

Making a difference: the concept of relation in Aweti onomastics

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Abstract

Taking as a starting point an apparently minor event of my fieldwork- the fact that I received an indigenous name from the Aweti, a Tupi speaking people who inhabit the upper reaches of the Xingu river - the article explores how personal qualities are elicited by my Upper Xinguano friends through names.

A presentation of the aweti onomastic system should highlight its analytical potential to interpret not only the case in question, but also what can be taken as a native theory of descent, centered on the issue of the familial transmission of the chief status. Personal names emerge as a way of producing people by the elicitation of specific relations, simultaneously connecting and particularizing the named person. Making a difference from what s/he was before having it, the name operates as a counter-identity device, while they produce identity qualities.

Keywords

Aweti, descent, onomastics, tupi, Upper Xingu.

The starting point of this reflection is a trivial incident that took place while I was living with the Aweti, a tupi-speaking group inhabiting the region of the headwaters of the Xingu river, in central Brazil: the fact that one day I received from a friend in the village the name of a mythical character, which, as far as I know, is not among the names usually adopted by the Aweti to name themselves. Understanding personal names to be intrinsically relational, I propose to ask here what they can reveal about an indigenous concept of relation.

As Marilyn Strathern (1995) observes, relations happen between anthropologists on several scales: through relations with her/his interlocutors in the field, the anthropologist learn about the form and content of relations in their world, drawing logical relations between them. In a series of articles drawing on the history of the term *relation* in English language, she points out how the emergence of a generic concept encompassing both epistemological and social relations is the product of a transformation taking place throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Strathern 2013, 2014, 2016). As argued by Strathern, the process by which the epistemological notion of relation as a means for knowledge (by classification, comparison etc.) is extended to imply a person's connections to other people, including kin and non kin, has some implications for the values we attribute to this generic notion today: first, the idea of the relation as something abstract that happens between concrete people, that is, something that can be traced through/as knowledge (excluding, therefore, the alternative understanding that relations, specially kin ties, can be integral to people, as concrete as they are); second, a general understanding of relation as something that connects through similarities (thus eclipsing all the forms of connection through difference); and third, a general evaluation of relation(s) as goodⁱ.

It might be asked, then, what happens when the generic term is absent - as is the case for the Aweti language, which has no name designating “the relation”, only names describing particular forms of connection, such as friend (*to’o tat’yp*), mother (-*ty*) etc. I take this as an indication that, for the Aweti, relations can only be recognized (or are only of interest) for their particular effects. Thus, and taking personal names as a possible entry to the issue, the ontological question “what is a relation” must build itself here into a much more restrictive formulation: “what is the form of relation established by the Aweti through names?”. I will start to follow this lead by approaching my own relation with them as mediated by a name.

The notion that names are relational devices is not new in anthropological theory (see, for an early ethnographic presentation, Bateson 1958; Lévi-Strauss 1962, for a structuralist reading on the matter; and Vom Bruck & Bodenhorn 2006, for a thorough investigation on the theme). By exploring this idea, my emphasis will be that Aweti personal names should not be primarily viewed as being related to a question of identity, as Western common sense would take it, even if the act of naming always implies some degree of identity stabilization of name-receivers. Rather, Aweti personal names are better described as a counter-identity device.

The debate on indigenous onomastics in lowland South America has been highly informed by the contrast, proposed in the 1980s by Viveiros de Castro, between societies with internal transfer of names, as is the case in the Upper Xingu, Northwest Amazon and Central Brazilian Ge peoples; and those in which names come from outside of the *socius*, typically ancient Tupi's acquisition of names from dead enemies (Viveiros de Castro 1992, Hugh-Jones 2006). As pointed out by Viveiros de Castro, more than two different ways of naming people, this distinction implies different conceptions of the person and the social. Thus, the adoption of names of the enemies,

animal names or even names of mythical beings, common among several Tupi-Guarani peoples, should be understood as “a true *heteronymy* (contrasting with the homonymy among the Ge), a function of the fundamental *heteronymy* of their cosmology” (*idem*: 155). To be named after the other is to partially turn into the other (and thus perceive oneself as someone's other), an ontological principle expressed in different levels of the life of these peoplesⁱⁱ. In accordance with the author's presentation of these two logics of naming as poles of a *continuum*, later readings of Viveiros de Castro's contrast allowed to view them as complementary aspects present in the same onomastic practices (Hugh-Jones, 2006). Following this lead, I propose that, although bestowed by familial transmission, Aweti personal names make a difference on the receivers in a comparable way to that effectuated by names acquired outside of the social world in other Amazonian societies.

