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**Session on Construction of the Person**

**Organizer: David Lancy**

***Becoming a person from Mbya Guarani perspective (Misiones Province, Argentina)<sup>1</sup>***

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***Purpose***

The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss some results from an ethnographic research on Argentinian Mbya communities focused on representations and practices related to childrearing and development during the first stages of life course.

Firstly, I describe Mbya linguistic categories, representations and values about growth and development, focusing on processes and events which allow children to be transformed into persons.

*Mitã ñemongakuaa* is the Mbya language expression used to refer to rearing practices; literally, it means “to make a child grow”. Being “*kakuaa*”, the term used to refer to children’s growth and development which is considered by Mbya people as a cultural and not natural process. In this sense, *kakuaa* means the achievement of certain socially recognized skills and attributes which makes the transition between life stages possible, bringing a change in children’s status. Therefore, being a “Mbya” is a status that is not achieved by birth but only when the personal name (sacred name) is given

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<sup>1</sup> Based on PHD dissertation: Remorini, Carolina. 2009. Aporte a la Caracterización Etnográfica de los Procesos de Salud- Enfermedad en las Primeras Etapas del Ciclo Vital, en Comunidades Mbya-Guaraní de Misiones, República Argentina. (Tesis de Doctorado). La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Edulp.

to the child. In this sense, one of the most important transitions in life course, which allows children to become persons, is the giving name ceremony called Ñemongarai.

Secondly, I present some aspects of Mbya *parental ethnotheories* about childrearing and children's growth and development. I specially analyze motor function as a central indicator of growth and health, describing daily practices oriented to promote movement as well as the beliefs and knowledge that justify them.

Finally, based on that, I stress the close relationship among movement, children's health, personhood and identity notion from Mbya perspective.

### ***Who are the Mbya Guarani people?***<sup>2</sup>

The Mbya, together with the Kayova, the Ñandeva and the Ava Guarani or "Chiriguano," are the Guarani groups with the largest number of members. They speak languages belonging to the Tupí-Guaraní linguistic family. According to recent estimations the total number of Mbya in Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina adds up to about 19,200 individuals (Assis and Garlet, 2004).

The Mbya communities where we developed our research settled down in a Reservation between Caingua and Libertador General San Martín departments, Misiones Province (Northeastern Argentina). (Figures 1-2: Maps).

In our country, according to the 2005 ECPI (Complementary Survey of Indigenous Peoples), there exist around 3,975 people who identify themselves as belonging to the Mbya Guarani people (Figure 3: ECPI). The Mbya presence in Misiones dates back to the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century (Garlet, 1997) when they begin migrating outward from the midsouthern region of the forest in modern day Paraguay (Remorini, 2001).

The Mbya inhabit the Paranaense rainforest, one of the most complex and biologically diverse ecosystems in South America (Figure 1: Images of Paranaense Rainforest together with the map). Mbya culture has been characterized by their constant spatial mobility as they exploit forest resources and search for areas having favorable conditions for *Mbya reko*, that is, the Mbya way of life. Periodical movement within the ecosystem's limits has allowed them to recover and reuse previously occupied

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed characterization of Mbya territory and history see Assis and Garlet, 2004; Garlet, 1997; Pissolatto 2007; Remorini, 2009.

spaces. At present, the Mbya population tends to form small, relatively stable settlements, although some individuals or small family units still move regularly. The more sedentary lifestyle embraced by the Mbya in recent years is the result of several factors (Remorini, 2009; Crivos et al, e.p) (Figure 4-5: Mbya Communities)

In other words, Mbya Guarani people have a deep history of movement and settlement across the South-american tropical forests. The individual's life trajectory is also marked by a constant circulation between different communities.

