The Mythic-Ritual System of the Aché Indians of Paraguay in Contact with Dominant Cultures

The Cognitive and Structural Flux and "Willingness" to Become "Civilized"

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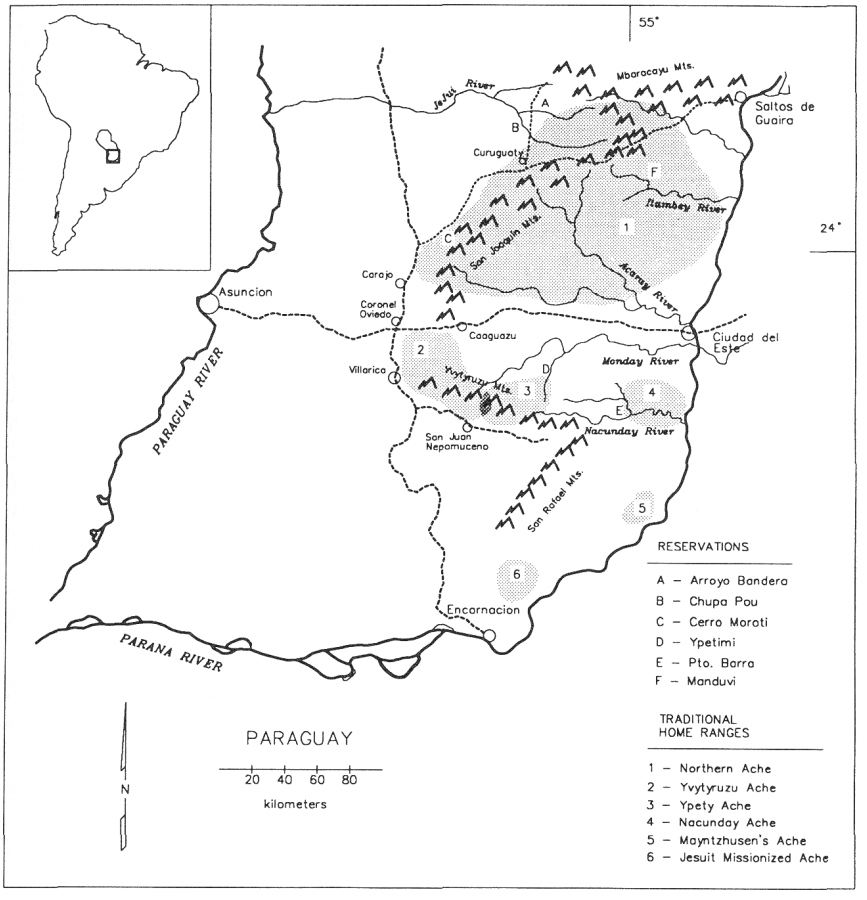
Introduction

The article concerns the process of radical and multifaceted change of the symbolic-ritual system of the Aché Indians of Paraguay over the last 50 years. The concept of "symbolic-ritual system" includes here both the "indigenous sacred way" of the Aché – that is, the pre-contact beliefs and ritual practices that had regulated their economic activities and social relations before they were profoundly affected by dominant Paraguayan, Brazilian, and US-American cultures – and "religion," by which I understand an integrated (but dynamic) complex of beliefs, rituals, and institutional arrangements perceived as an autonomous sphere of social life managed by a specialized group of religious functionaries. In the course of the last five decades, beginning with the late 1950s, the focal point of the Aché symbolic-ritual system shifted from the "sacred way" – which was adjusted to their culture of hunter-gatherers – toward "religion," and specifically, a local version of Protestant-Evangelical Christianity. This process occurred in the context of an intensive rural colonization of their ancestral territory that began toward the end of the 1950s and eventually led to confinement of that once nomadic people to six rural settlements where they undergo today a rapid social and cultural transformation. Pierre Clastres (1998) terms this phenomenon "Aché capitulation." I argue that the "flux" or "openness" of the Aché social structure and the associated cognitive categories, in combination with the progressive decrease of the area of their hunting territory, were the principal factors responsible for that abrupt and seemingly willing adjustment to the dominant cultures.[1]

1 Here, I draw on Peter Lawrence's (1989) study of cultural mechanisms that accounted for emergence and functioning



Map: Historical distribution of the Aché Indians in Paraguay (Hill and Hurtado 1996: 81).

