the opposite side. Beneath the shadowy tent and concealed by the *je kejewu* tray, the skull is either barely discernible or altogether obscured, yet the skill to tell whether the deceased has come lies precisely in *a capacity to see*. Some claim that the *aroe etawara are* sees a light emanating from within the skull or perceives the down beneath it moving. Aije Kurireu himself, however, described it as a genuine, almost unmediated vision of the approaching *aroe*, achieved by fixating intently into the dark opening of the *je kejewu* straw tray.

What we see here is a concealment nested within another. Women are visually separated from the men-as-souls inside the tent, who will consume their offerings after the session. Yet from the men's perspective, they too are severed from direct visual access to the *aroe*, whose presence may only be seen by the shaman within the scaled-down enclosure of the skull. What this double concealment achieves is to reduce to its minimum the distance between the living and the dead, and thus many narratives of fantastical manifestations of the *aroe* are associated with these sessions. Still, even Aije Kurireu noted that when he encounters an *aroe*, such as in his dreams, there is always a 'something' between them, a barrier he must not cross and across which he must not accept food — with no visual disjunction, what must be avoided here is the feeding relationship. In sum, the living may draw asymptotically closer to the dead, but the divide must never collapse; to do so would risk an irreversible transformation.

Aroeness as an aesthetics of memory

The skull and bones are placed in the mortuary basket only after several singing sessions, at sunset, when a barrier of straw mats is erected at the centre of the men's house to shield the procedure from women. Once again, a wave of grief engulfs the gathering. The basket remains in the mourners' house for two days before being transported by the *recent souls* and their clansmen to its final burial place — in Tadarimana, a small cemetery about a kilometre from the village. The *mother of souls*

sends a final liquid offering and a cigarette to be buried with the bones in this ultimate act of concealment.

In the recent past, immersion in lakes and marshes was a preferred burial practice. Further back in time, shelters in the towering rock scarps that mark the region's landscape also served as final resting places. From these *aroe eiao* ('souls' places') arises a network of plants, animals, and landscapes marked by *aroeness*. The moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*), abundant in wetlands, feeds various macaw species. Yellow macaws (*Ara ararauna*) nest in these palms; red macaws (*Ara chloropterus*) favour rock shelters. Long-settled dead are said to return as red macaws, which are both prominent *aroe remawu* animals ('themselves *aroe*') and cherished pets among older women. As one interlocutor noted, a red macaw that remains in a woman's home and does not eventually leave embodies deceased kin seeking her care. Their meatless diet is 'souls' food' (*aroe eke*), and their feathers — "Boe's gold," as Orodo used to say — are prized for the ornamentation of *aroe* bodies. When these pets die, they are buried in the central plaza, "just like people," another interlocutor remarked.

This is but a tiny fragment of a far broader ecology of *aroeness*, a vast network of metonymic connections linking species, materials, behaviours, and spaces that is experienced in synaesthetic ties between colours, sounds, scents, among other material properties — an aesthetic realm Crocker (1985) has persuasively outlined. In order to craft an *aroe* body for the deceased, one must actively weave it in such web of *aroeness*. The aesthetics of Boe mortuary rituals therefore both emerge from and belong to this ecology.

We have seen that the making of an *aroe* body unfolds through multiple sensory registers and within a relationship between performers-as-*aroe* and audience-as-mourners. This opposition is irreducible: from the perspective of performers (and even of shamans), the *aroe* remain in a receding beyond, where any safe engagement requires a fundamental disjunction. Throughout the *aroe*-making process, the soothing of grief for both the recent dead and the living are intertwined, produced through months of seclusion and the feeding of meatless souls' food, reciprocated by offerings of raw catch and game. These offerings themselves carry an image of gendered disjunction: they consist (or traditionally consisted) of transactions between exclusively female vegetable produce and the pure yield of men's hunting and fishing. Rather than

being combined, as in the conviviality of kinship among the living, they are detached, remaining separate and circulating in opposite directions. Over time, repeated acts of compassionate feeding pacify the deceased's soul and provide it with a renewed body, ready to be revealed both to the living and, in some eschatological accounts, among the dead. After that, the mourners themselves may bath, cut their hairs, and ornament themselves again.

The immersive sensorial space created in this process leaves enduring impressions in the memory of those who participate. While grief may continue to linger in various ways, ritual investment helps it not to remain as a constant, diffuse presence haunting daily life — an absence turned overwhelming presence. Instead, *aroeness*-bound memories tend to resurface most forcefully during future funerals, when the aesthetic coordinates of mourning once again permeate and reorganise collective life. Personal experiences of grief are, of course, too complex and powerful to be fully contained by ritual conventions. An account that “masks the emotional force of bereavement by reducing funerary ritual to orderly routine” (Rosaldo 1989: 13) risks focusing too much on *form* and lose sight of the *force* of grief. Yet it is precisely this difficult task of redirecting the powerful emotional flow of grief into ritual form that Boe mortuary rituals seek to achieve — with varying degrees of success. As Despret (2021: 11) reminds us, the dead require a place “to be *made* for them”. This is what the Boe seek with their technologies of memory. They attempt to give loss shape, temporal rhythm, and relational spaces that help to channel and situate its enduring presence.

This reshaping draws on the ecology of *aroeness* for its materials. It is by mobilising the self-referentiality of such an ecology that ritual attempts to contain grief's tendency to saturate experience. Boe ritual expressions operate within a closed circuit, activated and sustained by the *aroe* ecology itself, with limited external references. Ornamented bodies are sung upon with lyrics that speak of ornaments, eliciting wails whose metaphors draw from the very animals that provide feathers and down. Virtually every movement, sound, or image in a Boe funeral derives its *ro* — its ‘way’ or ‘habitus’ — from the same aesthetic universe, which ultimately refers back to the *aroe eiao*, the burial sites and entrances to the dead's realm. The beings metonymically tied to these places inform the ornaments of *aroe* displays, the

onomatopoeias of clarinet melodies, the movement of dancers. Like in Munn's (1995: 97) "memory worlds", this universe creates "a 'metamemory', a particular kind of iconic language about memory — as well as a 'formative' operator that has the capacity to shape the particularised biographical memory; and a mnemonic medium or 'agency' with the capacity to trigger this remembering in given contexts."

The village space itself is framed by these aesthetic coordinates, with the men's house doubling the *aroe eiao* burial sites. For instance, on the second day of a funeral's closure, the mortuary basket is carried at sunrise to the men's house, where it receives further ornamentation from the *aroe*. As the *ika* trumpet sounds, the recent souls approach the door, sliding their feet sideways as *aroe*-like birds such as the *ra pore pore* and *ra pogoriwo* along riverbanks. At the men's house threshold, they strike and pull the basket, producing a loud noise followed by *aroe* cries, to which mourners respond with wails. An interlocutor explained that this re-enacts former burials in rock shelters with still water, where the recent soul entered the pool with the basket between his legs, as teasing souls brushed against him like fish, until the *aroe* pulled the basket into the underworld. In the songs, the men's house is metaphorically called *cibae eiari*, 'the *cibae* macaws' nest' — the name of a former burial cliff (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962: 537-41).

Beyond capturing the senses, the aesthetic universe of a Boe funeral — like Gell's (1996, 2013) art traps — points to an intentionality beyond itself. In ritual, the dead remain perceptible yet out of reach: the fabrication and activation of *aroe* bodies gestures toward a virtual elsewhere, accessible only through abduction. This is not unique; as Fausto (2020: 19) notes, ritual presence always preserves "an infinitesimal distance [...] between the prop and the prototype" (see also Severi 2015). What distinguishes the Boe, however, is how this asymptotic presence shapes the experience of pastness: the dead erupt into the present only to expose their irretrievable loss. As Stasch (2009: 212) puts it regarding Korowai mourning, "moments of social copresence [with the dead] are not identical with themselves but contain signs of other times, when a relation was or will be different from what it currently is". In a Boe funeral, the presence of the dead does not merely commemorate the past — it brings it hauntingly close, even as it marks it as irretrievably gone.

The following chapter explores in depth this temporal dimension of the disjunctions observed in the relational and aesthetic forms discussed here. It shows how Boe ritual technologies not only produce severed relationships across space, gender, and affect, but also cuts through time layers, displacing generations and creating disjunctive relations between past, present, and future.

Chapter Four — The Sorrow of the Orphaned Singers: Knowledge and the Poetics of Decline

In the early hours before the final day of funeral ceremonies in July 2023, I watched as Ismael Atugoreu, standing with his pair of rattles, sang Kiege Barege for the first time — a suite of songs said to belong to the *bope* necrophagous spirits, who may punish even the slightest mistake. After a few verses, his quiet nostalgia turned abruptly into outward sorrow and tears, and yet he continued with a trembling, choked voice. A man next to me observed, plainly: “He remembered his father.” Ismael’s adoptive father, Kadagare, was famously responsible for undertaking the risky execution of that suite. After Kadagare’s death, his pupil Aije Kurireu took over. Then, with Aije advanced in age and in poor health, the responsibility fell heavily on Ismael’s shoulders.

I had witnessed many such scenes of sorrow, as singers often burst into tears when performing. Early on in my fieldwork, my interlocutors offered explanations as to why singers cry. As a singer concisely put it, it is not the most recent death that prompts their grief; they cry because they “remember those who sat there before them,” those who once sang those very words and melody in that same setting. Their own rattles and voices evoke someone else’s presence, yet only to deny it: the irreversibility of death becomes most evident when the gap between the living and the dead is at its narrowest.

Singing is a crucial aspect of Boe ritual life, and no ritual can be held without a competent singer. Virtually all Boe ceremonies begin with one or more singing sessions that serve as preludes to each of their main stages. Depending on the ritual matter they ‘set off’ (*parudo*), a single session can last from a few minutes to, in exceptional cases, more than five hours. Leading these sessions, a role reserved for experienced men, is the ultimate display of ritual knowledge and a crucial source of prestige. Based on such reputation, male singers coordinate and decide on most ritual matters: in times of sorrow, to sing is to lead. As we have seen, a Boe funeral is triggered through the initiative of a lead female mourner, the *mother of the soul*, and her desire to mourn her dead cannot be neglected by the male ritual leaders. Once a funeral begins, the lead

mourner withdraws to long seclusion in the mourning house that will last for as long as the body takes to decompose. During this time, all decisions and preparations fall on the male singers. These are thus known simply as *boe eimijerage*, the ‘chiefs.’

During my fieldwork, the two most elderly singers, Raimundo Itogoga and Aije Kurireu — regarded by many as the ultimate bearers of esoteric knowledge, and thus the epitome of *boeness* — fell ill and were no longer able to perform. Confronted with the decline of these two great chiefs, a pervasive sense of early grief settled in: their decline was experienced as that of *boeness* itself. These circumstances led to a surge in learning among an emerging generation of singers. Still, they felt hopelessly unfit for leading alone all the long and complex suites and singing sessions punctuating a Boe mortuary cycle. In collective gatherings, their condition was expressed in speeches through a motto that, repeated many times, marked my time among the Boe: ‘We are orphans’ (*marenarunure pagi*). As encapsulated in the phrase, rather than merely stepping up, this generation of singers saw themselves as living a constant struggle, needing to lead in the absence of the magnified kinship embodied by Raimundo and Aije. Still, they decided to keep on singing out of deep compassion for their elderly masters.

This chapter turns to how ritual acts generate a sense of loss that is inseparable from a time-saturated knowledge regime and becomes amplified as an experience of cultural decline. Crucially, I show how loss and decline are irreducible to passive or melancholic states, being rather one of the driving forces animating the Boe ritual machinery. This is done by demonstrating how the sense of early grief for Raimundo and Aije that compels the ‘orphaned generation’ to sing is deeply intertwined with the act of singing itself — an activity inseparable from the memory of one’s late masters. The same force that moves a singer to tears is what inspires one to pick up a pair of rattles for the first time: a profound, grief-tinged sense of intergenerational rupture and its irreversibility. I further contend that songs themselves are images of intergenerational relationships, making a proper performance before an audience a testament to one’s ability to cultivate the memory of these connections. For the Boe, ritual knowledge is rooted in a sense of pastness; hence, the great prestige experienced elderly singers enjoy arises from their unique relationship with the past, which stems from having lived alongside the ‘ancient ones’ (*mariguduwuge*). This capacity to

embody the memory of such past connections becomes a crucial tool for forging new ones in the present, producing the larger-than-life figure of the Boe singer-chief.

Generational discontinuity and a sense of rupture in the transmission of knowledge are thus not presented here as mere backdrops or obstacles for the seamless reproduction of a *corpus* of knowledge. They are rather what Boe singing is all about: intergenerational time and rupture are immanent to such performance of knowledge. The Boe sing to remember and mourn, and they do so because they feel chronically unfit to replace ‘the ancient ones’ (*mariguduwuge*), axiomatically seen as the very source of knowledge and tradition. Through these conclusions, the seemingly circumstantial context of generational transition I encountered in my fieldwork is reconnected (or even identified) to a deeper, more fundamental quality of the act of singing itself.



Figure 27. Ismael Atugoreu, the most respected singer of the ‘orphaned generation,’ weeps while cradling the mats that hold the deceased’s skull. He mourns not only the passing of the deceased but also the decline of Boe ero, ‘culture,’ which, in the words of his lament, he claims to be ‘ending’ (*akedugodunure*). August 2023.

Singer-chiefs

For Boe men, singing is the ultimate display and source of ritual prestige. As noted, singing at someone's funeral, an act placed among the highest acts of compassion, is what makes one a nominal *boe eimijera*, a chief. One of the aspects of the equation between singers and chiefs rests on such compassionate acts, a nearly unconditional commitment that reach far beyond their own kin, extending virtually to all. Just as funerals are supralocal events, so is a singer's prestige. When visiting other villages, they are treated with exceptional respect, often being hosted with full meals and a bed, instead of bringing their own food and receiving the usual cup of coffee that marks contemporary Boe hospitality. In times of joy, when attending large parties in other villages, the more prestigious singers may be waived from the fee paid by outsiders. In sum, they are expected to be treated as embodying the permanent, unredeemable debt created by their commitment to the losses of others.

In their strenuous task of performing lengthy suites of songs, singer-chiefs are the point where all eyes converge, drawing collective focus during the most crucial stages of a mortuary cycle. Consequently, their presence and commitment are etched into people's most poignant and enduring memories, those of loss and grief. Even after they pass, their lives may linger in the collective memory for a significant time: their stories and teachings are remembered by all much like those of one's own kin. For this same reason, their own funerals attract an extraordinary gathering, and their newly departed souls are regarded as not merely menacing, but exceptionally so. Just as an ordinary person's recently dead soul is particularly threatening to their immediate family, the magnified kinship embodied by the singer-chiefs amplifies the danger posed by their deaths, creating a generalised sense of peril. In sum, as the facilitators of the displays of sorrow and compassion in Boe mortuary rituals, great singers scale up kinship-defining memories of past caring, being thus virtually treated — in life as well as in death — as universal kin.

Singing is often spoken of as a burden and a source of suffering: "My mom didn't want me to be a *boe eimijera* [singer-chief]; she used to say that they suffer too much," a singer-in-training once shared. Great singers must be ever prepared to leave their homes at a moment's notice, joining mortuary ceremonies wherever they may be

held. As the Boe saying goes, “*boe eimijerage* [singer-chiefs] can’t sleep, can’t eat”: they must always be prepared to set everything aside to bring comfort to others in their grief. As shown in Chapter Two, compassion and suffering are experienced by the Boe as intertwined affects, seen as two sides of the same act. Compassion moves one to soothe the suffering of others. However, the selflessness of compassionate acts — such as singing, one of many possibilities — is further seen as a cause of suffering for the performer and in turn awakens compassion in others. Singers are moved by the plight of the helpless-orphaned (*mareнару*) mourners and the deceased. Yet, this act of singing renders the singers themselves as helpless-orphaned, evoking the compassion of the onlookers. Among these, women might fan the singers during their extended performances, sometimes weeping as they gently massage their shoulders; men, meanwhile, may feel compelled to sing themselves one day. Most stories of how a singer first became interested in performing begin with a feeling of compassion for the helplessness of an older generation of singers.

A singer’s prestige arises from the compassionate display of his exceptional knowledge and memory. Singing reveals this knowledge to others and is seen as a condition for leadership. As Levak (1971: 4) remarked based on his 1960s fieldwork, beyond any inherited titles (the Baadojeba clan has nominal precedence over chieftaincy), “The true influential leaders and authorities are the men who excel in knowledge”. Among these leaders, those like Raimundo Itogoga and Aije Kurireu are distinguished as ‘great singer-chiefs’ (*boe eimijera kurirewuge*), ranking above others for their mastery of the repertoire of songs, names, ornaments, and designs belonging to all clans. As Aije Kurireu once said, “I am neither Tugarege (the southern moiety) nor Ecerae (the northern moiety); I am everything.”

These Boe intellectuals also master the myths that map and explain the connections in these repertoires. They are recognised as *bakaru epage*, ‘storytellers’, capable not only of narrating but of extracting the consequences hidden within each episode. The adventures of a mythical hero — the animals they encountered, perils faced, and relationships established — are revealed by singer-chiefs as indexes of names, songs, ornaments, and ritual/matrimonial alliances connected to the hero’s clan. This knowledge is a testimony to a life spent near elder singer-chiefs, persuading

them to share their jealously guarded lore, despite their often fragmented and unsystematic teaching, which can frustrate younger aspirants.

Such knowledge, held by great singer-chiefs, sometimes doesn't rely on direct, first-hand experience, thus purely indexing their past copresence with deceased masters. Raimundo, for instance, once boasted that though he had never travelled far downriver, he could list every tributary of the São Lourenço River and name ancient village sites along its banks for hundreds of kilometres — all “through myths (*bakaru tabo*).” Aije Kurireu likewise described multiple design variants of a single chest ornament and their sub-clan affiliations, then noted: “I have never seen them myself.”

A singer's knowledge and prestige are closely associated with his pair of *bapo* rattles, which accompany most forms of singing. Occasionally said to contain one's *aroe*-like double (*u-wari*), the rattles are also seen as bodily extensions: if one breaks, the corresponding arm is said to be injured until it is repaired. They must only be broken at the owner's funeral, with fragments placed in the mortuary basket. However, the *bapo* seeds inside the rattles of great singer-chiefs may be recovered to make memory-enhancing medicines. Prepared with *kidoguru* resin and other ingredients like the brains of a bird (*Cacicus cela*) that mimics others, these medicines are applied behind the ears to improve listening and memory — key tools for aspiring singers.

For my interlocutors, Boe knowledge — in contrast with Barae knowledge — is a tensed category, predicated on pastness. The knowledge of the living stems from connections with the *mariguduwuge*, ‘the ancients’. When the exceptional knowledge of a particular person is mentioned, the response is usually: “yes, he or she was raised by X; was close to X; was X's son-in-law,” with X being a knowledgeable person who has passed away. As it will be further clarified in this chapter, knowledge is the activation of these time-laden relationships. Elders are exceptional in this regard, as the breadth and depth of their connections with the ‘ancient ones’ are unparalleled. And yet, such connections alone are insufficient: to prove one's knowledge, one must sing.

An elder who does not sing — and thus does not keep rattles — may have his knowledge regarded as illegitimate. There were two elders in Tadarimana during my fieldwork who were often belittled by others for their reputed ignorance of esoteric matters. As some would point out with contempt, despite having “lived among the

ancients (*mariguduwuge*),” these men couldn’t sing. One of them, privately criticising to his grandson the way a certain ritual was carried out, remarked, “But I have no small rattles (*bapo rogu*), no big rattles (*bapo kurirewu*); so I have no say on it”.

A leadership of orphans

As detailed in Chapter One, singer-chiefs were once the standard form of leadership among the Boe. Today, their extra-ceremonial influence has largely shifted to *caciques*, relatively young leaders elected to improve village life through engagement with the non-Indigenous world. What defines the *cacique*’s influence is, as one interlocutor put it, “knowing how to speak with the Barae,” a skill measured by their ability to extract resources. Singer-chiefs became bound to ceremonial matters, primarily operating in times of sorrow. While their decisions concerning funerals take precedence in such contexts, they have little influence in collective life during times of joy.