The Mbya prefer to live in rural areas on the province far from urban lifestyle, trying to keep those practices, knowledge and values that integrate the *Mbya reko*. At present, they practice a variety of subsistence strategies including horticulture, hunting, fishing and gathering—the latter of which takes place in both the “chacras” (orchards) and the “monte” (forest). Subsistence activities are combined with temporary employment in “colonias” (rural settlements devoted to the production of yerba mate, tea, tobacco and tung) and the selling of handicrafts. Some individuals receive also government allowances, while others earn salaries from working as teaching assistants or sanitary agents. The money obtained from either activity allows them to obtain industrially elaborated supplies (flour, sugar, pasta, rice, beans, cold cuts, sodas, candy, among others) has resulted in a lesser degree of commitment to traditional food-obtainig activities (Remorini, 2009)<sup>3</sup>.

(Figures 6-7: Subsistence activities)

### ***Our research***

The information presented here comes primarily from fieldwork (12) conducted between 2001 and 2008 in two communities Mbya called *Ka'aguy Poty* (flower of the forest) and *Yvy Pytã* (red earth).

From the methodological point of view, our research was based on the combination and complementary use of qualitative techniques. We apply different ethnographic observation techniques –systematic at fixed intervals, spot observations, day of life, participant observations-, semi-structured interviews, life histories and genealogies.

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<sup>3</sup> For more detailed description of Mbya current subsistent activities see Remorini 2009; Crivos et al 2006; Crivos et al in press.

Giving special emphasis to ethnographic observation of rearing practices and children's daily activities at the domestic scope.

Agreeing with Solis Cámara et al (2007), studies about parents' beliefs involved in child rearing have been developed in parallel, rather than convergently with studies about practices. As a consequence, there are few observational studies, and the majority are based on verbal reports. Frequently, studies in psychology and sociology focus on "parenting styles" defined as "parents' general attitudes or beliefs about their own children's upbringing". In contrast, the authors suggest that parenting practices relate to "parents' specific behaviors to guide children towards achieving goals of socialization".

In line with this argument we stress the heuristic potential of systematic observation of child's everyday life at domestic scope as the most important technique to get to know what it means to be a child in each ecological context and to characterize everyday experiences with an impact on their growth, development and health.

Based on observation results, we interviewed caregivers (parents, grandparents or other individuals) and local experts about their knowledge, values and experiences related with these rearing practices. Interviews also aimed us to access to Mbya categorization and definition of life cycle, identifying events and processes that mean discontinuities in child development were carried out.

In this sense our purpose was to recognize "parental ethnotheories" (Harkness and Super, 1986) about the person, the course of life, health and illness, and childcare. These are specific cultural models on one stage of life that provides a framework for adults to build their experience and knowledge that guide community and parental action. From these ethnotheories, certain children's behaviors, skills, ways of knowing and expression are privileged (Cervera & Mendez, 2006). Parental ethnotheories and practices refer to a wide set of cultural specific ideas and values about the child and their body, growth and development, and also the stages of life, personhood and family and community social ties (Remorini, 2010).

We consider parenting as a sociocultural process, historically anchored (Elder, 1998; Lalive d'Epinau, 2005) and inserted in a specific ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1987; Weisner, 1996).

Therefore childrearing refers to the "construction of person" according to the values of society and can be thought as a "cultural project". As Greenfield et al points out "(...) *culturally relevant developmental goals are represented in the form of implicit or explicit ethnotheories of development, e.g. a system of beliefs and ideas concerning the nature of the ideal child and the socialization practices necessary to achieve this ideal. These ethnotheories are shared (and negotiated) among members of cultural communities (...)*" (Greenfield et al, 2003: 464-465).

### ***Becoming a person***

In his work, Alma Gottlieb (2004) says that "*...When a new baby arrives among the Beng people of West Africa, they see it not as being born, but as being reincarnated after a rich life in a previous world. Far from being a tabula rasa, a Beng infant is thought to begin its life filled with spiritual knowledge*". And then, ask herself "*¿How do these beliefs affect the way the Beng rear their children?*"

Similarly, we wonder ¿What is a little child from Mbya perspective? ¿What is supposed to do with them? ¿what is supposed to teach them? ¿What do and know infants and children? ¿In which kind of activities they can participate or be integrated? ¿How should care for young children?¿What are the risks for them?

