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No past, no present:

A critical-Nayaka perspective on cultural remembering

A B S T R A C T

By means of an ethnographic analysis of Nayaka life stories and trance invocations, I revisit the common wisdom that cultures classed as "immediate-return hunter-gatherers" show little interest in the past. I argue that Nayaka are not interested in the past in the common Eurocentric understanding thereof. They are interested, however, in a past filtered through their own sensibilities. Their specific case supports a broader critique of studying ways of remembering the past in terms of a Eurocentric past–present distinction. [*past, time, cultural remembering, history, spirit possession, Nayaka, hunter-gatherers*]

In 2001 I returned to the Nilgiris hills of South India to revisit the small Nayaka group with whom I had first worked as an anthropologist in 1978–79. In a small clearing, amidst a shrinking deciduous tropical forest surrounded by rapidly expanding plantations, I met Madi, who had been my *aka* (sister) during the fieldwork. ''What has happened in the area?'' I asked her. She shrugged my question off, saying that her people did not remember such things. We talked at length about ''our'' parents and other relatives, remembering who was where and with whom more than 20 years before. This banal conversation raises a critical question in relation to the growing body of literature concerning the diversity of ways by which people remember the past. That is, is there a given, universal past? Are there not diverse perceptions of the past and various ways that people remember it? Specifically, in what way should one understand the past in which Madi was interested, compared with the one about which I inquired?

Of course, these questions did not arise only from this conversation, which amplified other ethnographic findings. The Nayaka with whom I worked, and, to my best knowledge, Nayaka in general, rarely related their own myths about the past. They did not usually recount genealogies beyond two ascending generations. Their rituals did not commemorate past events, and the few objects that they used therein were not approached as embodiments of the deeds of the deceased, but as the deceased themselves. Furthermore, they rarely drew trajectories of travel routes and settlements (about which I learned from their non-Nayaka neighbors). Their scattered clusters of huts, some with as few as one or two dwellings, usually were not referred to by place-names that condensed stories of the past but as *nama sime* (our home place) or by reference to a prominent landmark or the name of the closest plantation or rural market village, even if these were a long walk away.

These Nayaka belong to an analytical class of societies called ''immediate-return hunter-gatherers,'' who, in received wisdom, are rarely interested in the past. James Woodburn (1980, 1982a, 1982b)

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typified these societies in distinction to ''delayed-return hunter-gatherers.'' Hunter-gatherers generally have been cast in modern scholarship—reflecting *its* concerns—as representatives of the human past, raising fierce controversies during the 1980s and early 1990s.[1] Outlasting these debates, the category is still commonly used, framing for some anthropologists ongoing research into evolutionary questions and for others (myself included) a comparative context for studying common social practices and cosmologies. Woodburn distinguished between the two types primarily by the temporal horizons of their economic effort.[2] In the immediate-return type, he posited, ''activity oriented directly to the present (rather than to the past or the future) is stressed ... people use their labour to obtain food and other resources which are consumed on the day they are obtained or casually over the days that follow ... there is a minimum of investment in long-lasting artifacts or in long-enduring debts'' (1982b:205). Woodburn further suggested that such peoples ''are strongly oriented to the present'' and show a ''lack of concern about the past or the future'' (1980:106).

This proposition concurred with Claude Meillassoux's earlier suggestion that hunter-gatherers are ''tied to the present'' (1973:194) and with that of Maurice Bloch, who, in an oft-cited article, focused on the hunter-gatherer Hadza as an example of a people who show a ''total ... lack of concern with the past in the present'' (1977:288). Woodburn explicitly restricted such observations to the immediate-return type, for, included in the delayed-return type are societies such as the Aboriginal Australians and some North Amerindian societies who have complex temporal concepts, rich corpora of myths, and, in the Australian cases, complex genealogical reckonings. Some of the latter societies had classically been offered as examples of ''timeless'' cultures that exhibit an indifference to time, but more recent ethnographies have shown how complex their temporal concepts are. Fred Myers (1986), for example, has demonstrated how time is fused with space in the ''Dreamtime'' concept, and Diane Bell (1993) has shown how narratives co-constitute time and social groups. At the same time, the image of the present-focused immediate-return hunter-gatherer has remained the common wisdom, so much so that in *The Anthropology of Time,* Alfred Gell metaphorically draws on it—at the same time grounding it further in Roy Wagner's (1981) sense—when he alludes to his own ''present-focused, hunter-gathererish mind-set, coupled with a certain indifference to the past and the future'' (1992:314).

These exotic cases provide a good starting point for critiquing the study of ways of remembering the past. As elaborated below, ''the past'' is a cardinal notion in the branch of inquiry that, taking the past as given, focuses on how it is produced and reproduced in the present. Document and legend, myth and record, place-names, rituals, and travel routes have all been creatively investigated as diverse modes for making the past known in the present. Although history is pluralized in these studies, a Eurocentric past–present distinction is grounded in the process, along with the senses of the past that it selects. Until the 1980s, anthropologists uncritically used the nature–culture distinction with similar effects. The broader question with which I am concerned here, therefore, is whether—as is now well established for the latter distinction—this past–present distinction is also not as generalizable as has previously been assumed.

The ethnographic argument to be presented below builds on a series of earlier articles in which I maintained that Nayaka do not unify, objectify, or reify their environs as part of an integrated system, ''nature.''[3] Thinking predominantly in terms not of what but of who, they sense their environment as a community of situated persons: hill-persons, stone-persons, animal-persons, and so on.[4] They authorize a relational epistemology, giving priority to knowing these persons not in and for themselves, as knowns detached from their knower, but within relationships and for the sake of reproducing relationships. Building on these articles, I argue here that Nayaka also do not objectify or reify a past, in the Western hegemonic sense of the term. They do not envision the past primarily as a distant place, a foreign country, something gone by, that *was* and is never to return.[5] They do not assume an irreversible split, a rupture, an unbridgeable distance between that which had been and that which is now, as if the two can never meet. Rather, they primarily think, in this case, too, in terms not of what but of who, focusing on various kinds of *persons*: predecessors, ancestors, dead persons, and so on. They sense these persons as relatives who arrive before them, ones whom they join rather than replace, and with whom they share a home. Authorizing a relational epistemology, these persons are known relationally by means of, and for, social engagement, most importantly through dancing, singing, and, above all, talking with their invoked manifestations.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me make it clear from the beginning that I do not suggest that this argument exhausts Nayaka temporal concepts, applies wholesale to *all* other immediate-return hunter-gatherers, or is relevant *only* to these societies. A totalizing perspective underlies such readings, which, with Carol Greenhouse (1996), I reject. I grant (with Greenhouse 1996) that social times are plural, in at least the two following ways. First, there are rival social times in any social context, and, second, social times that Westerners fail to gauge by *our* geometrical metaphors are not, in their common difference from our social times, necessarily the same among themselves. In this article I explore a sense of ''the before'' that does not seem to be sufficiently appreciated by scholars. I claim

that Nayaka institutionally privilege this sense, for which reason, precisely, these Nayaka are good to think with about cultural remembering, leaving it for future studies to examine where, how, and with what their sense of ''the before'' is articulated.

I begin by situating the ethnographic inquiry within a broader theoretical context; this is followed by a description of the analytical approach, including a preliminary reflection on the limits of using *past* as an analytical term given that it has its own historical and cultural antecedents. I then analyze Nayaka ethnography, moving from personal recollections to collective ones, and I end with a discussion that abstracts from all of these materials some Nayaka sense of ''the before'' and how it is remembered.

