

ON *-ACĀRÁJAI* AND COMPARISON: TRANSFORMATIONS FROM AYOREO ETHNOGRAPHY

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*The comparing instance is not itself outside of
the field of what it compares, but the real
upshot of comparison is precisely to situate my
kind of knowledge in other variants of itself*

- Patrice Maniglier

ABSTRACT: Social anthropologists have long appreciated the notion of comparison as an important conceptual tool in the discipline. In this paper I ponder the meanings implicit to an Ayoreo (a Zamucoan speaking group living in Paraguayan Chaco) notion of ‘comparison’ through the idiom of what they describe as *-acārājai* and the sets of transformations it enacts. In proposing that Ayoreo ontology is inherently comparative, the aim of this article is not just to provide an ethnographic account of different contexts of Ayoreo lived world, be that as it may, but also to optimistically present a daunting task to an anthropological way of thinking about the notion of comparison. By addressing a question on how we can experience ethnographically how the differences compared by Ayoreo people are themselves differently comparing and redefining everything as their variants, I attempt to list similarities and dissimilarities between the concept of *-acārājai* and the anthropological notion of comparison and they appeared to me through my own comparative/ethnographic apparatus and to raise awareness of misunderstandings between them, to redefine our own way of making identities and differences through the notion of comparison by defining it by its differential relations to the notion of *-acārājai*. For it, this paper examines how one intellectual object twists the other and how the background from which each one of them emerge are placed on the same footing, in a manner that *-acārājai* and comparison are reciprocally constitutive of each other.

KEYWORDS: Comparison; Chaco; Social Philosophy

I. PROLOGUE: ON DIFFERENT MODES OF COMPARISON

The theme of comparison has long occupied an important place in the history of anthropological theory. The idea of comparison, central to ethnography since its inception in the eighteenth century, constitutes the core of the discipline and structures it as inherently comparative. As Margaret Mead (1955) reminded us long ago, "every single statement an anthropologist makes is a comparative statement" - yet in the particular case of the discipline, the fact that it is built around both the idea of comparison and its method has led it to produce more versions of the comparative method over the years than any other discipline (Candea 2019, p.3), and to borrow, transform, and reimagine comparative devices from almost everyone else. In and of itself, "anthropological comparison," as Candea has called it, has been a concentrated experiment in the multiplication of a method, a natural experiment in comparatism.

Crucially, however, as Meyer (2017) notes, since the 1970s the comparative method in social anthropology has been subjected to severe criticism for its aim of determining general laws and valid statements across the board. Paradoxically, there has been a retreat from what might seem to be a process of combining new elements under new rules, with the notion of comparison being put back on the agenda of social anthropology's interests. Anthropologists such as Holy (1987), Fox and Gingrich (2002), and Kuper (2002) have challenged a hegemonic and mechanistic notion of comparison in their studies, arguing that it has been replaced by different styles of comparison and strengthening the argument for multiple comparisons by emphasizing that the increasing demand for comparative research has proven productive for ethnographers (Gad & Jensen 2016).

While comparison was seen as inescapably intrinsic to social anthropology's research practices¹, the main question pinpointed by these authors, as Meyer (2017) has pointed out, the key issue these authors identified was how to deploy it as a critical project. This implied both a critique of comparison as it is carried out

¹ As Van der Veer (2016, p.7) has argued, "there is no escape from comparison when we deal with "other societies" as historical sociologists or anthropologists, since we are always already translating into Western languages what we find elsewhere, using concepts that are derived from Western historical experience to interpret other societies and other histories". Therewith, as Van der Veer had suggested, comparison is a question of raising awareness of the conceptual difficulties in entering "other" life world and opening radically new ways of understanding reality.

in different arenas, as well as an undertaking to compare differently by exploring how the idea of comparison can be used critically to advance understanding in radically different worlds (Meyer idem). A comprehensive assessment of the concept of comparison should include the comparative practices of the people who participate in our ethnographic conversations, through which they establish similarities and differences, identities and alterities in the multiple scenarios in which people constitute their lived worlds by jointly occupying them with different forms of alterity (Meyer idem, Van der Veer 2016).

