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Systems of Naming and Creolization: Authentic Acculturation and/or Authentic Tradition? The Yanomami Case

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Among Amazonian indigenous peoples, the first thing one may notice is a change in their appearance brought about by modern clothing, such as t-shirts, caps, shorts, or objects like watches and guns. In many cases the most striking feature is the adoption of a Western hairstyle. It is less often noticed that one of the symbolically powerful aspects of the composition of the person affected by creolization is that of naming. In general, the imposition of Creole personal and family names on the native populations quickly follows contact with missionaries and administrative State personnel.

One main difference between Creole and indigenous peoples is that while the former employ personal names, both for vocative and referential forms, the latter mainly use kinship vocabulary. Within Western society, the registration of individuals through written lists of names is used for many purposes, which correspond to an administrative practice of identification. This mirrors the practice of Christian baptism and baptismal registers held by churches and missions to count converted souls. From the Creole point of view, personal naming corresponds to the normal but nevertheless obligatory system of personal identification within the framework of integration into the dominant State model, a crucial structural feature of the social and political control in general that accompanies the acculturation process.

This topic will be illustrated by the naming system and the different uses made of foreign names among the Yanomami population, where the Creole naming process is more recent than in other Amerindian groups.¹ While personal names are particularly subject to strong taboos among the Yanomami, it can be thought that the use of names drawn from an external Christian or Creole corpus affects them deeply and corresponds to a considerable transformation of their identity. However, the Yanomami accept this kind of exogenous denomination with an obvious ease, which deserves exploration.²

The Use of Creole Names among the Yanomami

When I first arrived among the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco, in 1975, the people of the villages had Yanomami names. Some Creole nicknames had been given by the malaria health personnel but they were not used very often. It was quite the opposite when I first arrived in the Parima Highlands, in 1980, even though it was a much more recently contacted area. Some names had a Yanomami consonance, but with others the Western origin was immediately perceptible. One person was called Carlosi (Carlos), others Pablo, Alfredo, Eva, Tomasi (Tomas), Paquito, Francisco, and so on.

However, with most of the names, the foreign origin was not so directly intelligible. The terms had been “Yanomami-ized” in such a way that it was only with time that the original Christian names became apparent. For example, the name Imilike is a transformation of Enrique, and the name Preto corresponds to Bret. There is also Thaweiwë for David, Krokorio for Gregorio, Fenato for Fernando, and Peto for Pedro, Ehenio for Eugenia, Orato for Orlando, or Konorio for Cornelio...

Moreover, many names clearly mean something in the Yanomami language and merge with nicknames created by the Yanomami. A good example is the name of a man called *Poresivë*. It is a name composed of the terms *pore* (jaguar) and *si* (skin), which means “skin of the jaguar.” This name is also a malicious allusion to “skin of the ghost,” the last word - *porepore* (ghost) being the repetition of the term *pore* (jaguar). It was thanks to an informant, who knew the Spanish pronunciation of the Christian forenames origi-

nally attributed, that I became aware of the relation between the usual “Yanomami” name and the Creole name: “Poresiwë” was in reality a Yanomami version of the name “Boris.”

There were other similar names of Western origin where it was not easy to immediately discover the foreign origin. For instance, the name Thafiyawë (which means “alone,” “orphan”) is a transformation of Octavio, Aupora (which means “clear/waterfall”), a modification of Aurora, and Wawëto (which means “see through”) a version of Waldo.

In reality, all adults and children had been re-named by evangelical missionaries from the New Tribes Missions (NTM), who arrived in this region some years ago, and each adult and child was given a Western family name and first name. According to a missionary, they had been given new names because the Yanomami became upset if you mentioned their real names. Besides this pragmatic measure, there may have been other reasons for this re-naming: the baptisms that had apparently occurred at the first moment of the contact. The fact is that several of the principal adults of this time had names with a highly biblical consonance, such as Samuel, Nathaniel, David, Pablo, Moises, or Abraham.

Whatever their precise origins may have been, these names have since been used for each activity resulting from contact, like consultation at the dispensary, or for vaccinations in order to identify the patients. These foreign names (*napë kafiki*, in foreign language) permit external people to identify the individuals inside the villages. The Yanomami use them also to name each other among themselves as a nickname, and they are also less reticent about designating each other to strangers using these names.

In effect, the Yanomami refuse to reveal their own personal names and cannot reveal the names (*sipoat*) of their co-residents or close neighbours without running into trouble.³ Even the use of Western names can prove difficult. The Yanomami end up integrating them as “Yanomami” names, then submitting them to the common restrictions applied to all names. When one addresses a Yanomami adult person by directly pronouncing his or her (foreign) name, as Western people so commonly do (as when one calls somebody, say, “Francisco!”), he or she will have an immediate reaction of embarrassment and will protest: “Don’t speak my name! (Don’t pronounce me!).” This protestation is often deliberately exaggerated, but it underpins the permanent difficulty of mentioning people’s names in their presence.

The Yanomami Onomastic System⁴

What does the taboo on personal names correspond to among the Yanomami? As Lévi-Strauss already stressed in his essay on names, “another of the difficulties results from the multiple prohibitions that affect the use of names” (Lévi-Strauss, 1962: 243). Among the Yanomami, the personal name that each person receives as a child is unique and cannot be used for another person. This name is progressively obliterated at the end of childhood. It cannot be uttered from puberty onwards (the restrictions being more formal for men than for women), and should be forgotten after death. This includes, for those who knew the dead person, avoiding the use of the word or the composition of words from which the name was made up. The fact that the Yanomami never use existing names again, that they create a new name for each individual, and that the name can not be uttered (above all after the death of the person), has always been a matter of curiosity and interest.⁵ What is the most remarkable in this case is that, being characteristic of the uniqueness of a human being, the name when pronounced resounds like a presage of one’s death. The development of this idea is that the personal name in its singularity corresponds to the consciousness for each social being that he or she is also an individual; in other words, that he or she is mortal. *Personal names act as a memento mori: they constantly remind each living being that he or she will die.* Nevertheless, the Yanomami do not make this kind of statement directly; it is a deduction and it is necessary to give ethnographic elements to back up this analysis.

Unlike some other Amazonian societies, the Yanomami do not have an onomastic system associated with rules of transmission, nor a determinate stock of names that is recurrently used to denominate newborns.⁶ Neither is this system related to the reutilisation of the names of the dead⁷ or to the multiple utilisations of names. Each name is specifically made up for each person. It cannot be granted to another known Yanomami or to somebody else after death. If by chance two distant individuals are given the same

name, the name will be changed as soon as they find out. The prohibition on uttering the “real name” (*sipoamotima ya*), or “the name received when young” (*éfa osbe kuo tēbē*), is very strong among some Yanomami groups. To break it corresponds to a truly hostile declaration. Between co-residents or allied communities, the violence of the affront is such that it can provoke fights, and an arrow may even be shot at its author. The Yanomami will never utter the childhood name of a close relative, a close ally or, in principle, the name of a co-resident or a friend, and they would threaten to kill the person who utters their own personal name.

