PART VI

The Bororo
Corumba, the gateway to Bolivia, lies facing Porto Esperança, on the right bank of the Rio Paraguay. Jules Verne might have imagined it: perched as it is on the top of a limestone cliff that overhangs the river. One or two little paddle-steamers (two storeys of cabins, a hull low in the water, a flimsy smoke-stack) were tied up, canoes all around them, to the quay whence mounted the path to Corumba. One or two buildings, at the outset, seemed disproportionately large: the Customs house, for instance, and the arsenal, which harked back to the time when the Rio Paraguay was the precarious frontier between States that had recently acquired their independence and were in a ferment of youthful ambition. And, also in those distant times, a mass of traffic had once passed up and down the river between Rio de la Plata and the interior.

When the path got to the top of the cliff it ran along its crest for a couple of hundred yards and then turned sharply to the right. Corumba was revealed: a long street of low, flat-roofed houses, roughly painted in white or beige. At the far end was a square where grass grew among casalpiniae that had acid green leaves and orange flowers; beyond, the stony countryside stretched as far as the hills that closed off the horizon.

There was only one hotel, and it was always full. A few rooms were to be had in private houses; but these were on the ground floor, damp with the dampness of the marshes, and haunted by bugs that turned the traveller into a modern variant of an early Christian martyr. The food, too, was execrable: the countryside being too poor, or too little cultivated, to meet the needs of the two or three thousand people—sedentary workers or travellers—who made up the population of Corumba. Prices were absurdly high, and the town had a look of frenzied animation which contrasted with the flat, deserted, spongy hinterland on the far side of the river. The atmosphere of Corumba
was such as must have reigned, a century earlier, in the pioneer towns of California or the Far West. In the evenings the entire population would assemble on the cliff-road. The young men would sit, legs dangling, on the balustrade, while the girls filed past, whispering, in groups of three or four. It had an air of ritual, this solemn nuptial parade, in the light of the flickering electric lamps, with three hundred miles of marshland all around and ostrich and boa to be found even at the gates of the town.

Corumba is, as the crow flies, a bare two hundred and fifty miles from Cuiaba. I witnessed the development of air travel between the two towns—from the little four-seaters that bumped their way across in a matter of two or three hours to the twelve-seater Junkers of 1938–9. But in 1935 the river was still the only means of travel, and the two hundred and fifty miles were doubled by the river’s meanderings. During the rainy season it took eight days to reach the capital of the State; in the dry season it could be three weeks, so often did the steamers run aground, for all their shallow draught. Whole days were lost in the attempt to refloat the vessel, with the motor pulling its hardest on a cable tied to a stout tree on the bank. In the office of the shipping company a beguiling poster was to be found: on the opposite page is a rough transcription of its lay-out and style. The reality, needless to say, was very different.

And yet what a marvellous journey that was! Passengers were few: cattle-farmers and their families on their way back to their animals; a few Lebanese commercial travellers; some soldiers, garrison-bound; and a sprinkling of provincial officials. No sooner were these people on board than they changed, one and all, into the clothes which, for them, corresponded to a beach-suit: striped pyjamas (silk ones, where dandies were in question), through which much of their hairy persons could be glimpsed, and slippers. Twice a day we all sat down to a never-changing menu: a dish of rice, another of black beans, and a third of parched manioc flour; with these there went invariably a helping of beef, fresh or dried. This was called feijoada, after the feijão, or bean. To this daily pabulum my companions brought a critical sense as keen—and this was saying much—as their appetites. The feijoada would be pronounced muito boa (first-class) one day and muito ruim (disgusting) the next. When it came to the dessert (cream cheese and fruit jelly, eaten together from the sharp end of the knife) their vocabulary was even more restricted: it either was, or was not, bem doce (sweet enough).
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Every twenty miles or so the ship stopped to take on wood; and if need be the halt was extended to two or three hours while the cook went off into the fields, lassoed a cow, cut its throat, and (with the help of the crew) skinned it. It was then hoisted on board and we set off again with several days’ guaranteed provision of fresh meat.

For the rest of the time the ship steamed quietly along the narrow, winding river; it was said to be ‘negotiating’ the estirões—counting off, that is to say, the sections of the river which were bounded by corners sharp enough to cut off the view ahead. Sometimes the river wound round itself so completely that nightfall would find the ship only a few dozen yards from where it had started in the morning. Often, too, the boat would brush against the branches of the half-submerged forest that hung over the bank, while the sound of the engine made birds beyond number take wing: araras in a flash of blue, red, and gold; cormorants whose long necks were like winged snakes; parrots and parakeets whose loud cries were sufficiently like those of human beings for us to call them ‘inhuman’. Prolonged study of a spectacle so monotonous and so near at hand induced in the traveller a sort of torpor, and only rarely was our interest quickened by something more unusual: a pair of deer or tapirs, swimming across the river; a cascavel (rattle-snake) or a giboya (python) as it came wriggling to the surface, light as a straw; or a group of jacarés—inoffensive crocodiles that we soon wearied of despatching with a carbine bullet straight in the eye. Fishing for piranhas was more eventful; somewhere along the river was a large saladeiro where meat hung drying from a sort of gibbet. Bones were strewn on the ground beneath wooden racks; on these lay the purplish remains above which vultures hovered. The river was stained red for several hundred yards below the slaughter-house. We had only to throw a line overboard and, before even the unbaited hook had reached the surface of the water, piranha after piranha, drunk with blood, would leap forward and hang its golden lozenge on the hook. But the fisherman had to be careful how he handled his catch; the piranha can sever a finger at a single snap.

After the junction of the São Lourenço—on the upper reaches of which we shall shortly travel to encounter the Bororo—the pantanal disappeared. The landscape to either side became one of grassy savannah. More houses began to appear, and herds could be seen grazing.

There was not much to draw Cuiaba to the traveller’s attention: a paved ramp that ran down into the water, and above it the silhouette
of the former arsenal. Thence a road bordered with countrified houses ran for more than a mile to the square where the cathedral stood, pink and white, between two rows of palm-trees. To the left, the Bishop’s palace; to the right, the Governor’s. At the corner of the main street was the inn—the only one, at that time—kept by a fat Lebanese.

I’ve described Goiâma; and if I were to go on about Cuiâba I could only repeat myself. The site is not so beautiful, but the town has the same sort of charm, with its austere houses, half cottage, half palace in style. As the site is sharply accented the upper windows usually have an extended view: white houses roofed with orange tiles, the fronds and foliage of the gardens, or *quintaes*. Around the central L-shaped square a network of alleyways reminds one of the colonial cities of the eighteenth century. Follow any one of them and you will come upon a patch of dead ground that serves for the caravan-trains, or an adumbrated avenue of mangoes and banana-trees with one or two mud huts among them; and then, in no time at all, the open country, with pasturing herds of oxen on their way to or from the *sertão*.

Cuiâba was founded in the middle of the eighteenth century. Towards 1720 Paulist explorers—*bandeirantes* was their name—penetrated the region for the first time and set up a little outpost, with a handful of colonists, only a few miles from where Cuiâba stands today. The territory was inhabited by Cuiâpo Indians, some of whom agreed to help till the soil. One day a colonist, the aptly named Miguel Sutil, sent a small party of Indians to look for wild honey. They came back that same evening with their hands full of nuggets of gold that they had picked up off the ground. Sutil didn’t waste a moment, but set off at once, with a companion named Barbudo—‘the bearded one’—to the area in question. And within a month they got together five tons of gold-nuggets.

And so it’s not surprising that parts of the country round Cuiâba look like a battlefield. Mound after mound, covered with brushwood and rough grass, bears witness to ancient frenzies. Even today a Cuiâbano has been known to turn up a nugget of gold in his vegetable-patch. Gold is, in fact, always present in paillette form. The beggars of Cuiâba are ‘gold-diggers’ in the literal sense, and you can see them at work in the bed of the river that runs through the lower town. A day’s exertions will bring them just enough to buy a meal, and in many shops in Cuiâba you can still find the little pair of scales which measures off a spoonful of powdered gold against a cut of meat or a pound of rice. Any heavy rainfall will send the water tumbling down the
ravines, and at such times you will see the children rush out, ball of wax in hand, and plunge it into the current in the hope that tiny sparkling particles of gold will stick to it. The Cuiabanas claim that a rich seam of gold passes beneath their city at a depth of several yards; just below the modest premises of the Bank of Brazil there is more gold, they say, than is ever to be found in its old-fashioned safes.

Cuiaba has retained from its days of glory a style of life that is slow and ceremonious. The traveller's first day is taken up entirely with comings and goings across the square which separates the hotel from the palace of government. First, he leaves a card in token of his arrival; an hour later the compliment will be returned by the A.D.C., a moustached constable; after the siesta which paralyses the entire city from noon till four in the afternoon the traveller pays his respects to the Governor. The anthropologist receives a polite but unenthusiastic welcome. The Indians are, for the Governor, an irritating reminder that he himself has fallen out of favour, politically speaking, and been banished to a remote and backward area. The Bishop feels much the same; but I mustn't suppose, he tells me, that the Indians are as stupid and aggressive as one might think; why, one Bororo woman had actually been converted! And the Diamantino brothers had managed, after an unending struggle, to turn three Paressis into quite presentable carpenters! And as far as scholarship was concerned the missionaries had already taken note of all that was worth preserving. Did I realize that the unlettered officials of the Protection Service wrote 'Bororo' with an accent on the last vowel, whereas Father So-and-So had established a good twenty years earlier that it should fall on the middle one? And the fact that the Bororo knew of the Deluge was a sure sign that the Lord did not mean them to remain damned till the end of time. I was free to go among them, of course; but he did hope that I would do nothing to jeopardize the Fathers in their work. No trivial presents! No necklaces or hand-mirrors! Nothing but an axe or two, to remind those lazy creatures that work was sacred.

These formalities once discharged, one could get on to serious matters. Day after day would go by in the back-rooms of the Lebanese traders—turcos, they were called—who were half wholesalers and half usurers. Their stock of hardware, textiles, and medical goods was destined to dozen upon dozen of relations, clients, and protégés, who would buy on credit, take a canoe or a few oxen, and extort what they could from customers marooned deep in the bush or in some distant bend of the river. Life was as hard for the travelling trader as it was for
his victim; but at least the trader could afford to retire after twenty or thirty years.

