# "That Which I Dream Is True": Dream Narratives in an Amazonian Community

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*In an Ese Eja community in the Peruvian Amazon, people dream the names of their children. Apart from a neo-Freudian perspective, naming dreams reflect, more importantly, multiple overlapping realities of time and space. As such, notions of agency, multiplicity, and transformation need to be examined for a proper analysis of dreaming. Drawing on multinatural perspectivism, the author examines eshawa, an Ese Eja concept of personhood that connects the self not only with the body but also with all species and an expansive sprit world. The author suggests that naming dreams are reminders of the still possible transformation between multiple worlds. Such an interpretation of dreams, as sources of knowledge and channels to cross realities, emphasizes the overlay between subjective dream worlds and public objective waking worlds rather than their "opposition."*

KEY WORDS: Amazonia; dream interpretation; naming; myths; gender; multinatural perspectivism

The Sonenekuiñaji, an Ese Eja group of 90 people living in one community in a tributary of the Madre Dios River, Peru, dream the personal names of their children.[1] Like creation narratives, naming dreams refer to *yawaho nee nee* (a long time ago), a time when animals and humans were still undifferentiated and the transformation and multiplicity of and between beings was common. These dreams, which typically involve animals interacting with the dreamer in gender-specific ways, reveal a child's "true name" (*bajani nei*). In this article I examine naming dreams within the broader context of Ese Eja notions of dreams

[1]The Ese Eja are a lowland Amazonian group comprising about 1,500 individuals living in several communities along the rivers Beni, Madre de Dios, Heath, and Tambopata, in the border regions of Pando, Bolivia, and Madre de Dios, Peru. The Ese Eja language belongs to the Tacana language family, itself part of the Macro-Panoan group of languages of western Amazonia. Most Ese Eja plant swidden horticultural fields, hunt, fish, gather, and extract and process forest resources for their own consumption and commercial trade.

and personhood. The Ese Eja material lends support to the notion put forth by Basso (1992) and B. Tedlock (1992), among others, that comparative dream analysis needs to draw upon indigenous notions of personhood, agency and transformation.[2] In the case of the Ese Eja, this entails paying close attention to the concept of *eshawa*, the invisible, intangible, and inalienable aspect of all "life." In examining *eshawa* as personhood (with its ensuing sociality), I build on Viveiros de Castro's theory of *multinatural perspectivism* (1998, 1999, 2002) whereby intentionality and consciousness form the multiple subjects of humans, animals, and spirits and their ability to see each other differently. Concomitantly, multiplicity—the fluidity of human identity and the permeability between different realities—and transformation— the ability to change between various singular and plural forms—are prominent themes in Ese Eja dreams and creation narratives.[3] Dream names, as envoys between cross-realities, offer a unique opportunity to explore the coexistence, "contradiction," and possibility of transgression between these realities.

## ESHAWA, MULTIPLICITY, AND TRANSFORMATION

The belief that names are learned through dreams, *kiacojawi*, is consistent with how Ese Eja construe dreams. The visionary quality of dreams is central to the notion that dreams reveal knowledge and that different types of dreams disclose different types of knowledge (cf. States, 2003). The link between "seeing," "learning," and "knowing" is illustrated by the shared verb stem [ba]. *Ekweya banahe* literally means "I saw" but also means "I have learned" or "I know." Dreaming, *jakawibakiani* ("[for one] to know/see/learn in sleep"), involves a certain type of sight and knowledge, one linked to the ordinarily invisible world of eshawa, whose consciousness and intentionality affects everyday life. As such, dreams are sources of knowledge and channels of communication between multiple worlds that feed back dynamic information (Riches, 1995; Wright, 1992) unhindered by physical or ontological distances (Descola, 1989). The otherwise invisible world of eshawa is similarly accessed through *ayahuasca* visions,[4] the telling of creation stories, some solitary forest experiences, certain states of illness, extreme negative emotive states, and *emanokwana* sessions (ceremonies in which the Ese Eja contact the "spirits of dead ancestors").[5]

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[2]For instance, criticizing the way some scholars have discussed dreaming as a projection of the "soul" separate from the "self," Basso (1992, pp. 101–102) offers instead a Kalapalo term, translated as "interactive self," used to emphasize the heightened awareness of a part of the self while dreaming.

