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Inventing a new verbal art from traditional issues The evangelical songs of the Suruí of Rondônia

Cédric Yvinec

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Several ethnographical studies have described the conversion of indigenous Amazonian people to Christianity, which is a widespread phenomenon. However, these studies have often focused on the insertion of Christian discourses and practices within their cosmologies (e.g. Capiberibe 2007; Bonilla 2009; Grotti 2009; Vilaça 2009) and they tend to explain why the indigenous cosmology was somehow prepared to incorporate some elements of Christianity, while reformulating or neglecting others (Vilaça 1997). Thus, conversion is mainly described on the semantic level of representations – and, of course, on the level of sociological relationships that these inform (relations with kinsmen or with neighbouring groups). However, the semantic content of religious representations is often poor, confused, or not really taken into account by many individuals who claim to ‘believe’ in a religious doctrine. Indeed, for other phenomena of transmission of religious representation, such as prophetic movements, it has been shown that the semantic content was less important than the pragmatics of transmission (Severi 2004). As a matter of fact, before turning into beliefs and representations, Christianity first appears as a set of discursive and ritual practices, which are defined by some generic forms and legitimate contexts, such as prayer, preaching and praising. These pragmatic issues are closely connected with sociological issues. In indigenous Amazonia, these new discursive practices have to be implemented into a cultural context in which verbal arts play a prominent role, particularly in the sociological differentiation of knowledge – it is unlikely that, in Amazonia, someone can secure himself a position of chief, ritual leader or shaman without mastering some kind of verbal art. Consequently, in that context, conversion can be described as the interaction between two systems of verbal practices – the indigenous one and the Christian one. More specifically, due to the importance of musical (instrumental or verbal) speech in most relationships with Amazonia’s many figures of otherness – affines, strangers, non-human beings, spirits – conversion can appear as a case study for the concept of ‘musicalising the other’ (Hill, this volume).

Here, I thus argue that the success of Protestantism among a population of the Brazilian Amazon, the Suruí of Rondônia, can be analysed as the invention of a new system of verbal arts. First, I give some ethnographical information on the historical process of conversion among the Suruí, in order to show that a specific verbal art, evangelical song, played a key role in the success of Christianity in that population. Then I turn to a

comparison between the ‘traditional’ system of verbal art and the new one promoted by Protestant missionaries, in order to show that the pragmatic issues that underpinned the former remain at stake in the latter.¹

Traditional Social Morphology and Recent History of the Suruí

The Suruí of Rondônia (also known as *Paitei*, their auto-denomination) are a Tupi-Mondé-speaking population of Brazilian Amazonia that numbers about twelve hundred today. They were first contacted in 1969, when their territory, which lay in the interfluvium of the Rio Machado and the Rio Roosevelt, was opened up to agricultural development for settlers from southern Brazil. Before this contact, in classical Amazonian fashion, they relied on hunting and slash-and-burn horticulture, and maintained a warlike relationship with their neighbours. They lived in one or two big villages of several longhouses, which they moved every two or three years. Their population probably numbered around five hundred. Hierarchy and social differentiation were strongly marked among men, with a high proportion of polygynous families. Men, constrained by an avuncular rule of marriage, married at a relatively late age (over twenty), but some of them could have three or four wives, or more; this led to a high percentage of single men. The tensions that arose from these inequalities were partially reduced by two practices that provided young men with the opportunity to become political leaders, or at least to marry earlier: war and agonistic beer festivals, which both required the composition of a specific kind of ritual song. However, elders remained very dominant over the young.

This traditional order collapsed in the decades following the contact with ‘Whites’ (*yaraey*, who are defined as owners of metallic tools and firearms). First, the Suruí met a FUNAI contact team, and soon afterwards, pioneer farmers.² Most of the Suruí lands were invaded by settlers and deforested, while boom towns grew in the vicinity of the Indian reservation Sete de Setembro, which was delimited for them in 1977, in the states of Rondônia and Mato Grosso. The generation of men in their twenties at the time of contact were the first to be able to handle trade and working relationships with Whites. They first earned money as employees of the FUNAI. In 1980, as the Suruí succeeded in expelling the farmers that had settled on their lands, these young men became ‘owners’ of the fields of coffee trees that the farmers had grown, while the others had to work for them.

1. I refer to the verbal arts of the Suruí that existed before they converted to Protestantism as ‘traditional’ for the sake of convenience of reference, because they form a system that had stabilised and had been passed down from generation to generation, when the Suruí lived in voluntary isolation. I do not mean that these verbal arts display any intrinsic feature that would distinguish them from any so-called ‘modern’ ones. In my view, the Protestant verbal arts are not in any way more ‘modern’ or less part of a ‘tradition’ than the Suruí ones; they were just introduced into the Suruí system of verbal arts more recently.

2. The Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) is the Brazilian federal government agency responsible for protecting indigenous populations.

In the late 1980s, they turned to selling timber and controlled most of the monetary income of the Suruí until the mid-2000s. While that generation gained an economic prominence over the older one, they also had an opportunity to get round the avuncular obstruction. Indeed, the contemporaneous pacification of most indigenous groups of the region entailed access to foreign Indian women. Many Suruí men took women from Cinta-Larga, a neighbouring Tupi-Mondé population and former enemies, while the reverse never occurred. However, at the height of timber selling, in the early 1990s, the abundance of monetary resources was quickly spent on consumption goods, especially on manufactured alcoholic beverages, while maize-beer drinking waned, as people gradually gave up growing maize. Although industrial beer and liquors are consumed in a festive and somehow prestigious way, this kind of drunkenness had never been completely channelled in a ceremonial way and it frequently caused quarrels. Logging companies rapidly took advantage of the competition between Suruí men to gain access to their lands, so that almost every man eventually got to have 'his' logger and needed to control a piece of land and a trail to smuggle his timber out. Consequently, the villages, which had already split along the coffee plantations, became more scattered. Matrimonial instability grew, because wealth attracted many White women of easy virtue, whereas Suruí wives were suspected of having affairs with White men in the villages while their husbands were out in the forest with their logger. Such a condition is described as 'scattered' (*pamitota*, 'all following each one's face'), 'dissipated' (*wawala*) and 'lawless' (*paweitxaesame õm*, 'without law of living together').

