

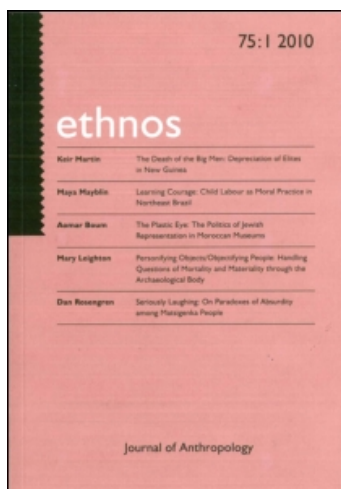
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# Xará: Namesakes in Southern Mozambique and Bahia (Brazil)

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**ABSTRACT** *In Maputo (Southern Mozambique) and Bahia (Brazil), the most commonly used word to refer to namesakes is xará – a word of Amerindian origin. Although the institutions in question diverge considerably in each of these contexts, the two usages come together in that the sharing of a personal name establishes an alliance not only between the two persons involved but also among their relations. In this way, it is argued that the namesake institution is both supervening upon filiation and is a way of closing the local universe of relatedness upon itself. By superimposing a set of crossing ties, the namesake institution consolidates the entities at play and their relations. Nevertheless, much like filiation, upon which it is dependent, the namesake relation is one of co-responsibility and fusion between the partners, not of reciprocal responsibility. The latter is the product of the triangulation that such relations of alliance produce.*

**KEYWORDS** *Relatedness, person, alliance, namesakes, Mozambique, Brazil*

One of the more recurrent aspects of personal naming in the ethnographic record is the way in which homonymy – be it of a first name or another kind of name, be it desired or a chance event – is used in many societies around the world as the basis for establishing a recognizable relation of close identification between the persons in question, the *namesakes*. In this paper, I propose to address such practices as institutions – that is, sets of principles and categories that interact in a structured manner so as to produce recognizable patterns of cognition and behaviour with general social implications.

Personal names, both as sound patterns and as written signs, are objectifications. That is, as inscriptions of processes of personhood in the world they play the role of technological and cultural props for thinking. Thus, much like

pronouns, they sit at the core of the processes of personal and collective engagement with the world for they contribute centrally towards the determination of perspectives of interest (cf. Pina-Cabral 2010b or Johnston 2010:308–9). Some contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists have recently argued that this is not simply a sociological phenomenon, as we have been trained to believe in terms of standard twentieth century notions of semiotic representation. We must heed their suggestion that ‘Mind [...] is congenitally predisposed to seep out into the world’ (Clark 2006:8). Such objectifications as names, therefore, can be seen to have deep cognitive implications as they play a central role in processes of distributed cognitive architecture. Personal names – and their repetition, as in namesakes or in patterns of name serialization – are central aspects of what Clark and Chalmers (1998:9) call ‘socially extended cognition’.

While namesakes have not received all that much theoretical attention in anthropological literature,<sup>1</sup> institutions of this kind are very prevalent in the ethnographic register and they are closely associated to the history of the concepts that have guided our discipline throughout the past centuries: filiation, classificatory terminologies, relations of alliance, joking relationships, twinship, reciprocity, etc. One of the *locus classicus* of these debates is Junod’s (1962 (1927)) ethnography of the peoples of Southern Mozambique that inspired Radcliffe-Brown’s (1952 (1940 and 1949)) essays on joking relationships; which, in turn, were central inspirations for all social and cultural anthropologists throughout the mid-twentieth century. While these essays were written in explicit dialogue with Mauss’ (2000 (1923/1924)) writings on reciprocity, they subsequently influenced in a decisive manner, even if by contrast, Lévi-Strauss’ (1949, 1974 (1945)) formulations of alliance theory.

It is particularly interesting, therefore, to find out that, in Southern Mozambique today, the most commonly used word to refer to this institution, with such deep roots both in local history and in anthropological history, is the recently arrived Amerindian word *xará*.<sup>2</sup> The paper follows the trace of these namesake institutions, taking recourse to ethnographic material from Southern Mozambique<sup>3</sup> and from Bahia (Brazil), where I have been carrying out research on naming practices since 2004.<sup>4</sup>

Upon finding that there are aspects that these institutions share and that are similar to institutions in the Iberian Peninsula (cf. Pina-Cabral 1986), the paper follows David Webster’s argument that these are relations of *alliance*. It is suggested that the namesake institution is superimposed upon filiation in the early history of the person through a process of *triangulation* – the word

retaining here its original meaning in geometry: the determination of the location of a point by relating it to two others. I am influenced by Donald Davidson's (2001) work where triangulation describes the process through which beliefs about oneself, beliefs about others, and beliefs about the world come into existence jointly. Thus, Lévi-Strauss' (1974 (1945)) arguments concerning the role of the mother's brother in alliance are seen as a type of triangulation, that is, the related entities come into existence by a mutual relation to a third entity that constitutes a necessary point of differentiation.

It is argued that these relations of triangulation that occur in the person's early life lead both to consolidation of personhood and to consolidation of the local universe of relatedness. That is, I adopt a view of kinship relations that frees them from the Fortesian biologicistic mould of the elementary family (cf. Carsten 2004), thus including alliance relations within the general category of kinship – contrary to the time-honoured British practice of separating 'marriage' from 'kinship' – thereby approximating it to the use of the French/Iberian words *parenté*/*parentesco*.

I start the paper by proposing the notion of namesake as the axis for a comparative trajectory. Such a notion, however, is hardly of itself a concept that can stand outside of history. In short, the very notion that makes it possible to trace a path through the argument is itself part of the argument. My use of the notion of namesake, therefore, is strategic. I employ it as a heuristic device, an instrument that allows me to connect things that otherwise might appear foreign to each other. In this way, 'namesake' becomes an *intermediate category* in the sense of a category that I use in order to propose an analysis and that I may well want to discard when I go on to discuss other arrangements of sociocultural events.<sup>5</sup> Neither am I arguing that the notion of namesake inheres in the institutions described, nor do I deny that there are many things in common between them that the concept captures. To the contrary of both, I aim to use the notion of namesake in order to bring out similarities that the people of Southern Mozambique and Bahia themselves identify. But I am fully aware that, as I do so, I participate in the creation of yet another register of sociality with a history of its own – social science.