[3]Creation stories (*Esehaya esowi*, "Ese Eja words") are oral mythical historical accounts that are recounted diversely from person to person in social contexts with a high degree of audience interaction, participation, and interjection. I choose the terms *creation narratives* or *stories* rather than *myth* because the former better convey individual experience, interpretation, and change. Creation narratives enforce the point that "myths" cannot be viewed as independent of context and audience but instead are ongoing stories and interpretations about the past as seen in the present by the speaker(s) and the responding listener(s).

[4]These visions are induced following the ingestion of *ayahuasca*, typically a plant concoction admixture of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*.

[5]*Emano-* means "dead" or "sick"; *kwana* means "people." Being sick entails dying, notably, a space of death (Alexiades, 1999; Burr, 1997). In *emanokwana* ceremonies, the spirits of dead ancestors are contacted through the medium of the *eyamikekwa* (Ese Eja healer). These are predominantly healing rituals but also great social occasions in which the *emanokwana* are offered fermented plantain beer while they heal, flirt, gossip, entertain through humor, give advice, and inform the community of events in mortal and immortal worlds. Ese Eja systems of relatedness also extend into "the world of the dead," where the *emanokwana* continue to reproduce among themselves and foster new relationships with living kin through participation in *emanokwana* ceremonies.

*Eshawa* is, above all, agency and consciousness (Burr, 1997; Peluso, 2003a). Ese Eja believe that it is their individual *eshawa* that interacts in dreams with other *eshawa*—the spirit world at large—where invisible beings have a capacity to transform between spirit, human, and animal forms as well as to take multiple and singular forms and to move between them. For Ese Eja, the existence of *eshawa* is certain. We might imagine the world in which *eshawa* dwell as a Kantian inversion whereby humanity—who we really are—is but a symptom or intuition of reality, for Ese Eja maintain that we do not perceive reality ("the world as it is"); it perceives us through the multiple forms of *eshawa*. This is one of the reasons that Sonenekuiñaji consult *eshawa* through the *emanokwana* ceremonies. *Emanokwana* opinions are sought not only for their ability to explain peculiar or unexplainable events but also in relation to daily events. For instance, an *emanokwana eshawa* revealed to a man circumstances that had unfolded unbeknownst to him as he obliviously planted corn in his fields earlier that same day, a scenario involving several hidden *eshawa* who attempted to harm him while others protected him. Through their invisibility and ability to see what is otherwise concealed, *eshawa* ultimately see the world as it truly is. This implies self-consciousness, something that is possible only through an awareness of other selves, thus granting *eshawa* personhood.

Multinatural perspectivism addresses the self-consciousness, multiplicity, and transformability of subjects in Amazonia, "multinaturalism" signifying "spiritual unity and corporeal diversity" (Viveiros de Castro, 1998, p. 470; 1999, p. 1).[6] The multiple and transformable representations of agency (with their subjectivities and personalities) do not pose contradictions, and even if they do, for Ese Eja there is nothing contradictory about contradiction, "it is just the way it is." Rather matter-of-factly, beings can simultaneously be in more than one place while at the same time taking various forms.

## DREAMING: NAMES AND NARRATIVES

For Ese Eja, dream imagery is important not only in ascribing personal names but in guiding such activities of daily life as hunting, working in the fields, and even bathing. The presence of certain animals in dreams, for example, is interpreted as a hunting omen.[7] A white-lipped peccary running away from the dreamer predicts success in fishing, a dream of a tapir bite predicts a caiman bite, a hawk predicts an encounter with a jaguar, and a dream with *jajasie*, a palm (*Astrocaryum spp.*) whose trunk is armed with long spikes, alerts the dreamer to the danger of being stung by a ray. On the other hand, dreaming of domestic animals such as pigs and chickens or of exotic animals "from far away" such as elephants warns of oncoming sickness.[8] As in other parts of lowland Amazonia, dreams are important modes of perceiving not only the future but also the present and its various surroundings (Brown 1992; Kracke, 1992a, 1993). In some dream scenarios the dreamer is capable of deliberate control over the outcome of the dream itself.[9] Dreamers can also diagnose illness

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[6]Ingold (1991, p. 5; 2000, p. 375) alternatively refers to subjects as "person-organisms," emphasizing the dialectical holism of agency and structure.

[7]The consistency of these dream symbols was cross-checked among men, women, and children within this community.

[8]The Ese Eja association of "exotica" with illness is reminiscent of the Mehinaku (Gregor, 1983).

