

Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

Volume 11
Issue 1 *Volume 11, Issue 1*

Article 4

6-2013

Autodenominations: An Ethnographer's Account from Peruvian Amazonia

Peter Gow
University of St Andrews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gow, Peter (2013). "Autodenominations: An Ethnographer's Account from Peruvian Amazonia," *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 4, 52-64. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol11/iss1/4>

This Special Topics is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Autodenominations: An Ethnographer's Account from Peruvian Amazonia

Peter Gow

University of St Andrews

A phenomenon that has received relatively little attention from the ethnographers of indigenous Amazonian peoples is the recent rise to prominence of autodenominations. These new names for the various indigenous peoples are usually thought of as unproblematic, simply the correct names for objects out there, and the correct names insofar as these are what these peoples call themselves. At the level of ethnography, the concept of autodenomination is an alien one, with little to do with how indigenous people actually think about identities, whether their own or other peoples'. At the level of political practice, the autodenomination emerges out of a series of transactions between NGOs and the indigenous people they work with.

The anthropological concept of creolization has not been much used in the ethnography of indigenous Amazonian peoples, and my contribution here is more to the ethnographic project than to the elucidation of the concept. That said, the very idea of creolization, and especially the linguistic concept of creole languages, raises an interesting question: what sorts of linguistic, social, and cultural practices arise when people of markedly different backgrounds in linguistic, social, and cultural terms are suddenly thrown together in a shared enterprise? The emergence of autodenominations is a good example of such a situation of creolization since it obliges both indigenous Amazonian peoples and their non-indigenous supporters to generate a shared and novel language in which to discuss the former. However, this new situation is necessarily marked by the power asymmetry generated by the reality that the NGO's remain key brokers between indigenous political organizations and international sources of funding.

The imposition from without of a specific model of who indigenous peoples are, and of what their political actions should consist, is one manifestation of this power asymmetry. NGO workers operate with a vision of indigenous people as natural proprietors of their specific and distinctive cultures, construed as intellectual property, and consequently as natural proprietors of their identities. If these identities are to be represented, they must be represented by the people who own them. In short, indigenous people must name themselves. The autodenomination is therefore a feature of a classic Western model of the politics of representation. That these ideas of intellectual property, identity, and representation have little or nothing to do with indigenous people's own ideas about knowledge, relations, and naming is not addressed.

Ethnographers are by the nature of their work concerned primarily with people's own ideas about their lives. I will explore some of the problems raised by these names in one area of south-eastern Peru, the Alto Ucayali, Bajo Urubamba, and Tambo region, and with regard to the parallel cases of the neighbouring Asháninka and Piro peoples. My concern is with how these two peoples have reacted to the politics of representation which, while alien to their own history and experienced by them as novel, provides them now with important arenas for action.

There are two points to be stressed about my ethnographic account here. First, as I began to think this issue through, it occurred to me that the idea that people should be named by the same word that they call themselves must have originated in some specific social context of which I remain unaware. It would be interesting to know what that social context was and how and why this idea spread to others and came, for many people, to seem self-evident. However, my fieldwork is conducted among Piro and Asháninka people living along the Bajo Urubamba river, and my ethnographic expertise is in *their* ideas, and in how these ideas originate and transform (see Gow [1991, 2001] for fuller accounts). Secondly, ethnography is a form of representation, but it is not a political representation in the specific sense of the politics of representation. My ethnography is my description of Piro and Asháninka people, and is not a substitute for how, in a world politically different to this one, Piro and Asháninka people might choose to describe themselves to the same kinds of audiences.

There are two initial points to be noted about politics here. First, I know of no strident demands by Scottish people to be called “Scottish” by speakers of Spanish, French, or German, nor by Dutch people to be called in English by their true name, nor even by Welsh people to be called in English by some slightly less offensive term. At most, Scottish people might prefer not to be called “Scotch,” which is simply a mishearing of a Scots word which has the English form of “Scottish,” and the offensive nature of “Welsh” is probably historically too remote to impinge on the people so designated. Politics, in Europe, does not occur at that sort of level, and it would be considered utterly trivial. Secondly, this essay is written in English. I could perhaps, with some difficulty due to lack of formal training and practice, have written it in literary Scots. But how many people can now read literary Scots, that great language of the poets? And why has this number become so few? The significance of these two reflections on the politics of language suffuses this account.

