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Aspects of the semantics of emotions and feelings in Dalabon (South-Western Arnhem Land, Australia)

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This article describes two of the principal roots allowing the expression of emotions and feelings in Dalabon, an endangered language of South-Western Arnhem Land. The first root, kangu, 'belly', is depicted linguistically as the location of emotions induced by interpersonal relationships. The belly is thus presented as the locus of good and bad moods generally and of conflict more specifically. Furthermore, the material properties of the belly—its fluidity in particular—impact on one's temper and ability to deal with others in an ideologically prescribed manner. Speakers describe ritual manipulations undertaken on the belly of young infants in order to shape their temper. Kangu-no may thus be described as a malleable interface between the person and the outside world, principally other people. The second root, yolh, may at first sight translate as ‘feelings’, either good or bad, but also means ‘appetite’, ‘drive’, ‘pep’. Yolh-no is associated with the most intimate part of the person, one’s own aspirations that are independent of interactions with others. Although yolh-no connotes the core self and kangu-no, the belly, connotes relatedness to others, they are conceived asphysiologically connected, so that material properties of the belly impact on the self. Thus, the semantic analysis of Dalabon, along with related anthropological observations, unveils an explicit conceptual and cultural attention to the distinction between emotions and feelings (as respectively defined in the article) and to the autonomy of the person within a constraining social framework. The article shows how this concern echoes and challenges both anthropological and philosophical considerations.

INTRODUCTION

Emotions and feelings attract several well-differentiated trends of interpretation within the social sciences. Within philosophy, emotions have been explored by a number of prominent philosophers from Aristotle to Russell, including Descartes, Hume and many more. Early psychology produced its own distinctive theories, as did neuroscience later on (Damasio 1999, 2003). Anthropology and linguistic anthropology have also explored emotions and have continuously reflected on the notion of the person (see Marriott 1968; Strathern 1988) neighbouring research on emotions proper (see Myers 1979, 1986, 1988; Lutz 1987; Wierzbicka 1999).

For the Australian region, Myers’s (1979) and (1986) studies of Pintupi are among the best anthropological descriptions of emotions. Myers (1986) in particular
depicts the ‘emotional landscape’\textsuperscript{1} of the Pintupi group from the Western Desert, providing fine interconnected definitions of the major emotions. He thoroughly describes their conceptual, cultural and social properties and the moral order they shape. As an ethnolinguist, my interests concentrate on the language of emotions. Within the Dalabon group,\textsuperscript{2} such analysis requires examination of Kriol as well as Dalabon, as Kriol is effectively the everyday language. I have observed several emotional behaviours and concepts that do resemble the ones depicted by Myers (1979), and there are reasons to anticipate that such a study would uncover a comparable (albeit not identical) ‘emotional landscape’. Hence, a complete study of emotional patterns within their social context should consider Kriol patterns. However, the semantics of emotions in Dalabon remains relevant, as it reveals specific features that are either absent or obscured in Kriol. In fact, analysing the semantics of emotions in Dalabon opens up new insights into the conceptions of emotions and feelings that underlie the speech of Dalabon speakers, and we shall find that such observations echo Myers’s interpretations. Indeed, Myers (1979) states that such discussions are often a source of confusion. He refers to a dichotomy between feelings defined as personal, non-observable private states vs. emotions as articulated, observable, public concepts framed within a cultural system. The following paragraphs spell out various aspects of this complex distinction.

Emotions and feelings have received different treatments in various disciplines. Neuroscientists conceive of emotions as bodily electro-chemical reactions, resulting from environmental stimuli or from representations triggered by memory. Damasio (1999) argues that emotions are not cognitive: they can take place without the person being physiologically aware of them. Feelings are the knowledge of these emotions: they are the private, cognitive counterparts of emotions.\textsuperscript{3} Neuroscientists focus on the biological nature of emotions, thus stressing their universality. This physicalist view pays little attention to the sociocultural dimension of emotions. As a result, social scientists, anthropologists in particular, have developed a different conception whereby emotions should be understood in their social context. An emotion is thus defined as a type of reaction adapted to a particular situation. Both the situation and the reaction may be defined and described in terms of social configurations, varying across cultures. In this conception, emotions are publicly defined and displayed; feelings are, again, the private counterpart of observable emotions. As an anthropologist, Myers adopts this second stance.

At first sight, these definitions of emotions sound different, if not contradictory.\textsuperscript{4} What is common to both theoretical dichotomies presented previously, however, is the observable nature of emotions, as opposed to the private, unobservable nature of feelings. Emotions are consistently conceived of as an interface between the person and the rest of the world, the observable part of a phenomenon that involves a private sequence (called ‘feelings’), happening strictly within the person. In his Philosophical Investigations (1953), Wittgenstein criticises this distinction. He opposes the ‘grammatical confusion’—a confusion about the way language works—that leads us to believe that when talking about feelings, we refer to actual events we
could treat as objects of reference. Wittgenstein (1953)’s famous parabola compares this would-be private object to a beetle that each one of us would keep enclosed in a secret box:

§293: Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a ‘beetle’. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle […] The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something […].

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’, the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.

Our inclination to refer to private states within our language games is the result of a grammatical misunderstanding, whereby we hold private states to be real objects of reference. The ‘beetle’ ‘cancels out’ because our world is entirely woven within what Wittgenstein calls language games: the idea of a private language is incoherent. This is Wittgenstein’s way of discarding a culturally specific confusion, the pervasive Western mind/body dichotomy. While Wittgenstein is not a behaviourist, he holds that human phenomena take place entirely within language—language being altogether social, rational, natural, even biological and thus indifferent to the mind/body dichotomy. Hence, the idea of referring to private objects makes no sense. Wittgenstein’s criticism encompasses both conceptions of the emotions/feelings pair, as both the physicalist and the ‘culturalist’ conception try to articulate something about the private counterpart of observable phenomena.

Myers’s reluctance to discuss feelings, which he spelt out in his 1988 article, takes Wittgenstein’s warnings into account. One of Myers’s points is that, as opposed to classical/common sense Western views (Lutz 1986), emotions should not be classified as being opposed to reason and concepts. Instead, following a Wittgensteinian trend, Myers argues that emotions should be understood as culturally articulated, rational concepts, operating without reference to unarticulated, irrational, private feelings. Throughout his writings, Myers convincingly shows that Pintupi emotions can be described as discursive, rational concepts, relating to one another within a wider social context and world view. Myers’s reluctance to discuss feelings also results from a concern expressed by Lutz (1987) in her study of the Ifaluk system, when she concludes that her article is not ‘intended as a model of how the Ifaluk “think about their feelings”’, because the ‘concern with “true, underlying feeling(s)”’ is a local cultural preoccupation’ specific to ‘Euroamerican cultural constructions’. Tackling the issue of private feelings amounts to imposing Western values and concerns. Myers’s attitude towards feelings both matches Wittgenstein’s criticism of Western conceptions of language, especially his reference to private feelings, and is associated with the same (self-)criticism of Western culture as Lutz’s.

