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Anchoring “The Symbolic Economy of Alterity” with Autobiography

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INTRODUCTION

Drawing continuities between indigenous Amazonian sociocosmological systems, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has introduced the term “potential affinity” (1993, 1998b, 2001). Potential affinity or “symbolic affinity” is distinct from affinity as a particular type of kinship tie. It is instead “a generic value” and a “basic mode of relatedness,” and it applies to relationships even if or, in fact, especially if, no marriage actually takes place (2001:22). It is, as he says, “affinity without affines” (2001:24). Potential affinity is a general way of talking about the kind of relationship that pertains to “the Other,” entities such as the enemy, the foreigner, animals, or spirits, to name a few. According to Viveiros de Castro, affinity is the “given dimension” of existence and Amazonian communities fashion themselves and are made local by the “very process of extracting themselves from this background” of affinity, thereby making their bodies kin or consanguines (2001:25). As Peter Gow phrases it, in this model, the potential affine or the enemy allows “social life to exist, rather than the real affine, who simply replays, in domesticated form at the intimate level of daily life, the function of the enemy” (2001:306). This focus on the multiple meanings of the categories of affinity and consanguinity, along with an exploration of the dialectics between alterity and identity, is what Viveiros de Castro calls more generally the “symbolic economy of alterity” (1996:190).

In this essay, I examine segments from two autobiographical narratives recorded in interviews with two Kayabi men through the lens of this “symbolic economy of alterity.” This focus demonstrates that an abstract analytic model, such as the one proposed by Viveiros de Castro, is useful at the level of understanding individual people grappling with very specific details of twentieth-century life in Amazonia, as well as for discussing social wholes or more general cultural patterns in a nontime-specific manner. The symbolic economy of alterity has been used to discuss personhood,

as well as gender-specific personhood, in Amazonian societies (Viveiros de Castro 1992; Gow 1997; Descola 2001; Taylor 2001). It has also been used to consider the details of historical change (Gow 2001). This essay combines an interest in alterity—with respect to personhood and with respect to the details of historical transformation—with the concrete details of particular individuals' experiences as they are remembered and narrated. My concern lies in how the details of the early twentieth-century colonization era and what was then called "pacification" became meaningful for these two Kayabi men as they moved through different types of social relationships in the Brazilian interior. Much as Ellen Basso has shown with her study of Kalapalo biographies, these kinds of narratives show the "efforts of individuals to reorient themselves with regard to personal ambiguities and difficult relationships within their communities" and beyond (1995:304). The two Kayabi narrators discussed here described their own experiences of shifting social relationships in a way that featured bodily states and treatments to the surface of their bodies. As Beth Conklin (2001a) has observed, in lowland South American societies more generally, the connection or lack of connection between a person and a social group is often worked out and defined in bodily terms: "... the physical body appears as the primary site where ... relations to others are created and perpetuated ..." transformed as well as terminated (Conklin 2001a:xx). Much as Aparecida Vilaça (2007) has shown for the Wari', the body, for these Kayabi men, is the central location where social identity is fabricated in the context of interethnic relations between indigenous and nonindigenous people.

The concrete details about the bodily states of Kayabi narrators over a significant timespan complicate the more abstract model of symbolic affinity. Kayabi autobiographical narratives show that "others," often understood as somewhat generic entities in Amazonian ethnographies (i.e., as spirits, enemies, the dead, et cetera), are also persons who are known intimately. Moreover, they show that these persons and beings oscillate between positions of identity and alterity at different points in time.¹ Similarly, the selves of the two narrators focused on here do not always share an identity with fellow Kayabi. The picture that results from these narratives is one of a highly transformable social world. Others have noted the extent to which transformation is a theme in lowland societies. Joanna Overing and Alan Passes, for example, have observed that Amazonian sociality involves a transformation of alterity (2000:7). Elsje Lagrou describes Cashinahua cosmology as setting transformable processes at the center of philosophical reflection (2000:164). Aparecida Vilaça (2005), drawing on Viveiros de Castro (1998a), examines the

extent to which the body is conceptualized as inherently unstable and as perpetually running the risk of being transformed into other types of bodies throughout Amazonia. The autobiographical material I focus on here draws attention to the process of selves and others shifting positions within a play of alterity and identity in very concrete historical terms.