Times and pasts

Various bodies of knowledge suggest themselves as thematic contexts for exploring why Madi and her people (in Madi's words) ''do not remember such things,'' and whether, what, and how they culturally remember instead. Moreover, we must ask whether it is Madi and her people who have no interest in the past, or whether it is we, as researchers, who should question our supposedly neutral terms of inquiry and the ''normal'' state that these foreground. Such supposed neutrality informs the studies of time, history, and collective memory, and (as will be seen below) the study of spirit possession. The respective relative autonomy of these fields is tale telling in itself. Obviously, I cannot do them all justice.[6] In what follows I offer only one synopsis from the vantage point of my ethnography, as a framework for exploring a privileged Nayaka sense of ''the before.''

''The past'' is a defining concept that frames the now-burgeoning study of historical or collective memory (dealing comparatively with cultural ways of representing and producing the past), but it is fair to say that by and large the concept itself is not problematized within this inquiry. To the contrary, in some sense, the past is naturalized by it. For the more one asks how people diversely reproduce the past in the present, the more firm becomes a sense of ''the 'real' reality'' of that past that people then diversely represent.[7] The very question foregrounds in the imagination a sense of a past that cannot be directly experienced, a past that is time apart from the present (in the Western sense of linear, spacelike time), a past that is over and gone and at best can now only be represented. As Greenhouse shows for linear time, this past may be only the past in its familiar representation to us now. This past may be a social past, in Emile Durkheim's sense of ''social time'' (as read by Greenhouse 1996, see especially pp. 24–28).

Greenhouse reads Durkheim's ''social time'' from a hermeneutic perspective, in disagreement with Gell (1992), who critically reads it as quasi-metaphysical. According to Greenhouse, Durkheim's ''social time'' assumes ''some real time in nature'' (1996:27) that is relevant to personal and social life only in highly mediated forms. Greenhouse distinguishes (with Durkheim) between ''personal experiences in time'' and ''a person's sense of temporal orientation from his or her awareness of time as a category'' (1996:27). She argues that temporality in the latter sense is by no means ''a defining hallmark of 'whole' cultures and societies'' (Greenhouse 1996:82). It is connected to the perception of agencies and their distribution in social space. It is politically generated and maintained by the ruling classes.

Whereas Greenhouse, it can be said, politicizes, pluralizes, and untotalizes ''social time,'' other students have tried to refine the concept of time as a tool for universal analysis. Gell (1992:149–155), for example, distinguished between what he called (following McTaggart) ''the A-series,'' in which time is immanent in the passage of events, and ''the B-series,'' in which events are strung out in time like beads on a thread. He maintained that time is ''one and the same, a familiar dimensional property of our experienced surroundings'' (Gell 1992:315) and urged anthropologists to study the manifold ways in which this dimension becomes salient in human affairs. In Greenhouse's terms, Gell's project is to promote a rival social time within anthropology as a culture or society itself.

Notwithstanding the essential differences between these two major studies of time, neither pays much attention to the past as a major temporal category. The past is rarely referenced in Greenhouse's book (e.g., even in its index), whereas Gell explicitly acknowledges the omission, which, as mentioned, he lightly ascribes to his own ''present-focused, hunter-gathererish mind-set'' (1992:31). In this respect, both of these major, recent texts on time align with classic time anthropology. In discussing time reckoning, counting, or telling, time anthropology, it can be said, has paid attention to the graduated scale of *small* temporal units (e.g., the clock's hours and minutes, the calendar's months and years, and, in their absence, the natural repetition of sunrises, moon cycles, seasons, social activities, and so on, *or*, at the opposite extreme, to the mega-entity of Time itself). Time (writ large) was itself characterized by how the past and the present are related in different cultures, against the yardstick of students' taken-for-granted arrangement of one epoch preceding another in a progressive sequence. ''Cyclical,'' ''reversible,'' or ''changeless,'' which were the classic characterizations of some non-Western Times, generally allude, after all, to an alleged conception of the present as an eternal repetition of the past. In this, they only foreground the past and the present as points (or zones) of reference, in other words, as the conceptual currency *in terms of which* other issues are discussed.

Yet Tim Ingold (1986, 2000) notes that even in modern Western thought there are at least two underlying past–present relations. Ingold shows the ricochets of Bergsonian and Newtonian temporalities. The first involves ''inner time that actively brings forth or reveals new [evolutionary] forms in progressive succession,'' and the second, ''outer time that provides a backcloth against which the whole parade of forms is to be projected'' (Ingold 1986:8). In both views, the past *precedes* the present, but in the first instance it is generative of the present and in the second, alien to it. In the first case, to quote an anonymous reviewer of this article, it is ''a long leash that ties us to our origins'' and in the second, ''a country that we have inexorably left behind.''

The historian David Lowenthal (1985) further shows how much the view of the past has changed in Europe since the 16th century. The past, once virtually indistinguishable from the present, he argues, was, by the late 18th century, viewed as a foreign country, separate and distinguished by its otherness from the present. This new past gradually ceased to provide comparative lessons and came to be cherished as a heritage that validated and exalted the present. Its changing conception was accompanied by a growing concern to save and restore monuments as emblems of communal identity, whereas previously, attention had focused on emulating past works in new creations. Interest in museums, relics, and history grew, and these Eurocentric modes of valuing the past are now spreading across the globe, even among non-Western peoples long deprived by, or at odds with, Europeanization (Lowenthal 1990).

Lowenthal (1985:xxvi) practically calls for a comparative study of views of the past, while at the same time lamenting his own exclusive focus on Europe and the elites within it. Why anthropologists have not (as it seems) taken up this challenge is hard to understand. A debate held among anthropologists on Lowenthal's thesis (Ingold 1996:199–249) suggests one reason. In the debate, it is the historian Lowenthal who urges the participants not to confuse the past and how it is viewed. He says, for example, that ''to show that the past is *viewed* as a foreign country is not to claim that it *is* one'' and that the past is ''both what has happened and how we *view* what has happened'' (Lowenthal 1996:207). For their part—and, in this respect, not unlike the proverbial cobbler who walks barefoot—some anthropologists have spent most of their efforts debating what the past *really is*.[8] In this way, they naturalize the past, something that also happens in the growing study of ''other histories.''

Pasts and histories: Narratives and events

The past is the common denominator in the avalanche of studies that, since the 1980s, have been examining ''Other Histories'' (Hastrup 1992) besides oral and written accounts. These studies—which, in James Faubion's words, dissolved ''the Great Divide between peoples 'without' and peoples with history, between peoples indifferent to and peoples devoted to history'' (1993:35)—explored the great diversity of idioms in which the past is made known, both within and outside Europe.[9] Among these are stories and myth, commemorative ceremonies and trance invocations, lists of place-names and trails, objects, and body decorations.[10] The more history is pluralized in this way, however, the more the past figures as an unproblematic given, and attention is largely directed toward the diversity of idioms in which *it* is represented. Furthermore, the more interest shifts away from the ''truth'' of history to its making, especially to the use people make of the past in the present, the more the past and the present become stabilized as separate and opposite entities. Moreover, when one asks questions such as who produced the story of the past, how and when, whose narrative of the past reigns supreme, when and by whom is it contested, and what explanation for and justification of the present does the narrative of the past provide, this past is naturalized as something knowable only through political stories.

In paying attention to nonliterate means of producing and circulating knowledge of the past, studies of literacy have been the forerunner of these newer concerns.[11] These studies have focused on literacy in its *distinction* from *orality* and for the purpose of demonstrating *literacy*'s significance.[12] Major questions probed by such studies were, for example, what were the cognitive and mental consequences of literacy? How did inscription alter critical faculties and the truth and accountability of stories about the past? In hindsight, one may just as well ask what were the consequences of *asking* in this way about the consequences of literacy? As Greenhouse (1996:50) points out, literacy was cast as the evolutionary successor of orality, and it was associated with linear time, both as an invention that took place at a certain fixed time and as providing a baseline for time.[13] In addition, perhaps the hegemonic *narrative* form of written history has been generalized, as both the means of gaining knowledge about the past and the evidence of interest in it. This generalization can be seen in some studies of exotic histories, which examine where or how *narratives* are embodied or related and that render exotic practices historical by showing they embody or relate *narratives*.