On the one hand, the category is intermediate to the extent that it depends on other categories that have a similar sort of status, themselves subject to re-definition and re-analysis. In this particular case, I have leaned heavily on the categories of the *person*, of *personal name*, and of *filiation*. Without them, nothing of what I will describe would make much sense. On the other hand, however, the anthropological use of the notion of namesake has a long

history. The category mediates my relation to this history. As I developed the argument, this history came to impinge more and more on what I wrote and I found it increasingly difficult not to hear the historical echoes of my very words. That history too is in a way ‘cultural’ and marks a historical process of constitution of a universalistic type of language of which this paper hopes to be a part.

### The *xará* in Maputo

In Southern Mozambique, as is so often the case in our contemporary globalized world, kinship systems with divergent histories cohabit, interacting creatively while concomitantly maintaining some of their internal coherence. In her recent study of poor families in suburban Maputo,<sup>6</sup> Bénard da Costa (2002) observes that, apart from what they call their *nome de registo* (registry name), people also have a *nome tradicional* (traditional name) which, according to her informants, was often the name of ‘an ancestor’ (p. 129 n 71). This ‘traditional name’ may be obtained either directly, as when an older member of the family decides to give their first name to a child (often to a grandchild of the same sex); or indirectly, as when the family decides to give the child the name of someone else. The eponym<sup>7</sup> may either be a friend of the family or, as is often the case, a recently deceased grandparent.

The norm in Southern Mozambique is for people to accumulate a series of names (polyonomastics). According to Bénard da Costa: ‘there are two types of names that may be ‘inherited’, which are not mutually exclusive: the ‘traditional name’, normally in the Shangaan language or another of the local languages, and the ‘Portuguese’ name, also called ‘registry name’ or ‘official name’.<sup>8</sup> A child, therefore, may be given two first names [*nomes próprios*] which identify her simultaneously with (at least) two members of the family: for example, she may be called ‘x’ like her live grandmother and ‘y’ like that grandmother is also called or like her great-great-grandmother was called’ (Bénard da Costa 2002:172).<sup>9</sup>

Sharing a name with an older member of the family, whether alive or dead, involves more than simple remembrance (a quotation, so to speak) since it implies that the named person assumes in attenuated form the relational attributes of the eponym. Concerning a grandchild who was about to be born, a widow told Bénard da Costa (2002:171): ‘I would love it if my grandchild were male, so he could be my husband; for me to have a husband’. In short, one may be given the name of a live person, to whom one becomes a kind of double, or one may be given the name of the deceased relative of a third person, and assume some of the relational attributes of the deceased. Note

that, as will be further clarified below, the child 'is' the husband only in an attenuated or secondary fashion.

As it happens, the system is highly dynamic since, in contexts of crisis resolution, people are prone to add new names to their list of first names. Polyonomastics, furthermore, allows for a sequential play on interpersonal referrals, which means that, as a result of naming, the person accumulates a number of identifications (a) with other persons, (b) with the situations that caused the name attribution (namely crisis situations), and (c) with third parties to whom the name giver was associated. A female informant told Bénard da Costa:

I am called V F D<sup>10</sup> because I was very sick. This name came as a result of my being baptized in the Catholic Church when I was 15. In church, they would not accept my name R., that was the name of my *xará* [namesake], who was my aunt, my father's sister. My traditional name is C. There are people who call me R.; my husband calls me V. but, when he is happy, he calls me C' (Bénard da Costa 2002:172).

Yet another case is VS, a widow in Maputo who earns a reasonable living in petty commerce. Upon her husband's death, she refused to go back to the countryside to take up home with her brother-in-law (in Jangano, Inhambane). This refusal of the expected levirate created bad feelings between her and the husband's relatives and they have not yet allowed her 'to say *mass*<sup>11</sup> for her husband', saying that someone in the family may die if she does so – which is an indirect hint at a witchcraft accusation, so as to prevent her from breaking away from their family by remarriage.

She keeps a *machamba* (a plot) in Inhambane and pays her relatives up there to farm it, for she has a child living there with her mother-in-law. This child is her father-in-law's namesake. He has been living there since he was weaned. 'When I make some money, I always send it there, as I have a child there; and also for them. I cannot fail to help them and, in turn, from Inhambane, they send me things'. Her other child is her own father's namesake and lives with her mother. 'My mother likes to stay with her husband's namesake'. Indeed, her in-laws' feelings of suspicion seem to be justified, for she confessed to the ethnographer: 'if I had to choose between [my husband's family] and my mother, I would rather help my mother. I always buy soap and 'calamities' [cheap clothing] to help her out [...] I feel I belong more to my mother's family' (Bénard da Costa 2002:111–12).

In spite of all the changes that have taken place in Southern Mozambique during the intervening century, the namesake institution that we see at work

in these examples overlaps significantly with that which was first described by Henri-Alexandre Junod in his famous ethnographic monograph of the Tsonga/Thonga.<sup>12</sup> One of the four modes of naming a child that Junod identified was when

... somebody asks the favour of giving his name to the new-born child; a friend of the family may do so, but it is also often a traveller who happens to be in the village to whom this privilege is accorded. He will *name himself in the child* (ku titshula ka nwana). This fact will establish a special relation between this person and the child, a relation which bears close resemblance to that of a godfather to his godson. Once a year he will come and give 'his name' (viz. the child) presents. When the child is able to travel, the mother will go with him to pay a visit to his 'friend in name' (mabitoku-lobye). (Junod 1962 (1927), I:38–9).<sup>13</sup>

### The *nyadine* as Alliance

By far the best description of the namesake institution for Southern Mozambique, however, is that provided by Webster (2009) in his ethnography of the Chope carried out from 1967 to 1976 (esp. pp. 213–48). In *xichope* (the local language) people of the same name call each other *nyadine*.