Of course, for the Yanomami it is unthinkable to utter one’s own name.⁸ It is difficult for us not to wonder why the Yanomami are so embarrassed to pronounce the names of others and to reveal their own names. To enunciate one’s own name would be the equivalent of “linguistic suicide,” that is to say, “auto-cannibalism” (Alès 1989), since it is effectively the characteristic of enemies to proffer names of the persons they want to kill (Alès 2000). This is why to give the name of a dead person to a newborn would definitively be to give the newborn the position of a dead person.⁹

Yanomami reserve in mentioning personal names is linked to the idea of the auguring of death, which is associated with the terrifying idea of becoming “perennial” after death; in other words, of “living eternally after death” as a ghost. Name avoidance is a lifelong process that precedes the complex ritual actions performed to dissolve the body of the dead person to ensure the proper separation between the dead person and the living people. The name is the verbal representative of the ghost of the person to whom the name is attached, and is an eminently immortal creation that does not disappear easily after the person’s death. The utterance of a dead person’s name is reputed to make his or her ghost appear. Generally feared, spectres are supposed to be angry about being dead whilst the living are still alive, and thus they come back to torment the living. Above all, their evocation through their names will dismay their still living family. This is why in order to avoid future suffering for the family when somebody dies (through causing grief by roaming during the night in particular), people take care to make others respect the avoidance of uttering his or her childhood name. Regarding close relatives, co-residents, allies, and friends, a person has an absolute duty to avoid the circulation of their names and to ensure respect of this avoidance by others. Close relatives and friends also have to help the person with the task of abolishing these names. Name-avoidance is reciprocal and the whole complex surrounding personal names creates very specific social ties (Alès 2000, 2002b).

Knowledge of a personal name normally spans three generations, the parents’ generation, extended to the grandparents’ generation, and Ego’s generation. The personal name of a boy is used until he becomes an adolescent, and the name of a girl until she has a child. It is used by co-residents to directly designate the child and since the names of adults may be obliterated, children’s names appear much more often as the key referent in teknonyms. The child’s name is frequently used to name its parents and adult siblings: one’s mother, one’s father, one’s elder brother and so on.¹⁰ Finally a person knows the names of co-resident and neighbouring people belonging to his own generation as well as many of the names of their children, the children’s names being extensively applied through teknonymy to the parents and all the elders in general. Conversely, a child does not know the name of his parents and, frequently, most of the names of the people of superior generations. As the result of conflicts, adult names are later revealed to the younger generation by their parents and grand-parents (see Alès 2006: 289), and also by their more distant relatives and friends when they visit one another – this, as we will see, is of great importance. However, in principle they never hear the names of parents spoken.

This is why the proscription on uttering the names creates a very strong social link amongst children of the same generation. Specifically, it binds the children of a neighbouring group of collective houses who all grow up together. They become mutual holders of the knowledge of their real names and can either uphold naming avoidance or, at the opposite extreme, divulge real names in case of enmity and/or warfare. The threat of disrespect of the prohibition constantly forces all current and previous co-residents to respect one another, something about which they are very particular. This contributes to the creation of veritable age groups, outside of which names are not known except in the context of hostility and war. Linking people belonging to the same age group with mutual obligations of respect, the reciprocal knowledge of names is constitutive of a solidarity system based on trust. Respecting and upholding these obligations is an absolute marker of the care given to one’s close kin, allies, and friends. Inversely, uttering their names is

characteristic of asocial behaviour, a marker of an ostensible hostility. The problem is that, most of the time, enemies were once friends, or supposed friends are also the friends of enemies, which means that enemies always know (or can find out) the personal names of their enemies. As a result of conflict and antagonism, the names of many important men and heads of households are gradually revealed to the next generation, either while they are still alive or after their death. In practice, this is also true of other men's names. All elders' names are known, regardless of whether they have developed relations of hostility or committed murders. Such knowledge may even be spread by close friends. Nothing can prevent names being repeated and diffused throughout the younger generations once they have begun to visit other communities and engage in ceremonial dialogues.¹¹

In wartime, uttering the name of the murderer who killed a close relative or friend is part of the ritual of revenge. In so doing, the Yanomami designate precisely the enemy they choose to be the next victim. When at home or when they go to another village to prepare the coalition with their friends, they shout their anger in their discourse and designate the name(s) of the enemy to be slaughtered (who is or are the supposed murderer(s) of the person to revenge). At home, during their nocturnal shouting speeches, they forcefully and repetitively proffer the enemy's name(s). Moreover, in preparing for a raid, and then before the attack, they utter their names while shooting mannequins made with leaves that represent the designated victim(s). What is striking in all these ritual actions is that the uttering of the name of the chosen victim by the warriors is a symbolic precondition for killing him. With the exposure of his real name, he becomes vulnerable since he becomes imprudent and so exposes himself to enemies. To utter his name is like pronouncing an anathema, to augur the death of the victim, as in doing so his 'soul' will already be as if dead and he will lose his vigilance and expose himself to arrows (Alès 1984, 2000, 2002b, 2006: 295). Following this assimilation of the personal name with a death presage, each name, as soon as it has been created, already constitutes a death augur, a condition that prohibits multiple utilisations.

If from the local point of view names should be purposefully forgotten (they should be "dead", "asleep"), from the enemy perspective, there will be no amnesia. It would be wrong to think that avoiding uttering names makes them disappear or that the names will be forgotten with the death of individuals. The names do not die, in precisely the same way as the ghost of a dead person never dies. The name remains attached to the ghost of the dead person, and both are everlasting. In proffering personal names, enemies make them live forever. It is thus difficult to say that enemies suppress the names in killing the victims (and so have to create new names). I refer here to Viveiros de Castro (1995: 154) who, probably thinking of the Tupinamba practice of taking the names of the enemies they ritually killed, proposed that, among the Yanomami, "enemies create names because they abolish names." In reality, if enemies create names it is rather because they perpetuate names. Enemies immortalize names, they make names live; in other words, they kill and figuratively eat the bearers of pre-existing names who then become dangerous immortal spectres who particularly target the killer. As mentioned above, it is the work of close relatives and friends to try to abolish the names, to make them as if "asleep", or "dead." Personal names are "hidden" or "covered," whereas enemies will never forget their own enemies' names. They "unveil" them, they "open" them, and they "bring them into the open". They keep them "alive," they "awaken" them, - which creates long-term suffering for the victim's close relations. Enemies' names are systematically transmitted throughout the generations so as not to forget the acts of revenge that will need to be carried out. These transmissions constitute dramatic elements that allow for and contribute to the memorising of a group's political history.