From Campa to Asháninka

In his book, *The Cosmic Serpent*, Jeremy Narby writes the following, about the Asháninka people among whom he did fieldwork

Until recently, and for unknown reasons, Spanish speakers have called the Ashaninka “Campas”. The etymology of the word is doubtful. As Weiss (1969) writes: “The term ‘Campa’ is not a word in the Campa language” (p. 44). According to him, the word probably comes from the Quechua “tampa” (“in disorder, confused”) or “ttampa” (“disheveled”) (p. 61). However, there is no agreement among specialists on the word’s exact etymology – see Varese (1973: pp. 139-144). Renard-Casevitz (1993) justifies her use of the word “campa” as follows: “The term campa is not appreciated as an ethnonym, though it does present a certain convenience... I use campa for want of a term with a comparable reach to designate the totality of the Arawak subsets who share a notable cultural trait: the prohibition on internal warfare, among all except the Piro” (pp. 29, 31). In the 1980s, one of the first demands put forth by the different Ashaninka organizations was that people stop designating them by a name that they do not use in their own language. [1998:169]

The sources Narby cites are in English, Spanish, and French, and refer to Asháninka and Quechua. By the very nature of language, we might expect words for things to differ across different languages. Why is it, then, that the Asháninka people apparently demand that everyone call them by a word in Asháninka, a language that they are perfectly aware that most people do not speak?

Narby’s account, while estimable for its liberality, is also troubling. When they speak in Asháninka, Asháninka people happily call the neighbouring Piro people

*simirints*¹. This word does not exist in the Piro language, although Piro people are well aware of what it means. Why, then, do the Asháninka people insist on being called by a name that comes from their own language, while they are perfectly happy to call their neighbours by a name inexistent in the language of those same neighbours. Are the Asháninka people hypocrites? I wrote this essay to rescue the Asháninka people from this potential charge.

Since the 1980's, Asháninka people have increasingly refused to be identified in Spanish as "Campa." This has led to certain number of problems, for many "ex-Campa" people do not speak Asháninka, but rather other dialects like Ashéninka, Ashíninka, or Nomatsiguenga. Consistency would imply that these names should also be used, which they are. However, the speakers of all these dialects consider that they are the same people, and so some name has to be used for them all. The term that is generally used, for better or worse, is Asháninka.

The word "Asháninka" as the Spanish name for these people emerged, as Narby noted, in the 1980's. The political organization of Asháninka people in various areas responded to a variety of political threats that they faced, especially from mass colonization from the Andes, the growth of cocaine production and trading, and the armed insurrections of *Sendero Luminoso* and the *Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru* and the responses from the police and armed forces. Dangerous political circumstances were hardly a novelty for Asháninka people, nor was the necessity to combat them, often violently, as Varese's remarkable book [1973] shows. What was new was the form such combat was now expected to take, political organizations that *represented* Asháninka people in the sense of the Western politics of representation. To be acceptable makers of political demands on the state, such political organizations had to be centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratized, a model of political organization locally absent and which therefore had to be imported from outside at some cost. Further, to be effective at all, they required considerable logistical and financial support from extra-local agencies such as NGOs and national level indigenous movements. This is not to say that the political will and energy of these movements was of exogenous origin, which would be manifestly false. My claim is simply that the recognizability, and hence national and international legitimacy of such political movements, drew on forms alien to Asháninka people.

Why did the assumption of Asháninka as their preferred name form part of this process? There is nothing particularly obvious about this. I remember being stunned to read in 1982, in an indigenous rights newsletter, an article called, "*¿No soy Campa, yo soy Asháninka!*" ("I am not Campa, I am Asháninka!") by the German anthropologist Manfred Schaefer [1982].² I had just spent almost two years living in an indigenous community on the Bajo Urubamba, which had many Asháninka residents, some of whom I knew very well. These people always called themselves Campa when speaking Spanish, and were so called by others. None of these people had ever suggested to me that the term Campa was offensive. By the 1990's, however, all of these people called themselves "Asháninka," and would not use "Campa" (although others did). If, as is claimed, Asháninka people always disliked being called "Campa", why did they wait until the 1980's to assert this? Why did they not tell me this in the Gran Pajonal, the Tambo, and the Ene areas in 1978, or on the Bajo Urubamba a couple of years later?

Narby, along with many other writers, argues that this was due to the rise of Asháninka political organizations. I agree, but I do not think that there is anything transparent about the sudden assertion of an autodenomination. Instead, we are dealing here with the development of shared political language between Asháninka people on one side and certain anthropologists and NGO workers on the other. Crucially, this shared political language was what has been termed, in more restricted situations, *legaleeze*, the imaginary hyper-translatable space in which all languages are simultaneously translatable into all other languages.

To my knowledge, nobody has addressed the phenomenon of the word Asháninka as an autodenomination as an ethnographic issue. In particular, it has not been explored as a linguistic phenomenon. The core of the issue is not so much

what indigenous peoples in this region call themselves, but specifically what they call themselves *when speaking in Spanish*. This has two features. First, autodenominations like Asháninka act as loanwords into Spanish, and then other international languages. Despite their strong politicization, these loanwords mark the limits of the linguistic interchange: the words for other key concepts such as culture, identity, representation, etc. flow from Spanish and the other international languages into local indigenous languages. Secondly, Spanish silently becomes the only acceptable local language in which to make political demands, which has the effect of structuring political discourse around the highly unequal access to educational provision and consequent linguistic proficiency in erudite Spanish in the region. For example, Asháninka people have probably been saying, “¡No soy Campa, yo soy Asháninka!” (“I am not Campa, I am Asháninka!”) for a very long time, but in order to be heard, they had to say it in erudite Spanish.