Autobiographical narratives anchor the symbolic economy of alterity in the historically specific details of lives in a manner not always possible in other genres, such as those found in ritual events. For example, the tobacco ceremony (*opetymo*) of the Parakanã (Fausto 1999, 2001), the dance festival (*p̄rahê*) of the Araweté (Viveiros de Castro 1992), the *arutam* quest and war rituals of the Achuar (Taylor 1993, 1996, 2001), or the *Jarwosi* of the Kayabi (Oakdale 2001, 2005), all of which have been described with respect to alterity, feature accounts of experiences that are more stylized and abbreviated, in contrast to the excerpts of autobiographical narratives I present here. They lack, for important reasons (see Déléage *intra*), accounts of interactions with “others” that are locatable in specific and dateable time periods. In addition, they are told without a surfeit of prosaic details, those “trivialities of the present that always seem to be slipping away from us,” which Edward Sapir found so compelling in autobiographical accounts such as *Son of Old Man Hat* (1938:ix). These details or “trivialities” are, however, exactly what is of interest for showing how others and selves are ambiguous figures with respect to identity and alterity.

The view of the Brazilian frontier (and the cosmos) presented in the two men’s narratives is one in which a subject can move into (and out of) a variety of different sorts of communities involving a range of very different people rather than a place populated by bounded social groups such as “whites,” *civilizados*, Indians, Kayabi, or any number of other tribal/ethnic affiliations. Rather than describing themselves in any simple way as a part of a group that comes into “contact” with another group, these men describe themselves as moving into and out of remarkably heterogeneous communities by virtue of participating in different types of activities over the course of their lives. This picture contrasts with the image of interethnic interaction presented by these same men in a more ritualized, autobiographic, song genre, called *Jarwosi*. In these autobiographical songs a singer describes how he has interacted with a variety of “others” (especially enemy individuals, but also spirits), and how he refuses to take on a position of empathy with them (Oakdale 2005:129). The image that is ultimately presented in these songs is one of clear boundaries between ethnic groups or between humans and nonhumans. The contrast between these two Kayabi autobiographical genres (*Jarwosi* songs and the life history narratives presented here) is analogous to that described by Janet Chernela

(2003) as existing in the Northwest Amazon between the normative view of language groups and that evident in the “speech culture” of women’s laments. According to the more normative view, presented largely by men, language groups in this region are discrete and contrasting cultural units. As a result of taking a “community of practice approach” (see Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and focusing on the practice of women’s laments, a different picture is presented. Named language groups in the context of sung laments are anything but discrete ethnicities, cultures, or societies. Analogously, the Kayabi men’s narratives discussed here could be understood as retrospective descriptions of some of the more salient “communities of practice” within which these two men have thought themselves to have participated or moved into and out of over the course of their lives.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE NARRATIVES AND NARRATORS

The narratives presented here were told to me in 1992 and 1993 by two Kayabi men, Sabino and Prepori.² Both were recorded in Kayabi, a Tupian language. They were later translated and transcribed with the help of two other, younger, Kayabi men, Aturi and Mairata. In the case of Prepori, I asked on numerous occasions (in Portuguese) for him “to tell me about his life” (*contar sua vida*) and finally one afternoon in 1993 he agreed to let me record him. In the case of Sabino, his son actually approached me in 1992 and asked if I would like to record his father “telling about his life and where he had traveled” (*contando sua vida e onde ele andou*). In both cases the narratives that resulted were mixed genres. They employed both modes of talking about personal experiences developed over the course of living and working with non-Kayabi, including working and talking to researchers such as anthropologists—something both men had done periodically since the 1950s—as well as modes of talking about one’s own life present in Kayabi ritual events.

In 1990, Sabino had participated in an education program headed by the anthropologist Mariana Kawall Leal Ferreira at a post (Diauarum), within the Xingu Park reservation where he lived. Between 1980 and 1990, Kayabi individuals as well as others living in the reservation, such as Suyá, Yudjá (formerly Juruna), Trumai, Kayapó, and Ikpeng (formerly Txicão) narrated stories about their past. According to Ferreira, the program was useful for improving the participants’ oral Portuguese, as well as for encouraging dialogue between different groups in the Xingu (Ferreira 1992, 1994, 1999). Many of the stories narrated over the course

of this program were circulated in the form of a mimeographed newsletter (Ferreira 1994:8). In this context, Sabino narrated his “life story” and his son wrote it down in Portuguese. Ferreira subsequently published Sabino’s “life history” (in Portuguese) within *Histórias do Xingu* (1994), a book that includes stories from many indigenous individuals residing in the Xingu. Even before this, however, Sabino had been telling “about his life” to other researchers. At least a small part of the narrative Sabino recorded for me in 1992, and for Ferreira in 1990, was also told to the German anthropologist Georg Grünberg in 1966 (Grünberg 2004:66). While large parts of the Portuguese narrative found in Ferreira (1994) and the Kayabi narrative I recorded in 1992 describe similar events, they are also complementary, as each includes details of many events that the other does not. The amount of overlap in terms of the content of the narratives very likely means, however, that Sabino had crafted his narrative into a relatively standardized account, one that attempted to discuss his “whole life,” from childhood to the present. Following Lawrence C. Watson’s and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke’s definitions, the narrative I recorded is partly an “autobiographical narrative” or a “self-initiated retrospective account” (1985:2). It is also partly a “life history,” an account that has been “elicited or prompted by another person,” usually over a series of interviews (1985:2). Sabino’s narrative is, therefore, a self-initiated retrospective account, but one crafted, at least in part, through many encounters with researchers over at least three decades.