In this paper, I address the meanings implicit in an Ayoreo (a Zamuco-speaking group living in the Paraguayan Chaco) notion of 'comparison' through the idiom of what they describe as *-acãrãjai* and the sets of transformations it enacts. Based on my fieldwork in the village of Tiogai, located on the right bank of the upper Paraguay River, this article focuses on building on the argument that while a Euro-American mode of comparison proceeds by comparing different types of cultural representations of a single world, understood as the virtual focus of different conceptual versions of social anthropology (Viveiros de Castro 2004, p. 7), Ayoreo women and men, through the idea of *-acãrãjai*, compare different types of bodies and peoples, so that the comparative relation itself (the way in which they differ from each other) plays an essential role both in the constitution of entities and in the structure of the Ayoreo "lived world" (Gow 2001) that gives shape to everyday practices.

In this regard, I suggest that Ayoreo ontology (like other Amerindian cosmologies) is inherently comparative in such a way that the contrast between two ontologically distinct entities is not an obstacle to comparison, but a precondition for establishing relationships between different types of bodies. One focus of this article, then, is to draw attention to the fact that while the anthropological notion of comparison is generally limited to the set of similarities that constitute the "lowest common denominator of societies" (Salmon 2013: 8), the Ayoreo idea of *-acãrãjai* presupposes difference and transformation as conditions for connecting different types of subjects.

In exploring an Ayoreo concept of comparison in this way, the aim of this article is not only to provide an ethnographic account of different contexts of the Ayoreo lived world, however that may be, but also, optimistically, to present a daunting task for an anthropological way of thinking about the concept of

comparison. Rather than attempting to use a single concept of comparison to compare an Ayoreo way of comparing with a Euro-American one, I will try to rethink comparison in terms of the relationship between the transformations of this concept that I can recover on the basis of the modulation of forms of comparison. One implication of this is that comparison will be considered here as a kind of totality whose identity is defined by the way it could be different. By positing my argument here in this way, I also suggest that different concepts of comparison share a number of properties, but differ on a sociocosmological basis and vary through their mutual ambiguities (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2004).

Moreover, from this perspective, I move partially into the terrain explored by Caroline Humphrey (2016), who offered a powerful insight into a non-European way of doing comparison by using Mongolian ontological categories, values, and means of conceiving and establishing cosmological relations, and by configuring Mongolian people as theoretical agents (rather than passive subjects of culture) so that they are able to reflect on what kind of theory they have produced. In this case, however, I seek to build on Humphrey's use of indigenous conceptual apparatus by adding that, in the case of the Ayoreo, transformation and continuity are intrinsic to the notion of *-acārājai*, which has its source in an aspect under which each being in relation is recognized as an aspect of the other.

In entering this terrain, I proceed through a thought experiment with Ayoreo ethnography, underpinned by asking the following question: how can we ethnographically experience how the differences Ayoreo people compare are themselves different, comparing and redefining everything as their variants. In doing so, I aim to show that the real result of anthropological comparison (Maniglier 2016) is to situate and redefine the knowledge produced by the concept of comparison in social anthropology through its relations to different forms of itself. I aim to do this both by experiencing an Ayoreo comparative apparatus through my own anthropological conceptual repertoire, attached to a Euro-American epistemic tradition, listing the similarities and dissimilarities between them, and by labeling the two comparative apparatuses in relation to each other.

Therefore, in this paper I will try to list the similarities and dissimilarities between the concept of *-acārājai* and the anthropological notion of comparison, as they appeared to me through my own comparative/ethnographic apparatus. By drawing attention to the ambiguities (Viveiros de Castro 2004) and raising

awareness of the misunderstandings between them, I will attempt to redefine our own way of making identities and differences through the notion of comparison by defining it through its differential relations to an Ayoreo notion of comparison. To do so, I will attempt to examine how one intellectual object distorts the other, and how the backgrounds from which each emerges are equated, so that *-acãrájai* and comparison are mutually constitutive. In this respect, rather than offering as a form of conclusion a precarious and naive interpretation of an image of Ayoreo thought through the concept of (as if concepts were mental attributes), my aim now is to elaborate on Roy Wagner's suggestion that "every understanding of another culture is an experiment with our own" (Wagner 1981) by suggesting that any possible understanding of an indigenous concept is ancillary to our ability to experience with our own conceptual repertoire.