In early life, a young child is brought up and nurtured by his parents. But shortly after birth, a naming ritual takes place, in which the child is named after some other person, usually living (as opposed to deceased ancestors). This *inter vivos* name-giving gives rise to an alliance between the parents and the donor of the name which is a form of ritual co-parentship. But the custom also has implications for the child, for he [or she] now has two sets of parents, one actual, one ritual, and is expected, after the age of about five, to live with his [or her] namesake, who may live some distance away from the parental home. (Webster 2009:67)

In those days, the namesake institution was very prevalent in Chopeland. About 63% of the households Webster (2009:87) studied had at least one namesake in residence. Typically, a household with five children had sent away two to be raised by their namesakes and received in turn two namesakes (Webster 2009:153). In fact, 57% of the 160 persons he interviewed on the subject had spent part of their childhood in their *nyadine's* household (Webster 2009:220).

Forty-two per cent of the namesakes were agnatic relatives of each other; the majority of the remainder being affines and maternal relatives. A majority of eponyms (76%) were of the 'inward-looking type' – that is, they already belonged to the local universe of relatedness before the naming ritual. Only 13% of the children were given the name of a deceased ancestor (Webster



2009:240); while around 20% were given the name of a grandparent or a classificatory grandparent (Webster 2009:224).

Note that Chope as well as the remaining peoples of Southern Mozambique and the Low Velt that Junod grouped under the general category Tsonga (or Thonga) have an Omaha-type kinship terminology which means that the mother's brother is classified as 'grandfather' (*koko*) and the sister's son as 'grand-child' (*ntukulu*). In his classic essay on the topic, Radcliffe-Brown (1952 (1940)) calls this terminological identification between the mother's side of the family and the alternate generation a 'legal fiction' (p. 99), and goes on to propose one of his three 'structural principles' of kinship: the principle of the unity of alternate generations (Radcliffe-Brown 1952 (1941):87).<sup>14</sup> 'Grandparents and grandchildren', he argues referring once again to Junod's ethnography, 'are persons with whom one can be on free and easy terms. This is connected with an extremely widespread, indeed almost universal, way of organizing the relation of alternate generations to one another' (Radcliffe-Brown 1952 (1941):9).

At the naming ceremony, and after consultation of a bone diviner (*nyatish-lolo*), the child is given a 'name of the bones', composed by adding a suffix to the name of his *nyadine*. In fact, Webster (2009:215) follows Junod in stating that if the first consultation does not confirm their choice, the parents are likely to go to another diviner in order to get the confirmation they need. The eponym, as much as the child, has a number of names and the name that is given is usually not his or her own 'name of the bones' but rather the more intimate name, normally given informally by his or her own mother, or alternatively, in the case of males, the name adopted at the time of circumcision. What this means is that, as a rule, a child does not receive the name of the *nyadine's* own *nyadine*, thus stressing the intransitive nature of the relation of namesake.

Webster's ethnography is particularly valuable in the way he demonstrates how the *nyadine/xarâ* institution functions structurally as a mode of alliance within the social universe of the Chope – in this way, in fact, he follows a lead already present in Radcliffe-Brown (1952 (1940):102). Men who were raised in their namesake's household are prone to develop close links with those relatives and, on marriage, pressure is placed upon them to settle close to their *nyadine's* home, thus joining their vicinality and reinforcing their political clout. This has the effect of spreading kinship links laterally and breaking up agnatic group cohesion, since over half of the namesakes were either maternal relatives or parents' friends. In this way, agnatic links are countered, matrilineal links reinforced, and alliances based on friendship prolonged; thus producing



the 'individualist' and mobile atmosphere that Webster finds characteristic of the Chope sociality.

In his perceptive analysis, Webster (2009) states that:

The namesake syndrome is composed of a trio of dyadic relationships: those between parent and child, between child and namesake, and between parent and child's namesake. The last mentioned of the three is, at the outset, the most important of the dyads. It is here that the alliance is cemented: the child, after all, is a helpless non-entity at the naming ceremony. The real purpose of the institution at this stage is the strengthening of an existing bond, or the creation of a new one, which takes place on the level of senior generations and can be seen as a dyadic contract. (p. 234)

This formulation of the institution as one of creative triangulation is especially valuable for our analysis. However, the teleological explanation ('real purpose') is less satisfactory as well as the correlate adoption of the concept of 'individual'. This has implications that we are bound to reject as it leads inevitably to a polarization of the relations Webster describes, attributing to them a characteristically dyadic and contractual aspect that the ethnographic evidence does not seem to corroborate.

In the course of the naming ceremony, the child becomes an 'entity', to use Webster's words. This effect is produced by means of a merging of the child's budding identity with that of the eponym. In other words, the latter and the child are thereafter somehow treated as being the same. Thus, the eponym is said to 'name himself [or herself]' in the child; when he or she gives a present to the child, they are said to give a present to 'his [or her] name'; and, finally, their relational attributes are inherited by the child in an attenuated or secondary fashion.

In short, the acts of maternal and paternal filiation that marked the child's initial socialization are thus, crossed by a new identification. As will be further argued below, these three relations (maternal filiation, paternal filiation and the namesake relation) are relations of close, open-ended identification. Contrary to what Webster and the dominant anthropological tradition in the twentieth century both maintained, these are not relations of reciprocity between fully identified 'individuals'. Rather, they are what gives rise to the child's personhood; that is, his or her entity status within a human (sociocultural) world of relatedness.

In this way, the *nyadine/xarú* institution in Southern Mozambique approximates many of the features that have been identified for the co-parentship institution (*compadrio*) in Catholic Europe and Latin America (cf. Pitt-Rivers

1977:48–70; Pina-Cabral 1986:116–19). It is significant that this similarity is identified by all three of our ethnographic sources (Junod, Webster and Bénard da Costa). Indeed, much like *compadrio*, the namesake institution crosses the links between the parents and the child (the bonds of filiation that first defined the child's social persona) by superimposing upon them a transversal bond with a third party. This triangulation counters the original relationships of fusion – as it identifies, it differentiates. It reinforces the child's social persona (its entity status) by linking it with parties outside the immediate household of birth. In this way, the namesake institution can be seen to operate much in the same way as incest prohibitions and exogamic rules in Lévi-Strauss' (1974 (1945):37–62) classic formulation of alliance. What we see here is the nature of an entity (the child's personhood) being defined by the relations that create it, rather than the relations being defined by the entity.