Prepori’s story does not appear in Ferreira (1994) and he seems not to have participated in this particular program. Prepori was, however, someone who interacted with anthropologists regularly in the Xingu as he was both fluent in Portuguese and had a reputation as a shaman. Eduardo Galvão lists him as an informant (along with Sabino) and describes several conversations with him during his 1965, 1966, and 1967 field stays (Galvão 1996). On at least one visit, Galvão writes that Prepori told him stories about his travels to the city of Cuiabá and elsewhere (1996:288). He was likewise a central informant for Berta Ribeiro in 1977 (Ribeiro 1979).

Along with having been shaped to some extent by ethnographic research, both men’s narratives also draw on Kayabi ritual genres of talking about life experiences. As mentioned previously, one such genre is *Jawosi* singing. *Jawosi* songs are sung by adult men during visiting rituals and as part of ending the mourning process for others. These songs, an index of male maturity, are about men’s travels. They feature encounters with people and spirits the men have met beyond the Kayabi community. Non-Kayabi are sung about in *Jawosi* songs through metaphor and with intentionally opaque references to the time and place of the encounter (Oakdale

2005:116). The autobiographical narratives these two men recorded are similar to *Jawosi* songs in that they are also about the narrators' travels and encounters with various sorts of non-Kayabi. Unlike *Jawosi* songs, however, they are filled with historically specific details. Also unlike *Jawosi* songs, these autobiographical narratives portray the narrator as engaged in common activities and as part of the same informal and temporary "communities of practice" as non-Kayabi individuals.

In addition to *Jawosi* songs, Prepori was also clearly drawing on a style of presenting personal experiences found in sung shamanic cures, called *Maraka*. These cures, which consist mostly of singing, usually begin with a brief, spoken, public account by the officiating shaman about how he first became empowered, including which spirits he regularly visits in dreams and which senior shamans have tutored him in the past (Oakdale 2005:84). Prepori's narrative is largely a story about how he became empowered as a shaman. As a result, it is much briefer than Sabino's and concludes with an account of his learning, as a young man, to cure through song. While neither man is reproducing the style of *Jawosi* songs or *Maraka* cures, both genres seem to have influenced the content and style of their narratives as did the ethnographic research genre of the life history interview.

In the early 1990s, when they narrated their lives for me, both Sabino and Prepori were very senior, well-respected men. In Kayabi terms they were *aerete*, or, great men who had reputations, men whose "names were known," men who had traveled and who "others spoke about." Sabino was known among fellow Kayabi as a "great worker" (*porowykyaraete*). He was especially known for his work among whites. Outside of the park he was given the title of *capitão* by members of the SPI (the Brazilian Indian Protection Service). As a young man Sabino was appointed to be the leader of a village near one of the government pacification posts. He was also sought out by commercial rubber tappers because he had managed the rubber tapping labor of many young Kayabi men. At some point in the 1940s, he began to work for a commercial rubber tapping firm. Later, he participated in many pacification missions to other less contacted groups, including more remote Kayabi communities. He also hosted newcomers to the park such as the Panará in 1975 (Schwartzman 1988; Hemming 2003:427). He was also a central worker in the construction of posts within the park (Hemming 2003:156).

Prepori was known by fellow Kayabi, other peoples in the Xingu, and Brazilians connected to the park, for his shamanism. In Kayabi, he was called a "great shaman" (*pājārete*). In the 1990s, he traveled to many of the other villages in the park, such as those of the Kayapó and Kamayura, to cure shamanically. People from these other villages also came to his house

to be cured. His reputation as a shaman has, in fact, reached beyond the park. As a younger man, he was featured in shamanic dress on a postcard that continues to be sold nationally. His obituary from 2000 in an Instituto Socioambiental publication, *Povos Indígenas no Brasil 1996/2000*, also mentions his shamanic powers (Senra 2000). In addition to his shamanism, he is known for working closely with the Villas Boas brothers, the founders of the Xingu Indigenous Park, initially leading Kayabi families, as well as helping bring other groups, to the park (Hemming 2003:418). Adrien Cowell’s (1973) account of the Panará pacification mission, for example, describes Prepori as one of the leaders of the team.

In sum, when both Sabino and Prepori told me about their lives, they did so very much as senior men, men who were *aerete*, people who had experiences worth telling about and, for others, worth repeating. Sabino’s son said that Sabino often told his family “about his life” while other senior men told myths. After I had recorded his narrative, others (apart from his family), also repeatedly asked me to play the recording so they could hear what he had to say. Similarly, Prepori’s stories about his life were also of interest to his family and others. Prepori, however, had a larger audience in mind and prefaced his recording for me by announcing that he was telling his story for my father and mother to hear. His story was for me to take back and play to others in my own country because “they would find it interesting.”