Conversion to Protestantism

Conversion to evangelical Protestantism took place in this context. The Suruí had been in contact with missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) since 1974. However, for two decades the missionaries barely preached and mainly dedicated themselves to translating the Bible into Suruí, which gave them a good command of the Suruí language. In the late 1980s, a few Suruí men encountered a couple of the Deutsch Indianer Pionier Mission (DIPM). These missionaries started to preach actively and to convert the Suruí even though they could not speak the native language at all (they had to rely on linguistic assistance by the previous ones). The first believers were recruited from among second-rate leaders; later, a number of people who did not succeed in the timber economy became believers, as well as the elderly. However, within a decade, almost all Suruí, male and female, had become *crente* ('believers' in Portuguese, a category that refers to all Protestants in that region, except Lutherans) or 'masters of God' (*palobiwayey*). Some of these converts have remained *crente* since then; others gave up going to church after a few months or years. In the ideology of the DIPM – or at least, in the interpretation of that ideology by the Suruí – being *crente* means 'giving oneself to God' (*palobġa awayõ*).

Long before they had converted any Suruí, the SIL missionaries had translated the notion of ‘God’ by the already existing locution *palob*, ‘our father (inclusive of addressee)’. In the traditional cosmology this locution refers to a mythological male character who provoked the differentiation of animal species and their separation from humanity, and to an unremarkable shamanic spirit, whose song claims it ‘made’ sundry beings (‘daylight’, ‘stones’, ‘shamans’, ‘benches’). The mythological character is related to the Amazonian figure of the Twins, since he usually appears with his ‘Skin-Flake’ (*palobleregud*), which was subsequently associated with the Christian ‘devil’ (in spite of the fact that Our-Father does not behave in a kinder way than his Skin-Flake). The missionaries managed to convince the Suruí that God/Our-Father had the power to cure diseases, solve tensions with kin and spouses, and protect believers from any aggressions, physical or magical. All these misfortunes define ‘sin’ (*ñan*, ‘bad’) as ‘entanglement with difficulties’ (*meresotepāy*). ‘Giving oneself to God’ is not a matter of faith, since no one ever questioned his existence. Believers explain their conversion, not because they realised that God exists, but because they interacted with him personally, meeting him in dreams. However, meeting God is not a significant occurrence: people may experience this quite frequently. Conversion is not a very dramatic process: the new *crente* simply states his will to live in a Christian way and starts going to church; sometimes, baptism by immersion is practised. Thus, no Suruí is a non-believer: there are only sinful believers.³ After a few years of observance, many individuals go through a time of sin, then mend their ways, and so on.

First and foremost, being a ‘believer’ depends on one’s behaviour. This requires abstaining from several activities that had been intensely practised at the time the Suruí met the DIPM. Believers must not drink alcohol, smoke tobacco or dance; this meant that both the consumption of manufactured alcohol and traditional beer festivals were prohibited; shamanism became impossible too. They could not indulge in adulterous relationships – however, polygynous marriages were not prohibited and the missionaries never interfered in the Suruí matrimonial rules. Believers could not fight with other Suruí or with foreigners; in their sermons, the DIPM missionaries advised their audience to yield to political authorities, both to the Brazilian state representatives and to the indigenous leaders (even if Suruí leaders often refused to observe Protestant rules). Finally, believers could not ‘interact with idols’ (*soeyalapa*), that is, practise shamanism, since the notion of ‘idol’ refers to any invisible power other than God; the missionaries failed to persuade the Suruí that the ‘idols’, that is the shamanic spirits (*soey*), do not exist. Believers state that these spirits are lower gods, whose power is just weaker than God’s.

3. There are heretics among the Suruí, since a few villages, because of political rivalry, left the ‘Suruí Church’ to follow other Protestant churches (Adventist, Assembly of God, and various local Pentecostal churches). However, those that I observed – Adventist – still used the SIL material (translated Bible, hymnal) that they had received before they dissented, and their verbal practices were still similar.

These prohibitions obviously met some expectations of the elder Suruí men and of all those who did not succeed very well in the timber economy. Indeed, the elderly could hope to dissuade the young from stealing the wives they had and did not lose much in the prohibition of violence and beer festivals. The poor, who had no money to spend on alcohol or other luxury goods, would not lose much in the dancing and drinking prohibition either. However, Protestantism spread far beyond these social groups, at least as a temporary state. This was probably made possible because evangelical Protestantism did not only act in a prohibitive way: it also offered new tools and means. Protestantism successfully promoted various verbal arts, most noticeably songs that were able to supersede those it banned: shamanic songs, which were important therapeutic devices, and beer festival songs, which were major symbolic goods, especially for those – the young – who were traditionally deprived of real goods (women). As a matter of fact, some of these new verbal arts enjoyed some of the performative properties and symbolic values of the traditional ones: some started to be used as therapeutic or magical devices; others became prestigious performances that new believers particularly valued, just like performing beer festival songs was appreciated by the young. In the Protestant tradition – at least in that to which the SIL and DIPM missionaries are heirs – no verbal art really enjoys such properties and values. So the success of these new verbal arts lies in the interaction between Suruí issues and these new verbal forms, and it is this question that I address here. First, I set out the traditional verbal art system. Then I describe the evangelical verbal art system and I detail rhetoric of evangelical songs. Finally, I explain the issue of authorship and the performative expectancies of these songs.

Overview of Suruí Traditional Verbal Arts

In the Suruí tradition, there are two marked forms of speech, which may be labelled as ‘verbal arts’ in so far as they are considered as different from ordinary talking and as requiring specific abilities. These are ‘singing’ and ‘performing spirits’, which hereafter I will refer to, respectively, as ‘profane songs’ and ‘shamanic songs’.

‘Singing’, *merewá*, literally ‘saying repeatedly’, refers to any kind of sung speech. It is only considered as an intensive form of speech, defined by its repetitive structure. Repetition and redundancy are the basis of the high expressivity of profane songs: this is what the particle *pere* – which means ‘repetitively, completely, throughout’ – denotes. ‘Singing’ is the most perfect way of telling something: when, in a narrative, the narrator announces: *eebo dena iwewá e* (‘then [he] said that’), he or she implies that the character sung about the event in question – and usually a quotation of the song follows. However, the Suruí do not credit profane songs with any symbolic efficacy: ‘singing’ has no material consequences whatsoever. The topics suitable for singing are numerous, ranging from exceptional events (homicide) to humdrum occurrences (fishing, hunting). Each of these define a subgenre of