Once numerous — ideally one per clan in each village — the great singer-chiefs had dwindled to Raimundo and Aije Kurireu, both elderly and infirm by the end of my fieldwork. Aije Kurireu passed away in November 2024. These prestigious ritual specialists are seen as the condition of possibility of Boe tradition, as though it emanates from their memory and compassionate acts. A relative of one of them, for instance, once shared the wish to, upon his death, forget all that had been learned, renounce tradition, and become Barae once and for all. This radical statement reflects the widely shared view that knowledge flows from these men, with others merely actualising it.

At a personal level, this expresses a common Boe experience: grief as a desire to forget culture. This possibility is also collective. The anticipated loss of the last great singer-chiefs evokes a sense of imminent cultural extinction. This fear is not purely speculative: in the other two Boe regions — the Salesian mission and the Pantanal wetlands — ritual life faded after singer-chiefs died. Mortuary rituals, as we have seen, became an inward performance of indigeneity and the *locus* of *boeness*. Hence, where ceremonial life persists, its decline is imagined as the fading of ‘culture’ itself. As younger interlocutors often remark, many believed that when Raimundo and Aije passed away, mortuary ceremonies in Tadarimana and Tereza Cristina would

disappear. Yet when faced with their illnesses, they reacted by choosing to remember rather than to forget.

My fieldwork unfolded as concerns with generational succession peaked. The first mortuary cycle I witnessed was the last conducted by Aije Kurireu. Raimundo had suffered a stroke shortly before. The next three funerals were led by Ismael Atugoreu, a singer-chief in his fifties from Korogedu Paru village, who mastered most mortuary suites. As noted, Boe funerals are triggered by an older woman's decision to step forward as lead mourner, but singer-chiefs — and especially the most senior — make most ritual decisions. With Aije and Raimundo ill, Ismael travelled to Tadarimana for ceremonies requiring his rare expertise, while Bosco Marido Kurireu, a former *cacique* and singer-to-be, assisted alongside other local singers.

All these younger singers were faced with the inevitable burden of generational succession yet felt ill-suited for the overwhelming task of adequately handling the grief of others. They saw themselves as lacking the knowledge, experience, and skills to lead mortuary cycles without Raimundo and Aije. Yet, in response to the elders' illnesses, they embraced the task and — while maintaining the characteristic sense of competition among singer-chiefs — encouraged each other's learning efforts. Still, rather than seeing this process merely as a matter of stepping up to replace the older generation, they experienced it as a permanent struggle, one condensed in the often-evoked formula, 'We (incl.) are orphans' (*marenarunure pagi*).

The term *marenaru*, imprecisely translated as 'orphan' or 'helpless', refers to the temporary or permanent absence of care from older kin, with the absent parent as prototype. The Boe often render it in Portuguese as *pobre* ('poor'), evoking a sense of poverty in kinship that leads to material deprivation. In the esoteric language of elegies, *marenaru* may refer to mourners or the deceased, underscoring the symmetrical impoverishment of kinship brought by death. Citing this term, younger leaders define themselves through the absence of the magnified kin embodied by great singer-chiefs. Whenever I heard the phrase "we are orphans," it appeared in public speeches such as gatherings before the men's house or, for instance, when the *cacique* addressed schoolchildren on the National Day of Indigenous People. "We are orphans" is not just a reflexive assessment but an exhortation — a call to action. No longer under the aegis of great chiefs, they now felt the need for a collective effort, a leadership of orphans.



Figure 28. Aije Kurireu, shortly before falling ill, prompts younger singers during the concluding singing session of a funeral. September 2022.

This younger generation also saw themselves as shortcutting the pedagogical stages that great singer-chiefs of the past are said to have undergone. Bosco, who began conducting chants when I arrived in the field, would often remark how singing was intended to be the last stage of a singer-chief's learning path, an outward display of a broader knowledge of Boe lore that starts with the attentive listening to myths. Yet, he had to skip directly to the last stage, performing and memorising songs whose vocabulary was obscure and whose mythical references he could not unpack. Retrospectively regretting the "lack of interest" of his youth, when, he recalls, great singer-chiefs were still around and would daily gather in the plaza and men's house,

Bosco now felt like running out of time. His regret would sometimes manifest in pieces of advice to his son and grandson: “When the *aroe* [the men-as-souls] are in the men’s house, you don’t pop in, look around, and leave. You stay and listen”.

Boe pedagogy is based on the silent, attentive watching and listening to another’s narratives, songs, skills, or performances. Actively enquiring toward others is, in most cases, seen as shameful. Teaching typically begins later, initiated by the teacher to acknowledge the apprentice’s effort and interest. In the realm of singing, the masters’ recognition of a pupil’s effort often manifests as a fragment of a song recited — or “given” (*maku*), as they put it — to the latter, with additional fragments provided later as a further acknowledgement of their ability to memorise the previous ones. The Boe hold a peripatetic pedagogy of memory: the ideal way to memorise a song is to walk long distances, reciting it to oneself along the way. As a woman light-heartedly shared, “My dad used to say, ‘Those who pee too close to the house learn nothing’”. The image of moving along a path is also often evoked as a privileged trope for the unfolding of the songs themselves, echoing the intimate connection between walking and memorising.

Most songs, as we will see, are drawn from a closed repertoire and defined by their immutability: they were spontaneously created by particular mythical heroes whose voices are deemed to have echoed unchanged throughout the generations. Noticeable mistakes or rumoured deviations are not only harshly criticised but may also invite harm or even death caused by the enraged *aroe* souls or the deceitful *bope* spirits. Therefore, like in other cases in lowland South America, as with the Yine designs, in which “no praise attends the inept but brave attempt, only ridicule” (Gow 2001: 115), there is no trial-and-error pedagogy when it comes to singing among the Boe. After long hours of quiet, private dedication to memorising the songs, one must expose oneself to the critical scrutiny of others — both human and more-than-human.³⁵

One’s knowledge is jealously kept, and great singer-chiefs maintain a relationship of antagonism and competition among themselves — one manifested in the relationship between Raimundo and Aije Kurireu, which used to be marked by

35. Ceremonies outside of mourning periods, such as name-giving rituals, are considered ideal opportunities for practise. During times of sorrow, the virtual presence of the *aroe* becomes more pronounced and potentially threatening.

covert or, at times, sharp, overt criticism. As my interlocutors more than once said, with, I assume, a hint of exaggeration, “the singer-chiefs (*boe eimijerage*) of the past would kill each other because of [disagreements regarding] myths”. However, when there is a significant age difference, competition is often replaced by a display of utmost respect. Given the axiomatic link between seniority and knowledge, an older person's views are never challenged in person, only in private. Consequently, younger people avoid discussing 'Boe matters' in the presence of their elders.

While still bound by such methods of Boe pedagogy, the younger generation began to develop technologies to shortcut aspects of it. In Korogedu Paru village, Ismael pioneered a new method of memorising songs by writing them down in notebooks. As a form of early grief, he started this practice out of regret for not having learned enough from his ageing adoptive father, Kadagare, a *bari* shaman and the foremost singer-chief in the region during the late 1980s and 1990s. Shortly before Kadagare's death, Ismael rushed into writing down songs his father would recite to him. Others in Korogedu Paru and Tadarimana later followed his example, keeping notebooks of songs for memorisation and performance. This new approach was combined with the practice of recording singing sessions using phones or audio recorders. For singers, a phone and a notebook are now as essential as a pair of rattles.

The Boe have seemingly used recorders for as long as professional anthropologists have been carrying out research among them; for example, Viertler (1987) observed that in the 1970s, singers in Korogedu Paru carefully kept tape recorders in the *kodobo* straw bags where one keeps one's rattles. Nowadays, combining recording and writing accelerates one's ability to memorise songs. Yet my interlocutors occasionally recognise a side effect: the gradual isolation of songs from other facets of Boe esoteric knowledge (myths, names, ornaments, etc.) to which they are connected. This is justified by the orphaned generation's sense of urgency regarding the need to sustain ritual life, which relies more on the proper performance of songs than on their unpacking. Ismael can be seen as the image of the new kind of great singer-chief emerging in the process. Although confidently mastering a vast repertoire, he overtly claims not to know what most songs mean or the myths underpinning them — at least, we might note, while both Raimundo and Aije were still around.



Figure 29. In front of the men's house on the day of a death, Bosco Marido Kurireu and Antônio Jokuria write down the marenaruie elegy composed by Aije Kurireu. March 2023.

During the peak of the grief-driven learning boom, my research, visibly based on recording and writing, inevitably became entangled with the politics and epistemology of my interlocutors' own studies. My presence and recorder became a mediator between the younger and older generations of singers. To avoid the respect-shame (*poguru*) barrier that typically separates them from the elders, the younger singers frequently asked me to record singing sessions for them, especially those led by Raimundo and Aije. Later, the focus shifted to Ismael's performances. Ismael himself would often hand me his recorder to elicit song recitations from Raimundo, his name-giver. In a clear sense of urgency, calling upon the anthropologist helped avoid the slow-paced, shame-saturated circumstances in which knowledge would otherwise be shared³⁶.

36. This technology of knowledge circulation, however, is not entirely unfamiliar; it distinctly echoes another relationship characterised by intense respect-shame: the avoidance between in-marrying men and their parents-in-law, where the former often communicates with the latter indirectly, asking his wife to relay his needs to her parents.



Figure 30. Aije Kurireu advises Ismael Atugoreu during a break in a suite's performance. July 2023.

My collaboration with Bosco, whom I had hired as a translator, made my position as mediator more systematic. What made working with Bosco so stimulating was that, in his quiet, patient way, he was as enthusiastic about the research as I was. After each transcription, he carefully transferred the text into his notebook. Following our initial attempt to translate a song — mainly the less cryptic genre called *aroe eke roia*, ‘the songs of souls’ — we would interview Aije, Bosco’s grandfather, about the meaning of the verses. After we formulated the questions, Bosco would be the one interviewing his grandfather — whose Portuguese was limited — while I recorded the conversation. Although Bosco asked the questions, in that context, they were framed as ‘the anthropologist’s questions,’ not his. My presence, as well as that of the recorder and the paper he held when interviewing, allowed Bosco to perform as *an anthropologist*. He thus bypassed the respect-shame barrier that would have otherwise discouraged such direct inquiring had he asked those questions *as a grandson*. Still, little by little, Bosco became more at ease around Aije, eventually recording his own questions and asking for songs. When I came back for a visit eight months after the end of our almost daily

collaboration, I found out he had kept visiting his grandfather and recording songs in my absence.



Figure 31. Aije Kurireu, at a local Indigenous Health Centre in Rondonópolis, where he spent the last year of his life, shares a song with his grandson, Bosco Marido Kurireu. June 2023

The generational transition described here is closely tied to the widespread sense of early grief caused by Raimundo and Aije's illnesses, a feeling intensified by the magnified influence these men collectively held. In fact, the learning boom I witnessed is integral to grief, a possible reaction to a sometimes overwhelming sense of the imminent disappearance of *boeness* as embodied by the two elders. This generation decided to sing in order to remember their elderly masters as well as past singer-chiefs, and, in doing so, create a space for everyone else to mourn their own losses. The connection between singing with remembrance and generational succession will be further unpacked later, demonstrating that the sense of generational transition discussed here is not merely contextual but is intrinsic to the act of singing itself. In other words, generational rupture is not simply a backdrop for Boe singing or an

obstacle to the continuity of ritual life; instead, it is an inherent quality of singing performances. Before substantiating this claim, we must first examine how singing brings the living and the dead face to face.

Facing the dead

The loud, continuous hiss of the seeds swirling inside a gourd captures everyone's attention, signalling the beginning of a singing session. Depending on the setting, singers may be one or many, seated or standing, and, in most cases, they are accompanied by a female chorus, who sit behind the male singers. In contrast with the intensity of men's singing style — marked by deep and explosive bursts often followed by intense vibrato — women, in a high-pitched, laryngealised unison, smoothly elongate the final vowels, as if sewing back together the fragmentary bursts delivered by the male singers. A well-attended chorus signals a prestigious singer, whereas an empty one may intentionally indicate disapproval. Much like Packer's observation (2020: 96) regarding the female chorus in Krahô 'rattle songs', the Boe chorus doesn't merely complement or echo the lead singers; it exerts "rigorous critical control" over them.



Figure 32. Orodo, at the centre, sits among a large female chorus at the men's house. July 2023.

A singing performance is not oriented towards the surrounding audience; it is always directed at (*keje*) or over (*bukeje*) a specific object or person. Lead singers focus their performance on such a target, facing it. When directed at a person, it is towards an ornamented person-as-*aroe*; when towards an object, it serves as an *aroe*-like index of a person, such as the deceased's clothes and other belongings, the grave, a feather body ornament, or a skull. During ceremonies such as name-giving, male initiation, commemorating a jaguar hunter's feat, or welcoming a traveller, the person being sung upon has their back turned to the singer. In contrast, during mortuary rituals, which involve longer and more elaborate performances, the singer and *aroe* face each other.

It is uncommon to see Boe people sitting or standing face-to-face. Typically, during conversations, people sit or stand side by side, facing down and forward to avoid the intimate act of making eye contact, particularly in relationships imbued with respect-shame (*poguru*). At funerals, the interaction between singers and the *aroe* hints at the possibility of such an intimate glance, yet only to deny it: the man-as-*aroe* dance facing the singer, but staring at his rattles instead of their eyes. During the climax of a funeral, when in front of the deceased's skull, singers wear feather visors covering their eyes, which are the distinctive body ornament of experienced singer-chiefs.



Figure 33. Dioni, embodying an *aroe*, focuses on Silvestre Powari's rattles. July 2023.

The *bapo* rattles are integral to most forms of Boe singing, and their sound is said to attract the *aroe*. One's first pair of *bapo* must be received as a gift from another singer, who crafts it as a sign of recognition of one's learning efforts or as a form of encouraging them. The *bapo* must never be played "for no reason" (*paga tu je*), as the Boe put it; that is, out of proper ritual context. Its sound immediately evokes the presence of the *aroe*, which must remain bound to such settings. In order to learn, one must either accompany other singers in collective singing sessions, copying their movements, or use branches from a particular shrub that are said to sound just like rattles when shaken.

When a singer summons the dead as a prelude for a ceremony, the souls are said to arrive angry and unsettled. This becomes visible when ritually enacted in *aroe* dances in the central plaza. In the beginning of these performances, the men-as-*aroe* approach the singer hesitantly while performing their glottal "*Hm! Hm! Hm!*" sounds, sometimes dispersing suddenly in a startled manner before resuming their approach. This apprehensive, unsettled behaviour is characteristic of how the dead are said to approach the living during other summoning events, such as The Last Feast, described in the previous chapter. To calm the souls, *aroe*-soothing verses are sung, such as "Don't be afraid/ don't be afraid (*apagudukaba/apagudukaba*)," and reminders of their familiarity with the village, "those are your same [old] trails in the plaza (*cewu akoda bororo aije mitodu*)." These verses are common in the semi-improvised *aroe*-summoning genre known as 'the songs of souls' (*aroe eke roia*). However, one interlocutor noted that it is primarily the sound and movement of the *bapo* rattles that soothe the dead. The *aroe* fix their gaze on the *bapo*, and their beats and direction dictate the souls' movements; they thus gradually add rhythm to an otherwise startled, unpredictable movement.

I once witnessed a lady instructing her granddaughter on how to perform the risky dance with the (still empty) mortuary basket, seen as a double of the deceased. The dance takes place on the last days of a funeral. She explained how one must start slow and steady, handling the basket "as a singer does with his rattles." Singers usually start with what is called *roia butugurewu*, the 'calm/careful singing', then move to the

roia rerewu stage, the ‘loud/fast singing’. “It’s like when you approach a [farm/domestic] animal,” she added, “you must do it calmly and pet it first.”

Her comment resonates with Viertler’s (1972: 189) observation from her early 1970s fieldwork that dancing to a song while personifying an *aroe* “is to make oneself into a pet”. From this vantage point, the male-led singing complements the female-led feeding, discussed in the previous chapters, as a means of soothing potentially unsettled souls. When properly conducted, the outcome of this process is making an otherwise harmful, unbounded soul into an adoptive child embodied in a gourd clarinet. This is a chronically unfinished effort that can extend beyond a single generation of mothers of souls (see Chapter Two). Besides its somewhat unique eschatological context, the fact that such a ‘refamiliarisation’ hinges on the relational tropes of adoptive filiation and petkeeping is far from unfamiliar to Amazonianists (see Costa 2017; Fausto 2008).

The Boe distinguish between two kinds of *bapo* rattles, the large and the little ones (*bapo kurireu* and *bapo rogu*). The latter kind is associated with the summoning of the recently dead through the songs of souls’ (*aroe eke roia*) genre — although the genre is also performed with large rattles in some contexts. Both this genre and the little rattles are more closely associated with *aroe* shamanism and the recently dead. Besides, the small rattles are said to be *akarure*, ‘prestigious; famous’: normally, they are only owned and played by the most experienced singers and by those specialised in the songs of souls.

Songs of souls are the only genre in the Boe musical universe open to improvisation and are not tied to any clan’s closed repertoire. Standardised elements tend to be singer-specific rather than clan-bound. Rather than echoing a clan’s mythical heroes, these songs voice an ongoing dialogue between the shaman-like performer and the *aroe*. This sung exchange both narrates and brings about the approach of the souls. Verses may appear in the third person, anticipating the dead’s actions, or in the second person and imperative, addressing or instructing the singer(s) or the souls. In both cases, a deliberate ambiguity often emerges around who is speaking to whom: it remains chronically unclear whether the *aroe* are addressing the singers (and voiced

by them) or the singers the *aroe*.³⁷ The example below — the first verses sung by Aije Kurireu during a Last Feast held in July 2023 — exemplifies this indeterminacy:

Hogohogohohow hogohogohow

Akaga birido arowe egoie okogerewu ji tu duji

Focus [sing.] on the *aroe* voices in the red macaw feather hairpin³⁸

Akaga birido arowe eroie kuwogorewu ji tu duji

Focus on the *aroe* movements in the yellow macaw feather hairpin

Akaga birido awara paru joie akirio to duji

Focus on the path that enters the duck down

Awuge ere bakure paru reko marigudu

These, they have already begun to wind they way around

Awuge ere bakure oia reko marigudu

These, they have already brought in the centre of the encirclement

Awuge ere bakure oto reko marigudu

These, they have already brought in the tail end of their encirclement

Aroe ere bakoro atugo reko pui marigudu

The *aroe* have already adorned one another with Bakoro designs

Hogohogohohow hogohogohow

37. Such pronominal ambiguity, often complexified by layers of reported speech, is a common feature of shamanic singing in lowland South America (Fausto 2020: 42-48; Graham 1995: 178-184; Gutierrez-Choquevilca 2012; Heurich 2015; Pedro Cesarino 2011; Severi 2015; Viveiros de Castro 1992, among others).

³⁸ The terms *okogerewu* ('like the Dourado fish') and *kuwogorewu* ('like the yellow ipê flowers'), tropes for beauty, refer to two kinds of small feather hairpins used to ornament the deceased's skull. Regarded as the central mortuary ornaments, they embody the dual pathways linking the living and the dead. In Aije Kurireu's version, this duality is essential, as *bope* spirits may block one route, requiring an alternative for the souls. In song, these hairpins function both as metonyms for the skull and metaphors for the souls' journey.

In the first three verses, the presence of the *aroe* is evoked through synecdoche by referencing elements of the skull's ornamentation: the two small feather hairpins, associated with the pathways between the realms of the living and the dead, and the bed of duck down on which the skull rests; then it moves to a description of an encircling of the deceased's soul/skull and the adornment of the *aroe*.

