Noa Lavi and Nurit Bird-David

AT HOME UNDER DEVELOPMENT: A HOUSING PROJECT FOR THE HUNTER-GATHERERS NAYAKA OF THE NILGIRIS

Introduction

This paper examines house-building development projects for the Nayaka, forest dwelling hunter-gatherers in South India. By taking a long-term perspective on Nayaka houses, the traditional ones built by themselves, and the modern ones they receive through contemporary development projects, we look at questions of social change and continuity in an era of modernization, globalization and development. Houses provide a unique anthropological site as they reflect their builders' ideas, values and norms and they are also a prime agent of socialization. While in the 1970s Nayaka lived in huts that they built for themselves according to their own cultural ideas, today most of them own houses designed for them by non-Nayaka development agents, according to the latter's notions of dwellings. Looking at how new houses are designed and built reveals much about the relations between the developers and the developed. Looking at the new externally built houses and at the ways in which Nayaka perceive, relate and actually dwell in them reflects a great deal of cultural resilience even under intensive pressure to change.

Over the last few decades the indigenous people of the Nilgiri hills in South India have gone through significant changes due to processes of land alienation, industrialization, globalization, modernization and development intervention. Since the early twentieth century some of the Nilgiri tribal people have been recognized by the Indian government as Scheduled Tribes (STs), and a few of those as the most backward and unprivileged groups in India. In recent decades they have been subjected to numerous development efforts of various kinds aiming at their economic, educational and social 'advancement'[1]. In the 1990s, failure and disappointment with such projects led to new attempts to approach development through the provision of houses and village infrastructure, as the 'tribal' huts were considered a symbol of their owners' backwardness, an unsuitable living environment and an obstacle preventing its dwellers from progressing. In this paper we focus on housing projects for

NOA LAVI, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel, *E-mail: noalaviw@gmail.com,* NURIT BIRD-DAVID, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, Haifa, Israel, *E-mail: nbird@soc.haifa.ac.il*

one of these groups, the forest dwelling hunter-gatherer Nayaka. The study is based on a long-term research among them, which started back in the late 1970s by Bird-David (followed by numerous papers, e.g., Bird-David 1983; 1987; 1990; 1992a; 1992b; 1994; 1996; 1999; 2004a; 2004b; 2005a; 2005b; 2008; 2009) and continues today by Lavi (see Lavi 2012).

Houses make a particularly good ethnographic field. The house is not only a place to live in; it is a prime agent of socialization. Being 'the human being's first world,' (in the words of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard 1994[1958]: 7), the house is a part of the objective reality in which its dwellers grow up and acquire their taken-for-granted and often unconscious habits of acting in the world and thinking about it (Bourdieu 1977). As Carsten and Hugh-Jones put it house, body and mind 'are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishings, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds' (1995: 2). Looking at houses, therefore, offers a fruitful site for analysis of their dwellers' unspoken and taken-for-granted 'truths' about their world. It is there that things, relations and actions become familiar, 'part of the way things are', part of the everyday repetitions, that are no longer noticed.

House building projects are therefore very fertile anthropological loci to look at the intersection between the developers and the developed. While Nayaka's 'traditional'[2] huts reflected their own ways of living and acting in the world, the new houses built in housing projects reflect the notions, values and 'truths' of their external builders, and not of their intended dwellers. Such houses form a juxtaposition where two distinctive cultures meet and relate. Being the most intimate and taken for granted space, the house creates a sort of silent 'clash-point' between Nayaka people and non-Nayaka external developers and, in fact, between Nayaka and non-Nayaka ways of living.