profane song: *paloakabewá*, ‘recounting a homicide’, *ayōrewá*, ‘recounting an adultery’, *ihxakabewá*, ‘recounting a fishing party’, and so on, each distinguished by a tune and a lexical style. Most of the topics of songs include a confrontational feature. Only the individual who initiated the event in question is entitled to sing about it – consequently, singers are almost always male. But anyone who has initiated such an event is allowed to sing about it, no matter how old or young he is. As a general rule, ‘singing’ claims both that the singer initiated a noteworthy sequence of actions and that this sequence is now completed. Indeed, some meaningful sequences – war, beer festivals – cannot be completed as full events or acts until their initiator sings. To this extent, ‘singing’ can be labelled as an illocutionary act, in Austin’s (1962) terms. For every new occurrence, a new song must be composed: it should comply with the stylistic rules of the subgenre in question, but a minimum poetic novelty is expected. This will prove both the authorship and the genuine responsibility of the singer and actor of the event. ‘Singing’ is the hallmark of agency: to prove that you have done a deed of some kind, you must be able to compose a song of *that* kind – the generic conformity of the song proves the act belonged to that class of acts (killing, drinking, etc.) and the singer is a man of that kind (killer, drinker, etc.) – and you must be able to compose a *new* song, as the novelty of the song proves that an act of that kind was achieved on *that* occasion. Thus, every profane song denotes the ‘eventhood’ of a particular sequence of actions and the authorship of its speaker.

‘Performing spirits’, *sopereiga* – literally ‘repeatedly picking a spirit’; that is, shamanic singing – is a special kind of ‘singing’ (*merewá*), defined by its authorship: indeed, spirits are said to ‘sing’ their own songs (only shamans can hear them), whereas the shaman is only said to ‘perform’ the spirits’ songs – this ‘performance of spirits’ is what the ordinary human can hear when a shaman is singing. Due to their foreign authors, the lyrics of shamanic songs resort to a language that is quite different from everyday Suruí and hard to understand for many listeners. Their tune is radically different from profane songs too. Although the performer – the shaman – is not the author, this speech is credited with perlocutionary effects, in Austin’s terms, since it is not only able to cure the sick, but also to kill its speaker. ‘Performing spirits’ is a very dangerous act, because when practised illegitimately, it leads the speaker to death; only shamans – that is, always adult men chosen by spirits – can perform their songs without making them angry and being consequently punished by them. Each song is expected by the spirits (and the patients) to be performed in a similar manner each time by every shaman. ‘Performing spirits’ is limited to a corpus of songs. In theory, each spirit owns one song and all shamans know all the spirits, which means that they all perform the same corpus of songs in the same way. In practice, the shamans do perform the most important songs in a roughly similar way; but their ways of performing minor songs probably vary a lot more. What is more, minimal variations on some specific part of the song prove that the shaman is attuning his singing to the invisible presence of the spirit, not trotting out words he

learned by rote. Shamanic songs are performed, always in a ritualised way, whenever the help of the spirits is needed, either to heal an individual or to drive away diseases from the village. In every shamanic session, the shamans enumerate songs in an organised way until the expected outcome (recovery) is reached or until the corpus of songs they know is exhausted. Thus, ‘performing spirits’ is aimed at preventing or remedying events such as breaks in the usual, healthy state of affairs, by displaying a whole, well-ordered speech. To a certain extent, since many spirits bear names of natural species (although their ritual connection to their natural eponym is rather weak), Suruí shamanic singing can illustrate the concept of ‘musicalisation as a process of creating a naturalised social space through singing the names of animal, fish and other non-human species’ (Hill, this volume).

The stylistic and pragmatic properties of these two verbal arts can be contrasted and summarised in the table below.

Table 10.1 Characteristics of profane songs and shamanic songs.

	Profane songs (<i>merewá</i> , ‘singing’)	Shamanic songs (<i>sopereiga</i> , ‘performing spirits’)
<i>Understandability</i>	Full	Low
<i>Authorship</i>	Human	Non-human
<i>Performativity</i>	Illocutionary	Perlocutionary
<i>Variability</i>	Mandatory	Negated
<i>Event</i>	Denoted and constituted	Prevented or negated

Evangelical Verbal Arts

When they converted the Suruí to Protestantism, the missionaries introduced three new verbal arts:

- Preaching, *palomakobáh palobğa*, literally ‘teaching God to everybody’;
- Prayer, *palobmayã*, literally ‘talking to God’;
- Evangelical song, *palobewá*, literally ‘saying/singing God’.

The most valued of these verbal arts, in the missionaries’ practice, are preaching and prayer, far more than evangelical songs. Of course, this is never explicitly stated, but the missionaries imply that preaching and praying can return some material benefits, whereas singing hardly does.

Preaching is specialist work, initially performed by missionaries; it is now carried out by trained Suruí, during church services. The content is very technical, expounded in quite scholarly ways through reading and commenting on the Bible, partly in Portuguese, standing behind a desk, on a platform in front of a blackboard. The congregation usually pay little attention to what is said and find it boring and tiresome – they consider themselves as engaged in the specific activity of pupils, *sodiğikin*, ‘studying’, ‘looking at written things’, even though they are not actually reading. On the contrary,

the various actual or potential speakers vie with each other in their erudition, carefully prepare their lecture and call themselves various bureaucratic titles ('pastor', 'assistant', 'missionary', 'usher').⁴ In stark contrast to local Brazilian preachers, who affect impassionate enthusiasm, the Suruí pastors opt for tedious earnestness, probably in the wake of the DIPM missionaries. The preachers' legitimacy relies on their personal training in evangelical institutes in distant cities (Porto Velho, Cuiabá), which only rather young individuals can attend, because this requires a fair command of Portuguese. The individuals, including a few women, who are selected by the missionaries to do a training course in preaching are motivated by the search for new horizons through experiences reserved for a few specialists. They particularly value the annual meeting with other Christianised tribes and the various trips they go on with missionaries. Such pragmatic settings and sociological issues of 'teaching God' are akin to the position of shamans in respect to helping ordinary people whenever the latter have no need of it: shamans are rather eager to talk about their experiences, and vie with each other, but ordinary (healthy) people are not really interested in listening to them. The efficacy of preaching is not really assessed according to its effects on the congregation (either by their attention, or by the improvement of their behaviour). However, some benefits seem to be expected by the preachers and the congregation: performing and attending 'teaching God' should favour God's blessing for both in a very general way. The exact kind of benefits (health, wealth, afterlife, etc.) and the nature of the connection (reward for care, enhancement of skill, etc.) between 'teaching God' and its salutary consequences are never stated though.