In order to understand the problem of autodenominations more deeply, it is worth asking what the word *asháninka* means in the Asháninka language. The Asháninka do refer to themselves as *asháninka* when speaking their own language. It means “our kinspeople.” It is in primary contrast to terms like *simirintsi*, “Piro people”, *chori*, “Andean people”, and especially *viracocha*, “white people.” To call others *asháninka* is to include them within the boundaries of an ethical universe, and to exclude them from the forms of alterity that lie beyond that boundary, where ethical rules do not apply. For example, *viracocha* are not *asháninka*, and relations with “white people” are not governed by Asháninka ethics. The word *asháninka* is therefore not a name, but a deictic. It only makes sense when one knows who is using it to refer to whom.

But why would the Asháninka want others to use the deictic *Asháninka* to name themselves when speaking Spanish? Why would they want others to call them by a word that implies ethical inclusion of those others? There are other words for “people” in Asháninka, and ones that do not imply inclusivity with others. After all, it does not on the face of it make a great deal of sense for a Scottish anthropologist or a Limeño engineer to describe the Asháninka as “our kinspeople”. A Scottish anthropologist or a Limeño engineer are *viracocha*, “white people”, not *asháninka*.

My sense of this issue is that the Asháninka wanted to be called Asháninka precisely to assert the ethical inclusion of those others who used this term. For some Asháninka in the early 1980’s, I suggest, the Spanish word *campa* became associated with *viracocha*, the various kinds of white people who oppressed them. As they organized politically, these Asháninka people sought out an alliance with others who would help them. In this they were following a standard model for dealing with severe crises in their world. As Brown and Fernandez have so beautifully shown [1991], Asháninka people habitually respond to local political crises by searching for distant others who will help them. These others, often called *amachenca*, have, Brown and Fernandez argue, included Juan Santos Atahualpa, Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald, Seventh Day Adventists, and leftwing Guevarist guerrillas. These *amachenca* others ally themselves with the Asháninka people and help them to fight their local non-Asháninka enemies.

An important feature of the Asháninka-*amachenca* relationship is that, while it originates in an extreme form of alterity, it is ethically reciprocal. The *amachenca* and Asháninka come to see each other as “kinspeople,” *asháninka*, people bound together by mutual kindness and support. That is why the Asháninka suddenly decided that they wanted to become known by others as Asháninka. This was not, obviously, because they wanted everyone to call them by their ‘true name,’ but because they wanted the *amachenca* others to call them *asháninka*, “our kinspeople.” They wanted those others to include them within the universe of ethical responsibility of those others. The word *campa* came to stand for the feared Asháninka-*viracocha* relation, while *Asháninka* came to stand for the desired Asháninka-*amachenca* relation. Further, it seems significant that they wanted to be called by an Asháninka word; that is, they wanted to be addressed in their own language. This solves the strange problem mentioned above of why they wanted to be called in Spanish by an Asháninka word.

This analysis fits well with what is known of Asháninka ethnography and history, and more generally for what Viveiros de Castro has termed the perspectival cosmology of indigenous Amazonian people [1998]. I suspect that the key seed for the rise in Asháninka was probably from anthropologists and NGO workers concerned, after the style of a radical politics of representation, to call the Asháninka by their authentic autodenomination. But once that started, it would have been interpreted by Asháninka people as the genesis of a new Asháninka-*amachenca* relation. After all, the indigenous political movements that developed among the Asháninka in the 1980's could not emerge without importing a non-Asháninka model of political action, and could not continue without enduring outside support.

My argument here develops from my own experience. While I was doing fieldwork on the Bajo Urubamba in the early 1980's, an incident occurred that disturbed me. At the landing strip of the little town of Atalaya, an old Asháninka man I had no memory of having ever met rushed up to me, and said, "*Aviro, nosháninka*." This much I understood, for it means, "It is you, my kinsman."³ I politely replied, "*Narori, nosháninka*," "It's me, my kinsman." Then, unfortunately, the old man began to speak to me rapidly and intensely in Asháninka, accompanying his speech with gestures. I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. The old man's talk died down into the excruciating embarrassment that accompanies any moment of mistaken identity. When I asked my companions why this had happened, they explained that this man was from the Pajonal, and had probably mistaken me for a *gringo* missionary (Adventist or SIL).