Far from unique, the Nayaka case would probably prove relevant to many other indigenous groups around the world. There has been an ongoing interest in housing for indigenous people elsewhere, for example, in Australia over the last half-century (see among others Heppell 1979; Memmott 1988; Read 2000; Jardine-Orr 2005; Musharbash 2008; Fien *et al.* 2011). In this paper, we exploit a rare opportunity for a long-term perspective thanks to three decades of working with the same small-scale Nayaka community; following the same people before, during and after they were subjected to various development projects. While in the 1970s, they still lived in bamboo and grass huts they built for themselves according to their own notions of dwelling, today most of them have houses designed for them by non-Nayaka, according to the latter's notions of dwellings. Although the physical transformation of the built environment seems to bring significant changes, the ways in which Nayaka engage with their new environment are far from simple adoptions of the external social traits dictated by it. Looking at the

ways in which Nayaka perceive, relate and dwell in their new externally-built houses reveals valuable information on their contemporary situation, and might shed light on broader questions concerning social change and resilience. It allows us to examine those questions in one of the main arenas where social values, habits and world-views are engendered.

Before we turn to the new houses, however, we must first dwell on the Nayaka's own 'traditional' notions of 'house', 'home' and 'dwelling'.

Before Development: Nayaka traditional huts in the 1970s

Generally built of bamboo, forest-wood, grass, tree-bark and mud, the huts in the Nayaka villages in the 1970s were strikingly diverse, reflecting dynamic life-cycles and nonconformity. They included huts walled on all sides by split bamboo canes (see Figure 1); lean-tos, resting on a rock face or on another dwelling (see Figure 2); and huts which stood wall-less for months, while their construction took place at a very leisurely pace or was never completed (see Figure 3). To bourgeois eyes, the huts would look shoddy and 'primitive'. However, they reflected the local priorities of people who - and this cannot be overstated - had the knowledge and the technological skills to build solid inward-oriented and protective dwellings. These same Nayaka built large, single-family houses for plantation-workers who wanted to establish their own houses outside the plantation. They employed their own traditional technology and, using the same forest materials, they constructed for these workers houses not only with dense walls, but also with fences between them.

Figure 1: Bamboo walled hut, 1978

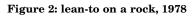**Figure 2: lean-to on a rock, 1978**

Figure 3: wall-less hut, 1978

As the construction of half-walled huts with no physical boundaries between them was not the result of lack of technology and knowledge, it raises the question: what styles of social life the huts –as the Nayaka preferred mode of dwelling – made possible and regenerated?

Firstly, the traditional settlements supported close communal living, with little separation between public and private arenas. Life was generally lived outside in the open air, in close proximity to other people. In the traditional small forest settlements, people often slept, cooked and ate outside their huts, around small fires that burned throughout the night, except in the rainy season. The huts were built very close to one another. The walls, often made from strips of bamboo, offered little audible or even visual privacy. Occasionally several huts were joined together in a row, with barely any partitioning walls between them. Lean-tos that rested against rocks or other dwellings, and lacked walls, also met housing needs, and no effort was made to wall them in on all sides. Some huts remained wall-less for months on end, as their construction took place at a very leisurely pace or was never completed, while people meanwhile dwelled in them. The dwellers took weeks, and even months, to build what could have been built in a day or two, meanwhile living in full view - and *with* a full view - of everybody around them. The erosion of land in some settlements made it necessary to build the huts on raised platforms made of beaten mud rather than directly on the ground or on a rock face. These huts were built so as to leave a veranda around them over which the thatched roof protruded, creating more open living spaces.

Secondly, the traditional huts supported a fluid and flexible social life that blurred distinctions between inhabitants and visitors. Some huts underwent a developmental cycle of sorts, starting as a single-space structure and ending up comprising two or three living spaces, in which different families lived. When the need arose, a lean-to was added and walls were later put up (or not).

For example, a living space was added for a family that came for a short-term visit and stayed on; or for a widowed person who had vacated his or her former house; or for a son or daughter who started living with a partner. There was an ongoing movement of people between the hamlets, and the flexible living-spaces supported the options of living-close to and with many (shifting) relatives, producing and reproducing the kinship relations with them. A lean-to was only added if no other living space was then vacant in the settlement. Often, vacant spaces were available, as previous occupants had left them, going to visit or live in another place. A sort of 'musical chairs' went on. At any given moment the population of a compound hut somehow reflected the comings and goings of relatives in the community, providing a sort of snapshot of chance sequences of love and death, visits and work opportunities, friendship and tension.