One good example of such studies is provided by the pioneering work of Renato Rosaldo (1980) on Ilongot stories. These stories, he argues, select and frame what they relate in a distinctive cultural fashion, at their most elemental, simply listing a lifetime of place-names of locations where people have gardened

or erected their house posts. Rosaldo argues that, even so, these stories are historical narratives that are both a moving force in the Ilongot's lived-in present and an accurate depiction of episodes from bygone days. Their accuracy (an issue important in the early 1980s but less so later on) is tangential to my point, which is, rather, that the conceptual mould of *narratives* about *events* frames this analysis.[14]

Another good example is provided by Richard Price (1983), whose own account of the Saramaka notably broke away from the narrative format of conventional ethnography. Price showed how Saramaka old men, whom he called ''historians,'' preserved knowledge of the struggle against slavery in the 17th and 18th centuries in diverse forms, including commemorative placenames, lists of lands owned by clans, proverbs, songs and prayers, and the invocation of Old-Time People themselves. He posited that ''events are the very stuff of [Saramaka] history (not, as Valery [1962:476] would have it, 'only the froth on things')'' (1983:5). A *narration* of these *events,* he maintained, is encapsulated in these various commemorative practices.

Two further cases can be mentioned, which are doubly interesting in the context of this article because they involve delayed-return hunter-gatherers, in Woodburn's paradigmatic terms. Myers (1986) shows how for the Aboriginal Pintupi, as elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia, any significant feature of the land is held to result from a sequence of events that occurred in the Dreamtime. The Pintupi narrate these events by myths, songs, dances, paintings, and other means. Their mythology mainly comprises narratives of beings who travel from place to place. The places are linked by stories and are classified into larger systems by what Myers describes as ''geographically based narratives'' (1986:59–60).[15] But these stories are not just "accounts of" in this case. Story is a key local metaphor, Myers suggests; it is a sacred object of sorts, with presence and agency, as it were, of its own. [16] In Irving Hallowell's study of the Ojibwa, a similar point emerges even more strongly. Although Hallowell states at one point that, for the Ojibwa, their myth is ''a true *account of events*" (2000:27, emphasis added), elsewhere he reports that these myths are locally thought of as conscious beings, with powers of thought and action. They are called ''our grandfathers'' (Hallowell 2000:27).[17] The grandfathers' voices can be heard in conjuring performances from within the conjuring lodge, and the audience can engage and talk *with* them (Hallowell 2000:40). In the Nayaka case, I shall argue below, the balance shifts even further away from *narratives about* toward *engageable persons.* There is hardly any interest in narratives about; concern focuses almost entirely on persons. Before turning to the ethnographic material, however, I reflect on the means for its description and analysis.

Past, nature, and other spirits

The study of nature, I suggest, outlines a promising direction for this analysis because, until the 1980s, its ''real'' reality was as firmly presumed as, I argue, that of the past still is. Nature was until then generally distinguished from, and seen as prior to, culture (irrespective of what was observed by some ethnographers, such as Hallowell [2000]). With Claude Lévi-Strauss, a binary opposition between nature and culture was generalized as a universal cognitive structure (see MacCormack 1980). Ethnographies in direct engagement with these assumptions subsequently suggested alternative cultural schemes. Examples of such alternatives were cultures that distinguish between wild and planted rather than between nature and culture (Strathern 1980), and ones that do not distinguish between nature and society but, rather, regard the physical environment as part of society (Bird-David 1990, 1992b, 1999; Descola 1992, 1994). Meanwhile, attention was also paid to European research showing the historical and cultural antecedents of the Western idea of ''nature'' and tracing the idea's changes since the 16th century.[18] The assumed universal nature was subsequently problematized, spurring ethnographic research into cultural perceptions of the environment.[19]

The past at first may seem far more commonsensical to us, as analysts, than nature, but, as Michael Herzfeld put it, ''Common sense is, anthropologically speaking, seriously mis-named; it is neither common to all cultures, nor is any version of it particularly sensible from the perspective of anyone outside its particular cultural context'' (2001:1). Similarly, Lowenthal cautioned researchers to ''be wary of anything from the past that appears familiar'' (1996:209), and his work, more than any other, shows that the warning applies at the very least to the notion of ''the past'' itself. We must critically reflect on this notion, which is a part of our descriptive and analytical language, before we use it. A small beginning can be made by noting four interlocking senses, bearing in mind, and this simply cannot be overemphasized, that by this I mean neither that it is *only Westerners* who sense the past in these ways nor that we view it *only* in such ways. We simply need to get a sense of the cultural and historical antecedents of our analytical language.

One contemporary sense of the past is as a foreign country. Indeed, if Lowenthal (1985) is correct, and Europeans have seen it this way only since the 17th and 18th centuries, such a perception cannot be lightly universalized as a general yardstick. Such a sense generally associates the past with distance, imagining the temporal and the spatial by reference to each other. This is evident in the popularity of time traveling as a genre in modern science fiction (Lowenthal 1985, esp. ch. 2). Conversely, we readily imagine geographically remote, exotic peoples

as temporally distant; this concept has even been institutionally promoted in classic anthropology by its privileged genre of ethnography (Fabian 1983). Whereas Johannes Fabian shows how the Other in modern discourse is relegated far back in time, Lowenthal (1996) suggests, conversely, that one of the reasons for the changing view of the past in Europe was the growing contact with non-European peoples. This, he suggests, helped dispel the belief in human uniformity, which underlined the pre-Enlightenment sense of a domestic past, analogous to the present. Either way, the temporal and the spatial are deeply entangled in the Western imagination.

Yet another sense of the past is bygoneness, which, equally, much as it appears commonsensical, can neither be ascribed a priori to *all* non-European peoples nor be taken as the yardstick for judging their views. In contrast to the present, which is here now, by definition, ''the past'' implies something that is bygone, over, done with, something that *was* and is never to return, something beyond reach, which is no longer here. This sense is built into the word *past,* defined as a noun by the *Oxford English Dictionary* meaning ''gone by in time, elapsed ... over'' and as an adverb meaning ''beyond in time ... beyond the reach, range, or compass of.''[20] It reverberates in the spoken, contemporary usage of the word *past* to mean ''finished, ended'' (Longman 1980:793). It is expressed in such common sayings as ''What's done is done,'' ''That's history,'' and ''It's all water under the bridge'' (Mines 1997:173).[21] In contrast with this past, the present is conceived of as novel, constantly new and unique (Strathern 1992).[22] The sense of the past as bygone is sometimes grounded by the argument for viewing it as a foreign country, for example, even by Lowenthal himself, who stressed that the past is ''over, finished'' and that ''with time's arrow the *actual* past is *gone forever*'' (1996:207, 211, emphasis added). At the same time—notwithstanding that the concern was largely over what the past ''really'' is—the debate over Lownethal's thesis helps one see alternatives. As Ingold summed it up, the past ''lies behind us'' and is ''by definition that which is not directly 'present' to consciousness''; however, ''as memory it remains very much *with* us: in our bodies, in our dispositions and sensibilities, and in our skills of perception and actions'' (1996:202).