The narratives that I discuss here were recorded at these men’s homes located next to each other in the village circle of one Kayabi village in the Xingu Park. In 1992, Sabino was partially paralyzed by a stroke and no longer considered himself to be the leader of his household (see also Ferreira 1999). Instead, he had turned that position over to his eldest son. Sabino narrated his account from his hammock in his house with his wife, children, and grandchildren sitting around him very much in the manner of someone who had stopped traveling and who believed he was near the end of his life. Prepori, while everyone said he was older than Sabino, still considered himself to be the head of his household. He was, in fact, so busy traveling and working that he rarely had time to sit and talk with me. After various requests, however, Prepori sat with me in front of his house and recorded the “story of his life” in Kayabi. My sense was that, in contrast to Sabino’s, a long narrative “about his life” was not something Prepori had fashioned for performing to others, even though as a “great shaman” Prepori was much more frequently the center of attention in large gatherings such as shamanic cures, where narratives about his experiences were focal.

PLACING THE NARRATIVES IN KAYABI HISTORY

Kayabi families have only lived in the Xingu Park reservation since the 1950s. They moved there from areas located further to the west at the urging of the founders of the park, the Villas Boas brothers, who believed that relocation would free indigenous people from the mounting pressures of rubber tappers, miners, and ranchers flooding into these areas. Before moving to the park, Kayabi people lived along the Peixes River in the state of Mato Grosso and along the Teles Pires River in the states of Pará and Mato Grosso. While a few families continue to live in these areas, beginning in the 1950s, the majority relocated to the Xingu. Prepori is credited with leading people to the park. In 1949, he met the Villas Boas brothers and later worked with them clearing landing strips in the interior as part of the Roncador-Xingu expedition's project to make the interior of Brazil accessible (Davis 1977:48). Over the course of the 1950s, Prepori worked with the Villas Boas brothers in the park and, at their urging, he personally encouraged the majority of Kayabi to move. In 1955, Prepori led Sabino and his family from the Teles Pires River to the Xingu River.

The narratives I focus on here, however, describe periods in Sabino's and Prepori's lives before they moved to the park. They concern events that took place at some point between the 1920s and the early 1950s. This period was marked by an increasingly heavy incursion of rubber tappers, government posts, and missions into Kayabi territories. The first official Brazilian government exploration of Kayabi territories occurred in 1915 when the telegraph commission sent out a team to survey the Teles Pires/Paranatinga River (Sousa 1916). Rubber tappers were, however, entering Kayabi areas much earlier than this, beginning in approximately the late 1800s (Grünberg 2004:49). By 1901, there were reports of Kayabi people working at *seringais* (Schmidt 1942:249; Grünberg 2004:49). A government pacification post was first established in 1922 in Kayabi territory on the Verde River, a tributary of the Teles Pires River. This post, Pedro Dantas, was destroyed by Kayabi people in 1924 and reestablished in 1925 in a different spot above the mouth of the Verde along on the Teles Pires River. According to Grünberg, the post was closed again in 1927 after Kayabi people killed six of its workers (2004:60). In 1929, the post was reestablished ten kilometers to the south and renamed José Bezerra (Grünberg 2004:60). In 1941, the SPI opened Caiabi Post in a third locale on the Teles Pires River (Grünberg 2004:60). In the 1940s, a Catholic mission school was also established in the vicinity on the Juruena River (Hemming 2003:322). By 1953, an Austrian Anchieta missionary, Father Dornstauder, was traveling from this site to Kayabi communities

and engaging them in his traveling mission (Hemming 2003:145). During this time, the Kayabi living in the Peixes River were more isolated. In 1955, Father Dornstauder made "contact" with this group and eventually set up a post in this area (Grünberg 2004:69).

During these decades, Kayabi families either retreated into the forest or gravitated towards posts, missions, and commercial rubber tapping camps, moving their households nearby. Of course, some families and individuals alternated between these two patterns. Sabino, born sometime around 1920, lost his parents and relatives to an epidemic of measles. As a result, he became fully enmeshed in post life as a young child. While Prepori's early childhood was spent in the forest, away from the posts, his family had contact with rubber tappers. His father, who disappeared before he was born, was rumored to be a nonindigenous rubber tapper (see Hemming 2003:144). By rough estimation, Prepori must have been born sometime between 1910 and 1920. As a boy, Prepori's family also took him to a post and he said he began to live "among whites," tapping rubber.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS

The accounts by Sabino and Prepori are striking with respect to the way in which they describe relations with various sorts of "others," particularly non-Kayabi Brazilians and spirits. The early portions of their narratives show how being a living human person, that is, a Kayabi person, is not something to be taken for granted. Rather, it is an achievement, something that happens through the work of others upon one's body. Similar to what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2001) observes for Amazonians in general, it is difference or affinity that precedes and encompasses identity or consanguinity. Both Sabino and Prepori describe having their identity with their living Kayabi relatives carved out in their early lives, that is, their identities derive from one kind of alterity or another and are not simply presupposed. Their narratives describe, to use Carlos Fausto's term, how they themselves have undergone a type of "familiarization" (1999).

