

GRANTA

PIERRE CLASTRES
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A
HOMOSEXUAL

Granta 60 : 203-21
(1997)



Krenbegi: 'A strange hunter, to say the least'

Pierre Clastres was a young French anthropologist whose book, *Chronique des indiens Guayaki*, described the time he spent among some of the stone-age tribes who then still lived in the jungles of Paraguay and Venezuela. It was published in 1972 and among the people intrigued by it was Paul Auster, who was living in Paris. After Auster returned to the United States, he began to translate Clastres' *Chronicle* and to exchange letters with the author. Eventually an American publisher was found. Then Clastres died in a car accident. The American publisher went bankrupt; and the manuscript, of which Auster had no copy, was lost. There the matter stood for the next fifteen years—a project consigned to oblivion—until in 1996 Auster went to San Francisco to deliver a lecture. After the lecture was over, a young man approached Auster and asked him to autograph a set of bound galley proofs. The young man had bought them for five dollars in a second-hand bookstore. Auster had never seen them before. They were proofs of the long-lost *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians*, from which the following extract is taken.

The Life and Death of a Homosexual

There was no sweetness in the air that day; the corpse gave off a terrible stench. The man had been dead for only a little while, but the vultures had opened his belly, which accelerated the process of putrefaction, attracting numerous swarms of flies, and the flies had become drunk with everything oozing and flowing from the gashes. There were blood-splattered holes in the place of the eyes, which had been pecked out by the birds. The mouth was enlarged; the birds had forced their way through the teeth to get at the tongue. But even so we could recognize him: the length of his body left no doubt. It was a Stranger whose height had surprised me: he was four or five inches taller than the tallest hunter. And now he had become food for the vultures. The Atchei did not like to see this happen. He had left several days before, saying that he was going to meet up with two families who were hunting. He had been rather ill and had probably changed his mind on the way; but he had not been able to return to the camp at Arroyo Moroti. He had died all alone, and no doubt had seen the *brikú* gather in the sky above and then swoop down on him one by one. The birds were motionless; bloody slivers of meat hung from their beaks. Hundreds of little yellow butterflies dilly beat their wings around the corpse of Krenbegi.

Unusual in many respects, he was immediately striking because of his exceptional height, which made him almost a giant compared to the little Atchei. But he was not proportionately more vigorous. He gave an overall impression of flabbiness. He had a broad, fat belly, whereas the bellies of the other men were hard and compact, even when relaxed. He was a strange hunter, to say the least.

But was this all? Krenbegi came from one of the two small tribes of Atchei that belonged to the Guayaki 'nation'. Until recently, they had had no contact with one another, did not know one another, and even considered one another to be enemies. One tribe, the Atchei Gatu, knew the other tribe as the *Iroiangi*, meaning 'strangers'. Krenbegi belonged to the Atchei Iroiangi or Strangers, and they did not like to talk about him, and when they did talk it was only with reticence. As for the Atchei Gatu, who were hardly more loquacious on the subject, their knowing looks and crafty smiles showed that even though they would not say

anything, they had certainly devoted some thought to the matter. It seemed clear that Krembegi was not just anyone.

Because he wore his hair long like a woman (the men wore theirs short), I wanted to take his picture one day and asked him to hold his bow, which was standing nearby. He got up politely but refused to hold the weapon.

'Why?'

'It's not my bow.'

'Take it anyway.'

'I don't have a bow, I don't want to touch this bow.'

He spoke firmly and seemed disgusted, as if I had asked him to do something obscene. And then, to show that he did not feel any ill will, he pointed to something that I thought could not have been his.

'I'll hold my basket.'

This was the Atchei world turned upside down: a man with a basket and no bow! Who was Krembegi? As soon as I learned the secret of this man's strangeness, people were quite willing to talk to me about him. His story was told to me little by little, first by the Atchei Gatu, who were delighted to have another chance to show that they had good reasons for scorning the Strangers and that they would never allow someone like Krembegi to live among them. Later, the Iroiangi agreed with the portrait drawn by the Atchei Gatu and added details to it. But from the man himself I could get nothing. Timid and reserved, he would avoid talking to me. He died without having said anything.