But Myers’s desire to avoid imposing Western values takes him one step further: Myers (1979) argues that the Pintupi moral ideal consists in minimising individuals’ private inputs by assigning radical moral priority to the public sphere—that is, to
emotions against feelings: ‘The ideology of emotions [in the Pintupi cultural system] can be read almost as a moral text against the wrongness of private wilfulness’ (alluding to Stanner). On the other hand, in Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self (Myers 1986), the author insists on the importance of individual autonomy—which connects with private feelings. This is not contradictory, as he explains that this tension between personal autonomy and relatedness to others is precisely the cornerstone of the Pintupi social order.

While I applaud Myers’s description of the Pintupi ‘emotional landscape’, and his qualification of emotions as articulated, social concepts, I have reservations about his treatment of feelings. These reservations stem from my observations of the semantic structure of the domain of emotions and feelings in Dalabon, in connection with speakers’ views and with culture-specific situations. I use the terms ‘emotions’ and ‘feelings’ here in the broad sense defined earlier in the text: emotions are an interface between the person and the world; feelings are conceived of as cognitive and thus private. These concepts may not necessarily be transferred to another cultural system in an identical way. However, we shall see that this terminology is not inappropriate in the case of Dalabon discourse and folk theories. Contrasting with Myers’s descriptions of the Pintupi, the question of the partition between culturally framed emotional experiences and bare, strictly private experiences does seem to be an issue of concern for Dalabon speakers and therefore a topic worth studying. In addition, while Dalabon moral values do put a strong emphasis on sharing, they do not seem to discard the private sphere.

In Dalabon, two roots seem to structure the expression of emotions and feelings. We will first explore the semantic values of kangu, the belly, which may be understood as the site and medium of interpersonal emotions, and further, as a malleable interface between the person and the outside world. The second morpheme, yolh, refers to personal, private feelings. Far from being ethically dismissed, it is explicitly regarded as the expression of the self and its autonomy. Kangu and yolh are not disconnected from each other. In fact, it seems that one’s yolh-no may be reached and transformed via the materiality of the belly. And we shall see that this interaction between kangu and yolh also sheds some light on the ‘beetle issue’ mentioned previously.

CONTEXT AND METHOD

As I challenge the question of private feelings in an Australian Aboriginal culture, dismissed by Myers (1979) as a vexed topic, it is particularly important to hear his warnings about the difficulty of this subject. Emotions and feelings involve entangled affects and ideologies, and the risk of extrapolating on fragile bases, of distorting foreign conceptions and inadvertently adjusting them to our own, is particularly acute. My argument is essentially grounded on a concrete, easily analysable linguistic corpus. My thorough knowledge of the Dalabon social framework and daily lives, built upon my living among the Dalabon community for several years, helps interpretations.
The corpus consists of about 30 h of recorded and fully transcribed conversations between myself and Dalabon speakers or semi-speakers on the topic of laws, reason, the mind, the self, emotions, feelings and interpersonal relationships in Dalabon and Kriol. These recordings were collected between 2007 and 2008 in South-Western Arnhem Land (Weemol, Beswick).6

Kriol is a well-developed creole widely identified as Aboriginal by its speakers. Numbering at least 20,000 native speakers across Northern Australia, it is the predominant mother tongue of the communities of the South-Western Arnhem region. Dalabon, a non-Pama-Nyungan prefixing language of the same region, within the Gunwinyguan family,7 is a highly endangered language numbering fewer than ten speakers at the time of writing, making it difficult to document in context as an orthodox methodology would require. A good way to document Dalabon is therefore to conduct interviews with the best speakers, encouraging them to tell stories, anecdotes, opinions and to articulate metalinguistic statements—explanations of all sorts and translations in Kriol (or English). Most interviewees being at least bilingual, the corpus is a mix of Dalabon and Kriol, with some English. In the case of emotions and feelings, most of the materials, and all the quotes except two, are drawn from conversations with two female interlocutors, out of six main speakers involved in this project.

Such a corpus may be deemed imperfect when compared to the standards of non-endangered language documentation. But because such ‘imperfections’ cannot be avoided with endangered languages, I suggest that one should rely on the obstacles mentioned previously, instead of fancying a ‘perfect’ corpus. Rather than considering the interviews as ‘artificial’, I re-claim research-oriented conversations as a ‘genuine’ context where Dalabon is still spoken. Additionally, metalinguistic statements are useful considering my interests. What I seek to understand via the semantics of Dalabon is how speakers conceive of their own words, statements and concepts—that is, their conceptual ‘models’ (Quinn & Holland 1987). Metalinguistic statements teach us a lot about these models. Kriol translations convey important information about speakers’ understanding of Dalabon (Ponsonnet 2009). As a result of this methodology, the exact anthropological context of Dalabon expressions cannot be fully described, simply because it has not been fully recreated. The real context of the quotes is the research-oriented conversations, where they are included in an anecdote, for example. This cannot compare to the rich, real situations that anthropologists often use as examples, but my knowledge of the social context and of the speakers’ personal background helps my interpretation. The quotes presented later are representative of a number of occurrences in the corpus (two sound occurrences, at a minimum). In this framework, the glosses and translations presented later in the text result from my own accumulated and cross-checked knowledge of Dalabon language and social background. Whenever useful, I present both literal and free translations, in order to make the translation and glossing processes more transparent.

There is a ‘gender bias’ in my corpus for this topic. Indeed, female Dalabon speakers talked more about emotions and interpersonal relationships than male
speakers did. This could reflect a gender partition of interests and activities. While emotions and feelings are by no means ‘secret’ topics, one of women’s major responsibilities is to look after children and family in general. This involves paying a lot of attention to emotions, as they result from interactions with others. Hence, this gender bias may be a consequence of a structural feature of the regional culture rather than an imperfection. There is little literature about emotions and feelings in languages of this region, apart from Evans (2007) and Ponsonnet (2009). Consequently, my analyses rely essentially on the corpus described earlier, on my observations of social behaviours and on my knowledge of the Dalabon group’s cultural scenarios, standards and values.