Names denote people's singularity (each name is unique and created for a particular person). This singularization corresponds to each social person's realisation that he or she is also an individual and mortal. The name calls back each human being to the consciousness of his or her mortality. Personal names prefigure one's death and, above all, the spectre one becomes after death - a being that is unaware of its non-living state, that is an a-social being par excellence. The personal name embodies that part of the individual that is asocial, it delimits the social and that which is beyond the social, it defines the collective life beyond which there is only the individual, forced to wander alone through eternity. The personal name clearly symbolizes the non-fragmentable, "non-fractionable" feature of the "in-dividual" subject - it represents the "in-divisible" part of the self: his or her spectre, from which the name is inseparable. The name constitutes the symbolic signal of the quality of uniqueness which belongs to each individual. It is the indivisible

part of the human being, that is to say, the part that is irreducible to the social: the individual's life after death outside the social world. To say the name of somebody is equivalent to reminding him or her that he or she will become an asocial being, that he will be separated from the social world, that he will suffer as a frightening creature for eternity, without the warmth of the living human being's world, in loneliness, without the care of his family who will also suffer for him. It makes him feel conscious, as a mature person gifted with awareness and knowledge, that he will no longer be conscious of social rules (Alès 2002b).

There are two kinds of insults that are powerfully damaging among the Yanomami. One consists in cursing, presaging the death of the adversary through sharp-tongued utterances (mainly referencing to the funeral fire, into which the body of the person will be thrown after death). The other resides in uttering the real name of an adversary. Nevertheless, informants do not find it overly difficult to speak of and give examples of the first kind of insult – despite the fact that it means to speak of the death of a person. They are, however, very embarrassed by the second one. The difference between the two is that the first refers to the physical death of the body (the body is perishable and it is not a valuable part of the person), while the second refers to the life after death of the body soul, the part of the soul that remains attached to the ghost (the body soul is imperishable and is the feared part of the individual). Meanwhile, the first form of insult is expressible because it concerns physical death, in the second, the reference to the ineluctable survival of the soul-spectre is simply unspeakable. If the two forms of verbal aggression “signify my own death to me,” one of them is still more frightening since it exposes the sound of my immortality. In other words, the emission of my name signifies, at the same time, my death, and my immortal survival as a ghost, - which is certainly not seen to be desirable.

This is also the reason why names are not rapidly given to newborn children. Once named, the human being acquires an individuality which lives on after his/her death, he becomes a spectre for eternity because his name persists (is *parimi*). On the other hand, as long as he has no name, the child will not be transformed into a ghost if he dies, it does not run the risk of becoming a “parimi” being. The Yanomami do not normally name the child when he or she is still young. They fear the child might become ill and die prematurely, so they wait to give him or her a name. The name is given when the child begins to walk and to talk, and in general the child has no name before he or she is one year old. The reason given by informants is that if the child were to die when growing up, it would transform into a ghost, so they do not name it until latter. And the final reason why giving a name ensures that one will become a ghost is that the name is everlasting (*parimi*).

How are personal names given in practice? To find a name, is never an easy matter. It should correspond to a unique creation and the parents worry about it. It is in dreams during the night that the names are revealed. There are names without a precise meaning, while other names can be made up starting from a special event, or a behaviour, or a characteristic (associated with a part of the body for instance) that specifically represents the child; animals and plants also enter into the composition of names.¹² Commonly, the parents solicit a shaman of their group, or a shaman from a neighbouring group if there is none in their collective house, for giving a name. Spirits will communicate the name to the shaman while he is dreaming and he will reveal the name of the child, or sometimes of several children at the same time, when he awakes.¹³

The “childhood name,” called the “real name,” the one that the person receives “when a child” is radically differentiated from the secondary name and all the nicknames a person acquires later in life. Adult names are made up for young boys as soon as they reach puberty. The parents usually are those who choose the second name, whilst women are named through teknonymy when their first child receives a name.¹⁴ Very soon, close relatives and co-residents of the collective house hear the new name and have to use it, and they must also condemn the use of the previous name. Moreover, it is common for adults to receive over the course of their lives several nicknames that are made up and employed by those who live nearby.¹⁵ Although both second name and nicknames can be used without fear during the person's life, they are avoided after his or her death in order not to make people close to them angry.

The Creolization of Names among the Yanomami

Today in the Parima area, most of the young adults have two names in use: a Yanomami, secondary name attributed after puberty and a Spanish name. Between themselves the Yanomami generally use nicknames (apart from kinship reference terms) to identify a person. However, when they speak loudly or to foreigners, they employ Spanish names. Like the nicknames' system that is used in parallel with the use of real names, Western names are used in parallel with both real names and nicknames.¹⁶

As we have seen, the Yanomami adopt foreign names and rapidly transform them into the Yanomami phonetic, often giving them a meaning as they do for nicknames. In the first instance, what the Yanomami are looking for with foreign names is the absence of meaning, while names created from the Yanomami lexicon very often have a meaning. As far as possible they want a signifier empty of signified, a pure "sound" without significance (even so, they often end up giving them a familiar consonance, and even a meaning).

In the godsend of names given by foreigners, the Yanomami believed they had received "unique names" which only referred to the individual in question. But, according to the principle of the Western onomastic lexicon, which is relatively limited and used non-exclusively, ineluctably some children received identical first names.¹⁷ Belonging to a finite corpus, Christian first names do not have the capacity *per se* to exclusively designate a particular individual. In the case of the Yanomami of Parima, they have already been confronted with the structural effects of the Western naming system, which have in turn problematized their own naming system. For example, three girls of neighbouring villages had received the name "Sisita" (probably "Jesusita"). It was not a real problem while they were young girls, until one of them died. After a while, I had the opportunity to observe a scene revealing the incompatibility between the two systems when one of the remaining girls had been loudly called "Sisita!" in the presence of adults of the deceased girl's village. They reacted immediately and vigorously, shouting "I told you! I already told you that this would happen! This was always going to happen!"

Another Yanomami informant also commented that "foreigners give their children names which their fathers' carried already." As a leader of an important house, he was furious because several people had been given the same name. "They even named people who were on the verge of death. They gave us names even though we were already old!" He was mainly indignant for the following reasons: "Foreigners gave them names, but they didn't tell them. They gave names to young people that dead people had already borne. Missionaries gave them names without their having asked for them, and although they weren't their real names, they became 'persistent,' because they gave again dead people's names to others! Although foreigners have many names, in truth they have few, because they give the same name to other people." And he insisted on the fact that missionaries had given them names without telling them: "They named us as if we were children! (Literally, 'they made children of us'). None of the Yanomami knew they had been named."