Or I would spend hour upon hour at the baker's, while he was preparing *bolachas* by the sackful. (*Bolachas* are loaves made with unleavened flour that has been thickened with fat; they are hard as stone, but the oven gives them a marrowy quality, and when they have been shaken into small pieces on the road and impregnated with the sweat of the oxen they finish up as a form of food for which it is difficult to find a name: and as rancid, certainly, as the dried meat from the butcher.) Our butcher at Cuiaba was a natural dreamer, by the way, and all his thoughts were fixed upon an ambition unlikely ever to be realized: that a circus should visit Cuiaba in his lifetime. He would have loved to see an elephant: 'So much meat!...

And then there were two Frenchmen, the brothers B. Though Corsican by origin, they had lived in Cuiaba for a good many years: why, they didn't say. They spoke their mother-tongue with a distant, sing-song hesitation. They had been egret-hunters before turning to the garage trade; and they described their technique, which was to lay on the ground a series of cornets made of white paper. The egret, fascinated by a whiteness as dazzling as his own, would come down and thrust his beak into one of the cornets; thus blinded, he offered an easy prey, and during the mating season his beautiful feathers could be plucked out of the living flesh. Many a wardrobe in Cuiaba was full of such feathers, for which there was no longer any demand. The two brothers then turned to diamond-hunting. Eventually they set up a garage and specialized in fitting out heavy lorries with merchandise. These they launched as once men launched galleons across uncharted seas; both lorry and cargo might end up at the bottom of a ravine or a river, but there was also the possibility that they might get safely to their destination, in which case a profit of four hundred per cent would make up for earlier losses. I often travelled by lorry across the Cuiaba territory. On the day before departure we took on a special provision of petrol, bearing in mind that we needed enough for the entire journey from base back to base and that most of it would be covered in first or second gear. Next we packed our food, and our camping materials, in such a way that the passengers could take shelter in case of a rainstorm. On the inner walls of the lorry we hung all our jacks of tools, together with planks and rope to improvise a bridge where necessary. At dawn on the next day we climbed the cargo, as we might have climbed a camel, and took
our seats. The lorry began its quavering progress. By midday our
difficulties had begun: the road was flooded or swampy and had to be
paved with logs. I've spent three whole days in that way: laying and re-
laying a 'floor' of logs just twice the lorry's length until at last we were
out of the wet. Or else we ran into sand and had to stuff leaves and
branches under the wheels. Even where the bridges were intact we had
to unload everything, before the lorry could be coaxed across the
rickety structure, and then to reload on the far side. Where a bush-
fire had destroyed the bridge we set up our camp and built another.
But as we couldn't leave it there—the planks were too precious—we
had to dismantle the whole structure before going on our way. Finally,
we had to reckon with the major rivers: these could be crossed only on
rude ferry-boats made up of three canoes laid side by side. The lorry,
even unloaded, weighted these right down to the gunwale; and often
we got to the other side only to find that the bank was too steep, or
too muddy, for us to climb it. In such cases we had to improvise a
'road', sometimes for hundreds of yards, until we came to a better
landing-point, or a ford.

The men whose profession it was to drive these lorries were on the
road for weeks and even for months on end. They worked in pairs:
the driver and his assistant, the one at the wheel, the other on the
running-board, looking out for trouble. They had always a carbine to
hand, for often a tapir or a deer would pull up, intrigued rather than
frightened, in their path. They would shoot on sight and, if the shot
went well, they pulled up for the rest of the day. The prize had to be
skinned, gutted, and cut up into thin strips of meat, much as one peels
a potato in a spiral right through to the centre. These strips of meat
were then rubbed with a mixture, kept always ready for this purpose,
of pepper, salt, and crushed garlic. They were then laid in the sun for
several hours, and on the following day, and for several days after, the
process was repeated. The resulting carne de sol was not so delicious as
the carne de vento, which was dried on a tall stick in the wind, when sun
was lacking; also it did not keep so long.

These superb drivers led a strange existence: ready at any moment
to carry out the most delicate repairs, and ready too to improvise the
very road on which they were to drive, they sometimes had to stick
it out for weeks on end in the bush at the point where their lorry came
to grief. Eventually one of their rivals would pass that way and take
the news to Cuiaba; and at Cuiaba they would order the missing part
from Rio or Sao Paulo. Meanwhile the driver and his mate would
camp out, and hunt, and do their washing, and sleep it all off, and have patience. The best of my own drivers was a fugitive from justice; he never mentioned what he had done, but people in Cuiaba knew of it. No one ever gave him away, however; when it came to a dangerous run he was irreplaceable, and by the daily venturing of his own he life was thought to have paid, and paid liberally, for the life he had taken.

It was still dark when we left Cuiaba at four in the morning. The eye guessed at the churches, stucco-decorated over every inch of their height; the lorry bumped its way along the last streets, paved with pebbles and bordered with clipped mango-trees. The natural spacing of the trees gave the savannah an orchardy look, even when we were already well out in the bush, but before long the track became so rough as to leave us in no doubt that we had left 'civilization' behind. Up it climbed, above the river, winding along stony slopes with often a ravine or a muddy river-bed, overgrown with capoeira, to call for our attention. When we had climbed to a certain height we noticed a long thin pinkish shape on the horizon. It couldn't be the dawn, because it never varied in shape or texture, and yet for a long time we couldn't believe it was quite real. But after some four hours on the road we cleared a rocky hillside and were confronted with a vaster, more explicit perspective; from north to south a red wall ran six to nine hundred feet above the green hills. To the north it gradually subsided into the flatlands; but towards the south, where we were approaching, certain details were discernible. What had previously seemed unbroken was seen to have subsidiary features; narrow platforms, jutting prow-like balconies. Redoubts and defiles diversified the long barrier of stone. It would take the lorry several hours to climb the ramp—uncorrected, almost, by Man—which ends at the upper edge of the chapada of the Mato Grosso and allows us to penetrate the six or seven hundred miles of plateau, the chapadão, which runs very gently down towards the north and ends in the basin of the Amazon.

A new world was revealed to us. Rough grass, milky-green in colour, never quite concealed the underlying sand, itself white, pinkish, or ochre, which had resulted from the superficial decomposition of the underlying sandstone. The vegetation consisted merely of a few scattered shrubs, knotted and gnarled, which were protected from the dry season, which lasts for seven months of the year, by a thick bark, varnished leaves, and prickles. Yet a few days' rain could transform this desert of a savannah into a garden; the grass turned bright green and trees were soon covered with white and mauve flowers. But the
dominant impression remained one of immensity. So uniform is the texture of the country and so gradual its inclination that the horizon is pushed back for ten or twenty miles. You can motor for hours in a landscape that never changes; today’s prospect and yesterday’s are so alike, in fact, that memory and perception are blended in an obsession with immobility. Such is the uniformity of the scene, such the absence of landmarks, that one ends by mistaking the horizon-line for cloud as it hangs high up in the sky. Yet the scene is too fantastic to be called monotonous. From time to time the lorry traverses a water-course which does not so much cross the plateau—since it has no banks—as inundate it at certain seasons of the year. It is as if this area—one of the most ancient in the world: a still-intact fragment of the continent of Gondwana which once united Brazil to Africa—were still too young for its rivers to have had time to hollow out their beds.

In European landscape it is the form which is exact and the light which is diffused. Here the ‘traditional’ roles of earth and sky are reversed; clouds build up into forms of extreme extravagance, whereas the earth below remains milk-white and undefined. Shape and volume are the sky’s prerogatives; the earth is formless and insubstantial.

One evening we called a halt not far from a garimpo, or colony of diamond-hunters. Before long shadowy figures appeared round our fire: garimpeiros in rags who drew forth little tubes of bamboo and emptied their contents into our hands: rough diamonds, these, which they hoped to sell to us. But the B. brothers had told me a good deal about the ways of the garimpo and I knew that there could be no question, in all this, of a bargain. For the garimpo has its unwritten laws and they are faithfully observed.

These men divide up into two categories: adventurers and men on the run. The second group is the more numerous, and this is doubtless why defections from the garimpo are few. Those who ‘got there first’ have control of the river-beds in which the work is done. As they have not resources enough to wait for the ‘killing’—a rarity, in any event—they organize themselves in bands. Each of these is led by a self-styled ‘Captain’ or ‘Engineer’; this leader has to have enough capital to arm his men, equip them with the essentials of their trade—iron sieve, wash-trough, diver’s helmet, air-pump—and, above all, feed them regularly. In exchange his men undertake not to sell his finds except to authorized dealers (themselves working in association with the big Dutch or British diamond-firms) and to share the proceeds with their leader.
If they have to be armed, it is not only to ward off the menace of rival bands. Until quite lately, and sometimes even now, it was to keep the police at bay. The diamond-zone formed, in fact, a state within the State, and the one was often at war with the other. In 1935 we constantly heard of the war waged by the Engineer Morbeck and his bravoes, the valentões, against the State Police of the Mato Grosso. This had ended in a compromise. It must be said in defence of the rebels that the garimpeiro who was taken prisoner by the police rarely reached Cuiaba alive. One famous leader, Captain Arnaldo, was captured with his second-in-command. They were tied by the neck at the top of a tall tree, with their feet resting on a little board; and when they overbalanced from exhaustion they were left to hang.

So strictly are the ‘laws’ observed that at Lageado or Poxoreu, the centres of the garimpo, you can often see, in the inns, a table covered with diamonds that have been momentarily left behind by their owners. No sooner is a stone found than it is identified by its shape and colour and size. Such is the exactitude of these details, and such their emotional charge, that even years afterwards the lucky finder can distinguish each diamond from its fellows. ‘When I looked at it,’ one of my visitors said to me, ‘it was as if the Holy Virgin had dropped a tear into my hand . . . ’ But the stones are not always so pure: often they are found in their atde and it’s impossible to judge of their eventual value. The authorized buyer makes known his price (he is said to ‘weigh’ the diamond) and that price is final. Only when the grinder gets to work will the upshot of the speculation be known.

I asked if people didn’t try to evade the regulations. ‘Of course. But it never works.’ A diamond offered to another buyer, or offered behind the leader’s back, will be immediately ‘burnt’: queimado. That is to say that the buyer will offer a derisory price; and that price will get lower and lower with each subsequent attempt. So it is that the garimpeiro who tries to break the law can end by dying of hunger with a diamond in his hand.

Once the diamonds are sold it’s a very different matter. Fozzi the Syrian is said to have grown rich by buying impure diamonds on the cheap, heating them on a Primus stove, and plunging them into a colour-bath; this gives the yellow diamond a more tempting surface and earns it the name of pintado, or painted diamond.