THE SEMANTICS OF EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS IN DALABON

Dalabon has a limited number of nouns to refer to emotions and feelings. Verbs and adjectives are more frequent. Dalabon is highly polysynthetic: lexemes are made of morphemes (sometimes many of them) that can be used in a number of different lexemes. Morphemes are often understood by speakers as conveying a fairly constant meaning, even when they are used within seemingly lexicalised, compound forms. A large number of lexemes expressing feelings and/or emotions use two focal roots, kangu and yolh, which can be approximated to ‘belly’ and ‘feelings’, respectively. Kangu and yolh are not strictly bound morphemes: they can also stand as nouns. However, they do not appear alone. Just like a number of Dalabon nouns—body parts in particular—they obligatorily bear a suffix, in this case, the possessive suffix. Hence, one cannot use kangu or yolh alone, but must say kangu-no, ‘his/her belly’, kangu-ngu, ‘your belly’, yolh-ngan, ‘my feelings’, etc. I will use the default third person singular forms kangu-no and yolh-no to designate the nouns. Kangu and yolh will designate the roots. I will start by describing the respective uses and semantic values of kangu/kangu-no on the one hand, yolh/yolh-no on the other hand, in order to understand their meaning, functions and status in comparison with each other.

KANGU

Kangu-no as a body part

Kangu-no refers to various body parts located in the abdominal region. The root kangu may thus be used to form lexemes that have nothing to do with emotions or temper. The verb kangu-barmu, for instance, means ‘to sleep on belly’, where kangu seems to refer to an external body part. But pregnant women may also be described as carrying a child ‘in their kangu-no’, showing that kangu-no may also be construed as a container, maybe akin to an internal organ. Five of the six speakers, when asked to point at kangu-no on the drawing of a male human body where organs were apparent (as in local ‘X-ray style’ painting), identified a central area just below the lungs, where the stomach is. This may indicate that kangu-no is
consciously construed as an internal organ, probably the stomach. *Kangu-no* is thus polysemic, meaning (possibly among other things) the belly, the stomach, or ‘abdominal container’. Because *belly* in English conveys the ‘container’ connotation, I will translate *kangu-no* with the broader term ‘belly’ along the article.

**Emotions and feelings for others**

*Kangu* appears within a number of compound verbs expressing one’s emotional state, typically in relation to persons. The verb *kangu-darrmu*, for instance, was used to describe the feelings of ‘missing someone’. We also find *kangu-kurduhmu* (*kangu* + ‘be stuck’), often more specifically ‘be stuck in an uncomfortable situation’, cf. Ponsonnet (forthcoming), and *kangu-run*, (*kangu* + ‘cry’). They are both used in example (1) to refer to an interpersonal emotional state, in this context as ‘worry about someone’, ‘feel sorrow about someone’.

(1)  

\[ \text{ngah-marne-} \text{kangu-} \text{kurduhminj} \]  
I>BENEF-*kangu*-be.stuck.in.an.uncomfortable.situation:PI

\[ \text{ngah-dja-marne-} \text{kangu-} \text{runinj munguyh} . \]  
I>just-BENEF-*kangu*-cry:PI constantly

Lit. ‘But before, when she was in hospital, then I used to be belly-uncomfortable about her, I would be belly-crying about her all the time.’

Free ‘But before, when she was in hospital, then I used to worry about her I would keep feeling sorrow about her all the time.’

*Kangu* can also be used in verbs expressing positive (or improving) feelings, as in example (2).

(2)  

\[ \text{ngah-lng-} \text{kangu-} \text{mon-minj kah-marne-dudjminj wujbidul-walung} . \]  
I>then-*kangu*-good-become:PI him>me-BENEF-return:PP hospital-ELAT

Lit. ‘Then my belly got better, as she came back to me, from hospital.’

Free ‘Then I felt better, as she came back to me, from hospital.’

Many more verbs or adjectives can be formed on the same pattern, associating *kangu* with another morpheme in order to describe emotions. *Kangu-no*, the belly, is represented linguistically as the locus of these emotions, or their medium, the organ that gets affected in one way or another when one experiences emotional pain or relief. An inventory of these lexemes would lead us to identify and describe typical emotions, their nature and social context, just as Myers (1979) did in the
Pintupi context—but this is not the topic of this article. It is worth mentioning, however, that in my corpus, compounds including kangu were nearly always used to describe feelings/emotions triggered by interpersonal relationships. It thus seems that emotions related to other human beings—the kind of emotions emphasised by Myers—are associated with this root. While the number of occurrences is too low to be fully conclusive, we will find other reasons to think that kangu is primarily associated with interactions with the outer environment, including interpersonal situations—the latter being, in this cultural context, a major dimension of the former.

**Moods**

*Kangu* is also used to describe people’s moods, such as their bellicose or peaceful attitudes towards others. Typically, *kangu-mon* (*kangu* + ‘good’) means ‘to be in a good disposition towards someone’, as opposed to being angry against this person, seeking conflict with him or her:

(3) *Bukah-dja-marne-*kangu-*mon.*  
he>him.high-just-BENEF-*kangu*-good

Si, laik François im stil gud la yu, im don graul yu bobala.  
See, like François he still good with you he neg argue:PR you interj

Lit. ‘He’s now **good belly** for her. See, François for instance, he’s still good with you, he doesn’t argue with you, good man!’

Free ‘He’s now **well disposed** towards her. See, François for instance, he’s still good with you, he doesn’t argue with you, good man!’

*Kangu-weh* (*kangu* + ‘bad’) is the symmetrical counterpart of *kangu-mon*, as shown in example (4), where the speaker provides defining explanations of the difference between several expressions using *kangu*. Her definition shows how emotions described using *kangu* are closely associated with interpersonal relationships, here verbal communication.

(4) *Yang bulah-marne-yenjdjung nunh mah wirrih kah-ling-*kangu-*weh-mun.*  
speech.content they>him-BENEF-talk:PR this but or he-then-*kangu*-bad-become:PR

*Nunh mah wirrih bulah-marne-yenjdjung nunh kah-*kangu-*burrama-mun.*  
This thus or they>him-BENEF-talk:PR this he-*kangu*-good-become:PR

Lit. ‘Either they speak out their views to each other, or if not then his **belly gets bad**. But in the case they talk to each other, then his **belly gets fine**.’

Free ‘Either they speak out their views to each other, or if not then he **feels bad**, they are in a **bad mood**. But in the case they talk to each other, then he **feels good**.’
Structurally equivalent forms, *gudbinji* (literally ‘good belly’) and *nogudbinji*, exist in Kriol, showing that speakers do, to some extent, endorse the actual implication of body parts in the phenomena at stake (see below). All these senses also apply to *kangu-mon* and *kangu-weh*.

(5) Yinbala polodjais gija na. you.two apologise:PR RECIP now

Yinbala *gudbinji*. Im *gudbinji* en yu *gudbinji* bla im. you.two *gudbinji* he *gudbinji* and you *gudbinji* DAT him

Lit. ‘You two apologise to each other. You two are good belly. He’s good belly and you are good belly towards him.’
Free ‘You two apologise to each other. You two are in a good mood again. He’s well disposed and you are well disposed towards him.’

