Abstract

This article focuses on ceremonial weeping and wailing and autoflagellation, characteristic practices of the women among the Môbengokre (or Kayapó), Amerindian Jê speakers of Central Brazil. The ritual wailings are not just restricted to funerals, they represent also a ceremonial style of behaviour when a close relative is leaving for extended travel or a period of absence from work, or when this person is coming home, or when someone is affected with a severe illness. It is a highly emotive and stylised female counterpart to male rhetoric. The weeping is traditionally accompanied by auto-flagellation, a practice now frowned upon by the Môtyktire sub-group with whom the author carried out fieldwork. The principal question is to what degree ceremonial wailing produces emotional catharsis, or if the women feel under pressure from the weight of tradition to express themselves in this way.