Another form of fraud is practised at a higher level. At Cuiaba and at Campo Grande I knew of men who made a living by evading the
duty on diamonds destined for export. These professional smugglers were full of stories: of the imitation packets of cigarettes, for instance, that they would toss casually into the bushes if the police caught up with them, and the anxiety with which they would go back to look for them as soon as they were free to do so.

But that particular evening the talk around the camp-fire turned on the everyday hazards to which our visitors were exposed. I learnt, too, something of the picturesque language of the seridão. To render the English pronoun *one*, for instance, they have an immensely varied assortment of terms: *o homem*, the man; *o camarada*, the comrade; *o collega*, the colleague; *o negro*, the negro; *o tal*, so-and-so; *o fulano*, the fellow; and so on. As bad luck would have it, someone had just found gold in his wash-trough. This augurs ill for the diamond-hunter, whose only reaction is to throw it back into the river at once. (Weeks of ill fortune must otherwise follow.) Another hunter had been wounded by the tail of a poisonous skate. This was a hurt not easily cured, for he had to find a woman who would consent to undress and pass water on the wound. As the few women in the *garimpo* are nearly all peasant prostitutes this ingenuous remedy often brings in its train a particularly virulent form of syphilis.

It's the legendary 'stroke of luck' that draws these women to the area. The prospector may become rich overnight; and, if he does, his police record will force him to spend the money then and there. That's why the lorries lumber to and fro with their load of superfluous goods. The moment the cargo arrives at the *garimpo* it will be snapped up at no matter what price; not necessity, but the wish to show off, will be the motive. At first light, before we moved off, I called on a *camarada* in his little hut on the edge of the insect-infested river, only to find that he was already at work in his old-fashioned diver's helmet, scraping away at the bed of the stream. The inside of the hut was as wretched and as depressing as its site; but the man's mistress showed me with pride his twelve suits of clothes and her own silk dresses: the termites were feeding well upon them.

The night had been spent in singing and make-believe. Each of those present was invited to do a turn: something remembered, in most cases, from a distant evening at the music-halls. I found the same practice on the Indian frontier when minor officials met to dine together. In both cases monologues were welcome—or 'caricatures', as they were called in India—imitations, that is to say, of the noise made by a typewriter, or a motor-cycle misfiring, or, by strange
contrast, a fairy-ballet and, in quick succession, a galloping horse. And, finally, a session of ‘funny faces’.

I noted down, from this evening with the garimpeiros, some snatches of a traditional lament. It was the song of a private soldier who complained to his corporal of the food served to him; the corporal passes on the complaint to the sergeant, the sergeant to the subaltern, and so on from subaltern to captain, major, colonel, general, emperor . . . The emperor passes it on to Jesus Christ; and Jesus, instead of passing it to God the Father, takes up his pen and consigns the whole lot of them to hell. Here is a little sample of this song of the sertão:

O Soldado . . .

O Offerece . . .

O Sargento que era um homem pertinente
Pego na penn, escreveu pro seu tenente

O Tenente que era homem muito bão
Pego na penn, escreveu pro Capitão

O Capitão que era homem dos melhor’
Pego na penn, escreveu pro Major

O Major que era homem como é
Pega na penn, escreveu pro Coroné’

O Coroné que era homem sem igual
Pego na penn, escreveu pro General

O General que era homem superior
Pego na penn, escreveu pro Imperador

O Imperador . . .
Pego na penn, escreveu pra Jesu’ Christo

Jesu’ Christo que e filho de Padre Eterno
Pego na penn et mando todos pros inferno

Yet they hadn’t really much heart for the fun. The sands had been yielding fewer and fewer diamonds for quite some time, and the area
was infested with malaria, leshmaniosis, and ankylostomiasis. Yellow fever had begun to appear a year or two before. And where once four lorries had made the journey every week, there were now, at most, two or three a month.

The ‘road’ we were about to embark on had been abandoned when bush-fires had destroyed all the bridges. It was three years since a lorry had ventured along it. No one knew at all in what state it could be; but if we got to São Lourenço we’d be safe. There was a big garimpo on the river-bank, and we’d find there everything we could wish for: provisions, men, and canoes to take us as far as the Bororo villages of the Rio Vermelho, which is a tributary of the São Lourenço.

I really don’t know how we got through. The journey remains in my mind like a confused nightmare; endless camping-out while we cut our way through a few troublesome yards, loading and unloading, and points at which we were so exhausted by having to lay the road, plank by plank and length by length, that we fell asleep on the bare ground, only to be woken in the middle of the night by a strange persistent muttering beneath us: that of the termites as they set about the siege of our clothes. Already they formed a compact, wriggling mass on the outside of the rubberized capes which served us both as raincoats and as improvised rugs. But at last the morning came when we trundled downhill towards the São Lourenço, still thick with valley-mist. Convinced that we’d accomplished a really extraordinary feat, we announced our arrival with repeated blasts on our horn. But not so much as a child came to meet us and all we could find on the river’s edge were four or five deserted huts. Not a soul to be seen: and a rapid inspection satisfied us that the hamlet had been abandoned.

Our nerves were in shreds after the efforts of the previous few days; we felt near to despair. Should we give the whole thing up? We decided to make a last effort before turning back; each of us would start off in a different direction and explore the outskirts of the village. Towards evening we returned empty-handed—all save the driver, who had found a family of fisherfolk and brought back the head of the family with him. Bearded, and with the unhealthily white skin of someone who had been too long in the water, he told us that the yellow fever had come to the village some six months earlier. Those few who survived it had scattered; but if we made upstream we should find one or two people and an extra canoe. Would he come with us? Certainly: for months he and his family had lived entirely on fish from the river. The Indians would provide him with manioc and tobacco plants, and
we would give him a little money. On this understanding he would guarantee us a supplementary boatman; we could pick him up en route.

I shall have occasion to describe other boat-trips that I remember better than the one in question. I shall therefore say only that it took us eight days to work our way upstream, the river being swollen by the rains. Once when we were lunching on a little sandbank we heard the rustling movement of a boa, seven yards long, that we had awakened with our talk. It took a lot of lead to kill it; for the boa cares nothing for body-wounds: the head alone is vulnerable. When we came to skin it—it took us half a day—we found a dozen little boas, already alive and on the point of being born. The sun killed them off. And then one day, just after we'd shot an itara—a sort of badger—we saw two naked forms waving to us from the bank. These were our first Bororo. We tied up and tried to talk to them; all they knew, it seemed, was one word of Portuguese: fumo—tobacco—which they pronounced sumo (didn't the old missionaries say that the Indians were 'sans foi, sans loi, sans roi', because they could pronounce neither f, nor l, nor r?). They were farmers themselves, in a small way, but their product had none of the concentration of the tobacco, fermented and rolled rope-wise, with which we kept them liberally supplied. We explained to them by gesture that we were making for their village; they indicated that we should be there by nightfall, and that they would go on ahead to give warning of our arrival. They then disappeared in the forest.

Some hours later we pulled up at a bank of clay at the top of which we had seen a few huts. We were welcomed with fits of laughter by a group of naked men, painted red with urucu from their toe-nails to the roots of their hair. They helped us to disembark, grabbed hold of our luggage, and conducted us to a large hut in which several families were living. There the chief of the village made over to us his own corner; and for the duration of our visit he went to live on the opposite bank of the river.
So profound, and yet also so confused, are one's first impressions of a native village whose civilization has remained relatively intact that it is difficult to know in what order to set them down. Among the Kaingang—and the same is true of the Caduveo—extremes of poverty inspire in the traveller an initial weariness and discouragement. But there are societies so vividly alive, so faithful to their traditions, that their impact is disconcertingly strong, and one cannot tell which of the myriad threads which make up the skein is the one to follow. It was among the Bororo that I first encountered a problem of this sort; and when I think back towards it I am reminded of my most recent experience of the kind. This was on the Burmese frontier; I had got to the top of a hill in a Kuki village—a climb that involved hour after hour of scrambling and hauling myself uphill, on slopes churned into slippery mud by the unceasing monsoon-rains. I was exhausted, hungry, thirsty, and disturbed in mind, as well; and yet despite the giddiness that overcame my whole being I had a heightened sense of both form and colour. I was vividly aware, for instance, of houses which, though flimsy, had a majesty of sheer scale about them. Their materials, and the uses to which they were put, were such as we encounter only in dwarfish state. For these houses were not so much built as knotted together, plaited, woven, embroidered, and given a patina by long use. Those who lived in them were not overwhelmed by great blocks of unyielding stone; these were houses that reacted immediately and with great flexibility to their presence, their every movement. The house was, in fact, subject to the householder, whereas with us the opposite is the case. The village served the villagers as a coat of light elastic armour; they wore it as a European woman wears her hats. It was an object of personal adornment on a mammoth scale, and those who built it had been clever enough to preserve something
of the spontaneity of natural growth. Leafage and the springing branch were combined, in short, with the exactions of a carefully planned lay-out.

The inhabitants seemed protected in their nakedness by the fronded velvet of the partition-walls and the curtain-fall of the palms. And when they went forth from their houses it was as if they had just slipped out of an enormous dressing-gown of ostrich-feathers. Their houses were caskets lined with down, it might have seemed, and their bodies the jewels within them. They were delicately built, those bodies, and their basic tonalities were heightened with fards. These embellishments were as if designed to set off ornaments yet more splendid: feathers and flowers that served as a background for the broad shining teeth or tusks of jungle animals. It was as if an entire civilization were reaching out in a passion of tenderness towards the forms and the substances and the colours of life; as if it were striving to bedeck the human body with the richest essences of that life and had chosen, from among all its manifestations, those which, whether lasting or fugacious, had that particular quality in the highest degree and were, in one or the other respect, its privileged depositories.

As we proceeded to 'settle in' in the corner of the huge hutment I did not so much take in these things as allow myself to be impregnated by them. Certain details fell into place. The lay-out and the dimensions of the huts were as they had always been, but their architecture had already yielded to neo-Brazilian influences. They were no longer oval, but rectangular in shape; and although roof and walls were still made of palm-leaves laid on a substructure of branches, the two elements were not distinct from one another and the roof, instead of being rounded, was in the shape of an inverted V and came down almost to the ground. Yet the village of Kejara, where we had just arrived (together with the two others which comprised the Rio Vermelho group: Pobori and Jarudori), was one of the few in which the influence of the Salesian Fathers was not yet preponderant. These were the missionaries who, in collaboration with the Protection Service, had managed to put a stop to the conflicts between settlers and Indians. They had also carried out some admirable pieces of ethnographical field-work. (On the Bororo their work is, indeed, the best source available to us, after the earlier studies of Karl von der Steinen.) Unfortunately this went hand in hand with a systematic attempt to exterminate the Indians' culture.