This has important consequences for the understanding of the Aweti political system and, I would venture to say, of the political practices of their Upper Xinguano neighbors. The region known in the ethnological literature as the Upper Xingu is inhabited by speakers of Arawak, Carib and Tupi languages, as well as Trumai, a language isolate. These groups come together in ritual and matrimonial exchanges in a culturally fairly homogeneous multilingual community (making it difficult to avoid overarching pan-Upper-Xinguano generalizations inspired by ethnographic studies produced in each village or language group). When the Aweti talk about their regional identity, as opposed to other indigenous peoples, they often refer to their staple diet – based on manioc sprinkles and fishⁱⁱⁱ –, their particular body ornamentation, and their rituals, among which the most representative is a funeral celebration motivated by the death of a village chief, ideally bringing together all the people inhabiting the region in the host village^{iv}. Indeed, chiefdom is a major topic in the literature about Upper

Xinguano groups. It is associated with what has been described in anthropological literature as a regional aristocracy characterized by a sort of hereditary transfer of status, aspects that make them stand out when compared to the egalitarian political organization common to most Amazonian peoples (Clastres 1974; Overing and Passes 2000; Sztutman 2013).

But how do Upper Xinguanos themselves talk about the relation referred to as heredity in the ethnological literature? In Aweti speech, names play a central role for the recognition of chiefdom as an inherited status. Building on this, I suggest that we approach name-giving as a native theory of descent.

The recognition of the inadequacy of some classical anthropological concepts for describing Amazonian indigenous societies is a well known turning point of the anthropology of that area since the mid 1970s, when ethnographic knowledge about the region started to increase significantly (Overing 1979, Seeger et. al. 1979). The notion of descent and its conceptual associates - lineages and corporate groups - are central to this discussion, which aroused with an urge to develop new and positive categories to describe Amazonian groups that otherwise appeared as amorphous and acephalous in comparison to African descent-based societies. In a brief review of the ethnologic literature inspired by that movement, Peter Rivière (1993) noticed, however, that for many Amazonian cases a critical engagement with anthropological theory did not imply a full rejection of the concept of descent, leading instead to an “amerindianization” of that notion. The alteration of analytical concepts by ethnographic data corresponds to what Viveiros de Castro (2004) later advocated as anthropology’s major task, as the outcome of a close attention to the “equivocations” involved in the process of translating indigenous ideas into anthropological terms. For what concerns kinship theories, it might imply an overcome of the dichotomy between nature and culture as

the implicit background of a concept like descent, classically thought of as a jural (cultural) connection opposed to biological (natural) filiation (Viveiros de Castro 2009). In fact, as shall be seen, the transmission of familiar names among the Aweti shortcuts the nature-culture opposition, producing not groups of rights and duties, but persons constituted of moral and physical characteristics alike. By labelling Aweti's ideas about this transmission as a native theory of descent I mean that names can be mobilized by them in an analogous way to that the notion of descent was classically used for - as an explanation for positions of status, for instance. But of course descent will mean something totally different to anthropology's classical notion then.

What can we learn about Aweti's ideas about relations through this investigation? As mentioned earlier, Strathern's analysis about the English (could we say Western?) notion of relation is specially valuable for making explicit that, despite the fact that modern Euro-Americans obviously recognize many possible forms of relation (epistemological and social), this generic concept carries some very specific values that tend to appear as its prototypical form. Now the prototypical form of relations for Amazonian indigenous philosophies has long been a subject of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's work (2002, 2004), as influenced by Lévi-Strauss' interpretation (1953,1991) of amerindian dualisms. Viveiros de Castro argues that the brother-in-law relationship, a relation between entities differently related to and through the same term (a woman), plays in amerindian thought a role comparable to that played by the notion of brotherhood for Euro-Americans:

The common word for the relation, in Amazonian worlds, is the term translated by "brother-in-law" or "cross cousin." This is the term we call people we do not know what to call, those with whom we wish to establish a generic relation. In sum, "cousin/brother-in-law" is the term that creates a relation whe-

re none existed. It is the form through which the unknown is made known. (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 16)

I believe the following analysis presents a particular instantiation of relations based on difference, not on similarity. Surprisingly, it does so in the domain of “descent”, classically associated with ideas of similarity and continuity.

My names

Unlike their neighbors in the region, the Aweti^v, an Upper Xinguano Tupi speaking group, did not have much experience with anthropologists when I began my research with them in 2004, except for a brief contact with a few researchers whose focus had been the collection of linguistic materials. Since the beginning of our relationship, and probably based on these previous experiences, they had clear expectations about what I would be working on there: I was there to record stories. Under the guidance of my hosts, the conditions were soon settled for working on narratives with the two most notorious narrators of the village. Since one of them refused to let me record his stories until I could understand their language, I first had to rely on the simultaneous translation offered by his eldest son. The storytelling sessions were usually accompanied by family members who were at home, always interested in hearing the stories that he “carried in his eyes,” as he explained to me one day, contrasting with my way of keeping them on paper. One day, a few years later, when I could already understand his stories by myself, one of the wives of this man gave me the following name: Ehezu.