1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my analysis hinges upon Clifford Geertz's (1958) distinction between "causal-functional" and "logical-meaningful" forms of cultural integration. According to Geertz, culture is an integrated system of beliefs, symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments. As such, culture constitutes a "fabric of meaning" used to guide and evaluate human experience. On the other hand, social structure, or a network of ongoing social relations, is the "causal web" of interdependent institutions that contribute to the functioning of the cultural whole (Geertz 1958: 499 ff.). Although both systems are more or less closely adjusted in societies whose structure remains relatively stable over a sufficiently extended time,[2] they cannot be regarded as mere reflexes of one another; rather, being inter-dependent, each of them is integrated in its specific way. Consequently, frictions may easily arise between them, particularly in the situation of an accelerated social change. This is what happened with the socio-cultural system of the Aché Indians at the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s and during the 1970s, and led to the de-emphasis of strictly social and/or territorial ties that bound their hunting bands together in favor of "diffusely ideological" ones (cf. Geertz 1958: 504) in the form of a particular version of Protestant Christianity that they adopted. Religion, indeed any system of symbols, Geertz continues, is an instance of such "logico-meaningful" mode of integration. Its function consists in establishing certain moods and motivations and placing them in a broader network of cosmological and moral conceptions in order to organize individual and social life in face of bafflement, suffering, and so-called "ethical paradox" (the problem of evil). It is particularly important because, as James (quoted by Geertz) put it: "Man can adapt himself to anything his imagination can cope with, but he cannot deal with chaos." In other words, the perennial search for meaning in response to bafflement, pain, and moral evil is what drives people toward religious beliefs and behavior (cf. Geertz 1973: 90 and 99 ff.) or, eventually, toward the substitution of one set of symbols and rituals for another.

of the cargo movement in New Guinea. Similarly, certain elements of Aché foraging culture, in the first place the social and axiological "flux," pervaded their decision to leave the forest and to accept Christianity.

2 Cf. A. F. C. Wallace 1956: 264–281.

2 The Aché-Guayaki: Recent Ethnohistory

The Aché, also termed "Guayaki" in older sources,[3] are one of the four indigenous peoples that inhabit eastern Paraguay.[4] Like their Guarani neighbors, the Aché speak a language that belongs to the Tupi-Guarani linguistic family, although the unique grammatical structure suggests that their originally different tongue was "guaranized" at one point of their ethnohistory. In the mid-twentieth century, they were divided into four territorial sub-groups, or "tribes," each with certain linguistic and cultural differences. The names and distribution of those groups were as follows[5]:

a) Aché Gatu,[6] or Northern Aché – the largest group of about 550 individuals that inhabited the area of about 18.500 sq. km, extending between the highway Asunción-Ciudad del Este, in the south, and the Mbaracayú hills in the north-east;
b) Aché Purã, or Yvyturuzú Aché; they numbered about 60 individuals and inhabited the area of the Yvyturuzú hills extending to the east of the town of Villarica;
c) Aché Ua, or Yñarõ Aché – a small group of about 32 members that lived on the Ypetî river, north-east of the town San Juan Nepomuceno;
d) Aché "Iroiãngi," or Ñacunday Aché – they lived along the middle course of the Ñacunday river; when they were contacted by US-American missionaries (1976), they numbered only 30 individuals.[7]

The Aché Ua and the Aché Purã were permanently contacted by Paraguayans in 1959 and in 1963, respectively. A regular contact with the Northern Aché was established in November 1970. A systematic Christianization of the Aché was initiated in 1978, at the "National Colony of Guayakí" (today Cerro Morotî), and it was conducted by an evangelical missionary organization from the United States. The new religion rapidly spread to other Aché settlements, and specifically to Ypetîmi and Chupá Pou

3 Cf. Metraux and Baldus (1946: 435). The ethnonim *aché* means "people." The term *guayakí* is a derogatory name given to them by the Guaraní.