Two things showed to what an extent Kejara was one of the last
The Bororo bastions of independence. It was, to begin with, the residence of the chief of all the Rio Vermelho villages. This haughty and enigmatic figure knew, or pretended to know, no Portuguese. Though attentive to our wants and curious as to the motives of our visit he never communicated with me directly. Considerations of prestige, as much as of language, enjoined him to negotiate through the members of the Council in whose company all his decisions were made.

Secondly, there was at Kejara a native destined to act as my interpreter, and also as my principal informant. He was about thirty-five years old and spoke tolerable Portuguese. He claimed, in fact, that as a result of the missionaries' exertions he had once been able both to write and to read in Portuguese. The Fathers took such a pride in this that they had sent him to Rome, where he had been received by the Holy Father in person. Apparently they had wanted him, on his return, to get married according to the Christian rites and in disregard of the traditional practices of his tribe. This had led to a spiritual crisis from which he emerged reconverted to the ancient Bororo ideal; and he went to Kejara and had lived there, for the last ten or fifteen years, the life of a savage in every particular. Stark naked, painted scarlet, with his nose and lower lip transpierced by nasal and lip-plugs, the Holy Father's befeathered Indian turned out to be a most remarkable exponent of Bororo sociology.

For the moment we were surrounded by scores of Indians; laughter and horseplay broke out all around us as they discussed the news of our arrival. The Bororo are the tallest and the most finely built of all the Brazilian Indians. They are roundheads, with elongated faces, regular, vigorous features, and the bearing of athletes; they reminded me of certain Patagonian types and it may be that they have affinities with them from the racial point of view. The women as a rule are small and sickly, with irregular features; it is rare to find among them that bodily harmony which distinguishes their men. The high spirits of the men contrasted from the very beginning with the more rebarbative attitude of the other sex. The population seemed, on the whole, to be strikingly healthy in spite of the epidemics which had ravaged the region. There was, however, one leper in the village.

The men were entirely naked, save for a little straw sheath that covered the extremity of the penis. This was kept in position by the foreskin, which was stretched through an opening on the top of the sheath and bulged out over it. Most of them had painted themselves red from head to foot with urucu seeds mashed up with fat. This was
applied even to their hair, which they wore either at shoulder-length or cut round at the level of their ears. All looked, therefore, as if they were wearing helmets. Other paintings were added to this scarlet ground: a horseshoe pattern in shining black resin often covered the forehead and came down on either cheek to the level of the mouth. Sometimes strips of white down were stuck on to shoulders or arms; or micaceous powder together with pounded mother-of-pearl was rubbed into shoulders and chest. The women wore a belt of stiff bark round their waists, and this held in place a white strip of softer bark which passed between their legs. On top of these was a loincloth of cotton steeped in urucu, and across the chest and over their shoulders they wore a double skein of finely plaited cotton. Their costume was completed by little bands of cotton, drawn tight around ankles, wrists, and biceps.

Gradually they all went away and we were left to share the hut, which measured forty feet by fifteen, with a sorcerer and his wife (silent and hostile, these two), and an old widow who lived on the charity of relations in huts nearby. Often they neglected her, and she would sing of her five husbands who had died, one after the other, and of the happy days when she lacked neither manioc, nor maize, nor fish, nor game.

Outside men were beginning to sing. Their songs, heavily accented,
The Bororo

low, sonorous, and guttural in character, were sung in unison; the simple tunes, their continual repetition, the alternation of solo and ensemble, and the virile and tragic style of the whole proceedings put me in mind of the warrior-songs of some Germanic Männerbund. Why were they singing these songs? Because of the irara, I was told. We had brought game with us and before it could be eaten an elaborate ritual had to be gone through. The spirit of the irara had to be placated, for one thing, and the chase itself consecrated. Too exhausted to behave as a good anthropologist should, I dropped off at nightfall into an uneasy sleep and did not wake again till dawn. Much the same happened every evening while we were there; the nights were given over to the life of religion and the natives slept from dawn till noonday.

The ritual demanded the intervention, at certain moments, of wind instruments; but as a rule the voices were accompanied only by the rattling of calabashes filled with pebbles. It was marvellous to hear what could be done with them: sometimes they would abruptly arrest, or as abruptly unleash, the singers in their singing; sometimes they would fill in a silence with a long-held crescendo or decrescendo; and sometimes, again, they gave the lead to their dancers by alternations of sound and silence so varied in their duration, quality, and intensity that not even our ‘star conductors’ could have asked for a more flexible or a more responsive instrument. It’s not surprising that in former times the natives of other tribes and even the missionaries were convinced that the devil himself was speaking to the Indians through this music. The traditional beliefs in the sound-language of the drum have turned out to be unfounded, but it seems probable that among certain peoples at any rate there did really exist a codified sound-language of an extremely simplified and symmetrical sort.

I got up at daybreak to make a tour of the village; and as I went out of the door I stumbled over a pathetic huddle of disfeathered birds. These were the domesticated araras which the Indians make pets, the better to pluck out the feathers from the living bird, thus equipping themselves with the raw material of their coiffures. The naked and grounded birds were like chickens ready for the spit, with beaks all the more enormous for the loss of half the body behind them. On the roofs other araras were solemnly perching; but these had new-grown feathers and looked like heraldic emblems enamelled with gules and azure.

I was in the middle of a clearing bordered on one side by the river and tapering off, on the others, into the forest; gardens lay hidden on
the very edge of the forest and in the distance, between the trees, I could glimpse a backcloth of hills patched with red sandstone. The circumference of the clearing was marked out by huts—twenty-six in all—identical with my own. They were arranged in a circle, and in the centre was a hut at least sixty feet long and twenty-five feet wide: much larger, that is to say, than the others. This was the baitemannageo or men's house. The unmarried men all slept there and in the daytime, when they were not out hunting or fishing, or engaged in some public ceremony on the dancing-ground, all the men of the tribe could be found there. (The dancing-ground was a large oval space immediately to the west of the bachelors' house.) Women were strictly forbidden to enter the baitemannageo; the perimeter huts were their domain and the men would go back and forth several times a day along the path through the brushwood which led from their club to their conjugal hearth. Seen from the top of a tree, or from a roof, the Bororo village looked like a cart-wheel, with the bachelors' house as the hub, the established paths as the spokes, and the family huts to make up the rim.

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**FIG. 29. Plan of Kejara village**

- The dividing line between the moieties.
- The dividing line between the upstream and downstream groups.
All the villages were laid out in this way at one time, except that their populations were much higher than they usually are today. (At Kejara there were a mere one hundred and fifty, for instance.) Consequently the family houses were laid not in one but in several concentric circles. These circular villages can be found, with certain local variations, among all the tribes of the Gé linguistic group, which occupy the plateau of central Brazil between the Araguaya and the São Francisco rivers. The Bororo are probably the southernmost representatives of this group. But we know that their nearest neighbours to the north, the Cayapo, who live on the right bank of the Rio dos Mortes, build their villages in the same way, as do also the Apinayé, the Sherenté, and the Canella.

So vital to the social and religious life of the tribe is this circular lay-out that the Salesian missionaries soon realized that the surest way of converting the Bororo was to make them abandon their village and move to one in which the huts were laid out in parallel rows. They would then be, in every sense, dis-oriented. All feeling for their traditions would desert them, as if their social and religious systems (these were inseparable, as we shall see) were so complex that they could not exist without the schema made visible in their ground-plans and reaffirmed to them in the daily rhythm of their lives.

To this extent we can absolve the Salesian Fathers: they took infinite trouble to understand this difficult cultural structure and to preserve the recollection of it. Anyone who works among the Bororo must first master what the Fathers have to say about them. But at the same time it was urgently necessary that someone should measure their findings against conclusions drawn in regions where missionaries had not yet penetrated, and where the system was still in force. Guided, therefore, by what had already been published, I tried to get my informants to analyse the structure of their village. We spent our days going from house to house, counting heads, noting the status of each inhabitant, and marking out on the sand of the clearing the ideal boundaries of the elaborate networks, which corresponded respectively to privilege, tradition, hierarchical status, rights, and duties. I shall simplify my account of all this by adapting the compass, as it were, to my immediate purposes: for the natives do not set the points of the compass as precisely as do our geographers.

The circular village of Kejara lies at a tangent to the left bank of the Rio Vermelho. The river flows roughly from east to west. The population is divided into two groups by a line that cuts straight across the
village and in theory runs parallel to the river. Those to the north are the Cera; those to the south, the Tugare. It seems, though it's not absolutely certain, that the first name means 'weak' and the second one 'strong'. Be that as it may, the division is fundamental for two reasons: one, that each individual belongs indissolubly to the same group as his mother; and the other, that he is compelled to marry a member of the other group. If my mother is Cera, I too am Cera, and my wife must be Tugare.

The women live in, and inherit, the house in which they are born. When he marries, therefore, a male Bororo crosses the clearing, steps over the ideal frontier which separates one moiety from the other, and goes to live on the other side. The men's house lies partly in one moiety, partly in the other, and to this extent 'breaks the fall', as it were. But the 'rules of residence' lay down that the door which gives on to Cera territory shall be called 'the Tugare door', and vice versa. Men only may use them, of course, and all those who live in the one sector were born in the other.

The married man never feels 'at home' in his wife's house. 'His' house, the one where he was born, and the one he remembers from childhood, lies on the other side of the village. His mother and his sisters, and now his brothers-in-law, live there. But he can go back there whenever he likes and be assured of a warm welcome. And when the atmosphere of his wife's house becomes oppressive—when his brothers-in-law come visiting, for instance—he can always go and sleep in the men's house. There he will find much to remind him of his adolescence. The atmosphere is one of masculine camaraderie, and the religious environment not so strong as to prevent an occasional flirtation with unmarried girls.

The function of the moieties goes far beyond marriage. Rights and duties relate directly to the other moiety, since some must be enjoyed with its help, and others carried out to its benefit. The funeral rites of a Cera, for instance, are performed by a Tugare, and vice versa. The two moieties are partners, in short, and all social or religious undertakings involve the participation of an 'opposite number', whose role is complementary to one's own. The element of rivalry is not excluded, however: each moiety takes a pride in itself and on occasion is jealous of the other. It's rather as if two football teams, instead of trying to defeat one another; were to vie with each other in demonstrations of generosity.