The insistence of the Atchei tribes on instilling in their young men the idea of *bretele*, the great hunter, is the basis both of the groups' moral law and of individual honour; but it also arises from economic necessity. Since they are nomads in a forest that is rather limited in edible vegetation, the members of the two Guayaki tribes cannot subsist on gathering. Roots, berries, fruits, palm-hearts, honey and larvae unquestionably account for a considerable portion of their food: it is the women's responsibility to gather this hidden food, and all around their stopping places in the forest they are constantly foraging for it. But not all areas are rich in trees with edible fruit, and the forest is generous only during

certain seasons. That is why the *krija* sometimes return to the camp without their baskets pulling on their necks. There is very little to be found in the *naku*: a few larvae reserved for the children, especially the 'soft heads', because they are very nutritious, a rat, one or two frogs, and sometimes a snake, which is caught by the tail, quickly dashed against a tree before it can bite, and then roasted. Eating like this is all right once in a while, but if you make a steady diet of it you lose weight, and that is depressing.

The major portion of the food is produced by the men. In Guayaki society it is they who have the task of supplying the people with meat and fat, which are indispensable. *Bareka*, to hunt: this is their function; they identify themselves with it and define themselves by this activity. A man can think of himself only as a hunter, one cannot be a man and not a hunter at the same time. The entire symbolic space of masculinity unfolds in the act of *jywo*, shooting an arrow, and from their earliest years the boys are prepared to enter their normal place, to fulfil their natural role. The long years of apprenticeship running along with their fathers through the woods, the initiation that confirms them as hunters, the women's preference for the best *bretele*, the night songs of the men loudly celebrating their exploits as archers—all these things combine to make the young men take on the collective will of the group as their own personal desire. They must become true hunters, for the survival of the tribe will depend on them. They know it, and in this knowledge lies their truth, their destiny as men: either one is a hunter or one does not exist. There is no choice.

Hunting is never considered a burden. Even though it is almost the exclusive occupation of the men, the most important thing they do every day, it is still practised as a 'sport'. There is work involved, of course, in endlessly tracking animals, in sitting still for hours watching the movements of a roebuck or a band of monkeys, in holding the bow poised for several minutes so that they will be ready for the brief instant when a bird or coat can be seen through the thickness of the foliage. They know that it is crouching in the branches above, but they can't see it: they have to wait until it shows itself, keeping their arrows at the ready. They must also dig holes for the tapir to fall into, and expand the

armadillo's hole: the man digs, and the animal tries to escape by burrowing further into the tunnels. It is a race that the hunter usually wins, but only after considerable effort—sometimes he makes an excavation so big that he can disappear into it.

And then the hunters must keep replenishing the supply of arrows. The tips are made of very hard wood tempered by fire, but as they are used they wear out and break. They are often lost, either when a wounded animal gets away after being hit or when an arrow misses its mark and flies off into the vegetation and disappears. Whether the men are in the woods or resting in the camp, then, they are always involved with the work of hunting.

Hunting is always an adventure, sometimes a risky one, but constantly inspiring. Of course it is pleasant to take sweet-smelling honey from a hive or split a palm tree and find swarms of delicious *guchu* left behind by the scarabs. But everything is known in advance, there is no mystery, nothing unforeseen: it is absolutely routine.

Whereas tracking animals in the forest, proving that you are more clever than they are, approaching within arrow's range without revealing your presence, hearing the hum of the arrow in the air and then the dull thud as it strikes the animal—all these things are joys that have been experienced countless numbers of times, and yet they remain as fresh and exciting as they were on the first hunt. The Atchei do not grow weary of hunting. Nothing else is asked of them, and they love it more than anything else. Because of this they are at peace with themselves. They feel no internal division, no bitterness troubles their souls. They are what they do, their Self fearlessly achieves its fullness in doing what the group has always done since the beginning of time. One might say they are prisoners of fate. But from what point of view? The Atchei hunters themselves feel that they live in complete freedom.