For both Sabino and Prepori, this identification with other Kayabi is something that takes place through manipulation of the body. Both men describe becoming identified with their relatives through baths, massages, and having substances rubbed on their bodies. Similarly, their connection to various "others" is also described in bodily terms. These others work on the body, make it bleed, or cover it with their clothing. Much as Anthony Seeger, Roberto Da Matta, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro have pointed out, indigenous South Americans structure themselves in terms

of symbolic languages that concern “the fabrication of bodies” (1979:9). Other anthropologists have focused in more detail on how newborn babies are gradually made into kin through the manipulation and nurturance of their bodies (Gow 1991, 1997, 2000; Rival 1998; Lagrou 2000; Londoño-Sulkin 2000; Vilaça 2007). For the Huaorani, Laura Rival (1998) notes that newborn babies are like “guests,” and for the Piro, babies are, according to Peter Gow (2000), only potential “kinspeople.” Lagrou observes that for the Cashinahua, “the body is held to be the result of a constant modeling of its forms by other people” (2000:160). For example, the woman who picks up the newborn and massages its face transforms the child’s appearance, transmitting some of her features (Lagrou 2000:160). Given the widespread idea that bodily identity and consanguinity are things that are fashioned (rather than innate) in the Amazon, it is no surprise that Prepori and Sabino describe how they themselves underwent these sorts of bodily manipulations.

Prepori’s Narrative

One might expect that having a non-Kayabi father could be regarded, for Prepori, as the sort of radical otherness from which he might need to be disentangled as a child. Prepori, however, never mentioned this in the narrative he recorded for me. Rather, he focused on his identity and, quite literally, his consanguinity with spirits while in his mother’s womb and as a young child. He begins his story with his birth, describing how a spirit called a *Mait* was his father. While all Kayabi babies come to the human world from the world of the spirits, only a few know their previous spirit caretakers. If they do know, it is because shamans sing about these babies before they are born. The shamans tell the parents from which spirit homes the babies will come. These children are often thought to have been the pets of spirits prior to birth. Only a very few are sired to human mothers directly by named spirit entities, as was Prepori. Prepori said the following about his own birth:

I was a shaman from the time I was small, from the time when my mother was pregnant with me. I slept for five days after I was born and then started to bleed from my mouth. When I was in my mother’s arms, my grandfather said to my mother, “he is the son of the spirits, a son of the *Mait*. That is why he was bleeding in your belly.”

My mother was crying the whole time. My grandfather and grandmother went to their field and came back again.

My mother said [to her mother], “Mother, Mother, my son is going to die.”

Then my grandfather began to smoke. The spirits talking to him said, “my child, your grandson is going to die.”

[My grandfather who was a shaman told the others,] “he is the son of my tutelary spirit, the son of the *Mait* called Masi’a Kwara (or Sunken Chest).”

Then speaking to my mother, he said, “he is the son of the *Mait* and that is why he made you sick when he entered into your belly and when he was born as well. That is why he is a shaman,” said my grandfather, my own grandfather.

I had another grandfather named Jupory’ok. He did not want me to become a shaman. It was the father of my mother who wanted me to become one. Jupory’ok did not want it and neither did my grandfather Wyrájup.

Nanoko jewuja ipājēnamu ikue. Auwe wryumewe te’ā je. Cinco dias, a’eramū je rua ua je jururupi. Tey juwape jerekoramū jeramyja, “mama’e ra’yra, maira ra’yra, Maira ra’yra,” jau jey upe. “A’eramū ‘nga wujarwe oo wryuamū.”

Jeya jerapiramū. Kope jeramyja jejarui ja ua nū.

Jau “A’ni, A’ni, jera’yra nipo ā amono.”

A’eramū jeramyja ua pytemawau. “Ma’ja jera’yt, neremominū nipo ā amono.”

“Jerupiwara ra’yra, ja’nui, Masi’a Kwara.”

A’eramū ‘nga ra’yra, “je oko imua enee ai’i. Maira ra’yra ‘nga esako ‘nga esako ‘nga oko enee ma’teara nepype awau ai’i, ‘ua nane nū ai’i. A’eramū ‘nga ipājēramū futat,” jau jeramyja, je ma’ete jeremyja.