A third sense of the past in its contemporary, common English rendering is ''all previous times together.'' The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes this sense in its definition of the term as ''all time before the present; bygone days collectively.'' In this sense, the past is an abstract category, reifying innumerable unique days passing one by one, and a series of complex lived realities. These are all objectified as a thing—real, tangible, and concrete—so much so that in popular and literary discourse the past can be described as rich or dull, glorious or grim. In scholarly discourse, it can be talked about as a *thing* to be produced and used by agents. This is the past that has become a marketable commodity in Euro-America only since the 19th century and that is now spreading fast throughout the world (Lowenthal 1985, 1990).

Finally, in the common Eurocentric perception, the stuff of which the past is made is *events* following and sometimes causing each other. ''Event'' itself is an abstraction of a complex field of happenings, places, things, persons, and actions. ''The past'' is an abstraction of such abstractions when it is seen as a multitude of such ''events,'' happening one after or alongside another. Similarly, ''history'' is abstracted when it is seen to consist of ''a concatenation of discrete and transitory entities or events, each unique in its particulars'' (Ingold 1986:74), and when the task of the historian is said to be the production of an authentic account of the succession of such ''events,'' in a particular region over a particular period of time.

To gauge the Nayaka sense of ''the before,'' it helps to bear in mind these four senses of the past, which to a degree are ingrained in the analytical and descriptive vocabulary. Furthermore, it is instructive to self-consciously juxtapose the ethnography with them. I adopt this strategy below. Indeed, it is an approach that is preferable in this case because the creolized nature of the dialect spoken by most of these Nayaka makes an alternative linguistic focus on their grammar and vocabulary highly problematic. Living in the border area between Tamil-Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka across the Nilgiri-Wynaad region, and having closely engaged with their diverse neighbors for centuries, possibly for two millennia, they speak a dialect that draws on Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam, depending on proximity to speakers of those respective South Dravidian languages.[23] I focus in this article not on language but on two cultural sites, where, for all that they supposedly lack interest in the past, Nayaka *do* relate to ''the before.''[24] The first is personal recollections, and here I ask in what patterned ways do people recall what anthropologists brand their ''life *history*'' (letting our ideas of ''history'' and ''story'' colonize the domestic personal sphere)? The second is collective recollections, which take place in Nayaka trance gatherings through what is branded in the literature ''spirit possession.'' In recent years, spirit possession has been approached by anthropologists as a prism through which to refract or undo such naturalized constructs as ''person,'' ''gender,'' and ''body,'' and as a means of knowing and learning about self–other relations and about the Other.[25] Here I approach it as a prism through which to undo the naturalized past, and as the Nayaka's means of learning about and knowing temporally different others.

It suffices here to provide only the following minimal briefing before turning to their personal and collective recollections, given that various ethnographic

perspectives on this group of Nayaka can be found in previous publications, and some details about their circumstances and history appear as part of the analysis below.[26] My study focused on a group living in the Gir Valley (a fictive name), in a deciduous tropical forest, not far from a small rubber and coffee estate that was established at the end of the 19th century and that almost closed down toward the end of the 20th. A fluctuating proportion of the adults had been working on and off on this estate since the 1950s, continuing at the same time to gather roots and fruits in the forest, collect honey, fish, and hunt to a limited extent.[27] In a bid to stake a claim over their land, they have been building and rebuilding their huts since the 1970s in more or less the same locations (while still moving freely among these locations). The new millennium has seen the building of a few brick-and-concrete dwellings in some settlements, which, nonetheless, remain very small in size, some with as few as two or three dwellings. The majority of the study was carried out in 1978–79, with follow-up visits in 1989 and 2001. I now turn to the Nayaka's own personal recollections.

Personal remembering

Madi's grandfather, Karriyen, was over 75 years of age in 1978–79.[28] He was a lucid man and a greatly respected trance performer. He still managed to provide for himself and his 70-year-old wife, who suffered from failing eyesight and stayed at home. He gathered roots and fruits in the forest and palm leaves to sell to vendors in little roadside stalls, where the leaves were used for packing cheap wares. His home area had undergone great changes in the course of his life. Five hundred acres of prime forest had been transformed into a rubber estate when he was a young child. During his adolescence and early adulthood, a Scottish company had run the estate under a lease from the minor royal family in Nelliyalam. After Karriyen married and was raising a family, an Indian company took over the estate, replacing some old rubber trees with coffee and spices, and bringing in a few dozen low-caste immigrants, mainly Muslims from Kerala, as workers (Bird-David 1992a). By the time he had grandchildren, a school had been opened on the estate, and one of his grandchildren studied there for a few years. The school later closed down, and, afterward, the estate itself partially ceased operations.

When I asked Karriyen about his life, he did not relate this sequence of events. He did not have a ready story to tell or seem to use a grand narrative as a means of understanding himself and his world (like, say, Barbara Myerhoff's [1978] old-age Jewish immigrants in the United States). Our conversations throughout the fieldwork, nevertheless, occasionally produced fragmented details that popped up in diverse conversational contexts or were prompted by my own questions. The fragments gradually accumulated into a retrospective view, if only intersubjectively between us and as notes scattered throughout my field diaries. This retrospective helps me to begin analyzing Nayaka's salient ways of remembering. Note that, when using *remembering* and *remembrance* in this ethnographic analysis, I refer not to psychological but to cultural phenomena. I follow Herzfeld, who stressed (with Jamil Dakhlia [1990]) the need to draw a distinction between ''memory, a psychological process, and remembrance, a social one; and between forgetting on the one hand, and more systemic forms of obliteration ('oblivion') on the other'' (2001:78).

Some of what Karriyen told me about his life follows. His remarks are abridged and arranged in an order, but at the same time I have tried to retain some of their original flavor:

> The first time I asked Karriyen about his life, he related how he had met his wife. She was sitting next to him and took an equal part in the conversation. Together they advanced the brief storyline, like football players, passing the ball and dribbling it in turns as they moved it jointly forward. He looked at her with tenderness and related with glee and laughter how as a young girl she had not wanted him. She giggled and said that he had followed her when she went foraging for roots in the forest and was waiting for her by her hut when she had gone down to bring water from the river. He said he had nothing else but her in mind, and her place and her people. In the end, she said, she had accepted him.
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> They met in Nelliyalam Palace, Karriyen mentioned on another occasion when I talked with him alone. His own people had been there, and her brother had worked there, too. Her parents came with her later. He had worked in the rani's elephant stables, helping clean and guide the elephants in the forest. The rani had asked them to come, had looked after them, and had given them food and clothes. When she died, they left the palace and returned to this valley. There was no coffee here then, only rubber. Amani *dore* [white man] lived in the valley with his five children, and also Mode dore, whose children were away.
>
> On yet another occasion, Karriyen mentioned that he had been married to another woman before he had married his present wife. This had been in Wynadu, where his mother had taken him when he was very young. But once he had seen this girl [his present wife] he had no one else in mind, only her, this place, and these people.
>
> Another time he said that his father had two wives. He was the only child of his mother and did not know the

other wife's children. (What about Kalan? I asked Karriyen, knowing from other sources that Kalan was one of the other woman's children. Yes, Karriyen said, this wife had four children; Kalan was the oldest.) His mother, Karriyen continued, had been the sister of his [present] wife's father, who had hunted with the rani, using bows and arrows.

In yet another conversation, sitting at the edge of the hamlet, with the spectacular view of the valley below us, Karriyen mentioned that his family had lived down there until they stopped working on the [rubber] estate, and moved up here. Some time later they went back, taking the *devaru* [gods] with them. But a skin disease spread, affecting many people. The devaru did not want to leave this place, Karriyen said, and so we returned.[29]

Karriyen's words give a sense of the extent to which persons, not events, loom large in Nayaka recollections. The eventful process of clearing a 500-acre forest—a momentous operation, which, needless to say, involved an influx of workers camping in the jungle; large chainsaws noisily felling the timber; huge logs piling up on the newly cleared ground; elephants pulling the timber uphill out to the main road; and, then, the construction of a bungalow at the center of the new estate—all of this received scant mention.