To be a *brettele* requires strength, poise and agility: you have to reach a state in which the body and mind feel at ease, are sure of themselves. This is *pana*. *Pana*: *pané-a*, the opposite of *pané*. And *pané* is what frightens a man most. For once you have fallen victim to it, *bareka* is finished. Your arm has no strength, the arrow flies far from the target, useless and absurd. You can no

longer kill anything. The return to camp is grim when your right shoulder is not straining under the weight of some animal. Instead of celebrating his catch with a sonorous chant, the empty-handed hunter sits in silence beside his fire. If *japu*—shooting wide of the mark—happens several times in a row, then measures must be taken, for *pané* has befallen the hunter. This is of course a painful humiliation, since it is an admission that he is incapable of being what he is: a hunter.

But it could be even more serious. A man never eats his own game: this is the law that provides for the distribution of food among the Atchei. A hunter kills an animal and his wife cuts it up, since he is forbidden to do it himself. She keeps a few pieces for herself and the children and the rest is given out, to relatives first, brothers and brothers-in-law, and then to the others. No one is forgotten, and if there is not much meat, then the shares are small, but each person gets something. In exchange the hunter receives a portion of the game brought back by the others. He feeds them with what he has killed, and they do the same for him. A hunter, then, spends his life hunting for others and eating what others have caught. His dependence is total, and the same is true of his companions. In this way things are equal, no one is ever wronged, because the men 'produce' equivalent quantities of meat. This is what is called *pepy*, exchange.

But if a man is *pané*, what can he give in return, how can he pay another man back for the game he has given him? You cannot receive without giving. It is impossible to be *pané* and to respect the law of reciprocity at the same time. In the end, your companions would grow weary of always giving without receiving anything in return. An old man who is too weak to hold a bow is given food. He deserves it, and a son never lets his father go hungry. If this parasitical existence goes on for too long, however, one day he will be left at the foot of a tree beside a fire. There he will wait patiently for death. But a strong male is not an old man. If he is *pané*, it is because he deserves it: he has certainly done something wrong. Every act against the order of things must be paid for, and this is how the imprudent man is punished. Why help a man who has been found guilty and condemned? It would not do any good.

Fortunately, long-term cases of *pané* are rare. Every man has his periods of bad luck, his hesitant arrow leaves too soon or too late, his hand does not draw back the bow with enough force. But this can be remedied. The young men's lips are pierced and their backs are scarred to confirm them in their condition of *pama*. If *pané* should occur, the operation is repeated. New scars are made, but much more superficial ones than the cruel stripes that were dug out of the skin before. They go around the biceps and criss-cross with the old cuts: some men cut their forearms, others their thighs. Very little blood flows, and once the wounds have been smeared with wood ashes and have closed up, the shallow scars have the effect of attractive embroidery on the skin. This treatment is almost always successful: the *pané* leaves you and once again you become *brevete*. And if you become *pané* again, you begin all over. The causes of this type of bad luck are mysterious. It can happen to anyone, and there is not a single Atchei hunter who does not have therapeutic tattoos in addition to the *joycha* on his back.

If the cause of *pané* is unknown in some cases, in others it is very clear. One cause—and this would be so fatal that no one even dreams of attempting it—would be to eat your own game, to refuse to participate in the exchange. To insist on keeping the animals you have killed leads to a total and permanent separation from the world of animals, since the *pané* will prevent you from ever killing one again. When you do not want to mediate your relationship with food through your relationship with other people, you risk being completely cut off from the natural world and placed outside of it, just as you are pushed out of the social universe by refusing to share your goods. This is the foundation of all Atchei knowledge. It is based on the awareness that an underlying brotherhood binds the world and men together and that what happens among men is echoed in the world. A single order rules them, and it must not be disrupted.