Webster's notion that, in Southern Mozambique, the concept of alliance should be extended to include the institutions of namesake and of formal friendship ought in my opinion to be taken seriously. He argues:

If both marriage and the namesake institution are kinds of alliance, then their differences must be of interest. Exogamy rules demand that an individual should not marry into the clan of either his father or mother; the alliances are thus spread widely, and a man may marry a woman he scarcely knows, or has never met. The introspective 'naming' (i.e. within ego's existing kin and social network), however, operates in the opposite way: if the exogamy rules make their resulting alliances centrifugal, then this type of naming has a centripetal effect on the pattern of alliances. The namesake institution, then, can, and usually does, take place within the very kin groups proscribed for marriage; it performs the functions of bonding inside the two clans that marriage performs outside. (Webster 2009: 235)

Note, however, that Webster (2009) appends here the following footnote: The 'outward-looking' namesake type, of course, has much the same effect (structurally) as a marriage alliance (p. 235).

Seen as types of alliance within a notion of kinship as relatedness, the namesake institutions contrast with matrimonial alliance in one central aspect: they are essentially intransitive, they create non-repetitive links. By forcing people to look for filiation partners outside the ambit of their closer kin, incest prohibitions and exogamy rules institute a breach within the process of human reproduction that opens it up as a field of circulation of people and, thus, of communication.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the namesake institutions function as a way in which the local system of relatedness closes in upon itself. This is why they

are characteristically associated with the principle of identity between alternate generations. It is no surprise that Radcliffe-Brown's (1952 [1940] and [1941]) famous formulation of the principle should have resulted from a reading of Junod's ethnography. Therefore, it is relevant that, although neither the *nyadine/xarú* nor co-parentship are limited to relations between alternate generations (being open to integrate friends, patrons, other relatives, strangers, etc.), both seem to depend a lot on it in practical terms.

### **Xarás and Compadres**

As it happens, in Maputo, the association between the historical institution of *nyadine/xarú* and European notions of co-parentship is explicit. This is how Bénard da Costa (2002) observed it:

It is said in Southern Mozambique (at least) that two persons with the same first name are *xarás* of each other. Often, the godfather or the godmother (or those who are chosen to name a child) give their own first name to their godchildren and thus become their *xarás*. In consequence, people at times talk of 'godfather' and 'xará' as synonyms even when there is no repetition of the name. In principle, being someone's *xarú* is a matter of some importance, as an identification occurs between the name and the person. (p. III n63)

In fact, the two institutions have a lot in common. When the institution of co-parentship was fully operational in Portugal, it was most common for godparents to give their own name to the child thus conjoining alternate generations.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, much like the *nyadine/xarú* relationship in Mozambique, it was conceived of as a secondary relationship (a 'ritual' or 'spiritual' kinship) that altered or qualified the already established relationship of filiation. Finally, a third common feature was that it was most common for grandparents to be invited as godparents of their children's first children (normally parents invited one person from each of the grandparental couples).<sup>17</sup>

Contemporary ethnography shows that, as Portuguese became increasingly common as a language of general communication in post-colonial Maputo during the 1980s and 1990s, the *nyadine* relationship came to be called *xarú*, this being presently its most common name (cf. Bénard da Costa 2002). Now this is somewhat surprising in the light of the fact that this is a Brazilian word of Amerindian origin (from Tupi \**xa'ra*, itself from *xe rera*, 'my name' – s.v. *Dicionário da Academia de Ciências*, 2001) with little circulation in Portugal.<sup>18</sup> The spreading of the word is probably due to the influence that spoken Brazilian

has acquired throughout the Lusophone world in the wake of the widespread distribution of Brazilian televised soap-operas during the same period.

In Portugal, where first names tend to be very repetitive and conservative (cf. Pina-Cabral 2008), the notion of sharing some sort of identity with someone who carries your first name is not relevant, as there are normally too many people around you with the same first name. When I enquired about it in urban Portugal, people told me that they know the word as a Brazilian slang for 'fellow' – as in 'meu xará!'<sup>19</sup> Again here the influence of soap-operas is predominant.

Unlike the Iberian Peninsula, in Bahia (Brazil), the notion of namesake is very common in everyday interaction. The *xará* is part of popular culture and has a generalized usage that is surprising to anyone coming from Portugal. For example, I was alerted to the relevance of the notion by the following event. A Military Police agent at a routine roadblock in southern coastal Bahia (2006) found out from my driver's licence that I was called João Paulo, whereupon he loudly called his colleagues to see this, addressing me as his *xará* and assuming that we shared some sort of humoristic bond as a result. He went so far as to shed his bullet-proof vest in order to show me how my own name was printed on his shirt. My surprise at the event was due to the fact that, in Portugal, sharing the same first name could never have that effect. This would, however, be characteristic behaviour between people who share the same birthplace.

As a result, I undertook to include a question about *xarás* in my normal interviewing routine as part of my research on personal naming. In southern Bahia, as it turns out, sharing someone else's first name does not of itself trigger the recognition of the *xará* relationship. Many men (and some women) are given the precise same name (first names and surnames) as their father or grandfather or uncle, adding the particles *Filho/Júnior*, *Neto* or *Sobrinho*, respectively (see Pina-Cabral 2007a). Such people do not consider themselves their father's or uncle's *xará*. Nor will a person whose name has been given in honour of an older relative consider him- or herself their *xará*. In such a situation, as an informant once told me, 'That was on purpose, it was homage. *Xará* has to be found by chance, a kind of surprise thing'. The same lady explains: 'If it is a matter of definition, *xará* is a person with the same name as another. But one can apply it to a companion, a partner. People use it in their workplace, saying things like: 'So tell me, *xará*!' or 'That guy is really cool, he is my *xará* – he is people of my people' [typical Bahian expression]. They talk like that even though they do not share a name'. She herself has two *xarás* with whom she is very close, but she

reckons that their name is not the main reason for their friendship because it happens to be quite a common name. But, she continues, 'When the name is not common, then it is something – a cause for throwing a party – since one had not yet found another person with the same name'. Her son, for instance, is called Marvin – a combination of her own name Márcia, with her husband's name Vinicius (not, as one might have thought, an Anglicism). This she claims is not a common name, so when they found someone with the same name it was cause for joy and celebration.