Among the Venezuelan Yanomami, Creole names are also currently frequent in the Upper Orinoco region. Some well known Yanomami "representatives" belonging to the villages situated in the area of the Salesian missions also have creolized names: Antonio Guzman, Luis Urdaneta, and Jose Seripino, for instance. One can also find Creole first names added to Yanomami names, like Fermin Irayawe, Lucas Omashi, Juana Irapraopemi, for instance, or Yanomami first names and Creole first names added to Creole or to Yanomami surnames, like Yapiwe Andrés Bello, Remy Shiapruruwe Heritha. But only rarely do people bear names solely composed of terms of Yanomami origin.¹⁸

The same phenomenon can be seen in the name formation among the Brazilian Yanomami. The most noticeable element is the term "Yanomami," appended to one Creole first name and one Yanomami first name. A well-known example is the name of "Davi Kopenawä Yanomami." Others' names formed in a similar way also illustrate this formula, like Morzaniel Eramari Yanomami, Daniel Mariri Yanomami, Chica Prororiamá Yanomami...¹⁹ According to a list of Yanomami signatures from a petition²⁰, it seems that most names have been standardized (this probably concerns the younger generation), and are composed of only one Creole first name and the generic name "Yanomami," like Raimundo Yanomami, Gerôncio Yanomami, Carlos Yanomami, Anita

Yanomami, Suzana Yanomami.²¹ Others names appeared to be composed of two Creole first names such as Pedrinho Matorino Yanomami.

The term “Yanomami” appears clearly as the “surname” for the Brazilian Yanomami, and the term “Xiriana” (a Yanomami subgroup) appears also as surname for one of them, Dário Vitório Xiriana. This use of an “ethnic” categorisation for the formation of the names of Amerindian people is widespread in Brazil (for instance, Marcos Terena, Uiton Tuxá, Wilson Pataxó, Gersem Baniwa), and seems to have come from the Brazilian Service for the Indigenous Affairs (the SPI/FUNAI administration). This system is not general, as some groups have Portuguese surnames given by the missionaries (like Silva, Dias, Pires, Seabra, Santos, Moreira, Pereira, Ferreira etc), and some others groups use their own native names like the Xavante.²²

In Venezuela, meanwhile the great majority of indigenous people have been given Spanish names, the “ethnic” trend seems recently to have spread to the naming of the Upper Orinoco Yanomami. The term “Yanomami” appears now in addition to the first name in the composition of the names of the youngest Yanomami, as in Brazil. Probably this system of appellation has been proposed at the level of the schools of the Salesian missions of the Upper Orinoco, similar to the system adopted on the Brazilian side.²³

Concerning the Yanomami of the Parima area, for whom I have more detailed data, Creole names have relatively recently been made official for a selection of individuals (at the end of the 1990’s), within the framework of the identity card campaigns orchestrated for electoral purposes by the National Electoral Council (CNE).²⁴ When consulting the listing, I was struck by the way the surnames had been proposed. As a missionary told me, Yanomami identities had been registered on the basis of the missionaries’ listing.²⁵ The surnames attributed were Spanish, like Blanco, Gomez, Borges, Sanchez, Gonzales, among others. Actually, what was the most intriguing in the electoral registers was not the Spanish names in themselves, but the manner in which the family had been given a name. Even if brothers and sisters had the same surname, they didn’t share a surname with their father. In some cases, half brothers had the same surname and, in other cases, they did not. What happened is that each person had only one surname and these names had not been accredited through the paternal line, but through the maternal line.

Some elements of explanation can be posited for this. First of all, the census of the Yanomami made by the missionaries was compiled according to the mother and her children.²⁶ This system appeared simpler to the missionaries and, overall, more secure because, as they said, “if one can be sure about the mother, can one say the same for the father?” The real data they were looking for was a global number in order to emphasize that the population was growing thanks to the health care given to the Yanomami that the mission’s presence afforded.

Nevertheless, while recording the composition of the families in reference to the mother facilitates the population census for the missionaries, this did not totally correspond with Yanomami ideas of the family. Among them, children belong first to the father. Moreover, residence follows a patri-virilocal model and the role of male sibships is central within the framework of social organization (see Alès 1990, 1998, 2002a). It is clear that in the family scheme drawn up by the missionaries through their naming system, fathers are divorced from their offspring.

It should be taken into account that marriage is a fundamental institution for evangelical missionaries and that, in their eyes, the Yanomami are not married, either in front of God or in front of the Mayor. However, the chosen method of denomination which privileges the female line²⁷ poses a problem of another kind from the point of view of Creole society. In practice, all this means that all the Yanomami are officially recorded as “single” people.²⁸ Above all, fathers do not transfer their name to their children, as if they did not recognize their children, all the women are “single mothers,” and all the children are illegitimate children (bastards). Generally, Venezuelan people bear the father’s name followed by the mother’s name. When a person bears only one name, the more common prejudgment is to think that he or she has not been recognized by the father.²⁹

In the meantime, for most Yanomami, Creole practices of identity are quite simply unknown, and the same is even truer of the values that they are related to. They are not the first Amazonian People to whom this has happened. They are probably among the last and there are still other alternatives for them in the future (as will be discussed afterwards). The answer given by the missionaries, who cite the Yanomami name taboo as a justification for giving new names, is to be taken cautiously. The problem with the secret of the name is not found in every society, and yet, groups that have been evange-

lised previously, like the Ye'kwana and the Wothiha, also have Creole names, without any marker related to ethnic origin. In the Amazonas State, save rare exceptions³ and elsewhere, a majority of Amerindian people have seen their naming system creolized. The problem of having to reflect on which kind of name to use for registration arises because the Yanomami have been more recently contacted, because registration is just beginning, and because times have changed.

Names, Authenticity, and Hybridity

In particular national historical contexts, marked by a particular set of values, certain solutions may seem appropriate, but there is no easy way to know what best suits indigenous people, especially as we must not lose sight of the fact that they did not ask to be colonised. The anthropologist does not escape the problem. Whatever one might favour, he or she will always be susceptible to criticism according to one's point of view. In 1996, I had to cite a number of Yanomami authors in various texts. After having discussed it with them, the chosen options were to indicate a Yanomami first name before the Creole surname, or to add the Yanomami name to the previous Creole first name and surname given by the missionaries (for example, Matowë Borges or Matowë Tomas Borges).³¹ These first names would correspond, not to the real Yanomami names they had received when children, but to the adult second names used as substitutes by the Yanomami.

This partly coincides with the formula used for a number of Brazilian Yanomami. They bear a Creole first name, followed for some of them by a Yanomami first name, then by the term "Yanomami," which is used, as we have seen, like a "surname" (Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, Anselmo Xiropino Yanomami... and more often now Raimundo Yanomami, Carlos Yanomami, Jonas Yanomami...). Considering this standardization of Creole names attributed to the Brazilian Yanomami, it is, on one hand, notable that the generic surname "Yanomami" is unique and seems to be a term coming from the "Yanomami" language. However, it does represent a kind of essentialisation and corresponds to an ethnocentric meaning of the word "yanomami" as a Western ethnic group classification – in Yanomami language the term "yanomami" means "human being" (a name will thus have, for example, the literal meaning of "Paul Human Being"). On the other hand, it is remarkable that it is the Creole first name that comes first when there is also a Yanomami first name, and that in Brazil the language of the dominant culture subordinates the Yanomami language.