Ira’ā jerayijamū, Jupory’ok. A’ea nafutari, nafutari jepājeā Jema’etea jeya tuwa jepāje futat. Jupory’ok nafutari. Wyrājuwa nafutari.³

After recounting the names of many more people who either wanted or did not want him to become a shaman. He continued:

My grandfather Ta’re’wara, who did not want me to become a shaman, began to rub medicine on me and gave me some to drink. He rubbed it on my shoulders and the bleeding stopped for a while, my empowerment stopped for a while.

Ta’re’wara jeramyja najefutari jepājeā nafutari, apenu jefuangetyka ifuangetyka iwau ka jee. Je kupekaty imanau. A’eramū opika jewa wojeramū jewa. Wojeramū jewa jepājeā.

Later, as a boy, Prepori described how he again began to bleed from his mouth and how once again his grandfathers gave him baths so he would not become a shaman. A group of shamans finally decided that he should, in fact, be allowed to become empowered, and so they stopped giving him baths. Once the baths stopped, the spirits began to work on his body, particularly animal spirits such as those associated with capuchin

monkeys. They came to him in dreams and pierced his body with their teeth and made him bleed again. As they did this, they also invited him to their village to see their houses. Just as his grandfathers had worked on his body—rubbing medicines and giving baths, in order to separate him from his identity with spirits and to bring him fully into the human world—now the spirits worked on his body, piercing, biting, and making it bleed, in order to bring him back into their world. Exactly who Prepori's consanguine relatives are is a question. It appears that he is part of both the spirit and human communities. Narrating from his position as a great shaman, Prepori depicts his birth and childhood as a conscious struggle to wrest a Kayabi life out of his background of alterity. This conscious struggle is greater for him than it would be for most Kayabi narrators. Prepori depicts it as a cosmic battle waged upon his young body.

Ultimately Prepori was trained by senior shamans who worked together with spirits to show him how to manage his kinship with spirits and to use it to benefit his other living Kayabi relatives. As a young adolescent, Prepori said he left his uncle's house, where he had been living, and went to work "among whites." Without much elaboration, the *seringal* becomes the backdrop for his shamanic training and display. Elder shamans and the spirits come to the *seringal* and work together on his body to cause him to bleed once again, this time rectally. Despite the fact that Kayabi men were said to "change blood," according to Prepori, during puberty rites (when these rites were still practiced) bleeding had never before been mentioned to me as part of this rite. Citing the work of Bruce Albert (1985), Conklin suggests that for other lowland people such as the Yanomami, defecating blood is explicitly part of puberty rites and is understood as parallel to menstruation (2001b:165). With his rectal bleeding, Prepori comes of age and becomes a true shaman. About this moment he said:

A group of my relatives came from the Rio dos Peixes and said "is it true that the animals are hurting you?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Then you have dreamed and you can sing." Then the old ones made me sing while I was living in the middle of whites. Then, I sang like a truly knowledgeable one [i.e. a shaman].

Poje Tay'wyawi eyija 'ua. "Hyyy, a'ja poko wyra nejukai rakue 'i."

"A'ja futat ikue 'u"

"A'eramū nipo nesakajeei 'ja eree ia'anga wei." A'eramū eyija ia'angika je tapy'yia pype ikue. A'eramū je ia'anga ikwapara jakatuete.

Prepori moves from an identity with spirits, to having his body molded and connected to his human kin, back to being bitten and pierced by spirits,

and then worked on once again and bled by his human kin who show him how to control the spirits. Throughout this process, and over the course of his life, Prepori’s connection and kinship to the human and spirit worlds shifts constantly. He is, thus, at some moments, an “other” with respect to his fellow Kayabi. Prepori said that this oscillation would ultimately end at his death. While he was alive, he described how he spent time both with his human wife (in his waking hours) and with his spirit wife (in his dream life), eating and living at both their homes. After he died, he said, he would go to live permanently with his spirit wife.

Sabino’s Narrative

Sabino—unlike Prepori, and more in keeping with most other Kayabi I interviewed—did not talk about his own birth. One’s own birth is not an event most people can remember so they do not claim it as their own firsthand experience. When I asked about events of their own birth or early childhood, narrators usually would employ the tense evidential *ra’e*, indicating that the events they were talking about were not remembered, but had been recounted to them by others. Sabino, instead, began his story by telling about when he was about four or five years old, a time when, according to Kayabi ideas about human development, children begin to reason and think properly. Motioning to one of his grandsons standing nearby he said, “I will begin when I was about his age.” Sabino’s narrative does not, therefore, describe how his own soul (*ang*) was tied to the world of the spirits, nor how his identity with his human relatives needed to be carved out early in his life. Instead, he chose to begin his account with a different image of alterity—that of the *tapy’yiarete* (literally, “the true enemy”), the nonindigenous Brazilians or, to use the Portuguese term that Kayabi use irrespective of race, *os brancos* (the whites).