Conflict
As indicated by the reference to apology in example (5), *binji* and *kangu* connote conflict. *Kangu-mon* (and *kangu-weh*) can be associated with fairly violent situations involving actual ‘fight’—rather than just bad moods and petty arguments. The adjective *kangu-yirru-mon*, *kangu* + ‘fight’ + ‘good’, can be used to describe a belligerent and aggressive person or animal. The expression *kangu-nguddu-bakka* conveys the idea of surrender—succumbing to a disease, for instance. One may also use *nguddu-bakka* alone. Adding *kangu* does not seem to amend the sense of the expression; it simply spells out the site where this internal fight takes place. In example (6), the speaker explicitly locates a conflict in one’s stomach. She does so in spite of her qualifying the conflict at stake as an intellectual one in the first part of the sentence, using the verb *kodj-wokarrun*, literally ‘talk to oneself in the head’, or ‘wonder’, ‘be in a dilemma’. Nonetheless the event, as a conflict, is located inside one’s stomach. *Kangu-no* is thus consistently associated with conflict, regardless of the type of conflict.


he-head-tell:RECIPEPR there this fight big he>him-have:PR **belly**-his-LOC

Lit. ‘He’s talking to himself in his head there, he’s got this fight, a big one. In his belly.’
Free ‘He’s got a dilemma there, he’s got this fight, a big one. In his belly.’

*Kangu-no* as the locus and medium of emotions, moods and conflicts
The semantics of *kangu* (reflected in its Kriol counterpart *binji*) connects with interpersonal relationships, emotions and conflicts. Furthermore, example (6) mentioned
previously indicates that (some) speakers conceive of the belly as the actual locus of emotions, and this is confirmed in example (7), a mix of Kriol and English.

(7) Well see, me sometimes, when I have funny feelings langa mai binji.

‘Well see, me sometimes, when I have funny feelings in my belly.’

Thus, the belly, *binji* in Kriol, *kangu-no* in Dalabon, may be understood as the locus of emotions and moods, dispositions related to some external events, interpersonal relationships in particular, whether they are positive (affection) or negative (animosity). There is an apparent emphasis on animosity: in some contexts, *kangu* is associated with conflict in itself. This emphasis may reflect a strong cultural concern for social conflict, particularly among women. A plausible interpretation is that conflict (especially involving kin) may be regarded as the primary social and moral disorder and therefore the predominant emotion affecting one’s *kangu-no*. In example (3), the speaker’s (repeated) concern for my interpersonal conflicts with my own acquaintance (a white person very close to the speaker) is a sample of her constant concerns about the fluidity of relationships between persons closely related to her.

The properties of *kangu-no* determine one’s temper

It seems that *kangu-no* is not only considered the locus of some affects, but also their medium. The verbs *kangu-kurduhmu* and *kangu-run* (example 1) associate the belly with an uncomfortable situation and with tears, respectively. The belly is not described as sheltering emotions in these cases; it is represented linguistically as affected by emotions. Likewise, as shown in example (8), the representation of the resolution of a conflict involves one’s stomach becoming soft, fluid, as indicated by the verb *kangu-yerrkmu*, literally *kangu* + ‘slip’, translated as ‘forgive’, ‘apologise’, and more generally ‘get rid of aggression and resentment’.

(8) Malung narrah-ngurrngdurrun, kardu dah-ngurrngdung

before you two-hate:RECIP:PR maybe you>he-hate:PR

mah njing yibung mah kardu djah-ngurrngdun,

and you him and maybe he>you-hate:PR

kenbo kanh kah-lang-*kangu*-yerrkmu.

then that one he then-*kangu*-slip:PR

Lit. ‘You used to hate each other, maybe, you would hate him and him, he would hate you as well, and then his **belly becomes fluid** again.’

Free ‘You used to hate each other, maybe, you would hate him and him, he would hate you as well, and then he **gets rid of his animosity**, he’s **ready to apologise**.’
Following the same trend, further material properties associated linguistically with the belly connote not only one’s mood on a specific occasion, but one’s temper, one’s character and personality, independent of a particular situation. The verb \textit{kangu-yowyow}, literally \textit{kangu} + ‘flow’, repeating the fluidity metaphor, provides a good example. \textit{Kangu-yowyow}, illustrated in example (9), can be said of someone who has a good, reliable temper, who is open to others.

\begin{example}
\textit{Laik, bulu kah-nan biyi kirdikird bulkah-marne-\textit{kangu-yowyow}.}
like they he-see:PR men women he>they-BENEF-\textit{kangu}-flow;REDUP

\textit{Djehneng kah-yin radjdjarr. Mak bulka-njirrmi-won.}
as.if he-say flood.water neg he>they:IRR-hatred-give:PR

‘Like, she comes across men and women and she is \textit{kind} to them.
You’d reckon flood water. She doesn’t have any hatred for anyone.’
\end{example}

When someone is not kind and generous, she is said to be \textit{kangu-murduk}, \textit{kangu} + ‘hard’. The adjective \textit{kangu-murduk}, often translated as ‘\textit{had binji}’ (<Engl. ‘hard’) in Kriol, describes someone ‘selfish’, not inclined to share with others—whether it be belongings, time, jokes, as shown in example (10).

\begin{example}
\textit{Kah-kangu-murduk-kun.}
he-\textit{kangu}-hard;REDUP-GEN

\textit{Laik had filin laik kardu, kardu kah-durruniyan, kardu…}
Like hard feeling like maybe maybe he-argue:FUT maybe

\textit{Munu kah-dja-ni yibungkarn, im ron.}
intention.privative he-just-be:PR himself him one.self

‘He’s got a \textit{hard belly}. Like hard feelings, like maybe, maybe he’ll keep having arguments, maybe. He just stays there, by himself, all by himself.’
\end{example}

In these examples, it was clear from the context but also from the tone that \textit{kangu-yowyow} was a positive description and \textit{kangu-murduk} a negative one. But interestingly, \textit{murduk} in \textit{kangu-murduk} sometimes gets translated in Kriol as ‘strong’ rather than ‘had’, with \textit{kangu-murduk} gaining a positive meaning: ‘brave’, ‘courageous’ (particularly in social situations). Example (11) describes, also with a positive tone, a ‘strong personality’.

\begin{example}
\textit{Im breibwan, im kin dangfait.}
he brave he can tongue.fight

\textit{Kah-djong-bruh, mak ka-djong-mun.}
he-fear-dry neg he:IRR-fear-become:PR
\end{example}
Bulah-dungiyan mak ka-djong-muniyan.

they>him-abuse:FUT neg he:IRR-fear-become:FUT

Kangu-murduk. Im sten fo det fait.

kangu-strong he stand for that fight

Lit. ‘He’s brave, he can fight with his tongue. He’s without fear, he’s not scared. If they abuse him, he won’t get scared. Strong belly. He stands for fight.’