Piro, *yine* and Yine

My account of the emergence of the word Asháninka as the authentic autodenomination of these people can be contrasted with the parallel but very different emergence of a Piro autodenomination. Søren Hvalkof has written that

The term 'Piro' is the most common name for this indigenous group in the ethnographic and historical literature. Nevertheless, as Amazonian indigenous groups have become politically organized this was substituted by the name which these people call themselves by: 'Yine'. (García Hierro, Hvalkof and Gray [1998:156]).

'Yine' was not the name by which these people called themselves until they were obliged to do so by indigenous political movements, anthropologists, and NGO workers.

Hvalkof's account contains a small but telling detail: the accent on the "i" in the word Yine. *Yine* is clearly a neologism in Spanish or English, but it is unclear where this accent might come from. The obvious source of this word is the Piro word written *yine* in the orthography developed by the very talented linguist Esther Matteson of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), the orthography familiar to most speakers. This elegant orthography uses no accents, for stress pattern is extremely regular in Piro.⁴ Spanish speakers would naturally pronounce the word much as it is pronounced in Piro. I can only think that the accented "i" is there to make the word look exotic, more Amazonian, and more indigenous. The case has a parallel in Brazil, where the Cashinahua word *kashinava* (with primary stress on the first syllable) is rendered "Kaxinauá," apparently on the basis that 'real indigenous words' are obligatorily accented in the stress pattern of Tupí. As McCallum has pointed out [1997], such usages have the effect of trivializing and folklorizing actual indigenous linguistic and social usages.⁵

In the early 1980's, I never heard any Piro person call themselves, when speaking in Spanish, anything other than "Piro". I had read in the literature (Chirif and Mora [1977], Ribeiro and Wise [1978]) that the Piro call themselves Yine. When directly asked about this by me, however, Piro people denied this, and assured me that the Piro word *yine* means *gente*, "people, humans, indigenous people." One man

told me, “*yine* does not mean Piro, it means people, the Campa are *yine*, and the Amahuaca are *yine*.” I asked if I was *yineru* (singular male form of *yine*), and he said with a certain embarrassment, “No, you are *kajitu* (a white man).”

When I asked this same man how Piro people would refer to each other when speaking Piro, he told me *numolene*, “our kinspeople” (hence the Piro equivalent of *asháninka*). While I have heard *numolene* so used, the most common term in Piro for Piro people is in fact *yine*. I found this confusing, so I asked Pablo Rodríguez for enlightenment. Pablo had worked as a language informant for the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and hence had reflected consciously on the nature of his first language. He told me

“When you are in the forest, and you see something moving, you might say *yinerni* (“It is a single male *yine*”) if you realize that it is a human, rather than an animal. In the village, however, when someone arrives, you would say *yinerni* to mean it is a Piro person arriving, rather than a Campa person.”

The Piro term *yine* therefore conforms exactly to the Ucayali Spanish term *gente*.

Most Piro people are well aware that their name comes from the word *pirobo*, from language of the Conibo people, their northern neighbours. They also know that it is not a pleasant term, since it means “*cabuara* catfish people”: *cabuara* have thick leathery skin and strong-smelling dark flesh. Piro people consider the *cabuara* ugly, and many will not eat it. As a name it is clearly a nickname (Piro: *rumutikolu ginaka*, “affection name”), and is hence accepted with good humour, for it expresses what the Conibo people see in the Piro people. The Piro call the Conibo *chayiko*, “very much *chai*/brothers-in-law” (from Conibo *chai*, “brother-in-law”). Brothers-in-law habitually joke with each other, and call each other by nicknames which are invariably offensive: these names are also shared, such that a man becomes known by his nickname for his brother-in-law. To call oneself by an offensive nickname of a neighbouring people is therefore to affirm a jocular and affectionate relation of potential affinity with those neighbours.

In 1995, when I returned to the Bajo Urubamba after a seven year gap caused by the civil war, things had slightly changed. One Piro leader who was important in OIRA (*Organización Indígena de la Región de Atalaya*) tentatively told me that the organization covered “*comunidades asháninka and yineri*,” “Asháninka and Yineri communities.” I must have looked a bit surprised at his mispronunciation of this Piro word, for this man was a bilingual school teacher and a fastidious speaker of Piro. He hastened to explain to me that Yineri meant Piro. Yineri is a hispanicization of *yineru*, “single male human, Piro man” (Ucayali Spanish lacks the mid unrounded vowel *u*). The usage struck me as interesting, since “single male human” is as an odd name for the collectivity called Piro. I suspect that Yineri, as an autodenomination, emerged in the specific conditions of OIRA as an organization. Confronted by Asháninka leaders who were vocal about being Asháninka, and quite possibly specifically asked for the authentic autodenomination of the Piro, a Piro leader would be forced to speculate on who he might be in this new and threatening setting. *Yineru*, “single male human, Piro man”, would be an obvious candidate in these existential circumstances. If a Piro person were forced to say *yineru* while speaking Spanish, it would emerge as Yineri. Nobody else told me that they were Yineri, and consistently called themselves Piro when talking in Spanish.