In contrast to preaching, prayer can be performed by everybody, in everyday Suruí language, and its communicative function is prominent. It is always spoken publicly and aloud, by only one individual, while others keep mute. Everybody is expected to close their eyes. It starts with a vocative (*palob!*, 'God!') and is usually made of two parts: first, it lists some attributes of God ('you made forest, you made rivers' and so on); then, it requests God's practical help, in a very specific way for some people ('cure them', 'give them enough money to pay their bus ticket'), and carefully lists them, without giving any justification; finally it concludes with only one foreign word, *amen*, repeated by the audience. In theory, the first part is stable and relies on the speaker's remembrance of the Genesis and his or her inspiration by the Suruí natural environment and mythological tradition ('you made the Brazil nut tree'). This is probably supposed to set his or her authority to pray. However, almost all adult men and women dare to pray. Believers claim that 'talking to God' has perlocutionary effects – and sinners tacitly agree. Of course, this belief is explicitly supported by the missionaries since the supposed efficacy of prayer is one of their main arguments in favour of Christianity. The varying efficiency of prayer does not elicit any discussion;

4. Some Suruí preachers acquire a good knowledge of biblical narratives and can argue sophisticatedly about theological matters.

when questioned about its failure to achieve its goal, Christian Suruí will answer that prayer should either be repeated and carried on, or performed by another speaker, or both. The Suruí have an idea that all speakers are not equally good at praying, but there is no explicit ranking of them and women can pray while men stay mute. Although prayer is verbally addressed to God, there are always one or several real human addressees in the audience: the expected beneficiaries of God's help – if God is requested to cure a sick person, the speaker will lay his or her hand on the former's head. Thus, 'talking to God' is tantamount to a public expression of the commitment of the speaker to the addressee's interest. This interactional issue is very similar to shamanic singing, since shamans are supposed to carry on performing one spirit after another, until their patient gets better; and their effort is assessed by the time they spend listing spirits' songs.⁵

As a matter of fact, evangelical songs are not as valued as preaching and prayers by the missionaries. Of course, they do not discourage praising God by singing and there is no explicit ranking of the various evangelical verbal practices. But the missionaries do not reward evangelical singing with a prestigious social status such as the position of preacher, and they do not grant it clear perlocutionary effectiveness. That which the Suruí call 'saying/singing God' is supposed to play the ritual function, in the missionaries' views, of praising God, since it translates the Portuguese locution *louvar a Deus*. Admittedly, celebrating, praising may be an aspect of 'singing' in profane songs. However, it is important to note that by denoting evangelical songs by a locution made of the verb *-ewá* ('say/sing') and of God as its direct object, the Suruí classify this verbal art as a subgenre of 'singing' – that is, as a genre of profane song (in contrast to shamanic song). Consequently, 'God' or 'God's deeds' appear as a topic suitable for singing, which is, in some respect, similar to a human activity such as killing, hunting, seducing, being intoxicated, and so on. The little interest missionaries take in Suruí traditional culture probably prevented them from noticing this odd equation from a Christian point of view. In spite of its lesser significance in the missionaries' views, compared to preaching and praying, evangelical singing is undoubtedly the verbal art that the Suruí appreciate most, both as speakers and as an audience. Such an unexpected preference is therefore worth analysing.

Genres and Uses of Evangelical Songs

Evangelical singing is the most complex of the verbal arts that appeared with conversion to Protestantism. Indeed, one can distinguish three

5. The opening of perlocutionary effectiveness – here, therapeutic efficacy – to anybody by prayer causes a problem: indeed, experience will soon contradict such a claim. Perhaps the characteristics of preaching somehow meet the disequilibrium caused by the 'democratization' of alleged verbal efficacy in Protestant prayer. In fact, preachers claim a kind of perlocutionary power too, but restrict it to a difficult technique that requires specialised training.

forms of evangelical songs. The first distinction is obvious: there are, on the one hand, evangelical hymns in Portuguese, and, on the other, songs in Suruí. But among the latter there are songs whose lyrics have been written down in a hymnal, and others whose lyrics have not. These distinctions are not purely linguistic or formal.

Evangelical hymns in Portuguese, available in the hymnal or orally taught by the missionaries, are learned by rote and sung collectively during church services, either by the whole congregation or by a choir of teenagers. Out of church, they are only sung by the young, especially teenage girls. Their performance without the help of a choir remains difficult for the elderly, who can neither write nor speak Portuguese. The aim of the performance is apparently to pass time, and especially to entertain the children who are often left in these young girls' care.

The hymnals that the SIL have supplied to the Suruí since 1992 contain 148 songs in Suruí. Some are obviously mere translations of classical hymns. Their tunes display a strong evangelical influence and their lyrics often refer to classical biblical themes. Most of these songs were composed by the first generation of converted Suruí, both male and female, probably with the help of SIL missionaries. However, some written songs were undoubtedly composed by Suruí by themselves. These display typical features of Suruí traditional songs that the non-written evangelical songs also display. The names of their composers, often illiterate individuals, also prove that many of these songs were first composed in a purely oral way. Although the name of the composer is mentioned above each lyric in this booklet, many singers do not pay any attention to it; consequently, they may sing works by their close kin or political rivals indiscriminately. Indeed, these are usually sung collectively, during church services only.

Finally, adult men and a few elderly women regularly compose new songs and sing them immediately, without writing them down. These songs do not explicitly refer to any specific event – or, more exactly, the audience cannot guess what the song refers to without an explanation from the composer. They usually allude to various biblical themes – especially salvation – and emphasise the relationship between the singer and God or Jesus. The motivation for composing a song – according to statements of both composers and listeners – is usually an interaction of the singer with God at night, in dreams.⁶ The author of such a song will often sing it again, during a church service and out of church as well. Some of these songs are well known, at least to the kin of their author; some quickly fall into oblivion. Respectable composers seem to own (i.e. to be recognised as the author of) no more than five or six songs, which is far less than the average number of profane songs owned by composers; pastors apparently compose more songs. Whenever asked, the author will proudly sing his or her song again. But for some time,

6. Among the profane subgenres, there is *akersonmabewá*, 'song of dream'. Songs of this subgenre allude to auspicious dreams in a very opaque way. They are mainly composed by young singers.

no one will dare to sing a new song in its author's place. The authorship is thus quite emphasised in these songs. Consequently, songs of this kind are never sung collectively – moreover, collective singing is mostly performed by the young, while the authors of these songs are mostly rather old. I collected a dozen of them, from a pastor about sixty years old, a fifty-year-old man and a seventy-year-old woman.

These subcategories of 'saying/singing God' are not explicit, and their boundaries are porous. While some of the written Suruí songs were probably first composed as oral songs, before the missionaries selected them to be written down, some composers perhaps hope to have their compositions included in future editions of the SIL booklet, since they do not conceal their pride in being recognised as 'God singers'. Conversely, the corpus of songs included in the booklet is obviously used as a source of inspiration by composers of new songs, either by directly reading the lyrics or by listening to the performance of this corpus during church services. The latter way is undoubtedly more productive.