A second diameter ran from north to south, at right angles to the
first. All those born east of this line were ‘upstreamers’; all those born west of it, ‘downstreamers’. We therefore have four sections, as well as two moieties, and both Cera and Tugäré are subdivided. Unfortunately no observer has as yet fathomed the role of this second diameter.

The population is also divided into clans. These are groups of families which consider themselves to be related through the female line by descent from a common ancestor. This ancestor is mythological in character and sometimes nobody knows who he is. Let us therefore say that the members of the clan recognize one another by the fact that they bear the same name. It is probable that at one time there were eight clans in all—four for the Cera and four for the Tugäré. But since then some clans have died out and others have subdivided. The empirical situation is therefore considerably confused. It remains true, in any case, that the members of a clan, with the exception of its married men, all live either in the same hut or in huts adjacent to one another. Each clan has therefore its own place in the circle of huts and will be either Cera or Tugäré, upstream or downstream, or yet further subdivided, should the second diameter happen to pass through the hutments of the clan in question.

Yet another complication: each clan includes hereditary sub-groups which also descend through the female line. Each clan has, in fact, its ‘red’ families and its ‘black’ families. Formerly, too, each clan was divided into three classes: higher, middle, and lower. This may be a reflection, or a transposition, of the hierarchized castes of the Mbaya-Caduveo; I shall come back to that point. What makes this hypothesis plausible is the fact that these classes seem to have been endogamous: a ‘higher’ person could only marry another ‘higher’ person (from the other moiety), and so on. We can only surmise in these matters: such is the total collapse, demographically speaking, of the Bororo villages. Now that they have only a hundred or at most two hundred inhabitants, as against a thousand or more in former times, many categories are perforce unrepresented. Only the rule of the moieties is strictly respected, and even there certain upper-class clans may be exempted; for the rest, the Indians improvise as best they can when faced with unforeseen situations.

The clan system constitutes, beyond a doubt, the most important of the divisions in which Bororo society seems to take pleasure. In the general system of marriages between one moiety and the other the clans were formerly united by special affinities: one of the Cera clans allying itself, by preference, with a particular Tugäré clan, and
vice versa. The clans also varied in their social standing. The chief of
the village was always chosen from a particular Cera clan, and the title
went in the female line from the maternal uncle to his sister’s son. There
were ‘rich’ clans and ‘poor’ clans. In what, though, did these differences
of ‘wealth’ consist?

Our conception of wealth is primarily economic; modest as is the
Bororo’s standard of life, there are some who live better than their
fellows. Some are better at hunting or fishing: others, more lucky or
harder working. One or two people at Kejara had the beginnings of
professional status. One man, for instance, was an expert at the making
of stone-polishers; these he exchanged for food, and he seemed to make a comfortable living. Yet these differences remained individual: ephemeral, that is to say. The only exception to this was the chief, who received tokens of homage from all the clans, in the form of food and manufactures. But as each gift entailed a subsequent obligation, he was in the situation of a banker: wealth passed through his hands, but he could never call it his own. My collections of religious objects were built up in return for presents which the chief would at once redistribute among the clans, thus conserving his 'balance of payments' intact.

Wealth of status, as between one clan and another, is quite another matter. Each clan has a capital of myths, traditions, dances, and functions, either social or religious. The myths are, in their turn, at the bottom of the technical privileges which are one of the most curious features of Bororo culture. Almost all Bororo objects are emblazoned in such a way that the owner’s clan and sub-clan may be identified. The privilege lies in the use of certain feathers, or colours of feathers; in the way in which an object is carved or cut; in the disposition of feathers differing in colour, or species; in the execution of certain decorative work: fibre-plaiting, for instance, or feather-mosaics; in the use of particular patterns, and so on.

Ceremonial bows, for instance, are embellished with feathers, or with rings of bark, according to the canons prescribed for each clan. The arrow bears at its base, between the feathering, which keeps it straight, a specific ornamentation. The pieces of mother-of-pearl out of which the lip-plugs are made are worked in designs: oval, rectangular, or pisciform, according to the clan. Fringes vary in colour. And the feathered diadems worn during the dance bear a mark of the same sort: generally a strip of wood covered with a feather-mosaic. On festive occasions even the penis-sheath goes into regalia and is equipped with a ribbon of stiff straw decorated or cut out with the colour and the emblem of the clan.

These privileges (they may be bought and sold, by the way) are the object of watchful, not to say quick-tempered supervision. It's inconceivable, people say, that one clan should usurp the prerogatives of another; civil war would result. But from this point of view the differences between the clans are enormous; some live in luxury, some in squalor; a glance at the interior of the huts will prove this. The distinction is not so much between 'rich' and 'poor' as between bumpkins and sophisticates.

The material equipment of the Bororo is marked by simplicity on
FIG. 32. Arrow shafts bearing clan ornamentation between the feathering

FIG. 33. Emblazoned penis-sheaths
the one hand and a rare perfection of execution on the other. The tools remain archaic in style, despite the axes and knives which were given out at one time by the Protection Service. For heavy work the Indians use metal tools; but they still carve and polish the clubs with which they kill off their fish, their wooden bows, and their delicately barbed arrows. For work such as this they have a traditional tool, half adze and half burin, which they use on all occasions, as we would use a pocket-knife. It consists of one of the curved incisors of the *capivara*, a rodent which lives near the river-banks, tied sideways-on to a stick of wood. Apart from the plaited mats and baskets, the weapons and tools—made from bone or wood—of the men, and the digging-stick of the women who work in the fields, there's not much to be seen in the huts. A few calabashes; some black pots, bowls and shallow basins, with sometimes a long handle, ladle-wise. These objects have a great purity of form, and this purity is underlined by the austerity of their component materials. One strange thing: it seems that Bororo pottery used to be decorated, and that in relatively recent times this was forbidden on religious grounds. Perhaps it is for the same reason that the Indians no longer carry out rupestral paintings such as may still be found in rock-protected shelters of the chapada: yet these paintings contain many elements taken from Bororo culture. To make quite sure of this I once asked them to decorate for me a large sheet of white paper. A native set to work with a paste made of urucu and some resin; and although the Bororo have forgotten when they used to paint those rocky walls, and indeed no longer frequent the escarpments where they are to be seen, the picture which he made for me was an almost exact version, on a smaller scale, of one of them.

Austere they may be, where their household objects are concerned; but when it comes to dress—or rather to the accessories of dress which are their entire wardrobe—the Bororo give free rein to fancy. To luxury, too: for the women own caskets of jewels and pass them on from mother to daughter: necklaces of monkeys' teeth or jaguars' fangs mounted on wood and delicately held in place with strings. These are relics of the chase; but they also allow their husbands to pluck the hair from their temples, and with these hairs the husbands weave long ropes of hair that they wear wound round their heads like a turban. The men also wear, on fête-days, crescent-shaped pendants made up of a pair of claws taken from the big armadillo—that monster burrower, at times more than a yard in length, which has changed hardly at all since the tertiary era—and embellished with incrustations
FIG. 34. Black pottery bowl

FIG. 36. Crescent-shaped pendant decorated with jaguar teeth

FIG. 35. Two examples, one single and one double, of a Bororo 'pocket-knife'

FIG. 37. Improvised ornaments: painted crowns of dried straw
of mother-of-pearl, or a fringe of feathers or cotton. Or there may be
seen a toucan’s beak fastened to a feathered stalk; egrets by the
handful; the long tail-feathers of the arara, stuck into bamboo-stalks
covered with white down: all these ornament the chignon, natural
or made-up, like hairpins devised to balance, at the rear, a diadem of
feathers on the brow. Sometimes these two features are combined in a
composite head-dress which takes hours to set in place. I got one for
the Musée de l’Homme in Paris in exchange for a rifle, after negotiations
that went on for eight days. It was indispensable to their rituals, and
only after they had assembled a duplicate collection of the feathers
involved would they consent to sell. It consists of a fan-shaped diadem;
a feathered visor that covers the upper part of the face; a tall cylindrical
crown that encircles the head, and is made up of harpy-eagle feathers
on sticks; and a basketwork plaque into which is stuck a whole bushful
of tall stalks topped with feathers and down. The ensemble is six feet
in height.

Such is the Bororo’s love of display ornament that the men are
always improvising ornaments for themselves even when they are not
in ceremonial dress. Many wear crowns: bandeaux of fur embellished
with feathers; circlets of basketwork, again with feathers inserted;
coronets of jaguars’ claws mounted on a circle of wood. But they are
pleased with the simplest things: a ribbon of dried straw, picked up off
the ground, hastily painted and pulled into shape, will give delight
enough, as a head-dress, until some other fantasy takes its place. Some-
times trees are stripped of their flowers to this end. A piece of bark and
a feather or two will be quite enough to give these tireless man-
milliners the elements of a pair of sensational ear-rings. Enter the men’s
house and you will see how hard these virile giants work to make
themselves beautiful: in every corner someone is at work with knife or
chisel or burin; shells from the river are taken to pieces and polished
on millstones to make necklaces; fantastic constructions of feathers and
bamboo are in process of creation. These are men built like stevedores;
but no dressmaker could better the application with which they stick
down on to one another’s skins and finish up looking like day-old
chicks.

But the men’s house is not only a workshop. Adolescents sleep in it;
and when there is no work to be done the married men go there for
siestas, or to talk things over and smoke the big cigarettes that they roll
in a dried leaf of maize. They also take some of their meals there; for a
minutely organized system of obligations compels all the clans in turn
to serve in the *baitemannageo*. Every two hours or so one of the men goes over to his family hut and fetches a bowl of the dish, made from boiled maize, which is called *mingau*. Great shouts of joy greet his arrival: ‘Au, au!’ resounds through the silence of the day. Ceremony requires him to invite a group of six or eight of his fellows to partake of the dish; this they proceed to do, with ladles made of pottery or shells. Women are forbidden, as I said earlier, to enter the men's house. Married women, that is to say: for unmarried girls take good care not to go too near it; they know too well that if they stray too near, either from inadvertence or from the wish to provoke, the men may dart out and rape them. And, once in each woman's life, she must enter the men's house of her own free will: in order to 'propose' to her future husband.
The baitemannageo is many things in one: workshop, club, dormitory, maison de passe, and, finally, temple. There it is that the religious dancers make themselves ready and that certain ceremonies are held, out of sight of the women of the village: the construction andwhirling of the bull-roarers, likewise. These bull-roarers are musical instruments, made of wood and richly painted. They have the outline of a long flat fish and their length varies between one and five feet. When they are made to wheel round on the end of a length of rope they make a sort of low roaring noise—hence their name; this noise is attributed to the visiting spirits of whom the women are supposed to be terrified. Any woman who sees a bull-roarer is ill-fated; even today, as like as not, she will be clubbed to death. When I first watched them in process of construction I was assured that they were cooking utensils. The natives’ extreme reluctance to let me have a few of them to keep was explained not so much by the work that would have to be done over again as by fear that I might betray their secret. I had to take one of my kit-cases to the men’s house under cover of darkness; the bull-roarers, already wrapped and parcelled, were laid inside and the case shut and locked; I had to promise not to open it till I got to Cuiaba.