Karriyen's remembrances reflect Nayaka interest in interpersonal relatedness, even more than in Otherness. Of the never-seen-before white men, who moved into the bungalow in the estate, he recalls that they had children. Other Nayaka chose to mention that same fact, including one old woman—an exceptional Nayaka, who in her youth had worked as a housemaid in the estate's bungalow, the only Nayaka person of the group I studied ever to have done so. She related that ''the dore and *doressai* [white woman] had several children, and there was another woman who took care of them.'' In an interview I conducted with him in 1979, the estate superintendent related that when the two Scotsmen were staying in the bungalow, the wife of one came for a visit, staying for several months with her five children and a nanny to help her. Historically accurate as it may seem, Nayaka attention to the whole remarkable event focused on the white people's domestic relationships, oblivious to the intervening ocean of rank and culture, wealth and manners, between the colonialists and themselves.

The period of work in the rani's palace (which probably followed from Nayaka occasional help with the elephants in clearing the jungle area for the rubber plantation) is enfolded in the brief mention of the rani, who ''had looked after us, and had given us food and clothes.'' So elusive were Nayaka references to this palace and its rani that at first I was left unconvinced of their historical veracity. Contemporary records, however, tell of the mother of a young feudal lord orphaned from his father, who, as the boy's guardian, exercised great power in this area (see Francis 1908:72). In 2001 I succeeded in locating the palace, which by then was in ruins and hardly known to local officials or jeep drivers transporting people in the region. An old lady lived in the small, ruined manor house, the wife of a descendant of the minor royal family who had owned it and who later had fallen on hard times. Her cheap pots and pans cluttered the cracked marble floor; her chicken roosted in the broken marble fountain; her laundry hung between broken, intricately carved wooden columns. Several Nayaka men, she said, had worked in the elephant stables a long time ago, living with their families in the surrounding forest outside the palace grounds. Her neighbors, small peasant villagers, took me to see where the stables had been and where these Nayaka had lived. Historically grounded as the brief Nayaka references to the era seem to be, it is inconceivable that a member of a local feudal family of high class and of high caste, living in a palace of immense grandeur in local terms, would have looked after the lowly, impure, tribal stable cleaners. Nayaka remember this period in this way, focusing on the rani as a person in whose home they had stayed. Out of the entire situation, they choose to mention not the grand establishment, with its servants, its small temple, its lawns, its busy palace life, and so on, but an interpersonal relatedness.

Interpersonal relatedness is remembered more than political structures. Karriyen's son mentioned the school that operated for several years in a small hut in the valley, 20 minutes' walk from where he had then lived. He told me how the teacher did not take care of the children and at the stroke of noon every day had gotten rid of them. Every afternoon, Karriyen's son said, the teacher made the several hours' hard climb up to P (the nearest small roadside marketplace) and drank arak there, returning home late at night. His wife, the son noted, had to wait for him each night. Records kept in the local municipality's archives at Gudalur refer to the school's eight troubled years, after which it closed down. There had been a high turnover of teachers; ten had served during those eight years. Inspectors had come and gone, reporting on the deplorable situation. But it was the relationships between the teacher and his wife and between the teacher and his pupils that left their mark in Nayaka recollections, more than the center–periphery and government–tribe politics involved.

Karriyen's words illustrate yet another noteworthy point, namely, that Nayaka allude to major changes in the surroundings, if at all, principally in the same way that they refer to a person's life states. Instead of relating a narrative of changes, they refer to passing bodily states as temporal markers. For example, one might say, ''before she had breasts'' or ''when he was only this high''

(gesturing with a hand). Likewise, Karriyen mentions that he had returned to the valley when ''no coffee was there, only rubber.'' AttiMathen, apparently even older than Karriyen—over 80—a wrinkled man with straggling, tatty hair tied into a ponytail, mentioned the arrival in the valley of his grandparents ''before there was a plantation.'' His wife (the second wife, over 65) said that her father had worked on the estate ''when the rubber was planted.'' These Nayaka did not describe the sequence of events that took place one after the other in the valley or the foreign workers and their deeds. They described the states of the environment as a subject.

Last, but not least, Karriyen's words help one recognize the association made by Nayaka themselves between remembrance and social relatedness. The central axis throughout Karriyen's remembrances is his own conjugal relationship, especially its beginning. Conjugal beginnings were one of the easiest topics to get Nayaka to talk about. They took exceptional delight in narrating how they themselves, or other persons, had begun their married lives. Even the more reticent persons did so willingly. Like Karriyen, other Nayaka told me about their lives from that point onward, not, say, from when they were born, where, and to whom. The birth of a conjugal relatedness is constructed by Nayaka as a watershed of a sort, which is associated with remembrance. As in Karriyen's story, the closing sentence of many marriage stories conveyed that after the couple ''got together'' they had in mind only the new partner and his or her place and people, forgetting all others. The speakers meant not that others were erased from their memories but that they were no longer mindful of them. In this sense, Karriyen also said at first that he did not know his stepsiblings, but he later provided details at my request. During family surveys that I had conducted in 1978, informants similarly often listed only the children living with them at the time.

In sum, Nayaka everyday references to their personal pasts exhibit a selective cultural attention to subjects, their relations, and their changing states. In their culture, relatedness is associated with remembering and severance of relations with obliteration. With these patterns in mind, I turn next to examining their shared remembrances, which, likewise, are embedded in social relatedness and focus on subjects-in-relations.

Shared remembrances

Shared remembrances are largely produced and reproduced in a public celebration, which I briefly describe here (see also Bird-David 1996, 1999). Strictly speaking, it is the only public celebration that Nayaka hold. It is organized every year or so in each hamlet and is attended by all of the hamlet's residents and visitors from other local hamlets. Individuals participate in up to half a dozen such occasions a year, if not more, normally attending both their own and their neighbors' gatherings. Relatives and visitors from surrounding places start arriving at noon, and toward evening the *kunyatta* (merrymaking) begins. Night and day, drums and flutes are played, people dance, and one after another, or simultaneously, *cemakara* (trance performers) fall into a trance. Through the cemakara a diversity of persons in alter-states make their presence known, including *sattavaru* (dead persons), *dodavaru* (''big,'' early persons), local devaru (animistic persons), and various non-Nayaka persons (including white people), who had previously lived in the area. Nayaka do not always care to draw clear distinctions between these different kinds of persons (see more below). They often address them all together as ''devaru,'' or ''dodavaru,'' or most often as ''*dodappanu*'' (big fathers), further aggregating themselves and *all* of their trance visitors as *nama sonta* (our family). For analytical clarity and for reasons that will become clearer below, I refer to the aggregate of trance visitors as ''the first persons.''

The first persons take part in the merriment and, above all, converse with their human hosts, day and night. Specific speakers constantly change on both sides, and listeners come and go, walk down to the river, chat with each other, smoke and chew betel nuts, lie down, and so on. The humdrum routine of everyday life continues around the trance performance, which is not cordoned off physically or otherwise within the hamlet but, on the contrary, integrates the nonhuman visitors into the hamlet's everyday life. The visiting first persons talk, dance, sing, eat, drink, smoke, and go bathing in the stream with their hosts. People often begin such everyday routines by bowing in four directions and inviting all the invisible guests to join in.

The trance conversations are, on the whole, highly repetitive (except for trance engagement with very recently dead people, about which Nayaka are sensitive and which I do not consider here). To provide a sense of what they are like, a short segment follows, a mere moment in a conversation that goes on day and night.