Ehezu is the name of the youngest wife of Tati'a, the Bat, a marginal character in one of the stories about the beginnings that I had been listening to. Interestingly, the second wife of the same narrator soon added that my partner, who was with me in the

village during that period, could be called Mawutsini, a creator hero whom Xinguanos usually associate with God (when the question of cosmological translation comes up). In the story, Mawutsini is the son of Ehezu, but this apparently did not pose a problem for my friends. What seemed to be even more puzzling to me, however, was the fact that we were associated with such mythological characters.

The names did not really “catch on”. Some people in the village, jokingly, also used to call me Marina Kahn, identifying me with an indigenist agent who had worked with them on developing a writing system for the Aweti language. Others gave me the invented name of Marinawalu, adding the suffix *-walu* - common to several Xinguanos names – to my name. I later received the name of an Aweti grandmother, Jali, according to the traditional name-giving system. When I recently visited the village with my daughter, my Aweti mother gave her the name of Tsimaju.

I never set out to understand what could have made my friend give me the name of a mythical character – could it be that she had perceived a connection between us, or had she just chosen a random name from the standard Aweti naming stock?^{vi} In addition, why did my Aweti friends insist on giving me other names besides the ones I already have? I take these questions as a starting point for some considerations about the form of relation presented by Aweti name-giving practices.

The names of the person

Every person in the Upper Xingu should have at least two names: boys are expected to receive a name from their mother's father, and another one from their father's father, while girls should receive names from their mother's mother and their father's mother. Ideally, people receive a name from their grandparents in their first months of life, or even when they are born, with neither a specific date nor a specific naming ce-

remony. These names are called by the Aweti *tekyt eput*, which I would tentatively translate as “green names”^{vii}. Girls should change their names at menarche or during puberty seclusion. Boys ideally give up their childhood names at the ear-piercing ceremony, performed while they are still children, but often have their ears pierced at birth, usually by their own grandfather. In this case, they are not given any childhood names (“green” ones). People are not supposed to call someone by a name that has already been changed by another one, since there is a risk something bad could happen to them, such as being bitten by a snake or stumbling in the bushes.

The same family names go from village to village in the Upper Xingu through interethnic marriages – which are not prescriptive nor preferential, but allowed and common. Although some of them are recognizably proper of some linguistic group, broadly they are shared by all those who the Aweti refer to as *mo'aza* – humans or, in a narrower sense, Upper Xinguano people. Therefore, several names whose meaning is known in one language do not have a meaning in another one. There are also names that are known to not mean anything in any language – they are “names only”. I have never noticed an interest either in the meaning or in any kind of extra-social origins of family names on the part of my interlocutors. Names of mythical characters, like the one I received from my Aweti friend, are rare, even if they exist within the scope of possibilities of name-giving, as it became clear when she named me.

In addition to family names, many people also have nicknames and white people's names^{viii}, but none of them are compulsory. The Aweti make an opposition between them and inherited names, recognized as “true names” (*et ytoto*), rather than just “ways of calling [someone]” (*tejojtat*). Sometimes the absence of a familiar name is compensated for by the presence of a “way of calling” that may or may not be a white people's name, whereas many people only have the family name and no nickname,

while others have only nicknames but no white people's name. The transfer of the latter within a family seems to be a possibility, but it is not taken very seriously, and it would be unthinkable in the case of nicknames, which are usually ironic. White people's names can be self-assigned – and it would not be strange for someone to decide to change them at any time – but nicknames are always given by others, as is the case in most parts of the world.

Since pronouncing names of affines is prohibited – including parents-in-laws, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law – the father of a boy can only call his son by his father's name, while a mother must call him by her own father's name, and so on. Distant and even close relatives usually know only one of the names of someone, but it is not uncommon that they do not know any of their family names, and call the person only by a nickname or by their white people's name. Some of my Aweti friends explained to me that the prohibition of pronouncing names of affines may extend to any name associated with the person, including their nicknames; on the other hand, there are people who do not accept being called by a nickname, since they prefer to always have their family name pronounced. The use of one or another type of name is not restricted to specific contexts.

As they give their names to the grandchildren who are born, adults must acquire new names, often no longer received from their elders, but remembered from the name stock once possessed by their dead ancestors. The relationship between new and abandoned names is of substitution rather than accumulation, but names already received by a person never cease to be “theirs” in the sense that they are at their disposal for transfer. From this cluster of paternal and maternal names, it is possible to choose indiscriminately which will be transferred to which grandchild. Therefore, from the point of view of the person who gives names, it does not matter which ones came from

their mother's side and which came from her father's side, since all will be equivalent at the time of giving names to their descendants. People avoid to bestow the same name at a time to two people living in the same village, but controversies about who would have greater or lesser legitimacy to use a name are not uncommon.