Thirdly, the traditional huts supported the local value of continuous sociability and availability to requests made by relatives for sharing and help. People withdrew into their huts to preempt being asked to give something or help. Staying secluded and invisible in a hut, therefore, was associated with stinginess and a reluctance to help. Withdrawal into a hut was also a common tactic to avoid outsiders who came to recruit laborers. Remaining inside the dwellings carried other negative associations such as a fatal illness since very ill people remained inside the dwelling, when they could no longer stay out with other relatives. Living in un-walled or partly walled hut precluded any suspicion or accusation of hiding and avoiding giving help. This, no doubt, was a contributing factor to the attractiveness of living in open huts.

Living and sleeping alone was irregular and undesired. It expressed tension and conflict resolved by that person's moving soon to another hamlet. Sleeping alone was regarded a graver issue than mixed-gender or mixed-aged co-sleeping. Parents and children co-slept together, an old widow could co-sleep with a young girl, or even with a young boy, so as not to sleep alone.

Lastly, the traditional huts supported on-going direct engagement of each dweller with all the other hamlet's co-dwellers, and in fact, sharing life with all others. Except for the rainy season, people normally stayed outside the huts, sitting around open-hearths. The hearths were often no further than a few meters from one another. They were located in-between the huts in such a way that the huts did not block them off from one another. As they sat beside their hearths, people were in eye-contact with others. They could talk with them, without leaving their hearth. Furthermore, unlike a walled building - the enclosed size of which limits the number of persons who can enter it, the access to which can be controlled at a door, and what happens inside it can be concealed from outside view - the outside hearth allowed far less limits on who gather around it. The circle of people can be enlarged, or people can form another circle beyond the first circle. This social space is not regulated by an in/out binary division but at best by degrees going from 'warmer' to 'colder', literally and metaphorically. The open hearths - resonating with what we described above for the living spaces inside the compound huts - are not separate domestic zones as much as multiple focal points of on-going lives entwined together.

Altogether, then, the structures of the traditional huts, the way they were built and the way they were dwelled in, were part of the local way of life. They reflected and reproduced the local taken-for-given ways of relating to one another. To outsiders such as the staff of government and non-government development organizations the huts were seen a sign of poor standards of living. To their dwellers they were the infrastructure for maintaining their standards of social living. In Bourdieu's sense, the traditional huts were part of the objective reality within which Nayaka grew up and acquired this sense of how to live well with others. In Carsten and Hugh-Jones' sense, the huts

helped to enable, mould, inform and constrain the Nayaka ideas and senses of social life.

Under Development: Life in the Nilgiri Hills today

The last three decades have brought significant changes into the Nilgiri Hills. Deforestation accelerated and many forests, once covering the majority of the hills, have been replaced by industrial plantations. Over the last half-century, the Tamil Nadu government has encouraged a large population of immigrants to settle in the region and cultivate what once were natural forest lands and the home for several social groups[3], including the Nayaka. Alongside agricultural industrialization of the area, there have also been increasing attempts in recent decades towards the conservation of the depleted forests. In 1986 the Nilgiri was declared a highly protected Biosphere Reserve as part of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere program (MAB)[4]. However, for many years, conservation efforts for natural reserves resulted in the exclusion of the people who had traditionally lived there. Rules were set against hunting, gathering and even collecting forest materials and, in some cases, against the very living in the forest[5] (similar turns of events brought many indigenous societies around the world to share such a fate with the Nayaka, other examples being described in Leacock and Lee 1982; Shnirelman 1994; Schweitzer et al. 2000; de la Cadena and Starn 2007). Partly as a result of all this and partly due to global processes and trends, since the late 1980s, the Nilgiri and its original inhabitants have become the focus of various development initiatives and programs, both local and international, governmental and non-governmental.