Devaru (animistic person): This year, you have not made the *pandalu* [the special hut for the visitors; also temple]. You are not making things as the elders did. You are skipping things.

Nayaka speaker: This year it happened. We will make it next year. This was a mistake; from next year onward, we will do everything correctly. For this *aaita* [offense] I shall give an offering of one or two *anna* [1/100th of the Indian rupee].

D (speaking in Malaylam): You have made a mistake. We can't do anything. Now you have to make a four-anna offering. What happened happened;

henceforth, it should not happen. In the days of the dodavaru [the elders] the elders were good. In the days of the *makalo* [the children] you are doing things like this. Therefore, you get this *batha* [fatal illness].

Sattavaru (dead person): You have committed many faults in the past. You have made mistakes with all your *amma*, *anna*, *tamma* [mothers, elder brothers, younger brothers], but you come and say everything is inflicted by the devaru. ... You do not clean the pandalu as in former days; that is why you get all these illnesses which do not heal. The *appavaru*, *tammavaru*, *annavaru* [father people, elder-brother people, younger-brother people] are all here, and you leave this place and go to live wherever you like, and you do not look after them.

NS: Next hot season if I am all right [i.e., not ill], then we'll do it.

Another Nayaka speaker: Now, this year it happened. Next year, we'll do it correctly.

NS: If I go away from this place, what will *you* do then?

S: Do not go away. Stay here. We will look after you.

In this immediate-return hunter-gatherer society—where, as with the type in general, stories and myth *about* the past are rarely narrated—these trance gatherings are the main context in which Nayaka get to know the first persons. A child does not hear *about* the sattavaru, the dodavaru, and others, but year after year, she meets and hears them as they are invoked. She may stand behind her father, clutching his legs and peeping out from this safe haven at the performers-in-trance with whom he talks. She may run around with other children while adults, her relatives, converse with the sattavaru. One way or another, she spends a whole day amidst her relatives as they engage with the eldest people, the dead people, the big people, and so on. Even without paying attention directly to the conversation, she absorbs how these diverse persons conduct themselves bodily and socially: She picks up whether they talk fast, slow, in a low voice, or in a shriek; whether they move rapidly from side to side, stand still, or wave a stick; whether they request biddies (Indian cigarettes), water, or rice; whether they are demanding, cajoling, firm, or lenient. She will recognize, as she grows up, that some of them, the Nayaka sattavaru, speak a Nayaka dialect, albeit different from the everyday one, whereas others speak neighboring languages, Tamil, Malayalam, Kurumba, and Chetti, depending on who they are.

By participating year after year in such gatherings, the growing child learns not so much *about* the first persons and their deeds as about how to engage, talk, and share with them. The child learns what they want, how they respond to what Nayaka say, what they get angry about, and so forth. The persons in alter-states directly enter the conversation, usually introducing themselves, if at all, as relatives of so-and-so. The conversation's structure limits what they can say about themselves. In its structure and rhetoric, the conversation resembles demand sharing, which is common among hunter-gatherers (Bird-David 1990; Peterson 1993): Those on each side demand, nag, beg, and cajole each other to give them what they need, in a sort of bargaining over needs and sharing that expresses, affirms, and regenerates caring and responsibility.

Repeatedly, improvising to the best of their rhetorical and argumentative ability and growing exhausted as the talking goes on, Nayaka request that the first persons look after them and protect them from illnesses. They promise that they, in turn, will look after the first persons and offer them better hospitality in the future. Nayaka complain about their illnesses and the deaths of close relatives; they express disappointment and reprimand the sattavaru and the dodavaru for their neglect. For their part, the first persons complain that the living people, the makalo (children), do not care for the elders; they do not give as much food to the sattavaru as the sattavaru did in their day; they do not dance as much; they do not cooperate with each other; and so on.

From these structured conversations the child learns the importance of maintaining relationships with these persons. Much of the conversation, in fact, reflexively focuses on how to keep itself going. The child learns, above all, that relationships with first persons involve mutual commitment and responsibility. As she grows older she herself starts to step forward and contribute her share to keeping the conversation going, as an interlocutor at least, if not as a performer.[30]

Within the trance conversation genre's limitations, Nayaka indirectly pick up meager information about the earlier days from the references that are rhetorically built into the complaints and the demands. For example, the sattavaru say, ''In our day we earned only four anna, and still we offered more food to the sattavaru than you do nowadays.'' An old Nayaka says, ''In your days it was dark in the forest because many trees were there, but nowadays so few honey trees are left, and we cannot offer you as much honey.'' Nayaka complain that there are few cemakara these days, whereas in the sattavaru's days there had been many more.

In the absence of a fixed narrative structure, each participant cumulatively builds his or her own retrospective from such fragments. A measure of the diversity opening up between individuals, reflecting their experience and interest, can be gauged by comparing the comments of two individuals as they translated and interpreted

for me the same section of a taped conversation. One individual, a charismatic man in his fifties, extroverted and eager to engage with others, the closest approximation to a leader in this egalitarian community, identified a variety of historical characters, for example, Bhanu's grandfather, Bomi's grandmother, this or another Kurumba, Chetti, and a white man. Listening to the hour-long excerpt, he distinguished a dozen different characters. The other man, in his thirties, a leading honey collector, barely differentiated individual characters. He could only identify the speech generically as that of Nayaka sattavaru, devaru, Kurumba sattavaru, and so on. Each Nayaka constructs his or her own retrospective on the group's shared past, which is jointly reproduced by all of the celebration participants, through the conversations they engage in with the persons in alter-states. By interacting with the first persons, each individual, to the extent of his or her interest, deduces what he or she can *about* the first persons themselves. Talking with the first persons, regenerating the relationship with them, is the important point for Nayaka, not knowing the early persons as objects of knowledge in and for themselves.[31]

Ordinarily, Nayaka imagine the early people as humanlike in appearance and lifestyles, although they do so in extremely vague terms, picturing little more than the essential details (say, where each lives, what each does, and so on). Nayaka's deep interest is vested not in the early people, in and of themselves, but in their relations with them, on which, as seen from the above excerpt, they elaborate the most. Differences in kinds of persons are subordinate to the overall interest in the *relations*. The relations are the focus.

In sum, the trance gathering does not offer a story *of* the local past. There is no narrative to speak of, even in the current, all-encompassing sense of the word, a narrative told, sung, performed, inscribed into the landscape, or embodied in objects. However little they are concerned with information *about* the first people, Nayaka relate *with* their manifestations, from which they derive some knowledge of the first people's times. Like personal remembrances, collective ones, then, pay cultural attention to subjects in social relations. Collective remembrances are produced and reproduced within social relations. The early persons are remembered largely by *socializing* with their invoked manifestations.

The past and first persons

Nayaka clearly *do* show concern for their temporal horizons, and in this section I try to conceptualize in more general terms how and in what manner that concern is expressed. In earlier articles I argued that Nayaka see their spatial environment in terms of who, not what; they do not unify and objectify their environs as an integrated system, a nature separate and distinct from society (Bird-David 1990, 1992b, 1999). Here I extend this argument to their sense of the temporal environment. I contend that Nayaka are concerned with persons who have lived before (especially in maintaining relations with them), rather than with the past as a unification and objectification of what has happened, be it processes, events, or heroic deeds. The distinction is critical, and it simply cannot be overstressed. Note that an immediate analytical implication is that, as soon as one frames one's interest in terms of the English word *past,* asking if Nayaka show interest in it, the answer is necessarily negative. The very word *past,* in its commonsense renderings discussed above, embodies a concept that is foreign to these people, whose overall concern is with who, not what. In this section, I try to elucidate their concerns, in juxtaposition with the past's commonsense renderings, by which (it is worth repeating) I do not maintain that the senses I discuss exhaust all Nayaka understandings or are exclusive to them. On the contrary, I believe these senses show, in an undiluted way, a relational sense of ''the before,'' other varieties of which can be found in abundance among other groups of people.