The Atchei therefore avoid doing things that will attract *pané*. Young hunters, for example, never eat animal brain. Although it is a great delicacy, it also causes bad luck. For this reason it is reserved for the *chypwete*, who hunt little or not at all and therefore run no risk. Some kinds of honey are also forbidden to

the young men because they bring on *pané*, such as the honey from the *rei* bee. The honey of the *iare*, on the other hand, only prevents the *kyhuchu* from growing pubic hair. But there is something else. For what does it mean to be a great hunter but to identify one's very existence with the bow? And doesn't *pané* separate a man from his bow so that it becomes exterior to him, as if it had rebelled against its master? The bow is the hunter himself: an initiate's first task is to make his first adult bow by himself. This weapon is much more than a tool. When its owner dies, it becomes *ore enla*, the dwelling place of the departed soul, as do the arrows. The bow and arrows have now become dangerous, and are discarded. The bow is the sign and symbol of the man, the proof that he exists and the means of his existing. When he dies, then, his bow disappears as well, for it is that part of the man which could not survive him. Conversely, if the bow abandons him when he is *pané*, then he is no longer a hunter, he is no longer anything.

The very strength of the bow makes it vulnerable. It is not difficult for *pané* to affect a hunter: it has only to affect his bow; he will immediately suffer from it and be *pané*. A bow is the essence of virility, the irrevocable metaphor of masculinity. Because of this, it is one of the things that must be protected from their opposites. How far does the hunter's space extend, what is the boundary of the masculine world? The boundary is the feminine world. An order presides over the lines of force in this geography and keeps the different regions separate. If some disorder causes them to interpenetrate, masculine space is contaminated, weakened and degraded by this contact with feminine space. In other words, if a woman touches a bow, *pané* befalls its owner. For this reason there is a severe taboo against women having any contact with a bow. They themselves run no risk, but for the men it can be fatal. Inversely, the equivalent of the bow for the *kriga* is the *ndku*, the basket, which is the quintessence of a woman's femininity. After the ritual of seclusion and the scarring of her stomach, a young woman celebrates her entrance into the world of adults by weaving palms into her first basket. She knows how to do it because her mother has taught her: she made little ones when she was a girl. Now it is up to her to make

it by herself, and until her death she will carry a basket. Just as the bow is the man, the basket is the woman. So that if a hunter touches a basket, or even thinks of carrying one—which would be even more absurd than comical—the result would be the same: *pané* would be his punishment for having contact with the basket.

It is always the men who suffer the consequences. The unwarranted overlapping of masculinity and femininity affects only the man. Of course the *kiya* will also suffer from the *pané* in the sense that the hunters will no longer have anything to give them to eat. But the women's power is so strong that it can be harmful to men. To be a hunter, that is to say a man, you must always be on your guard against women, even when they are not menstruating. You cannot be a man except by opposing yourself to women. When the distance separating men from women vanishes, when a man crosses the dividing line, a contagion is produced that makes him lose his worth, that wears away his masculinity: he finds himself within the sphere of women. Bowman, basket-woman, this is how people are divided up. What happens to a man without a bow? He becomes a basket person.

This is what had happened to Krenbegi. He was not joking when he said 'my basket', because it really was his, made by his own hands with the help of one of the women. Why did he have a basket? Because he did not have a bow. And why didn't he have a bow? Because he was *pané*. But this had been the case for a long time; in fact, it had always been the case. He had never been able to kill an animal with a bow and arrow, and the matter became clear rather quickly: he was *pané* in the same way that the others were *bretete*. This was not an accident. It was his nature. But still, why, when circumstances had taken away his bow, did he provide himself with a basket? He could have had nothing at all, have remained, so to speak, between bow and basket. But is it possible to be neither a bow person nor a basket person?