The first formula was frequently employed by Aije Kurireu as an opening to these singing sessions. In a simpler version, he would sing: "Focus [sing.] on the down (*aeku kido rakado akirio to*)". Like its variants, this verse, echoed by the accompanying singers, is sung facing the skull of the deceased, which at this point is placed on a bed of white duck down. However, my interlocutors admit that it is unclear whether the souls are urging the lead singer to concentrate on the ornamented skull — deemed the source of the verses and shamanic visions or sensations — or the singers are reminding the deceased to focus on the path that leads to the skull and down, where the singing is meant to guide them. In the section that describes an encircling, an indeterminate collective is referred to in the third person plural. What remains indeterminate, in this case, is whether the singer describes the souls encircling the deceased or the souls report to one another that the living have already surrounded the skull. In the final verse, the *aroe* collective, referred to in the third person plural, is said to have adorned themselves, suggesting that the living are the enunciators. Yet it remains unclear who exactly the *aroe* are: the recent souls — doubles of the deceased — have likewise adorned themselves and ornamented the deceased's double, the feather-covered skull.

It is also common for a singer to convey a message from the specific deceased for whom the funeral is being held (rather than from the undifferentiated collective of the dead). In this case, singers commonly employ reported speech: "The woman said to us (excl.) souls, 'mother, mother' [searching for her living mother]" (*aredu akore, 'imuga, imuga', aino, aroe cei*). This phrasing is very common and often specifies that the message was addressed to 'us *aroe*' by employing the 'ce-' pronoun for *exclusive* first-person plural. It thus excludes the recipient of the encompassing statement, implicitly defining them as the living (those who are not *aroe*). Here, the ambiguity regarding who is included or excluded by the pronoun is partially resolved into a matter of perspectives. For the female audience and accompanying chorus, the lead singers and male chorus are virtually *aroe*. Conversely, for the latter, the *aroe* are still elsewhere.

The souls' speech (*aroe ewadaru*), from the men's perspective, comes from the *aroe*-like person, body, or object they sing upon, being thus merely emerging, as Aije Kurireu put it, "from their mouths" (*enogwa piji*).

As I argued in Chapter Three, the *aroe* are by definition beyond one's immediate grasp, and each attempt to close this gap only recreates it in an ever-receding 'beyond'. In the verse in question, this separation appears in two levels: the deceased tells the *aroe*, who then report to the living. The singer, this Boe "complex locutor" (Severi 2015: 244) who is ambiguously living and dead, *aroe* and *boe*, are the ones who enable such communication. Although more explicit in the shamanically-charged songs of souls, singers are always ambiguously *being* and *facing* the dead, occupying unstable positions that can never settle as single perspective. While the *aroe* are sometimes described as those for whom one sings, there are occasions, for instance, when singers explain their leg fatigue during a prolonged singing session by attributing it to the weight of the *aroe*, who, sitting on their laps, sang through them to the living audience.

By attracting and soothing the *aroe*, singing narrows the gap between the living and the dead. This is why songs are consistently (though not exclusively) performed as both a prelude and a prerequisite for the presence of the *aroe* in subsequent ceremonies. Therefore, most singing sessions can be referred to as '[name of the ceremony] *paru*', with "*paru*" here meaning 'base', 'beginning', or 'preparation'. The songs of souls serve as the prototypical prelude, being always performed before other genres. Every men's house feast and display of *aroe* in the plaza is preceded by an evening singing session by the grave, called *roiao*. This session, which always begins with songs of souls, attracts the dead towards an offering placed by the mourners between the lead singer and the grave. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, in Boe rituals, feeding and concealment always precede revealing and display, yet singing sets the stage for each of these operations.

Singing as shamanism

Singer-chiefs position as mediators between *aroe* and *boe* make them shamanically-charged figures. In the past, their intimacy with the dead would, from time to time, precipitate the exceptional figure of the *aroe etawara are* shaman, literally, the 'master

of the dead souls' paths' — which I call here '*aroe* shaman'. These were said by Crocker (Crocker 1985) to have disappeared by the time of his 1960s fieldwork. During my fieldwork, while Aije Kurireu claimed this title and was recognised as such by many, my interlocutors implicitly distinguished between a broader and a stricter use of the notion. Raimundo would often emphasise the stricter version in order to disparage his long-standing rival's claims: "the *aroe etawara are* is the one who died [and came back from the dead]", he defined. He is here referring to a near-forgotten notion that the *aroe* shaman would be sent back from the village of the dead, waking up during his funeral's preparations and becoming the ultimate mediator between the *aroe* and the living (see Crocker 1985). In this strict sense, these *aroe* shamans, with their fantastic feats and powerful curing capacities, are agreed to have been long gone. Yet, in a broader sense, *aroe* shamanism and its specialists haven't faded.

Dreams of the dead are common experiences and are often recounted to family members the following morning. These dreams are often perceived as (unintentional) journeys to the realm of the dead undertaken by one's *aroe*-like double (*uwari*), capable of bringing back news about the deceased's status in the afterlife. Recently bereaved families eagerly await such news, as they can provide insights into how the deceased is settling in the afterlife. The news can influence the family's own grieving process, which reflects the state of the deceased. Additionally, dreams can foreshadow future events; for example, if elements of a mortuary cycle's aesthetics, from songs to objects and ornaments, appear in a dream, it indicates that times of sorrow are approaching.

Although this oneiric capacity is considered virtually universal, the intimacy between singers and the *aroe* makes them especially attuned to such experiences and the divinatory potential they bring. An apprentice singer once told me that since he began singing, he had been able to sense "when bad things are going to happen." He recounted a dream he had had shortly before a woman's death, in which he saw a gourd clarinet and the *mutum* feathers that cover the *recent souls* in their final dance (see Chapter Three). He then awoke suddenly, his arms involuntarily spasming "as if I was playing my rattles," he explained. Experienced singer-chiefs are even more susceptible to divination. Raimundo, for instance, would frequently share his ominous dreams with his wife, who would then warn the rest of the family. These dreams often featured deceased singer-chiefs — those he had personally met — performing fragments of

mortuary songs. After such dreams, overcome by nostalgia, Raimundo would spend the day lying down, quietly chanting that same song.

Aije Kurireu, in turn, possessed exceptional skills that have led many to recognise him as an *aroe* shaman. The crucial one was his capacity to perceive the arrival of the souls during the singing session of the Last Feast at funerals. This ability to conduct such a session, attracting the *aroe* when their virtual presence is at its peak, is, for most, what defines an *aroe* shaman today. Aije also had exceptional control over his oneiric capacity. For instance, he told me that a few days before a Last Feast, he makes a cigarette and smokes it while drinking something sweet before going to bed. Tobacco and sweet liquids are *aroe eke*, ‘souls’ food’, and by doing this — in other words, by behaving *as an aroe* — he induces an oneiric journey. In such a journey, he meets the deceased person and announces that they must soon come to the village of the living to be fed. People who have experienced recent losses also come to him and, offering tobacco as payment, request news from their deceased kin.

Both the shamanic qualities of singer-chiefs and their status as the *locus* of esoteric knowledge are based on their time-saturated images: they personify intergenerational time, bridging past and present, *aroe* and *boe*. Their shamanic intimacy with the dead is rooted in past co-presence: powerful divination capacities, as we have seen, are many times tied to oneiric encounters with deceased singer-chiefs one personally knew. Given their role as mediators, it is unsurprising that a singer-chief’s skills and status are closely tied to the performance of mortuary rituals, where they literally stand between the living and the dead. However, we are yet to introduce how such embodiment of intergenerational time fosters relationships among the living. In other words, how singer-chiefs, by transforming memory and knowledge into compassionate performance, extend the reach of their kinship network.

[Repetition, differentiation, magnification](#)

We have already explored the genre of songs of souls (*aroe eke roia*), which explicitly focus on luring the dead, a process detailed within its lyrics. These songs are easier to interpret, with their tropes and grammatical twists relatively accessible to both the audience and the singers. In contrast, most other Boe songs belong to clan-specific

repertoires that are understood closed to innovation. They also employ a broader range of tropes, arcane vocabulary, and grammatical distortions, making these songs, at times, utterly opaque for most native speakers, including the younger generation of singers.

Except for the songs of souls genre and the elegies, most Boe songs may be distinguished into two categories: ‘songs along the village’s perimeter’ (*roia ba okwa jiwu*) and ‘big/great ones’ (*kurire boe*)³⁹. The first expression, which I will shorten to ‘peripheral songs’, highlights the performance context of such chants. These songs are typically (although not exclusively) performed inside houses in the circular village’s periphery, while the ‘big/great’ songs are usually executed in the men’s house or central plaza. Moreover, the reference to the village periphery in the first category also underscores the fact that such songs are recognised as part of specific clans’ closed repertoires, which are associated with distinct sections of the ring of houses.

In mortuary ceremonies, peripheral songs are typically performed as a prelude to a specific display of ornamented *aroe* in the plaza (see Chapter Three). Before these ceremonies, which begin a couple of hours before sunset, a singing session must be conducted in the mourning house. Seated before the deceased’s belongings with his big rattles and accompanied by a female chorus, a singer freely weaves together songs drawn from the repertoire of the clan(s) sponsoring the ceremony. Depending on the singer’s erudition, such a session may last from one to three hours. They begin with a *paru*, a ‘base’, often sung slowly and quietly (*roia butugurewu*). In these, one must perform a subcategory of longer, more complex peripheral songs distinguished as ‘elder brother’s song’ (*roia umanarewu*). As the intensity and pace of the session grow to ‘louder/faster singing’ (*roia rerewu*), these chants then give way to a string of shorter and simpler ‘leftover songs’ (*roia gigudu*), punctuated by further ‘elder brother’ ones.

39. The Boe recognise six different kinds of elegies, the most important being the one known as ‘the orphans’ (*marenarui*). All elegies follow highly standardized formal features and sets of tropes but are ideally unique to each deceased person. The *marenarui* elegy is sung with different melodies and rhythmic patterns at various stages of a funeral and can be used to commemorate the deceased in subsequent funerals. Some families write down their kin’s *marenarui* elegies in notebooks to ensure they are not forgotten.

Finally, announced by the characteristic ‘hohohohoho’ vocalisations, a ‘song which goes on top’ (*roia ao jiwu*) closes the session.⁴⁰

All peripheral songs are part of a clan's exclusive repertoire. However, during the crucial sessions described above, these songs must be performed by a man married in that clan, an in-law. As a result, learning the songs of one's wife's clan is said to be just as crucial as knowing those of their own. Yet, in the absence of an in-law up to the task (as is the case almost every time), anyone who masters the clan's repertoire may take over. Songs from different clans often share certain rhythmic patterns, melodies, and text. Still, even when the difference is minimal, elements in the text of a song allow listeners to identify its origin. Let us then dive into a pair of examples, starting with a ‘leftover song’ (*roia gigudu*) from the Iwagudu clan:

Kujibo tore aroe uture

The soul went into the Kujibo River

Kujibo tore aroe atugo uture

The soul's [body] design went into the Kujibo River

Kujibo tore aroe enawu uture

The ornamented soul went into the Kujibo River

Kujibo tore aroe urugu uture

The soul's redness [dyed skin] went into the Kujibo River

Kujibo tore aroe akiri uture

The soul's down went into the Kujibo River

Kujibo tore aroe oiaga uture

The souls' feather went into the Kujibo River

40. The Boe have names for both contexts of performance (which I call ‘sessions’) and types of songs, which can be quite confusing for the newcomer ethnographer. The sessions in question, for instance, are referred to as [the name of the *aroe* ceremony] *paru*, ‘the base/beginning of’ a certain ceremony. Yet the same songs (‘peripheral songs’) can be performed in other contexts, including outside times of mourning, such as in the ‘songs over the animal's skin’ session (*barogo biri kejewu roia*) to commemorate a large predator's slaying, and the ‘prelude for children's names’ (*Boe etore ekie paru*) performed before naming ceremonies; among others. However, performances in ‘times of joy’ must be differentiated from those of ‘times of grief’, adding melodic diacritics after each song.

Kujibo tore aroe ukiga uture
The souls' hairpin went into the Kujibo River

Parallelism in most Boe songs is achieved through the interplay between what I call a *theme*, that which remains the same in each verse, and a differentiating series, which I call a *variation*. A central structural feature of Boe music is its serial nature. It thus fits well with Menezes Bastos' (2007: 300) suggestion of "sequentiality" as a defining trait of Amerindian music more broadly, one that hinges on a logic of "repetition and differentiation". In the Boe case, such logic of serial repetition and differentiation define both the relationship between verses in a song and between songs in a session or suite. All these series are one-way oriented: there is no refrain to which a song returns, and no song is repeated within a session; the music only moves forward.

In the song above, the variation series (ø; design; ornamented; redness; down; [tail] feather; hairpin) is the most common one in Boe music, referred to by singers simply as 'the design one' (*atugore boe*). Given its recurrence across clan boundaries, such a series achieves serial differentiation *within* a song but not *between* songs from different clans. Inter-clan differentiation is created through other devices. Regarding text, songs from different clans may share the same theme, differing only in their variation. They can also do the opposite, sharing a variation series (the 'design one,' for instance) but varying themes. In the song below, from the Badojeba clan, we see yet another alternative; what comprised the theme in the previous Iwagudu song is here turned into variation and vice-versa:

Bakororo tore aroe eture iawo
The souls went into *Bakororo* [the realm of the dead] *iawo* [vocalise]

Oroaribo tore aroe eture iawo
The souls went into the river *iawo*

Kugarubo tore aroe eture iawo
The souls went into the river sand *iawo*

Padarobo tore aroe eture iawo
The souls went into the water foam *iawo*

Mariguru tore aroe eture iawo
The souls went into the *buriti* palm grove *iawo*

Marigurubo tore aroe eture iawo
The souls went into the *buriti* palm grove's marsh *iawo*

We are left with the question of how the difference between these two songs is understood as one between the Badojeba and the Iwagudu clans. A singer may identify the latter song through its variation series. The sequence *Bakororo*, river, river sand, water foam, *buriti* palm grove, and *buriti* palm grove's marsh — all of them metonymic images of the subaquatic realm of the dead — is characteristic of Badojeba songs: they appear combined with varied themes, but only in the Badojeba repertoire. All clans similarly have exclusive and recognisable variation series. The Iwagudu song, conversely, employs a variation shared by all clans, so it is its theme that provides a clue as to which clan it belongs. The metonym for the land of the dead employed in the Iwagudu song is the Kujibo River, known by the non-indigenous population as Coxipó. This is a part of the ancient Boe territory that nominally belongs to the Iwagudu clan, appearing in the repeating series of other songs from this clan.

Such dynamics of theme and variation are virtually universal in Boe verbal arts, but they reach their highest complexity in the songs known as 'the big/great ones' (*kurire boe*), which I refer to here as 'great suites'. The main formal difference between these and the peripheral songs rests on a sequential structure of a different scale: the freely assembled sessions that characterise the peripheral songs give way to a fixed series of songs in the great suites. The dozens of songs that make up these named suites (peripheral songs are not named) must always be performed in a particular order. Additionally, they employ more obscure tropes and feature longer variation series — a single song in the Cibae Etawadu suite, for instance, has twenty-one elements in its series. There are nine such great suites, all belonging to clans in the Ecerae moiety,

most of them to the Badojeba and Bakoro Ecerae, the two chiefly clans.⁴¹ They are performed at the moment of death and the last stages of a funeral, preceding and accompanying the dealings with the deceased's body and bones.

Most great suites are executed at a funeral's closing ceremonies, accompanying the preparation of the mortuary basket, the ornamentation of the bones, and their placement inside. As I argue in Chapter Three, the sequence of ritual procedures for a display of the *aroe* in the plaza unfolds as a scaled-down version of the mortuary cycle. In these displays, previously concealed men-as-souls reveal their ornamented bodies in the plaza, personifying specific deceased people. The broader cycle is paced by an analogous procedure: an all-encompassing process of concealing the remains (initially, in the grave) and revealing them (with flesh replaced by ornamentation). The two main song genres presented here relate to this recursive distinction: peripheral songs are a *paru*, a 'prelude', for the displays of the men-as-*aroe*, while the great suites are paired with the dealings with the body of the deceased who triggered the ritual and the opening and closing of the cycle.



Figure 34. Ismael Atugoreu leads the 'Daily Sitting Song' suite at a funeral's closing ceremonies.

41. In mythical times, these suites — alongside chieftaincy itself — were given to these clans by clans of the opposite moiety. Even when not ceded to others during rituals, clan wealth always refers back to an inter-clan or inter-moiety relationship.

This close association between the great suites and the dealings with a recent death and the corpse makes them *bope eke roia*, ‘songs of the *bope*’, the necrophagous spirits that cause most deaths and who are said to devour a corpse’s flesh, causing its decay. Any mistakes in these suites’ long and intricate series may not only enrage the *aroe* but also trigger the *bope*’s deadly trickery. This is why, the Boe say, they must ideally be performed by those of the Ecerae moiety, and the most dangerous ones by the Badojeba clan: these are the *bope*-like moiety and clan whose intimacy with the *bope* is expressed in the kinship they claim with these spirits, who they call *iedaga pega* (‘my old name-giver/elderly matrilineal kin’).

The performance of these prestigious suites is expected to be led by men from the clans they belong to, and thus not by their in-laws, such as in peripheral songs performed as preparations for *aroe* displays in the plaza. Yet, in practice, they are most often performed by people in other positions, including men in the Tugarege moiety. In these cases, their cession is explicit. Employing standardised metonymic tropes instead of the suites’ common names, men from the clans who have precedence over them must officially announce its ceding on the day before a funeral’s closing ceremonies. When ceding the Nightly Sitting Suite (Roia Mugurewu Boe Co Jiwu), for instance, one places a hand over the head of the performer and say, ‘You be ready for the dark *bope*’ (*aki akanagodure bope corewu ji*).

A singer achieves exceptional prestige precisely by performing on behalf of others, thus mastering cross-clan repertoires. This logic reinserts a certain dynamism into otherwise closed, clan-bound repertoires that, in their ideal immutability, would leave no room for creativity. Therefore, dynamism reappears not within the repertoires but in the gradual accumulation of others’ prerogatives that singularises a performer, a movement achieved by blurring clan boundaries rather than reinforcing strict matrilineality. This is possible since, among the Boe, knowledge and skill take precedence over clan titles.⁴²

42. This was noticed many times in the ethnographic literature on the Boe (see [Caiuby Novaes 1986](#); [Crocker 1967](#); [Drago 2018](#)).

Carrying a name-title from one's birth mother's clan nominally grants precedence over the performance and alienation of that clan's ritual wealth. However, for the Boe, it would be shameful and ultimately inconceivable to claim such precedence without possessing the necessary skills to perform, especially in the presence of someone who masters that particular performance. Consequently, when a knowledgeable person steps forward to perform on behalf of another clan, the entitled yet unskilled are assumed to be quietly ceding their precedence. Due to the strict deference in the form of respect-shame (*poguru*) paid to 'the knowledgeable ones' (*goruduiwarewuge*), these tend to take over multiple ritual duties, gradually accumulating knowledge and skills across clan boundaries. Their prestige and singularity rest on such capacity to know and perform more than what is expected of them, an image overtly constructed in contrast with those who are shamed for not upholding their title's basic duties. Since a Boe clan is not distinct from its ritual wealth — it rather *is* its wealth — these Central-Brazilian 'Great Men' gradually become themselves unbounded, supra-clan figures.

Singers, however, may have their own claims to songs and suites of other clans. Two singers in Tandarimana, for instance, received the Roia Kurirewu suite from the Badojeba clan as a reward for killing large predators to avenge a deceased from that clan, with one of them often leading the suite. Others may turn to Boe's latent bilateralism in clan matters to re-establish such a link. I once asked Ismael Atugoreu, who at the time had mastered eight of the nine great suites and was a known jaguar slayer, if he had killed a jaguar for those of the Badojeba clan, who owns the suite he was about to sing. His wife, who was dying his skin red, replied for him, "he didn't; they [the Badojebage] are his fathers". He then recalled how his adoptive Badojeba father, the greatest singer in the Boe's recent history, had kept something from him for many years, only revealing it when he showed his capacity and interest to sing: "He didn't tell me, but he had given me a name. He said, 'You are called Meri Tugo ['Sun's Arrow'; a Badojeba name-title]; you will stay in my place.'"