It is a fact that no name is totally composed in a truly indigenous way. Whatever the considered formula, the result constitutes a combination of Indigenous and Creole names. This pattern of naming has been created as a hybrid form. It remains a classic Western naming system, playing with a class (Yanomami) and an individuation (the first name) within the class.

In present day Brazil, the current choice seems to be to give a Creole first name and the ethnic surname rather than a Yanomami first name and surname. Another alternative could be to give as a surname the name of their village instead. The names of the inhabitants of a collective house, like Mavakatheri, Okiyamopëtheri (people of Mavaka, people of Okiyamopë), have the quality of being generic names used by the Yanomami themselves to identify people and could be an example of how to diversify "surnames".³² Unlike personal names, these names can be applied to multiple people and have no taboos on their pronunciation. In effect, the "collective names" of the houses are the names which the Yanomami like to think will survive through designating numerous descendants after their death. This represents a social ideal that is characteristic of influential men as house founders (Alès 2003).³³ A Yanomami informant proposed an even more specific possibility.³⁴ He thought that each of them should have the name of the place in the forest where he or she was born, like Thëpëwë Horeapë (the Yanomami second name followed by the name of the place of birth). His idea is that this system would give a lot of different names (even in a sibling set). What is remarkable is that this tends to particularise each person's "surname" as well, which would be more in line with the traditional Yanomami onomastic system. It fits also with the fact that it is the territory, the places where they were born and where they lived, that serve to name people.

In Venezuela, those political parties locally in power, whose priority is the possibility of being elected, commonly push the State identification services to create identity documents for indigenous people. With great lucidity, indigenous people often say that they

constitute “vote” reservoirs” for the political parties (see Alès 2007). With the Chavez’ government,³⁵ there were many registration campaigns,³⁶ and it now seems easier to have identity cards than it was before.³⁷

In conclusion, we can observe that, whatever naming system is chosen, it does not correspond to a kind of “authenticity” of Amerindian origin but at best to “hybridity”. One can argue that the “anthropological” trend, which favours ethnonames and “ethnic” indigenous values, influences Indigenous Organisations, the Catholic Church and NGOs, and that this in turn influences the national institutions concerning Indigenous Peoples recognition. One might also contend that “ethnic” names are a factor in negative discrimination at the level of Creole national society given that names act as powerful “markers” of differences, a difference of origin everlasting for the descendants of indigenous people, and that Indigenous names do not favour integration into the dominant Creole culture. Even if it is an imposed situation, when Indigenous people move towards Creole national society, they rarely escape what is called “ethnic shame.” It is not certain then that indigenous people who may perhaps live in areas with a Creole majority would be at that point very much in favour of the “ethnic” claim but might rather prefer to adopt Creole criteria that assimilate them positively.

It is an open question whether the emphasis placed upon ethnic names by people and NGO’s supporting the indigenous populations should be seen as politically correct and what the long-term consequences of such identities might be. It is clear that indigenous supporters and Indigenous organisations who prefer, in response, the “ethnic” marker in order to defend both the pride and “authenticity” of the Indigenous Peoples, are making these choices instead of those directly concerned just as much as those who favour an apparently more Creole integration. The first choice can be considered to be the “correct” one, however, it is a “political” choice different in form but not different in essence. It remains the choice of acculturation and nobody really knows if what seems to us politically correct nowadays is, and will be, correct for indigenous people. It is difficult to guarantee that this choice will be the right one for the Amerindians in the future, or for us, according to changes in socio-political contexts. This remains a vision of things that lies outside the autochthonous society constructed from our own point of view. Indigenous people can see things from a different angle and appropriate for themselves Creole forms to secure what they see as advantages (see Peter Gow’s very interesting discussion in this volume, which also focuses on this point and on the supposed “auto-denominations” of indigenous peoples).³⁸

From the Yanomami perspective, there is another kind of understanding. The utilisation of Creole names reflects their own conception of naming and of the relationship between a person and his or her name. Some Yanomami people are very interested in non-Yanomami names for their children. They persistently call for foreigners around them (missionaries, health personnel, school teachers, anthropologists, for instance) to name their child: “Name him! Name her!” they say, showing their young child. If Yanomami people are fond of foreign names, it is because they represent pure signifiers like empty sounds without a signified.³⁹ It is exactly the effect they greatly seek in the creation of a Yanomami name. At the moment the Yanomami discover these new words, they think that they are singular. They hear the foreign names as fabulous “hapax”—a hapax being a pure word or a pure linguistic form of which only one exemplar can be observable (at a given time). The meaning of the “name” in the foreign language, whatever it is, does not matter to them. They therefore have no problem taking names that we would consider inconvenient or ridiculous, like *Lechuga*, *Zapato*, *Sardina* (Lettuce, Shoe, Sardine) among others. The Yanomami demand for alien names is not a wish to possess a Spanish or a Creole name for the purpose of integration within the dominant national culture or of an encompassment in a common collectivity with non-Yanomami people. Rather, it corresponds to a wish to have a name that is a meaningless foreign expression in the Yanomami language, with less individual social implications, and if possible which does not entail any social involvement at all. There we could perhaps invoke “the scheme of predation” (Descola 2005: 471) in the sense that the appropriation of alien expressions does not involve an idea of reciprocity or of social implication with the name providers in return. But one could also say that “the hunter becomes the hunted”. This underpins the misunderstanding between the two visions.

From a more Western point of view, the application of foreign names can be seen as an efficient acculturation or a “hybridisation”⁴⁰ process. On the indigenous side, this corresponds less to an “acculturation,” to a “syncretism,” or to a “métissage” strictly speaking, than to a “convergence” between a linguistic corpus of which the exterior is a gen-

erous provider and pre-existing original values. To describe this phenomenon there is an interesting notion in linguistics. Linguists speak of “borrowing” or “loan” when a word is consciously transferred from an idiom A to idiom B (socio-linguists prefer the expression “contact of idiom”). This concept is used when the speakers of a language draw from a foreign lexicon, which is often the case, to designate new objects or recent situations due to contact with another population. In the Yanomami case, it would not be a “borrowing” in the linguistic sense of the term, since it is not a loan of terms destined to be anchored on a long-term basis in the language. In principle, conversely to what frequently happens in the case of a linguistic borrowing, this kind of borrowed term has to ultimately disappear from the language. It is then a borrowing that is added to the language without modifying the internal logic of the cultural system. The loan of vocabulary is exploited by the actors themselves. For the Amerindians, we could say that it is like a costume. Secondary names and nicknames all constitute “disguises,” that is, they constitute the roles of the characters that they embody – one can change all these elements as when acting in a play, but they are not the persons themselves.

We can say thus that there is here a process of authentic acculturation fitting the traditional cultural system: the registration of identities for Yanomami people has a real dimension of encompassment in the dominant Western/Creole society *and* conforms with their cultural values, since for the Yanomami, the names given by foreign people and used for registration and identity cards are perceived not as a matter of “authenticity” but rather as compatible with their cultural values – the taboo on personal names.