By the early 2000’s, my Piro informants were willing to admit that Yine was a name for them, and would occasionally even use this word when talking about themselves in the context of political actions in the arena of indigenous movements. Outside of these contexts, however, Piro people never called themselves Yine when speaking in Spanish. They continued to use ‘Piro’ to refer to themselves in Spanish. Nobody ever suggested to me that they found being called Piro offensive or that they would prefer to be called Yine. It seemed to me that, at most, Piro people put up with being called Yine in Spanish.

Part of the resistance of Piro people to using their supposed authentic autodenomination is linguistic. All Piro people are multilingual, and they view

languages as highly discrete entities. They very seldom use Piro words when speaking Spanish: I know of only three Piro words that are regularly used in speaking Spanish. It is likely that the use of the Piro word *yine* in Spanish discourse offends Piro people's linguistic sensibilities. NGO workers, none of whom to my knowledge understand or speak Piro, have different linguistic sensibilities, and happily use a Piro word when speaking Spanish, hence providing their speech with an entirely spurious flavour of local knowledge.

A deeper sense of this issue was revealed to me in 2008, in conversation with Limber Melendez. Limber is from a fairly wealthy family from the centre of the city of Pucallpa, and he could (although he did not) have claimed to be *blanco*, "white." He has been happily married for many years to his Piro wife Miriam Mosombite, and, unusually for men of such origins, is completely unashamed of this fact. He understands the Piro language, sometimes even speaks it, and lives happily in Miriam's community, much like any indigenous person. He managed to get himself elected as that community's *presidente*, its official representative in regional politics, including the politics of indigenous political organizations. He quite happily defined himself as Yine in such contexts, but he never referred to himself as Piro. To be Piro is to have been raised by senior Piro kinspeople in a particular fashion, something that was emphatically not true of Limber: as such he is not *yineru*, but *kajitu*, and he knows what that means. But he could be Yine because this referred to specific political alignments in the regional political system.

What Piro people had discovered over the twenty eight years from 1980 to 2008, I argue, is that indigenous political movements demand that indigenous peoples have an autodenomination, and so the Piro obliged them by accepting, albeit reluctantly and contrary to all of their own ideas, that Yine was, in fact, their name in certain contexts. Now given that Piro people actually are indigenous people, and given that indigenous political movements are supposed to represent them in their own terms, it would seem that Yine as the autodenomination of the Piro is a foreign imposition, and almost certainly from NGO workers. Piro people are not very keen on using this word when speaking in Spanish, but seem to be willing to put up with it in order to continue to benefit from the projects the NGOs provide. As I have discussed at length elsewhere (Gow [1991], [2001]), Piro people are well-used to putting up with the importunate demands of those they call *kajine*, "white people."

Amazonian onomastic systems

Clearly, my ethnographic account of these phenomena would be greatly improved by placing it within a wider account of indigenous Amazonian onomastic systems, which have been a major topic in the regional literature. In particular, my account here of autodenominations provides a strange mirror-image of the burgeoning literature on exonyms initiated by the work of Patrick Menget on the Txicão/Ikpeng people of Central Brazil, "Au nom des autres" [1977]. Unfortunately, while I have a reasonably good understanding of Piro onomastics, no detailed study of Asháninka onomastics is, to my knowledge, available. For the Asháninka, we have Weiss' brief statement

...kinship relations with everyone in the tribe are recognized. The entire network of social interrelationships, indeed, can be seen as primarily a kinship network. Individuals are identified more often in terms of their kinship relationship to the speaker or some known person than by name. Personal names are usually nicknames given in infancy by parents, but there are Campas who have no personal names for whom identification and self-identification can only be in terms of how they are related to their fellows. [1970: 241].

Weiss is clearly referring to the use of names derived from the Asháninka language, as opposed to those of Spanish origin, and his account would certainly not apply to those Asháninka people involved in the kinds of social processes that led to the adoption of the autodenomination from the 1980's onwards. But the situation that Weiss describes for the 1960's has clear relevance to the issue under analysis, for the very word chosen as an autodenomination is not a name, but a kin term.

While my own data on Asháninka people from the Bajo Urubamba from 1980 onwards provided only one case of a man who appeared to have no name, it was certainly true that names were less important to Asháninka people than to their neighbours such as the Piro. Older Asháninka people often claimed to have no surnames, and when asked for them, invented them on an *ad hoc* basis, or had them invented by others. More widely, there seems to be a general aversion for naming social units that lie within the Asháninka social world. There are no named subgroups recognized by these people. At most, specific subgroupings can be referred to by specific geographical terms such as *tampusati*, "dwellers on the Tambo river," or *keshisati*, "dwellers in the grasslands" (that is, people of the Pajonal), but these are descriptors based on geographical or ecological features, not names. Indeed, the most dramatically developed area of Asháninka onomastics is precisely toponymy: as Weiss has documented, they have a remarkably elaborated series of names for places, rivers, mountains, etc., many of which are linguistically analysable [1970:247-254, 550-7]. In this context, it becomes easier to understand why, when stimulated to 'name' themselves, they do so with a collective kin term, and not with a name.

