

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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