In the long-term, however, it seems that the introduction of a naming system is not just the sort of minor change that can occur in multicultural contexts. Because a name is a foundational element of personal identity and a structural element of social identity, the creolization of names plays both a major symbolic and social role in a process of cultural domination that, by promoting homogenisation, denies cultural difference in favour of a standardised model.

Notes

¹ Living in a particularly remote region, the Yanomami long remained relatively isolated from contact with the outside. In the second half of the 20th century, Yanomami communities gradually entered into contact with various representatives of wider, national society. In Venezuela, missionaries began to establish themselves in Yanomami areas in the 1950s and the State really made its presence felt from the 1970s onwards. Health and education services only gradually developed, mainly around the six Evangelical and Catholic missionary centres. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, clandestine gold-miners crossed from Brazil into Yanomami territory. This led to the creation of Army and National Guard bases in the area. In any case, their situation changed radically from the mid-1990s onwards, when even this isolated part of Amazonas State began to feel the effects of regionalisation and politicisation, driven by administrative reorganisation at the municipal level and the impact of political parties. Although many Yanomami are unfamiliar with the idea of the nation-State and even with the Venezuelan nation, some of them have begun to participate in national politics (see Alès 2007).

² A previous version of this paper was presented at the *EASA Conference*, Vienna, 8-12 September 2004 in the session entitled “The Creolization of Identity and Personhood” and organized by Ernst Halbmayer and Elke Mader. I would also especially like to thank Matthew Carey and Donna Martin-Dilley whose help with the English translation has been invaluable.

³ This prohibition on revealing names, which can be stronger in some places more than others, is a major difficulty in relation to the carrying out of sociological survey, and in particular, for the collection of genealogies.

⁴ This section is a summarized part of a paper titled “The Indivisible ‘I’” and presented at the *9th Conference of Hunter and Gatherer Societies* in 2002.

⁵ See Cocco 1972, Lizot 1973, Ramos 1974, Clastres & Lizot 1978, Alès 1989, 2002b, Viveiros de Castro 1995.

⁶ As among Gê societies of central Brazil (see for example Lave 1979, Lea 1992), where stocks of names are transmitted from name-givers to name-receivers at birth, then are ceremonially confirmed (most often for the first child), according to an ideal model from cross-sex siblings to one’s another children. This name transmission represents a crucial

ceremony organization for maintaining continuity through time for the community as a whole (Lave 1979: 30-33).

⁷ Like among the Arawate for example (Viveiros de Castro 1995: 143-156), where, despite the similarity in the use of teknonyms with the Yanomami naming system, main differences appear in the utilisation of previously created names and, notably, those bore by deceased.

⁸ They are shocked by the foreigners' habit of identifying themselves by stating their own names. Regularly, and not without some malice, they will surround the new arrivals who have just descended from the airplane, and ask them: "Como se llama?", and with pleasure the newcomers will answer "Yo me llamo Roberto!", "mi nombre es Natalia!" and so on. The utterance of the one's own name by the person ineluctably provokes the same result, a good laugh amongst the ranks of the Yanomami.

⁹ And that explains as well why two persons cannot bear the same name, since when one of them dies, the other

¹⁰ Teknonymy refers also to the husband for a wife, and to the wife (wives) for a husband, a man often being named after his wife whilst she is young and has no named child, and a woman after the "second name" of her husband. These denominations shift when they have their first child. But a child's name ceases to be used to name the parents just before puberty, replaced by the name of a younger sibling, or eventually by the child's second name. Teknonyms referring to partners or children, second names, or to nicknames are alternatively used.

¹¹ For more details on this topic, see Alès 2006: 77-89.

¹² For instance, the name "Hayaferōsimi" (haya/ferōsi/mi: deer/skull/naming marker) was created for a girl who liked a deer skull. For more detail on the linguistic elements within the formation of names, see Lizot 1973: 61-64.

¹³ According to some informants, it is the father who asks for the shaman for his children, whatever their sex, or if the father does not it is the mother who makes the petition. According to another informant, who is a shaman, it is women who give girls their names, whilst it is shamans, and not fathers, who give boys their names. A father can also name his children or instead both parents appeal to people around, which is more often the case when there is no shaman. The manner of naming a child can vary from one place to another. It can also evolve and this is especially so in higher contact areas, and can coexist. Nowadays, there are Yanomami who directly name their children without appealing to the shamans or the close circle.

¹⁴ See above in the text and note 10.

¹⁵ Which obviously does not facilitate the task of the anthropologist. And even so, it is also a serious Yanomami habit to transform any name by changing the order of the syllables: "Shatirawē" for "Tirashawē" - this means they did not really proffer it (as "Gosh" for "God").

¹⁶ All of my informants agree that foreign first names are "added" to Yanomami names given at birth, and that they are simply replacement names, like nicknames, rather than real names. One informant added that today when they ask foreigners for names, they do not think they are real names: "Children already have Yanomami names, but these will never be revealed to foreigners. That's what he did for all his children: they have a 'real' birth name and then a foreign name that isn't a real one."

¹⁷ We have a stock of first names that is in principle recurrent, even if there is more flexibility in recent times (in France, not so long ago, first names chosen by parents that did not feature in the list of traditional first names recorded in the Mairies were not accepted for the register of births). These first names become personalized once they are associated with a second name, the patronymic name, which in itself gathers together the individuals composing a specific sibling-set under the same banner, each having been given a distinct first name. In contrast, inter-generationally, this is not always the case, and it may be repetition which is sought, for example John Sr./ John Jr., or transmission of first names from godfather and godmother to a child, from grandparents to grandchildren, from uncles and aunts to nephews and nieces, from deceased siblings to children who are born afterwards, etc.

¹⁸ On the 2007 electoral lists for the Mavaca polling station, near the Salesian missions, where 742 registered names have been identified as belonging to Yanomami people, more than 77% are composed of one, two or three Yanomami name(s) added to a Spanish first name, such as Lorena Teshoma, Oscar Yawetiwe, Rogelio Rurupewe Yawarinawe, Santagio Yerekopewe Kurianama, Paulino Miwereopewe Yutuowe Tirikami (respectively, 36.52%, 37.6%, and 3.64%). In some of them, one or two of the Yanomami

name(s) correspond(s) to surnames, such as Dario Puriwatowe Nimo, Antonia Kreminimo, Hakoíwe Andres Moyena, or Dario Jeminawei Cucuwe Moy (see note 23). More than 10% of the names are composed solely of two, three or four Creole names (6.74%, 3.37%, and 0.01%), against 2.15% which are composed solely of two or three Yanomami names (1.21%, and 0.94%). For 3.5% of the names, one or two Yanomami names are added to a Spanish (Creole or non-Yanomami) surname (2.56%, and 0.94%); for more than 5% of the names, one Yanomami name is added to two or three Creole first names and surnames (5.29% and 0.04%); and for three of them (0.04%), two Yanomami names are added to one Creole first name and one Creole surname.