Free ‘He’s brave, he knows how to argue. If they abuse him, he won’t get scared. A strong personality. He stands up to fight.

Hence, remarkably, the same word may be used to criticise a selfish person and to praise a person being brave in social contexts. Kangu-murduk seems to be inadequate when one’s bravery is not social. The expression yang-murduk (‘content of speech’ + ‘strong’), ‘verbally strong’, once used to explain kangu-murduk, confirms that kangu-murduk applies to social situations. We will see how speakers deal with this ambivalence of kangu-murduk in the discussion of yolh, later in the text.

Kangu-murduk, understood as ‘had binji’, ‘hard belly’, ‘selfish’, contrasts with the adjective kangu-bolabola. Bola does not exist as a lexeme but is used, for instance, in kurlah-bolabola ‘skin’ + ‘soft’, describing the tender skin of the inside forearm. Kangu-bolabola describes generous persons prompt to share with others (daily things such as food, radio sets and so on), as in example (12), where the speaker proudly applies it to herself. Kangu-bolabola can also be said of someone who enjoys the presence of others—a happy, funny, enjoyable person.

Kangu-yerrkmu (kangu + ‘slip’), kangu-yowyow (kangu + ‘flow’), kangu-bolabola (kangu + ‘soft’/‘sensitive’), kangu-burrrama (kangu + ‘good’), kangu-murduk (kangu + ‘hard’ or ‘strong’), kangu-weh (kangu + ‘bad’) all describe one’s temper, personality—tendencies in one’s interactions with others. These expressions are all interconnected: speakers use one to define others, by contrast or association. One is made/considered a happy person because she enjoys the presence of others and

Lit. ‘This is when I give money, then they give. Personally, I have a sensitive belly.’

Free ‘This is when I give money, then they give. Personally, I am a generous, giving person.’

(12) Nunda mani nunh ngah-ngabbun kenbo bolah-ngabbuyan.

this.time money this I>him-give:PR then they>he-give:FUT

Ngay ngah-kangu-bolabola.

me 1-kangu-sensitive:REDUP

Lit. ‘This is when I give money, then they give. Personally, I have a sensitive belly.’
is therefore good company; enjoying aloneness is associated with selfishness, sadness and unhappiness. Higher value is put on being generous, on sharing and enjoying the presence of others. This preference was once expressed by two interviewees bursting into a delighted chorus when I eventually uttered ‘kah-kangu-yowyow’, ‘her belly flows’ (a sentence to study which they chose to hear as a statement), just after our discussing ‘kangu-murduk’, ‘being selfish’. This ethical framework matches what Myers describes as an emphasis on relatedness, the defining connection of individuals sharing with one another within the social group, as opposed to autonomy, the individual’s specificity and independence. The ambivalence of kangu-murduk, meaning both ‘selfish’ and ‘courageous’ in social conflicts, constitutes an interesting exception to the coherence of the system.

Several of the expressions mentioned previously rely on a representation of the belly (or possibly the stomach) as more or less soft/fluid vs. hard/solid. The structure of language is not in itself a sign that speakers do actually hold the fluidity of one’s stomach to determine one’s personality. Indeed, the figure is not realistic, as body parts cannot, strictly speaking, be fluid. But one can imagine them as more or less soft and malleable: fluidity and malleability unite in their opposition to hardness. And in fact, there is some evidence that speakers do endorse a fluidity/malleability representation of the belly.

First, Kriol definitions of kangu-murduk used the Kriol had, literally ‘hard’, or strong, ‘strong’, with strong being used to describe hard ground. This recurrence in Kriol is a sign that the morpheme murduk does retain its original semantic value here. More importantly, kangu-yowyow was explained by a very explicit comparison with flood water. This comparison sounds like a cultural trope, as shown by the recurrent and more or less reified comparison with flood water exemplified in (9), repeated later:

(9) Laik, bulu kah-nan biyi kirdikird bulkah-marne-kangu-yowyow.
Djehneng kah-yin radjdjarr. Mak bulka-njirrkmi-won.
‘Like, she comes across men and women and she is kind to them. You’d reckon flood water. She doesn’t have any hatred for anyone.’

Crucially, both major female consultants separately described a secular ritual whereby a young infant was dragged on her belly over the sand from the top to the bottom of the river bank, and her belly was rubbed with sand. The water then flowed over the bank (during rain season), making the baby kangu-bolabola, a generous, happy person, who ‘never says no to anybody’. Symbolically, the fluidity of the sand and water are transferred to the baby’s belly thanks to massaging—which, in itself, can also render the belly malleable. Thus, the representations displayed by the semantics of Dalabon did correspond to material actions in ritual practises. Individuals’ tempers and personalities, their ability to interact with others in an ethically appropriate manner, are understood to be related at least symbolically, to properties
of their bellies, mainly fluidity or malleability as opposed to hardness. It should be noted that the properties of the sand and water may be regarded, in the ritual, as both symbolic and material. They are real material properties and stand as symbolic tokens for such properties. Material manipulations upon the belly, activating symbolic representations of physical properties, are considered adequate actions to make the child a good person.

An interface between the person and the outside world

Kangu sometimes occurs in contexts that do not match any of the uses described previously. The most salient case is the expression kangu-barrhmu, kangu + ‘crack’, which means ‘have a fright’, ‘have a shock’, ‘be very surprised’ by something. An occurrence of kangu-weh referring to a bad feeling that was, in fact, a premonition also indicates that kangu may be understood as the receptacle of external events affecting the interface between the person and the outside world. This does make sense in connection with the idea that the belly is the locus of interpersonal emotions and affects because in the Dalabon universe, interactions with others are the most prominent aspect of one’s interactions with the environment.

To summarise, we may state that the semantics of kangu in Dalabon correlates with the fact that kangu-no, the belly, is regarded as the locus of interpersonal emotions (the kind of emotions described by Myers in the Pintupi context), linked to affection or animosity—with an emphasis on conflict. Kangu-no is not only linguistically depicted as the locus of interpersonal emotions, but also as their medium. The belly (or stomach) is affected when one experiences an emotion. Its material properties, its being fluid or malleable as opposed to harder, determine one being more or less open to others, more or less socially valuable. This representation of the physical properties of the belly is echoed by accounts of manipulations undertaken on young infants, involving sand and flowing water as symbols and instances of fluidity, to make the infant’s belly more fluid and malleable so that she grows as good-tempered. Further, kangu-no seems to be considered the receptacle of what comes from outside more generally—an interface between the person and the external world (other human beings constituting the most important part of the external world for Dalabon individuals). To the extent that kangu-no is conceived of as an interface between the person and the outside world, it seems that Dalabon speakers’ constructs of the belly play an important part in what has earlier been called ‘emotions’. Indeed, emotions were defined as observable, ‘reachable’ phenomena (as opposed to ‘unreachable’ private feelings) standing at the interface between an individual and the world. Because Dalabon value relatedness to others, one’s kangu-no primarily shelters emotions triggered by interpersonal interactions—that is, emotions of the sort emphasised by Myers in the Pintupi context. I will now describe meanings and uses of yolh-no, thus shedding light on Dalabon speakers’ conceptions of private feelings, of the self as an autonomous entity.
**YOLH**