[9]Brightman's (1993) "performative theory of dreaming" (p. 99) stresses how people actually have ideas as to how they should act in their dreams. This is indeed the case with Ese Eja action-driven lucid dreaming.

and find cures in their dreams. For instance, Ese Eja have told me of how they learned about the use of particular plants in causing and curing a specific illness. Hence dreamers "know," "see," and "learn" through the exchange and acquisition of knowledge in a dream reality. Therefore, dreams are considered to be important sources of literal, metaphorical, or prophetic information and as such are taken seriously.

Sonenekwiñaji say that dream names, the names people dream for their children, are "true names" and are different from other types of names.[10] Names (*bajani*) that are not dreamed tend to reflect distinguishing physical features of the child, circumstances of pregnancy and birth (such as food cravings and place of birth), or the names of dead ancestors. Dream narratives themselves are one way in which knowledge is accumulated and transferred among people (cf. States, 2003). It is precisely because of their origin in the cross-reality world of *eshawa* that dream narratives clearly designate and legitimize the name of a newborn or soon-to-be born child. In contrast to other dreams, whose meaning may be open to different interpretations (Kracke, 1979), the meaning of naming dreams is unequivocal. Once the dreamer, usually the mother, father, or grandparent, makes the dream known, then it soon becomes news and there is no further search for a name.[11]

The defining moment of a naming dream is when the animal transforms itself into an Ese Eja child and addresses the dreamer by the appropriate kin term, revealing his or her true identity. The sequence of events leading up to the transformation from animal to human differs consistently according to the gender of the dreamer. Typically, in women's dreams the animal attempts to suckle; in men's dreams either the dreamer is trying to kill the animal or it is trying to kill him. Although gender differences have been recorded in how dreams are recounted (B. Tedlock, 1999), among Ese Eja it is the dream content that tends to be gender specific, at least in naming dreams.

In a characteristic dream narrative, a woman sees an infant animal either in her home or in the forest and calmly watches it. Invariably the animal wants to be treated as a pet and eventually tries to suckle.[12] The woman resists, continuously pushing it away, but eventually succumbs. As soon as the animal places its mouth to her breast, it becomes an Ese Eja child and says, "Mom, it is me," and the woman immediately wakes up. *Siobi*, a neighbor, described the origin of her son's name:

> My son's name is "Tortoise." I know that because I dreamt it when I was about eight months pregnant. I was in my fields when I saw a small tortoise under a fallen tree. I wanted to take care of it. When I went to pick it up it wanted to nurse but I wanted to put it aside to keep working. I thought that I would later rock it in my hammock. It kept trying to nurse and then it called me *Nai* [mother] and became an Ese Eja, my baby. That is when I awoke.

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[10]"That which I dream is true," the title of this article, is a direct quote by Gregorio Huajo Huajo (August 29, 1995). Also, when one asks the name of a newborn or soon-to-be born child, the reply is usually, "I have not yet dreamt the name." There are cases in which more than one dream has been dreamt for the same person. In those cases they use the first name dreamed. In general, Ese Eja names, like nouns, are gender neutral. Naming patterns vary extensively among and within Ese Eja communities, reflecting the heterogeneity and fluidity of Ese Eja social structures (Peluso, 2003a, 2003b). Today, most Ese Eja have two personal names, one in Spanish and one in Ese Eja, aside from their surnames. Spanish names are chosen, not dreamed.

[11]By turning naming dreams into shared experiences, not only does the naming dream—by way of delivering one's "true name"—circulate personal experience into the public domain, but also dream names themselves, like *Xavante* dream songs, persist across generations (Graham, 1994, p. 725). Graham describes Xavante dream songs as conduits by which an individual's subjectivity becomes a means to participate in and maintain a cultural form of expression.

[12]It is not unusual for women to breastfeed young domestic animals. However, in many of the naming dreams, women nurse animals that they normally would not, such as ducks, turtles, and rats.

For men, the most common dream scenario involves hunting. In these cases, either the man is hunting the animal or the animal is chasing or threatening, in effect "hunting," the man. Immediately before the man kills or succumbs to the animal, as the case may be, the animal becomes an Ese Eja and identifies him- or herself as his child by saying, "Don't kill me, Dad, it's me." *Na*, one of the oldest men in the village, described the source of his daughter's name:

> I know that my daughter's name is "Porcupine" because of my dream. I was hunting when I saw a small porcupine. It had seen me and so I had to corner it in the brush. I was aiming my arrow at it: "Dad, do not kill me!"[13] It was Ese Eja. That is when I woke up. My daughter was one month old when I had this dream.