The composition of the 211 names registered for the Yanomami people of the Ocamo polling station, near another Salesian mission, appears to be more varied. The largest proportion of the names, more than 45%, is composed of one, two or three Yanomami name(s) added to a Spanish first name (32.7%, 10.06%, and 2.84%). Almost 29% of the names are composed exclusively of two, three or four Creole names (19.91%, 9%, and 0.05%), against 4.42% which are composed solely of two, three or four Yanomami names (2%, 2.37% and 0.05%). For more than 7.5% of the names, one or two Yanomami names are added to a Creole surname (6.64%, and 0.95%); for more than 10.5% of the names, one Yanomami name is added to two or three Creole first names and surnames (10.43% and 0.05%); and for four of them (2%), two Yanomami names are added to one Creole first name and one Creole surname.

A striking contrast can be observed between the composition of the registered names for the Yanomami people of the Parima B and the Coshilowe polling stations, near Evangelic missions, where, as we will discuss it afterwards, first names and surnames are for the most part Spanish: almost 59% of the 228 names at the Parima B station, and more than 91% of the 174 at the Coshilowe station. For the first station, 53.07% are composed of only two Creole names and 5.79% of three Creole names; for the second one, 51.72% are composed of two Creole names, 38.5% of three of them, and 1.15% of four of them. For the Coshilowe station, less than 9% of the registered names have at least one Yanomami name; for almost 7% of them, they are composed of one Yanomami name associated with one or two Creole first name(s) and/or surname(s) (3.44%, and 3.45%); and for 1.72% of them, it is two Yanomami first names and one Spanish first name. For the Parima station, more than 31.5% of names are composed of one Yanomami name associated with one or two Creole first name(s) and/or surname(s) (25.44%, and 6.15%), whilst almost 5% of them are composed of two Yanomami names and one or two Spanish first name(s) (3.51%, and 1.32%); 0.88% are composed of two Yanomami names and one Spanish surname, and three names (3.51%) are composed of two Yanomami names only.

¹⁹ And also, Rogério Waimona Yanomami, Sebastião Saruwari Yanomami, Toinho Xikiri Yanomami, Valmir Weyaore Yanomami, Antônio Xapirinama Yanomami, Justino Wari Yanomami, Anselmo Xiropino Yanomami, Joseca Mokahesi Yanomami, Sebastião Saruwari, Pedro Mioti Yanomami, Paulo Yarixiri Yanomami.

²⁰ Published in the bulletin *ProYanomami* n° 51 (2004).

²¹ And as well, Jair Yanomami, Jonas Yanomami, Islique Yanomami, Luis Yanomami, Genésio Yanomami, Lourival Yanomami, Cleonice Yanomami, Juana Yanomami, Josani Yanomami, Zita Yanomami, Ehuana Yanomami, Liliane Yanomami, Rita Yanomami, Fátima Yanomami..., Amarildo Yanomami, Fernando Yanomami, Delfina Yanomami, Guiomar Yanomami, Edimur Yanomami, Ricarado Yanomami, José Yanomami, Denise Yanomami, Junior Yanomami, Jane Yanomami, Esmeraldino Yanomami..., Maria Acosta Yanomami, Marta Yanomami, Eda Yanomami, Mocinha Yanomami, Helena Yanomami, Madalena Yanomami, Marquinho Yanomami, Abilio Yanomami, Salomé Yanomami...

²² Personal communications of R. Athias, and of D. Buchillet.

²³ In 1989, Salesian missionaries worked with N. A. Chagnon on a way to give names to Yanomami pupils, names that could also be used for identity cards and on other occasions where a “precise” name is required (as for a cooperative) (Chagnon, Bortoli and Eguillor, 1989). The project focuses on surnames (with the Yanomami choosing the first names, either of Yanomami and/or Creole origin). The proposal starts with the general idea of giving a surname, which is the father’s paternal name, with a second surname, which is the paternal mother’s name (this corresponds to the Creole/Spanish naming system used in Venezuela). It aims to employ a “scientific” approach by using Western genealogical constructions and the notion of “patrilineage” utilized by Chagnon in his works in order to determine the paternal surnames for the father and for the mother. Nevertheless the project fails in its initial purpose. This can be seen by the fact that in

addition to the notion of lineage there appears the notion of residence in an attempt to conform to the Yanomami way of identifying themselves (the notion of lineage -and a fortiori of patrilineage- is not appropriate, as I discussed elsewhere (see Alès 1990), in the case of the Yanomami). The authors thus introduce the notion of “sub-lineages,” and, in such a way, the paternal line ends up the only one to be considered. Names are made up from the root of the residence name of the oldest male ancestor that Chagnon recorded. Other names are composed in adding this root to the “sub-name” (“Namo” for “Namowei” for instance) of the residence of the “sub-lineage” of the father. The project concludes in giving examples of “the application of the data for the assignation of the pupils’ surnames *taking into account only the paternal surname*,” such as Kuyarawe Javier Namom, Frere Moy Nicolás Namomi, Prateremi Ana Maria Namoni. After this attempt, this naming system remained as an alternative proposal amongst others (I. Eguillor, *pers. com.*).

²⁴ In 1993, the Amazonas State lost its specific status of Amazonas Territory governed centrally from Caracas, and came to experience the effects of regionalisation. The Law of Political and Territorial Division passed by the Territorial Assembly decreed the division of indigenous territories into “municipalities.” This resulted in the participation of indigenous people in local, regional and national elections in which only those possessing a national identity card could take part. Few Yanomami (or other indigenous people) possessed these identity cards, and registration campaigns took place two or three times in the localities where voting would occur (see Alès 2007). Though creolized names are used for pupils at school, it is especially at the moment of registration for identity cards that the creolization or transformation of the Yanomami naming system really gains substance since it then becomes official.

²⁵ A few years ago, these names were not even known by most of those concerned, they only knew first names. Only those who had begun to voyage outside their territory, having been called on to represent the Yanomami at various events in the towns, made use of a surname. At one point, in 1986, it was necessary to ask for an identity card from a Yanomami who wished to travel to Caracas. He only knew his Creole first name given by the missionaries, and a surname had been invented so that his identity conformed to the requirements of the Venezuelan administration.

²⁶ Effectively, it is easier to ask the women who their children are, rather than carrying out a census by foyer and locality, nevertheless the results would not provide the same quality of information.

²⁷ Contrasting with the Western traditional position where it is the father who is the only one who counts, women being considered to have negligible authority in relation to their children.

²⁸ This is relatively frequent in Venezuela, a great number of unions never having been made official.