Before fully exploring these arguments, let us consider some important facts about Ayoreo sociality

2. -ACÃRÁJAI

In October 2012, during part of my fieldwork on the right bank of the upper Paraguay River, I lived in the village of Tiogai in a one-person camping tent set up in the domestic courtyard of a very old shaman couple with whom I spent a considerable amount of time living and participating in their daily lives, helping them with daily activities when I could. While living with them, I spent most of my days with Kikome (Kuisi's wife) and her extended family and clan relatives, talking to them in both Spanish and Ayoreo about whatever interested them most, collecting their stories and impressions of the changes that had occurred in the course of their lives since contact with the *cojñone*, the white people, and answering their many questions about myself, my family, and the place from which I came.

These conversations and the context in which they took place were essential to my research, as I was able to record most of them and take notes on the topics discussed. This was always done at the request of Kikome's relatives, who often amused themselves by coming to my tent at the end of the day to listen to the files I had previously recorded on my computer, or to ask to see and browse through my notebooks, during which they habitually said: "You need more. There's much more you can learn from us and take back to your country."

One hot afternoon in Tiogai, I sat by a tree in Kikome's home courtyard, drinking *tereré*, smoking cigarettes, and chatting with Peebi, one of Kikome's sons (a man of about 45 who also happened to be the current leader of the village), his wife Ajoté, Kikome, her husband Kuisi, and Ajoté's mother, Uguijña.

As we sat drinking *tereré* and talking about a recent fishing festival in the Brazilian town of Porto Murtinho, which brought together people from different countries and included unusual competitions such as a boat race and a river swimming contest, the conversation suddenly turned to a long recollection of leaders (Ayoreo: *dacasuté*) from the past and the results of the changes that occurred when the Ayoreo people left the Salesian mission of Puerto María Auxiliadora and began living in the region downriver, closer to the cities and the white people (Ayoreo: *cojñone*).

According to these stories told to me in Ayoreo and in Spanish about past leadership styles (which immediately seemed to me to be related to several other stories I had been told on numerous other occasions, and which were also said to be typical of "el tiempo de los-abuelos", "the time of the grandparents", From the experience of the first contact with the *cojñone*, the new ways in which the Ayoreo people of the upper Paraguay River region interacted with various outsiders were mediated by the existence of new forces, such as money and disease. The same narratives I heard from Kikome's extended relatives offered a glimpse of a system of relations through which leaders of the past engaged with different types of outsiders, and which involved the maintenance and transformation of good relations with co-residents.

Peebi told me that Ayoreo *dacasuté* of the past had a strong aversion to war, and might even kill people from their own group to avoid having to lead people in war. These leaders, who played the dual roles of moral authorities and political figureheads who guided people from their villages, were generally expected to be trustworthy and hardworking titular heads who tended to form groups and keep them together by coordinating collective activities, giving opinions on group issues, and mediating relations with various types of outsiders. Nevertheless, *dacasuté* leaders of the past were also humorously described by Ajoté as "unlucky hunters": leaders of the past, constantly in the dual position of mediating relations both with co-resident insiders and with enemies and potential affines coming from outside, were characterized as beings who "never had time to hunt," so that

the people of a village often felt obliged to support them with honey, the leg of a wild pig, or a piece of anteater back.

It is worth noting that this was narrated by Peebi and Ajoté in stark contrast to an image of the Ayoreo people's contemporary lived world, characterized by the idea that relations both inside and outside were mediated by the existence of new classes of diseases, forms of wealth, and outsiders that did not exist before. Peebi told me the following, now in Ayoreo, to make this point:

"It feels like we have collided. Money did not exist in our world before. Things got mixed, and that mixing led to change. You see? I tell you. Everything has changed. Mom and Dad always say, "If our grandmothers and grandfathers lived here in this world, near the river, they wouldn't change their world in the forest for anything. They always say that things were much better in the past. There were a lot of wars with people from other local groups, but at the same time we have a lot of conflicts now with hunters and land buyers. In the past, when our people lived in the forest, there were no diseases. Our bodies were different. People could die if they were attacked by a jaguar or bitten by a snake, but no one would ever die of a cough, fever, pneumonia, cancer... Life was easier with this kind of body. The *cojñones* [white people] began to invade our territory, and everything became worse. Now we are fragile. Owners of fragile and frightened bodies."