Sabino began to tell about his childhood by recounting how his mother, father, and uncle took him to Pedro Dantas Post. The post and its workers in the beginning of his story are portrayed as dangerous and hostile. After spending two months there, Sabino recounts how measles killed his parents. In the first decades after contact, epidemics were viewed as acts of violence perpetrated by the whites that could justifiably be avenged by Kayabi. Diverging from the story of his own life, he retold some of his uncle’s stories about his first encounters with whites during the previous years when he had journeyed to see one of these early pacification posts. These stories recount how his uncle encountered new goods (such as metal tools), drank coffee for the first time, and saw the curious habit of men brushing their teeth. These stories also tell, from his uncle’s perspective, of waves of epidemics at posts and the assassination of particular post

employees by Kayabi in retaliation. In general, these accounts give a sense of the mundane characteristics of the whites, as well as their danger and enmity. Directly after relating these stories, Sabino returns to talking about how his own experiences as a very young boy, living in a village near a post, were shaped by waves of epidemics. He recounts:

Many Kayabi died. My mother and father died too when I was a small boy. They abandoned me and I was left crying. I cried in the morning, in the afternoon, at night. I cried the whole day long. Then a relative took me up river to my older brother. I got used to living with my older brother and I didn't cry any more, but then I was left without relatives again. There was no one left to take care of me.

The chief of a post said, "there is no one taking care of this child." "All your relatives have died," he said to me.

From then on the chief stayed with me. I began to grow. I grew more and more. You whites who raise children do not let them mature into men. When I was a boy he made me work for him. I grew up working.

After I grew up, where the Kayabi were first pacified, I started to work in the fields. I worked taking care of cattle. Then I worked at a farm in the middle of whites ... I went to the headwaters and worked again. Then, I went to work in the middle of a large group of whites. I worked collecting corn together with the whites.

A'eramū futat kayabia pisau kwakwarii. A'eramū futat jeya, jerup. A'eramū jere jaa jemongo'uu. Eokwere jerekoi te ja'wau ai'irwe, ai'irwe nū karup ai'irwe nū karup. Te joo'o tee futat je orokarup. Poje jeree ojemujama'e je rerawau peu ywa katy jerekiyra upe. Tuwi ma'e upe je rerawau. A'eramū te je jepokwaawi. Te je kiyra upe je jepokwaawi. Je jo'ooa kwete pawamū. A'eramū je te kau te jare'emāu. Tetyweramū futat te kau.

A'eramū wyriara, "na te kwawi ā koa kunumia'are." "Ijara oko amano jui ikue," jau jee.

A'eramū futat wyriara je koka. A'eramū futat te wau te'a ran nupa te kau. Te wau te'a ran a nupa ete ete. Tapy'yanamua tene oi opifakaramu ra'ne nepe'je'ā. A'eramū jearanuwya owi awe futat tapy'ya je mo porowykau. Te porowykua futat je eroa ran nupa ikue.

A'eramū je te aranuwire eyja mota'waweripe ra'ne te porowykau kope te porowykau. Kwatau resakawamo je te kau nū. A'eramū je a'ere marupa 'oga jawipe tapy'ya futat ... A'eramū je a'earwi te wau Ypytunga rapyripe te porowykau nū. A'eramū je a'earwi te wau peu tapy'ya ryrarete era wykawamu amuna'wa mo upa nū. A'epe te kau te porowykau nū. Awasi'uua iwykanga fukawamu te kau tapy'ya pyri.

While he disagrees with the "white" method of raising children through hard work, Sabino describes how he was partly raised in this manner. The manual labor typical of frontier jobs, such as cattle ranching and farming,

as well as living with other workers, had the effect of transforming Sabino’s body. After being raised by the white chief of a post through this kind of work, Sabino took on the physical appearance of a nonindigenous Brazilian. The episode below confirms that Sabino had, as a young man, the appearance of having become “white.” In it, Sabino describes how the SPI appointed him to be the chief of a Kayabi village, established near José Bezerra Post, that was set up for the Kayabi in the Teles Pires River area. After becoming a “chief,” he was called to contact the still more isolated Kayabi living on the Peixes River. In 1955, Sabino made a visit to these more remote Peixes River Kayabi. Emphasizing his bodily appearance, Sabino describes his first encounter with one Peixes River Kayabi homestead in the following way:

All of a sudden we came to a Kayabi settlement and the Kayabi saw us. “The whites are coming,” they shouted. “The whites are coming,” they shouted to us.

The girls climbed up on the house to see us. The house was just like that house over there. [He points across the village.] They went up on top and stood up on top to see me arrive.

We arrived just like whites. We even had glasses. My younger brother was wearing glasses. They didn’t know us. We were really unknown.