We accord with Gaskings (2000) when states that cultural understandings about the nature of the world and about the nature of children significantly shape the child's experiences.

In line with the issue of this session ¿When a child begins to be considered a person? ¿How this affects the way children are raised in this society?

From Mbya perspective "*kakuaa*", that is, "to grow" is viewed as a process that involves a set of physical achievements together with the development of skills and habits associated with an idea of person rooted in the culture (*Mbya reko*: Mbya way of life).

The expression *mitã ñemongakuaa*, literally means "to make the child grow" and is used to refer to rearing practices<sup>4</sup>. Being "grow" the achievement of certain socially

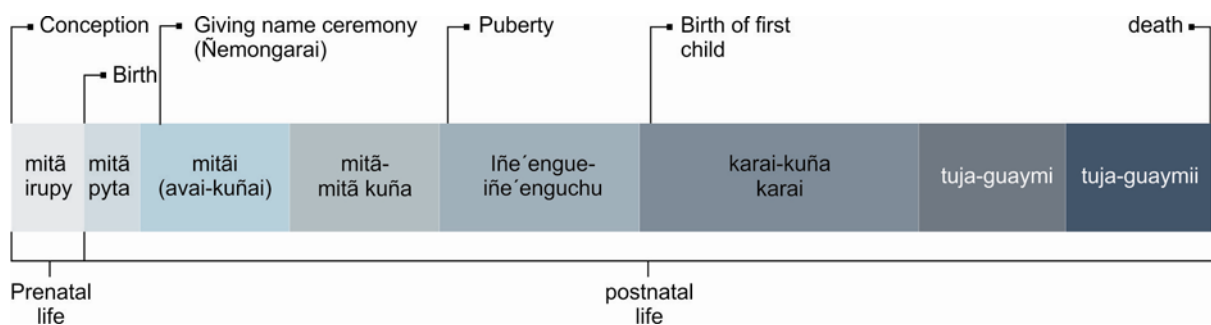
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<sup>4</sup> The semantic range of this expression includes other three terms: to care ("*eñatende*" or "*eñangareko*"), "to keep an eye on" ("*emae*") and to teach ("*ñe'emboe*"). Childrearing encompasses all these activities. "Eñangareko" is used to refer to the care given to children (e. g. feeding, hygiene, rocking him to sleep, take care of the child when sick) and respond to their needs and demands. It

recognized skills and attributes that makes the transition between life stages possible, bringing a change in children’s status. Therefore to be a “Mbya” is a status that is not achieved by birth but only when the personal name (sacred name) is given to the child. In this sense, "growth" (*kakuaa*) makes possible the passage between life stages and children receive different names, depending on recognizable changes in their physical and cognitive skills, in their behavior and their ability to participate in different activities. In this regard, through the discourse obtained from caregivers and local experts, we could delimit a set of growth indicators of transition between stages associated with changes in children’s postures and motor behavior, feeding, games, language, learning and social network.

Lying on the description of scenes that depict the variety of behaviors and activities of individuals of different age and sex, we intend a progressive approach to life course model. It allows us to know Mbya criteria to characterize its stages as well as qualities and values assigned to individuals in each one. We focus on stages between gestational period and Mbya ceremony of giving a personal name (*Ñemongarai*)<sup>5</sup>.

**Figure 8: Mbya life course**



Source: Remorini, 2009 ©

Human life (*teko*) begins when the human spirit or soul (*ñe'e*), sent by one of the four gods (*Ñe'e Ru Ete:* "the true fathers of our souls") "sits down" (*oñemboapyka*) in the women uterus at conception. When child is conceived they acquire their name but it is

means that someone, adult and / or child, is temporarily or regularly responsible for childcare. "Emae" simply implies to take a look at the child. Finally, "ñe' mboe" means teaching and refers to oral transmission of knowledge, guidelines, advice and experiences..