**Feelings**

As a first approximation, yolh-no may translate as ‘filin’ in Kriol and ‘feelings’ in English. Just like kangu, it is used to describe either good or bad feelings. Yolh-burrama (yolh + ‘good’) and yolh-weh (yolh + ‘bad’) express moods in a similar fashion to kangu-burrama/kangu-weh in Dalabon, gudbinji/nogudbinji in Kriol. In some contexts, expressions including yolh seem nearly interchangeable with expressions using kangu. This is the case in example (13), where yolh-weh describes the mood of a loner, who stays away from others. Example (13) compares with example (10), where the speaker refers to a similar situation but uses kangu-murduk (kangu + ‘hard’, ‘selfish’). It may be noted that in example (13), in contrast to example (10), the speaker sounded compassionate rather than judgemental.

(13) Kardu kah-yolh-weh, kah-nini kanihdja kardu kah-yolh-weh! maybe he-yolh-bad he-stay;REDUP:PR there maybe he-yolh-bad

Lit. ‘He might have a bad yolh, he just stays there [by himself], maybe he’s got a bad yolh!’
Free ‘He might be in a bad mood, he just stays there [by himself], maybe he is melancholic!’

Yolh is also found in expressions such as yolh-yerrkmu, yolh + ‘slip’, apparently a synonym of kangu-yerrkmu. Not all kangu compounds transfer to yolh, or vice versa, but the fluidity property of kangu-no partly applies to yolh-no as well. Consistently, this figure is extended via the idea of entanglement, with an expression apparently specific to yolh: yolh-dukkarrun, yolh + ‘tangled up’, translated in Kriol as ‘worimbat’ (<Eng. ‘worry’), ‘fil sori’ (<Eng. ‘feel sorry’). In example (14), yolh-dukkarrun conveys the idea of anxiety, typically the anxiety that is said to make one sick when worrying about deceased people for too long (a culturally typical scenario).

(14) Nunh munguyh ngaye-ningiyan, ngaye-bengkiyan, nunh wunga-yelu xng-moyh-rakkan. this all.the.time I:SUB-stay:FUT I>him:SUB-know:FUT this I:APPR-then-sick-fall:PR

**yolh-**ngan wunga-yolh-dukkarrun.

**yolh-**my I:APPR-**yolh-tie.up:RECIP:PR

Lit. ‘If I remain by myself inactive all the time, if I think about it all the time, then I will get sick. My yolh, my yolh will get entangled.’
Free ‘If I remain by myself inactive all the time, if I think about it all the time, then I will get sick. My feelings, I might become anxious.’

In example (14), the source of anxiety was, again, the speaker’s concern about a close family member being sick. However, yolh-dukkarrun refers to what happens to the person herself and the way her health is affected from the inside if she stays...
withdrawn from others and from worldly activities. While yolh and kangu expressions are often interchangeable, here yolh-dukarrun is not equivalent to a kangu compound: yolh connotes what happens to the person proper, in the culturally typical scenario when she unhealthily focuses on her own feeling of sorrow. The entanglement metaphor recalls fluidity, but in that case, the feeling results from the absence of interpersonal, and broadly speaking external impacts. As we shall see, this idea that yolh connotes private feelings of the person is confirmed by further uses of yolh.

**Desires and appetites**

Yolh can be described as good or bad: good yolh is associated with good moods, bad yolh with bad moods. Yolh is thus treated as a neutral component, with its value yet to be qualified. But yolh may also bear a slightly different connotation. For instance, the verb yolh-wudj, yolh + ‘finish off’, describes the absence of cheerfulness, a low and depressed mood. This lack of enthusiasm contrasts with yolh-ni, yolh + ‘be’, which often means ‘feel like’. In this framework, being deprived of yolh amounts to an absence of enthusiasm, of gusto, and yolh, rather than being neutral, connotes higher, positive moods. Example (15) makes the connection of yolh with appetites and drives very explicit.

(15) *Ngah-yolh-wudj, nunh mak [nga-nguniyan].*

I-yolh-finish.off:PR this neg [I>he:IRR-eat:FUT]

Lit. ‘If if my yolh is finished off, then I won’t [eat].’
Free ‘If I’ve got no appetite, then I won’t [eat].’

In other instances, yolh-wudj (yolh + ‘finish’) is explained thanks to Kriol expressions: ‘im don wana laf’, literally ‘he doesn’t feel like laughing’, ‘ai no hepi’, literally ‘I’m not happy’. Lacking appetite and not being cheerful or happy are culturally equivalent in that context. They are all consequences of yolh-wudj, having no yolh, no pep, which results in being morose, serious, depressed (see example 14). In such cases, yolh is not neutral but denotes positive feelings, positive drives, rather than feelings generally. In line with this interpretation, yolh is used in some translations of what English describes as love. Yolh, as a root, may nonetheless be used to form expressions related to negative or lower moods, because the absence of drives, or unsettled drives, results in undesirable states (depression, anxiety, etc.).

A lot more could be said about yolh and yolh-no, but we may now articulate a hypothesis. While kangu-no designates the interface between the person and her (natural and social) environment, yolh and yolh-no seem to refer to moods understood as specifically personal—the set of one’s drives, stemming from ‘inside’ the person. These moods are not seen primarily as consequences of interactions with others (or with the environment), but as resulting from events within the person,
as in example (14). Additionally, the contrast between examples (10) and (13) tells us about the values governing the range of affects connected to yolh-no and to kangu-no, respectively. Both sentences describe a loner who likes to stay away from others. Example (10) uses a kangu compound (kangu-murduk, kangu + ‘hard’), describes a social situation, and is quite explicitly judgemental: one should not keep away from others. Example (13) uses a yolh compound (yolh-weh, yolh + ‘bad’) and sounds compassionate rather than judgemental: the speaker describes someone subject to an unexplainable and incontrollable ‘melancholy’. This contrast indicates that, in the domain of yolh, individuals enjoy greater autonomy to borrow a term used by Myers to refer to the possibility that one may act as an independent entity. The moods related to yolh-no, freed from the constraints of relatedness, are rooted and dealt with within the individual and belong to the person proper. To that extent, they correspond to what was earlier called ‘feelings’.