Housing was hardly the target of development schemes to begin with. Development efforts were first focused on 'social upliftment' that was to be accomplished through education, economic aid and training, health treatment and health education. However, disappointment from the unsatisfying results of previous development schemes required reconsideration and it brought many development bodies in India to turn their attention in the late 1980s to the 'beneficiaries' poor living standards'. The huts became the marker of those poor standards in the eyes of the external developers, being so visible and different from the latter's own dwellings. As a result, there has been a major attempt to replace all traditional houses with new 'modern' ones, designed in a way that the development agents considered as 'proper'. The new houses were provided together with instructions on how to 'properly' use them. The developers' expectations were that proper dwellings would naturally lead to the adoption of proper dwelling habits, and eventually assist the overall social change that the people were expected to go through. (Similar reasoning and processes occurred in many other places around the world, e.g., see Singh 1989: 3; Verma 1996; and Kakkoth 2009 for accounts of such cases in India; see also: Heppell 1979; Memmott 1988; Read 2000; Runcie and Bailie 2000; Jardine-Orr 2005; Penman 2008; and Fien et al. 2011 for similar cases among

Australian Aborigines; See Stern 2005; Collings 2005 for similar cases among Canadian Inuits)[6]. Today, the rebuilding of houses has become one of the most visible expressions of development projects in the Nilgiri hills. Most of the Nayaka now live in brick and mortar houses designed and built for them by non-Nayaka development organizations.

Cultural clash: The developers' notions of dwelling

The reason the traditional houses, while perfectly reflecting the Nayaka life ways, were perceived as unfit for dwelling, lay in the cultural differences between the developers and the developed. Development initiatives for tribal people in the Nilgiri, whether governmental or not, have always been an external enterprise. All the development institutions in the district dealing with house-building projects are headed and run by non-'tribal'- usually non-local - people, most of them from larger communities (e.g., cities or large village environments). They grew up in large-scale hierarchical societies valuing social status and order, property and land ownership; and identify themselves as a part of 'modernized India'. Employees of the organizations were also non-tribal or tribal people of the 'more developed' tribal communities in the Nilgiris. We do not pretend to present here a unified identity of 'the developer'. It is hard to generalize such a large group of people from diverse places, social statuses and religions, not to mention age and gender. Nevertheless, it is possible to find similarities between many of them on the basis of specific matters, such as their notions of house and dwelling.

Among the development workers, the very basic notion of *house,* as dwelling space, differs from that of the Nayaka. First, the location of the Nayaka huts brought about considerable concern. The Hindu concept of forest and forest dwelling is a complex one, embedded in notions of wilderness and primitiveness, which go side by side with holy and supernatural aspects. The forest evokes feelings of fear as much as of awe but, in any case, it is not considered a 'proper' human living environment (see also Fortier 2009: 64-6). Daniel (1984), who studied notions of personhood among Tamil rural society, stressed that in the Tamil tradition, a strict separation exists between the village centre (*urkatu*) and the forest (*katu*); and lone houses that are built outside the village sphere are considered vulnerable and looked upon with suspicion. In the Tamil perception according to Daniel, houses- like people- tend to cluster together. A house built away from the village centre is considered to be as afraid as a person left alone in a non-human environment, as it is thus exposed to unknown and therefore dangerous substances (such as ghosts, snakes and thieves, Daniel 1984: 110-14). Indeed, spending many hours in houses and offices of housing-project workers, while engaging in conversations about their work and aspirations, Lavi reports that all houses (whether of NGO or governmental workers) were located within a clearly defined human residential area (be it a city, a village or a fenced campus),

physically and culturally separated from its surrounding 'forest' or 'nature' environment, forming a nature/culture dichotomy of sorts. A connection was made between the forest environment and the 'uncultured' traits of primitiveness and backwardness related to the Nayaka (see Lavi 2012: 39-43; see also Fortier 2009: 57-66 for similar notions relating to the Raute in Nepal; see also Charsley 1997: for a general discussion).