4 These are (besides the Aché): Guaraní-Avá, Guaraní-Mbyá, and Guaraní-Paî Tavyterã.

5 Cf. Hill and Hurtado (1996: 49).

6 In fact each Aché group denominated itself *gatu*, which means "true" or "genuine" in their language. Here, I give the names of particular groups taking the perspective of the Northern Aché, the largest of all sub-groups of that people.

7 They were named *iroiãngi* ("enemies") by their neighbors, the Aché-Ua ("cannibals") who almost exterminated them in the mid 20th century (cf. Clastres 1998: 311).

that had already been established by that time. The Ñacunday Aché have been Christianized by US-American Baptists at the mission of Puerto Barra. Today, the traditional sacred way of the Aché practically ceased to exist and almost all adult Aché identify themselves with Protestant Christianity. They are led by indigenous religious leaders, and only one foreign missionary, Mr. Bjarne Fostervold of Puerto Barra, is still permanently living among the Aché.

3 Foraging Economy and Social Structure: Flux as the "Organizational Principle" among Hunter-Gatherers

Although the east Paraguayan sub-tropical forest was relatively rich in animal and plant species, only several of them constituted Aché diet. Those resources were highly dispersed, however, and an efficient foraging was possible only within a relatively extended area of the forest. Moreover, as only few edible plants were rich in calories, the hunting provided more than 80% of about 3600 calories that the Aché consumed per capita (Bettinger 1991: 98). This fact had profound economic, social, and ideological consequences. In the first place, as hunting was a male activity, the socio-economic role of hunting men was far more important than that of women (gathering and processing food). The dominant role of men in the Aché society was in turn legitimized and supported by the traditional symbolic-ritual system (Clastres 1972: 167 f.). The high dispersion of foraging resources was also reflected in the social organization of the Aché: they were organized into larger territorial "tribes" that were further divided into several bands – the basic economic and residential units of each tribe. The bands – usually composed of six or seven nuclear families – seldom counted more than 50 individuals. The membership of a band was highly flexible however: in a random sample of about 104 territorial units, studied by Hill and Hurtado, not a single one demonstrated a durable composition of individuals for any extended period of time (1996: 66). Such fluidity, or the structural "flux," is one of the most characteristic cultural traits of foraging peoples[8] which enables them to keep conflicts at a relatively low level: in case of a dispute one of the competing parts may leave and join another band (where they usually have relatives), and in this way the argument does not degenerate into a more disruptive violence (Lee and De Vore 1979: 9).

Secondly, the boundaries between genders have also been "in flux." The Aché identify three gender categories: man (*kimbae*), woman (*kuňa*), and *pané* (biological man who socially functions as a woman). An ideal of manhood, or being a "true man" (*breteté*) among the Aché, has always been to become and to function as a good hunter. Such association was a possible consequence of the heavy reliance on hunting among them. Indeed, successful hunting activities constituted the primary way of establishing and affirming maleness, and the bow and arrows were explicit symbols of masculine sexual parts. On the other hand, a symbolic representation of womanliness was a basket used in foraging activities. The word *pané*, in turn, designates a man who is not a good hunter or who does not hunt at all, and consequently, although biologically a male, he is socially classified as a female. As such, *pané* cannot hunt and he has to subsist on gathering; in this function, he uses a basket, the female emblem, in spite of a strict taboo of even touching baskets by men. In the grid of Aché cognitive categories, a *pané* denotes therefore an "incomplete man." A good rendition of that idea in the Aché language is the word *pan-iã*, the negative form of *pané*, which means "good hunter" (and hence "true man"). The fact of having bad luck in hunting – that is, not bringing a kill to the camp on a particular day – is also commented with the word *pané*. Obviously, it can happen even to a good hunter, but it immediately makes him somewhat suspicious and presents a threat of being degraded to the status of *pané*. In other words, being a "man," and hence a "complete human being" is a status rather than an established ontological condition among the Aché, and one can become *pané* if one does not have enough luck in hunting for a longer time, watches a delivery, touches a basket or consumes his own kill – something that is viewed as an extremely antisocial behavior (Clastres 1998: 201).