The Situation for Piro people is quite different. All Piro people have a series of names: *givaka potu*, *yokle givaka*, and *rumutikolu givaka*, meaning real name, extended name, and affectionate name. The first two types correspond to non-Piro personal names and surnames respectively, a pattern that has existed since at least the late nineteenth century, while the third refers to nicknames given by specific kinspeople and affines at different life stages. All names are regularly used in everyday life, especially to junior kinspeople, given that there is effectively only one kin term of address for all younger people. Further, Piro people hold that the distribution of Piro people among a plethora of named subgroups (currently via surnames) has always been true of their people. The ancestors were said to have been divided up among a series of endogamous subgroups that, while speaking the same language, were mutually hostile: contemporary Piro life began when these subgroups began to intermarry. These subgroups were named, such as *koshichineru*, *manxineru*, *nachineru*, etc., and some of these subgroup "extended names" continue as surnames to the present. Because Piro communities are spread out in a variety of separate river basins, Piro people do use geographical descriptors of the form found among the Asháninka, but this is less common. Piro people experience themselves as living in a landscape of named peoples, of whom they are one.

It might be argued that the Piro do not have a Piro language name. *Yine* is ambiguous in these terms, since it does not exclusively refer to Piro people nor is it a name. Of course, Piro people do have names such as *shimirintsi* or *pirobo*, but these are not Piro words, but rather from the Asháninka and Conibo languages respectively. They function precisely like the *rumutikolu givaka*, "affection name" of specific Piro persons, given by other people to express some singularity of the named. It seems significant in this regard that Piro speakers never seem to have suggested *numolene*, "our kinspeople" as a possible autodenomination, because this is precisely a collective kin term, not a name. As such, they reluctantly gravitated to *Yine*, which is, in a sense, the answer to the question of how one would say "Piro" in the Piro language. It is not a name, but it will have to do for this purpose.

Possible confirmation of this analysis comes in the form of an early alternative for *Yine* as the autodenomination of Piro people, *Yine Yami*. This is a juxtaposition of the two Piro words, *yine* and *yami*, "Urubamba/Ucayali/Amazon River." It seems to have been formulated by a bilingual schoolteacher in Miaría village, and is in the title of the indigenous federation based in that village. This federation covers communities in the department of Cuzco, and hence without formal links to OIRA,

which operates in the department of Ucayali. Yine Yami never became popular outside of the Miaría area, and to my knowledge is not even used by its inhabitants outside of the context of the federation. Its advantage as a term seems to be that in Piro terms it actually contains a name, albeit a toponym.

Autodenominations

Given the contrasting histories of the autodenominations of the Asháninka and Piro, it is worth asking why autodenominations were ever thought to matter. In both of the cases discussed here, there is little evidence that indigenous people think of autodenominations as the true names of their identities as natural proprietors of their cultures. Even where indigenous people genuinely want to be called by others by the term that they call themselves, this term turns out not to be a name, but a deictic. The Asháninka desire to be called Asháninka is not a desire to be referred to by a true name, but the desire to be addressed by a deictic which implies ethically reciprocal recognition.

Where does the concern for autodenominations by the non-indigenous supporters of indigenous political movements come from? From the case studies presented here, it does not originate among indigenous Amazonian people themselves. It must therefore have originated elsewhere. I am unaware of any literature on this topic, and, as noted before, it is usually treated as so transparent by anthropologists and other supporters of indigenous peoples as to require no further elucidation (on this topic see also Alès, in this volume). What follows is my own tentative reconstruction of how this issue came to matter in southeastern Peru.

A concern with autodenominations is fairly old in the ethnographic literature on Peruvian Amazonia. The German ethnologist Günther Tessmann published his general survey of indigenous peoples in Peruvian Amazonia, *Die Indianer Nordost-Perus*, in 1930. It consists of the answers to a predetermined list of questions about specific cultural traits uniform for all the indigenous peoples covered. I am unaware why this issue should have been of interest to Tessmann, and the earlier but similar project of the American anthropologist William C. Farabee showed no interest in autodenominations [1922]. Internal evidence suggests that Tessmann was concerned to show that the indigenous peoples he identified and meticulously inventoried were genuine entities for local people. He was as interested in what these people called themselves as in what they were called in the literature, and crucially, in what they called their neighbours. This concern with what have come to be known as exonyms in the literature does not suggest that Tessmann thought of autodenominations as of any specific import as such, but rather saw them as evidence of the uniqueness of a given people/culture.