Only in early childhood is there any space in which the difference between the sexes remains negligible. And Krenbegi was a grown-up—he was no longer a *kromi*. He could no longer exist in this neuter universe. When one is an adult one is either a man or a woman, a bow or a basket: there is nothing in between,

no third possibility. What, then, is a man without a bow? He is a non-man, and for this reason he becomes a basket-carrier.

There were two basket-carrying men at the camp at Arroyo Moroti where the tribes now lived, and both were Iroiangi. The second one was named Chachubutawachugi, the Great Wild Pig with the Long Beard. A very hairy beard covered his face. And since it often took him a long time to find a woman willing to shave him, his beard would grow quite prodigiously. I gave him a present of a mirror and some razor blades: he would put the blades in the middle of a split piece of bamboo and then fasten them tightly. In this way he could shave more often. In gratitude he gave me the name of *apaio*, father. Chachubutawachugi had a basket because he was *pané*. But unlike Krenbegi he was very strong, and though he had not used a bow for several years because of the *pané*, he continued to hunt coats by hand and to stalk armadillos in their burrows. He would distribute his catch and would receive presents from the other hunters in return. His shoulders, striped with thin black lines, attested to his efforts to overcome his bad luck with tattoos. But after repeated failures he had given up and resigned himself to his fate. One of his brothers' wives had made a basket for him. He lived with them, more tolerated than welcomed. When his sister-in-law was in a bad mood she wouldn't give him anything to eat. At those times he would cook for himself. No woman would have agreed to become the wife of a *pané* man; he therefore had to take on the feminine work himself. He had once been married, but his wife had died, leaving him alone. To judge by the evidence, Chachubutawachugi did not have the best of luck.

Krenbegi, on the other hand, seemed comfortable with his situation. He did not say much, of course, but he looked serene. He lived with a family who accepted him completely. Cooking was not a question for him since he helped the wife in her daily household tasks. It was almost as if he was the co-wife of the man who lodged him. In the morning he would go off with the *kiya* to look for larvae, fruits and palm-hearts. His basket would be just as full as those of his companions when he came back. He would put it down, crouch on his heels, and diligently and efficiently begin to prepare the evening meal: husking berries, peeling roots,

preparing *bruce*, a thick soup made of palm marrow mixed with larvae. He would fetch water and firewood.

When he had nothing to do he would rest or make necklaces with the teeth of the animals killed by his host. They were very pretty, far more attractive than those made by the women. The women were content to pierce the teeth of all the different animals killed by their husbands and to string them through with a thin cord. It amounted to little more than a collection of teeth of different sizes placed in the order in which the animals had been killed. These necklaces were sometimes very long, six feet or more, containing hundreds of teeth from monkeys, agoutis, and especially pacas—those from pigs and roebucks were not saved because they rattled against each other. When a woman is feeling happy she puts on her necklaces in several layers, glad to be able to wear the proof of her husband's prowess as a hunter. Then she puts them back in the bottom of her basket. Krembegi's necklaces showed more care. He would use only monkey canine teeth and only those that were more or less the same size. It is no small job to pierce all these tiny canines with nothing more than a paca tooth. But Krembegi had great patience.

No one in the camp paid any particular attention to him, he was like everyone else. He did only women's work, but this was known and taken for granted. Krembegi was no more or less anonymous than anyone else in the tribe, and he tranquilly filled the role destiny had given him. He lived with the women and did what they did; he did not cut his hair and carried a basket. He was at home in this role and could be himself. Why should he have been unhappy?