In addition to location, the very appearance of the hut was a striking image manifesting Nayaka's 'poor and improper living standards'. All of the various development workers lived in stable and permanent houses, divided into rooms and enclosed by thick walls, concealing the people and the things within them. The appearance and the size of the house conveyed the social status of its dwellers. Higher-ranking workers lived in big multi-roomed houses with a porch and a garden, located in a desirable location and they had bigger offices, while lower-ranking workers lived in much smaller apartments, in the nearby city or village, and settled in a private niche in a shared office. And, whatever the size of the house, each of the houses had an inner division including indoor kitchen, living room and bedrooms[7], all furnished and designed according to their specific function. Heavy furniture such as beds, kitchen-counters, tables and sofas do not allow or encourage flexible changes in room function, but determine a specific role to each room. The overall design of the house allows its dwellers to spend all their time indoors, in their 'private' domains, concealed from the view of others. The design of the organizational offices expressed similar notions. The vast majority of work activities took place indoors, allowing control of who was to share and see what was being done. Even inside spaces were divided so as to seclude certain persons from certain rooms and actions. The doors themselves were constantly locked, preventing uncontrolled entry. Keys -like doors and walls- acted as another filtering instrument, assisting the control and separation of spaces and people to insiders/outsiders at various levels.

The developers' own notion of dwellings, embedded in their everyday lived experience, construct the way they define a house or - to be more accurate - a 'proper' house. Looking at Nayaka huts through the filters of their own dwelling norms, as we all tend to do, those huts fail to achieve a status of a 'proper' house. Nayaka's unwalled and temporary one-spaced huts in which most daily practices conducted outside and in full view of everyone could not be considered 'proper' dwelling to those who grew up in individually owned permanent concrete houses that act as a private and intimate sphere, concealing and securing the family from the public/outside, encouraging living indoors with control over visits and entries. Nayaka's flexible dwelling habits could not be considered 'proper' ways of living to people who value sedentary life in a privately owned property, among one stable community. Changing this environment - meaning, rebuilding the houses and redesigning the villages - was then conceived by the development organizations a necessity in order to

ensure the success of the organization's efforts in other fields such as education, health and economy.

The new houses

The Nayaka villages we worked in were subjected to several house building projects since 2000. The new houses have thick and sealed brick and mortar walls (see Figure 4). They are equipped with metal doors and windows, some with bars, all can be shut down and locked. Thatch roofs were replaced by tiles, asbestos sheets or concrete plates. Some houses were built connected to one another, forming an elongated structure with several dwelling units, divided by solid walls, designated to inhabit several families (see Figure 5). Each house or dwelling unit is divided into rooms, each with a predefined function (e.g., a kitchen, a bedroom, a main hall). This plan was meant to allow the dwellers to spend most time indoors, where each nuclear family could be on its own. Some houses have small square porches, kept within the square outline of the house, closed from three sides by the house walls and thus excluding it from public view as well (see Figure 5). Together, the new constructions create a space of private and concealed areas that are highly separated from the 'public' domain, with defined entrances and exits, hidden object and subjects and limited visibility. In some places, an electric fence was
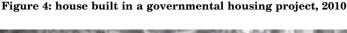
Figure 4: house built in a governmental housing project, 2010

Figure 5: house built by a local NGO, 2012

Figure 6: enlarged porch, 2012
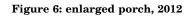
Figure 7: enlarged porch, 2010

Figure 8: own-built open house, 2010

Figure 9: own-built open house, 2010

laid around villages in order to protect the inhabitants from wild animals, and practically creating a physical separation between the 'human' village and 'non-human/natural forest'.

After Development

Fixed houses vs. mobile life: notions of houses, family and ownership.

Each new house was given and assigned to a specific family, from among those families who happened to live therein that certain moment of organizational intervention in the ongoing flow of coming-and-going of people between villages. Houses were registered in the official governmental records as private property of a nuclear family[8], listed under the person considered to be the 'head of the family'[9]. This was done as part of a more general attempt to encourage the Nayaka to settle down by creating permanent settlements and 'stable' communities, alongside granting them agricultural land, saplings and domestic animals in order to teach values of private property ownership. Families registered as owners of houses in one place, could not be recipients of more houses in another, and therefore were expected to be much less mobile, to remain in - and maintain - their property. This new house-scape threatens the values of living together with ever-changing relatives as described earlier.