We took an old man and spoke to him. “We are not whites. It is me who is arriving again. It is me who is coming back from the whites. It is not a white who I am bringing, it is our brother Jupopinima. I have taken over the position of chief,” I said to another.

“Ah, is this true?” he said. Then he came to hug me and he became happy. He got my clothing all dirty with red paint. He came to receive me. He put a lot of red *urucú* on my head and rubbed it with his hand. He made my whole head red. All the while the girls were watching me from on top of the roof.

Arawau orojesaka au kayabiupe. A’eramū futat omājau oreee, “Tapy’ya owaeeema janee. Tapy’ya owaeeema,” jau.

Kujamukua eyja tajykujamuua ‘oga pype rupi ojeupia. Oga pypea nanuara rupi. Awau peu. Oāma ojenongyawu.

Tapy’yiamo tātfutat ore waeeemi. Teayrū ajererekau. Iwujā ia teayrū rerekou. Jau tamengje. A’eramū oro kwapaawe emamu.

A’eramūorererawara sawa’e’i okwapa oje’enga ojojupe. “Naani natapy’yarji jeoreko je te ojo te kou nū. Je te ojo te kau tapy’yarwi nū. Natapy’yarji je ore ko jane te jane te Jupopinima rewirera. Wyriaramo ekoi nū,” jawu ojo upe.

“Ah a’ja ae’a nipo,” jee. A’eramū futat ua jemana ojekytyka jeree. Eu kwereei je ryruā je piararupi urucua kwai jeakangarupi apoypa. A’eramū jeakanga mo miranga. A’ape kunjāmukua oje mongyje ywa te.

Much like Prepori’s grandfathers, who bathed and rubbed him with medicines and ultimately even facilitated his rectal bleeding, this old man

also rubs Sabino with red urucú, and transforms the surface of his body, even covering over the enemy's clothing, making it "dirty" with Kayabi paint. While this kind of body treatment occurs later in life for Sabino than for Prepori, it can be understood as a moment in which an elder molds a type of identity for a young man as a fellow human, or a fellow Kayabi, by working on the surface of his body. In these narratives, as Conklin has observed for the Wari', "the body is essential in defining connections or the lack of connections to a social group" (2001a:139).

Directly after describing this greeting, Sabino explains how he was commissioned to hold a *Jawosi* festival in this settlement. He travels to the surrounding homesteads, inviting them to participate in the *Jawosi* and then describes how all of the men, himself included, sing in *Jawosi* style. *Jawosi* singing is the hallmark of mature male adulthood. Only married men can participate, with senior men singing the loudest and the most frequently. Much as in Prepori's account—in which he comes of age and sings "like a true shaman"—Sabino also describes himself as singing in a traditional ritual genre, at the point at which he reconnects with his long lost relatives, after his sojourn through the world of whites.

CONCLUSION

Both of the stories Prepori and Sabino recount of their early lives are accounts of how they either began life as defamiliarized from their kin or quickly became defamiliarized over the course of their childhood by virtue of the fact that they lived with whites. This defamiliarization could simply be explained by virtue of the fact that the frontier created enormous disjunctures for many people. Newly introduced diseases left people orphaned to grow up—in some cases like Sabino's—with whites. As with Prepori, many Kayabi are also genealogically tied to whites in disconcerting ways. In turn, one might suppose, this could lead to a kind of projection of a father figure onto the spirits. I would argue, however, that these frontier situations were also understood according to a more general Amazonian pattern—identified by Viveiros de Castro (2001)—in which identity with one's kin is understood to be fashioned out from alterity. The details of the early twentieth-century frontier recounted by these men give a specific, historically grounded, texture to this process. Autobiographical narratives such as those of Sabino and Prepori also bring to the foreground the extent to which subjects can be transformed from alterity to identity with kin, and then transformed back again over the course of their lifetimes. They show the potential for continual transformation. They suggest that, over time, life is not just wrested out of alterity at birth and that difference

is not simply domesticated once and for all, but rather that there is a continual process of oscillation over the lifetime. Through different sorts of body-focused practices—manual labor at posts, baths, massage, body painting—these narrators come to partake in a variety of “communities of practice” that each encompass a range of people and beings. Dependent as it is on bodily practices, the sense of belonging to these communities is necessarily ephemeral.

NOTES

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1. Peter Gow suggests a similar type of shifting of positions with respect to people who are known intimately. He describes, for example, the Piro relative who “ceases to be a relative” when he or she becomes the person who cuts a newborn baby’s umbilical cord (1997:48).
2. Both men have since passed away. Sabino died in 1993 and Prepori in 2000.
3. This orthography is based on that used by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a system also used by several Kayabi. I thank Aturi and Mairata for helping me write and translate this portion of Prepori’s narrative as well as all those which follow by Prepori and Sabino.

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76 Suzanne Oakdale

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78 Suzanne Oakdale

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