Acting on behalf of others and assuming their responsibilities heightens a singer's expression of compassion. His performances — like the feeding relationships carried out by the mothers of souls discussed in Chapter Two — are simultaneously his own and those of many others, whose ritual obligations are lifted through the singer's

acts of compassionate suffering. Consequently, he comes to be seen as an *iedaga*, a elderly and/or knowledgeable matrilinear kin for those beyond his clan. The extraordinary reach of his kinship network applies not only to cross-clan ties but also to intergenerational time. In fact, these two dimensions are intimately linked: it is only because one has lived among the knowledge-saturated ‘ancients’, the Boe reasoning goes, that their skills can be as vast as to cross all clan and moiety boundaries. We thus now turn to this temporal and intergenerational dimension, suggesting that it is precisely a singer’s singular memory, grief, and nostalgia for a lost past that makes them outstanding figures within the collective present.

Why Boe sing

The Boe say that the more experienced the singer, the deeper the grief and the more nostalgic they become when performing. The depth of elderly singers’ memory is seen as unfolding into a long chain of past griefs, making their performances exceptionally nostalgic. Commenting on this, one interlocutor remarked about Raimundo Itogoga, “Think how many funerals he saw, how many singers he met.” The performance of extraordinarily long suites and songs across clan boundaries indexes one’s relationships with past singers, and it is precisely the memory of these relationships that triggers one’s grief. In short, the ties to the past that undergird a singer’s knowledge are also what prompts his sorrow and enhances his prestige. Since learning occurs mostly by observation, the relationships remembered need not be those of direct tutoring. When performing, a singer recalls being in the audience’s position, witnessing past singers. Thus, the experience of now being a performer (and no longer a spectator) indexes the absence of past singers, often triggering tears of grief. This time-saturated experience of rupture and succession, condensed in such a reversal of positions, is both the impetus for singing and what the act of singing itself evokes.

In my early months in the field, many people asked if I could find and bring back old recordings of deceased singers. In June 2023, I returned to Tadarimana with some recordings by the anthropologist Sylvia Caiuby Novaes made in the 1970s. Assuming their interest was simply in expanding their repertoire, I was surprised by their response. On several occasions, as the voices and rattles of the easily recognised

deceased singers emerged from the speaker, a profound atmosphere of nostalgia and melancholy enveloped the listeners. Some stayed silent and introspective, while others sobbed quietly. A few left after just a few minutes, unable to bear the grief. Yet there is no contradiction between their desire to listen and the effect produced. My interlocutors wanted to hear these voices in order to remember and mourn. As Allard (2010: 179) emphasises, technologies that “retain the capacity to evoke exceptional grief” are, in many cases, just as important for lowland South American peoples as the well-known practices of erasing traces of the dead to avoid “constant grief.” Just as with the recordings, resurfacing grief is precisely what mortuary singing is intended to achieve: Singing to remember, the Boe compassionately create the conditions for others to grieve.

Bosco Marido Kurireu once summarised the inversion of perspectives that prompts a singer’s sorrow with exceptional clarity. While listening on his phone to a recording from the village where he grew up in the 1980s — a recording available online that he frequently played — he nostalgically remarked, “I remember sitting with my mother watching late Joãozinho [the singer in the recording] sing like that [in those same evening sessions].” He then added, “What I am feeling now is what singers feel [when performing]”.



Figure 35: Bosco in a Toro Kigadurewu, ‘the white palm skirts,’ ceremony. August 2023.

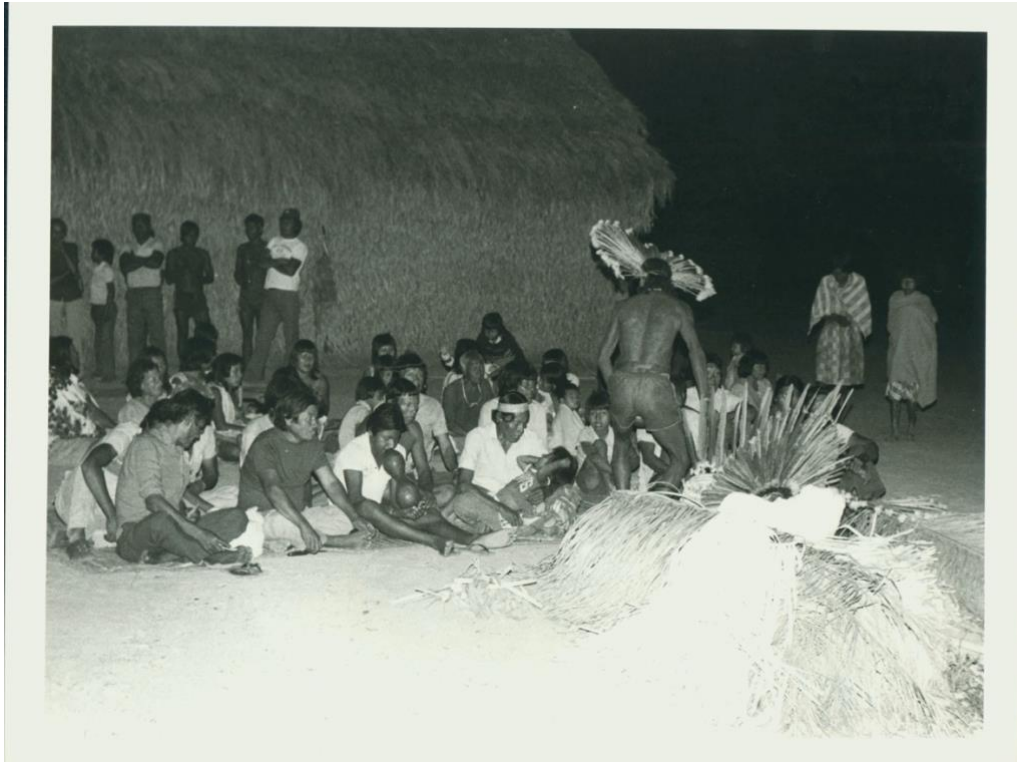


Figure 36: Joãozinho sings by the grave at a funeral in Garças village in July 1986. Seated with the chorus, appearing beside the singer's left leg, the young Bosco gazes at the camera. Photo courtesy of Luis Grupioni.

The nostalgia of singers operates under the same logic of memory as described in Chapter Two, concerning the practices of mothering the dead, and in Chapter Three, regarding the aesthetic operations of funeral ceremonies. This logic transforms the conventionality of ritual procedures into icons of all their past iterations, unfolding one experience into a chain of images of a lost past: singing is iconic of other acts of singing, just as caring for the dead evokes past acts of caring. This chain of grief resurfaces as one image triggers another, encapsulating memory within certain aesthetic media — the atmosphere, rhythm, melody, and text of singing sessions, for instance — and thus establishing under which conditions grief can be re-enacted. That is, how one *should* remember the dead — as an *aroe* — thereby displacing the too painful and even dangerous memories associated with the deceased as a living person, the material remnants of which, as we have seen, are literally destroyed during the funeral. For example, grief for past singers, who are seen as magnified, universal elder kin, is evoked by (and evokes) images of them *as singers*. These men are remembered through the aesthetic coordinates established by the ritual landscape, where the dead are recalled

through iconic images of their ritual activities when they were alive — activities in which, we must remember, they compassionately personified or cared for yet other dead people. Like in Raimundo oneiric encounters with deceased singers, who always appeared to him performing a particular song, it is always in their *aroe*-like facet that the dead are recalled. Since photographs and recordings stored in museums typically depict these contexts, they fit well within this logic. In many recordings and old photos I brought to the field, the deceased were not evoked in their daily activities but rather when performing as *aroe*.

Singing exists within a grief-infused intergenerational timeframe. In other words, singing performances and an experience of irreversibility and rupture in intergenerational time are virtually one and the same. This brings us back to a crucial connection: the relationship between the act of singing and the “context” that nurtures one’s desire to sing. As mentioned, my research became part of the singers’ efforts to master the extensive repertoire of Boe songs. In the process, I could grasp the deep connection between learning to sing and revisiting one’s memories of other singers. This was particularly evident with Bosco, with whom I worked on translations multiple times a week.

Initially, like many relatively young people, he denied knowledge of the songs’ semantic content and the specifics of their performance. However, gradually, his approach shifted. Through his own memories, he began to uncover intricate details of ceremonial lore and song content, recalling what deceased or elderly singers had shared with him — usually explaining it with abundant use of authority-hedging evidentials and reported speech. This process was not bound to our collaboration. During that period, Bosco’s deep immersion in studying songs was accompanied by a process of delving into his memories. He frequently shared newly recovered memories of singers he had known and their teachings, sometimes with sorrow and regret, at other times with hopeful enthusiasm. In a sense, Bosco gradually unveiled knowledge that, like the development of a film negative, had always been there. This process of retrospective knowledge transmission triggered by a change in one’s life circumstances — which I suspect must be far more common in lowland South America than it seems — suggests how one may learn not only with the living but also with the dead. If singing is an act of remembrance, the same can thus be said for learning to sing. The latter

endeavour is inseparable from a reflexive re-examining one's relationships with past or elderly singers. Ultimately, what both performer and audience experience is the foregrounding these relationships. For the Boe, this is what proper knowledge is: an intimate, reflexive re-examination of memory turned into an outward display of compassion.

While a man's initial engagement with singing may stem from personal reflexivity and voluntary choice, once his knowledge is recognised and affirmed in the collective ritual arena, singing is no longer merely optional — hence the singers' burden. To possess knowledge and skill and yet refuse to sing is regarded as more reprehensible than ignorance of one's clan duties. Knowledge is actualised by being turned into a compassionate act witnessed by others, creating the conditions for collective grief. It is not uncommon, however, for singers to refuse participation in ceremonies as a way of signalling disapproval — excessive drinking during rituals being a frequent cause. Such refusals can give rise to a vicious cycle of resentment. Still, the more prestigious the singer, the more common it is for him to exhibit a certain reluctance to sing, prompting others to approach him with gestures of respect and persuasion in an effort to convince him to perform.

Finally, there is one last important connection between singing and intergenerational time, this time linked to biographic trajectories. The grief associated with generational transition and the memories it prompts is a transformative milestone in life: to sing, in a sense, is to become an 'elder', a figure who rests in between generations⁴³. The relationships to the past that singing bears witness *defines* what it means to be an elder. Indeed, 'elder' (*ancião*) is one of the terms the Boe use to refer to singer-chiefs when speaking Portuguese — even when the person in question is relatively young. Grief and nostalgia-infused memory prompt a reflexive transformation of personhood; when expressed through compassionate acts, they give rise to prestigious persons.

Many of the singers I met trace their decision to learn how to sing back to an experience of early grief — either for an ageing singer in their family or in response to

43. In its intrinsic connection with the life-cycle transition to old age, Boe singing can be associated with myth-telling. For further details on myth-telling and ageing in lowland South America see *Déléage (2010), Gow 2001, and Packer 2020*.

the broader sense of helplessness surrounding singers. This forms a kind of *biographeme*, a recurring element in how most singers narrate their own trajectories. During my fieldwork, the decline of the two most prominent singer-chiefs amplified this sentiment. An entire generation described themselves as orphaned (*marenaru*), driven to sing by this condition. Bosco, for instance, often recalled an incident a few years back when his grandfather, Aije Kurireu, collapsed after leading alone all the suites at a funeral. He explained that witnessing his grandfather's fainting was what made him decide to pick up a pair of rattles for the first time. Reflecting on the same event, a woman remarked, "They all sing out of pity [compassion; *dó*] for Aije and Raimundo." Ultimately, there is no fundamental difference between the act of singing and the motivation behind why Boe sing; both are deeply connected to a grief-fueled experience of time, one that casts generational succession as an irreversible series of ruptures⁴⁴.

However, if knowledge and pastness are seen as mutually defining, succession and replacement can only be seen as chronically flawed: a younger singer is, by definition, unskilled compared to his elderly or deceased masters. This projects an image of an irreversible decline in that infuses one's grief. This is not restricted to singing. In times of sorrow, the world appears impoverished, as though life was a faint echo of a vibrant past. The pastness in which knowledge is rooted thus invariably casts the present as a time of decline. Such a sense of nostalgia prompted by mortuary ceremonies is turned outward when put into words in the elaborate poetics of grief of Boe laments. We thus now turn to such sang images of decline.

A poetics of decline

Laments are closely connected to singing. During mortuary singing sessions, there are often predetermined pauses reserved for laments, either at the end of the session or between songs in a suite. In these, the lead singer spins his rattles continuously and starts sobbing or, when able, performs a lament himself. Simultaneously, the high-pitched cries that mark the beginning of female laments emerge from the chorus. Each

44. The similarity with the Krahô case, as studied by Packer (2020), is striking. As one of his interlocutors remarked: "Why do I sing? Because my brother-in-law [Tejapôc] has already left us" (p. 140).

line in a lament explores different image of loss, grief, and nostalgia, employing a lexicon and grammatical structures distinct from everyday speech.⁴⁵ These lines can range from fully improvised to standardised phrases memorised as fixed blocks, but most fall somewhere in between. Although most elderly Boe women in the region where I work could understand what is being said, only some master such verbal art. By the time of my fieldwork, male laments were only performed by Aije, Raimundo, and Ismael, with the latter just beginning to learn them.

The analogy to singing is multifaceted. In many respects, wailing for women is comparable to singing for men; it involves the same logic of a reflexive inspection of memory turned into performative display of knowledge — both within a performance and as a learning process. It is thus the ultimate display of female knowledge. Laments, also like male-led singing, follow a serial structure, incorporating their unique version of theme and variation logic. Lines must not be repeated within a single wailing session, which may last up to fifteen minutes. Some laments are said to unfold their lines in a “straight path,” while others take a “circular” approach. In the latter, themes are occasionally revisited but with different or more sophisticated forms and tropes: rather than a circle, they form a spiral of sorts.

Seriality also appears within lines, often reduced to its minimal form, a dyad. Most elements of a grammatically complete sentence are duplicated through synonyms, alternative tropes, or varying sets of anaphoric pronouns — at least five parallel sets, distinct from those in natural speech⁴⁶. These internal micro-variations make each sentence significantly longer than its non-ritual counterpart. Each line begins with a very quick, high-pitched burst, followed by a few pronounced consonantal peaks

45. Urban's (1988: 387) definition of a line in wailing as a pulse of crying “demarcated by breath pauses” is helpful in the Boe case. However, if we consider semantic content, a line may exceed one pulse to close a grammatically complete sentence.

46. I was able to detect four alternative sets which can be provisionally described as suffixes added to the standard set of pronouns in the Bororo language: *-bara*; *-ia*, *-komia*, *-nia*, *-wa*. They are used both to produce opacity and as a device for adding variation to repetition. They are employed mostly anaphorically, replacing nouns at every possible position, thus “stretching” a line by unfolding a single sentence into many juxtaposed ones. A single postposition, for instance, can be unfolded into a distich by replacing the noun it refers to with two variants of the third-person pronoun—as in lines 13 and 14 of fragment 4. In these cases, I added variation to the English translation by using synonyms for other aspects of the verse. Besides pronouns, there is an alternative set of kinship terms whose equations differ from those in the standard set—these were described by Levak (1971).

towards the end. Besides the melodic parallelism between lines, their semantic content is expressively interconnected: they revolve around nostalgic images of loss and decline.⁴⁷ The many doubles of the dead that one faces during a ritual, from a singer's performance to the grave itself, unfold into multiple and personalised images of grief in laments. While all face the same images and performances, each person cries for different reasons and in unique ways.

On one occasion, a mother of souls began her twelve-minute-long lament by connecting the most recent death — that of a man who held the position of 'ritual son' to her (see Chapter Two) — to all other deaths of those in the same role. She started her lament while secluded in a house during the *aije* ceremony, which is forbidden to women, as we saw in Chapter Three. After a lengthy wailed recollection of how her ritual sons would metaphorically 'turn into pumas and ocelots' to hunt and fish for her, she continued as follows:

Fragment 1

Marenaru kurigodu ira ia imana ia

My orphaned son

Uwa padugodure tu

He laid down

Iramage ia bukeje

Over my [other] sons

Imanamage ia bukeje

Over my [other] sons⁴⁸

47. There are, however, other genres of laments. The *boe etoragudu pegadodu*, 'the ill-making lament,' for instance, is closer to what Briggs (1992, 1993) described among the Warao, since it works as a critical social commentary of sorts. However, such genre for the Boe can't be reduced to a mere 'commentary'; it rather resembles a curse. It can harm or even kill the one who is the subject of criticism in such laments. In some versions, referred to as to 'spread one's mouth' (*togwa mado*) one can lay a generalized 'curse' on an entire village. In others, the *bope* spirits, ultimately responsible for death and decline, are the ones criticised.

48. When referring to one's son in laments, it is common to use the term *ira*, meaning 'my son' (likely derived from

Korodo bari
Gourd clarinet

Korodo iwoi
Bark fibre [sinedoque of the mortuary basket]

Ia tada inodu tabo
Into them [the clarinet and basket] joining the others

Bara tada inodu tabo
Into them [the clarinet and basket] along with the others

In this context, she connects that man's death to those of other 'ritual sons,' a category that, for a mother of souls, can be extended to all men in the opposite moiety. The image of layering one over the other and joining the others into gourd clarinets and mortuary baskets, both containers for a deceased's *aroe*, illustrates how a single image of death and loss unfolds into many others. The singularity of a deceased is quickly unmade, working as a prompt for the memory of other losses. In this sense, it differs from other Amerindian laments, such as the well-studied Warao case, where the wailer "points to her relationship with the deceased with nearly every line she sings" (Briggs 1992: 349). Not only does one's lament connect that particular death with other past deaths, but it also draws on elements of the ritual aesthetics surrounding the wailer, unfolding them into varied images of decline. Among these elements is one's own body. Later in the lament under discussion, the performer's experience of ageing is evoked in analogy to a prey animal wounded by Boe arrows:

Fragment 2

Ikiare ainono
[Now] I am like this

the trope 'my bone,' used exclusively in laments), followed by the variation *imana*, meaning 'my elder brother.' The reason for this usage of 'elder brother' is unclear.

Iwarare ainono

I am like this

Iwurimage etugo cibaio

My elder kin's plumed arrow

Etugo okogerewu

Their feathered arrow

Uwara rekodu pegare jiwu

[I am like] that which was grazed by them

Bara rekodu pegare jiwu

That which was grazed by them

Iwarudo Ki

Tapir⁴⁹

Iwarudo Jugo

Pecari

Uwa magai tu

Just like them [when wounded]

Iwarudo akimodu

[In the] forest

Iwarudo arimodu uwa tada durewure

In the savannah

Ikia muguia keje

Here I sit

49. Every time an *aroe*-like being (an animal, plant, object, or feature of the landscape) is mentioned in a lament, it is preceded by the term *iwarudo*. The translation of this word — if there is one — is unclear to my interlocutors.

Ikia jetuia keje

Here I remain

A few lines later, the focus of her grief shifts again as she begins to recall her deceased parents. However, she does so through the theme of reflexively depicting her own lament as an impoverished echo of theirs, a common motif in Boe laments:

Fragment 3:

Ikia akokare nono ia barare

I do not wail like (...)

Ikomia botugowu itaredomage ia akore

My parents used to

Itaredomage bara akore

[Like] my parents used to wail

Iwa kode/Iwara kode

And so

Ikomia madaduia kurigodure

I am very ignorant

Like the previous fragment, this one belongs to what an interlocutor defined as laments of “compassion for oneself (dó de si mesmo). Still, in this case, the wailing recursively folds the loss-laden performance onto itself, producing a recursive image of decline. Such self-deprecating meta-laments are very common, being present in most performances. They express a reflexive logic of memory analogous to the one presented in the last section about male-led singing: to perform a lament is to remember those whose laments one witnessed in the past. It has been noticed in other Amerindian contexts how, in Urban’s (1988: 398) terms, a wailing performance is “an icon of other instances of ritual wailing” (see also Briggs 1992: 345; Conklin 2001: 72). In the Boe case, this proposition is not as abstract as it sounds. Many lines of one’s laments were

learned by imitating one's older kin, literally repeating their words.⁵⁰ When performed, they immediately evoke the memory of these relationships. Such Boe meta-wails imply that one's kin are often recursively recalled *as wailers*: their memory is captured by the mortuary aesthetics and its nostalgia-infused atmosphere. In reaffirming ritual knowledge as pastness, one's lament explicitly appear here as an impoverished copy, a mere simulacrum⁵¹.