Stylistics and Pragmatics of Evangelical Songs

Most songs, especially non-written ones, are composed by middle-aged or old Suruí, who used to compose profane songs. Unsurprisingly, they have inherited numerous formal characteristics of profane songs. From a melodic point of view, they display an overall pattern that can be found, on a different scale, in many profane song subgenres: the first segments of a sentence, which often are the same syntagms repeated two or three times, are sung rather loudly, with a slightly rising pitch, and then the last one is sung by a lower voice, with a descending pitch. On the lexical and syntactic levels too, non-written evangelical songs inherited the mannered style of profane songs: they have conspicuously complicated locutions, including rare or foreign words inserted in strings of genitive or objective constructions:

meresotepāyepabepekotigta

'carrying the width of arms [= cross] of entanglement with difficulties [= sin]'

or:

omaparaisoiway

'the master of the paradise of mine'

However, the most interesting patterns that evangelical songs share with traditional ones are rhetorical: these are the parallelistic structure, the quoting pattern and the evidential modality specific to those genres. Evangelical songs have clearly the same parallelistic structure as profane songs – this pattern is conspicuously absent from the written Suruí evangelical songs that are obvious translations of hymns of the Protestant tradition. This parallelism relies on a leitmotif and development pattern: a similar syntactic structure is expanded and enriched throughout the song by

inserting and varying some syntagmatic elements, usually direct objects or subjects. For instance, consider the following fragment of a song composed by an old woman:

1. *Ate meyxā omerepi i, Palobağa pağay*
Ate meyxā omerepi, ate meyxā omerepi, omerepi i, Palobağa ena
Ate meyxā Noeperemi meyidağa ma, ibapna ma, olade meykay ewepi oğay i,
Jesusაğa ena
Ate meyxā omerepi, ate meyxā omerepi ġaraesiyōpabilī ibapağa ma
Noeperemi maloyppoyha makoy ma, olade meykay ewepi oğay i,
Jesusაğa ena
Ate meyxā omerepi, ate meyxā omerepi, omerepi i, Jesus აğa pağay
 ‘Don’t you listen to me?’ God is saying to all of us
 ‘Don’t you listen to me, don’t you listen to me, listen to me?’ God is saying
 so
 ‘Don’t you hear what I’m saying to you, “Just like Noah, make your own, your
 canoe!”’ Jesus is saying so
 ‘Don’t you listen to me, don’t you listen to me, don’t you hear what I’m saying
 to you, “In the middle of the swamped forest make a canoe, just like
 Noah shunned the downpour!”’ Jesus is saying so
 ‘Don’t you listen to me, don’t you listen to me, listen to me?’ Jesus is saying
 to all of us.

Its parallelistic structure relies on the following semantic and syntactic pattern:

Ate meyxā o-[developmental slot No. 1]-*epi i* [developmental slot No. 2]-*eğa*
 [developmental slot No. 3]
 ‘Don’t you hear me saying [No. 1]’ [No. 2] is saying to [No. 3]

Developmental slots No. 2 and No. 3 are syntactically loose – they are made up of a free subject with an indirect object or an expletive locution – and they are semantically simple, as they only refer to Christian deities and indefinite addressees. Developmental slot No. 1 is the direct object of the transitive verb *epi*, ‘to hear’, and can grow to become a complex clause set that contains most of the lexical variations and semantic information of the song. It is worth noting that what is developed initially appears as a simple personal pronoun, *o*-, ‘me’; thus a deictic pronoun is later replaced by a whole discourse (‘make a canoe like Noah’s’, and so on). Such development of deictics is particularly productive, as Suruí sentences include numerous exophoric and endophoric pronouns whose reference often remains uncertain. This uncertainty is especially pronounced in evangelical songs, since the relevant context is noticeably vague, as the song refers to events that the audience has not witnessed (e.g. interactions in dreams) and/or cannot identify accurately (e.g. Biblical comparisons).

This whole pattern – Leitmotiv part No. 1 / Developmental slot / Leitmotiv part No. 2 including minor developmental slots – is a classical

structure of profane songs.⁷ It is worth noting that in profane songs this structure is usually both more complex and more rigid. On the one hand, the leitmotif nature can be more syntactical or abstract, allowing more developmental slots to appear. On the other hand, the classification of subgenres requires developments to include some sets of metaphors specific to each subgenre – to some extent, such a lexical or semantic classification of evangelical songs is only assumed by the references to Christian deities. Thus, this developmental pattern is probably easier to handle in the evangelical context than it has ever been traditionally.

As the previous example shows, evangelical songs are scarcely a direct discourse: they often include quotations, and these sometimes contain other quotations. Even if a song does not claim to quote God's speech but only refers to the singer's speech, this will usually be reported as a quotation, as in the following fragment of a song composed by a middle-aged man:

2. *“Yena te bo oih ter”, olade ihkarsonimaibikoy moribmoyhpiabpabeka, eetiga
Palob ya ihkarsonimaibikoy moribmoyhpiabpabepi oiga po’, oğa
ena pağay*
 *“So I’m really dying”, as I was thinking so, at the bottom of the vast lake
inside the belly of the big fish, then God picked me out of the belly
of the big fish at the bottom of the vast lake, they say’, I’m saying
this now to us all.*

This embedding of quotation is perfectly in the style of profane songs. It seems closely connected to the very act of ‘singing’: in many written songs, although they probably rely on translations of some Christian themes, the Suruí composers apparently added such quotation-framing phrases to embed the whole song. This quotation device is articulated with the parallelistic structure described above. As a general rule, quoted sentences appear in an anaphoric way, at the head of a whole sentence, while quotation-framing sentences appear as an epiphora. Thus a quoted sentence usually provides the first part of the leitmotif, while the quotation-framing sentence provides its second part and some minor developmental slots. The main developmental slot is filled in by some parts of the quoted material. If there is only one level of quotation, a syntactical part of the quoted sentence will be developed; if there are two levels of embedded quotations, one of those will be developed. As a result, quoted elements are foregrounded, while quotation-framing elements appear last, somehow backgrounded rhetorically and musically – since the last part of the musical phrase is sung in a lower voice.