In some dreams, men passively witness an animal in danger. For example, a man dreamed that he was watching *bemasha*, a sloth (*Bradypodidae*), begin to cross a turbulent river. He watched intently, sensing that the sloth was at risk of drowning. When *bemasha* finally emerged from the river on the other shore, the sloth transformed into his newly born grandson, who, in fact, at the time happened to be "traversing" a period of illness. Sometimes women dream about the encounters between men and animals. For example, on one occasion a woman dreamed that she was sitting in a canoe washing her clothes along the river's edge when she saw a poisonous snake, *majjasha*, a bushmaster, sneaking up to attack her husband, who was standing in the port unaware. At the moment she called out to warn him, and before he could kill it, *majjasha* transformed into an Ese Eja, her daughter, and said, "It is me."

Ese Eja concepts of fertility and sexual reproduction offer some clues for interpreting the differences between men's and women's naming dreams. Like other Amazonian groups, Ese Eja consider that conception follows the accumulation of *ema'i* (sperm) in the *eyone* (uterus) from successive copulations since the last pregnancy (Peluso & Boster, 2002). In the case of sexual affairs, the fetus is formed with more than one man's *ema'i*. Fatherhood thus becomes a question of a man's proportion of *ema'i* in the uterus. Whereas brief sexual affairs do not contribute much to the formation of a fetus, long-term affairs result in more than one man being recognized as the father of the child. Given this model of conception, many children have or are rumored to have secondary fathers. This results in a woman's motherhood being incontestable and a man's paternity being ambiguous and potentially partible (Peluso & Boster, 2002). Many men express the wish that their son or daughter be entirely their own yet will not mind if the child is "a little bit" of someone else's. Women's dreams in which animals either threaten or are threatened by their husbands may reflect expressions of anxiety, in this case about the husband's possible rejection of the child. In other cases, such as the sloth crossing the turbulent river,[14] the dream imagery expresses other forms of uneasiness, such as vulnerability of small children to illness and death.

In contrast to men's naming dreams, animals in women's dreams are often neither threatened nor threatening. Women regard the baby animal's persistence and desire to be nursed as more of a nuisance than a peril, and this initial ambivalence toward breastfeeding the animal may reflect the conscious or unconscious frustration and reluctance toward submitting their bodies to the functions of reproduction and lactation. Yet, ultimately, they surrender to the animal's wishes because of its persistence. A main difference between the

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[13]Naming dream narratives are mostly what D. Tedlock (1999) describes as "double voiced" (p. 106), in which the dreamer voices the character in the dream.

[14]Rivers are particularly associated with death. When Ese Eja die, they first travel on *Kweyjana*, the river of the dead.

male and female naming dreams is that a woman—through the act of suckling—accepts the animal before it identifies itself as her child, whereas in men's dreams the threat or danger disappears only after the child legitimately identifies itself.

A number of Amazonianists (Gregor, 1983; Kracke, 1981) have used a psychoanalytic perspective to inform their analysis of dreams, suggesting that through their creation stories, Amazonians express and explore a series of underlying concerns and anxieties.[15] There are indeed persuasive psychoanalytic elements in the themes played out in naming dreams and in the differences between the dreams of men and women. The image of the hunt in men's naming dreams is consistent with the oedipal antagonism between a father and his son, a theme that recurs in Amazonian creation narratives (Murphy & Murphy, 1985). Ese Eja notions of partible paternity are likely to magnify any conscious and unconscious ambivalence expressed by fathers toward their unborn or newborn child in naming dreams, particularly in those cases where extramarital affairs are known, suspected, or rumored. In these cases, resolution in the dream could be interpreted as representing a symbolic resolution of the internal conflict, when the father accepts the child as "his own" and affirms his paternity.

Neo-Freudian perspectives afford some valuable insights into Ese Eja dreams. Yet looking at how Ese Eja construe their world, in its multiple and interpenetrating forms, provides yet another, complementary view of dreaming. I now turn my attention to this dimension of dreams and begin by exploring the relationship between a person and his or her dream namesake.