²⁹ This is exactly what a great number of Venezuelans think about foreigners who bear only one surname, a misunderstanding that has at times led colleagues publishing texts in Spanish to add the surname of the mother after the patronymic name. The patronymic name imposes a constraint in the sense that the practice of such a naming system reveals one of the most important structures of society (this is different from Spain, where two names, the father’s and the mother’s are handed down to children: the possibility of the mother’s name and of both the father’s and the mother’s name was recently introduced in France). For instance, the name transmitted to children along the paternal line, excluding the transmission of the mother’s names in France, in Great Britain and elsewhere, supports a male-centred orientation of society. It illustrates the manner in which male primacy is imposed at a symbolic level of the utmost importance, since it is a question of a system of identification of individuals, and thus a question of their very identity. One’s name, therefore, is not a minor affair, since in addition to this consideration, we must take into account all the prejudices connected with social class and race in relation to the origin of the name.

³⁰ For instance, the Baniwa, Baré, Kurripako and Warekena of the Amazonas State still have an important stock of patronyms of Arawak origin which coexists with Creole names (on this topic, see R. Iribertegui, 2001).

³¹ See Alès 1997, 1999.

³² During a later registration campaign, this was the way that some Yanomami from Parima A were registered. For instance, Kopari Anabel, or Janiama Natalia, for persons respectively from the village of Kopari and of Haniyama (they probably did not know if they had been given a Creole surname, and this highlights that it is a more traditional

way for a Yanomami to be identified). In three of the cases, two surnames were given, like Maicoto Maicoteriama Isabel, or Maicoto Maicoteriama Frederico - “Maicoto” being the name of a village, and “Maicototeriama” the female version for a person from the village “Maicoto.” The composition of these names appears to correspond to an appellation including the names of the two parents (which is probably due to the registration agent). In the region of Koyowe, a missionary had proposed to introduce Yanomami names according to the Creole names previously attributed, and the Yanomami chose to keep the Creole name first (for example, Morales Matoa Silvio, or Mendoza Ficali Antonio - “Matoa,” “, for the village of Matowe, and “Ficali,” “, a Yanomami term which means “garden”).

³³ One of these important house founders mentioned that “he did not know (sur) names like Gonzalez, Blanco, etc., only young people who attend school know them. They are not ‘real names.’ They are names that the Yanomami do not hear and do not use. Now they hear them at election time. Personally he doesn’t think about them and he doesn’t pronounce them. Foreigners give them these names, but it’s pointless, they don’t count.” He explained that the Yanomami have many names by which they identify themselves. These are nicknames and residential names (which change over one’s lifetime as one’s place of residence changes). One of his own nicknames is “Wayowawë,” “, which could be translated as “the angry one” “or “the irascible one” and he has at least three main residential names. If he has to identify himself, he says he is Shokekeretheri Wayowawë, which means inhabitant of the place called “Skokekere” and then his nickname.

³⁴ He said that he did not like the way they have been given Spanish names and that he will change his registered name next time he asks for an identity card. He confirmed that they were given Spanish names by a missionary when they were receiving a religious education. They do not come from schooling, but now the people who attend school all have such names. It is the same missionary that gave these names when they were registering for identity cards. This Yanomami informant asked: why “Blanco” or “Silva?” He was not happy that during the voting session several of them were called by the same name: “Gonzales!” (For each of them who was registered under this name), then, “Sanchez!”, and so on.

³⁵ In accordance with his prior undertakings towards indigenous leaders, the election of Hugo Chavez led to the recognition of the country as a “multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural” nation. One chapter of the new constitution of the Venezuelan Bolivarian republic (which was adopted by referendum on 15th December, 1999) is specifically devoted to indigenous rights, which have also been included in several other articles (RBV 2000). Subsequently, two important laws were passed, which were meant in principle to guarantee the application of constitutional rights: the Law for Demarcation and Guarantee of Indigenous Habitat and Lands and the Organic Law for Indigenous Peoples and Communities (RBV 2001, 2005). They were intended to guarantee indigenous peoples the right to develop in accordance with their own organisational models and values. In reality, the implementation of these laws did not live up to its promises. All the indigenous demarcations of large tracts of lands have been rejected, and the right of consultation on the projects affecting their lands widely ignored. Moreover the speed of the changes and the suggestions for reform introduced into the constitution of 1999, as well as new laws whose aim is to construct 21st century socialism, promote a form of homogenisation that runs counter to indigenous rights, like the right to cultural diversity and to self-determination in the spheres of lifestyle and style of government (on this topic, see Mansutti and Alès, 2007; Alès and Mansutti, 2009).

³⁶ In 2003 a decree established a partial regulation of the Organic Law of Identification to make easier the civil registration of the indigenous people (Decree N° 2686, *Reglamento Parcial de la Ley Orgánica de Identificación*, November 2003); afterwards, with the same objective, the third chapter of the Organic Law of Identification (RBV, 2006) was devoted to the indigenous identification.

³⁷ With the increase of registration in situ and of their comings and goings to the town, it is now more common for the Yanomami to request a new identity card each time they lose or damage the original. They are then even able to give a new name different from the previously registered name.

³⁸ I had finished this article when I read an article by R. Iriberegui (2005) who cites Alex Condori, a Peruvian Amerindian author, who considered the problem of autochthonous names for the Aymara people and other Amerindian people of the continent. This latter explains the process through which indigenous names almost totally disappeared in many groups, but underpins the danger of cultivating the confusion between “indian-

ness” (*indianidad*) and the supposed genuine archetypal indigenous from five hundred years ago: “(...) la forma de ser amerindios que se supone correcta no es más que una recreación de la imagen folclórica bucólica del indígena. Asumir esa imagen como la forma verdadera de ser indios nos pone en clara desventaja frente a los occidentales. Entonces mi pregunta es ¿es la forma de ser indígena ponerse en inferioridad de condiciones?” (*ibidem*: 27). He concludes by arguing that far from any archetypal image of the Amerindian, the important thing about being an Amerindian, whether one has an Indigenous or a Creole name, is the process of consciousness raising of that allows the person to assume his or her “indianness” (and so to avoid feeling “ethnic shame”).

³⁹ At least at the beginning. This primary lack of significance is subsequently abolished in the act of designation of a precise and unique person, which in itself has meaning.

⁴⁰ S. Grunzinski (2002: 31) distinguishes between hybridisation and “métissage.”. The term “mestizo” is used “to designate the mélanges that occurred in the Americas in the sixteenth century - mélanges between individuals, imaginative faculties, and lifestyles originating on four continents (America, Africa, Asia, and Europe).” He uses the term hybridization “for mélanges that occurred within a single civilisation or historic ensemble - Christian Europe, Meso-America - and between traditions that had often coexisted for centuries. Mestizo and hybrid mechanisms concern not only objective processes observable in various domains but also the awareness that individuals had of them in that past, as expressed through the manipulations they effected, the constructs they developed, and the arguments and criticisms they advanced.” Grunzinski (*ibidem*: 214) aims to distinguish “between internal dynamics and processes stemming from the confrontation between the West and indigenous societies. There is no question of defining the ‘nature’ of mestizo processes but rather of revealing the mechanisms of construction that operate within an historical situation marked by colonial-type relationships of power.”

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