Finally, the evangelical songs also display a pervasive rhetorical feature of traditional songs, both profane and shamanic – a complex

7. The survival of this traditional structure in non-written evangelical songs can be compared to the structure of written evangelical songs obviously based on translation. Indeed, such a parallelistic structure tends to disappear in many of the latter: either the song is purely repetitive, or it is purely narrative with no lexical or semantic recurring features. The repetitive songs are sung at church only, in a very ritualised way, to open or close the service. The narrative ones are never sung.

authorship pattern, due to the avoidance of the witnessed evidential mode. In Suruí, two evidential modes contrast with each other: witnessed and non-witnessed evidentiality. The former is marked by the verbal particle *de* and by the sentence-final marker *e*; the latter is marked by the verbal particle *ya* and/or by the sentence-final markers *a* (assertive) and *i* (non-assertive). This evidential opposition is clear-cut in affirmative sentences dealing with past events: then *de* claims that the speaker witnessed the event that he or she is talking about, whereas *ya* states that it was not, but that it was known through hearsay. In other types of utterances, *ya* only states that the speaker did not or could not witness the events, without positively referring to hearsay – perhaps just because the events may not have occurred yet, like in an interrogative sentence. In some sentences, aspectual particles may take the place of verbal evidential particles; then, only the sentence-final markers allow the evidential status of the utterance to be inferred. However, if no evidential markers can be identified, this usually means that the witnessed mode is avoided – for instance, the present marker *eǵa* is seemingly incompatible with the witnessed sentence-final marker.

Although non-witnessed evidentiality (*ya... a* or *ya... i*) does not positively appear in all songs, any kind of sung speech – shamanic, profane or evangelical – is explicitly incompatible with witnessed evidentiality (*de... e*). In shamanic songs, witnessed evidential particles just do not occur, and speakers have no reason to worry about it, since these songs are supposedly fixed. As regards profane songs, informants state this as a rule: ‘When you sing (*merewá*), you do not say “*de*”. You say “*de*” when you tell something (*iwema*)’. This rule was elicited as I had tried to sing a basic profane song of my own composition, but I was corrected by an old woman and her adult son. I was not given any more justification of this rule, except that ‘This is our way’. Similarly, in the evangelical songs, witnessed evidentiality does not occur (except in a few embedded clauses) and these songs pervasively use the particles *ya* and *eǵa*, contrasting or incompatible with it. These non-witnessed evidential particles especially occur in the main, quotation-framing clauses:

3. *Waba meypah meyxa, ye ya Palobla paǵay a, paǵay ma, oǵa ena paǵay*
Let’s teach us all this: ‘God told us all, they say, “You are going to disappear”’, I’m saying so to all of us
4. *Anode, anode ena e, iwepide oǵay eweiway ya Jesus ya iweariwa ena*
‘This one standing there thinks about me “That’s true”’, the one in charge of that, Jesus, delights of that, they say
5. *Jesus ya awewá oǵay*
Jesus talked to me, they say
‘So you are going to come here, as owner of my paradise, aren’t you?’ thus he talked to me, he talked to me

Thus the song as a whole is always affected by a doubt surrounding the identity of the ultimate source of its utterance.

Of course, these characteristics of evangelical songs are, in a sense, ‘inherited’ from the traditional songs: the composers of evangelical songs have gone on developing leitmotifs, embedding quotations and denying

witness because they had learned to sing that way in their traditional verbal art system. This is particularly true from the point of view of the rhetorical technique: composers have had to resort to the skills they already managed, and the developmental structure has provided them with a routine technique for composing songs. However, they were not compelled to embed quotations or to keep a non-witnessed evidentiality – the missionaries are probably not very keen on the sceptical innuendos that the latter feature may arise. Eventually, whatever the historical reasons of these patterns, the inferences they allow the audience to make, the relationship they set between the speaker, its utterance and the audience, the ideological consequences they have on the understanding of Christianity by the Suruí and the epistemological and sociological issues that they deal with are still to be analysed.

The combination of these three patterns – developmental structure, quotation embedding and non-witnessed evidentiality – creates a complex assertive system and an elusive authorship in these songs. Indeed, until the singing ends, the audience cannot be certain that some developmental potentialities do not remain unnoticed, hidden in some pronouns; and until the end, they cannot be sure that some utterance will not end up embedded in a discrete, delayed quotation frame; and even then, the paramount evidential authority will remain unidentified, due to the framing non-witnessed particle.

Authorship in Traditional and Evangelical Songs

Actually, such delusiveness can be found in traditional songs, profane or shamanic, and to an even higher degree, since they display the same feature in a very systematic way. Elsewhere (Yvinec 2011, 2012), I have suggested that the avoidance of witnessed evidentiality in traditional songs always introduces at least two kinds of co-speakers or co-authors of the sung utterance, along with the singer.⁸ In short, in shamanic songs, these co-authors are the spirits – who are the official authors of the songs that the shamans perform – and the other shamans, who all claim to sing exactly the same songs, and who obviously assess the correctness of the singer's performance. In profane songs, such co-authors are less obvious. However, since one cannot sing without having previously achieved some act that deserves being celebrated, the co-authors can be identified as, on the one hand, himself (not as the singer he is now but as the agent he was before – at the time he performed the event that justifies his present singing); and, on the other hand, the audience, who tacitly recognise his action as worthy of song. Thus, in each case, there are two kinds of co-author: one that is singular and absent – invisible (spirit) or past (individual as agent); and one that is plural and present – the audience, either a specialist or a general one (see Figure 10.1).

8. Complex authorship is frequent in Amazonian verbal arts, especially in shamanic songs, which led Cesarino (2011) to prefer the concept of translator, instead of author, to describe the relationship between Marubo shamans and their songs.

Since such a homology can be found between the authorship patterns of two radically contrasted genres of songs, it is worth trying to search for a homologous tri-partition of authorship in evangelical songs.