Do the Nayaka view ''the before'' as a foreign land, where different people live, ''them'' as opposed to ''us?'' Clearly, in this local conception, the earlier people are perceived as ''our relatives,'' and part of ''us.'' The first persons are commonly referred to by kinship terms; they are aggregated with the living Nayaka as ''all of us,'' and ''our family.'' Kinship terms are applied to *all* first persons, *including* non-Nayaka, not just to one's own dead relatives or one's own genealogically specific ancestors (as in some ancestral-worship cults). References to ''our fathers'' are common in many other cultural contexts, including, for example, in nationalistic discourses. In modern evolutionary thought, early people are regarded as humankind's ancestors. But the point to notice is that in these two cases descent is emphasized (cf. Ingold 2000); identity is instituted on *sameness regardless of actual social engagement*.[32] In this local case, on the contrary, emphasis is put on *actual social engagement regardless of diversity,* indeed, regardless even of temporal differences. In the first case, the ''early'' ''fathers'' are bygone ancestors, and, in the second, they are co-present parents and neighbors. In the second case, the ancestors not only do not live far away, but (as can be seen in the excerpt above) it is also *they* who fear that the living (children) will leave them and go away.

It closely follows that in this local view—which is institutionally privileged by these Nayaka—the first people are not bygone, over, something that *was* and is never to return, something beyond reach that is no longer here, something about which or whom one can learn only from narratives. On the contrary, in this local perception, the first persons are present in everyday life, inflicting and curing illnesses. Relations with them continue and must be

continued; first persons are invoked at the trance gathering—not to be gazed at or to narrate their past deeds—but precisely to be met and engaged with. Socializing with them is both the hub and the raison d'être of the event.

Whereas a terminal conception of death is connected with viewing linear time as natural (Greenhouse 1996), this relational sense of ''the before'' is connected with another temporal sense of death. Death, in this case, is not seen as a switch from being to not being, from being alive and present to having passed and gone. The concrete body is gone, but the person changes from a visible, bodily fragile state to an invisible, transbodily one, with the power to inflict, heal, and protect from illnesses. Death is sensed as a transition between states of being (cf. Ingold 2000:142). Even if death does involve going to another place, this place is not necessarily as far away as it figures in the European imperial imagination (or, for that matter, in any other imperial imagination). Rather, in terms of the indigenous world and experience, it is a place (or a land) close enough to allow for recurrent return and visiting. The spatial correlate of the death transition, in other words, does not necessarily imply great distance, and, in any case, it does not preclude periodic engagement and ongoing relations. Even in the case of other hunter-gatherers, who, according to their ethnographers, elaborate far more than these Nayaka on the land of the dead, the dead and other-than-human beings recurrently come as social visitors in the course of trance gatherings, which, as among these Nayaka, are not peripheral but central, major institutions.[33]

The transition effected by death between states of being is principally imagined here not in terms of spatial transport, as ingrained in the Eurocentric temporal sense, but in terms of life-cycle stages. Death is constructed as a passage from childhood to parenthood, in which sense the first persons are constantly referred to as ''big parents'' and the living as ''children.'' ''Parents'' and ''children,'' however—and this is important—are not constructed locally as substitute generations following one another, one going and the next coming, one replacing the other. *Western observers* are likely to understand parents and children in this context as subsequent and substitute generations, even though parents normally *co-live* with their children for many years. Westerners generalize ''parent'' and ''child,'' each an autonomous kind, into its own class: ''parents'' and ''children.'' Nayaka, by contrast, generalize the parent–child *relatedness,* and so their parents and children imagery stresses temporal overlap and sharing rather than temporal distance and separation.

''Generation'' is not a key concept in this local view, in either of the two senses distinguished by Ingold, that is, the genealogical and the relational (Ingold ascribes the latter to hunting and gathering societies or, perhaps—it is not entirely clear in his work—draws on such societies in developing his own new, ecological approach). In the first case, ''life is encompassed within generations,'' and in the second, ''generation is encompassed within the process of life'' (Ingold 2000:142). Instead of Ingold's relational sense, I suggest that the local concept of ''siblings'' can be usefully contrasted with (the genealogical) ''generation'' for a better sense of the local temporal perspective. Generations follow one another, one goes and another comes, one replaces the other. Siblings also follow one another, first the eldest, then the second, the third, and so on, but they join rather than replace each other. In both cases, there is a temporal ordering, sequencing generations in the first case, and siblings in the second, as one before the other. But these cases have very different meanings. Generations pass in this order, receding into the past. Siblings come in this order, sharing lives. Generations before us are past and gone; siblings before us, we join. The first persons are first not in the sense of followed and replaced but, rather, followed and joined. They are first in the same sense that parents in the Nayaka perspective come before and live with their children.

Are bygone days collectively brought into the present in the Nayaka trance gathering? Clearly, it is *persons* who come, and, they come as *coevals,* in Fabian's (1983) sense of the term. Fabian distinguished between synchrony (or simultaneity) and coevalness as different aspects of the present. The former, he suggested, applies to events or things that co-occur in the same physical time, and the latter to persons who occupy the same intersubjective time, that is, they share lived time. Obviously, the first persons come as coevals in the trance gathering; they come to talk with Nayaka and share with them, negotiating mutual needs and commitments. This, after all, is what the ritual is about.

Nayaka do not want to leapfrog to the past to learn how it *was* in advance of who and what *they* are. They want to teach their children how to keep living with the first persons as coevals. Their historical consciousness and effort is directed toward keeping relations with former persons, and learning *within* the relationships how to *keep on* reproducing them. In almost a literal sense, their cultural project is to be at home with the early persons. The trance gathering neither offers nor embodies *narratives of* the past, but it provides an opportunity to share with the early inhabitants, to get to know them firsthand, as persons within a field of social relationships. By engaging with them, Nayaka intimately know them *as* they behave within relationships, so Nayaka learn how to keep these relations going.

In Nayaka cultural discourse the early people are cast as coevals, just as in classic anthropology coevals were cast as temporally distant (see Fabian 1983). In each case the designation has to do not with a distorted sense of time but with instituted practices of learning, connected

to an objectivist epistemology in the second case and to a relational epistemology in the first one. I argued in an earlier article (Bird-David 1999) that a relational epistemology characterizes Nayaka authoritative way of knowing the environment. Their knowledge, I argued, is inseparable from social life and concerns learning how to behave within relations to keep these relations going more than knowing things in and for themselves, as knowns detached from the knower. The same logic applies to their ways of knowing the past and first people. Because knowledge inheres in and grows from social engagement, to know someone, Nayaka have to socially engage that individual as a coeval. The early inhabitants are no exception; they are invoked by means of a trance as coevals, making possible social engagement with them and, hence, knowledge of them, or better, knowledge of how to be in relation with them. Nayaka shamanistically remember the first persons as coevals so they may remember them relationally.

The cost of promoting this kind of remembering, it should be added, is a tunnel view of what has happened previously, for people and relations are in focus instead of events and processes. One learns about what happened only inasmuch as it arises from the engagement with the first persons, geared as this is largely to remembering how to keep relating with them. Yet no lack of concern with ''the before'' is apparent here, only a lack of concern about the past in Western commonsense understandings, which are ingrained in our analytical understanding of the term *the past*.