Chachubutawachugi was a different matter altogether. It was not at all assumed that he had found his niche, or that he was content with his lot. And the proof was that no one took him seriously. Whatever he said or did was greeted by the Atchei with condescension. They did not openly make fun of him, because that was not done, but they found him rather ridiculous and smiled behind his back. The men were somewhat wary of him and the women laughed into their hands when they saw him coming with his basket. The children, who were usually so respectful of their elders, forgot the rules of politeness and good conduct when

they were with him. They ran wild, were insolent, and refused to obey him. Sometimes he would get angry and try to catch them, but they were always too fast; he would give up and sullenly take a walk in the woods or lie down somewhere off by himself. Everyone pretended to believe that he was stingy with what he brought back from the forest, while he was actually as generous as anyone else. For example, he had gone off in the morning one day saying that he was going to look for larvae. On his return he ran into a group of men. 'Well?' 'Nothing. No *guchin*.' And he walked on. When he was out of earshot one of the men said: 'Nothing? *U pa mado!* He ate everything up!' And they all burst out laughing. This was an unjust accusation.

Why were the Atchei so mean to poor Chachubutawachugi? It was true that they found him something of a clown, with his passion for adorning his neck and head with the most unexpected objects. If he saw a piece of metal, a cartridge case or a bottle, he couldn't resist; he would pick it up, attach it to a string and put it around his neck. He would walk around with his chest covered by a necklace made of a few dozen penicillin bottles, some sardine can keys, and formless pieces of scrap iron. He would wear it for a while, then abandon it and go to find other things. The *kyhichu* were once given a rubber ball. After a short time they had ruined it. For him it was a godsend. He cut it in two and made one of the pieces into a superb skullcap that covered his whole head down to the eyes. He was very happy with his idea. The Atchei, however, looked at the elegant fellow with an air of pity. 'Not at all surprising! That's his style, all right!' In other words, the victim of *pané* had found another way to call attention to himself through this rather awkward dandyism.

But there had to be another reason for the Atchei's ill will, for in the final analysis Chachubutawachugi's innocent faults were more than compensated for by his activity as a hunter of coatis and armadillos. This activity was of course somewhat limited; but it was by no means negligible. On the other hand, Krembegi, who never trapped animals, was not mistreated in the slightest way by the Atchei. This was why he was able to accept his fate with such placidity. What was the difference then, between these two *pané* men? What was the difference that made people adopt different

attitudes towards two negatively similar individuals—similar in that they were both excluded from the circle of hunters? As a rule, the Atchei would have had the same attitude towards both of them. But it was not at all the same. Therefore, the fact that both these men were *pané* did not make them identical. As it turned out, they were not.

Man=hunter=bow; woman=gatherer=basket: these two equations strictly determine the course of Atchei life. There is no third equation, no additional space to protect those who belong neither to the bow nor the basket. By ceasing to become a hunter, one loses one's very masculinity; metaphorically one becomes a woman. This is what Krembegi understood and accepted: his radical renunciation of what he was incapable of becoming—a hunter—automatically put him on the side of the women; he was one of them, he accepted himself as a woman. He carried his basket in the same way they did, with a carrying strap around his forehead.

And Chachubutawachugi? It was simple: he hadn't understood a thing. For he, the innocent one, thought that he could remain in the masculine universe even after he had lost the right to do so, so blind was he in his desire to remain a man—the hunter. *Esse est percipi*. What did the others see when they saw him? Perhaps this is not the right question. Because from a certain point of view Chachubutawachugi was invisible. Why? Because he did not live anywhere; neither among the men, because of the *pané*, nor among the women, for in spite of his basket, he refused to incorporate himself into their group, to inhabit their space. But the place he was obstinately trying to occupy, midway between the two, did not exist. And so he did not exist any more either: he was a pathetic inhabitant of an impossible place. This was what made him 'invisible'; he was elsewhere, he was nowhere, he was everywhere. Chachubutawachugi's existence was unthinkable.

And this was what annoyed the Atchei. What they reproached the *pané* man for without their even knowing it was his incomprehensible refusal to let himself be taken along by the logical movement of events, which should have put him in his new and real place, among the women. When you have a basket, it is

because you are a *kuija*. But he did not want to be one, and this created disorder in the group and upset the ideas of the people—not to speak of the man himself. This was why he often seemed so nervous, so ill at ease. He had not chosen the most comfortable position for himself, and he had thrown things out of order.