## SOME DREAM NAMES ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS

The assertion that a person's dream name is his or her "true" name raises the question as to the relationship between the person and the animal. On a day-to-day basis there is no obvious association between an individual and his or her dream name animal other than a linguistic one.[16] For instance, a person named *Sokwe* (toucan) may hunt and eat that animal like any other Ese Eja does, just as, accordingly, there are no dietary rules associated with the animals that identify the two Ese Eja moieties, as is common in other Amazonian moiety systems.[17] However, people do validate links between dream names and namesake animals through critical or humorous commentaries directed toward their perceived shared physical and character traits. For instance, the husband of a young woman named *Tewishiye* (*carachupa olorosa*), a species of armadillo who sleeps on heaps of dried vegetation, jokingly told me, "The reason my wife piles a mound of clothes together to sleep on is because she is *tewishiye*." Another friend is often disturbed by his son's destructive behavior: "Because he is *ño'* [white-lipped peccary], he likes to kill everything!" Likewise, most Sonenekwiñaji have made the overt connection between *Shai'jaime's* (black caiman) old age and the longevity associated with his namesake. Although such comments are made casually, they point toward causality rather than coincidence.

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[15]Whereas Kracke's (1981) analysis examines Kagwahiv dream content using an individual's specific unresolved issues, this analysis, similar to Gregor's (1983), instead explores a condition—in this case partible paternity—that is general to all members of the community.

[16]Fiorini (2000) finds that the relationship between Namiquara names and their corresponding animal or plant species is arbitrary and "meaningless" (p. 157).

[17]Such beliefs are consistent with the cosmology and everyday practice of the Ese Eja, who, for instance, actually hunt and eat *ño'*, the wild peccaries believed to embody their reincarnated dead ancestors.

Also, Ese Eja occasionally offer details from specific naming dreams to substantiate the link between the person and the namesake species. For instance, in one friend's dream the little squirrel that converted into his child had a red spot in its eye. Alas, his daughter *Chipo* (squirrel) was born, like in the dream, with a red spot in her eye. Similarly striking is a story by Petisa. She had dreamt of the transformation of a howler monkey into her soon-to-be born child. When *Do* (howler monkey) was born, he had a large lump on the side of his neck, characteristic of the protruding larynx of the howler monkey. Ese Eja draw comparisons between the individual and the "affects" of his or her dream namesake. Viveiros de Castro (1998) suggests that it is precisely these corporeal affects, not so much the physicality but the "dispositions or capacities which render the body of every species unique: what it eats, how it moves, how it communicates, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary" (p. 13), that form the distinctive viewpoints of subjects.

According to Chavarría (1996), Ese Eja will not name their children after feared animal spirits, such as *sa'ona* (the anaconda) or *iba* (the jaguar). Nor will they "pronounce" the name at dusk, "not even to insult an enemy," since "to mention his name means to invoke his malicious spirit" (Chavarría, 1996, p. 96).[18] And yet, in Sonene alone, one of the smaller Ese Eja communities, there are three people named Iba. Although obviously not a taboo, people are apprehensive about giving a child the name of a strong animal *eshawa* as it may potentially threaten his or her life.

Nonetheless there is a general consensus among Ese Eja that children should use their "true" names even if they indeed refer to dangerous or disliked animals. Conventionally, a child is not actually "given" a name, but rather his or her real name is revealed to the dreamer by virtue of his or her "seeing" the animal *eshawa* transform into the child. Yet there is no way of ascertaining whether the dreamer has decided to refrain from the telling of the dream.[19] A close friend confided in me how she had learned the "real" name of her daughter but refrained from giving it to her or letting anyone else know about it:

> [The name my daughter has now] is not from a dream. In my dream I saw *sitata!*—a snake! Sitata is her name!—But me, I remained silent about my dream. I didn't say a word to anyone. I did not want to give her *peeyoha'bajani* [a snake's name]!

However, many Ese Eja actually do give their children "snake names" or names of other animals that have the power to *jemíkani*, "kidnap the soul"; only in some cases are they ignored or changed.

The following story describes what can happen to a person with the same name as powerful animal *eshawa* and how his relationship with that animal can turn the temporary transcendence of dreams and daydreams into a more permanent state.


## SA'ONA: A DREAM NAME

After knowing Besha for months I began to hear a few of the elders occasionally call him by a different name: *Sa'ona*. I wondered what the mystery was behind this other name,

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[18]Chavarría's information (my translation) comes from one informant, interestingly, the son of Wohahé, the shaman from Palma Real who plays an important role in the narrative about Besha considered later in this article.