In Bahia, where having a rare name is considered a value in and of itself, and where first names are often compounds resulting from the combination of parts of other relative's first names, parents are very concerned not to 'copy' the name choices of the other parents around them. This pre-occupation responds to an explicitly 'modern' conception of personal value. Many of the people we interviewed about the names they gave their children insisted on this aspect. For example, a school teacher once told me that he regrets not being called Danilo, a more distinguished name than his own. But, he explains, shortly before he was born, a neighbour called her son that name, which meant that his mother would be looked down upon if she 'copied the name', so he was called Djavan, after a popular singer. She wanted a name that started with D because his father had a daughter by his official wife, with whom he lived, whose name started with that same letter. By creating a name series with this other daughter, the mother of Djavan was reinforcing the siblingship between the two children and, thus, claiming paternity rights for her own son.

In contemporary Bahia, then, we find most of the features of the *nyadine/xará* institution of Mozambique, but they are spread between two institutions: the *xará* and the *homenagem* (lit. homage – see Pina-Cabral 2007a). Following the latter, many people receive either the same name as their parents (as in Chopeland, where 20% of the *nyadine* were the child's own parents – Webster 2009:240) or of their grandparents. Or, they receive the initial letter or the initial syllable of a relative's name. In common parlance, as a result, the *xará* word is kept mostly to describe the chance event of two people finding that they have the same name. This, to my mind, is the force behind the fascination the Bahians have with encountering a *xará*.

Such encounters are perceived as being somehow odd or humouristic precisely, because they are seen as paradoxical, as countering the dominant notion that no person is or should be identical with any other. Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte has identified this emphatic engagement in 'self-affirmation' as one of the central axes of contemporary Brazilian personhood (Duarte & Gomes

2008). In interviewing secondary school kids in Valença, I too was repeatedly confronted with the way in which this feature plays a central role in differentiating modern/contemporary/consumerist modes of sociality from the locally despised rural world – the *roça*, a world of ‘backwardness’ (*atraso*), solitude and suffering. ‘Copying’ personal names, as these students would have it, is a sign of *atraso* and they laughed loudly at jokes such as: ‘The other day a truck (*pau de arara*) was coming from the *roça* (rural area). Suddenly someone called out ‘Maria!’, so all of the women jumped out of the truck’.

Thus, the *xará* identification in Bahia must be seen as an ideological mechanism; that is, as playing a programmatic role. It is a mechanism which emphasizes the salience of a feature that contemporary Brazilian culture especially values. There is an explicitly and emphatically ‘individualist’ tone to contemporary modes of urban living in Brazil. The separation of the *xará* institution from the *homenagem* institution responds precisely to this need to prevent the latter from challenging the dominant valuation of ‘self-affirmation’ (cf. Pina-Cabral 2007a:84–6). Thus, as I argue below, ‘individualism’ must not be seen as a given of contemporary society, but rather as something that has to be constantly produced in the face of the relational nature of personhood.

What we have to remember is that the division between *xará* and *homenagem* is specific to contemporary Brazilian modes of sociality. In Amerindian societies, where the notion of *xará* originally emerged, this emphasis on ‘self-affirmation’ was not present and the institution covers generically the same features that the *nyadine* institution did in Chopeland or the *compadrio* in the Iberian Peninsula. The clear separation between *xará* and *homenagem* as found in my contemporary Bahian material was not present there. There are excellent ethnographic reports on the institution among the Gê peoples of central Amazonia<sup>20</sup> (Lave 1967) and among the Sanumá in the border with Venezuela (a branch of the famous Yanomami – Ramos 1995:199–ff).

McCallum (2001), studying the Cashinahua on the Amazonian border with Peru, warns that ‘It is hard to exaggerate the importance of the namesake relationship in everyday life’ (p. 21). Namesake people are called *xutamaua* and the importance of the notion lies in the folk theory that the child absorbs the name into its body matter as a result of hearing it repeatedly pronounced. In fact, the complex micropolitics of naming people in their village life emphasize the intimacy and affectivity of name usage and the relational nature of name use.<sup>21</sup> Names ‘are attached to and define the body while the person lives, but are safely attached to others [through the namesake institution] and repeated

into eternity. In traditional funerary endocannibalism, an explicit function of the rites was to detach the name from the corpse' (McCallum 2001:26).

Boys are most often given the name of their paternal grandfathers (FF or FFB) while girls nearly always of their maternal grandmothers (MM or MMZ, the *chichi*). Due to the predominantly uxorilocal pattern of residence, the proximity between girls and their *chichi* is particularly close. People have lifelong relations with their namesakes, and this warmth extends even to complete strangers who turn out to have the same name. The result is that 'Upon meeting a stranger, all that need be asked is his or her name, and upon the basis of previous relationships with people of the same name, a reciprocal kin relationship can be established. To have a true name establishes one as a relative of every other person who also has one, irrespective of genealogical distance' (McCallum 2001:24).<sup>22</sup> Once again, as in the Southern Mozambican institution of the *nyadine/xará* or in European co-parentship, this link has an effect of closing in the local universe of relatedness, even when it is established with strangers.

Ethnographers who speak of namesake institutions are prone to use terms like 'ritual', 'spiritual', 'legal fiction', 'fictive kinship' or 'metaphorical' kinship, even though there is nothing specifically more ritual, spiritual or fictional about them than about other types of kinship relations. In point of fact, all of the cases presented above show that very real and practical results issue forth from the institution of namesakes.<sup>23</sup> Speaking of co-parentship, Pitt-Rivers (1977:176 n1) noted that 'It has also been called 'fictive kinship' though there is in fact nothing fictive about it [...] and [this] for a long time obscured its nature which is to be opposed rather than assimilated to kinship'.