Surprisingly or not, Nayaka today do express in their words a more fixed and personal ownership of a specific house, which sounds far from the flexible and ever changing use of dwellings in the 1970s. Whenever they were asked who lived in each house, they answered not with the names of the people who currently lived in the house (as was meant by the question), but the name of the person who had originally received it from the NGO.

Lavi [pointing at a house, knowing that it had been standing empty for a long time]: 'Who is living in this house today?'

Devi [a widowed woman]: 'This is my house. It is mine.'

Lavi: 'And the next one?'

– 'Kalan.'

Lavi: 'And the one after that?'

– 'Rajan.'

Lavi: 'Who is Rajan?' [a man named Biju had lived in the mentioned house for at least a few months preceding this conversation]

Devi: 'Rajan is my father'

Lavi: 'Where is he?'

– 'He died.'

Lavi: 'But this is his house?'

– 'Yes. This is his house.'

This movement towards more fixed ownership might be expected, as the whole purpose of the new houses was to get the Nayaka to adapt to such external dwelling manners. However, there appeared to be a significant difference between what they said and what they did. In practice, mentioning 'ownership' of a house did not necessarily tell us who was actually living in it.

Looking for example at the above conversation we can say that Kalan spent most of his days in a traditional-style house he had built not far from there. Rajan was long dead and a few couples had lived in 'his house' over the years. Devi, who was very keen on mentioning her ownership of a house on every possible occasion, had not actually been living there for quite a few years. She has been living with her sister and her sister's husband in a nearby house, co-sleeping with the husband's widowed sister. When asked why, she explained that 'I am alone. My entire family died; therefore I don't live in that house anymore'. As was the case thirty years earlier, sleeping alone remains a social pathology and even today, widows do not live alone in their 'owned' houses, but move in with relatives. Not only widows, but relatives of all kinds continued to live together, and no one slept alone. Moreover, sleeping and living arrangements in the village, as well as the very identity of the dwellers, kept changing from day to day. Much as it was in the 1970s, villages still create a sort of 'musical chairs' of coming and going relatives. People keep moving between relatives' villages, 'visitors' frequently moved in with their 'hosts' and quickly became part of the village's dwellers. People went to visit

other villages and others moved in instead of them. People also moved between the houses within the village, sleeping one day in this house with those people and on another day in another house with other people. If there happened to be no room inside, people slept outside or on the porches. In cold nights, plastic sheets were used to close the porches, creating an ad hoc warm sleeping space. Though Nayaka today can no longer move their entire village to a new location or set up new villages due to prohibitions and laws that bind them to certain locations, they still lead a very mobile life by frequently moving between their existing, now fixed, villages. While their houses may be fixed to a certain place and are no longer mobile, the people themselves certainly are still mobile (for similar Australian cases see Memmott1988)[10]. And all the while, each new house *was* related by the Nayaka to a certain fixed 'owner'.

The Nayaka with whom we lived did not consider their words and behaviour as contradicting each other nor did they consider their behaviour to be defying the 'dwelling codes' set up by the external agents. Those agents were distributing 'a house' for 'private ownership' for each 'family'. It is only that Nayaka's notions of 'living-in' a house, 'ownership' and 'family' are rather different. Nayaka's notions of 'dwelling' do not necessarily indicate the settling in a permanent locus of habitation meant for the use of specific nuclear family members only. When pressed about the discrepancy between house dwellers and owners, people eventually turned to talking about *sonta* (~family, relations, those who belong to us).

> Lavi: 'Who lives in Rajan's house now?'
>
> – 'Biju lives there.'
>
> Lavi: 'And the house in GR [a nearby village], is it also his?'
>
> – 'Yes, that is Biju's house. His mother lives there now.'
>
> Lavi: 'Does he have two houses?'
>
> – 'Yes, two houses. He lives here and that house belongs to him as well. His mother is there, and his sister lives next door.'