There is something almost scandalous, to a European observer, in the ease with which the (as it seems to us) almost incompatible activities of the men’s house are harmonized. Few peoples are as deeply religious as the Bororo; few have so elaborate a system of metaphysics. But their spiritual beliefs and their habits of every day are so intimately mingled that they seem not to have any sensation of passing from one to the other. I met with the same artless religiosity in the Buddhist temples of the Burman frontier, where the bonzes live and sleep in the room in which their services are held, with their pots of pomade and the
contents of their medicine-chest laid out at the foot of the altar; nor did they disdain to caress their pupils in the interval between two lessons in the alphabet.

This nonchalance with regard to the supernatural was the more surprising to me in that my only contact with religion goes back to a stage in my childhood at which I was already an unbeliever. During the First World War I lived with my grandfather, who was the rabbi of Versailles. His house stood next to the synagogue and was linked to it by a long inner corridor. Even to set foot in that corridor was an awesome experience; it formed an impassable frontier between the profane world and that other world from which was lacking precisely that human warmth which was the indispensable condition to my recognizing it as sacred. Except at the hours of service the synagogue was empty; desolation seemed natural to it, and its brief spells of occupation were neither sustained enough nor fervent enough to overcome this. They seemed merely an incongruous disturbance. Our private religious observances suffered from the same offhand quality. Only my grandfather’s silent prayer before each meal reminded us children that our lives were governed by a higher order of things. (That, and a printed message which hung on a long strip of paper in the dining-room: ‘Chew Your Food Properly: Your Digestion Depends On it.’)

It was not that religion had more prestige among the Bororo: on the contrary, it was taken for granted. In the men’s house people went through the motions of religious observance in a consummately casual
manner, as if they were actions performed for a specific purpose; there was none of that attitude of respect which comes over even the unbeliever when he enters a sanctuary. That afternoon they were singing in the men's house, in preparation for the evening's rites, which were to be held in public. In one corner boys were snoring or chatting; two or three men were intoning to the accompaniment of rattles. But if one of those men wanted to light a native cigarette, or if it was his turn to dig into the maize gruel, he would either pass his instrument to a neighbour, who would take over where he had left off, or go on with one hand, while scratching himself with the other. If one dancer paraded round to show off his latest creation, everyone would stop whatever he was doing and give his opinion. The 'service' seemed to have been forgotten—until suddenly in another corner the incantation would begin again where it had been left off.

And yet the men's house has a significance over and above that of its being, as I have described, the centre of the social and religious life of the village. The lay-out of the village does not only allow full and delicate play to the institutional system; it summarizes and provides a basis for the relationship between Man and the Universe, between Society and the Supernatural, and between the living and the dead.

Before going into this new aspect of Bororo culture, I must say something in parenthesis about relations between the dead and the living. Without this, it would be difficult to grasp the particular character of the solution which Bororo thought has applied to this universal problem—a solution remarkably similar to that which may be found at the other extreme of the western hemisphere, among the inhabitants of the forests and prairies of north-eastern North America: the Ojibwa, for instance, and the Menomini, and the Winnebago.

There is probably no such thing as a society which does not treat its dead with consideration. At a time when mankind as we know it had hardly come into being, Neanderthal Man already buried his dead in tombs made up of a few rough stones. No doubt funerary practices vary from one group to another. Can we say that these variations are negligible, in relation to the unvarying sentiment which underlies them? Even when we simplify, as far as we possibly can, the respective attitudes maintained in this matter by one society or another, we still have to acknowledge one great distinction: two poles, that is to say, linked by a whole series of intermediary positions.

Certain societies leave their dead in peace. In return for periodical acts of homage the dead, in such cases, give the living no trouble. If
they come back to take a look at them, it is at foreseeable intervals and on the foreseeable occasions. And their visits bring only good: the punctual movement of the seasons, fertility in gardens and in women—all are guaranteed by the dead. It is as if the dead and the living had made a pact together: in return for certain sober marks of attachment the dead will remain where they are, and in such momentary encounters as may take place the interest of the living will always be put first. One of the universal themes of folklore puts this formula very well: the so-called motif of the ‘grateful dead’. A rich hero buys back a dead body from creditors who had refused to allow it to be buried, and gives it formal burial. The dead man then appears to his benefactor in a dream and promises him success, on condition that the benefits resulting from this are shared equally between the two of them. And, sure enough, the hero soon wins the love of a princess, whom he manages, with the help of his supernatural protector, to rescue from one danger after another. Is he to share her favours with the dead man? The princess lies under a spell and is half woman, half serpent. The dead man claims his share, the hero keeps to their bargain, and the dead man, well pleased with this loyal observance, takes for himself the bewitched half of the princess, leaving the hero with a wife entirely human.

As antithesis to that notion, we have another theme from folklore: ‘the enterprising knight’, as I like to call it. This time the hero is not rich, but poor. His only possession is a grain of corn which he manages, such is his cleverness, to exchange for a cock, in the first place, and later for a pig, an ox, and finally a dead body, which he barter for a live princess. Here the dead body is rather object than subject: no longer a partner to be negotiated with, it is an instrument to be played upon in a speculation in which untruths and swindling are involved. Certain societies maintain an attitude of this sort towards their dead. They do not allow them to rest, but rather conscript them: literally at times, when cannibalism and necrophagy are based upon the wish to annex for oneself the merits and capacities of the dead; and also symbolically, in societies where competitive prestige plays a great part and the peoples concerned must continually, as it were, summon the dead to their rescue. Evocation of their ancestors and artful genealogies are two of the means by which they try to justify their prerogatives. Such societies feel themselves particularly harassed by the dead whom they exploit. They think that the dead pay them back in kind for their persecution: ever more exacting and irascible, the dead get their own back on those of the living who aim to profit by them. But,
whether it is a matter of 'fair shares', as in my first example, or of 
unbridled speculation, as in the second, the relation is never, and 
cannot be, one-sided.

Between the two extremes are a number of intermediary positions. 
The Indians on the west coast of Canada and the Melanesians summon 
all their ancestors to appear in ceremonies in which they bear witness 
in favour of their descendants; in certain ancestor-cults, in China or 
Africa, the dead keep their personal identity— but for a few generations 
only; among the Pueblos, in the south-west of the U.S.A., they 
immediately lose their identities but share out among themselves a 
certain number of specialized functions. Even in Europe, where the dead 
have become anonymous and lost all character, folklore still preserves 
certain vestiges of a quite different eventuality in the belief that there 
are two different kinds of dead person: those borne off by 'natural 
causes', who form a corps of protective ancestors, and those who died 
by their own hand, or were murdered or magicked away; the latter 
turn into jealous and maleficent spirits.

If we confine ourselves to the evolution of western civilization, there 
is no doubt that we tended less and less to speculate on the dead, 
and more and more to enter into contractual agreement with them. 
Eventually this gave place to an indifference foreshadowed, perhaps, in 
the New Testament phrase: 'Let the dead bury their dead.' But there 
is no reason to suppose that this evolution corresponds to any universal 
pattern. It would seem, rather, that all societies have a certain obscure 
awareness of both possible formulas. No matter towards which of the 
two they incline, they will always take superstitious precautions against 
the possible validity of the other—as do we ourselves, whatever the 
faith, or lack of faith, which we profess. The originality of the Bororo, 
and of the other peoples whom I have cited as examples, lies in their 
having clearly formulated both possibilities and built up a system of 
ritual and belief applicable both to the one and to the other: machinery, 
that is to say, with the aid of which they can pass to and fro in the hope 
of a twofold conciliation.

I should express myself imperfectly if I were to say that there is no 
such thing, for the Bororo, as natural death. A man is not, for them, an 
individual, but a person. He is part of a sociological universe: the village 
which exists for all eternity, side by side with the physical universe, 
itself composed of other animate beings; celestial bodies and meteorolo-
gical phenomena. Nor is this affected by the fact that the village itself 
rarely remains more than thirty years in any one place, so rapidly is the
soil brought to the point of exhaustion. The village does not, in fact, consist either of the land on which it stands, or of the huts which comprise it at any one time; it consists in the lay-out which I have described above. And this lay-out never varies. That is why, in putting a stop to it, the missionaries destroyed an entire culture.

As for the animals, some belong to the world of men—birds and fish, above all—and some, as in the case of certain terrestrial animals, to the physical universe. The Bororo consider, therefore, that their human shape is transitory: midway between that of the fish (whose name they have adopted for themselves) and the arara (in whose guise they will complete the cycle of their transmigrations).

If the Bororos’ thought—like that of the anthropologist—is dominated by the fundamental opposition between Nature and culture, it follows that they go beyond even Durkheim and Comte and consider that human life should itself be regarded as a department of culture. To say, therefore, that death is either natural or unnatural is meaningless. In fact and law alike, death is both natural and anti-cultural. That is to say that, whenever a native dies, an injury is done not only to those near to him, but to Society as a whole; and Nature, in consequence, is held to be in debt to Society. It is, in fact, as a debt that we may best interpret the notion, essential to the Bororo, of the mori. When a native dies, the village organizes a collective hunt, incumbent on the moiety of which the dead man was not a member. The object of this expedition is to make Nature pay her debt; the natives hope, by killing some sizable creature—a jaguar, for preference—to bring home a skin, and a set of teeth and nails, which will constitute the dead man’s mori.