When explaining these multiple processes of transformations made possible through different forms of relations with different types of people and extended to a notion of body and to the way both a *dacasuté* and people from the village relate to different outsiders as they transitioned from living in the forest to residing in a mission and, later, in villages closer to towns and to the river bank, Peebi seemed to me to be examining and starkly contrasting, among his kinsfolk in his mom's domestic patio, two dissimilar lived worlds and conditions of being to establish dissimilarities between them. The image of this evaluation of two different states of affairs by determining their relevant characteristics to be contrasted and by designating how each set of circumstances of each lived world are different to the other was evoked by Peebi by the idea of *-acãrãjai*.

At the time, I understood the notion of *-acãrãjai* to be something like an Ayoreo version of what Gow (1991, p. 285) called "history," stating that it corresponded to the "narrative of the creation of contemporary kinship and the source of indigenous response to new situations," as if the idea of *-acãrãjai* corresponded to a response to the disjuncture between modes of kinship that appear in different forms constitutive of two different types of bodies and modes

of kinship that could be understood as historical transformations (Gow 2001, Hewlett 2013).

Later it was made clear to me that the term *-acãrájai* was also used in other contexts. I was told of two other uses of *-acãrájai*. One referred to the relationship between a body and its image (a shadow, a photograph, a drawing, etc.) and the other to the distinction between mythical times and contemporary life on the Paraguay River. Often, I was given some examples to help me see what the idea of *-acãrájai* could mean, as if the interior of the "historical" aspect of this notion were brought to light by others, as if each additional context of this notion revealed its further implications - but the implications themselves were made only by their attachment.

In any case, one of the most powerful of these examples came one early morning from Peebi's 9-year-old daughter (who was, in my personal opinion, a very talented artist herself) in response to my complaints about her constant requests for crayons and blank pages from my field journals. Once she was sitting at Kikome's door, busy making various drawings with the paper and crayons she had previously taken from my things. Later she came to my tent with one of the drawings she had just made.

At first glance, I could see a huge man in a tiny house, and I did not ask her enthusiastically what she had drawn. She laughingly said, "You!". Since I could not see any possible resemblance at first glance, I ventured that it could be either because she was teasing me or because of what had happened in the last few days, during which I had spent most of the day in my tent recovering from a severe intestinal infection. I was curious and wanted to know more about the drawing. "It does not have to be identical to you. It is like you, *-acãrájai*, but here, in the paper. You know when you are out in the sun and you see your shadow? It is you there, but on the ground. You are *-acãrájai* to each other. Or on the photos you take of us. We are there, but we live on your camera," she said.

Later that day, I told Kikome what had happened, and she remarked that the same thing is said to happen to the body of a deceased person. Among the Ayoreo, the individual is composed of a *pibai*, an *oregaté*, and an *ayipié*, a physical (living) body, a vital pulsation of the body (*ayipié*), and a soul/image (*oregaté*) endowed with form and agency. Toi, death, is said to cause the disappearance of the *ayipié* and the decomposition of the person into different elements. One of

these is called *ígosi*, "corpse," and is known to the Ayoreo as the only element of the body that rots after being buried in a bush or on a path away from the village. For the Ayoreo, this period of decomposition also corresponds to the time when the village disperses into the forest. This is because, as some Tiogai people claim, the place of a person's grave is the place where the *oregaté* rises. The notion of *oregaté* refers to a corporeal image that, once encountered apart from the body (temporarily or not), leads an autonomous existence as a living repetition of the person. Once permanently separated from the body, the *oregaté* transforms the living *pibai* into a dead *ígosi* and divides itself into a ghost that appears at the grave site, robbing things and scaring the former inhabitants, and a soul emancipated from the corpse that descends into a subterranean domain called *jnaropié*.

According to some shamans active in 2013 and living in the Tiogai and Guidaichai villages, although this subterranean realm corresponds to the world of the living Ayoreo and life there reproduces the earthly *modus vivendi*, it is not entirely identical. *Jnaropié* is said to have an *oregaté* village, a forest, and a river. But unlike what happens in the terrestrial realm, the river in *Jnaropié* is said to flow backwards, the forest of this subterranean world is said to be denser, with much taller trees with thicker trunks, and the houses of the *oregaté* village are said to look like giant armadillo burrows

After death and the escape of the *oregaté* from the *ígosi*, it is carried by a pair of armadillos through a tunnel to the portal of *Jnaropié*, where the newcomer is received by *Pitoríngai*, the chief of the *oregaté* village, and is painted by one of his assistants with white clay in a pattern of thick and rough lines and fed a black fruit called *adi*. From then on, the *oregaté*, whose appearance is reminiscent of the living person, begins to age. An important feature of the *oregaté's* new aging process is that it culminates in the suffering of a new death and transformation of the *oregaté's* physical aspect. Accordingly, Ayoreo shamans say that at the second death, the deceased *oregaté* again disintegrates into two elements. A new *ígosi*, which is immediately buried in the terrestrial realm by the two armadillos that previously guided the new *oregaté*, and another *oregaté*, which, once freed from the corpse, rises in the terrestrial realm as an animal of its own clan.