<sup>5</sup> Also referred as "baptism".

discovered (by the religious leader: *Opyguã*<sup>6</sup>) and given to them in a ceremony called *Ñemongarai*. In this ceremony the *Opyguã* discovers the origin of the child's soul (it means, their father). It is important because the person's abilities, skills, preferences and future social roles are based on their soul origin. For example, children of "*Jakaira Ru Ete*" (one of the *Ñe'e Ru Ete*) are called *Karai* and *Jachuka*, men and women respectively. They have a special orientation toward religious and therapeutic activities, and when they reach old age, are often chosen as *Opyguã* of their communities. Instead, the children of "*Tupa Ru Ete*", have special skills for political leadership (Cadogan 1997).

There are four names for boys and four for women, combined with secondary names. As a result, the same sacred name can be attributed to more than one person. Also, members of the same family may incarnate spirits from any of the four deities.

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The *Ñemongarai* ceremony occurs around the second year of life. Only when the child can stand up, walk, speak some words and "understand their name" is ready to receive their "sacred name", i.e. the name of their soul/spirit (*ñe'e*).

In Mbya Guaraní language newborn children and those in their first two months of life are called *ava pyta i* and *kuña pyta i* (boys and girls respectively) . *Pyta* means "new". "*Mitã*" is the term used to refer to breastfed children from two months to the age of 4-5 (after that they are called "*mitã*").

So, we can consider the naming ceremony (*Ñemongarai*) as a kind of "*rite de passage*" which allows the "*mitã i*" (*kuña i* or *ava i*, girl or boy respectively) to become "a member of *teko'a*" (Mbya community). This ceremony represents a social recognition of a change in the children ontological status.

Mbya person consists of, at first, a spirit/name (*ñe'e*) and a body (*hete*), each with different origins, divine and human respectively, closely related. Being their dissociation a sign of disease or death (Remorini, 2009).

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<sup>6</sup> (Figure 9) Within both communities, a diversity of actors play roles in the provision of healthcare. The term *Karai* is used to refer to prestigious people within a community who have displayed extensive knowledge not only of natural remedies (*poã*), but also of the prayers and other rituals associated with treatment of illness. Some of these *Karai* are also recognized as religious leaders within the community, in which case they are called *Pai* or *Karai Opyguã*. Unlike other specialists, the *Opyguã's* performance goes beyond the therapeutic domain; due to their extraordinary powers, they are the only ones who can lead the ceremonies related to natural, annual, and human life cycles (Martinez et al; 2002; Remorini 2006).

Considering that name/spirit /person are inseparable, the Mbya people explain that giving the wrong name may cause serious illnesses or even death. The main signal of this is that the child has no signs of “normal” growth and development. According to our informants: “(s)he doesn’t want to grow” (*ndokakuaa*), (s)he is undernourished (*ipiru i*), or “(s)he gets sad” and “doesn’t find him/herself” (“no se halla” *ndojaveima*). “no levanta” doesn’t stand up (*ãi eÿ va’e*) it means he/she doesn’t stand on their feet, doesn’t walk. In this sense, to be “on your feet” means “to be healthy” (Cf. Cadogan, 1997).

In these cases, it is the *Opyguã’s* responsibility to find out the correct name, that is, baptize the child again. In this sense, giving the name is equal to giving back the child’s health. When the child is thought to be getting ill, changing its name implies taking protection measures.

In Mbya language, spirit/soul, personal name and language are designated with the same term (*ñe’e*). *Ñe’e* then has a double meaning: “expressing ideas” and “divine portion of the soul” (Cadogan, 1997; Clastres, 1993). Thus, the soul is identified with the name and the ability to speak. It is the individual’s vital force “*it is something that stands erect the flow of his words*”<sup>7</sup> (Cadogan, 1997). The *ñe’e* is what enables a person to belong to the community of those who share the *ayvu* (human language), that is, the *teko’a* (community). (Garlet, 1997)

Because of that, stimulation of the upright posture and speech are central components of childrearing. Associated with this, the great concern expressed by parents when their children do not walk (*ndoguatai*) or speak (*ndaijayvui*) in the expected time is remarkable.