Another example of the cognitive flux is what I interpret here as a "blurred" concept of persona, in fact the lack of individual autonomy among the Aché, as manifested in the *pepý* taboo. Although every "complete" Aché man affirms his human (*aché*) identity and status through hunting, he is at the same time under a strict prohibition of consuming his own kill which must be surrendered to the group. A violation of *pepý* is considered a serious threat to the community and means an immediate relegation to the status of *pané*. There were even cases when a good hunter who suddenly lost his luck and became *pané* fell under suspicion of having broken *pepý* and was subsequently killed. The *pepý* taboo causes therefore a total, although reciprocal, depen-

8 Cf. Lee and DeVore 1968: 7; Turnbull 1979: 132; Nanda 1994: 266.

dence of an individual from the group: all hunters are bound by the *pepý* because they rely on each other for survival. In other words, an individual exists, both biologically and socially, only because the group exists. In this way, however, the basic Western distinction between the individual and the world is nullified in the cognitive system of that hunting people. This principle is also valid for nuclear families: by and large they function and survive as components of a broader unit – the foraging band. "If there is a human group," Clastres says, "built as a society upon the institution of a general rule of exchange of economic goods, it is the Guayaki society" (1972: 169).

4 The Pre-Contact Sacred Way of the Aché

The issues of flexible group boundaries, gender categories, and *pepý* taboo should not be viewed separately from the "indigenous sacred way" of the Aché through which those categories and the social praxis is based on them were supported and legitimized. Moreover, the blurriness of cognitive boundaries in Aché culture brings into focus all other important "constants" of their forest life, such as the environment itself and its life-giving qualities ("activated" through hunting),[9] as well as the entire symbolic dimension of their way of life which made their cosmovision "uniquely realistic," and hence sacred (cf. Geertz 1973: 90).

In the first place, the differentiation between "culture" and "nature" among the pre-contact Aché was also ambiguous, or "flexible." Let us consider, for example, the distinction that the Aché made (and still make) between *ové* ("soul") and *eté* ("body-name") as well as the meaning that they give to the concept of *bykua* ("essence of life"). *Ové* is the "spiritual" soul of a person that ascends to the sun (or to heaven) after one's death. The "spiritual soul" is not exclusively a human attribute however, as certain animals, such as armadillos or coatis, are also believed to possess *ové*.[10] The notion of "body-name" has a slightly different connotation. The basic meaning of that word is "body." The Aché identify, for instance, three skin colors: *eté ijú* ("white" or "yellow body"); *eté pirá* ("red" or "light brown body"); and *eté braá* ("black" or dark brown body"). Another meaning of the word *eté* is "name," and it reflects the belief that the individual appellation that every Aché individual has, and which is exclusively the name of an edible animal, gives that person specific, "natural" characteristics of that creature. After one's death, the *eté* does not ascend to the sun but rather takes the bodily form of the animal that it designates. During a hunting expedition with a group of the Aché in 1992,[11] I observed an older woman who cried loudly after a shot deer (*wachú*) had been brought to the campsite. As it was explained to me, the woman was mourning because the *eté* of one of her deceased relatives was *Wachugi* ("The-One-that-Has-the-Nature-of-a-Deer"). Sickness was also interpreted as the "loss of the body-name" (*eté iko-iã*).[12] The Aché myth of origin also points to that primordial unity between animals and humans. In the beginning, the story goes, there existed only certain undifferentiated, ontologically ambiguous beings called *aché pyvé* ("ancient creatures") that were common ancestors of all animals and people, Indians and whites alike. They had human-like bodies and behaved like humans; they also spoke a common language. Those of them who decided to abandon the forest life and to subsist on farming became ancestors of Paraguayans and all other sedentary peoples (Godoy 1982: 13).