A man had just died when I arrived in Kejara but, unluckily, he had died some way away, in another village. I could not, therefore, witness the double burial ceremony: first, the body is put in a ditch, covered with branches, in the middle of the village, and then, when putrefaction has been completed, the bones are washed in the river. Next, they are painted and ornamented with feather-mosaics stuck on with glue and, finally, they are sent down in a basket to the bottom of a lake or a running stream. All the other ceremonies at which I was present were in strict traditional style, inclusive of the ritual scarification of the relatives at the place where the provisional tomb had had to be dug. I was also unlucky in that the collective hunt had taken place either the day before, or on the afternoon of, my arrival, so that I could not witness it. Nothing had been killed, in any case, and an old
The jaguar-skin was brought into service for the funeral dances. I even suspect that our irara was commandeered to take the place of the missing prey. They would never tell me if this was the case—and more's the pity: for, had it really been so, I could have claimed for myself the role of the uiddo, or chief huntsman and representative of the dead man. His family would have presented me with an armband of human hair and a poari, or mystic clarinet: this was made up of a little befeathered calabash which served as amplifier to the bamboo reed-pipe on which the huntsman would play when the kill had been completed; and, later, it would be attached to the skin. I should have shared out, as I was bound to do, the meat, the hide, the teeth, and the nails among the dead man's relatives; and they would have given me in exchange a ceremonial bow and arrows, another clarinet in commemoration of my services in the field, and a necklace of flat discs made from shells. I should also, no doubt, have had to paint myself black in order to escape the notice of the evil spirit which had been responsible for the man's death. By the rules of the mori, this spirit would be incarnate in the animal I should set out to kill; and, although it had to offer itself by way of compensation for the harm it had done, it would be filled with a vindictive hatred for its executioner. For, in a sense, the Bororo's murderous Nature is human and operates through the intermediary of a special category of souls, answerable directly to her and not to Society.

As I said above, I was sharing a sorcerer's hut. The bari formed a special category of human beings and did not belong completely either to the physical universe or to the world of Society; their role was rather to mediate between these two estates. It is possible, though not certain, that they were all born in the Tugaré moiety; mine certainly was, since our hut was Cera and he lived, as was the rule, with his wife. A man becomes a bari by vocation. Often this follows upon a revelation whose central motif is a pact concluded with certain members of a very complex collectivity of evil, or perhaps merely formidable, spirits. These are in part celestial (and in control, therefore, of the phenomena of astronomy and meteorology), in part animal, and in part subterranean. Their numbers are continually increasing, as the souls of dead sorcerers arrive to swell the ranks: and they have in their charge the operation of the solar system, the wind and the rain, sickness and death. Their appearance varies, but is in every case terrifying: matted with hair, some say, and with holes in their heads from which tobacco-fumes emerge when they smoke; monsters of the air with immensely
long nails and rain pouring from their eyes, nostrils, and hair; one-legged creatures with huge bellies and the soft and downy body of a bat.

The bari is asocial. By reason of his personal links with one or more spirits, he is a privileged being: when he goes out hunting by himself, for instance, supernatural help is forthcoming; he can turn himself into an animal at will; he has the gift of prophecy and knows the secrets of disease. Neither an animal killed in the chase, nor the first fruits of a garden, can be eaten till he has had his share. This last is the mori owed by the living to the spirits of the dead. Its role in the system is, therefore, symmetrical with, and the obverse of, that of the funerary hunt which I have described.

But the bari is also under the dominion of one or more guardian spirits. They make use of him for their own incarnation; at such times the bari, with the spirit, as it were, in the saddle above him, is subject to trances and convulsions. In return for his guardianship the spirit watches the bari’s every movement; he is the true proprietor, not merely of the sorcerer’s possessions, but of his very body. For every broken arrow, every broken pot, every fingernail, or lock of hair not accounted for, the sorcerer is answerable to the spirit. As none of these things may be destroyed or thrown away, the bari drags along behind him the debris of all his past existence. The old adage about the quick and the dead here takes on an unexpected and terrible significance; for, between the spirit and the sorcerer, the bond is of so jealous a nature that one can never be quite sure which of the two partners is, in the end, the master, and which the servant.

Clearly, therefore, for the Bororo the physical universe consists in a complex hierarchy of individualized powers. Their personal nature is directly manifested; but this is not the case with their other attributes,
for these powers are at once beings and things, living and dead. In Society, the sorcerer is the intermediary between mankind and the equivocal universe of evil spirits who are at one and the same time persons and objects.

The sociological universe has characteristics quite different from those of the physical universe. The spirits of ordinary men (those, I mean, who are not sorcerers) do not identify themselves with the forces of Nature, but form a society, as it were, of their own; but, conversely, they lose their personal identity and merge in that collective being, the aroe, a term which, like the ancient Bretons' anaon, should doubtless be translated as 'the souls' society'. This society is, in point of fact, twofold, since the souls are divided after the funeral ceremonies into two villages, of which one is in the east and the other in the west. Over these villages stand guard, respectively, the two great hero-divinities of the Bororo Pantheon: in the west, the older of the two, Bakororo, and in the east the younger, Ituboré. This east-west axis corresponds, by the way, to the course of the Rio Vermelho. It is therefore probable that there is a relation, as yet unillumined, between the duality of the villages of the dead and the secondary division of the village itself into an upstream and a downstream moiety.

The bari serves, therefore, as intermediary between human society and the evil spirits, individual or cosmological. (The spirits of the dead bari are both at once, as we have seen.) There is also another mediator—one who presides over relations between the society of the living and the society of the dead (this last being beneficent, collective, and anthropomorphic). This is the aroettowaraare, or 'Master of the spirits' road'. His distinguishing marks are the opposite of the bari's. He and the bari hate and fear one another, what is more. The Road Master is not entitled to receive offerings, but he must keep strictly to certain rules: there are things that he must not eat, and he must be very quietly dressed. All ornament, all brightly coloured clothing, is forbidden him. Nor is there any pact between him and the spirits, and these are always present to him and, in a sense, immanent. Instead of taking possession of him when he is in a trance, they appear to him in dreams; if he calls upon them from time to time, it is always to someone else's advantage.

If the bari has the gift of foreseeing illness and death, the Master is both nurse and healer. It is said, by the way, that the bari, as the embodiment of physical necessity, is always ready to confirm his prognostications by killing off any invalid who is too slow to realize his grim predictions. But it must be noted here that the Bororo do not
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share our conception of the relation between life and death. Someone said to me one day, of a woman who was lying in a high fever in the corner of her hut: ‘She’s dead’—meaning that they had given up her case as hopeless. And, after all, this is not so different from our army’s way of lumping together dead and wounded under the single heading of ‘casualties’. As far as immediate effectiveness goes, they are indeed one and the same, even if, from the wounded man’s point of view, there is an undeniable advantage in not being among the dead.

The Master can, like the bari, turn himself into an animal at will. But he never turns himself into a man-eating jaguar, symbol (until he is killed in his turn) of the power of the dead to exact their mori from the living. The Master chooses, rather, one of the provider-creatures: the fruit-picking arara, the fish-catching harpy-eagle, or the tapir, on whose flesh the whole tribe can feast. The bari is possessed by its spirits; the aroettowaraare sacrifices himself for the salvation of mankind. Even the revelation which makes him aware of his mission has its painful side; he recognizes it, initially, by the dreadful stench which follows him everywhere. This stench recalls, no doubt, the smell which hangs over the village at the time when a dead body is given provisional ‘burial’ at ground-level, in the middle of the dance-area; but at the moment of revelation it is associated with a mystical being, the aije. The aije is a mythical monster of the aquatic deep, repellent, evil-smelling, and affectionate: it appears before the budding aroettowaraare and forces him to endure its caresses. The scene is mimed, during the funeral ceremony, by young men daubed with mud who throw their arms

![Figure 40: Bororo paintings of cult objects](image-url)
round the fancy-dressed impersonator of the young spirit. The natives have so clear an idea of the aije that they can even paint his portrait; and they give it the same name as is given to the bull-roarer, whose humming announces the emergence of the animal and imitates its cries.

And so it is not surprising that the funeral ceremonies go on for several weeks. Their functions, many and various, are situated on the two planes which we have just distinguished. Seen from an individual point of view, every day is the pretext for negotiations between Society and the physical universe. The hostile forces which compose the physical universe have done harm to Society, and that harm must somehow be put right: that is the role of the funerary hunt. Once the dead man has been at once avenged and redeemed by the hunters, as a group, he must be admitted to the society of spirits. That is the function of the roiakeurilu, the great funeral dirge which I was about to have the good fortune to hear.
In a Bororo village, one moment in the day has a particular importance: the evening roll-call. As soon as night falls a great fire is lit on the dancing-place, and the chiefs of the clans assemble there. A herald calls out in a loud voice to each group: Badedjéba, the chiefs; O Cera, those of the ibis; Ki, those of the tapir; Bokodori, those of the big tattoo; Bakoro (from the name of the hero Bakororo); Boro, those of the lip-plugs; Ewaguddu, those of the buriti-palm; Arone, those of the caterpillar; Paiwe, those of the hedgehog; Apibore (a word whose meaning is uncertain).... As and when each group arrives, the orders for the morrow are made known to them, still in a tone of voice that can be heard even in the most distant huts in the village—or would be, if those huts were not by now more or less empty. As the mosquitoes vanish with the last of the light, the men all move away from the family houses, whither they had returned towards six in the evening. Each has under his arm the mat that he will spread out on the beaten earth of the dance-plaza that lies to the west of the men’s house. There they stretch themselves out, wrapped in a cotton blanket dyed orange by long contact with bodies stained with urucu; the Service de Protection would hardly recognize in these blankets one of its benefactions to the region. There are also larger mats, on which five or six men can lie together, occasionally exchanging a word or two. Some are quite on their own, and amble about among the prostrate bodies of their fellows. As the roll-call proceeds, the head of one family after another will rise to his feet in answer to his name, receive his orders, and once again lie down, face upwards towards the stars. The women, too, have left their huts, and stand in groups on the threshold. Conversation dies down and gradually, led at first by two or three officiants and growing even greater in volume as more and more people arrive, we begin to hear, first from the depths of the men’s house and eventually on the plaza itself, the songs, recitatives, and choruses which will continue all night.