In order to name their grandchildren, people have to go beyond their own names and the names of their brothers, and even of their immediate classificatory brothers. Names of cross cousins are also commonly used, as well as names of distant cognates, people from other villages with whom they have little relation. In a sense, *knowing* a family name is equivalent to *having* a family name, but even in relation to the names of close relatives there is a risk that someone will interpret the act of naming as a kind of theft. Since more family names are always needed, giving a forename or a sibling name to a grandson (or someone classified as such) from another village is a highly significant act. Names acquired far from home are often paid for with valuables – shell necklaces, pots – but name-receivers must still be recognized as a cognate coming from the second descending generation towards the name-giver.

Many children are born without any available family name, when all names have already been given to their brothers and cousins. Elders, in turn, also tend to be nameless after using and passing on all the ones they could remember. Therefore, elders and children often have “invented” names (*mimo'ege put*), names that are not on the list of those coming from their ancestors. These invented names can be bestowed by relatives or friends. I once learned that two old Aweti, both already lacking family names, had given names to each other. One gave the other an “Indian name” (*waraju et^{ix}*) – Kaxinawá – learned on some trip to the city, as he explained to me, while he received the name of a mythical character, Wyrakaty, from the same person.

The fact that my partner and I received names coming from the Aweti

mythology, therefore, was not entirely unusual in the Aweti naming practices. It was not by chance, I believe, that I first had to behave like a granddaughter, being able to listen and understand her grandfather's stories to be worthy of being named. On the other hand, it is clear that at that time, or for those people, me and my partner did not participate in family relations that could assure us family names. At least we had friends who could name us, just like what had happened to the elders who had run out of family names.

But this was just an isolated episode of a more general fact. The Aweti were clearly amused by the possibility of addressing me by names other than mine. Ehezu, Marinawalu, Marina Khan, all these names had something in common: the fact that they brought me closer to their world through historical, affective or aesthetic connections. During my time with the Aweti, I began to understand that personal names (in all their varieties) serve to elicit specific qualities on people, thus producing people as a result of their relations. From this point of view, it would be really strange to stick to just one name. This was made specially clear to me in conversations about chiefdom.

Some elements for an ethnographic theory of descent

The Aweti term *morekwat*, usually translated as chief, designates a kind of regional aristocracy in which the village chiefs ideally participate, but may also allude to the exemplary behavior of any individual. In all these cases, *morekwat* is someone that perfectly exhibits, or should exhibit, the moral behavior that defines humanity/Xinguanity. The fact that Upper Xinguano chiefs are ideally succeeded by their firstborn sons was taken by some authors to indicate the existence of a lineage system associated with class status in the Upper Xingu (see specially Heckenberger 2000, 2005; but also

Dole 1976). This question, however, needs to be analyzed in the light of a more thorough investigation into what exactly is transferred between grandparents, fathers and children, how this transferring occurs, and how that relates to the constitution of chiefdom. Having this in mind, Guerreiro (2015:141-172) discusses Kalapalo (Karib Xinguano) utterances about inherited chief status, concluding that a notion of substance transmission through conception that assures any kind of status is absent in Kalapalo ideas, although blood may be used as an idiom to connote the efforts to produce similarity between parents and sons. This production involves a series of techniques to built beautiful and capable bodies, always associated with a strong moral character. Although Guerreiro does not mention the transmission of names as part of this process, this was a point frequently emphasized to me by the Aweti when talking about the chief status. The transmission of names must be understood, though, as one among other forms of the "fabrication of the person" (Seeger et al., 1979), a classical theme in Amazonian philosophies.

As we have seen, names of grandparents are assigned to grandchildren without any specified rule of transmission, although certain preferences are considered. Given the preference for marriage between close cross cousins^x, it is common for spouses to have the same grandparents, and for a pair of brothers-in-law to have the same set of names to pass on to their grandchildren. It is therefore in a very vague sense that the transfer of names to descendants reflects or allows the existence of lineages among the Aweti. But how can we understand the fact that names are mobilized to justify chiefdom?

"This name belonged to a *mokut etsat*. That is why I did not give it to my son", a friend once explained to me about the naming of his sons. A *mokut etsat* is a man whose cause of death is a counter-spell (i.e., a sorcerer)^{xi}. It should be clear that my fri-

end was not referring to a sorcerer among his relatives, but to a namesake relative of a famous Aweti sorcerer, the protagonist of an ancient story. Therefore, his considerations did not call into question a genealogical connection revealed by the name, but the qualities that it could associate with the name-receiver. Other conversations showed that this calculation also works in reverse. An Aweti friend once explained to me how a boy, who at a young age proved to be especially intelligent and skillful in everything he did, was given the name of an ancient *morekwat*, especially chosen among the names of his grandfather. Upon receiving a chief's name, the person is persuaded to act as such. An Aweti elder told me about how he had been promised the name of a great *morekwat* by his mother's father when he was a child. He noted that after having received that name, he could never lie or lose control.