The "body-name" cannot be viewed separately from *bykua* – the "essence of life." Again, both notions point to the life-giving constants in the pre-contact "sacred way" of the Aché – nature (forest), hunting, and the dominant social role of hunting men. The *bykua* is the principle of life common to all beings – humans and animals alike. Specifically, a successful hunter (and a "true man"), who is bound by the *pepý* taboo, can offer his kill to a pregnant woman and thus make possible the transfer of *bykua* to the unborn baby. The custom is called *bykuapyré* ("acquisition of nature"). All men who perform *bykua* enter into the godfather relationship with the child and hence become responsible for his/her survival. After the baby is born, the mother chooses the body-name from among the names of animals that were provided to her during the time of her pregnancy (Hill and Hurtado 1996: 67). In other words, the institution of *bykuapyré* makes possible a permanent circulation of the essence of life between the realm of humans and that of animals.

In the pre-contact period, the relation of the Aché to spirits was characterized by fear, avoidance, and ritualized attempts to neutralize their impact upon humans; in general, sacrum was believed to be dangerous. Three spiritual beings were seen as particularly important: *Kre'i*, *Ajãvé*, and *Berendy*. The first of them, *Kre'i*, was imagined as an impersonal spir-

9 Cf. Turnbull 1979: 137.
10 Cadogan 1968: 133.
11 The author worked with the Aché Indians at the missions of Chupá Pou and Ypetîmi in the years 1992–1995.
12 Cadogan 1968: 49.

itual entity that could manifest itself as a shadow or a gust of wind. In fact, the word *kre'i* denotes "cloud" in the Aché language, which also points to certain celestial aspects of that spirit; it was thought of as an ambiguous being that could both heal and harm people. *Ajãvé*, on the other hand, was clearly evil and particularly dangerous: it could push people into fire or knock them out of trees (Hill 1994: 6). Another frightful spiritual being, *Berendy*, was associated with fire, lightning, and falling stars. It was the only spirit that could appear in human form. *Berendy* was also responsible for carrying the spiritual soul (*ové*) of the dead to the sun. Certain Aché even believed that after the death of a person his or her *ové* becomes *Berendy*.[13]

The principle of avoidance and neutralization of spirits extended also upon the souls of the dead. If a dead adult was particularly ugly, mean, or otherwise disliked, or if his/her death was violent, the cadaver was cremated in order to drive out the malicious spirit and to avoid the *jepý* ("vengeance"). It was not an absolute rule among Aché tribes, however. The Aché Ua, for instance, consumed the cooked flesh of their dead and broke open the skulls in order to liberate the vengeful spirit (Clastres 1998: 327). Indeed, the Aché Ua owe their moniker to those endocannibalistic burial practices: the Aché verb *u* means "to eat" and the noun *ua* – "eater."