Further down the string of memories that unfolds in the performance in question, the wailer reaches broader depictions of the decline in knowledge and culture. In the next passage, she portrays the deterioration of ceremonies as a result of the dwindling number of the elders, generically referred here as "mothers" and "fathers". Also, by incorporating auditory references, she indexes her experience of wailing in visual isolation:

Fragment 4

Itaredomage egomia akedugodu bukeje

My mothers are dying out

Itaredomage enia akedugodu bukeje

My mothers are disappearing

Itarege ia akedugodu bukeje

My fathers are dying out

Iwarudo iogwari kurigodu

The loud voices

Bokudururu kurigodu

The cacophony [of ceremonies]

50. Although less common than with male singers, notebooks are also used to memorise laments. Recordings, on the other hand, are often kept.

⁵¹ For reference, a longer and more elaborated version of these meta-laments appears in an article accepted for publication (Kelmer, forthcoming).

Uwa makodu kurigodure aino

Are now an utter silence

Bara makodu kurigodure aino

They have fallen into deep silence

Aroe uiogwaio kurigodu

The eastern outer plaza

Aroe paraduia kurigodu

The inner plaza

Aroe ewororo kurigodu

The western outer plaza

Uwa akedunure

Are disappearing

Bara akedunure

Are dying out

Uwa kejere

At them

Bara kejere

Over them

Marenaru kurigodu iramage

My orphaned sons

Uwa mitodu

(...) are alone

Bara mitodu

They are alone

In these fragments of a lament, we observe four images of grief and decline, all inspired by the ritual aesthetics surrounding the wailer. In the first fragment, her relationship with the deceased (as a ritual mother) unfolds into the memory of all past losses of ritual sons. In the second, her ageing body evokes an image of her own decline, metaphorically likened to wounded prey in the bush. In the third, her lament folds onto itself, triggering memories of her deceased kin's laments, depicted as models of mastery in comparison to hers. Finally, in the fourth passage, her aural experience of the ceremonies happening out of her sight in the plaza is depicted as an impoverished version of past ceremonies when knowledgeable elders were still alive. Now, she highlights, the orphaned generation (in the lament, her "orphaned sons") is left alone.

The 'seriality' of Boe verbal arts is here clearly linked to the seriality of grief: the formal parallelism between lines is paired with an affective parallelism between losses. Death and its related ritual aesthetics at once evoke other memories of loss and shape them as nostalgic decline. When assisting in translating and interpreting this lament, Majur Traitowu, after I repeatedly got confused with whether the wailer was speaking of the past or the present, summarised: "In Boe funerals, we compare what is happening with what has happened before." Every element of a ceremony is experienced within its relationship with all its past iterations. As noticed in the previous chapters, when *aroe*-like performances, bodies, and songs lure the dead towards the living, they come as a crowd, being said to "never wander alone". However, much like a singer who can never match their mentors or a wailer whose lament is but a faint echo of her elders', one's attempts to transform memory into presence and bring the past into the present consistently fall short of expectations.

These laments, however, are not merely introspective reflections on time and loss. As Berthomé and Houseman (Berthomé & Houseman 2010: 59) remind us, wherever the genre of ritual wailing is found, it "is not a confidential outpouring but is destined to be witnessed or overheard by others who knowingly attend to them." Like male singers, wailers who mourn a lost past are also communicating their relationship to that past to others. This recalls the antinomic character of ceremonial speeches among Upper Xingu chiefs, which, as Franchetto (2000: 501-2) and Guerreiro (2015: 338) observe, simultaneously deny the existence of real chiefs today while affirming a personal connection to the great chiefs of the past. Among the Boe, lamenting the loss

of what one has witnessed becomes a way of turning self-deprecation into a claim to privileged proximity with the ‘ancients’ — a proximity the performance itself enacts. In this way, self-deprecating reflexivity is converted into a public assertion of prestige, fundamentally reconfiguring personhood. As Majur once remarked, “To say that one wails (*enogurure*) is the same as to say that one knows a lot.”

Generative nostalgia

Boe mortuary singing and laments at once reconnect generations and foreground the irreversible disjunction between the living and the dead, highlighting rupture as a crucial dimension of intergenerational time. The orphaned generation's grief and struggle of succession compel them to sing, yet their singing is not merely an attempt to replace the older generation. True replacement is impossible since proper knowledge is axiomatically tied to the past and the memories of deceased singers. Therefore, insofar as proper performance is expected to exactly replicate past practices, Boe ceremonies are inevitably bound to ‘fail’. These performances are ultimately meant to evoke generational rupture, not to bridge it.

Once Aije Kurireu patiently explained to me that when the dead approach the living during a Last Feast, they hope to return to life and reunite with their living kin. When the singer-as-shaman tells them this is not possible, they cry in desperation, confronted with the irreversibility of death. Their grief mirrors that of the living, who lament the impossibility of returning to the past by inviting the dead back into the village through ritual repetition. The living attempt to personify and display the presence of the dead — as if trying to reverse the track of time — yet only to ultimately reaffirm its impossibility. One’s lament and singing — and thus one’s knowledge — *can only be* experienced as a faint echo of the past. Nostalgia, therefore, becomes an enduring feature of Boe mortuary rituals.

From the older generation’s perspective, this chronic sense of decadence can lead to melancholia and radical pessimism. Some elders, as discussed in Chapter Two regarding the *mothers of souls*, are at once seen as sources of knowledge and tradition and explicitly call for the end of ‘culture’. During my fieldwork, the most pessimistic among Boe elders was Raimundo Itogoga. He firmly instructed his family not to hold a

funeral for him upon his death, unable to tolerate what he viewed as an unskilled, unknowledgeable younger generation of singers "singing over him" at his death. He once told me, "Culture must end with me". Similar stories about past singers circulate among the Boe. For some prestigious singer-chiefs, to be sung upon implies an inconceivable inversion of positions: succession becomes ultimately unthinkable.

I heard the same remark in multiple funerals: "This is the last Boe funeral." In moments of deep nostalgia, a single death is thus collectivised as the death of 'culture', all funerals being virtually experienced as the last. Yet, this notion of an ever-impoverishing world that mourning carries is strengthened — not challenged — by the 'proof of reality': despite their remarkable resilience, the stunning complexity of Boe ritual life and the number of specialists are undeniably declining. In other regions, mortuary rituals and singers have nearly vanished. Even though, by definition, every singer is 'orphaned' — they sing because their masters are gone — the current orphaned generation faces a different scale of struggle. They tangibly sense that the shrinking of their world is coming to a turning point.

Still, Boe ritual nostalgia is not confined to passive or contemplative pessimism. As we will return to in the conclusion, it also acts as a temporal operator — reflexively assessing, but also actively delineating the boundaries between past, present, and future. In fact, my interlocutors express no desire to return to the past; their performative nostalgia instead affirms that the present *cannot* be the past, rendering the irreducibility of the present palpable.

Furthermore, grief and nostalgia are generative forces that inspire action and profoundly reshape personhood. Living through experiences of grief makes one gradually become attuned to the helplessness of others in times of sorrow, ultimately triggering the nested dynamics of compassionate action and helplessness that drives the Boe ritual universe. Longing for the past is precisely what makes and transforms persons in the present and sustains the extraordinary resilience of Boe ritual life, propelling it into the future. A deeper and perhaps paradoxical continuity in Boe ritual lies in a persistent sense of loss — one that is not merely retrospective, but also generative, and thus imbued with future-making.

By nostalgically proclaiming themselves orphans, the new generation issued a call to action that fuelled a remarkable surge in learning. Its effects were tangible.

When I returned to the field in September 2024, after nearly a year away, I attended the closing ceremony of a funeral where seven different singer-chiefs led key suites — a striking contrast to the first funeral I observed exactly two years earlier, when only two, Aije and Ismael, took on that role. In December 2024, Aije Kurireu passed away. Soon after, I returned once more to Tadarimana and accompanied several days of ceremonies. His widow told me that shortly before his death, he had asked his niece to visit him at the Indigenous health centre where he was living. He told her that his time was near, and that the younger singers — the orphaned generation — had shown they could carry a funeral without him. When the moment came, he said, she should step forward as the lead mourner and mother his soul. And so she did.

During that same visit, at Aije's funeral, I discussed the first draft of this chapter with his grandson, Bosco. He made a striking observation that sheds further light on how the crisis experienced by his generation remains entangled with enduring modes of engaging others: the orphaned generation's motto is no recent invention. Bosco explained that they had learned it from Aije himself, who, during his active years, often invoked those very words to stir others into compassionate action — *we are orphans*.

Chapter Five — The Reverse Side of the Sky: History and Christianity in Boe Eschatology

In the Boe ritual temporality discussed in the previous chapter, knowledge and performance are grounded in pastness without objectifying the past: no specific events or periods are directly indexed. Unlike Suruí songs that index specific persons and events (Yvinec 2021), or those in Southwest China that evoke figures of the Cultural Revolution (Mueggler 2001), Boe mortuary performances are primarily iconic rather than indexical. Their links to past iterations allow them to carry multiple, undetermined memories, functioning as hollow vessels to be filled by participants' memories. A sense of change, in turn, emerges from the axiom that one can neither know more nor perform better than those whose memories are the source of one's own knowledge. The result is a diffuse sense of a lost past, awaiting inscription through the memories of others.

In this chapter, we turn to other images of change — those expressed through traces and reflexive elaborations of historical transformations. More specifically, it explores a major and recent shift recognised by my interlocutors: the notion that, after death, Boe souls no longer settle in the underworld villages of the dead but instead ascend to the Christian Heaven. This development raises questions about how historicity is expressed within Boe eschatological discourse as it appears in ritual aesthetics, shamanic practice, and mythical narratives.

When asked about their conceptions of the sky before the knowledge of the Christian Heaven, my interlocutors claim that only one class of celestial entities populated it: Tupa, translated as 'the angels'. Despite deemed traditional, these entities can only be spoken of through tropes drawn from a non-indigenous repertoire. As we have seen, my interlocutors draw a sharp distinction between the areas of their lives open to innovation and those bound to tradition, the spaces and times when exogenous knowledge is to be acquired and performed and those in which their own knowledge comes to the fore — a distinction imposed in a world where these lines seem constantly blurred. By delving into the evolving meanings of the Tupa figure, I explore in this

chapter the point where these distinctions seem to collapse: a traditional figure assembled with exogenous elements.

The extensive ethnographic documentation on the Boe seems to challenge my interlocutors' descriptions of the sky. The conception of the sky as a monolithic realm inhabited by 'angels' appears to be a relatively recent development, one that is tied to the spread of Christianity and the decline of a specific form of shamanism that once engaged with now-forgotten celestial entities. Additionally, this shift coincides with other significant changes that have profoundly reshaped the Boe understanding of *bope*, a vital class of spirits that deeply influence daily life. These transformations and the evolving concept of Tupa in ethnographic records, along with transformations in Boe myths, lead to an analysis where Tupa emerges as a key historical operator in the context of Christianity. Acting as a mediator, it bridges indigenous and non-indigenous realms, much like its role as 'angels' that escort Boe souls to the Christian Heaven. Thus, the historical imprint of Barae religious technologies in Boe 'culture' appears not as the consequence of a chain of past events, but as a transition from life to death. In short, eschatology becomes a mode of reflecting on historicity that challenges a historicism that, in Walter Benjamin's (2009: 13) words, "contents itself with establishing a causal nexus of various moments of history" (see also Chakrabarty 2009; Stewart 2017).

This chapter, like the previous ones, explores how the Boe reflexively situate themselves in time; yet it differs sharply both in the modality of change it addresses and in its approach. To show how the Boe have transformed historical change into eschatological historicity, I present a fragment of ethnohistory centred on the Tupa category, alongside a reconstruction of broader shifts in Boe mythology and cosmology. I thus deliberately employ an historicist approach that stands in tension with — and thereby helps to foreground — my interlocutors' own elaborations of this history. While this discussion moves beyond the aesthetics of mourning previously explored, it circles back to the Barae/Boe relationships introduced in the opening chapter, now approached from the perspective of eschatology.

Souls within the sky, souls under the earth

All my interlocutors identify as Catholics. When asked about religion, many claim

multiple affiliations, evoking Catholic and, in some cases, Evangelical baptism alongside traditional Boe naming practices. However, Catholic services are not regularly held in the village, and when they are, they attract little interest. Their Catholicism is diffuse, primarily centred around baptism — making it, in this sense, not different from many forms of Brazilian Catholicism. The relationship of *compadrio* between a couple and their children's godparents, on the other hand, is seen as essential and baptisms are frequently held in Tadarimana.⁵² Nevertheless, I have witnessed Catholic missionaries expressing frustration more than once over what they see as a lack of moral engagement with Catholicism. One missionary notably remarked, "They only seek baptism to gain godparents."

My older interlocutors recognise Christian baptism as a relatively new practice in the region. They often recall that in the 1980s, missionary Father Gonçalves Ochoa would regularly make the 250 km journey from the Salesian mission's village of Meruri to their region (Tadarimana and Tereza Cristina Indigenous Reserves) to conduct Catholic baptisms. These were performed separately yet immediately following traditional Boe naming ceremonies, deliberately suggesting an analogy still often brought up by my interlocutors.

Baptism is evoked to explain a crucial pivoting of Boe eschatology. As noted, most of my interlocutors assume — though matters of eschatology are never dogmatic — that, after death, one's soul no longer settles in Bakororo or Itubore, the traditional western and eastern villages of the dead, but rather in the Christian Heaven. Still, at first look, this important shift seems to have left the Boe mortuary cycle mostly unaffected. Rituals were not abandoned or visibly reformed for this reason, and the display of Christian motifs in them is, at best, peripheral⁵³. As argued in Chapter One, in such times of mourning and sorrow, the deliberate effort is to extract an image of pure *boeness* out of the movement towards non-indigenous ways of living seen as characterising times of joy.

⁵² I hadn't had the chance to witness catholic baptisms in the village, primarily because of the extended periods of mourning during my fieldwork: both Catholic baptism and traditional naming must ideally not be held during times of mourning.

⁵³ Some families manage to hold messes during or after a mortuary cycle, yet these are seen as supplementary, keeping separate from what is seen as proper traditional ritual procedures. The only image of 'syncretism' or 'hybridity' one may find in a Boe funeral is the usage of cross-shaped body paintings made with plant medicines, which keep *bope* spirits ('the devil') away.

Still, when closely examined, a particular ritual procedure seems to contain the images of the Christian pivoting of Boe eschatology: the singing sessions that summon the recently dead through the shamanic genre known as ‘songs of souls’ (*aroe eke roia*). As introduced in the previous chapter, this genre offers exceptional leeway for improvisation when compared to the orthodoxy of most other kinds of Boe ritual singing. Instead of singing the ancient immutable deeds of mythical heroes, the ‘songs of dead souls’ genre gives voice to the recently dead within reach of memory — precisely those who were baptised.

The most extensive and significant performance in this genre is the singing session I refer to as ‘The Last Feast.’ This session accompanies the final round of offerings for the souls of the deceased and is known, among other expressions, as ‘making the souls drink’ (*aroe ekududodu*). A closer look into this session suggests how a dramatic eschatological shift is reconciled with a set of ritual practices considered immutable. This analysis sets the ground for the following sections, where we will follow the historiographic and mythical traces of the Christian-related imagery introduced here and explore their implications.

As introduced from a different vantage point in Chapter Three, such a feast happens on the last day of collective mortuary ceremonies, which may occur one to five or more months after the initial burial. It is held shortly after the deceased’s exhumed skull, at this stage covered with a feather mosaic and other ornaments, is first revealed to women and mourners. For the session, a canvas tent is set up inside the men’s house, covering its central portion from the eastern wall to the mainstay, at the base of which the ornamented skull is placed — thus returning to concealment from women and children. The lead singer, holding the shamanic ‘small rattles’, positions himself facing the skull and mainstay, accompanied by two or three fellow singers seated alongside him. Inside the dark tent, up to fifty men form a chorus behind them. The aim is to summon the deceased’s soul to be fed, which comes accompanied by virtually all other dead souls. Once the lead singer perceives the arrival of the souls — whose stages are narrated in the chant — the deceased is fed directly through the skull’s mouth.

The virtual presence of the newly dead is here at its peak. In such singing sessions, an atmosphere of expectation hangs in the air, instilling a feeling that something extraordinary might happen. Being capable of leading this session,

attracting the dead souls and perceiving their presence, is seen as the defining skill of a contemporary *aroe* shaman. Uncanny, fantastic feats are attributed to shamans of the past in such feasts. These include making the feather hairpins that ornament the skull rise, the deceased light up the cigarette offered, or even the straw tray supporting the skull float. When an interlocutor explained to me the feats attributed to Cadete, a revered shaman of the past, he was moved into tears. Sobbing, he lamented that if Cadete were still alive, he would have had the chance to hear his son's voice one last time at his funeral, for he is said to have been able to make the dead speak through their skull.

These fantastic feats are often spoken of as evidence to convince 'non-believers' of the truthfulness of Boe traditions. The way my interlocutors phrased such miracle-like events always sounded to me as if drawn from a Christian repertoire. Not coincidentally, when explaining such events, my interlocutors often recalled a particular Last Feast session: the one held for the German Salesian priest Rodolfo Lunkenbein, murdered in the Meruri mission due to a land dispute in 1976. The extraordinary occurrences attributed to his death began right after the murder: an interlocutor who lived at the mission in the 1970s asserts that when he was shot, day turned into night. Ten years after the murder, Fr. Lunkenbein's bones were exhumed and taken to a nearby village for a Boe funeral. His brother and nephew came from Germany to attend the closing ceremonies, carried out during an encounter organised by a Catholic organisation, so nuns, priests, missionaries, and even a couple of French tourists were present (see Caiuby Novaes 1993).

In one version of the events of that funeral's Last Feast, a piece of written paper is said to have mysteriously floated down the men's house's mainstay while the singers conducted the session. The writing was in a language unknown to the Boe, that of Lunkenbein's country. The paper was taken to the missionary's relatives, who could read it, proving the veracity of Boe's traditions: "How could they have written it?" remarked an interlocutor who did not witness the events. In another version, during the session, Cirilo, a *bope* shaman (another kind of shamanic specialist) who had never lived in the mission and was allegedly unfamiliar with Christian matters, suddenly began singing an Ave Maria prayer in Portuguese — a language he was purportedly unable to speak.



Figure 37. At Fr. Rodolfo Lunkenbein's funeral, a nun holds the straw trays containing the deceased's skull. Garças village, 1986, photo courtesy of Sylvia Caiuby Novaes.

Recalling this story of 'speaking in tongues', an interlocutor spontaneously made a connection. It reminded him of a man who once claimed to have heard the voices of the dead coming from the skull during a Last Feast. To him, these voices were unintelligible, resembling the chatter of a flock of parakeets or a crowd of babbling babies. Concluding that the language of the souls is indecipherable to most, he observed, "only Tupa-doge, 'the angels (pl.)', can understand it."

Although absent from most ritual lore, the entities known as Tupa have a key role in the Last Feast, being described as the main auxiliary spirits of the lead singer that, as a souls' scout, "opens the pathways" for the dead, connecting the Christian Heaven to the tent where the offerings await. Moreover, Tupa protect the souls and the shaman in charge from being tricked by the Devil-like *bope* spirits.

When asked about Tupa, my interlocutors' discourse often resorts to expressions drawn from a Christian repertoire, such as 'faith'. This notion is

occasionally brought up to explain what is needed to make a ritual performance actualise its other-worldly virtualities. However, when concerning Tupa, the notion of ‘faith’ is evoked more consistently: “The Boe have much faith in it” is a common phrasing.