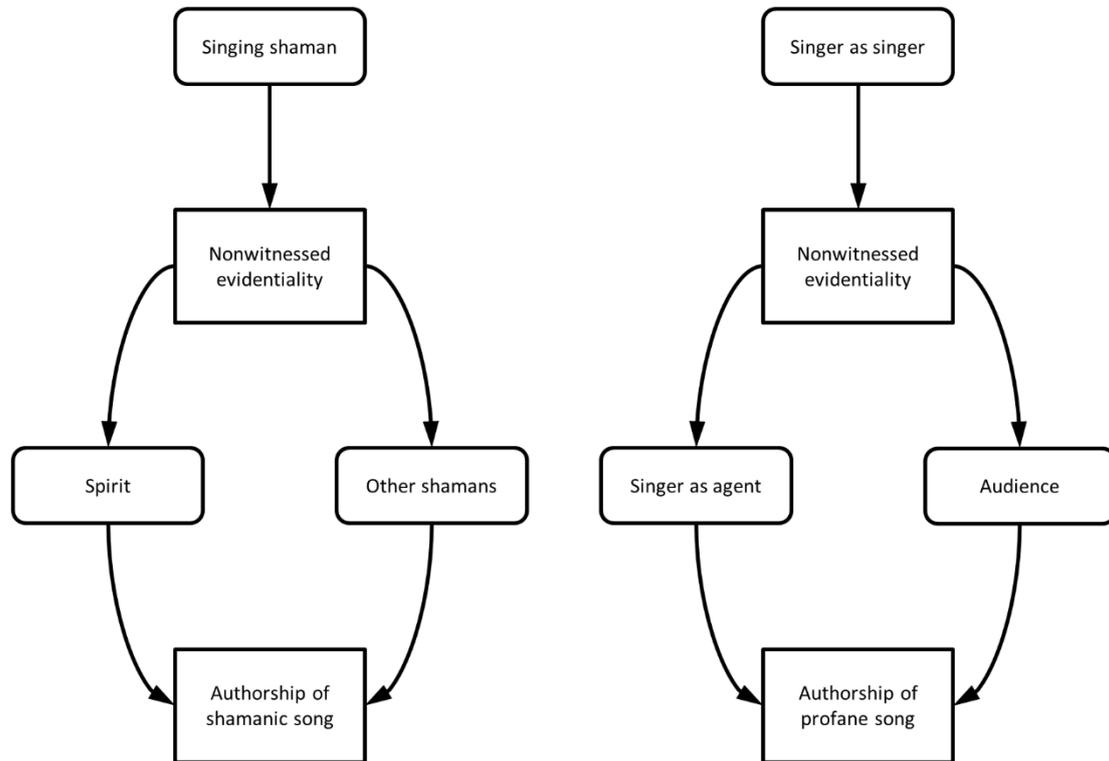


Figure 10.1 Authorship pattern in shamanic songs (left) and profane songs (right). Figure created by the author.

The first candidate for co-authoring these songs is obvious: God himself, who could play the part of the shamanic spirits. Indeed, many songs claim to report what God did or said. Evangelical singers admit that they consciously composed their songs – they thought about them before singing them aloud, they hummed them first, and so on. Nonetheless, they ascribe the decision of composing to some personal interaction with God. Ascribing one of the positions of co-author to a supernatural agent (i.e. an entity that is invisible, powerful and impossible to interact with under ordinary circumstances) thus sets us in the shamanic songs’ authoring pattern, since the profane model does not call on any such agency. So, if we follow this shamanic model, then the third pole of authorship should be attributed to a human audience that masters a specialised knowledge. Within the evangelical world, such an audience could be identified as the missionaries (and, secondarily, as the previous evangelical song composers). Such a cast for the present, plural, audience-like co-author part does suit one kind of evangelical song: those that have been written down. As a matter of fact, by being selected by the missionaries to appear in the hymnal, these songs have been approved and co-authored by them. Of course, the Suruí individuals who are already recognised as good evangelical composers, especially those who are employed by the SIL as Bible translators, might influence the missionaries’

choice and share their position of co-authors. These songs, by being recognised, collected, materialised and distributed in a standard booklet, become a common heritage that all the believers are entitled to sing, regardless of the identity of the individual human author. Once it has been written down, a song is less identified by its human composer than by its subject or inspirer, since it is the latter that motivated it being written down. As the human author is forgotten, the agency that supposedly inspired all the songs of the corpus, God, can appear as their main author.

Such a homology of authorship pattern between the written evangelical songs and shamanic songs is relevant because it can account for various similarities in their uses. Just like shamanic songs are more or less fixed, and various shamans (who do not claim to have authored them but still allow themselves to assess every performer of these songs) perform these with minimal variations, so also the singers of written evangelical song are multiple. They do not claim to have composed them, and they try to perform them in a stable way, which is always likely to be assessed and corrected by other potential performers, particularly by the supposedly skilled ones, such as evangelical leaders and missionaries. Although evangelical songs do not have a perlocutionary effectiveness by themselves, they are collectively sung in a ritual setting that is monitored by specialists – the church service led by pastors and/or missionaries – and from which some benefits are expected; this echoes the performance of shamanic songs in collective rituals, in which the whole population sings along to the shamans' performance in order to protect the village from disease and disorder. Just like shamanic singing is not by itself efficient in curing the sick but sets into action the powerful agency of the song's spiritual author, evangelical singing during a church service gains God's favour and opens up the way for the efficacy of prayer. Indeed, the corpus of written songs and its tangible materialisation, the SIL hymnal, are considered as 'God's holy things' (*palobasoeymağuy*), endowed with some protective powers. People sleep with the Bible and hymnal at their side, just like they used to sleep with shamanic paraphernalia by their hammock. Of course, there are important differences between shamanic songs and written evangelical songs in terms of linguistic understandability, modality of learning and allowed performers. However, a similar kind of authorship, denied for him- or herself by the speaker, and indeterminately attributable to supernatural agencies and human specialists, is correlated both in shamanic songs and written evangelical songs with an analogous way of performance and expectancies about its perlocutionary effects.

The shamanic pattern of authorship can account for the use of non-witnessed evidentiality in written evangelical songs, but it would be inadequate for non-written ones – and this is rather troublesome, since many written songs were probably initially composed as non-written ones. Indeed the divine authorship of songs is problematic. God, as an invisible agency and authority, may undoubtedly be convoked by the singers to legitimise their singing. However, tempting as it may be to assign him the part of the shamanic spirits after he turned them silent, I do not think the Christian God

is mighty enough to author songs exactly in the same way as shamanic spirits. No shaman would dare to claim a shamanic song as his; by contrast, evangelical singers do claim authorship of their compositions, at least until these are selected to be written down. Evangelical singers do not describe themselves as modest ‘performers’, always in fear of the author of their utterance. They do not sing God’s words, but sing *about* God words and deeds.

In their description of the song-composing process, singers do not say that God taught them a song’s content, but that they interacted with God and afterwards composed a song. Admittedly, interactions with God, which usually take place while the individual is sleeping, often amount to verbal messages from God to the human person, whether they result in a song or not. Nevertheless, if the song inspired by such a message may reproduce God’s words in direct speech, this will always appear as quoted speech, with an explicit quotation-framing clause – moreover, God’s quotations in songs are not always verbatim reports, according to informants. This is consistent with the classification of such a discourse as a ‘saying/singing’ (*ewá*), rather than as a ‘performing’ (*pereiga*). Consequently, that which authors the song, in the sense of that which legitimises the singing, is not an entity, but an event, and this event includes the singer as a participant, just like in the profane authorship pattern.