5 Colonization and Christianization of the Aché

The first reliable information about the religiosity of the Aché was provided by Fr. Lozano, a 17th-century Jesuit missionary, who observed that after their conversion and baptism, they usually became exemplary Christians (Hill and Hurtado 1996: 45). Permanent contact with entire groups of the Aché was established only in the 1930s, however – that is, with the onset of rural colonization of the central regions of Paraguay and the construction of the east-west highway that cut through their territory. These processes affected in the first place the Aché Ua and the Aché Purã who were constantly harassed and killed by settlers as "game animals."[14] Such abusive behavior toward Indians was rooted in the popular Paraguayan belief that not baptized individuals are somehow "incomplete" human beings. The Aché who left the forest in that area settled at the ranch of a Paraguayan farmer, Jesús Manuel Pereira. Shortly afterwards, Pereira received a governmental appointment and funds to operate his private "Indian reservation." In 1968, the establishment was moved northward, to the place called Cerro Morotî, in order to contact and "tame" (as it was then officially termed) the Aché living in that region. The settlement was eventually converted into an official, state-run reservation, the already mentioned National Colony of the Guayaki (*Colonia Nacional Guayakí*). In order to fulfill the purpose of "taming" Indians, J. M. Pereira, the appointed manager of the colony, used to send relatives and friends of the still foraging Aché to the adjacent forest in order to track them down and convince them to walk out to the nearest road, where they were subsequently collected and brought to the reservation. No physical coercion was applied in the process (Hill and Hurtado 1996: 51).

In 1978, however, in the context of the growing international critique voiced by NGOs engaged in the area of human rights and environmental protection, Pereira was dismissed under public accusations of genocide and corruption, and the administration of the reservation passed to the US-American Protestant missionary organization of the "New Tribes" (NTM), founded in 1942. The stated purpose of that association has been to "reach new tribes until the last tribe has been reached" and to teach the Gospel to "those who have never heard it." Its theological doctrine is based on messianic Salvationism and infallibility of the Bible that is interpreted literally and unconditionally accepted. The NTM, whose total membership exceeds 3000, operate about 800 missions all over the world. An important cultural work that NTM agents make is the grammatical standardization of indigenous languages as well as translations and publications of texts, mostly biblical, in local vernaculars.[15] After having taken charge of the reservation in Cerro Morotî, the New Tribes missionaries began their work of conversion of the Aché to Christianity. Their method was based on strong criticism of indigenous beliefs and on a systematic exposure to Protestant rituals, such as singing psalms and preaching (Pytel 1988: 174). On the other hand, they also draw on certain elements of traditional culture, such as the awe-inspiring, "fiery spirit" *Berendy*, and thus inculcated upon Indians the fear of infernal fire and eternal damnation.[16] The New Tribes agents also used the traditional mobility of the Aché for their purposes: soon after the Christianization had been initiated and the first converts had been made (almost exclusively from among the younger generation), the Aché themselves took the new religion to their fellow-tribesmen in other set-

13 Cf. Hill 1994: 6; Cadogan 1968: 96 and 131.
14 Cf. Davis 1988: 29.
15 Cf. New Tribes Missionaries 1996: 28.
16 Cf. Escobar 1988: 30; Pytel 1988: 178.

tlements. As a result, about fifty percent of the entire Aché population became baptized Christians in relatively short time of six years (Hill 1983: 173). As for the other spiritual beings, the belief in *Kre'i* has been completely erased from the Aché symbolic system, while *Ajãvé* became identified with the Christian devil. In general, however, the traditional culture was ridiculed and attacked by the missionaries. For example, typical canticles recounting hunting or amorous exploits were strictly prohibited. Other banned elements were the "body-names" that expressed metaphysical conceptions about the essence of life – they were replaced by Christian names, although today they still function as middle names (Münzel 1976: 35). Consequently, although the New Tribes missionaries did render essential, life-saving services to the Aché, particularly during the transitional period, and made a considerable contribution to the knowledge of the dying Aché language, a dubitable effect of their policy was that the Aché began to think of their indigenous culture and their forest past as something shameful and sinful. In 1993, for instance, the leader of the community of Chupa Pou stated at a meeting of the tribal leadership that before the Aché had lived like animals in the forest but today they know Jesus Christ and hence they are fully human.[17]

Nonetheless, in 1987 the New Tribe Mission was expelled from Cerro Morotî due to a latent conflict that was fueled by the discrepancy between the principle of radical reciprocity of the Aché and the economic individualism of the US-American missionaries. The issue became even more complicated by the fact that certain elements of the Christian doctrine, particularly those emphasizing charity and community of believers, fit very well within the traditionally egalitarian character of a hunting society. The discontentment and disillusionment of the Indians with the New Tribes mission during that period was well expressed by one of Aché leaders who said: "we have always shared our resources. Now we are obliged to sell them. If there is no money, there is no food in Cerro Morotî. Besides, we have to pay for using tractors that belong to the mission; now you have to pay for everything" (Mbywangui 1988: 201).