Yolh-no as what is specific to the self

Here again, the hypothesis articulated on the basis of the semantic structure of Dalabon confirms that speakers do explicitly associate yolh-no with individuals’ autonomy. In example (16), the speaker defines yolh-no as the eminently and purely subjective component of the person. Her assertive tone emphasises the value put on autonomy, enacted as the right for one to be different—precisely, in her sentence, the right to not feel good, to be unhappy (we have seen that being happy, or at least cheerful and of good company, was morally praised in the domain of interpersonal relationships and dominated by the values of relatedness).

(16) Yolh-no nunh im⁄ oni yolh-no na. Laik blanga im filin.

yolh-his this it [false start] only yolh-his there like POSS him feelings

Hau im fil. Im matbi nogud filin, im difren brom enibodi.

how he feel:PR he maybe bad feelings he different from anybody

‘His yolh, this is/only his yolh there. Like, his feelings. How he feels. He might feel bad, he’s different from anyone else.’

Additionally, while in spontaneous translations speakers usually translate yolh-no with Kriol ‘filin’, the same speaker, when prompted to explain yolh-no, suggests a more refined translation, namely ‘wil’ (<Engl. ‘will’). Wil is not very frequent in Kriol, and considering the speaker’s limited mastery of English, what she means is not transparent. Nonetheless, if we lend to wil a semantic value more or less equivalent to the value of will, this definition remains amazingly consistent with example (16). Thus, we may safely conclude that yolh-no, one’s pep, the set of one’s drives and appetites, of one’s private feelings, stemming from inside the self as opposed to socially triggered emotions, is regarded as a defining element of the person, of the independent individual.
The autonomy of yolh-no

While the root yolh may be used to denote moods like kangu does, these items are well differentiated. Yolh-no may be understood as the set of one’s private feelings, as well as one’s pep or gusto, the set of one’s positive drives—feelings, desires, appetites, love. As the absence of drives may entail negative moods, yolh may also be used to express moroseness, melancholy, anxiety. (Some) speakers explicitly associate yolh-no with the specificities of one’s personality or will, that is, with the individual’s independence and autonomy. The domain of private feelings is thus associated with personal psychological well-being (happiness, enthusiasm and their counterparts, depression, lack of desire, melancholy etc.) and conceived of as independent of social order and values.

The assertion of one’s right to be different in example (16) and the absence of judgement in the ‘yolh related’ description of a loner in example (13) demonstrate that autonomy is not ethically dismissed at all times. This is puzzling in comparison with the values enforcing relatedness, firmly asserted in the evaluation and control (by means of ritual manipulations) of people’s tempers. The analysis of kangu had led to the conclusion that the Dalabon, matching Myers’s description of the Pintupi, largely places ethical value in relatedness and connection with others. Indeed, Myers (1986) identifies a tension between autonomy and relatedness in the Pintupi context. But I have not observed any significant tension with Dalabon speakers. Socially oriented emotions mediated by kangu-no and individual feelings, yolh-no, rooted in the private self, do not seem to stand in opposition. Rather, these sets of values seem to operate on parallel planes. Within the hours of conversations I have recorded (and the rest of the time), the legitimacy of one’s yolh-no was never denied—it was, in fact, acknowledged. And importantly, the ambivalence between kangu-murduk as ‘hard belly’, ‘selfish’ (example 10) and kangu-murduk as ‘strong belly’, ‘standing up for his view’ (example 11) remained unnoticed by the speaker even when the confrontation neared the surface. The negative evaluation of kangu-murduk relies on values of relatedness; the positive evaluation of kangu-murduk relies on values of autonomy. As the polysemy may go unnoticed, I am tempted to conclude that Dalabon speakers can be indifferent to what we perceive as a contradiction between these two sets of values. We are thus left with the problem of understanding the omnipresence of interpersonal relationships in a way that explains how the expected tension with personal autonomy may be avoided.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN KANGU-NO AND YOLH-NO

Echoing the semantic overlap between kangu and yolh, some speakers talk of yolh-no as if it were located in the belly, or even as if it were the belly. In such cases, yolh-no and kangu-no are more or less conflated, reflecting the fact that both terms can translate as ‘binji’ in Kriol. However, the matter is not clear cut. A female speaker explicitly rejected this equation. Several speakers, when asked to point at the yolh-no on the drawing of a (male) human body showing the organs as in the
local ‘X-ray style’ paintings, located yolh-no in the brain—fewer speakers located yolh-no in the belly or along the spine. One female speaker stated that yolh-no was not on the drawing—presumably because she considered it immaterial, not an organ that could be drawn.\(^\text{17}\) But she also added, ‘oni jis kangu-no dedsol’, ‘only his kangu-no that’s all’. This was, of course, induced by my asking where the kangu-no was just before. But we had been listing various body parts, and listening to the recording, it is hard not to imagine her reasoning along the following lines: yolh-no, being immaterial, cannot be represented on the drawing; thus, we can only see the associated organ, kangu-no. The same speaker uttered example (17) about the sand and water ritual on the infants’ belly, assuming that the manipulations operated on the infant’s kangu-no impact on her yolh-no.

\(\text{(17)}\) 
\begin{align*}
\text{Kah-dja-lng-}\text{\textit{kangu}-burrama}. & \quad \text{Kah}\text{-}\text{\textit{kangu}-yowyowmu.} \\
\text{he-just-then-}\text{\textit{kangu}-good} & \quad \text{he-}\text{\textit{kangu}-flow;REDUP:PR} \\
\text{Mak} & \quad \text{ka-}\text{\textit{yolh}-borledmu, mak ka-run.} \\
\text{neg} & \quad \text{he:IRR-}\text{\textit{yolh}-change:PR neg he:IRR-cry:PR} \\
\end{align*}

‘She is \textit{good kangu}. \textit{She’s got an easy, fluid kangu.}’

‘She doesn’t have unstable \textit{yolh}, she’s doesn’t cry.’

The question of the exact connection between kangu-no and yolh-no is intricate and deserves dedicated research. Yolh-no and kangu-no are distinct; some speakers, in some circumstances, locate yolh-no in the belly, but this is far from systematic. Nonetheless, some speakers clearly (if implicitly) establish some physiological connections between kangu-no and yolh-no, as in example (17). Although the nature of this connection remains vague, this example provides an interesting insight.

The above-mentioned quote followed the description of the ritual whereby an infant’s kangu-no is made fluid and malleable, resulting in her becoming a good, generous person, but the speaker mentions consequences for the infant’s yolh-no as well. We thus face the following configuration. Kangu-no is a body part or internal organ. On the one hand, it is represented linguistically as a malleable (literally depicted as fluid) bodily interface, affected by external events (primarily interpersonal relationships, in this cultural context), triggering many socially framed and socially oriented emotions. On the other hand, kangu-no is connected to one’s yolh-no, one’s set of private feelings. Hence, kangu-no may, in fact, be understood as the malleable interface connecting the private self to the outer world. This can be made sense of in two ways. Explicitly, one’s kangu-no being malleable means that she is sensitive to others, a highly valued personality feature. Less explicitly, the fact that her kangu-no is malleable also means that the properties of one’s kangu-no can be modified by means of physical manipulations, as we have seen with ritual manipulations. And via one’s kangu-no, such manipulations eventually impact on one’s yolh-no. This understanding of the nature of kangu-no is in line with the phenomena described by Keen (2006) as ‘extensions of the person in space and time’. Keen
explains how some bodily substances and body parts may be considered extensions of the person and can be made to act upon someone (via sorcery), from a distance. While there is no concept of extension in our case, the external world is allowed to penetrate and modify the most private aspect of the person by means of physical action upon an organ conceived of as a malleable interface, an interface which external influences—and crucially, social influences—may reach.