You had only to see how Chachubutawachugi carried his basket. He did not do it as the women and Krembegi did, with the carrying strap around his forehead. In this position the women walked with their heads lowered, somewhat bent, looking at the ground. But he carried his *maku* differently, with the strap in front and slung over his shoulders. Whenever he slipped he would painfully squeeze his neck. But in this way he walked like a man.

As for Krembegi, his relations with the bow were the same as those of the women: he never touched a bow because this would attract bad luck to the owner of the weapon. Nothing set him apart from the *kuija*. That was why he refused when I asked him to hold a bow for the photograph, and had picked up his basket instead. But this was not all. Krembegi, who was separated from the bow and masculinity, had gone the full symbolic distance into the feminine world. This accounted for the Strangers' reticence and the hints made by the Atchei Gatu. What did the Atchei know about him? Why did the one group refuse to speak about him and the other group make only sarcastic remarks about him? It was because Krembegi was a *kyyjy-meno*, an anus-lovemaking, a homosexual.

The people of his tribe accepted it naturally, even though they were somewhat annoyed by it. But that was because of the Atchei Gatu, who were very disapproving. 'There are no *kyyjy-meno* among us! You have to be Iroiangi for that!' But everyone agreed that if Krembegi was what he was, it was because he was *pané*. The Atchei Gatu felt no contempt for him personally. For them it was rather comic that a man would accept the compliments of another man by offering him his *kyyjy*. They laughed about it and saw in this yet another proof of their superiority over the Strangers. They could not recall any similar cases among their group. They only told the story of Bujiamiarangi. It had happened a long time ago, when Paivagi was still a young man. An Atchei went out hunting and had the good fortune to fall upon a *kware*,

which was caught unawares and did not have time to escape into the thickets. The man did not even have to use an arrow; he beat the animal with his bow and broke its spine. The vegetation in this spot was very dense, the underbrush a tangle of creepers and climbing plants. The hunter left behind his still-dying prey and tried to open a hole in the vegetation by using his bow to knock down the plants and shrubs. He had progressed a few dozen yards when he came upon a more open space and then went back to get the antelope and put it on his back. He saw someone next to the animal. It was Bujamiarangi, a very young man, who had been following him. And what was he doing there? The hunter could not believe his eyes: Bujamiarangi was making *meno* with the dead antelope! He was so absorbed in taking his pleasure that he did not hear the man approach. The hunter did not hesitate for a second. Mad with rage over what the other man was doing with his game, he shot an arrow, and Bujamiarangi collapsed on to the cadaver of the *kwire*. No one, concluded the Atchei, ever saw him again.

But as for *kyryry-meno*, no, they didn't know anything about it. To be insensitive to the charms of women was something that surpassed the understanding of the Atchei Gatu. But then, to give in to the assaults of other men, that was too much! And all that because of *pané*. What did they say about Krembegi? First of all, of course, that he never 'went' to women. But why? Because his penis was very small, like the penis of a coati. It was freely compared to the little barbs put on the tips of arrows: it was really not much of anything, he could not use it. It could well have been that this was simply malicious gossip. But who were Krembegi's partners? Were the Strangers also different from the Atchei Gatu in that their hunters all enjoyed *kyryry-meno*? For obviously Krembegi could not be a homosexual all by himself.

He did have partners. But not many, and not those one would have thought. It would be logical to assume that, to the extent that a man like Krembegi represents a certain disorder in the ethico-sexual world of the Atchei, a subversion of all accepted and respected values, the field of his sexual activity would not be governed by any rules, that he could pursue his own pleasure at will: in other words, that any man of the tribe, if he so desired, could make love with Krembegi. But this was not at all the case;

The Life and Death of a Homosexual

homosexual relations are not anarchic, they are governed by a very rigorous logic. Krembegi was the Atchei world upside down, but he was not its negation; he was part of another order, another group of rules which were the image—even though reversed—of the 'normal' order and rules.