In the family that hosted me, there was a boy whom everyone called Nopiri. I once asked them to explain the meaning of that nickname to me. They told me that since there were no names available on the mother's side when he was born, he did not receive any names. When he grew up a little, his older sisters began to make fun of this situation, calling him “pobre” (“poor” in Portuguese). Since the Aweti are crazy about playing games with words, his family soon turned that adjective into a new name, Nopiri (he is now known as Epi). The term “poor” seems to me to sum up well the condition of a person without a family name: they lack something that others have, but that is not essential. As the Aweti considerations about the names of chiefs and sorcerers of the past show, a name has the power to add a certain value to the person, but it is perfectly possible to live without a name. For practical life, it is obvious that each person must have at least one way in which to be called, be it a family name or a nickname.

In analyzing the relationship between clanic names, nicknames and non-

indigenous names for the Tukano of Northwestern Amazonia, S. Hugh-Jones (2006) argues that the transfer of names associated with spiritual qualities, exclusively owned by patrilineal clans, is counterbalanced by the acquisition of nicknames, always acquired through everyday interactions and which make reference to corporal signs or remarkable personal history events. Instead of connecting a person to a group of descent as clanic names do, tukanoan nicknames individualize them within this group. While clanic names establish ties of spiritual participation, nicknames fulfill an individuating function. Aweti nicknames are created according to a rationale similar to that mobilized by Tukanoan nicknames. My interlocutors' comments on the effect of certain family names on name-receivers, however, suggest that the transfer of family names among the Aweti often follows comparable principles, making it impossible for us to identify a clear distinction of effects, as seems to be the case for Tukano onomastics, between types of names in this ethnographic context.

A person is often nicknamed after the family name or nickname of another person. There is an Aweti girl whom everyone calls by the name of a much older woman, who currently resides in another village. When I asked why, someone explained to me that the girl has a peculiar way of placing her foot on the ground when she stops on the bicycle, a body-shape that resembles that of her "name-giver". Another boy is called by the Aweti word that designates "shoe" because he resembles a Kuikuro man (Carib Xinguano) whose name means "shoe" in his language. In the village school, the teacher calls a student, his cross cousin, by the name of a Kamayurá (Tupi Xinguano) girl whom she resembles. A young man from the village is called Foguinho ("little fire") because they consider him similar to the homonymous character of a soap opera that everyone followed in their TVs connected to the generator in 2007. A girl was nicknamed Xavante (another indigenous ethnonym) when her mother mistakenly cut

her bangs over her ears in a manner that resembles the typical haircut of that indigenous group. A young man became angry with his young wife who could not set up a grill for smoking fish and instantly received the nickname of a former Aweti chief, known for being nervous about his wives. Another man who, as a teenager, could not wait to have his first sexual intercourse, having thus remained short in stature^{xii}, was nicknamed by his own father with the family name of a Suyá man known for his short height. My namesake Marina, who soon decided that she was my sister in the village, was named after being born to the hands of Marina Villas-Boas, the wife of the government agent who managed the indigenous area at the time.

In contrast to the scarcity of family names, the ways of calling a person do not stop proliferating. Family names are distinguished from nicknames and white people's names as valuable goods, and may even be bought (or stolen), as I said. Not for nothing, they are recognized as "real" names (but the qualifier *ytoto* also designates a large quantity, "many"); they are names in their full power. "Real" names have a special effect that in no way applies to nicknames and non-indigenous names, whose value is much more referential. I have never heard of anyone who got angry for having the name of a white man recognized as such, or who has become akin to someone because of a nickname (even though I can imagine the Aweti making such hypotheses jokingly). The logic is always the reverse – the nickname, or non-indigenous name, eventually encompasses a previously detected connection, and usually with humorous connotations. In addition, because they are non-transferable, nicknames and non-indigenous names activate relationships between a maximum of two generations. Hence perhaps their "poverty", from the Aweti point of view.

However, the point I want to make is that just like nicknames indicate historical, logical, or aesthetic connections between people, "real" names are not

indiscriminately transferred to descendants, but activate particular relationships. As nicknames, “real” names not only connect people to groups of relatives, but also particularize them; or rather, they particularize as they connect people to certain relatives. Bestowing family names involves recognizing qualities that already exist, and qualities that can be produced through the act of naming, leading people to explore similarities and proximity between homonyms, in a way comparable to what happens with nicknames. Just as the *morekwat* represents the ideal of humanity, or the real people, in a distinction of degree but not of nature with respect to ordinary people, “real” names are distinguished from the other ways of calling a person to perform at the highest degree what every name does: establishing a relationship that, at best, can convey qualities to its new bearer.

The importance of having a chief name in order to be a chief does not have to do with showing the presence of the physical or animistic substance of chiefdom – for, I repeat, I have never heard anything like it – but to point out the fact that *one is invested and recognized by others as a chief*, and as a *given chief* whose chief qualities can be replicated, expressed and developed. In this sense, names actually make chiefs, producing qualities not only moral but also physical – since, because they are more conscientious, chiefs are also those who follow the rules of pubertal seclusion more closely, and thus constitute stronger bodies.