For instance, during an event with missionaries from a Catholic organisation, as recalled by an interlocutor, a group of Boe people was asked what aspect of their own culture is similar to Christian teachings. This prompt, I was told, immediately redirected the conversation towards their “faith in Tupa.” On another occasion, this one witnessed by me, a Salesian missionary invited ritual singers to a Catholic event in the nearby city of Rondonópolis, where he hoped they could make a ‘cultural presentation’ of a Boe tradition that would be, in his words, “like a prayer to Christ or the Virgin Mary”. Ismael Atugoreu, a respected ritual singer, concluded that it had to be the Last Feast’s singing session, precisely the one closely connected to Tupa’s agency. Still, such an analogy asserts a connection while keeping its terms well separate. Once the missionary left, they concluded that they wouldn’t participate since performing out of context could enrage the souls: “It must be done properly. Many singers died in the past because of such things [performing out of proper context]”, Ismael remarked.

The figure of Tupa is closely related to the emergence of the Christian Heaven as a posthumous destiny. In a version of Boe eschatology, the recently dead souls are said to undergo a strenuous, perilous journey through the forest, travelling back and forth between the eastern and western villages of the dead, where they are greeted by their deceased kin. However, baptised people, my interlocutors claim, do not settle in either of them, being rather taken to heaven by the Tupa-doge, ‘the angels’, where they finally end to their wanderings. These opposed posthumous destinies are contrasted by Aije Kurireu — who was recognised by many as an *aroe* shaman — as ‘the souls under the earth’ (*moto kudawu aroe*) and ‘the souls within the sky’ (*baru tadawu aroe*).

An interlocutor once told me a story of a man who reached Bakororo, the western village of the dead, and came back alive. He was in Perigara, the westernmost Boe village furthest downriver when he joined two white men for a boat trip even further downstream — west, downstream, underwater, and under the earth are all related coordinates of the realm of the *aroe*. After a long journey, the air got bitterly cold and damp as a thick fog settled in. They ultimately reached an island, where they

were met by the ancient Boe. Men only wore traditional penis sheaths, and women had only cotton strings crisscrossed over their chests — through these details, the storyteller depicts them as quintessentially traditional figures. The ring-shaped village was enormous, with many concentric circles of houses. At its centre, the large men's house was filled with all past *boe eimijerage*, deceased singer-chiefs. The three men knew they had to leave swiftly, or they risked never finding the way back.

Aije Kurireu, who claimed to possess the ability to control his dreams and journey into the realm of the dead, confessed to having never seen the ancient villages of the dead. In his dreams, he only travels towards the 'souls within the sky'. The only description of Heaven he offered in our conversations was not quite as detailed as the story above. Still, in contrast with the massively populated Bakororo village, we see here the outline of a place with a single, isolated house:

Some think that it [Heaven] is like the place the Boe live, but it isn't. We'll miss this place [after death]. We'll miss it; we'll miss it. It [Heaven] is a boundless place. One sees no trunks, no forests, no branches, nothing. One only sees a path leading to their house. That house alone.

Although Aije has not made it explicit, it is hard not to recognise in such a depiction the landscape surrounding the Boe indigenous reserves: endless maize and soya plantations, interrupted only by roads leading to solitary main houses and other facilities.

During my fieldwork, Aije Kurireu was the only one deemed able to conduct a Last Feast's singing session. More than once, he described his shamanic vision of the arriving souls in such rituals as divided into those emerging from the earth and those descending from the sky. In his account, whereas the latter arrive in the form of birds and wild pigs, the former descend in aeroplanes, cars, buses, and trucks. Upon reaching the many offering pots surrounding the skull, both kinds of souls turn again into humans. The souls of the Barae (non-indigenous people) come along with those of the Christian Boe — "all mixed up", he used to remark. Such an arrival of the souls from Heaven is thematized in the fragment below, recorded in Moacir's Coguiepa's funeral, in March 2023:

Imedu, imedu, arawuje, arawuje

Man, man [avoiding the deceased's name], come down, come down

Aredumage, aredumage, turawuje, turawuje

Women, women [all deceased women], come down, come down

Akogoduia okogerewu

Sounds begin to emerge [from the] red macaw feather hairpin [the souls' path/deceased's skull]

Akogoduia kuwogorewu

Sounds begin to emerge [from the] yellow macaw feather hairpin

Aroe ekudu aregodu

The souls' shouts are here

Aroe emago aregodu

The souls' talk is here

Meriri jaruru aregodu

The noise of metal is here

Meriri kia aregodu

The rattle of metal is here

Aroe epadure pugajeje

The souls are mixed up together

In the esoteric language employed in such semi-improvised chants, Heaven and the souls who dwell there are referred to through different kinds of tropes. The most common is Meriri Maka, 'Abundant Goods' — *meriri*, 'metal', is used in the sense of all industrialised goods. In the fragment below, besides Abundant Goods, another metonym is used, that of *bapera*, 'papers/documents/books' or, by extension, 'school', a phonetic adaptation of the Portuguese word papel, 'paper'⁵⁴ — which evokes the

⁵⁴ In a verse sung by Aije Kurireu at a funeral in September 2022, the word 'paper' shifts meaning, echoing the narrative of the miraculous descent of the written note at Lunkenbein's funeral. He explained

narrative of the mysterious floating note in Father Lunkenbein's funeral:

Meriri Maka jaruru padure pugajeje iagai

The noise of the Abundant Goods is mixed up in front of me

Imedu, imedu

Man, man [the deceased]

Apagadukaba Meriri Maka ji

Don't be afraid of the Abundant Goods

Meriri Maka ere juredo Cibae Eiari ji jokodu

The Abundant Goods are really lined up in the men's house

Meriri Maka ere juredo okogerewu ji jokodu

The Abundant Goods are really lined up at the feather hairpin

Bapera roie imedu otodai

The Paper moves in front of the man [the deceased]

Meriri Urugu roie imedu otodai

The Glow of Metal moves in front of the man

Akego okogerewu ji

Rush to the red macaw feather hairpin

Akego kuwogorewu ji

Rush to the yellow macaw feather hairpin

Marigu mato, marigu mato

Come, come

Besides 'goods' and 'paper', another trope employed is Aroia Maka, 'Abundant Clothes'. In Aije Kurireu's version, the deceased's soul does not bring the ornaments that adorn

the verse "A written paper dropped in the middle" by saying that "white people sign documents when we die, so it happens in Heaven".

the skull to Heaven: the traditional ‘souls under the earth’ take them back to their villages during the Last Feast’s singing session. When listening to one of my Last Feast’s recordings, another interlocutor added that the newly dead are ornamented by the other ‘souls within the sky’ with “Barae’s necklaces and earrings” when taken to Heaven.

In previous chapters, we explored how an affective opposition between sorrow and joy became linked to performances of *boeness* and *baraeness*, respectively. This same affective opposition, as we also noted, defines the relationship between the living and the dead: the sorrow of the living mirrors the joy of the dead, and vice versa. It is thus not surprising that the transition from life to death may be expressed as a process of becoming Barae. One woman once put it quite plainly: “Here today, I am Boe; when I die, I’ll become Barae.” This is not common as an explicit reflection; there is no established orthodoxy on the matter. Still, it seems to exist as a virtual possibility, one that circumstantially surfaces not only in statements like this but also in verbal arts, shamanic discourse, and eschatological speculation.

The same matrix applies to the relationship between ancient souls and the living. Drawing on a pan-Amazonian perspectival motif, my interlocutors often recounted stories told by shamans of the past, in which the ancient *aroe*, appearing to the living as wild pigs, would in turn perceive the living as the Barae. In a brief version of such accounts, the *aroe* were said to turn to one another upon the approach of a Boe hunter and cry out: “Run, the Barae are coming!” For these quintessentially Boe ancient dead, the living Boe are perceived instead as predatory Barae.

If a proper way of living relies on the alternation between *boeness* and *baraeness*, the dead, by contrast, emerge as static — and thus undesirable — manifestations of these poles. While the ancient Bakororo and Itubore villages of the dead are described as realms of suffering, sometimes likened to hell or purgatory, no life of fulfilment seems to await in Heaven, as evidenced by Aije Kurireu’s portrayal.

The Tupa figure, in turn, appears as a mediator between heavenly *baraeness* and earthly *boeness*. As we will see, this is precisely the role it seems to have played across history in the Boe dealings with the new form of knowledge introduced with Christianity. Later in this chapter, I attempt to reconstruct a fragmentary history of this entity and the Boe conceptions of the sky. This leads me to propose that ‘Tupa’ is likely

a borrowed term from a *lingua franca* used by early settlers in Central Brazil, tracing back hundreds of years in Boe history — the image of Tupa as a translator of unintelligible languages thus acquires a new meaning. The evolving meanings of the term, recently equated with 'angels', are documented in ethnographic literature, consistently pointing to tropes of foreignness.

This investigation shows that Tupa functioned as an operator of history and change in Boe conceptions of the sky. Yet my interlocutors firmly deny any such changes, insisting that, before Christianity, the sky was inhabited solely by Tupa — a claim that contradicts available ethnographic literature. The notion of Tupa appears highly change-sensitive, yet for my interlocutors, it achieves an obliteration of time — a quality akin to that of Amerindian myths (Gow 2001). By claiming a category evoked only through non-Indigenous tropes as 'traditional', a historicist view of change is converted into something else. Still, the historicity embedded in the Tupa operator is not lost: rather than appearing entangled in a chain of events, Tupa is repositioned as a timeless mediator, bridging languages, the living and the dead, the earth and sky, Boe and Barae. Put simply, Tupa makes eschatology a form of historicity. Before unravelling this 'forgotten' history, it is necessary to clarify how the contemporary Boe engage with Christianity.

A technology of antagonism

The sources of my interlocutors' current experience and understanding of Christianity are diverse and extend far back in history. The Salesians have been carrying out systematic missionary work in a particular region of the Boe territory for more than a century, and there has always been high mobility between regions. For the past couple of decades, many people in Tadarimana have also had some kind of engagement with Evangelical forms of Christianity, both in the nearby city and within their own territory.

Around a decade ago, a small Evangelical church was built in Tadarimana village, and a non-indigenous preacher has held service twice a week ever since. Currently aligned with the Assembléia de Deus denomination and situated at the far end of the settlement from the men's house and ceremonial plaza, the church is surrounded by the homes of its most devout attendees. Unlike the exclusively Catholic

Boe, the minority of Evangelical devotees — comprising about a dozen people out of roughly 300 living in the village — participates in services regularly, some adopt distinct attire (skirts below the knees for women, and formal shirts and trousers for men) and largely eschews traditional Boe ceremonies. "For them, culture is only body painting and language; everything else is the Devil's work, *bope*" explained a former Evangelical man. These frequent churchgoers often start the service by singing hymns or reading Bible passages. However, the main sermon is always delivered by a non-indigenous pastor who lives in the city and, along with his wife, travels from Rondonópolis to the Tadarimana village twice a week. He typically begins his sermons emphasising the rejection of ancestral false gods and idols: "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old" (Isaiah 43:18; King James Bible), he once chose as the opening passage⁵⁵.

The ritually active Boe people with whom I worked more closely — often referred to in Portuguese as people da cultura, 'of culture' — would at times speak of a radical divide, pointing to the Evangelical Boe as a source of cultural decline. However, taken at face value, such a clear-cut division can be deceptive. Even the most engaged churchgoers, rumoured to admonish Boe ceremonies, could sometimes be seen in the men's house during a funeral or taking ornamented children to dance in a ceremony out of compassion for the bereaved family. Conversely, families 'of culture', when faced with strange dreams, uncanny behaviour from a family member, or certain forms of misfortune, often seek out the church for blessings and advice from the preacher after service. The reason why the latter may exceptionally attend service is the same as why the former abstain from ceremonies: the immanence of the Devil.

All misfortune, accident, or simply bad luck — be it as minor as a stubbing one's toe on a chair or as significant as a person's death — may be seen as an intervention of the *bope*. These necrophagous spirits are often said to be watching over the living, lurking for any distraction, planning on how and when to act. When, in Apido Paru village, a house accidentally caught on fire after the wood-burning stove

⁵⁵ The preacher was noticeably uneasy with my presence during service, as I was there to 'study culture' and since establishing an Evangelical church on an Indigenous Reserve in Brazil is illegal. Besides, the Evangelical Boe were cautious not to link their disinterest in traditional ceremonies to the church in conversations with me, making my access to their community somewhat restricted.

was left unattended close to a straw wall, an interlocutor remarked: “The *bope* was watching, wondering how to act. When they left, it said: ‘That is how I’ll do it’.”

Daily life in the village is permeated with prophylactic, anti-*bope* behaviour. Walking around Tadarimana at dawn, one notices most houses’ lights on. People avoid sleeping in the dark, where the *bope* dwells; when its name is avoided, it may be called *Boe-Co-Kaowu*, ‘The-One-Throughout-the-Darkness’. Children’s toys are gathered at dusk to prevent the spirit from stealing them as a way of capturing and devouring the child’s soul, and hammocks left outside must be removed since “the *bope* may lie in it”, potentially making the owner ill. The *bope* is an omnipresent, invisible, unpredictable trickster whose prototypical action is predation: *okwagere pai*, ‘it eats us’, the Boe saying goes. Far from being esoteric or rarely mentioned, the *bope*’s immanence is a constant concern, deeply infusing my interlocutors’ experience of contingency and misfortune.

The identification of *bope* with the Devil, in turn, is not seen as a play of contexts used for explanation or clarification — as are other Christian-inspired analogies such as “the men’s house is like a church” or “Boe name-giving is like baptism”, which highlight both difference and connection. In the *bope*-Devil case, we are faced with a statement of identity rather than an analogy between terms that must remain separate. When asked for clarification, an interlocutor explained: “What the Boe call *bope*, the Barae call ‘Devil’. They are the same.” Unlike the knowledge of God, which is said to have been acquired through Barae teachings, the Boe claim to have always known the Devil. However, *bope* itself is not considered *cultura*, as it marks a convergence rather than a distinction between Barae and Boe knowledge. Nevertheless, their respective ways of managing its immanence are seen as fundamentally different.

My fieldwork was carried out about two decades after the death of the last known *bari*, a shamanic specialist who allied himself with *bope* familiars to mediate their relationship with the living. My interlocutors often refer to priests and preachers as *bari* and may explicitly speak of them as replacements for shamans. Still, instead of collapsing the terms into one, this analogy points to their similar positions as mediators. Some of the same potentially *bope*-related afflictions that used to lead a person to see a *bope* shaman in the past take them to an Evangelical church today, from hope that a chronic health issue could be cured to protecting a person from being ‘possessed’ by the

bope again, the latter being a relatively common affliction⁵⁶. In turn, what differentiates preachers and priests from *bope* shamans is their technology. The latter were themselves *bope*, living a classic Amerindian shamans' double life, one among the living and the other among such spirits, a position that put them at once in the role of mediators and potentially under suspicion (see Crocker 1985). In short, their technology was one of (a double) alliance. Conversely, the technology of priests and preachers regarding the Devil (or the agency of Christian motifs in general) is seen as one of antagonism. Instead of incorporating, familiarising the *bope*, Christianity is seen as driving it away; Christianity acts *against* rather than *with* it, thereby potentially shielding people from its harmful influence.

To illustrate this point, we may consider the story of a woman who frequently dreamt of animals associated with the *bope*, such as dark snakes. Such dreams are often interpreted as the initial stage of a *bope* shaman's initiation (in her case, as a *barigo*, a female *bari*), where one must confront several challenges related to these animals. She was terrified of the initiation process: "The *bope* makes the *baire* (plural) suffer a lot," she explained. To avoiding this ordeal, she consulted a Catholic priest and requested a cross to place over her bed to ward off the *bope*. After doing so, the dreams ceased. I heard many similar accounts in Tadarimana. Reflecting on the disappearance of the *bope* shamans, another woman lamented, "Every time someone begins to become one, the family takes them to a church [preventing the emergence of a new shaman]." Others attribute the decline of *bope* shamanism to the rise of Christian baptism. It is clear here how the roles of the *bari* and the priest-preacher appear as alternative, yet conflicting, technologies for dealing with the *bope*.

While I do not wish to oversimplify my interlocutors' personal experiences with Christianity as merely a pragmatics against the *bope*, most of their visible performances as Christians and displays of devotion are either triggered by signs of encounters with

⁵⁶ Although the capacity to cure and protect — and more rarely to foretell the future — may have been perceived as partially replaced by the activities of preachers and priests, a significant practice of *bope* shamans vanished alongside them: the offering of food to the *bope*. This led to a simultaneous and total abstention from consuming the 'foods of the *bope*' — game, fish, and other provisions that must be presented to the *bope* before being eaten. The largest kinds of game in the territory such as tapir, capybara, and deer, which fall under the category, are today entirely avoided by Boe hunters. For instance, one condition for a non-indigenous person to marry a Boe person is to avoid such kinds of food since it could affect the entire family.

these spirits or are aimed at shielding themselves from their influence. Christianity is not a matter of morality for the Catholic Boe. I never observed Christian themes invoked in discussions about proper behaviour — despite such topics being frequently discussed — nor did I hear the term 'sin' used: Christianity's potential as a technology against the *bope* seem far more salient than its capacity to provide a moral repertoire⁵⁷.

However, this doesn't mean that alliances or other forms of relationship with the *bope* were entirely abandoned. For instance, as explained in the last chapter, the great mortuary suites are all *bope uke*, 'of the *bope*', and performing them entails a delicate, treacherous co-presence (or virtual identification) with the necrophagous spirits. The Baadojeba clan, to which the *bope* belongs, has precedence over the most crucial among such suites. Those who belong to this clan often refer to the *bope* (to avoid uttering its name) as *iedaga pega*, 'my old name-giver'. Still, the *bope* is inherently unpredictable and does not combine kinship and protection. As a Baadojeba woman once said: 'the *bope* is our uncle (*iedaga*), but it harms us anyway'.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ I do not mean to suggest that these characteristics define the singularity of Boe Christianity; in fact, my limited knowledge of rural Catholicism in southern Mato Grosso prevents me from making such a claim.

⁵⁸ The uniqueness of the strictly evangelical Boe, with whom I did not work systematically, seems to lie in the degree to which the technology of antagonism provided by Christianity was embraced. According to an ex-Evangelical interlocutor, church regulars understand that all mortuary ceremonies must be avoided precisely because they are *bope*-related: there is a refusal of all kinds of co-presence or alliance with the 'devil'. When the traditional/Evangelical divide is highlighted in discourse, the Catholic Boe claim that the Evangelical people refer to them as *bope-doge*, 'the devils', because of their ritual activities.



Figure 38. Ismael Atugoreu performs the *Kiege Barege suite*, the most perilous 'song of the bope'. Precision is essential, as the performer cannot afford any errors. In the photograph, Ismael is seen wearing a crucifix for protection. August 2023.

As pointed out, my interlocutors directly associate the disappearance of the *bope* shamans with the growth of Christian technologies. Yet, this shift in the handling of *bope* matters must not be mistaken for a zero-sum replacement of one element (shamanism) for another (Christianity). It required a silent, forgotten pivoting of the properties of the *bope* category. Such a shift and its consequences can be traced by going back to the notion of Tupa.

A forgotten pantheon

In Crocker's (1985) detailed and insightful account of *bope* shamanism, the vivid descriptions of shamans who lived in Korogedu Paru village in the 1960s give shape to a vast and varied pantheon of named *bope* spirits. The *bope*, in contrast with the *aroe*, is always referred to in the singular. Yet, in Crocker's account, the term denotes a singular, immanent multiplicity, one in which a myriad of spirits are not only constantly

transforming into each other and animals but also generating all known change and creativity: “as a category, the *bope* are credited with controlling all natural change, whether this is as critical as the formation of a child in the womb or as trivial as a rain squall” (ibid: 122). In sum, the *bope*, in Crocker’s words, would be the ‘spirits of metamorphoses” (: 36). The *bope* is defined in his account within its dialectical relationship with the *aroe*, whose immutable plurality provides the means for sociocosmological continuity and differentiation through the transmission of names and forms. In contrast with the *bope* as the personification of contingency, change, and predation, the *aroe* appear as images of regularity, form, and succession.