In religious language, Mbya people say that *ñe’e* “keeps upright” the child i.e. it makes life possible. In this sense, to be “erect” means “to be healthy”. Also, to belong to human beings, and to be different from animals. Unlike gods -who “stand up” from the beginning- people must achieve that status throughout their life. Being erected not only from the anatomical point of view but also from a spiritual point of view (Clastres, 1993; Cadogan, 1997). In Mbya mythology, animals used to be humans but lost their condition because of their inappropriate behavior and because they broke the social

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<sup>7</sup> In Mbya religious language: “*es aquello que mantiene erguido el fluir de su decir*”



rules and taboos. Due to this, they cannot “stand upright” and, consequently, they are “imperfect beings” (Cadogan, 1997). Thus, the transition from crawling to walking is one of the most important body transformations in the process of becoming a Mbya person.

On the other hand, *Ñemongarai* ceremony allows a change in children feeding. After that, children may consume meat from forest animals. Before that it is prohibited because it causes severe gastrointestinal diseases such as intestinal parasites (Remorini, 2009)<sup>8</sup>.

In sum, the beginning of straight walking (*guata*), together with two other capabilities, like speaking (*ayvu*) and eating meat (*karu cho’o*), are highly valued by the Mbya as indicating their children’s growth and maturity<sup>9</sup>. Only when they can stand upright and walk, they begin to be regarded as *true Mbya*<sup>10</sup>.

### **Motor training**

(Figure 10)

The Mbya recognize different stages of locomotor development which are differentiated by a set of categories below:

<b><i>oguapy</i></b>	<b><i>opoñi ña’ã</i></b>	<b><i>Opoñi</i></b>	<b><i>oguata</i></b>
To sit down	To creep	To crawl	To walk

According to the beliefs about human condition mentioned above, my observations of everyday parents` behaviors show the importance attributed to the achievement of

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<sup>8</sup> Just as infants are not able to consume the flesh of wild animals before they are “baptized”, so too are they not to inhale the aroma of wild meat as it is being grilled. The main cause of parasitic infection in little children is related to the transgression of dietary and cultural taboos. The wind is described as the agent enabling the “activation” and growth of parasites that exist “naturally” within the infant’s body from its formation in utero. It is nevertheless the parents’ responsibility to protect the child from exposure to the smell of grilling meat and the possible parasitic infection that may result. The role of the parent in protecting the child is also evident in the second cause of infection: inappropriate food choices and regimen. Feeding a child forbidden food that is too “heavy” for his/her age, as well as stopping breastfeeding and simultaneously giving different types and flavors of foods potentially “activates” latent parasites within the human body and triggers symptoms of parasitic illness. For more details see Remorini, 2009 and Crivos *et al*; in press).

<sup>9</sup> In that respect, *kamby ryru* (milk stomach) designates the child’s digestive organ during lactation and is different from that of the children who can already receive “adult food”, which is called *gekue guachu kue*. (Remorini, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> The value of these three simultaneous acquisitions to growing process is also noted for other South American indigenous groups like the Huaorani (Rival, 2004).

upright posture and walk training through various practices. In this sense, "healthy" children have a potential to be encouraged, since no process of development and body growth is seen as simply "natural".

While Mbya children under one year, spend some time in the arms or loaded into the shawl (*monde'a*) or sleeping within hammocks (*ky'a*) (figure 11) , sustained and/or limited in their movements, as they are beginning to sit up and crawl, they spend a lot of time on blankets laid on the floor, where tested various postures and movements. Mbya parents provide these conditions for the child to move independently and to play with various objects that are offered, although in their speeches give little attention to these movements and to preparatory stages of the vertical motion (creep, crawl) being the latter which represents the main interest.

Except during sleep, when infants remain in the *ky'a* (hammock) for a few hours, there is no other object or construction that limits their movement. When the child begins to crawl, they are allowed to "explore" the environment while their short movements are closely monitored. Although at the beginning caregivers help children, then they are free to rehearse balance holding from various objects available in the house or patio as well as people.