To my mind, what is being described by recourse to this 'spiritual/fictional' label is the fact that namesake relations supervene upon filiation, qualifying it by contrast, but never absorbing it or diminishing its force. I imagine that is what Pitt-Rivers had in mind when he talked of 'opposed but not assimilated to kinship'. Today, however, as we have come to adopt a broader view of kinship as relatedness, we no longer need to place co-parentship outside of kinship. The biologicistic presuppositions that guided our twentieth century anthropological predecessors and saw the elementary family as a unique founding event, make little sense today. We can see kinship as a complex process of superimposed, open-ended, criss-crossing acts of constitution of persons and of supra-personal entities.

To conclude, all of the three general features of namesake institutions identified above seem to be observable in these Amazonian examples. The first is that



the institution constitutes *a form of alliance*<sup>24</sup> to the extent that it draws out links between persons that affect their relations to third parties. That is, it consolidates social entities by instituting relations of triangulation. The second is that it supervenes upon filiation and conjugal alliance in a *secondary manner*. It does not change the links of filiation; it further complexifies them by means of a kind of change of angle or rotation. Finally, the third feature is that namesakes are nearly always associated with a *turning in of the local universe of relatedness* upon itself. It can do this in two ways. Either by means of what Webster calls the ‘inward-looking namesake’ and the Bahians call *homenagem* – where homonymy within the local universe is explicitly procured. In particular, this is often done by bringing into identification alternate generations and in that way transforming the historical linearity of consecutive links of filiation into a kind of cyclical oscillation of hierarchy. Or by means of what Webster calls ‘outward-looking namesakes’ and the Bahians call *xará* – that is, the homonymy with strangers (either by chance or by naming young children after them). What this does is provide the stranger with a local network of relatives. This counters the potential openness caused by the fact that the stranger appeals by his presence to external links.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have unearthed what might seem, at first glance, to be a diffusionist story. Not one of linear diffusion, but rather a complex historical process of mutual indebtedness. I have shown how, in contemporary urban Mozambique, we observe the coming together of an already long history of mutual influences between local traditions (*nyadine*), Christian notions of relatedness derived from ancient Roman law (*compadrio*), and Brazilian notions of sociality (*xará*), in turn deeply marked by the Amerindian long-term (*xutanaua*). All this is hardly surprising considering the sort of global interconnectedness that is going on all around us in our contemporary world.

In the course of following this trajectory, however, it became clear that the notion of namesake describes a set of institutions that are very similar to each other throughout. A more general argument started to emerge. Webster considered that there was a large element of personal autonomy in Chopeland. He called it ‘individualism’ because he saw it as reinforcing the role of the ‘individual’, which he believed to be a universal feature of society, following in the line of Mauss and Dumont (cf. Carrithers *et al.* 1985). By contrast, in Maputo or Bahia today, ‘self-affirmation’ is an explicit value associated with an urge to enact the ‘modern’ utopia (Pina-Cabral 2009b). Unlike Webster, I do not see

this as confirming any kind of universal proclivity of humankind, since I am prone to emphasize the dividual nature of personhood,<sup>25</sup> but rather as part of the ideological constitution of modernity.

The recent convoluted debates concerning dividuality by Mark Mosko and others highlight the problems that arise from culturalist approaches that polarize ‘West versus Rest’, ‘Christianity versus indigeneity’ or ‘Melanesia versus Rest’ (see Mosko 2010:257). Although these polarities might prove to be useful heuristic devices for ethnographic description, they should not prevent us from seeing that partible personhood and dividuality are at the root of all forms of higher-order consciousness. We have to free ourselves decisively from socio-centric background assumptions. Mauss’ notion of reciprocity and his notion of personhood are interdependent and they are the foundation for Dumont’s influential theorizing concerning hierarchy and individualism (cf. Pina-Cabral 2007b).

Radcliffe-Brown ends his first essay on joking relationships with a reference to a debate he was then having with Marcel Mauss. Countering the latter’s suggestion in his *Essai sur le don*, he argues, ‘The joking relationship is in some ways the exact opposite of a contractual relation’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1952 (1940):103). Thus, he raises an issue that emerged repeatedly as I wrote the above passages: can one say that the relation of namesake, much like the relation of filiation on which it depends, is a contractual relation? Yes, there are mutual responsibilities that eventually emerge between the *nyadine/xarã*; but are they specifiable and do they mark the onset of the relation?

While we can see what Webster might mean when he characterizes the initial gesture (the choice of the eponym by the parents) as one that establishes a set of responsibilities between two clearly distinguished ‘entities’; we are not entitled to do the same when considering the other three relations involved (i.e. maternal filiation, paternal filiation and the *nyadine* link). These are not relations of contractual binomiality but of continuity and fusion – typically exemplified in the way in which the two partners’ identities tend to merge and their relational attributes fuse. Between mother and child and father and child, the relationship is one of co-dependence and co-responsibility; there is no reciprocity between two partners. The same occurs with the *xarãs*: they merge their interests as if they were substitutable; they contract nothing. There is no responsibility<sup>26</sup> between them; there is only *co-responsibility* – that which emerges from a fusion of interests, not from a matching of interests. To that extent, Radcliffe-Brown’s (1952 (1940):102) proposed notion of ‘consociation’ may yet prove to be useful.

If, in following our anthropological predecessors, one were to choose to start our analyses from the point of view of two groups of men who exchange women,<sup>27</sup> relations of alliance would come to appear as binary relations between pre-constituted collective entities. If, however, we were to approach alliance, not from the Eurocentric perspective of the notion of ‘marriage’ (cf. Rivière 1971:57–74), but from the ontogenetic perspective of the person (what I consider to be a more profitable angle), alliance would emerge as the result of the crossing of the two gestures of filiation (maternal and paternal) and would play a central role in attributing entity status to the person<sup>28</sup> – a countering of the ever re-emerging dividuality of the person.