The politicization of autodenominations seems to have begun with SINAMOS, the organization commissioned to promote land reform of the left wing military dictatorship of General Juan Alvarado Velasco. In 1977, Alberto Chirif and Carlos Mora published the *Atlas de comunidades nativas*, a general survey of all indigenous peoples in Peruvian Amazonia. Included in the information on each people, where possible, was their autodenomination. However, SINAMOS was concerned with the implementation of land titling for indigenous *communities*, as the title of the book suggests, not indigenous *peoples*, and there no suggestion that autodenominations were important politically in and of themselves. Indeed the major theorist behind land reform for indigenous people in Peruvian Amazonia, Stefano Varese, had happily written a book about the Campa, fully aware that they call themselves Asháninka [1973]. SINAMOS, following Varese, was interested in what all indigenous Amazonian peoples had in common due to their historical conditions, rather than in what made each group separate and different. The inclusion of autodenominations in Chirif and Mora's book was probably inspired by Tessmann, but also responded to the actions of another organization was already of major importance in the lives of indigenous people in Peruvian Amazonia, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL).

In 1978, Darcy Ribeiro, the exiled Brazilian anthropologist, and Mary Ruth Wise, the director of the SIL in Peru, published *Los Grupos Etnicos de la Amazonía Peruana*, in which autodenominations are given for those groups for whom they were available. This volume is an outgrowth of Ribeiro's classic *Os Índios e a Civilização* [1970], which showed no interest in autodenominations, and the primary inspiration for including them in this book would seem to have been Tessmann's work. The SIL have shown relatively little interest in the potential political significance of these autodenominations, and largely continue in their Spanish and English publications to call the various indigenous peoples of the region by names that had become standard in the ethnographic and linguistic literature, although this is changing.

That said, SIL action in Peruvian Amazonia was strongly concerned with indigenous languages and with the development of bilingual schools. Autodenominations were important to the SIL as linguistic phenomena, and the titles of their didactic materials regularly feature autodenominated languages or peoples. SIL action certainly sensitized many bilingual schoolteachers and other indigenous people to the nature of their own linguistic practices in a way that had never occurred before. It is likely that the constant concern with the use of maternal language words for things in the formation and practice of bilingual school teachers laid the basis for the potential concern of indigenous people with autodenominations.

The land titling project of SINAMOS seems to have been closely coordinated with the SIL, which was certainly the only organization in the region that had the knowledge and logistical capacity to connect the state to indigenous peoples. This function was a contractual obligation of the SIL, and it had been doing so already for some decades. Central to this function were the indigenous bilingual teachers themselves, who were usually the best educated people in indigenous communities and those most at home in dealing with state bureaucratic systems. These teachers, of course, were the ones who had been most sensitized to language use and the politics of naming things.

As previously stated, neither SINAMOS nor the SIL seem to have considered the use of autodenominations important politically. The key change came with the disbanding of SINAMOS and the increasing indifference of the Peruvian state towards indigenous Amazonian people. Militants from SINAMOS set up NGOs like CIPA, and indigenous peoples, now lacking in any government agency specifically concerned with their conditions, found themselves obliged to establish their own political federations to represent themselves to the state. The former militants and indigenous people were thus forced to rely on international aid for support for their local organizations (personal communications from Alberto Chirif and Carlos Mora).

It was at this point that autodenominations became politicized. For the SIL, indigenous peoples were souls to be saved through translation of the Bible into their languages and through education, while for SINAMOS, they were economically and politically marginalized citizens to be mobilized for the transformation of an underdeveloped country. Autodenominations were central to neither project. In the globalized market of international aid, however, neither evangelization nor the nationalist political integration of indigenous peoples mattered. What could matter, however, was their cultural specificity, a property amenable to various sorts of visible and quantifiable enhancement and audit. In this socio-economic milieu, what indigenous peoples say and do became their intellectual property, and the core of their identities. Given the Western model of the politics of representation, indigenous peoples had to represent themselves. How indigenous people name things, and specifically how they name themselves, began to matter.

I am not suggesting that indigenous people are so benighted that they will simply comply with any demand made on them in return for money. Instead, I am arguing that the politics of representation matters to the international aid agencies, and is indeed a non-negotiable feature of their action, and hence sets up

transactional opportunities for indigenous people. These transactional opportunities, however, are explored by what indigenous people themselves find possible and desirable. Given that indigenous people differ from each other, what they find possible and desirable varies too. For Asháninka people, an authentic autodenomination operates to set up a new *asháninka-amachenca* relation, and hence a relation that they find possible and desirable. For Piro people, an authentic autodenomination offends their linguistic sensibilities, and is a minor irritant they are obliged to endure in order to reap the benefits of their political movements.