[19]In their elaborate system of animal dream imagery, Ese Eja do not always consider animals with strong *eshawa* to be negative omens. For example, in most nonnaming dreams the image of Sa'ona predicts the successful hunting of deer. Moreover, the inverse does not necessarily apply. For instance, a deer image warns that *Edósikiana,* a custodial forest being, not Sa'ona, is looking to eat your soul.

since people would immediately correct themselves upon saying "Sa'ona" as though they were catching a mistake. I knew that the name, which means anaconda, is generally used with caution, yet I also knew Ese Eja with personal names associated with equally powerful animal *eshawa* that were not uttered with such hesitancy.

One afternoon Besha told me that his "true" name is Sa'ona, his dream name, the name his father dreamed:

> Besha is my "new name." It is better you call me by this name [Besha]. When you call me [by the name Sa'ona], the anaconda hears my name and she wants to come and take me—she loves me because she says that I am beautiful. I never go alone to bathe because she could capture me.

Besha had been known and addressed as Sa'ona throughout his childhood. Then, around the age of 12, he became extremely ill. Neiri, his wife, elaborated: "The very same spirit as his name, Sa'ona, wanted to fill him with arrows so that she could carry him away. Sa'ona is the mother of the river—the most dangerous of animals that knows how to do harmful witchcraft."[20]

Sa'ona, one of the most powerful spirits, who commonly manifests itself in female form, like all predators was originally an Ese Eja, an original human–animal. According to my friends from Sonene, Sa'ona was not always associated with the water but instead had "fallen in [the river] and no longer wanted to come out." In those beginning times of nondifferentiation, transgressive events frequently catalyzed transformations between the genders or forms of humans and animals.

People say they fear Sa'ona, and her spirit relatives, especially when alone near bodies of water: "Once Sa'ona gazes into your eyes she will try to seize you and drown you." All snake *eshawa* have the power to *jemíkani*, causing illness and often death.[21] Some people experience this as being pierced with small arrows. Sa'ona mostly targets children, sickly individuals, and pregnant women. Women particularly fear Sa'ona when they break the prohibition, as they often do, that forbids them to bathe while menstruating.[22] Besha continued:

> Sa'ona is the name of the boa—she can jemíkani by shooting you with arrows—it is all right with the animals from the forest, these arrows you can deal with. Fish—catfish—these are bad. Wohahé [name of *eyámikekwa*, shaman] saw that Sa'ona, herself, was trying to grab me, get me. Sa'ona is an Ese Eja, a woman, a beautiful woman. She wanted to be my wife.[23] When I was sick I would dream of this ... she was approaching me. In my dream I was not asleep, I was awake, like during the day. She wanted to be my wife; she would sit by my side.

Besha, like creation stories, depicts *sa'ona* in a human form, expressing a perceived commonality underlying people and animals despite their manifest physical differences. Sa'ona's capacity to jemíkani is generally framed in the language of sexual predation.[24]

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[20]Neiri's reference to Sa'ona as "the mother of the river" resonates with elements of *deja* ("non–Ese Eja"), mostly Ribereño cosmologies where rivers, as well as different environments and organisms, are understood to have "mothers" who act as guardians. However, spirits are gendered to the extent that they are more associated with the earth or the water, such as happens to be the case with female spirits and water throughout Ese Eja cosmology—but these domains are not exclusive (Peluso, 2003a).

[21]The sexual symbolism associated with *jemíkani* is often described as "loving" or "cohabitating" (Alexiades, 1999, p. 205), first and foremost a form of sexual predation.

[22]People say that Sa'ona will *jemíkani* when "she" smells menstrual blood from great distances via little fish that bring it to her.

[23]Vilaca (2002) discusses how among the Wari, some childhood illnesses originate from an animal's desire to make kin.

[24]There are also stories about male *sa'ona* and *enashawa* ("custodial water spirit"), but their

When I asked him whether Sa'ona, the anaconda, had wanted to have sexual relations with him, he answered, "She did not want to have sex. She just wanted to be next to me, to stay by me. She was oh so beautiful! She wanted to be my wife." Besha does not experience his relationships with Sa'ona as sexually aggressive, yet he expresses the sexual symbolism associated with *jemíkani* in affectionate terms.