Because the term *-acãrájai* was used to explain how the *oregaté* relates to the physical body, and how the *oregaté* of the *oregaté* further relates to the *ígosi*, it acknowledged that it is associated with the relationship between two kinds of

existence.

Just as the *pibai* and the *oregaté* are simultaneously in and through themselves and in and through the other, the *oregaté* is in and through itself and in and through its own *oregaté*. In this use of the notion of *-acãrájai* and in the relationship between one kind of being and the other, the existential reality of one can be transferred to the other through a change in the ontological condition of a being. While, under the aegis of the concept of *-acãrájai*, the *pibai* figures both as an independent matter of existence and as a being related to its own kin, the *oregaté* in *Jnaropié* plays the role of a mode of being absolute in its existence and the part of a matter related to the physical body. For its part, then, this use of the idea of *-acãrájai* suggests a kind of "plurimodal existence" (Souriau 2015) realized through the approximation of different modes of existence, as if through the idea of *-acãrájai* Ayoreo people discovered existential variations in which different modes of existence take an operative part in this relationship.

While attempting to comprehend this, I encountered an issue: how is the original portrayal of *-acãrájai* as a plurimodal existence, which compared various types of existence through perceiving existential differences, related to the conceptualization of *-acãrájai* as 'history' and its acknowledgment of the separation between the modes of relating of different bodies, which can be viewed as historical transformations? I understood that the utilization of *-acãrájai* in both cases, either as an idea or for comparative purposes, illustrated that diverse modes of existence were not an inherent aspect of existence itself but were rather recognized as existing between different types of bodies and living conditions.

The concept of compared existence (*-acãrájai*) was also observed in a distinct but comparable social context. During my fieldwork, I collected narratives regarding the models of social organization and the modes of relatedness expressed by the Ayoreo people towards animals considered beautiful (*omeja*), powerful (*ujopiéje*), or angry (*tagu dejode*). I observed that this supplementary form was also present in those stories.

According to the stories I collected from various Ayoreo villages in the upper Paraguay river region, animals that the Ayoreo people classified as *omeja*, *ujopiéje*, or *tagu dejode* live in households and cohabit with other conjugal pairs and a 'core' couple within a domestic group called *jogasui*. In these stories, the social

life of animals is often described as intensely active on the domestic patio of the core couple - which was seen as the place where everyday practices occurred, indicating a strong cooperation between a diverse set of related and unrelated animals who engage in various activities in different ways.

These descriptions reveal that animals affiliate at specific moments with political intentions in larger social units, which consist of a leader who expands smaller, kin-based social units to wider networks that are not based on kinship. It is as if animal leaders create extra sociality, converting kinship 'energy' into alliance formations between animals from different species and domestic groups. Times of warfare play a significant role in connecting animals from different species and domestic groups into a single wide network, unified for a common goal, thereby revealing an animal village on its largest scale. This occurs outside the contexts in which an animal leader has prominence as a generator of extra sociality. Led by a group of leaders, animals go to bloody wars against their enemies.

According to the depiction of animal warfare, the killers fight until their opponents are defeated, beheading them and taking possible captives to their leader's domestic group. Moreover, capturing enemies during conflicts wasn't depicted as an ultimate goal. Multiple accounts describe animal social life in Tiogai and other villages, where *omeja*, *ujopieje*, and *tagu dejode* animals and with time, the community assimilates war captives into their own social and political relationships, resulting in an increase in physical and social proximity, made possible by cohabiting and having meals together. Overtime, these captives come to be considered 'real people,' eventually integrating into their captor's clan through real and socio-political affinity relationships to gain 'true' being status.