What autodenominations are not is a universal feature of all indigenous people's ideas about themselves and the world. For obvious reasons, indigenous people in Peruvian Amazonia did not spontaneously develop for themselves the Western model of the politics of representation, nor did they spontaneously develop for themselves the linked ideas of themselves as the natural proprietors of their ideas and actions, and of those ideas and actions as their culture and intellectual property. But other people who hold these propositions to be true have become an important feature of the lived worlds of indigenous people, and so have to be dealt with.

In conclusion, I want to address briefly the politics of this issue. If, as is true, Asháninka people want people like me to call them Asháninka, it seems only common politeness to do so. However, politeness and politics have, from their shared beginnings, radically diverged. The desire of the Asháninka people to be called Asháninka has been taken by others beyond politeness and been politicized. It has gone from being what you *ought* to do, and become what you *must* do. It strikes me as extremely unlikely that Asháninka people ever intended that to happen, given their own political philosophy. As the 'ought' gives way to the 'must' we enter a different political philosophy, and one that asserts simple universal rules that everyone must follow. It became illegitimate for Piro people to call themselves, or be called by others, by the "name of affection" given to them by their Conibo neighbours. A politics that forbids, or even simply disapproves of, that sort of thing has something very seriously wrong with it.

Notes

¹Despite long co-residence with Asháninka people, I could not claim to reliably understand, far less speak, the Asháninka language. I do, however, understand enough to know that my statement here is true.

²The spelling of Asháninka with a "c" or a "k" has a complex political history all of its own.

³Juan Pablo Sarmiento (personal communication) has pointed out to me the man's phrase was a question, "Is it you, my kinsman?", rather than a statement.

⁴This is only true of Ucayali-Urubamba and Manú Piro dialects. Manchineri, spoken on the Yaco River, has a more complex stress pattern.

⁵As an autodenomination, Asháninka has its own problem with accents. Earlier versions of the spelling were Ashaninka or Ashaninca. Unwary Spanish speakers tended to accent the word on the penultimate syllable, hence proving that they had never actually heard the word spoken by an Asháninka speaker. The accented written form, unnecessary for native speakers, solves that problem.

Acknowledgements

My fieldwork on the Bajo Urubamba between 1980 and 2008 was funded by the Social Science Research Council, the British Museum, the Nuffield Foundation, the British Academy, and the London School of Economics. I thank Angela Torresan, Ernst Halbmayer, and Elke Mader for invitations to present previous versions of it at the AAA and EASA conferences, and to Catherine Alès, Fernando Santos-Granero, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and Aparecida Vilaça for their advice, and to

Juan Pablo Sarmiento and Christopher Hewlett for enlightening discussions of the region's ethnography.

References

- Alès, Catherine
2013 "Systems of Naming and Creolization: Authentic Acculturation or Authentic Tradition? The Yanomami case" (this volume)
- Brown, Michael F. and Eduardo Fernandez
1991 *War of Shadows: The Struggle for Utopia in the Peruvian Amazon*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press.
- Chirif, Alberto and Carlos Mora
1977 *Atlas de comunidades nativas*, SINAMOS, Lima.
- Farabee, William Curtis
1922 *Indian Tribes of Eastern Peru*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of and Ethnology, Harvard University, Volume 10, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- García Hierro, Pedro, Soren Hvalkof and Andrew Gray,
1998 *Liberation through Land Rights in Peruvian Amazon*, Copenhagen: IWGIA Document no. 9.
- Gow, Peter
1991 *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University Press.
2001 *An Amazonian Myth and its History*, Oxford University Press.
- McCallum, Cecilia
1997 "Comendo com Txai, comendo como Txai. A sexualização de relações étnicas na Amazônia contemporânea" *Revista de Antropologia* (40:1).
- Menget, Patrick,
1977 "Au nom des autres: Classification des relations sociales chez les Txicão du Haut-Xingú (Brésil)", doctoral thesis, Université de Paris X.
- Narby, Jeremy
1999 *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge*, London, Victor Gollancz.
- Renard-Casevitz, France-Marie
1993 "Guerriers du sel, sauniers de la paix", *L'Homme*, 126-8:25-43.
- Ribeiro, Darcy
1970 *Os Índios e a Civilização: A Integração das populações indígenas no Brasil moderno*, Sao Paulo.
- Ribeiro, Darcy and Mary Ruth Wise
1978 *Los Grupos Etnicos de la Amazonía Peruana*, Lima: ILV.
- Schafer, Manfred
1982 "Yo no soy campa, ¡soy asháninca!" *Amazonía Indígena*, No. 4.
- Tessmann, Günter,
1930 *Die Indianer Nordost-Perus*, Hamburg.
- Varese, Stefano
1973 *La Sal de Los Cerros (Una aproximación al mundo Campa)* (first edition, 1968), Lima: Retablo de Papel Ediciones.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo
1998 "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (N.S.) 4:469-88.
- Weiss, Gerald
1975 *Campa Cosmology: The World of a Forest Tribe in South America*, New York: American Museum of Natural History.