We have seen that, in spite of this permeability of the person, personal autonomy is well acknowledged and recognised as such. In the Western, Cartesian tradition, feelings that define the ‘subject’ may be partly controlled, mainly thanks to the power of the mind—that is, via rational thinking. In the conceptual, or symbolic, model observed with Dalabon speakers, the subject may also be reached ‘materially’ speaking: actions operated on the body may indeed impact on the mind as well. In this conceptual framework, just as in the Cartesian framework, the autonomy of the self is acknowledged, and in both cases, it may be partly controlled. But the means by which it is controlled, and the related conceptions of the body, of the mind, of reasons and affects, of what is material and immaterial and of the interactions between such components, vary significantly.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Many of our findings do echo Myers’s description of the Pintupi ‘emotional landscape’. Nonetheless, the reservation about Myers’s (1979) radical opposition between a dismissed private sphere and a morally valued public sphere is apparently grounded. Such a sharp opposition is not to be found in the Dalabon context. The tension between autonomy and relatedness described by Myers (1986) does not seem to occur among the Dalabon. These spheres tend to evolve independently with respect to moral judgements; judgements stemming from different spheres do not collide. From the point of view of the person, they appear as interconnected, as the self is defined by both kangu-no and yolh-no, which are physiologically interconnected. Practically, however, interpersonal relationships cover literally every aspect of (female) Dalabon life—but this does not undermine the right for one to claim her feelings and live by them. But how can we explain and interpret the omnipresence of social interactions so that it does not result in a tension with the value of autonomy? Before we can answer this question, we shall have to describe the epistemological features associated with this omnipresence of interpersonal relations.

The second reservation, related to the cultural specificity of the supposedly Western concern for private feelings, seems grounded too. Indeed, Dalabon semantics, practises and representations do display a distinction that mirrors the distinction between emotions and feelings. The belly, kangu-no, is represented as an interface between the person and the world and is thus the locus of something akin to emotions. Indeed, the emotions mediated by one’s kangu-no may be considered bodily reactions (matching the neuroscientific conception), or they may be described in terms of social situations (matching the anthropological conception). One’s yolh-no,
on the other hand, encompasses the affects stemming from one’s own, private nature—reflecting the reference to private, non-observable feelings. This distinction is not strictly identical to the Western emotions/feelings distinctions, but it does bear resemblances. An obvious difference is that, within the system I have described, the self is also defined by its materiality, via the properties of one’s kangu-no, impacting in turn on one’s yelh-no. In ‘Western’, Cartesian conceptual models, the ‘essence’ of the self is either considered immaterial, or reduced to physical properties (the neuroscientists’ model). In the ‘Dalabon system’, the self is the body as well as the mind.

As a consequence, what Wittgenstein calls the ‘beetle’ is assigned a different position in this system of language games. As we have seen, in the parabola, the ‘beetle’ stands for private feelings reified as objects of reference. According to Wittgenstein, the question of the existence of such private feelings lies outside the scope of our language games: our ‘beetle’ does not enter our world. But this (standard) interpretation of Wittgenstein’s writings does not account for the fact that the figure of the ‘beetle’ does keep coming back in our language games. Interestingly, it seems that Dalabon language games present us with a different perspective on this dilemma. They do, indirectly, incorporate the ‘beetle’ into their social interactions, via ritual manipulations whereby private feelings may be physically affected. In such a social, symbolic game, the self and her feelings are reachable objects. This suggests an alternative way of solving the ‘beetle’ problem, the problem of the integration of feelings and the private self within a conceptual and social system.

NOTES

1 My expression.
2 Whether there is such an entity as a ‘Dalabon group’, and what it is, can be questioned. In this paper, this expression generally refers to ‘the descendants of Dalabon speakers’.
3 Damasio distinguishes two stages of consciousness of feelings, but this is not relevant to our argument.
4 And they do not match the respective semantic categories of feelings and emotions in daily language either.
5 Myers refers to Peirce, but Wittgenstein and Peirce are very compatible.
6 I take the opportunity to thank AIATSIS for funding my research projects. I am particularly grateful to Sarah Cutfield and Tony Boxall. I also thank Nick Evans and my anonymous reviewers. My greatest thanks are for Dalabon speakers, in particular Maggie Tukumba and Lily Bennett. Warm thanks to Salome Harris for conversation and advise.
8 Quinn and Holland (1987), and other authors in this volume, refer to ‘cultural models’ and not to ‘conceptual models’. I prefer my formula, which is free of the assumption that members of a social group share the same model, or what is called a ‘culture’. In my view, while there would be ‘family resemblances’ between the conceptual models used by members of one social group, we should bear in mind that these models are unlikely to be identical or to respond to any set of ‘cultural rules’.

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Some aspects of Dalabon culture may remain inaccessible to one or the other gender—mostly to women.

See Evans and Merlan (2001), Cutfield (in prep.) for details about this complex phenomenon.

The sixth speaker implicitly agreed with this scope, while defining kangu-no as the whole thorax.

The meaning of darrmu is yet to be clarified.

Abbreviations: [pers.x]>[pers.y], x is agent, y is object; APPR, apprehensive mood (if Ø, then the mood is realis); BENEF, benefactive case; COM, comitative case; DAT, dative case; ELAT, elative case; FUT, future tense; high, object is a human being or a being classified as higher than agent; interj, interjection; IRR, irrealis mood (if Ø, then the mood is realis); LOC, locative case; neg, negation; PI, past imperfective; POSS, possessive case; PP, past perfective; PR, present tense; RECIP, reciprocal verbal form; REDUP, reduplication; SUB, item represent the argument(s) of subordinate clause (if Ø item is the function of main clause).

The root kodj, which approximates to ‘head’, is used to describe intellectual states or processes (Ponsonnet 2009).

The speaker reported having operated these manipulations on her own children and grandchildren. However, since 1998, I have never heard of this ritual being performed—although I am usually notified of initiation rituals and other ceremonies.

Exactly which expressions may be used with both remains to be thoroughly documented.

See Ponsonnet (2009) for a similar reaction about men-no, the set of one’s thoughts.

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