If we follow the latter authorship pattern, the other co-author of the non-written evangelical song should be identified as the audience in the wider sense – that is, as an unrestricted, unspecialised audience. As a matter of fact, these songs are initially sung in front of such an audience. Composers recount that they listened (*epi*) to God ‘while they were asleep’ (*akereibita*) – an epistemic situation that is not mere dream, because it has the same ontological value as waking – then they woke up and immediately sang their new song for the first time. This means that the first audience of the song is made up of people who live in the same house – that is, close kin and spouse(s). Then the song may be sung during the day among kin and neighbours, and afterwards, during a church service. If it is sung directly at church, this will only occur during a routine church service, not on a special occasion, such as a meeting of parishioners from different villages or a service in which missionaries or visitors coming from afar participate. Thus, the first audience of non-written evangelical songs can be defined as not very impressive, rather familiar, informal and usually well disposed towards the singer. From an epistemic point of view, it is an audience of peers, since they do not master any specialised knowledge that would allow them to judge the singer’s composition or performance. This does not mean that all the new compositions will be equally welcomed, but praise and criticism will not be able to rely on some specific, recognised competency, so that everybody will know that they are influenced by the everyday relationship between kin. Once again, the similarity of the authorship pattern between profane songs and non-written songs correlates with analogies in their way of performance and the expectancies about their perlocutionary effects. Both are sung by one singer

alone, in front of people who are potential singers of songs that ought to be both similar and different, and who are thus entitled to judge that song. No perlocutionary effect is expected from such songs, since they are neither sung in a particularly ritual context nor are they a prelude to any efficacious verbal practices, such as prayer. As speech acts, they only testify that the singer somehow interacted with God, just like a profane song only testifies that its singer claims to have previously achieved a deed of some kind, that of the song's genre.

Therefore, an interesting correlation between, on the one hand, the kind of audience and, on the other hand, the performative properties and the supposed powerful co-author of the utterance, can be detected in both traditional and evangelical sung verbal arts. In both cases, a non-specialist audience correlates with the denial of perlocutionary effectiveness, whereas a specialist audience allows the singer to claim perlocutionary effectiveness for his or her song. Performative properties depend upon the relative competence of the audience, probably because a specialist audience is able to introduce some supernatural agencies as co-authors of the utterance, whereas when singing in front of peers only, the singer has to assume authorship of his or her utterance. Thus the presumption in the symbolic efficacy relies on a split within the whole audience, between ordinary members and a few members whose special competence is acknowledged by the others. Furthermore, there needs to be a kind of incommunicability between these two parts of the audience. Indeed, Suruí shamans cannot fully explain to their non-shaman kin how they learned their songs. Admittedly, missionaries do not look for any exclusive mystical relation with their deity, but the historical, political and linguistic settings do separate them from their Suruí flock.

As regards traditional verbal arts, this split in the audience relies on obvious linguistic devices, such as lexical opacity and syntactic irregularity, which impair the parsing and understanding of shamanic songs. These characteristics are absent in evangelical songs, or they are ineffective, since Portuguese songs are used in the same way as some Suruí songs. One could argue that writing plays that part: indeed, the use of a song will change once it has been written down. However, this would bypass an important element: it is not writing by itself – many Suruí can write and read nowadays – but writing down by a third party that appears as a determining factor in the perlocutionary expectancies about some evangelical songs. So, first and foremost, it is a pragmatic, interactional setting that is at work, not a technical, cognitive device. It is for this reason that, although they are formally similar to profane songs, some evangelical songs have the performative properties of the traditionally opposite genre – that is, shamanic songs.

Conclusion: Pragmatics of Innovation

The success of Christianity among the Suruí undoubtedly relied on various factors, and verbal arts were probably not the most decisive. However, the success of evangelical singing among the Suruí was probably

favoured by the ambivalence of its authoring pattern, since this allowed the advantages of both traditional genres to be combined: individual recognition and perlocutionary effectiveness. These can be combined by one song, but only successively, not simultaneously: individual recognition of its singer before it is written down, and perlocutionary effectiveness afterwards. By combining these, each suffers some diminution: the singer is recognised only for some time, and the most acknowledged ones will be forgotten by having their songs written down; the perlocutionary effectiveness is only relative, subordinate to that of prayer.

The impossibility of simultaneously holding these advantages shows that this pragmatic issue – combining personal authorship and belief in symbolic efficacy – is a long-lasting, stable element of the Suruí tradition of verbal arts. Indeed, this pragmatic issue remains the same while verbal practices and cosmological representations drastically change. Furthermore, this pragmatic issue has an obvious dynamic part in the composition of new songs and, consequently, in the renewal of verbal arts. Thus, the core of a tradition of verbal arts appears to lie not in some stylistic devices or in beliefs about the performative properties of some discourses, but in these kinds of pragmatic issues that structure a system of verbal arts by organising relationships between the authors', performers' and audiences' expectancies about the performative properties of various genres, which can support various cosmological lexicons.

The importance of singing for the integration of Christian deities in the Suruí discourse appears as an ethnographical case that could exemplify the concept of 'musicalising the other' that Hill (this volume) defines as a pan-Amazonian 'way of socialising relations with affines, non-human beings, and various categories of "others"', so that their otherness is 'both acknowledge[d] and encompass[ed]'. Indeed, the musical genre 'singing God' has rearranged the socialised interactions with the non-human being 'Our-Father/God', by defining its specific position within the set of Suruí musical genres, which often refer to various kinds of others – enemies, affines, others' spouses, shamanic spirits, and so on. Evangelical singing has also created a space for newly arrived human others – the missionaries – among the various voices that can co-author sung discourses. However, in contrast with the ethnographical cases studied by Hill, from the north-western Amazon and Central Brazil, the natural dimension – animal or vegetal names – plays a lesser part in this process of musicalising the otherness of Christian beings, while its dynamic, historical, event-oriented aspect is more salient. Of course, this is linked both to the well-known cultural style of Tupi-speaking groups, in contrast to the Arawakan- and Gê-speaking populations, and to the novelty of the 'others' at stake. Nevertheless, this shows that the concept of musicalising the other should be extended to the question of dynamic otherness – that is, historical changes. Thus, musicalising the other is not only creating new sounds, melodies and metaphors but inserting the new others into the set of contrastive features that define a musical tradition.

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