After several months Besha/Sa'ona's illness worsened, and he fell into a state of semi-paralysis. His family expected him to die. After having tried several unsuccessful remedies, Sa'ona's father enlisted the help of the most powerful *eyámikekwa* (shaman) of that time: Wohahé. He happened to live in Palma Real, the community in which Sa'ona and his family resided at the time. Wohahé's help was expensive because Besha's cure demanded the *eyámikekwa's* constant dedication for approximately one month's time:

> The *eyámikekwa* (Wohahé) came several times a day to blow tobacco smoke over my body and prepare a mixture of plants that my parents would bathe me with. When the cure was ending and I was nearly recovered Wohahé told me that I should no longer be named Sa'ona. He said, "Besha *bajani poyakue!*" (You must make your name Besha!)

Wohahé's cure for Besha's illness was a synergistic model for everyday and multiple social worlds. He validated the anaconda's sexual aggression and power to transform Besha into her husband as manifested in his dreams. Although he is called Besha, his "real" name is Sa'ona, the name his father dreamed. Besha is a "trick," a way to fool Sa'ona so that she will not come to him on land. Even if he suspends its use, it remains his name. This is why Besha still does not bathe alone in the river, for not even the river can cleanse away and erase his dream name.

## BEYOND NAMES

The story of Sa'ona reveals that additional and even more profound bonds exist between individuals and the animals whose names they bear.[25] Animals are visible manifestations of normally invisible anthropomorphic beings. Here, it is important to look at the signification attached to these namesakes, particularly through the Amerindian multinaturalist ontology proposed by Viveiros de Castro (1998, 1999, 2002). Multinatural perspectivism, as I relate it to Ese Eja cross-realities, such as the dream world, implies that all subjects (human or not) share personhood and interact socially as enacted in dream narratives.[26] These are not strictly alternative perspectives but rather a capacity for the "carrying-over of the same view point" into different cross-realities (Ingold, 2000, p. 424). Second, it means that having shared a primordial state of "humanity," subjects continue to share an intangible component—*eshawa* in the Ese Eja case—that withstands any corporeal transformations. In this sense, humanity is at the core of personhood, and animality is a future possibility (Viveiros de Castro, 1998), a point I return to later.[27]

encounters with women are not as successful. These stories never proceed as far as the men's, perhaps because women are imagined as exercising more libidinous caution and suspicion with strangers or perhaps because they are more exposed to sexual predation.

[25]The fact that dream names are mostly animal names coincides with an Ese Eja cosmovision that is basically fauna centered (Alexiades, 1999). This is to say that Ese Eja creation narratives, shamanism, and traditional subsistence strategies are, or were, more centered on animals than on plants.

[26]*Perspectival multinaturalism* is a more appropriate expression than *animism*, which recognizes only the social character of beings and not their viewpoints as subjects (for discussions on Amazonian animism, see Arhem, 1996; Bird-David, 1999; Viveiros de Castro, 1999).

[27]An example of this potential animality is the visitations of deceased Ese Eja ancestors, who

Dream names are not merely links to the visible body and affects of their animal namesake but are potentially linked to the animal's *eshawa* (the intangible immaterial dimension of personhood) and hence linked to *eshawa* of the spirit world at large. This is because *eshawa* are themselves the embodiment of even more powerful *eshawa*, such as various "custodial spirits" like *edósikiana*. Thus, the roles and presence of animals in everyday life surpass their physicality, their *eyami* (bodies), which serve as transient "envelopes" for *eshawa*.[28] Yet not all *eshawa* are capable of the same degree of deliberate power. The greater an *eshawa*'s ability to transform is, the greater is its phenomenological presence and scope of power.

This helps us explain why Besha can no longer bathe alone. Besha is not threatened by just one particular *sa'ona* but by many and all *sa'ona*. *Eshawa* are not fixed and singular; they are instead always *japanakiani*, mutable and forever regenerative. The efficacy of the shaman's prescription, a change of name, is a reminder of the potential transgression between Ese Eja and *eshawa* that is still possible.[29] Accordingly, dream names have an ordinary signification in everyday life but have the potential of forming more powerful bonds in expanding cross-realities. Just as dream names link individuals to the social, they link them to the cosmos as part of the social.