The person does not pre-exist its social self; rather, he/she emerges as an entity out of the links that constitute it in sociality and that, as they cross with each other, by means of triangulation, produce and shore up the self. The self emerges where the bonds of close identification are crossed by the intervention of other such bonds, third persons,<sup>29</sup> in a dynamic of plurals (Pina-Cabral 2010b). This means that reciprocity and formal responsibility are secondary phenomena; they are produced by the very triangulation that the relations of alliance create. The initial asymmetry of constitutive alterity (that is, the fact that persons emerge from other persons’ proddings) is never fully abolished even as it gives rise through processes of triangulation to the symmetry of relations of reciprocal responsibility.

Thus, namesake institutions are forms of alliance because they are means for the triangulation that gives rise to the person – both as a social person (that is, seen from the institutional perspective) and as self (that is, as ‘arena of presence’, cf. Johnston 2010:188ff.). In the context of the present argument, therefore, it seems useful to stress the difference that is characteristic of social relations between constituted selves as opposed to the original relation of deep conjunction of interests that characterizes both filiation and the namesake relation. I call the latter *co-responsibility* and the former responsibility so as to stress that reciprocity between identified persons marks responsibility while it is absent from co-responsibility. No contract is implicit in the latter relation, as Radcliffe-Brown had perceived from the very start of the discussion. Thus, the links of filiation (paternal and maternal) and the links of namesake must be seen as instances of co-responsibility (at least when they are first instituted). It is in crossing each other (and other such links) that these dyadic relations triangulate to make the person emerge as an entity. Central to this process is name attribution and acceptance.

Incest and exogamy prohibitions leading to bilateral filiation (paternal and maternal) foster a person whose relations are always with two familial histories (*continued identities* – see Pina-Cabral 1997). Later, the person is further granted entity status by means of other relations of close proximity (such as those of siblingship). The person is, thus, inserted into a generational hierarchy. But, when they choose a *nyadine/compadre/homenagem/xutanaua* for their child, the parents are transforming their friend or relative into an avatar, so to speak, both of their child and of themselves – it is as if they were negating the hierarchical arrangements produced by filiation.

In short, the namesake institutions now come to perform a similar role of consolidation of the person as a distinct entity but they do so by means of a rotation of the axis of reference. The relationships of filiation could be plotted as two lines crossing along a flat surface. But now, in order to plot the new relations constituted by the namesake, we would require a three-dimensional picture, as the new crossing breaks across generational hierarchy. While filiation is asymmetric in terms of gender (for the child is gendered), the namesake institutions are asymmetric in relation to generation. In breaking familial linearity, they further consolidate the child – they do so by an act of crossing identifications/differentiations that raises the child above the original familial links. The eponym is co-parent to the extent that he or she assumes a paternal role towards the child but, at the same time, he or she *is* the child. When an eponym is chosen, therefore, a further crossing occurs that performs much the same role of affirmation of the person as that of filiation but that is asymmetric in a different manner.

In fact, in many, many instances around the world, the eponym is a grandparent. Now, as our anthropological ancestors suggested, what this does is to identify generation 1 with generation 3, generation 2 with generation 4, generation 3 with generation 5 and so forth. This breaks the linearity of descent, of linear time, producing familial cyclicity. This is the traditional interpretation and it does, indeed, correspond to the ‘inward-looking namesake’. But what about the ‘outward-looking namesake’? It would seem to do the contrary.

We can see, thus, that valid as it is, this explanation remains insufficient, as it does not take into account two important facts: (a) the namesake relationship is typically interpersonal and intransitive; (b) the choice of eponym does not simply produce an identification between grandchild and grandparent, it also confuses generations by identifying the eponym both with the parent and the child. In the Chope case, the process is even further compounded by the fact that the MB is called GF and the ZS is called GS. But then in the Brazilian

modern system, the homage namesake is again a case of the generational merger.

Here we are once again reminded of Pitt-Rivers' insight that namesake institutions supervene upon filiation. This, I imagine, could be the reason why they are so often presented as exceptional relations – ritual, spiritual, religious, symbolical, theatrical, joking or even comical, as we have seen. There is an element of exception to the namesake institutions by reference to the personally primordial links established (or, in any case, celebrated) in filiation. Families, households, neighbourhoods, consolidated friendships are breached, expanded or supervened by the namesake relation as much as generational hierarchies are collapsed and generational identifications melted down.

While the process of personal consolidation is furthered by this new set of identifications and differentiations, the namesake also plays a kind of helicoïdal role that opens up the path to new forms of constructive ambiguity that go beyond the earlier familial environment. The partial questioning of the generational hierarchy (typically enshrined in Radcliffe-Brown's famous joking-relationships) further frees the child from the binds of filiation and, in this way, it individuates him or her. To conclude, then, in namesake relations as in filiation, responsibility emerges out of co-responsibility by means of a process of triangulation.

We can return, thus, to the suggestion laid out at the beginning of the paper that personal naming can be approached as an instance of 'socially extended cognition' (Clark & Chalmers 1998). The identifications and differentiations that are established by filiation and by the naming process are integral parts of the very constitution of the thinking self, to the extent that they affect the boundaries of personhood. As such, the institution of a namesake is an 'epistemic action' in the sense Clark and Chalmers (1998:2) give the expression; that is, it 'alter[s] the world so as to aid and augment cognitive processes such as recognition and search'. To that extent, namesakes can be seen to operate as part of the mental process, not as mere pragmatic actions.