6 Towards an Indigenous Aché Christianity

A direct missionary presence of the NTM among the Aché lasted only ten years (1978–1987). Still, they succeeded in converting almost all members of that small ethnic group to their version of Christianity. Today, the Aché consider themselves *creyentes* (Evangelical Christians). In all Aché settlements, even those once operated by the Catholic Church (Chupá Pou and Ypetîmi),[18] native preachers gather their communities for Sunday services that last about two hours. A service consists primarily of preaching on a selected passage from the Guarani version of the New Testament, commonly used in Paraguay by both Catholics and Protestants, and singing religious songs (translated by NTM missionaries) in Aché and Paraguayan Guarani. The first complete Aché translation of the New Testament became available only in 2013. Interestingly, although the designated community preacher is the central figure at the assembly, theoretically each participant, no matter if man or woman, feels free to preach and frequently does this.

Still, in spite of having opted for a Protestant version of Christianity, which became an important component of their new identity, the Aché demonstrate an ecumenical spirit and experiment with various form of the Christian religion, including Catholicism, which perhaps points once again to their traditional "cognitive flexibility." During a meeting of Aché Christian religious leaders in Puerto Barra, in 1993, one of them stated for instance: "No matter who preaches the Gospel to us, what really matters is the Gospel itself."[19] The community of Ypetîmi, where I worked, is a case in point: although a Catholic mission was located there, other Christian preachers were also allowed to speak at Sunday services. Furthermore, a Brazilian Pentecostal lay missionary started regular work in Ypetîmi and he even built a chapel for the community. During that period, the Aché demonstrated an increased religious fervor and gathered for long services almost every day, neglecting their daily chores. The culmination of that time of tension was a meeting during which the Indians criticized the Catholic mission for what they viewed as mission's insufficient assistance in the economic field. The religious idiom was used in this case to express profound anxieties about the future of the community, in the context of the rapidly changing economic and social landscape produced by neoliberal reforms in Paraguay of the 1990s.[20]

17 Personal observation.

18 The Catholic Church, represented by the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), terminated its permanent presence among the Aché, and specifically in the communities of Ypetîmi and Chupá Pou, in the years 2002 and 2010 respectively.

19 Personal communication

20 Neoliberal reforms were initiated with the accession of Paraguay to Mercosur in 1991.

7 Why Did the Aché Abandon Their Traditional "Sacred Way"? – A Conclusion

The "Aché capitulation" or the relative rapidity with which they abandoned the forest life and adopted the dominant culture (including Christianity), raises questions about reasons that prompted that decision. Certain external developments, such as the deforestation and the rural colonization of the Aché territory, along with the conflicts with colonists and new diseases that appeared even in distant forest campsites were certainly important factors at play. However, I would also like to point to internal, or cultural, motives for the apparent "cultural suicide" of that indigenous people, and specifically to the flux, or "openness" of their cognitive and social categories.