The entities that comprise the *bope* pantheon would inhabit specific cosmic layers, from the earth to the several skies named after colours: “the heavens and the earth are the domain of the *bope*, but the *aroe* have suzerainty over rivers, lakes, and the underground” (Crocker 1985: 123). Such a cosmography was consistently described in varying degrees of detail throughout the 20th century, from the early works of the Salesian missionaries (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962: 776; Colbacchini & Albisetti 1942: 111) to Crocker’s (1985: 125-134) detailed account and Fabian’s (1992) work in ethnoastronomy. Crocker describes the *bope* population’s diversity in detail, from each ‘*bope* species” typical behaviour and the kinds of illnesses it may cause to physical appearance and particular dwelling places. Although the details are to some degree idiosyncratic of each shaman, Crocker’s interlocutors consistently divided the *bope* in the sky into three celestial layers, the white, blue-green, and red skies, the same division presented in the *Enciclopédia Bororo* (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962: 776).

In the lower cosmic layer called ‘white sky’ (*baru kigadureu*), among several other kinds of *bope*, Crocker’s (1985: 131) interlocutors placed a form of *bope* which was “anomalous” yet universal among shaman’s familiars, the Tupa-doge (pl.):

The *Tupa-doge* do not even appear like other *bope*, but instead resemble Brazilians, wearing clothes and shoes, possessing guns, horses, houses, and extensive gardens. [...] They have villages at various points in the white sky and live uniquely upon the rice, beans, sugar cane, and melons they cultivate there. [...] They never cause affliction among the Bororo but can cure some diseases caused by other *bope* and are especially beneficent with sick children. Nearly all Bororo shamans count *Tupa-doge* among their possessing *bope*. Most female shamans have only these spirits as their familiars. They are generally very kindly disposed to the Bororo and cordially detest the *maereboe* and other bad

bope. Unfortunately, their powers to cure affliction are somewhat limited [...]. This category is a thoroughly anomalous one; it may represent an attempt to incorporate the Bororo's ambiguous experiences with the Western world. There is also the possibility of direct influence from the cult of Catholic saints and the local Brazilian mediumship which utilizes it. In any case, the benign attitudes of the Tupa-doge are offset by their relative feebleness.

Besides its non-indigenous attributes, the Tupa-doge were unique in their benevolence: they were classed as *bope pemegarewu*, 'good *bope*'. Shamans who only had Tupa as their familiars — as my interlocutors still recall — could cure but not offer *bope uke* ('foods of the *bope*') to them, game and catch banned from consumption if not shamanically treated. In shamans' incursions into the *bope* realm in their dreams — one of perpetual war, predation, and deception — sometimes to recover stolen souls, the Tupa-doge were distinguished by their capacity to antagonise the other *bope*, protecting the shaman. At times, they would even "intervene with their guns if the fight seems to be going against the side of the shamans" (: 218).

What I suggest here is that, in the 1960s, when Tupa was considered a form of *bope* that dwelled in the inner white sky among a myriad of other spirits, it already stood out. It personified an alternative technology to deal with *bope* matters, one of benevolence and antagonism. Its connection with Christianity — recognised by Crocker, although what led him to such a conclusion is not transparent — becomes clearer in the light of the argument about contemporary Boe dealings with religion presented here. The "relative feebleness" of Tupa mentioned above by Crocker is also analogous to my interlocutors' evaluation of techniques for dealing with the *bope* of 'white people's shamans' (*baraedu baire*), category which includes priests and preachers. These are said to be weak when compared to the power of shamans of the past who allied themselves with the *bope*.

The widespread adoption of baptism after Crocker's fieldwork seems to have led to major shifts. While I initially avoided prompting my interlocutors with topics from the literature, in my final months in the field I began asking about elements of Boe lore — such as the presence of *bope* in the sky — that appeared absent from their discourse. I asked several interlocutors — including the two most respected singer-chiefs, who had close ties to Crocker's shaman interlocutors — whether they had ever heard of *bope* dwelling in the sky. While those seen as less knowledgeable simply said

no, ritual specialists and elderly women firmly denied it. In the sky, they all agreed, there is only the Christian Heaven and Tupa-doge, responsible for rain and storms. All also denied that Tupa is *bope*, insisting that *bope* lives only on the earth's surface. The celestial *bope* pantheon seems to have vanished along with its diversity. While still able to transform into nearly anything, *bope* is now equated with *maereboe*, the earth- and lower-sky dwelling *bope* described by Crocker (1985). When I read Crocker's account of the celestial *bope* to an elderly woman, she replied: "They lied to him." Rather than merely denying, my interlocutors asserted that sky-dwelling *bope* never existed — any record of it is false. Before Heaven, there was only Tupa. Understanding such statements requires a deeper look into the history of the Tupa category

Tupan, tupã, tupa: a cosmological palimpsest

The earliest record of the use of the word Tupa by the Boe comes from word lists collected by the Austrian naturalist Johann Natterer in the 1820s (Feest 2014). These lists were collected among the branch of the Boe population known at the time as the Western Bororo, who lived far northwest of the contemporary Boe population, referred to by contrast as 'Eastern Bororo'. The former population, deemed to have disappeared around the beginning of the twentieth century (Crocker 1967; Viertler 1990), was the first to have contact with colonial scouts as early as 1680 (Vangelista 2008). In two of the published word lists, one of them elicited from a 15-year-old girl living in a non-indigenous settlement, the word *tupa* (or *tupà*) appears. In both cases, the translation provided is simply "God" (Feest 2014: 204, 208).

The initial contacts of settlers with the (Western) Bororo, starting in the 17th century, were made through the *bandeirantes* scouts, 'flag-carriers' in exploratory voyages to expand borders and enslave indigenous peoples in Central Brazil (Viertler 1990; Vangelista 2008). Coming from São Paulo, these men of mixed Portuguese and Indigenous ancestry were speakers of a *lingua franca* widely spoken in that region at the time, known as *Língua Geral Paulista* (São Paulo's General Language) (Rodrigues 1996; Vangelista 2008). Based on indigenous languages of the Tupi-Guarani family, this *lingua franca* was spoken in São Paulo until the beginning of the 20th century, yet the records of it are scarce. In the few recognised sources of *Língua Geral Paulista*

vocabulary, spanning from the 18th to the 19th centuries, *tupan*, *tupana*, and other variants are consistently translated as ‘God’, being also used in other Christian-related expressions (Leite 2013: 23-35, *appendix VII*). One such source comes from a missionary settlement in the north of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais in 1819, where Boe people were taken by the *bandeirante* Antônio Pires de Campos for catechisation and were reported to be fluent in Língua Geral Paulista — in this settlement, however, the recorded word for God was not *tupan*-derived (Rodrigues 1996; Saint-Hilaire 1937: 255).

The translation of ‘God’ for Tupan and its variants in this *lingua franca* has roots in the early attempts at Christianisation of the Tupi-Guarani-speaking population on the coast of Brazil by the Jesuits. In a letter dating from 1549, Father Manoel da Nóbrega (1886: 70) makes explicit the instrumentalisation of the notion of “Tupane” in his proselytising:

These gentiles do not worship anything, nor do they know God; they only call the thunder Tupane, which is like saying divine thing. And so we have no other more appropriate word to bring them to the knowledge of God than to call him Father Tupane.

Such connection became widespread among Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples. Speaking of the Guarani, H. Clastres (1995: 26) points out that “once forced to think of themselves in opposition to Christians, Tupã came to mean God; so that even though it has lost none of his former attributes (it is situated in the west and linked to thunder and storms), it is still sometimes thought of as an element foreign to Guarani culture.” It is worth noticing here the connection to thunder and storms. As pointed out in the last section, the Boe notion of Tupa-doge was also associated with rain and storms by my interlocutors; we shall return to this later on.

A gap of around a century and hundreds of kilometres separate the 1820s record of the notion of Tupa as ‘God’ and the next appearance of such term in the Boe ethnographic literature, this time, among the so-called Eastern Bororo. In the dictionary included in the 1942 Brazilian edition of the first thorough ethnographic account of the ‘Eastern Bororo’ published by the Salesian missionaries, one finds an entry for *tupa*: “a good spirit; alien in an offensive sense” (Colbacchini & Albisetti 1942: 439). We can

see here that it had kept an explicit sense of ‘an element foreign to Boe culture’, to borrow Clastres’s phrasing, which has been dropped by my interlocutors; these claim, instead, that it refers to a traditional Boe spirit despite its explicit placing as a mediator between the living and the Christian Heaven. The term later reappears in the *Enciclopédia Bororo* (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962) plotted in their celestial chart of *bope* spirits as entities in the intermediary ‘red sky’ who, besides curing, “defend them [the shamans] against the assaults of *bope pegarewuge*, bad spirits, who insist in disrupting the shaman’s functions” (: 776). Although this definition lacks references to ‘foreignness’, the same volume includes a list of esoteric terms employed by a shaman when possessed by a Tupa spirit, among which one finds phonetic adaptations of Brazilian Portuguese expressions (ibid: 983).

This fragment of ethnohistory leads us to the conclusion that the Boe notion of Tupa has its origin in the missionary usage of the Tupi-Guarani ‘Tupã’.⁵⁹ It thus appears as an artefact of early attempts at Christianisation which preceded the Salesian missions. However, I wish to highlight the incongruencies between such a historicist approach and my interlocutors’ understandings of Tupa. The non-indigenous tropes my interlocutors employ when explaining what Tupa is leads the ethnographer to steer towards a question of origin. Yet, the contemporary Boe in Tadarimana seem to approach it otherwise: Tupa is at once surrounded by images of what is seen as exogenous knowledge — one lady, for instance, recalled how a deceased *bope* shaman would describe them as Barae children — and understood as traditional in the sense of existing outside of or beyond change. The evidence of such anti-processual quality is not simply based on the fact that its alien origin was forgotten. This could be naturally expected given the time depth. What is worth noting is that Tupa consistently adapted and transformed its enduring association with ‘elements foreign to Boe culture’ while not being itself understood as historically bound. In the next session, the changes that Tupa introduced in Boe cosmology are traced through another vantage point, that of changes in mythical narratives connected to the origin of Tupa, God, and the Barae.

⁵⁹ Besides Tupa, the Boe still employ another term of Tupi-Guarani origin that arguably came from the early exposure to the *Língua Geral Paulista*: *tapira*, a term use to denote ‘cattle’. It comes from the Tupi-Guarani word for the tapir, from where the English word derives. Through an analogy with the large mammal, many Tupi-Guarani languages derive the word for cattle from the one for tapir. The usage appears in records of *Língua Geral Paulista*’s vocabulary (see Oliveira 1936: 167).

On the reverse side of the sky

As shown earlier, both in the *Enciclopédia Bororo* (Albisetti & Venturelli 1962) and in Crocker's (1985) account of Boe shamanism, Tupa is described as a distinctive form of *bope* living among a crowd of other sky-dwelling spirits of the same class — which, as we have seen, is currently identified with the Devil. Still, my interlocutors denied that such a celestial pantheon, consistently described in 20th-century Boe ethnography, has ever existed, the same being extended to the categorisation of Tupa as *bope*. Keeping its enduring anti-*bope* qualities — the good, trust-worthy allies of shamans who antagonised their deceitful peers — Tupa has been extracted out of the *bope* category, becoming something else and, in doing so, also altered the *bope* category itself. This extraction process concurred with the emergence of the Christian Heaven and the decline of *bope* shamanism. Tupa's technology of antagonising the *bope* through unambiguous benevolence — which, one must recall, is that of Christianity — took over, becoming a form of more-than-human agency separated from the *bope*. In this and the next section, I show how such process became inscribed in Boe mythology.

As already remarked, my interlocutors consistently associate Tupa with rain and storms. In Crocker's (1985) account based on his 1960s fieldwork, Tupa only shared the lower 'white sky' with one other category of spirits, a myriad of entities controlling different aspects of rain and storms who comprise the overarching class of Butao-doge. Faced with my interlocutors' denial of non-Tupa entities in the sky, I inquired an elderly lady about Butao-doge. Her reaction was: "Yes, they exist. But they are *the same as* Tupa". When comparing two versions of a myth narrated to me as the origin of Tupa, we may find the traces of its fusion with Butao. In the story, told by the elder Aije Kurireu, a woman secretly feeds her anaconda lover with the game brought by her sons, leaving nothing to them. Suspecting something, they ask their youngest brother, a tiny dove (*Columbina squammata*) who spies on their mother, finding out about her lover. The brothers kill the anaconda lover and chop his head. When the mother finds out, the elder brothers run away to the sky, asking the dove to stay on earth: "Whenever you are suffering from thirst, whenever you are suffering from heat, call us by singing '*ku tuku, ku tuku*'. We will hear you." The elder brothers in the sky

became Tupa, sending rain whenever the dove sings.

The Salesians published a version of this narrative around five decades before I recorded it (Albisetti & Venturelli 1969: 813). In their version, the brothers who run away to the sky become the Butao-doge, not Tupa. The juxtaposition between Tupa and Butao was already there in Crocker's (1985) account, sharing the same celestial layer. Yet, in contemporary Boe discourse, Tupa encompassed Butao and its qualities, erasing its *bope* identity by detaching itself from such a category and taking over the sky as the sole traditional sky-dwelling being.

A detail in the Salesian version is worth highlighting. The mother in the narrative is called Cibae Urago, a title from the Bokodori Ecerae clan — which allows us to assume that this was also her sons' clan, given the nominally matrilineal regime. This clan has traditional nominal precedence over white people and their 'things'. This is consistent with contemporary Boe connoisseurs' take on Tupa's clan: it is said to belong to the same clan as white people, the Bokodori Ecerae. This detail helps connect this narrative to another key mythical motif.

Raimundo Itogoga, a respected Boe ceremonial chief, once woke up from an afternoon nap and, without providing much of a context, suddenly said to me: "Once the Barae went all the way to the base of the sky. Then they passed to the other side [above the celestial dome]". He then went silent. I took it as a prelude for a mythical narrative, so I asked what happened next. But he concluded, "That's it. There is no story." I would only come across such a fragment again much later. One day, a close interlocutor told me how his grandfather — who lived most of his life at the Salesian mission's village — used to add an unusual episode to a narrative describing the origin of the Barae. The episode, as he remembered it, tells the story of a non-indigenous man who crosses to the other side of the sky and gets stuck there, leaving his companions on this side. The next day, he gave me a ride to his grandfather Toribugu's village, where we recorded the narrative.

In this 'origin of the Barae' myth, Capuchin Monkey (Juko) creates the Barae and their food with a "magical stick" (Albisetti & Venturelli 1969: 595), which, upon hitting the ground, creates things *ex nihilo*. He then loses it to the whites, who create their own technologies with it. In the Salesian version, the narrative ends with the Capuchin Monkey recovering the magical stick. In Toribugu's version, an extra episode

is added.

The episode begins with a straight-haired Boe man greeting a curly-haired non-Indigenous companion in the Boe language, who replies to him in Portuguese. They then arrive at a gate that leads to the world above the sky. Upon opening it, they find that each side mirrors the other, both being populated by non-indigenous and Boe people — mentioned here through the tropes of curly and straight hair. The only difference is that the world above the sky is brighter than the one under it. As they pass through the gate, the curly-haired man transforms into an *iroere* rabbit, an animal from the same clan as the Barae and Tupa. The rabbit chases the magical stick — which is assumed to have been taken to the other side at this point in the narrative. While his companion manages to return, the rabbit is held by the sky-dwellers, and the gate shuts forever. Trapped above the sky, the rabbit becomes God.

Toribugu finished his narrative with a remark. He said: “I don’t know what this *pemo* (the ‘magical stick’) is, but it must be like a priest’s staff. The *bope* shamans had it, but they lost it.” This comment is particularly significant. Besides being a mythical trickster, the capuchin monkey, original owner of the stick, was a typical form of *bope* among shamans’ familiars (Crocker 1985: 133). The irreversible transfer of the *pemo* stick from the *bope*-like capuchin monkey to the Barae, from the earth to the sky, can be read, I suggest, as a reflection on the emergence of Christianity and the transformation of Boe cosmography. However, this irreversibility itself was added to a story that, in the past, narrated how the ultimately creative instrument was, in the end, kept by the capuchin monkey, an image of *bope* shamanism. What has changed in the narrative is a recursive image of that same change. In other words, the myth narrates the change that made it possible.

Furthermore, the motif of earth-dwellers crossing the divide between earth and sky runs through both the narrative of the origin of God and that of Tupa. While the latter emphasises mediation (the sending of rain upon request), the former suggests severance (the closing of the gates, locking away the ultimate source of creativity). Such connections implicitly remake in myth a relationship that is explicit in discourse: Tupa, after all, is the one who travels between earth and the sky, connecting Boe and God. Instead of constituting a history, this movement was converted into an eschatology: at this level, every person posthumously repeats the trip to the reverse

side of the sky, now the Christian Heaven, in the company of Tupa.

God, the Devil, and the transfer of creativity

The *pemo* stick appears in myth as an image of unrestricted creativity. In Crocker's account, the *bope* is the force of all transformation and generation, from childbirth to the creation of the world, embodied in myth by the *bope*-like Sun and Moon (Meri and Ari). These tricksters, according to Crocker's (1985: 125) interlocutors, "created everything in the world." Their banishment to the sky by the Iwagududoge clan, in turn, marks what could be called the origin of the celestial *bope* (Albisetti & Venturelli 1969: 1139). However, in fieldwork decades later, no one spontaneously associated Sun and Moon with *bope*. The narratives of Sun and Moon are still well known, yet, when asked, people either denied this identification or had never heard of it. Even when "bope" and "Sun" are used interchangeably as a form of cursing, this was dismissed as a meaningless idiom: "It's only something people say". When I asked Raimundo Itogoga, deemed the most knowledgeable storyteller, about the tricksters Sun and Moon being *bope*, he replied: "Sun is not *bope*; Sun is light," adding, "That's why I believe in God." He then recalled a myth in which Sun revives Moon by replacing missing bones with wood (see Albisetti & Venturelli 1969). Equating this act with Lazarus' resurrection, he concluded: "God lives in the sky. He is Sun; He is Moon."

The transferring of the 'magical stick' to non-indigenous people, creating God, can thus also be read as a comment on the historical transferring of the *bope*'s creative capacities to the latter. The *bope* as a personification of body strength, reproduction, growth, and fructification, as presented to Crocker (1985) by his shaman interlocutors in the 1960s, seems to have faded with *bope* shamanism. It is entirely absent from my interlocutors' discourse. Instead of Sun's creative powers, what was indeed many times the object of people's spontaneous claims was that "God created everything"⁶⁰. All Boe people I asked explicitly denied any involvement of the *bope* in reproduction and

⁶⁰ An argument I heard more than once the Catholic Boe make criticising the more radical Evangelicals was, in one interlocutor's words, that "God created everything, even culture; so how can culture be of the Devil?".

growth, whether in human affairs or in the world of animals and plants. After denying *bope*'s agency in childbirth, an interlocutor added: "This is a matter of God".

Crocker's (ibid.) interlocutors associated all internal bodily processes involving the containment and flow of blood and other fluids with the *bope*. He argued that this *bope*-driven bodily hydraulics — integral to strength and reproductive capacity — played a crucial role in the dynamics of domestic relatedness. This included the way the sharing of food and other domestic practices were said to render the blood of co-residents increasingly similar. In contrast to such notions, my interlocutors firmly reject the idea that blood similarity ever had any significance, much as they refute claims concerning sky-dwelling *bope*. The possibility of multiple paternity, widely attested in the literature (see also Caiuby Novaes 1986), is today acknowledged as something the 'ancient ones' once believed; and my interlocutors insist that they were mistaken, as the Barae have clarified that there is no such thing. In short, for Crocker's interlocutors in the 1960s, both the interior of the body and the inner sky were domains of the *bope*, and thus fell under the scope of shamanic knowledge — *bari* shamans, for instance, would be called upon to assist with childbirth and to interpret celestial omens. For my interlocutors, however, these very domains are now understood as governed primarily by non-Indigenous knowledge.