Names as devices of counter-identity

What does a name do? The inadequacy of the representation paradigm – of the conception of name as a sign, and its related meaning, the name-receiver – is a recurrent theme in the investigation of nonmodern (but also modern) onomastic regimes that bring to the fore the performative character of names (see Vom Bruck & Bodenhorn,

2006: 7 and passim.; and all the contributions to the volume). When questioning the automatic association between name and identity, Lévi-Strauss (1962) already pointed in this direction: as the author notes, even in contexts in which naming is supposedly “free”, such as ours, naming combines the attribution of identity and the classification of the name-receiver, of the name-giver, or more probably of both. However, his emphasis on the logical (classificatory) character of the established relations is not enough to account for the effectiveness of the Aweti names, as it must be already clear.

In his analytic synthesis of lowland South-American onomastic systems, Viveiros de Castro (1992) suggests that the lévi-straussian classificatory model could apply to those societies where the acquisition of names follows familial lines, but not the ones which value names taken from outside the social world. The author takes the Ge of Central Brazil as a paradigmatic instance of the first case and the Tupinambá of the sixteenth century as a clear example of the second, but is explicit about conceiving the two models as poles of a *continuum* (Viveiros de Castro, 1992:143-155). More than developing a case typology, the distinction helps to clarify different logics involved in *endonymic* and *exonymic* practices - if we might adopt the terms proposed by the author. As he puts it, systems based on the transfer of names between members of the same social group, usually among the living ones, frequently operate as sociological classifiers, organizing relations through naming. On the other hand, the exonymic practices adopted by the highly belligerent peoples inhabiting the Brazilian coast at the time of the European invasion – for whom the adoption of names of dead enemies was an essential motivation for war – would be less concerned with the positioning of the name-receiver in a network of relations, than with its radical particularization^{xiii}. But it is not just a matter of opposing collectivizing or individuating effects of being named. More significantly, according to Viveiros de Castro, endonymic and exonymic practices

point to distinct regimes of subjectivation through naming.

Later analysis of “endonymic” systems in the Amazon confirm that the value of the distinction proposed by Viveiros de Castro is less classificatory than analytical, allowing to distinguish forces or aspects of naming practices in a series of contexts. Regarding the Tukano of the Northwestern Amazonia, as already mentioned, Stephen Hugh-Jones (2006) argues that clanic names transferred between agnatic relatives can only be understood alongside the giving of nicknames and non-indigenous names in terms of their complementary effects (see also Viveiros de Castro comments in Hugh-Jones, 2006: 94-95). Comparing Ge onomastics, Coelho de Souza (2002: 280-281) notes, in turn, another type of combination, also expressed in terms of the composition of different aspects of the person. On the one hand, she argues, the name objectifies the relations that result in the constitution of the person as relative and fully human; on the other hand, having its origin in mythical ancestors and other extra-social sources, the name connects the person to the time of the myth and to the possibility of metamorphosis continually reinstated by the ritual, to reintroduce the differences necessary to the reproduction of the social world (idem: 571 and subs.). While the transfer of names between relatives constitutes the person as an equal and a member of a specific social group, inserting the person into a universe of intra-group relations, the relation between name and name-receiver could be defined as exonymic, in Viveiros de Castro terms, so that the name operates as a principle of alteration.

Unlike the Ge and Tukano systems, the Aweti onomastic practices do not allow for the distinction of matrimonial groups or of groups associated with the exclusive possession of material and immaterial goods (see especially Coelho de Souza, 2002; Hugh-Jones, 2006; and Lea, 2012)^{xiv}. Hence, what is involved in the transfer of names among relatives in the Upper Xingu? The interpretations of Hugh-Jones and Coelho de

Souza suggest the possibility of understanding it in terms of different and combining dynamic forces.

What seems to matter to the Aweti, in a more general sense, is the generational criteria – the perception that a person is the continuity of a universe of ascendants, “our grandparents”. Through names that are replicated in all the Upper Xingu villages and throughout generations, their world is configured as a geographically and temporally stable unit, without losing sight of local particularities. In addition, the pair of names from the maternal and paternal sides constitutes the person as the product of the joint action of two collectives^{xv}, clearly distinguished by the prohibition of naming their kin, which obliges the parents of a child to address it always by the names of his own “side”^{xvi}. *As far as the quality of the name is concerned, however, the value of family names also lies in the possibility of adding particular qualities to the name-receiver.* The emphasis on the acquisition of names among cognates of the second ascending generation indicates that the transformative power in question lies in the history of the Upper Xinguanos themselves, the deeds of their ancestors. A chief is someone who confirms, repeats and adds to the history of other chiefs after whom he is named. But nothing is forcibly inherited, and the right relations must be activated (or obliterated) through naming. Thus, a name always comes “from the inside” *and* “from the outside”, producing a difference in the person who receives it^{xvii}. The “true” name not only conotes family continuity, but also promotes individuating qualities, in this sense differentiating the receiver from what it was before receiving it. Descent takes the form of alteration^{xviii}.