In the first place, in spite of the relative isolation and not infrequent hostilities among the Aché "tribes," most members of neighboring groups were in fact relatives. Several Aché Gatu and Aché Purã, for instance, were full siblings. In the light of this fact, one can plausibly argue that the Aché who left the forest in 1959 and settled on Pereira's ranch, and later at the reservation in Cerro Morotî, actually did that with the intention of visiting relatives. Such behavior certainly fit within the pattern of high Aché inter-band mobility, which was, in turn, facilitated by the relative fluidity of band membership. Even today, in the situation of sedentary life, they frequently move from one hut to another at least once a year, while the abandoned place is occupied by another family. Secondly, some authors also point to the fact that in the situation of the gradual loss of territory and deforestation, which destroyed the precarious biological balance that guaranteed the acquisition of just a sufficient amount of calories, they were in fact willing to establish a peaceful modus vivendi with Paraguayans (Hill and Hurtado 1996: 52). Looking for a meaning of that experience, some Aché even explained it in terms of their traditional mythology, and specifically the myth of origin, according to which the Aché and Paraguayans have common primordial ancestors (*aché pyvé*). They even designated Paraguayans with the term *jamó* ("relatives"). Still, Paraguayans stem from those *aché pyvé* who were lazy and stingy, and that is why they did not want to share their goods with forest Indians, reacting violently whenever the latter came to their villages. Later, when the process of rural colonization of the Aché territory accelerated, Paraguayans even began to be associated with the malicious *Berendy*. However, the traditional corpus concerning that fiery, lightening-like spirit became now enriched by stories about *Berendy* firing arms at the Aché or having the eyes resembling the lights of trucks used to transport captured Indians (Godoy 1982: 17). Finally, in the context of the rapidly progressing deforestation of east Paraguay, which seriously affected the traditional subsistence strategies of the Aché, younger men began to question the authority of older hunting males and certain tribal customs, such as *tõmombú* (ritual club-fight) that provided social legitimization of that leadership. The generational conflict became even more acute at the reservation where young individuals promptly adopted new customs, religion, technology, and language, and used the newly acquired power to their personal advantage.[21]

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21 Cf. Hill 1983: 156; Hill and Hurtado 1996: 53.

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Resource Management and the Development of *Homo*

The Long March toward Farming

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It is undeniable that the development of farming in a number of places, and the domestication of different animals at the same time, mark a pivotal point in the history of *Homo*, but there is a danger of obscuring the developmental processes that led to this point if too much emphasis is put on the endpoint. There is most definitely a point at which humans can be said to be farmers and a long period of time before this point during which they cannot be said to be farmers, but not being farmers does not mean that *Homo* was disorganised and/or a poor resource manager. On the contrary, it can be effectively argued that *Homo* has been on the trajectory toward an increasingly sophisticated resource management for at least two million years. The first two factors that help *Homo* to develop the ability to manage resources were fire and time, both of which opened the door to other developments in resource management. Once *Homo* learned how to control fire and manage time, environmental extractive efficiency and human resource management acquired the necessary foundations to develop. Human resource management must develop once extractive efficiency increases because a population that has access to more resources has to discipline itself in order to manage the environment, along with controlling the size of the population living off the environment, so that resource exploitation does not lead to an environmental and/or population collapse. Appearance and development of all other typically (though perhaps not exclusively) human facilities, such as erect bipedalism, technology, language, serial monogamy, food sharing, female ovulatory crypsis (Lovejoy 2009), colletive parenting, prolonged childhood, body decorations, art, and hierarchical social structure, are natural consequences of resource management initiating and maintaining a set of self-amplifying feedbacks (Bielicki 1969; Henneberg 1992). Such ongoing development has only recently begun to falter as the rise of individualism has had a deleterious impact on human relations and resource management.

Resource Management in Early *Homo*

Numerous attributes distinguishing humans from animals have been so far proposed: Aristotle mentioned the antero-posteriorly flattened chest and relatively large brain; Abrahamic religions proposed an immortal soul; other authors pointed to the use of language (Burke 1966) and tools (Oakley 1962), to unusual encephalisation (e.g., Jerison 1973; Martin 1998), etc. Today most palaeoanthropologists agree that the prime distinguishing characteristic of the human tribe (*Hominini*) is erect bipedalism (Lovejoy et al. 2009). It can be argued, however, that all these characteristics are static and isolated traits that identify human uniqueness rather than functional entities explaining this uniqueness. Within mammals, functional uniqueness of humans can be defined as sustained management of multivariate resources. Such dynamic entity can explain