Pictures 12-15 depict the beginning of upright posture and walk training. From 8-9 months of age, children are encouraged to rehearse both their upright posture and first steps. It is common to see mothers or older siblings holding children to help them walk, even if they are not yet ready to do so.

Once a safer walking is acquired, caregivers play with children and teach them to follow the path of a ball, kicking it at different distances, searching and collecting various items from the floor or encouraging the child to imitate movements they make. Thus, these games promote motion training (pictures ... to...)

These boys and girls (pictures 16-17) are learning to walk. They have different ages and are at different stages of the procurement of vertical position. Their parents build for them the "*mitã amba*" which means in Mbya language "*the place or dwelling for children*".

This object is located in houses's courtyard and serves the child to hold standing and walking around them. There children rehearse different movements previous to walk freely. Women put children there for several minutes at different times of day and

watch them while they perform tasks near them or ask another of her sons to take a look at the child (for example: *emae chichi! Emae nde kypyi re!*).

We also note other practices aimed at "accelerating" growth, specifically, the achievement of lower limbs development that allows the child to stand up and walk. Around the fifth or sixth month of life, Mbya parents puts this thing called *ipykuaa* below the knees, made from the leg bones of a bird called *araku* or *saracura* (*Aramides saracura*) (Figure 18). Observation of the way this bird walks behind this practice, as it is expected that children gain strength in his legs through contact with the leg bone of the animal.

Some parents said "... *there are some who are not used, they have not the habit*", that is, don't know the value of this object, especially young parents. On the other hand, other parents recognize the importance of this practice but states that it is difficult now to create this element, because is not usual to capture the bird in the area where they live. In relation to this, states that when the *ipykuaa* is broken (due to increased child's musculature) it should be replaced. However, given the lack of resources they usually put another *ipikuaa* made with the same bone, but claim that this is not so effective.

Likewise, and based on the same kind of explanation, the Mbya believe that children could acquire undesirable physical characteristics if they eat meat of some birds. For example, is prohibited for growing children eat meat of *jeruchi* (*Leptolila verreauxi*) and *saracura* as its "hardens" and "closes" the leg's bones, making difficult locomotion. However, the consumption of this meat is allowed once bone growth is completed.

If analogies with animals are established in relation to locomotion, analogies with plants are established in connection with the upright posture. "To be upright" makes humans to be similar to plants, trees, and different from animals which lost their verticality and humankind because they broke moral rules (cf. Cadogan, 1997). In this sense, being "upright" indicate, first, that the child is in the process of achieving the status of person and secondly, he/she is healthy. As we said previously, if children or adults can't stand up it is a sign of their spirit weakness and therefore, they could become ill.

When children walk without help, the children wander around different spaces near the house. As we can see, the little cloth or being naked facilitate the movement of the child. (figures 10-19-20) In this respect, Mbya parents do not care contact the child's body to the ground. Although this may have consequences for health. For example, an increased risk of exposure to parasites, highly prevalent in these communities because of soil humidity and other environmental factors (Crivos et al, e.p). But from the Mbya perspective contact skin/soil is not a risk factor, stressing other causes of parasites as we pointed out previously.

However, there are some occasions in which intentionally restricted the movement of the child, when they consider that there may be a risk for it, or when the caregiver can not leave their task to follow the child's movements.

As there are not many movement restrictions mothers should be careful and avoid children exposure to risks.e.g. fireplaces, wires, glasses, knives, rubbish and domestic animals excrements. At the same time, vegetation growing in patios should be cleaned to prevent rodents and snakes hiding there.

When children become able to wander freely they can integrate other children's games, and go even further than the patio, i.e. paths connecting houses, streams and water sources. This doesn't mean total freedom. On the contrary, they are not alone for long periods until they are two years old.

Children who are able to walk are viewed as more independent than babies who depend on their mother to get from one place to another.