The ultimate bases of Atchei social life are the alliances between family groups, relations which take form and are fulfilled in marriage exchanges, in the continual exchange of women. A woman exists in order to circulate, to become the wife of a man who is not her father, her brother or her son. It is in this manner that one makes *picla*, allies. But can a man, even one who exists as a woman, 'circulate'? How could the gift of Krembegi, for example, be paid back? This was not even imaginable, since he was not a woman, but a homosexual. The chief law of all societies is the prohibition against incest. Because he was *kyryry-meno*, Krembegi was outside this social order. In his case the logic of the social system—or, what amounts to the same thing, the logic of its reversal—was worked out to its very end: *Krembegi's partners were his own brothers*. '*Picla kyhai* (meaning *kyryry-meno*) *meno*': a *kyryry-meno* man does not make love with his allies.' This injunction is the exact opposite of the rules governing the relations between men and women. Homosexuality can only be 'incestuous'; the brother sodomizes his brother and in this metaphor of incest the certainty that there can never be any real incest (between a man and a woman) without destroying the social body is confirmed and reinforced.

That is why Krembegi's partners were so few in number. Of course now and then a man without family ties would solicit his favours—the dissolute Bykygi for example. But these things rarely leave the family, so to speak. Such was Krembegi's fate: *pané*, homosexual, a complete inversion of the sexual and social order. But still, he was not too unhappy with his lot.

But now it was all over. He had run into his last bit of bad luck, and the vultures were in the process of devouring him. It would not have been a good idea to let them go on. Krembegi was going to be buried. One of the men went back to the camp to give the news. He would bring back several women so that they could

do the death *chenga-rivara*. In the meantime the others would prepare the grave. With a few quick blows of the machete they cleared a small space in the woods at the centre of which a hole was dug. It was a sort of well that was more or less cylindrical, just wide enough for a human body, and more than three feet deep. The thick humus that covered the ground of the forest was not hard to dig, and the machetes went into it easily. The vultures were still waiting, not at all scared off by our activities. They did not try to get closer to the corpse. A man went off a little way under the trees to look for *chipa*, a fine creeper used as string.

The messenger came back, accompanied by three women. One was the wife of the chief, Karewachugi; she presided over all the tribe's rituals, she was always the first to intone the chants. The other two were Krenbegi's sisters-in-law. Crouching on their heels, they burst forth in the *chenga-rivara*. Their sobbing seemed even more lugubrious than it had the other times, because now it did not mingle with the quiet but constant noise of camp life. Silence, light, vultures. The men (among whom was a brother of the dead man) seemed indifferent. Krenbegi's passing did not seem to affect them. Were the words they were speaking—so quickly that I could not understand them—an elegy to the dead man? I couldn't be sure, but I doubted it. When the farewell to Krenbegi was finished, the men took over.

Working rapidly because of the stench, with almost brutal gestures they folded the legs high over the chest, having to force them a bit because rigor mortis had already set in. He was in the foetal position: as it is before birth, so it is after death. To keep the body in this position it was tied tightly with the creepers that had been gathered a little while before. The same process was repeated with the arms: they were folded in to the torso against the ribs, the forearms bent up to the shoulders, the elbows against the body. The head was last. The men pushed on the neck to lower it against the chest. The hands were then pushed against the temples with the fingers slightly separated and closed, like the claws of a bird of prey. The head was put between the hands and a solid knot of creepers fixed it in this position. Krenbegi's large body now resembled a kind of ball caught in a net. It was ready for burial.

The Atchei always leave the area in which an adult is buried after destroying or burning his possessions: a woman's basket and mats, a hunter's bow and arrows. The bow is broken and thrown into the fire. The arrows are not burned, but shot off at random in all directions. Aren't they *ove enda*, the dwelling place of the soul? After a person's death nothing must remain that belonged to him during his life. Those things are too dangerous. As soon as Krenbegi's death was known, therefore, his basket was thrown into the fire.