This effect is emphasized by the fact that people are always changing their names, something that reveals a peculiar relation between a name and the named person. When people talk about their family names, they do not refer to them as their

own names, but as to “the name my mommy calls me”, and “the name my daddy calls me”. It is clear from this formulation that a name does not just *belong to someone*, but its main characteristic is that it was *given by someone*. This formulation seems to imply that no name can fix the identity of the person and, further, that the person is not supposed to be a self-determined and determinable nature. Names do not subsume the person of the name-receiver: there is always the possibility of a subject being identified by other names, by other subjects. Thus, rather than emblems or even producers of identity, Aweti always changing names seem to constitute counter-identity devices.

This question addresses us to a recurrent theme in Amazonian ontologies: the idea that children need to *be made* relatives through caregiving, because when they are born they are not considered human yet (see Gow, 1997). The identity of kinship is not given by conception, but must be actively produced (Viveiros de Castro, 2002: 447). The emphasis given by Amazonian peoples to bodily construction (Seeger, *et al.*, 1979) is directly linked to this problem, since the constructed bodies are identified as both relatives and humans. The act of naming is part of this process - names make proper humans, that is, relatives. My point here was to show that even when there is transfer of names from grandparents to grandchildren, as is the case of the Upper Xinguano system, the relation which takes place in the naming act implies the production of the name receiver as different not only from its relatives (who never possess the same sets of names) but even from her/himself. Of course this individuating process is always accompanied by the opposite effect of producing people-in-connection to other people.

Conclusion: back to Ehezu

Noticing that Tukano languages have the same terms to refer to personal names, group languages, vital power and things, Stephen Hugh-Jones (2006:76,77)

argues that names not only signify, but are the very essence of things for those Northwest Amazonian peoples. His observation is also derived from the fact that Tukano clan names (along with certain ornaments and ritual knowledge) are understood as part of the vital principle that unites the members of the clan^{xix}. The Aweti relation with their personal names would not allow me to say that, for them, names are (and reveal) the essence of entities, if this means that the name and the named being should coincide fully: the profusion of real names and ways of calling a person, without ensuring any kind of stable social or substantial identity, undermines the possibility of determining individual or collective essences. The Aweti comments on the effect of names on people show that, rather than the essences of things, personal names *are things* that can be added to individuals by giving them good or bad qualities. People and names affect each other: a name is imbued with the qualities of the person who possesses it; people are imbued with the qualities of the name they receive. Its effect is close to the one evoked by Roy Wagner (1972), with the notion of metaphor, used to interpret, among other things, the Daribi onomastic system, as a procedure of individuation “by addition”: the Daribi name does not *represent* an individuality; it *creates* the individuality by associating the person with a series of influences and marks – an animal species, a namesake, the circumstances of the gestation or the birth of the name-receiver etc.

My argument was organized around two independent problems: why I received a specific name from my Aweti friends; and how to understand the constitution of the chiefdom in terms of the transfer of family names? The analysis of the Aweti onomastic practices shows that it is only possible to speak in terms of a chief’s lineage (or even of cognate groups) having in mind that names, alongside other techniques and knowledges applied to produce real people, flowing along unorthodox channels of transfer, effectively produce chiefs by attributing specific qualities to whoever receives them.

These observations are useful to illuminate the first problem, because the effect of the names I have received can only be of the same type. I was produced as an Aweti person (or, rather, as “the white of the Aweti”) through these names. While my nicknames could be taken as a manifestation of humorous intimacy, the mythical name Ehezu – which is close, because it belongs to their familiar stories about the world, but also distant, because it is proper of ancient beings, previous to the origin of the present humanity, perhaps loaded of a power strange to their present world – seems to give the right measure of the kind of person I can be to them.

Notes

ⁱ Strathern's overall conclusions about the values attributed to the english generic term *relation* seem to apply for latin languages in which corresponding notions do not designate kin ties, but still extend to social and epistemological connections.

ⁱⁱ See the extrapolation of this question, raised by the Araweté ethnography, in Viveiros de Castro's synthesis on Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro, 1996), as well as Stolze Lima's (1996) formulation on the Yudjá case.

ⁱⁱⁱ Most game meat is prohibited because it is considered dangerous for consumption by the indigenous peoples of the region. This restriction is constantly evoked by the Upper Xinguanos as a diacritical of their way of being. As for vegetables, although other species, domesticated or not, are regularly consumed, they do not compare to cassava in terms of the consumed amount and time spent on production – with the exception of pequi, an essential component of the Xinguano diet in the rainy months.

^{iv} Ver Guerreiro, 2015, for an excellent analysis of the ritual, known by the “brazilianized” tupi term *quarup*.