Returning to heavenly matters, we can say that by merging with Tupa or God through identification, the celestial *bope* either disappeared through redundancy or by losing their *bope*-like qualities, thus becoming God-like instead. Such a merger happened alongside (and in reason of) a parallel process of extracting the quality of 'goodness' present in the Tupa category from the *bope* realm, allowing Christianity to emerge in its uniqueness. The recreation of the sky as Heaven, the exclusive realm of Tupa (the 'angels') and God, also required seizing *bope*'s creativity: now deprived of its power of life and squeezed between the 'souls under the earth' and the 'souls within the sky', the *bope* retreated to a role as solely an agent of death, decay, and misfortune.⁶¹

Tupa and, with it, Christianity originated from within the very category they antagonise — the *bope* — as though God had emerged from the Devil. About the latter,

⁶¹ This does not mean, however, that the *bope* was converted into a personification of 'evilness'. Some explicitly deny that the *bope* is evil, often saying that it depends on how one deals with it. Alliance is still a possibility, although a relatively dormant one.

Crocker writes: “The *bope*, as the determinators of all unique, singular events, are much more relevant [than the *aroe* lore] to any particular Boe’s own appreciation of the historical situation in which he finds himself” (: 124). As the embodiment of newness and the event, the *bope* contained within itself all virtual change, including the one that may antagonise and undermine its own creativity. Therefore, this is not an iteration of the argument about an infinite Amerindian capacity to assimilate change as questioned by Fausto (2009: 497-8) and High (2015b). The *bope* — spirits of metamorphosis, as Crocker (1985) described them — may serve as the medium through which change enters and becomes intelligible in the Boe world. Yet it does not neutralise change; on the contrary, it provides novelty with a channel to exert its effects — even when this means radically reshaping the very category of *bope*.

At this point, it is necessary to recall the ‘forgotten’ character of many such changes: its traces are visible wherever the notion of Tupa can be found. This entity transformed itself as a myth that erases time while retaining history (Gow 2001). As the scout of Christianity, it paved the way for its emergence while retaining a sense of Boe’s agency over it. For instance, the Tupa-function implicitly appears, I suggest, as the agent in the myth of the origin of God in the form of the *iroere* rabbit, creating God out of the creative powers (the ‘magical stick’) originally owned by the *bope*. The myth retains a sense that God’s power comes originally from the Boe shamanic knowledge.⁶² This stance echoes numerous other Amerindian cases in which non-Indigenous historical agency is deliberately downplayed (Amaral 2024; Lucas 2019; Santos-Granero 2007; Taylor 2007). When Raimundo Itogoga compared biblical episodes to other Boe narratives, he would often conclude: “We already knew that”. Here, asserting continuity functions similarly to recognising Tupa’s traditional status: it reflects upon history while denying rupture and, in doing so, challenges the sense of novelty that non-Indigenous people attribute to their own actions and knowledge. In other words, Raimundo’s words express an implicit critique of non-Indigenous claims of history making.

⁶² Albisetti & Venturelli (1969: 595) had already noticed an “affirmation of superiority” in their published version of the narrative (which lacks the origin of God).

The ancients as prey and the utopia of the benevolent Barae

Throughout this chapter, I have explored how Tupa functions both as a mediator — positioned between — and as an operator — transforming — *boeness* and *baraeness* within historical and eschatological frameworks. Yet one crucial question remains: what kind of relationship between the Barae and the Boe does the figure of Tupa embody? To address this, we must return to two contrasting images of that relationship that emerged in the chapter: the perspectival anecdote of the wild pigs, and the portrayal of Tupa's 'goodness' as an auxiliary spirit.

In the first account, the dead ancients are perceived by the living Boe as peccaries. Yet from the ancients' perspective, they remain persons, while the living Boe appear instead as predatory Barae. In some versions of the story, the *aroe* shaman emerges as a double agent, deceiving the Boe-peccaries and leading them into the Barae ambush. This image of the Barae as predators stands in contrast to the shamanic portrayal of Tupa in Crocker's account, where Tupa appears as settlers dwelling in celestial farms, armed with weapons — thus heavenly doubles of the Boe's once traditional enemies, responsible for centuries of brutal violence against them. Yet here, their weapons are used solely to defend the Boe from harmful *bope*, embodying pure benevolence and protective intent.

This double image seems to be related to an ambiguity that the Barae share with the *bope*. Non-Indigenous people are often admired for their ingenuity yet feared and resented for their deceitfulness and tendency to lie. The same double nature is attributed to the *bope*. In fact, in the Boe language, metaphorically calling someone *bope* can function either as an insult — implying that the person is deceitful and morally suspect — or as a compliment, suggesting cleverness and inventive skill. In sum, trickery and creativity are seen as features of both *bopeness* and *baraeness*. In fact, Crocker (1985) proposed a direct association between the Barae and the *bope* — an idea echoed by one of my interlocutors, who once remarked, "the ancients used to say that the Barae are *bope*." The phrasing, however, retains a degree of ambiguity: invoking the ancients may serve either to legitimise the claim or to relegate it to a bygone view — in which case, it seems to reflect the removal of Tupa from the *bope* category.

Engagement with the Barae can be broadly defined as seeking to suppress deceit and channel their ingenuity toward Boe ends. Tupa is enveloped in images of such ingenuity — tropes of paper, goods, and clothing among them. As an auxiliary spirit, it turns its weapons exclusively to the defence of the Boe against the *bope*. This image conjures a utopia of sorts: the complete and unambiguous pacification and instrumentalisation of the Barae — a utopia that contemporary engagement with Christianity, as a substitute for shamanism, also seems to embody. The anecdote of the wild pigs, by contrast, evokes images of unmitigated violence and deceit — the very facet of the Barae that Boe ancestors were once forced to confront. At the end of the nineteenth-century, as still recalled by my interlocutors, the Salesian mission presented the Boe with a tainted alternative in the face of escalating settler violence (Vangelista 1996). While Tupa may embody the utopian horizon in these historical choices, the wild pig anecdote — in which the contemporary Boe appear to the ancients-as-peccaries as predatory Barae — functions as a mirror held to the present. It simultaneously reminds the Boe of their ancestors' perspective on the Barae and their own *barae*-becoming historical choices. In doing so, it underscores the impossibility of fully pacifying *baraeness*, whose predatory potential remains ever close at hand.

Conclusion — Performative Temporalities and the Shaping of a Disjunctive Present

Boe rituals have both performative and reflexive dimensions: they not only shape time, transform personhood, displace generations, and lay the ground for future memory-based transformations but do so through reflexive temporal models of personal and collective life. When the Boe frame ritual as cultura — an inherently reflexive notion (Carneiro da Cunha 2009) — they articulate what has often been recognised as a fundamental characteristic of collective rituals more broadly; namely, “the continuous presence of a metalanguage” (Turner 1979: 467). That is, the way ritual acts appear as simultaneously themselves and a reflection upon themselves. In Turner’s (ibid) words, this renders ritual “full of potency and potentiality”, as both “experiment and play”. In Handelman’s (1998: 49) typology of ritual reflexivity, such rituals would fall under the category of “events that re-present”, which:

(...) work through contrast and comparison within the event itself. In turn, such work may raise possibilities, questions, perhaps doubts, about the legitimacy or the validity of social forms, as these are constituted in the lived-in world. Events that re-present are like multiple or magic mirrors that play with forms of order that refract multiple visions of the possible, from among whose uncertainties there re-emerge probabilities.

In other words, ritual has the potential of framing action within an implicit yet persistent ‘what if’ (see Buitron 2022). In the Boe mortuary ritual, this translates into the question: ‘what if we lived like the ancient ones’? Which is asked alternately with its correlate in times of joy: ‘what if we lived like the Barae’? Experimenting with living like the ancient ones is a risky endeavour, for there is no element of make-believe involved. Doing so means feeding them as they once fed their own dead, singing to them as they once sang their own sorrows, bringing them eerily close without ever collapsing the defining disjunction between the living and the dead, the present and the past. Moreover, to live like the ancient ones is to temporarily eclipse the centrality that the relationship with the Barae holds at other times, when their crucial role in

sustaining kinship and collective life — through government aid, political models, religious rituals, and communal festivities — comes to the fore. In pastness-focused performances, moiety and clan divisions re-emerge with renewed salience; hunting and fishing become frequent once more; relationships are again forged through ritual displays of suffering and compassion; and the central plaza regains its political vitality, as the Boe rehearse the possibility of restoring the village circle as a microcosm of the world. Ultimately, in times of sorrow, the Boe explore and bear witness to their unique ways of forging relationships and making them visible.

What seems particularly striking in the Boe case is the coupling of temporal reflexivity and the affective disposition of grief that becomes magnified into a pervasive (ritual) nostalgia. In lowland South America, the past often appears as a crucial reference for shaping present life. However, in many cases, instead of embodying a nostalgic ideal or a sense of ancestral continuity, it constitutes an undesirable “state of imagined sociality” (Taylor 2007: 156) from which one must actively distance oneself. In certain contexts of reform and prophetism, the creative reconfiguration of the present is predicated on a decisive rejection of past ways of living. Such is the case, for instance, of the reforms initiated by João Tuxaua among the Marubo in the 1930s, which centred on repudiating warfare: “Don’t talk the old talk. Talk my talk. Talk my young [*kani*] talk now. Don’t use the talk of the old ones” (Welper 2009: 175). Similarly, the form of Christianity developed by the Kapon and Pemon peoples characterises certain remnants of the past as Devil-like (*makoi*) thereby positioning them as a contrasting backdrop to forward-facing religious performance (Amaral 2024: 230). In other Western and Northern Amazonian contexts, where deliberate practices of white-becoming are portrayed as central to Indigenous self-perceptions, we also find an image of an undesired past, this time associated with the figure of the “wild Indian”, which lingers in the collective imagination, embodying both a geographically remote other and a temporally distant self against which one must differentiate (Bonilla 2005; Gow 1991; Taylor 2007).

In Amazonian forward-looking modalities of imagining personal and collective becoming, nostalgia appears to have no place. When mentioned, the affect could be more accurately described as melancholia — a retreat from social life driven by a perilous longing for the dead. As Gow observes regarding the peoples of the Bajo

Urubamba, “Only the sick, those lacking vitality and already separated from the processes of life, are open to this nostalgia for the dead” (: 186). Concerning the sterility of nostalgia in that region, Gow (1991: 286; my emphasis) offers a particularly compelling insight:

The native people of the Bajo Urubamba do not see their ancestral cultures as heritable property, but as *weapons for the defence of kinship*. At particular times such weapons may be useless, and are dropped, to be picked up later when circumstances change. This is why native people are so lacking in nostalgia for the ‘authentic culture’ we attribute to their ancestors. The ancestral ‘ancient people’ made contemporary people, but they are now dead and cannot help them. It is the living who must be defended, with whatever comes to hand. Native people fear the loss of their children, not their ‘culture’.

For the Boe, as I have argued throughout this thesis, nostalgia is not a passive sentiment but a generative force imbued with virtual futurity, itself constituting a *weapon for the defence of kinship* my interlocutors have never been willing to drop. Nevertheless, it is essential to bear in mind that we are dealing with Central Brazil, where the ‘vertical’ transmission of identities has traditionally been contrasted in scholarship with the ‘horizontal’ openness to otherness characteristic of most Amazonians (see Viveiros de Castro 1992). Indeed, most documented cases of nostalgia-driven ritual practices and identities are associated with Jê peoples (Packer 2020), the Upper Xingu (Franchetto 2000; Guerreiro 2015; Moiroux & Vienne 2015; Vienne 2011), and Upper Rio Negro groups (Bonomo, forthcoming; Chernela & Leed 2002).

Moreover, the capacity of Boe ritual performances to inscribe a multiplicity of virtual memories that evoke longing in those who witness them appears to be a more widely shared feature across regions where knowledge regimes based on “extended *corpus*” (Fausto et al. 2011) are central — such as Central Brazil and the Upper Rio Negro. As Ewart (2020: 133) observes in relation to Panará rituals, “Sadness is an important aspect of virtually all ceremonial activity”, an emotion produced “by the memory of seeing other ceremonies performed by other people, now dead.” Similar instances have been observed in anecdotal fashion among the Xavante (Graham 1995: 22), Krahô (Packer 2020: 244), Tuyuka (Frignati, pers. comm.), Trumai (Vienne, pers. comm.), and Kawaiweté (Ewart 2013: 133, note 23). However, the Boe have amplified

what appears to be a latent feature of Amerindian ritual conventionality — the ability to simultaneously embed memory and manifest a rupture with the past — to an unprecedented level of complexity, transforming it into the central driving force of their ritual machinery and a vehicle for situating themselves in time.

Still, it would be reductive to establish a typology distinguishing nostalgic from anti-nostalgic peoples in lowland South America. Such temporal orientation tends to be context-bound (ritually or otherwise), coexisting with more future-oriented, white-becoming trajectories. The Boe, as demonstrated in Chapter One, exemplify this temporal pragmatics in remarkable ways. As most contemporary Indigenous populations, they have enacted sweeping reforms, actively experimenting with the possibilities of white-becoming. In doing so, they have reshaped leadership structures, rendered certain rituals obsolete, and widely adopted non-Indigenous cultural and ritual technologies. Still, at other moments, they restore traditional authority, express regret over the excesses of white-becoming, and mourn the perceived loss of Boe knowledge. On the level of collective rituals, the Boe skilfully juxtapose these opposing dispositions, creating the affective, cultural, spatial, and temporal shifts between times of joy and times of sorrow described in Chapter One.

As we have seen, these alternating temporal orientations give rise to different images of the past that evoke contrasting states of imagined sociality. The varying descriptions of the village of the dead reflect this contrast. In Chapter Five, the ancient dead's dwelling was described as a thriving village composed of multiple concentric rings and populated by paradigmatically traditional Boe. Its men's house is said to be the largest ever seen, where all the great chiefs — epitomes of ritual knowledge — gather to sing. Yet it is also a place a living visitor must leave quickly, otherwise they never return to the realm of the living. A reflection on the past seems embedded in this ambivalence. This becomes clearer when juxtaposed with an alternative discourse on the village of the dead, resonant with another depiction of the past: its portrayal as hell or purgatory. When I asked about this association, I was told: “they [the dead] make each other suffer a lot” (eles judiam muito uns dos outros). The expression ‘to make [someone] suffer’ (*roreru*; *judiar*) often describes how the ancients conducted ritual — frequently involving (typically younger) people in painful, strenuous, or risky acts, with little concern for whether participation was voluntary. Many reforms in ritual life aimed

to reduce this suffering: simplifying male initiation, doubling the role of the *recent soul*, abandoning lip piercing during name-giving, making scarification voluntary, and cutting rather than plucking mourners' hair.

As we have seen, suffering is a central trope in the temporal dimension of Barae-becoming: non-Indigenous technologies of kinship-making project the image of a future free of it. Still, suffering is a crucial aspect of *boeness*, being intimately coupled with the compassionate acts that drive Boe ritual life. As discussed in Chapter One, what is ultimately undesirable is cultural stasis and homogeneity — whether in the form of the ruthless world of the ancients or as an irreversible state of *baraeness* — and what is favoured instead is alternation and heterogeneity. The fabric of contemporary Boe life is woven from such disjunctive temporalities. These, however, exist not in abstract 'concepts of time', but rather in rather tangible performances of pastness and futurity.

Still, when enacting the past and the future, the Boe simultaneously affirm the irreducibility of the present. Performing a lost past is not a retreat from the present, but a means of measuring it against particular images of pastness. The relation between past and present, like that between the dead and the living, is not one of identification. Mourning the loss of the old ways does not express a desire to permanently live 'like the ancient ones'. In the tears the Boe shed for culture, we find a double and somewhat paradoxical operation: not only they mourn an irretrievable ideal but they also affirm that they are not — *and must not become* — the ancients; in the same way as that the past must not collapse into the present, the living must not become the dead. Again, by performing the past, the Boe are not retreating from the present, but drawing a line that separates them from the past — they are crafting a temporal disjunction.

This apparent contradiction inherent in Boe ritual nostalgia — mourning a lost past while asserting its irretrievability — closely aligns with the paradoxes embedded in the Boe technologies of making kin with the dead. When, during an *aije* ceremony, a thin straw wall separates the crowd of dead souls approaching a house from the women wailing inside, the act of longing for the dead is performed as severance is reinforced. Similarly, when mothers of souls feed their dead children out of sight, they enact both care and detachment: the helplessness of the *aroe* must be soothed in order to keep the separation between the living and the dead. In essence, the various barriers, whether literal or performative, that the Boe establish between the living and the dead

manifest a form of longing that paradoxically asserts a divide: they can only relate insofar as an irreducible disjunction is kept.

This is a crucial sense in which ritual nostalgia should be understood as both temporal reflexivity and performative act — not merely a mirror that reflects but a knife that cuts through temporal layers. At once gaze and gesture, a sense of loss and decline can be seen as achieving a separation rather than simply reflecting failure. The same logic applies to the performances of *baraeness*. When my interlocutors express dissatisfaction with their own versions of Barae rituals and institutions for not perfectly replicating their exogenous models, they are also enacting a separation. In doing so, they assert that the present *is different from* an envisioned future of pure *baraeness*. Yet these complementary affirmations do not arise from the negation characteristic of dialectical processes; rather, they emerge by bringing states of sociality associated with the past and the future into the very present they affirm as irreducible. With each reiteration, the performative temporalities of *baraeness* and *boeness* are measured against one another, fostering the reassessment of where and how the boundaries between past, present, and future are to be redrawn.

This thesis has shown how, through such performative temporalities, the Boe move beyond the position of passive spectators of history. They experiment with, selectively appropriate, transform, and reflexively evaluate the possibilities and limits of alternative ways of living. As a result, the relationship between past, present, and future resists reduction to linear causality. Instead, pastness and futurity impinge on the present through generative disjunctions, comparisons that at once separate, connect, and transform. While Boe white-becoming rituals are not so intensely marked by competition as Shuar festivals are in Buitron's (2022: 36) account, the Barae similarly emerge as the 'absent others' against whom these performances are measured. When the Barae are *present* as an audience, they elicit performances of cultura tailored to non-Indigenous expectations — including cultural displays and other public events not addressed in this thesis. When *absent*, however, they enable the Boe to internalise *baraeness*, holding its dangers at a distance while experimenting with its political and cultural technologies. In times of sorrow, the Boe, in turn, reflexively portray themselves from the ancients' point of view, measuring themselves against images of previous generations.

This Boe dynamic resonates with broader Amazonian critiques of historicist models of change. Fausto et al. (2016), in their call for “a deflationary account of social change,” renew Fausto & Heckenberger’s (2007: 12-3) critique of Hill (1988: 6-7) and Turner’s (1988) human-centred approach to ‘historical consciousness’. They warn against “a central premise of modern Western society, namely, that society results from a convention between agents who reflexively recognize the human ability to produce social order itself” (Fausto et al. 2016: 44). In response, it is crucial to stress that Boe performative reassessments of the present are not human-centred conventions set against a linear backdrop of time. Rather, it emerges through active processes of rapprochement and differentiation vis-à-vis other given possibilities of living together — possibilities that are experienced relationally, through engagements with beings such as Tupa and the *bope*, the *aroe* and the Barae. In shaping and being shaped by these other agents, the Boe experience the present not as a fixed outcome but a non-totalising field of possibilities, expressed through contrasting temporal orientations, political forms, spatial arrangements, and affective dispositions. In this way, the Boe render, in Chakrabarty’s (2009: 350) words, “not-being-a-totality a constitutional characteristic of the ‘now.’”

This composite present, as lived and shaped by the contemporary Boe, bears the imprint of struggles with forces beyond their control, yet also preserves their capacity to forge pathways into possible futures. Among the many weapons the Boe have taken up and set aside in the defence of kinship across time, their generative aesthetics of loss stand out as among the most effective and enduring. The orphaned generation will now pick up their own weapons. They will likely continue to draw on the time-tested force of longing and compassion, but also on new technologies of Barae knowledge and the uncertain promise of emerging alliances — forging renewed compositions to meet the challenge of sustaining collective life in the eroded landscape of southern Mato Grosso.

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