### Notes

1. Ramos (1995), in her study of the Sanumá, has argued that 'The phenomenon of namesakes is probably far more widespread than has been indicated through ethnographies' (p. 199).
2. Pronounced sharah.
3. I am personally familiar with Southern Mozambique from having lived there for many years and, later on, having taught at Eduardo Mondlane University. However, as I have not carried out detailed ethnographic fieldwork on these

- issues there, I have preferred to rely for this paper on three ethnographic reports that span the twentieth century.
4. Research project 'Names and Colours: Person and Identity in Bahia', 2004–2008. I am grateful to the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon and to the Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (Portugal) for subsidizing this research (cf. Pina-Cabral & Matos Viegas 2007; Pina-Cabral 2008; 2010a). I wish to thank Susana de Matos Viegas, Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, Ana Lúcia Pastore Schritzmeyer, Ulla Romeu, Inês Ponte and Mónica Chan for their invaluable help to this project. The paper was written at the urging of Ignasi Terradas, an already longstanding intellectual companion. I am also grateful for comments from Susan Gal and Dain Borges (Anthropology of Europe Seminar, University of Chicago, April 2010) and Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte (Anthropology Seminar, PPGAS, Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, June 2010). The paper has benefited also from the useful suggestions of the anonymous referees.
  5. I am grateful to Dominic Boyer for our discussions concerning this notion.
  6. A later version was published as *O preço da sombra: sobrevivência e reprodução social entre famílias de Maputo* (Bénard da Costa 2007).
  7. That is, the one who first bore the name in question.
  8. Note the implication that 'official names' may be inherited in the 'traditional' way since the ancestor in question in a 'traditional' form of name attribution may have already been known by a Portuguese or English name. In discussing *xarás*, we are mostly dealing with first names (*nomes próprios*); since the inheritance of surnames in the family normally follows the 'official' system (cf. Firmino 2008:129–42; Pina-Cabral 2008).
  9. All translations of passages from books quoted in languages other than English are by the author.
  10. These are pseudonyms attributed by the ethnographer: V, a first name; FD, surnames, maternal and paternal, as in the contemporary Portuguese naming system (cf. Pina-Cabral 2008:237–64).
  11. We are left in doubt as to whether the word is used literally to refer to a Catholic ritual manipulated in a 'traditional' manner or whether it is used metaphorically to refer to a ceremony that might not be Christian at all.
  12. His monograph resulted from long-term research in Southern Mozambique and the Low Velt over a period of 30 years or so. The first draft appeared in French in 1898; the definitive version (in English) appeared in 1911/1912 and was considerably re-edited in 1927, still by the author's own hand; a posthumous French version by Junod's son Henri-Philippe appeared in 1936 (Payot, Paris); the fuller English version published in 1962, where the appendices in Latin where translated into English is the one that I own. More recently, a second Portuguese version based on Henri-Philippe's French translation was published in Brazil (*Usos e Costumes dos Bantus*, Ed. Omar Ribeiro Thomaz, IFCH/Unicamp, Campinas, 2009).
  13. Ramon Sarró, whom I thank for that, notes that in the Creole of Guiné Bissau people also attribute considerable importance to the alliance between namesakes, assuming a substantivist conception of naming. Thus, namesakes say to each other 'Bo nha nome' – 'you are my name'.

14. Together with the ‘principle of the unity of the sibling group’ and the ‘principle of the unity of the lineage group’ – in ‘The study of kinship systems’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1952 (1941):87).
15. As a matter of fact, the argument of Lévi-Strauss (1949) in *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* is that they institute processes of repeated exchange, even when they do not specify the entities to the exchange.
16. In the specific case of Iberian co-parentship, there is a further suggestion that it should be read as a type of alliance in the practice of people whose children are married to each other calling themselves mutually *compadres*.
17. As indeed happened in my own case. Pitt-Rivers notes that the custom of choosing the grandparents as godparents is characteristic of the north and north-western regions of the Iberian Peninsula where household reproduction tends to follow a more linear mode (cf. Pina Cabral 1991; Rowland 1997). In these regions, where the house has a greater centrality in the constitution of the local community than in the regions south of the Tagus valley described by Pitt-Rivers, such a practice again has the effect of closing the local universe of relatedness upon itself by means of an alliance of alternate generations.
18. As the famous etymologists Corominas and Pascoal, in fact, notes – 1987: s.v.
19. An expression used much like contemporary Black Americans use *brother* or *bro*.
20. Note that the Xavante, as studied by Maybury-Lewis (1974 (1967)) and Lopes da Silva (1986) seem to differ in the way this set of institutions is structured.
21. On which McCallum insists much like Alcida Rita Ramos for the Sanumá: ‘To pronounce Sanumá personal names in front of a stranger is considered to be in extremely bad taste, offensive both to the owner of the name and to his or her close relatives. Etiquette prescribes that one should not pronounce the other’s name in vain. This does not mean that the Sanumá do not know everyone’s name or names’ (Ramos 1995:199–200, see also Ramos 2008:59–72).
22. A pattern that is very familiar from many other societies around the world – the Kung case foremost in anthropological lore, cf. Marshal (1957).
23. I do not deny that ethnography has registered many instances of performances associated to alternate generations that take the form of ‘pretence’ – cf. Radcliffe-Brown (1952 (1940):97). The point is that the close relational links that the performance brings to life are no less real because of that.
24. Note that already Radcliffe-Brown (1952 (1940):102) had classified ‘joking relationships’ as one of his ‘four modes of alliance or consociation’. My argument here is different, but interestingly correlated.
25. Not only in the Highlands of New Guinea (cf. Strathern 1988) but everywhere (cf. Pina-Cabral 2009a, 2010a, 2010b).
26. At least in the formal, legal sense, where I am accountable for the fate of another person before a third party.
27. As is the case with Radcliffe-Brown (1952 (1940):91): ‘For the sake of brevity, though at the risk of oversimplification, we will consider only the husband’s relations to his wife’s family’. Oddly enough, considering that he then goes on to adopt a view based on relations rather than entities, Lévi-Strauss starts from the same angle and sticks to it right to the end. In fact, curiously enough, even his successors seem to stick to this restrictive view of alliance.



28. This might be called *hypostatization*; that is, the process of 'to make into or regard as a self-existent substance or person; to embody, impersonate'. Much the same meaning as used by Symonds (quoted OED, s.v.) when he claims that 'the products of speculative analysis are hypostatized as divine persons'.
29. I am inspired here by Levinas' (1999) notion of the *third person*: 'Alterity's plot is born before knowledge. But the apparent simplicity of the relation between the I and the you, in its very asymmetry, is yet again disturbed by the arrival of the third person, who stands next to the other, the you' (p. 101).

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