It is essential to note that animal sociality and the units that regulate it were not portrayed as equivalent to human sociality and Ayoreo people social units. Instead, they were modulated under a different ontological framework. Although 'true humans' and *omeja*, *ujopieje*, and *tagu dejode* animals were mentioned as living in domestic groups and joining forces under specific conditions in large villages - potentially for securing a leader and war enemies - the portrayal did not depict two indistinguishable modes of relatedness and existence that are layered over each other. Instead, the description I had was that of a relationship between two heterogeneous worlds determined based on the concept of *-acãrãjai*. This became

apparent during my fieldwork, which involved Ayoreo people's observations on the perspectival standpoint revolving around the enemies' position that was exchanged between Ayoreo humans and *omeja*, *ujopieje*, and *tagu dejode* animals. Specifically, the descriptions that intrigued me the most were the aspects concerning the relationship between a group and their possible enemies - particularly, a perspectival tension revolving around who can be considered an enemy (*namosorade*) by whom.

Based on descriptions provided by senior individuals from Tiogai and other villages (Guidaichai and Punta), pre-Salesian missionary-era Ayoreo people classified potential *namosorade* into four categories: These categories include: (1) Ayoreo killers aligned to other villages and local groups, (2) Nivaclé warriors, (3) White people (*cojñone*), and (4) jaguars, *omeja*, *ujopieje* and *tagu dejode* animals. Conventionally, these entities classify animals from different species as their *namosorade*, along with unbridled human hunters whose activity they view as warfare. For instance, jaguars consider flies (thought to be their arch-enemies) and Ayoreo people as potential *namosorade*. Similarly, in the same context, macaws and howler monkeys regard human hunters as generic figures of enmity who continually wage battles to seize their bodily adornments.

It is important to note that according to Ayoreo hunters, hunting expeditions, often viewed as warfare from an animal perspective, require precautions to control the number of prey killed. This is because unbridled hunters risk being captured by animals and transformed into their war captives. In addition, Ayoreo hunters suggest that determined hunting expeditions have a higher likelihood of unwanted events happening compared to other hunting expeditions. For instance, although peccaries are the most common prey for Ayoreo people, hunting them is a high-risk activity since they are deemed violent and vengeful animals. Peccaries do not hesitate to capture unbridled hunters and transform them into captives.

According to the accounts of individuals from Tiogai, Guidaichai, and Punta who have described aspects of peccary hunting expeditions, a hunter who becomes a captive of a peccary domestic group is taken to the central couple, who are the 'owners' of the domestic group's patio. There, the captive will undergo a ritualistic adoption and become a member of the clan associated with the domestic group's central couple.

The captive hunter, previously disguised as a peccary, plays a crucial role in performing daily tasks within a domestic group. They are responsible for activities such as harvesting gardens, fetching water for the central couple, collecting and chopping firewood, and preparing meals for the conjugal pair, which leads to numerous exchanges. These exchanges are important elements of peccary social interaction. As the captive hunter integrates into their new kin through relations and bonding activities such as smoking, drinking *tereré*, and feeding alongside peccaries, they become a prospective leader of an animal village. Their body undergoes shape changes and begins to resemble that of a peccary. However, this apparent similarity between the hunter and their new peccary relatives is deemed incomplete, as only the head of the captive hunter retains its original shape despite the transformation of the rest of their body.

It is crucial to observe that the use of *-acãrájai* does not suggest that humans and peccaries experience the same event differently. Instead, it indicates two parallel events - one being the human hunt and the other the attack on peccaries by their enemies, experienced in their respective parallel dimensions. One event involves humans hunting peccaries while the other event involves peccaries being attacked by their enemies. Although these events are correlated, they do not refer to what we know as 'nature' under the Euro-American perspective. Instead, they refer to two parallel and simultaneous events that are interconnected.

By presenting this usage of the *-acãrájai* concept, I aim to highlight that the shift from being a hunter to becoming the leader of an animal species does not represent a human leadership model being imposed upon the social life of animals. It is evident from this specific application of the *-acãrájai* concept that the former human peccary did not aggregate relationships into a unified network as a human leader would and neither did it as a typical peccary would. Since his new animal form partially supplants his prior human perspective, it also enhances his capacity to lead politically within a wider network of relationships.