As children get older these movement patterns are combined with other Mbya education rules seeking for their independence and autonomy

Finally, at dusk or night, parents do not allow children to go far from the houses, because pathways are inhabited by evil spirits at these times. They can kill or sicken children, especially, if they have not been "baptized" yet.

To protect them against these evil spirits, parents are accustomed to burn and smoke tobacco on child's crown using a ceremonial pipe, and calling for the protection of "Ñande Ru Ete" (Our True Father). (See figures 21- 22)

In this sense, there are some health concerns for Mbya parents, including environmental hazards and supernatural dangers. These lead to specific limitations on children activities and displacements to ensure their well-being.

### ***A culture of movement***

Based on these considerations, much of my interest was to analyze the movement and displacement as indicators of growth and development, its importance in terms of the Mbya concepts of person, the life course, health and cultural identity.

When the child walks independently is integrated into the activities that develop other children, i.e. the group of siblings, which are designated by adults as *kĩĩngue* or "*la gurisada*", it means, children who circulate and play together in different spaces of community and integrates the "community of play" (Melia 1979, en Larricq, 1993: 49). Through integration into peer groups, child "walks with others", which introduces at least three transformations: wide their relationships, expands their environment and acquires new knowledge and skills.

(Fig 23-24-25)

In these displacements the child learns the paths that connect homes and other relevant places in the village, identifies who live in each household, recognizes the distances and the alternatives to go and coming from different parts of the village. The knowledge of space and environmental resources is a highly valued acquisition because it indicates that the child is "*growing like a Mbya*", it means, is learning what he/she need to know to live in the forest. Over the years, and in so far as he/she accompany others in search of water or firewood, collecting medicinal plants or other activity that children are earlier trained, this knowledge is expanded and refined, enabling the transition to adulthood.

As the life course progresses, initiation of boys in walking on the forest is related to cultural expectations about their activities in adulthood. While girls begin to visit this space at a later age, the daily displacements of girls include other areas delimited by the routine activities of household women. Thus, the walking in men is associated with subsistence activities taking place in the forest and on the farm ("*chacras*"). In the case of girls, they walk alone or with other women for washing clothes, collecting water, gathering food, visiting other women or sell handicrafts to nearby towns. Then young boys and girls (teenagers) usually start to walk out of their community, for visiting

relatives in other villages, wage labor in colonies<sup>11</sup>, study or the searching of couple. There is a gender differentiation in displacements. (Remorini, 2009; 2010)

In summary, movement is part of everyday life and is a central goal of rearing practices from early childhood.

Finally, one aspect that emerges from the analysis of conditions that makes possible the children movement is its relation to the adaptation to the environment. I mean, ecological characteristics of the environment in which Mbya live, the pattern of settlement and economic activities, encourage and require the movement. The *Mbya way of life (Mbya reko)* need, even today and despite the changes, the displacements in the forest for hunting, gathering, fishing or farming activities. The forest resources are not concentrated but scattered, these availability forces the indigenous to move in its search. In this sense, the current ethnographic and ethno-ecological studies about forest of South America suggest that the characteristics of this environment favors the displacement of people, animals and plants (see Balee, 1998; Rival, 1998; 2004). Also, through these micro-scale displacement, these people design and transform their environment, adapt to it and adapt it to their needs and projects (Crivos et. al, 2006).

In conclusion, motion training is one of the most important component of the process of becoming a person in Mbya society. In this sense, I link the practices that enable the upright posture and movement with cultural identity, as the expression of a set of values, meanings, knowledge and techniques learned and trasmitted intergenerationally as a cultural heritage of Mbya Guarani people. Our results allowed us to state the close interdependence between child development, well-being, environment and cultural identity.

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<sup>11</sup> Rural settlements devoted to the production of yerba mate, tea, tobacco and tung in Misiones Province. Their owners are called "colonos" because they are descendants of immigrants of European origin first installed in the late nineteenth century

ethnographic work with them I understand the importance of ethnography in the study of child development.

Finally, I'm very grateful with David Lancy for his kindness and help and for making possible my participation on this meeting

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