The dead man was a member of the Cera moiety; the Tugaré officiated, therefore, at his funeral. In the centre of the square, branches had been strewn to ‘stand in’ for the tomb itself. These are flanked to right and to left by raised bundles of arrows, before which bowls of food had been set out. Priests and singers numbered about a dozen, and most of them had on a large diadem of brilliantly coloured feathers (others wore this on their buttocks), with, on their shoulders, a rectangular wickerwork fan, kept in place by a thin cord round their necks. Some were entirely naked and painted either in red (all over
or striped) or in black, or else covered with long thin strips of white down; others wore a long straw skirt. The main character, whose role it was to personify the young spirit, had a change of costume to suit the various stages of the action. Sometimes he appeared clad in fresh green leaves, wearing on his head the enormous diadem I described above, and carrying, like a ceremonial train, a jaguar-skin; this last was held up behind him by a page. On other occasions he was naked and painted black, with no ornament but what looked like a huge pair of glassless straw spectacles round his eyes. This detail is especially interesting in that it is analogous to the motif by which Tlaloc, the rain-god of ancient Mexico, may be recognized. Perhaps the Pueblo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico hold the key to the mystery, for the spirits of their dead turn into the gods of rain; and they also have certain beliefs relating to magical objects which protect the eyes and allow their possessor to become invisible at will. I have often noticed that spectacles exert a great fascination among South American Indians—so much so that on my last expedition I took along a great quantity of glassless spectacle-frames. These had a great success among the Nambikwara—as if their traditional belief made them particularly welcome. We had no record of straw spectacle-frames among the Bororo, but as black paint is said to render the wearer invisible, it may well be that spectacles do the same—as they do, for that matter, in Pueblo mythology. And, finally, the butarico (the spirits responsible for rain among the Bororo) are described as having the same redoubtable aspect—hooked hands and great fangs—as the Maya goddess of water.

During the first few nights we witnessed, one after another, the dances of the Tugaré clans; Evoddo, those of the palm-tree, and Pauwe, those of the hedgehogs. In both cases the dancers were covered with leaves from head to foot and, as their heads were invisible, we took them to be higher than they really were—on the level, in fact, of the feathered diadem which stood up in so imposing a fashion that we involuntarily took the dancers to be enormously tall. In their hands they held palm-stems or sticks ornamented with leaves. There were two sorts of dances. In the one, the performers came on alone divided into two quadrilles which faced one another at the two extremities of the square, ran towards one another with cries of 'Ho, ho!' and whirled round and round each other until they were facing the opposite way from which they had come. Later, women would weave in among the men dancers, and the dance became an interminable farandole which formed up, moving forward or simply marking time, led by
naked coryphées who walked backwards, waving their rattles, while other men squatted on the ground and sang.

Three days later the ceremonies were interrupted, so that Act II, the mariddo dance, could be got ready. Teams of men went off into the forest, returning with armfuls of green palms: these were stripped of their leaves and the stems were cut into sticks, each about a foot in length. With crude ropes of plaited foliage these were roughly tied together, in bundles of two or three, to form the steps of a flexible ladder several yards in length. Two such ladders were made, of different lengths; and they were then rolled up to form two wheel-like shapes. Each stood on its narrow breadth, and they rose to a height of roughly five feet in the one case and four in the other. The sides were then decorated with a network of foliage, held together with thin ropes of plaited hair. The two objects, when complete, were solemnly taken to the middle of the square and put down side by side. These were the mariddos, male and female, whose construction was the responsibility of the Ewaguddu clan.

Towards evening two groups, each of five or six men, made off respectively to east and to west. I followed the first group to the point, some fifty yards distant, at which I could watch them at their preparations. Hidden from the public by a screen of trees, they were covering themselves with leaves, like dancers, and fitting their diadems in place. But on this occasion secrecy was essential to their role: like

Fig. 42. Diadem of yellow and blue arara feathers carrying clan marking
the other group, they represented the spirits of the dead who had come from their villages in, respectively, the west and the east to welcome the new addition to their number. When all was ready they headed, whistling, towards the square, where the eastern group was already in position (the westerners had come 'upstream', in symbolical terms, so that it was natural for them to take longer than those who had come 'downstream' from the east).

Their hesitant and fearful bearing was admirably descriptive of the plight of the shades; I thought of how, in Homer, Ulysses strives to keep hold of the phantoms conjured up by blood. But all at once the ceremony became more lively: men seized one of other of the mariddos (all the heavier, these, for being made up of fresh-cut branches), hoisted them at arm's length, and danced beneath them until they dropped from exhaustion, leaving the mariddo for some rival to continue the dance. The scene lost its initial, mystical character and became a fairground on which the young men of the village showed off their muscles in an environment of sweat, horseplay, and crude joking. The sport is one that recurs among certain related peoples in a purely profane sense—in, for instance, the log-races of the Gé on the Brazilian plateau; but among the Bororo it still retains its full religious significance; the hilarious and disorderly scene is one in which the native really feels that he is playing with the dead and wresting from them the right to go on being alive.

This opposition—the living against the dead—is expressed, in the first place, by the division of the villagers, throughout the ceremonies, into participants and spectators. But the real participants are the men, protected as they are by the secreries of the communal house. The layout of the village must, therefore, have a significance even deeper than that which we ascribed to it on the sociological level. When a villager dies, each half takes it in turn to play the living, or the dead, in relation to the other. But this game of poise and counterpoise mirrors another, in which the roles have been distributed once and for all; for the men who have grown up in the baitemanageo symbolize the society of spirits, whereas from the huts all around, which belong to the women (who have no part in the most sacred of the rites and are, therefore, predestined spectators), is drawn the audience of the living.

We have observed already that the supernatural world is itself twofold, since it includes both the domain of the priest and the domain of the magician. The magician is the master of the celestial and terrestrial powers, from the tenth heaven (the Bororo believe in a
plurality of heavens, each superimposed upon the other) down to the depths of the earth. The forces he controls—and on which he depends—are, therefore, disposed along a vertical axis; whereas the priest, Master of the spirits’ road, presides over the horizontal axis which unites east and west, where the two villages of the dead are situated. But much goes to show that the bari is invariably Tugaré in origin, and the aroettowaraare Cera; this suggests that the division into halves is also expressive of this duality. It is a striking fact that all the Bororo myths present the Tugaré heroes as creators and demiurges and the Cera heroes as men of peace and organization. The Tugaré heroes are answerable for the existence of things: water, rivers, fish, vegetation, manufactured objects. The Cera heroes have put creation in order, delivering the human race from monsters and assigning to each animal its specific nourishment. One myth even tells how the supreme power once belonged to the Tugaré, who voluntarily made it over to the Cera—as if the antithesis of the moieties was intended to symbolize, in native thought, the passage from an unbridled Nature to an ordered Society.

This explains the apparent paradox by which the Tugaré are known as ‘the strong’, while the Cera, though the repository of political and religious power, are known as ‘the weak’. The Tugaré stand closer to the physical universe, and Cera to the human universe: and the latter is not the more powerful of the two. Social order cannot cheat the hierarchy of the cosmos and get away with it. Even among the Bororo, Nature can be vanquished only if we recognize her authority and allow her fatalities their true role. A sociological system such as theirs allows them, in any case, no choice: a man can never belong to the same moiety as either his father or his son, since it is to his mother’s side that he owes allegiance: only with his grandfather and grandson is he again at one in the matter of moieties. If the Cera should wish to justify their power by claiming an exclusive affinity with the founder-heroes, they set themselves, in so doing, at a further distance of one whole generation—becoming, in effect, the heroes’ ‘grandsons’, whereas the Tugaré would become their ‘sons’.

But to what extent are the natives bemused by the logic of their system? I cannot, after all, dismiss the feeling that the dazzling metaphysical cotillon which I witnessed can be reduced, in the end, to a rather gruesome farce. The men’s brotherhood claimed to be impersonating the dead in order that the living should have the illusion of a visit from the spirits; the women were excluded from the rites and
The Bororo
deceived as to their true nature—doubtless to sanction the division of
rights by which they take priority, where housing and birth rights are
in question, leaving the mysteries of religion to their men. But their
credulity, whether presumed or authentic, has also a psychological
function: that of giving, for the benefit of both sexes, an affective and
intellectual content to fantasy-figures which might otherwise be
altogether less meaningfully manipulated. If we bring up our children
to believe in Father Christmas, it is not simply because we want to
mislead them: it is also because their enthusiasm gives ourselves fresh
warmth. Through them, we contrive to deceive ourselves also, and to
believe, as they believe, that a world of unqualified generosity is not
absolutely incompatible with reality. And yet men die, and die never to
return; and all forms of social order draw us nearer to death, in so much
as they take something away from us and give back nothing in
exchange.

For the moralist, Bororo society has one particular lesson. Let him
listen to his native informers: they will describe to him, as they des-
ccribed to me, the ballet in which the two halves of the village set them-
selves to live and breathe in and for one another; exchanging women,
goods, and service in a kind of shared passion for reciprocity; inter-
marrying their children; burying one another’s dead; offering each
other guarantees that life is eternal, that human beings help one another,
and that Society is based on justice. To bear witness to these truths, and
back them up in their convictions, the wise men of the tribe have
evolved a grandiose cosmology which is writ large in the lay-out of
their villages and distribution of their homes. When they met with
contradictions, those contradictions were cut across again and again.
Every opposition was rebutted in favour of another. Groups were
divided and redivided, both vertically and horizontally, until their
lives, both spiritual and temporal, became an escutcheon in which
symmetry and asymmetry were in equilibrium—just as they are in
the drawings with which a Caduveo beauty, equally though less
explicitly a prey to the same preoccupations, will ornament her face.
But what remains of all that, what is left of the moieties and the
counter-moieties, the clans and the sub-clans, when we draw the
conclusions which seem to proceed inevitably from certain recent
observations? In a society whose complexities seem to spring from a
delight in complication for its own sake, each clan is subdivided into
three groups: upper, middle, and lower. One regulation takes prece-
dence over all others: that an ‘upper’ should marry another ‘upper’, a
'middle' another 'middle', and a 'lower' another 'lower'. Despite, that is to say, all the appearances of institutionalized brotherhood, the Bororo village is made up in the last analysis of three groups, each of which always marries within its own numbers. Three societies which, all unknowingly, remain for ever distinct and isolated, each imprisoned within its own vainglory, dissimulated even from its own self by misleading institutions; with the result that each of the three is the unwitting victim of artificialities whose purpose it can no longer discover. Try as the Bororo may to bring their system to full flowering with the aid of a deceptive prosopopoeia, they will be unable, as other societies have also been unable, to smother this truth: that the imagery with which a society pictures to itself the relations between the dead and the living can always be broken down in terms of an attempt to hide, embellish or justify, on the religious level, the relations prevailing, in that society among the living.