3. EXCHANGEABILITY OF CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES

Until now, I have used my ethnographic description as a starting point to understand what the people from Tiogai communicated to me under the term *-acãrájai*. Until now, I have endeavored to take Viveiros de Castro's (2011a, p.113) call seriously, which urges anthropologists to genuinely understand the people

they study. Based on my own experiences as an ethnographer and as a reader of anthropological theory, I utilized my imagination to identify how an indigenous community conceptualizes the implications of the term *-acãrãjai* in their reality and objectively determine what it elicits. This is especially critical as I proceed with my thought experiment that relies on accepting the Ayoreo notion of *-acãrãjai* as a concept (Viveiros de Castro 2002) and examining the ramifications of that decision. It includes conceiving the idea of comparison, as can be inferred from the virtuality of the mutual misunderstandings, and situating different versions of that notion in specific relationships with one another.

At this point, I have an understanding of the role of comparison in both social anthropology and the ethnographic description of *-acãrãjai* across various contexts within the Ayoreo lived world. One way to begin is with the concept of 'comparison'. Firstly, it involves recognizing the similarities in the way each mode of comparison attempts to depict dissimilar phenomena and understanding the connection between specific phenomena and the categories utilized to categorize similarities and differences. Additionally, it requires acknowledging that each comparative system structures distinct relationships differently from one another.

The Euro-American understanding of comparison in social anthropology works by comparing collective kinds, which are roughly conceptualized as species in natural sciences. Both these approaches involve the issue of translation and the impossibility to measure or compare using the same metric (Handler 2009). However, regarding the notion of *-acãrãjai*, relevant parameters include perceived existential variations and comparison between ontologically distinct categories of existence. Considering the comparative relationship and resemblance between these two modes of comparative analysis, I observe that anthropological comparison occurs via two interdependent approaches (Candea 2016). The first involves contrasting entities that are intrinsically different in form, while the second focuses on comparing entities that are conventionally of the same kind. The concept *-acãrãjai* functions as a response to disconnect between modes of relating, manifesting in distinct forms that constitute different forms of relatedness which could be regarded as historical transformations.

Furthermore, in anthropological comparison, differences are identified between two domains (which includes the perspective that identifies them). This is relevant because the concepts cross a landscape that consists of entities, and the entities both bound and rebound. The *-acãrãjai* notion, however, displays a

plurivocal multiplicity in which different modes of existence coexist in an entangled manner (each mode eclipsing the other to appear). However, each mode of existence possesses a specific ontological pattern that does not overlap other modes. Similarly, the anthropological notion of comparison maintains a 'breaking point' position by barely addressing the outline of contrasted entities, and its inherent inability to do so without a pluralist framework. However, Ayoreo people refer to the assemblage of ontological categories that are specific to each mode of existence by using *-acãrãjai*. The superimposition of modes of existence causes distortions and epistemic category mistakes, as each mode of existence has its own unique ontology.

However, it is crucial to ask: how can we understand the potential ambiguities between comparison and *-acãrãjai* regarding their manifestations?

In my opinion, the most appropriate method to distinguish between them is based on how they form identities and differences. While, as suggested by Candea (2016), anthropological comparison consists of two intertwined modes and a dual relationship between entities (symmetrical or asymmetrical), the concept of *-acãrãjai* presents a contrast because it can produce mutually interchangeable terms that counteract hierarchies by cutting across previously defined ontological categories.

For instance, we can better understand the deconstruction of a dual relationship through the concept of *-acãrãjai* when comparing various types of existence and calling them 'history,' which shows that distinct modes of existence cannot be compared by relying on a substance that is common to all of them, and each mode is just a minor deviation from the other. Furthermore, by providing the ability to create an assembly of ontological categories that are tailored to each mode of existence.

I suggest that the ethnographic definition of *-acãrãjai* as the possession of a specific ontological pattern by each mode of existence forms a complex comparative system that bypasses ontological boundaries. In this system, each role is reciprocal and interchangeable. However, the transformation and overlaying of the modes of existence lead to changes in perspective according to Viveiros de Castro (1996). Furthermore, I am suggesting that by avoiding dualism and participating in processes of becoming, the comparative dispositive of *-acãrãjai* enhances communication between ontologically different modes of

existence and facilitates multiple points of view to express meanings while traversing different ontologies.

This indigenous take on the anthropological concept of comparison relates to the ongoing epistemological debate about the traditional differentiation between nature and culture, and the associated criticism suggesting that such a standard dissociation cannot adequately describe the internal realms of non-western cosmologies without first undergoing a thorough ethnographic critique.