^v The Aweti now number about 250 people, divided into three villages with a predominantly Aweti population (two of them have a significant presence of Kamayurá affines), as well as dispersed individuals married in neighboring villages. The study that follows is primarily derived from a 12-month fieldwork period conducted between 2006 and 2010, although it has been initiated earlier and still continues in more sporadic visits.

^{vi} By the time it occurred I did not realize the obvious connection between this episode and the many cases in which Euro-Americans were interpreted by tribal peoples as related to mythical ancestors or attributed mystical powers associated with the past (to stay with a few cases, see Sahlins 1981 for a classic analysis of Captain Cook's tragedy in the eighteenth century, but also Levi-Strauss 1991 for a reading on the incorporation of the "White Man" as a character in a sixteenth century Tupian myth). As must be clear in the conclusions of this article, the name choice in my case seems to follow a similar logic to that involved in other comparable historical events: as a distant foreigner coming from a technically powerful society, I was associated with powerful characters of the distant past through the name Ehezu. That this interpretation was not clear to me then can be partially explained by the fact that I had (and still have) not heard of similar attributions of indigenous names to anthropologists or other westerners along the history of contact in the Upper Xingu region. Certainly this does not assure any uniqueness to my experience - probably other cases were just not reported. In what follows I try to understand the fact of receiving that name as part of the Aweti naming practices, illuminated by and illuminating of their notions about the person and the relation.

^{vii} *Tekyt eput*: *te*, third-person possessive pronominal prefix; *-kyt*, green; *-e(t)*, name; *put*, -ex.

^{viii} Literally, a *cara'iwa* name. The term *cara'iwa* is usually translated by the Aweti as "white people", meaning non-indigenous peoples in general. Since nicknames, as presented below, can be anything, including non indigenous names, what distinguishes a *cara'iwa* name is the fact that it is taken from the known Brazilian stock of names.

^{ix} The term *waraju* usually refers to indigenous peoples that the Aweti distinguish from themselves and other Upper Xinguano peoples. Eventually the same notion may be used to oppose all indigenous peoples (including those from the Upper Xingu) to non-indigenous ones. Kaxinawá is the ethnonym of a large indigenous group from Western Amazonia, living more than 1800 miles away from the Upper Xingu.

^x This preference was mentioned by my interlocutors, but such a marriage is not always possible, given the limitations in terms of population, which make it difficult to find a suitable spouse among close relatives.

^{xi} *Mokut etsat* refers to the technique of tying the skin of the thumb (*mokut*) of the dead, through which one is expected to reach the sorcerer who caused the death. The expression means (in a loose translation) “someone who suffers through the skin of the former thumb”.

^{xii} I was told that people cease to grow after their first sexual intercourse, hence the constant warnings of Aweti parents, so that their children postpone this moment.

^{xiii} Although of course both outcomes cannot be totally distinguished, since this particularization was a necessary step for a man's inclusion in kinship and political orders among these Tupian groups (see specially Sztutman, 2012).

^{xiv} It is worth noting in this respect that, as the analyses of Hugh-Jones and Coelho de Souza make clear, if the Ge and Tukano onomastics order relations between groups and individuals, classification is an effect of the production of individuals by the attribution of qualities, a process that (also) takes place through names. As Hugh-Jones explains, it is not the patrilineal descent that guarantees the transfer of unique names and other clanic attributes to the Tukano. Rather, it is the sharing of names, language, ornaments and sacred musical instruments, understood as spiritual substances, that determines the constitution of the patrilineal group (2006: 76). The Tukano name only classifies as an effect of the substantial relationship it establishes between people who share the same vital principle.

^{xv} It objectifies the person as the result of this action, as Coelho de Souza (op.cit.) puts it, adopting a strathernian vocabulary.

^{xvi} See Wagner (1967, 1977) for an inspiration on the effects of affinal behavior in terms of defining “consanguineal” units.

^{xvii} Based on S. Hugh-Jones (2006) comments on his distinction between endonymic and exonymic systems, Viveiros de Castro rephrases the initial proposition, noting that even where there is internal transfer of names, it is never given by parents, always requiring a certain distance between name-receiver and name-giver. “Amazonian endonymy is always a limit of exonymy” (idem: 92), he concludes.

^{xviii} See Bodenhorn (2006: 139 and subs.) for the analysis of a case in which the transfer of qualities through names is associated with a theory of reincarnation, unlike the Aweti case.

^{xix} I have never heard from the Aweti the idea of a correspondence between name and soul, common in several Amazonian contexts (see, for example, the Guarani Mbyá case analyzed by Macedo & Sztutman, 2012), and believe the very notion of “soul” as something possessed by an entity is strange to my Aweti friends’ way of thinking (see Vanzolini, 2012). In any case, rather than an identity principle, for most of the indigenous peoples of the South American lowlands, the soul seems to be a principle of alteration, which allows humans to communicate with spirits and animals by adopting their nonhuman perspectives (Stolze Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1996).

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