Conclusion

''No past, no present'' paraphrases Marilyn Strathern's (1980) ''no nature, no culture,'' which in the early 1980s questioned the universality of a nature–culture dichotomy. I have broadly argued for the need to equally problematize another naturalized and universalized distinction, past–present, especially to destabilize (with Lowenthal 1985) the senses of the past that it selects.

Hardly a better case exists for beginning this project than the exotic class of immediate-return hunter-gatherers, who previously have been described as having no interest in the past at all. In specific reference to one of these groups, the Nayaka, I have shown that more than what happened, they are interested in who, specifically in ''our parents and grandparents who had lived here before us.'' Embodied in this seemingly simple interest is a fourfold critique of the past that has often been generalized in studying other times and histories. First, cultural attention is directed to persons more than to processes, events, or heroic deeds. Second, these persons are approached not as Others, strangers who live in a foreign land, but as relatives to be engaged with, who are part of ''our family.'' Third, they are constructed not as past and gone, beyond reach, but as persons with whom it is vital to maintain relations. Fourth, they are known less through narratives about them than by socially relating with their trance-invoked manifestations.

The kind of conversation that I had with Madi is a banal experience for all anthropologists, familiar both in our diverse fieldwork contexts and in our own everyday lives. The relational view of the past that it led me to examine is not restricted to these Nayaka or to immediate-return societies or even hunter-gatherers broadly. These Nayaka are only exceptional in the authority that they bestow on certain senses and modes of remembering the past, compared with others. Their extreme case powerfully forces into the researcher's ken other modes of attention to the temporal, which in all likelihood operate in other cultures, including the researcher's own—in diverse ways, to diverse extents, and in diverse articulations with other modes—all to be ethnographically explored in each particular case.

Notes

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1. For a general critique, see Fabian 1983. For key statements in the debate on hunter-gatherers, see Solway and Lee 1990, Wilmsen and Denbow 1991, and Lee 1992.
2. There are problems with Woodburn's totalizing classification, which lie beyond my present concerns, not the least of which is his absolute distinction between the two types. His own observations about the intermediate position of the Australian Aborigines and subsequent studies suggest that one does better to think in terms of a continuity between ideal types. For critical commentary, see Ingold 1983, Bird-David 1992a:24–25, and Naveh 2003.
3. See Bird-David 1990, 1992b, 1993, 1999.
4. Irving Hallowell (2000) drew this who–what distinction.
5. Silverman and Gulliver (1992) emphasize the common understanding of the past by referring to it as ''Thepast'' [*sic*].
6. See Munn's 1992 review essay on the anthropology of time; Faubion 1993, Krech 1991, and Herzfeld 2001 for reviews of the anthropology of history; and Boddy 1994 on the anthropology of spirit possession.
7. The ''real'' reality of the past paraphrases Greenhouse's (1996) ''real'' reality of linear time. Greenhouse argues that linear time is social time, and she shows how its supposed reality is naturalized in the classic discourses on literacy, exchange, and reciprocity. She shows how linear time is politically privileged over other temporal constructs.
8. Lowenthal suggested that the problem of the anthropologists may relate to the growing disillusion with the notion of a precontact ethnographic present, ''[a] once-foreign past now exposed as a flagrant fraud'' (1996:207).
9. See, for example, Herzfeld 1991 and Hastrup 1990. Herzfeld

points out that Western history making resembles that of non-Western groups more than may be thought. Most anthropological definitions of myth can be applied quite directly to history making of the official varieties in nation-states.

10. For some of the many existing studies, see Feld and Basso 1996, Hill 1988, Santos-Granero 1998, Beckett 1993, Sahlins 1985, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, and Nabokov 2002.

11. See Goody 1968; Ong 1977, 1982; and also Street 1984, Levine 1986, and Baumann 1986.

12. See Greenhouse 1996:50 on this point.

13. In an important note, Greenhouse points out that the comparison between orality and literacy as communicative traditions must take into account the political struggle between them, and the fact that ''primarily, oral cultures today are former sovereignties'' (1996:53). She also notes that the power of inscription to fix meanings already presupposed an economy in which fixed meanings are privileged.

14. Rosaldo shows that Ilongot accounts of the Japanese invasion, for example, are fully confirmed by reports from the U.S. Army.

15. Cf. Santos-Granero (1998), who argued that the South American Yanesha have ''topographic writing,'' that is, a narrative written into and embodied in the landscape. The consequences of literacy as metaphor here are obvious.

16. Myers (1986:59–60) notes that ''story'' is one of the meanings of the verbatim word for sacred objects, all the referents of which are perceived as manifestations of a story.

17. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for directing my attention to this point.

18. See, among many others, Merchant 1980; Jordanova 1986, 1989; Thomas 1984; and Haraway 1989.

19. For examples, see Milton 1993, Descola and Palson 1996, Ellen and Fukui 1996, and Ingold 2000.

20. The same definitions apply to other languages. For example, the Hebrew word for the past, *avar,* is a verb meaning ''gone, passed, was and is no more.''

21. Strathern (1992) argues that, in what she calls the ''English procreative model,'' generations appear irreversible, children seem further on in time from their parents, and tradition comes before change. Parents and children represent, respectively, past and future, continuity and change, tradition and novelty, convention and choice.

22. Strathern (1992) sees this as one of the characteristic features of her English procreative model.

23. Literary sources suggest long-term trade in minor forest produce between hunting and gathering populations and past Indian kingdoms. See Subrahminian 1966 and Dubois 1897. See also Morris 1977, 1982 on this point.

24. A study of the language of the Kattunaicka, who are closely related to the Nayaka whom I studied, is provided by the linguist Natanasabapathy (1986). Natanasabapathy (1986:263–271) suggests that, unlike other South Dravidian languages, in Kattunaicka there is an absence of temporal markers in verb forms. This accords with what I know from the Nayaka I studied and with the findings of Danny Naveh, a doctoral student working presently with another Nayaka local group. There are separate words for ''yesterday'' *(nene),* ''now'' *(iga),* and ''tomorrow'' *(nale),* which at the same time can be used to indicate the temporal context of the act concerned. Naveh reports no equivalent words for ''past,'' ''present,'' and ''future'' in use by the people he works with.

25. See, among many others, Boddy 1989, Comaroff 1985, Janzen 1992, Lambek 1993, Ong 1987, Stoller 1989, and Nabokov 2000.

26. See note 3.

27. As I argued elsewhere (Bird-David 1983), wage work was integrated with foraging pursuits in a manner that preserves the logic and rhythm of the foraging way of life in an immediate-return system.

28. I estimated ages by standard anthropological procedures, listing people by order of seniority and drawing on external datable events in the area.

29. Recent years have seen the incorporation of cheap Hindu idols into Nayaka celebrations. The idols are displayed during the trance gathering along with personal objects of dead persons (a knife, a coin, a necklace of beads, etc.; Bird-David 1996).

30. The trance performer role is open to anybody in principle, but during my field study men most often performed it. The sattavaru themselves may invite a bystander to put on performer's paraphernalia (tie a colorful cloth around the waist and hold certain branches, a bell, or a knife) and try falling into trance. Some persons refuse; of those who try, some fail, and their voluntary shaking does not develop into a trance.

31. Explicit knowledge reflects, among other things, individual experience, interest, and social competence, as well as the finesse and vividness of the cekamaru performance, which varies from performer to performer, sattavaru to sattavaru, and time to time. Some sattavaru, for example, Karriyen My, were portrayed far more vividly than others and were recognized and distinguished far more clearly and by far more individuals.

32. See, especially, Ingold's discussion of what he calls the ''genealogical model'' (2000:132–153).

33. See, for example, Howell 1984, Endicott 1979, and Silberbauer 1981.

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