As argued by Viveiros de Castro (2015), this critique proposes that we should not only rearrange the predicates found in the two paradigmatic sets that are commonly believed to represent opposing concepts (as well as other contents related to their Western counterparts), but also modify our conceptual framework by ethnographically-informed reconfiguration. This critique has significant implications for understanding the concept of *-acãrãjai* as a tool for comparison. As a modulation of the anthropological concept of comparison, *-acãrãjai* leads us to suggest that one of its key dimensions concerns the contrast between being and becoming, and the relative and relational/perspectival statuses of subject and object.

Viveiros de Castro (2015) demonstrated that a perspective does not entail an object's representation by subjects but denotes a relation between subjects. Following the same line of reasoning, I maintain that *-acãrãjai's* usage illuminates a plurality of voices, representing different modes of existence that are interwoven in such a way that each mode of existence eclipses the other to appear. To clarify, I venture into the next domain, suggesting that *-acãrãjai* withdraws from existence as a representation and transcendence with respect to a single mode of existence. Instead, it involves converging various modes of existence beyond a particular 'lived world' (Gow 2001) that defines a specific mode of existence.

Compared to other forms of comparison, the concept of *-acãrãjai* suggests that its central aspect involves the contrast between being and becoming as well as between subject and object, from a relative and relational/perspectival standpoint. As Viveiros de Castro (2015) demonstrated, perspective isn't solely a subject's representation of an object, but also the interrelation of subjects with each other. Similarly, I assert that the use of the comparative technique *-acãrãjai* serves to illuminate the contrast with anthropological comparison by separating forms given as representation and transcendence concerning a single mode of

existence, while converging multiple modes of existence beyond a solitary “lived world” (Gow 2001), where each unique mode of existence is situated, and is exclusively defined by them.

This brings me to a final point before reaching a conclusion. The matter requiring discussion is inspired by the questions recently raised by Patrice Maniglier (2016). How can the differences and similarities I previously outlined assist us in comprehending what is at stake for a general idea of comparison? The shift in focus onto the comparison between the two comparative devices causes us to be at a crossroad between the lack and excess of similarities between my conceptual repertoire and the Ayoreo conceptual repertoire.

A possible concern is the apparent lack of similarity between anthropological comparison and *-acãrãjai*, which could imply that the two concepts are entirely distinct. Upon closer examination of this potential lack of similarity, I acknowledge that, from this perspective, this case is not particularly noteworthy, as the absence of connections between dissimilar conceptual repertoires implies that one cannot be designated as the other. Alternatively, it could also be a concern that these two comparative instruments match each other to a greater extent than desired, in that the differences expressed in one are in line with those expressed in the other.

I am not naive, and the purpose of this thought experiment was never to promote or suggest the possibility of a contentious and prolonged union between the various methods used by the people I am studying to create a recognizable comparison. Instead of achieving a bilingual reference work by giving an account of the lived world, in which I can find many significant aspects to help me gain new impressions and opinions, the purpose of my argument in this paper is to introduce a coherent comparative tool that momentarily diverts our focus away from a dyadic and totalizing mode of comparison.

In conclusion, it is acknowledged that both it's time for indigenous peoples to provide theoretical clarity to concepts and that the systematicity of my comparative mechanism results from the systematicity of the variations between different modes of comparison. *-Acãrãjai* is useful as a reflective prompt because it carries far less anthropological orthodoxy than conceptual content, allowing a broader array of comparisons to be included when filling in the content without the problem of certain forms slipping through the cracks. In fact, there are not

two sets of comparisons at stake here, but three: the Ayoreo, the Western, and my own. Shifting focus onto various comparative devices creates a shadow composed of modes of comparison. Switching perspectives again is not only enabled but also necessitated by this shadow in order to bring to light the details of a concept as well as its shadow. Avoiding each of these comparative abstractions provides a view of the epistemic processes by which epistemic tools are recontextualized and unsettled through the use of a comparative epistemology to compare this set of connections with the other.

The *-acãrãjai* can provide thorough scrutiny of the non-human factors in the politics of associating ontologically distinct concepts in anthropological comparison. The *-acãrãjai* introduces the concept of becoming into the field of anthropological comparison, where identity and representation typically reign supreme. The unapparent yet eerie correlation between both varieties would generate analyses that consider the cosmopolitical aspects of Amerindian comparative idiom and the limitations of the traditional social anthropological notion of comparison.

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