## BEYOND DREAMS

Like creation stories, dreams reveal an underlying philosophical and epistemological order. They remind us that just as in the temporal–historical times of yawaho nee nee, transformation between multiple worlds is still possible.[30] Naming dreams broaden conventional ideas about time because they reflect a multi-spatial–temporal orientation of the overlapping realities of *yawaho nee nee*, present, and future. Upon hearing oral creation narratives told and retold, one is struck by how transmutable and undifferentiated beings once were. Ese Eja explain how in *yawaho nee nee* (a long time ago; an ancestral time), Ese Eja became animals. For instance, in the story about Besha/Sa'ona, people explained that "Sa'ona is Ese Eja" and that most animals (i.e., *dokwei* [deer], *shawe* [tapir], and *se'ao* [agouti]) "are Ese Eja." By insisting that certain animals "are Ese Eja," people are not merely referring to the common humanity once shared with animals. Their use of the present tense suggests that humans and animals continue to share this humanity in the form of *eshawa*. However, in naming dream narratives it is animals who are becoming Ese Eja. I suggest that the transformation in naming dreams inverts and reflects the transformations

temporarily reincarnate themselves as *ño'*, white-lipped peccaries. Life and death are metaphysically linked, for both the living and the dead have *eshawa*.

[28]Alexiades (1999) examines the relationships between Ese Eja, animals, and plants and the notions of *eyami* (body) and *eshawa* (spirit, spirits). Viveiros de Castro (1998, 1999), in discussions on Amerindian perspectivism, describes how the physical form of each species is a mere envelope, clothing, or mask for the "spirit" or "soul" (cf. Ingold, 2000). See also Kamppinen's (1988) use of the term "embodied" with respect to plant and animal spirits in his analysis of mestizo ethnomedicine.

[29]Dreams are one context in which this transformation is still possible, not just through the potential link of a dream name to its namesake *eshawa* but also through other types of dreams in which animals, disguised as humans, attempt to have sexual relations with Ese Eja (Burr, 1997). Such advances are resisted, because sexual encounters could cause the dreamer to die in this world and join the specific *eshawa* as a transformed animal in theirs.

[30]Naming dreams also have their performative narrative interpretive styles in common with creation narratives (Graham, 1994). Both have dramaturgic forms that depend on the same "spatial-sensory modality" for communicating internal visualizations (Kracke, 1992b, p. 32).

from *yawaho nee nee*. Hence, there is a reversal of mythic ontology: Whereas historically animals emerged from a shared humanity, in naming dream narratives Ese Eja emerge from animality.

Naming dreams and their resulting dream names, with their transient sense of corporeality and looming possibilities toward animality, illustrate the coexistence and cohabitation of different realities and potential states of being. Ese Eja clearly distinguish between different worlds despite their sometimes ambiguous boundaries. I suggest that it is not the contradiction between the private, subjective dream world and public, objective waking world but rather people's recognition of their coexistence, similarities, and differences that is most significant.

The concept of *eshawa* implies a blurring and overlapping between dreaming and waking realities; however, this does not insinuate that Ese Eja cannot distinguish between these worlds. Gregor (1981), for instance, suggests that Mehinaku dreams lie between the "self and not-self" (p. 717), reflecting a general concern over individual physical and psychological boundaries. In general, for Ese Eja, mixtures of distinct categories of self and "other," despite their familiarities, trigger anxieties reflecting the fragility of Ese Eja identity (Peluso, 2003a). This is particularly the case with dream namesakes, because the tensions of shared essentialized traits are often charged with notions of danger and the threat of transgression. But by focusing on contradiction as an acceptable condition of existence, one sees that it is not just the limits of the "self and not-self" that are a concern but also the nonlimit, the rejoining, and the overlapping of a unifying personhood (*eshawa*) as well. As such, the undifferentiation (not to be conflated with an individual's ability to distinguish between realities) so vividly represented in naming dreams and creation narratives emphasizes the "wholeness" of personhood.

Through the examination of Ese Eja ideas about personhood, multiplicity, and transformation, as well as their interpretations of dreams and self, I hope to have shown why "that which I dream is true." For Ese Eja, dream names reflect a connection not only with the self but also with all of the other beings that animate the world. Just as one's dreams connect different realities, so does one's *eshawa*. Such an outlook reflects the ability of dreams to cross uncertain boundaries of self, community, and other. Ese Eja dream names and their narratives highlight the ongoing combination of dream and other realities in the production of difference and sameness. These narratives forge perspectives on Ese Eja identity, the "self," as being in a continuous process of contestation and fragmentation as well as a rejoining and solidification. Exploring these ideas through a multinaturalist perspective conveys the openness, permeability, and plurality of Ese Eja realities, as well as the multiple and sometimes contradictory identities that challenge our representation of Amazonian communities today.

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