Manju [Biju's wife] suddenly lost her patience and said out loud: 'We don't belong to any house! We can go to whichever house we wish, to any house of our *sonta*! We are all *sonta* and therefore wherever we are we can go anywhere, live anywhere and do whatever we want!'

> Devi [an elder woman]: 'When our children come, they can always live here. When they come, if sometimes there is not enough room, we will even find room on a rock. We'll just spread some grass there and sleep. There will always be enough room for everyone.'
>
> Lavi: 'How do you decide where to go?'
>
> Devi, Manju [and others around them shouting together]: '*SONTA*!!'
>
> Manju: 'These are our *sonta*, so we just go and visit them.'

Sonta, in its Nayaka sense (this word is commonly used in other Dravidian languages), can be translated- but very roughly-into English as a *family*, or

kin, but it encompasses a much broader sense than the standard modern term of nuclear family or a single and defined household. Nayaka's *sonta* is a much more flexible and inclusive unit, including broadly of all those with whom they have social relations, all 'those who live and share with us' (which could easily be both humans and non-humans persons, see Bird-David 1992a; 1999; Naveh 2007: 187, 200; see also Ingold 1996; Fortier 2009: 66-9; Kohler 2005b for more examples of such 'extended family' categories around the world). Rather than blood relations, the sharing of things, spaces, actions and time, and literally 'being together' indicate kinship among Nayaka. *Sonta* relations are maintained, and created, through immediate relations, spending time together and acts of mutual caring (Bird-David 1999). Therefore, in order to maintain these relations people have to be with their *sonta*. To maintain *sonta* relations with people who live in other villages, Nayaka are actually required to move between villages and live with their relatives there.

As for ownership, Nayaka do have their own concept of relating objects to specific persons, but this association is far from ownership as envisaged by the external institutions and by no means implies rights of exclusion. Original owners or first people in a specific land do have a particular significance, as 'first owners'. This is the case especially when it comes to places but also to objects (see Bird-David 1990: 193-4 about ownership of objects; Naveh 2007: 120-57 in relation to land ownership). A village might be associated with and named by the first man who settled in it. In the same spirit, a house might be related to the first person who lived there (e.g., the deceased Rajan). But this will be a personal association of a thing that is shared. Nayaka relate things to persons in a space where relatives share and co-use their owned things with each other (Bird-David 1990: 193). Since co-sharing things and lives immediately implies close relations, and vice versa (Bird-David 1990: 193-4) - Nayaka freely share 'ownership' of a house with all those who are with them at the moment, as the very fact of 'being there' creates a close kinship relation. The very concept of *sonta* both requires social mobility, and enables it even today. As a result, Nayaka have no problem talking about and conveying ownership of the new houses and at the same time, continue sharing them with all their *sonta*. And since so many people are considered *sonta*, Nayaka can practically keep moving between most houses and ignore, or not even notice, the obstacle of private possessions in their mobile life.

Closed walls vs. full visibility

The design of the new houses poses a threat to the practice of living together in full view. With solid walls and doors that block vocal and visual communication, the houses are designed to separate between indoors and outdoors. Activities that the Nayaka used to conduct outside (such as cooking, sitting together and even sleeping) are now taken indoors by the design of the houses, concealed and away from public view. Adopting ideas such as 'privacy'

and 'individuality' are some of the social values that the developers are trying to instruct their so-called clients. Even the external parts of the new houses reflect the builders' pursuit of values of privacy. The porches (in houses where they exist at all), walled from three sides, do not allow a view of anything or anyone that does not stand directly in front of them (see Figure 5). People sitting in the porches are unable to see what is going on in neighbouring houses and they, in turn, are hidden from the eyes of others by the walls of the porches. This design provides privacy and exclusion despite sitting outside. In addition, those porches are very small in size. Unlike the traditional hearths that allowed many people to sit side-by-side, the small new porches allow for only a few persons to sit under the roof together (the dwellers and their closest relatives). Using these new houses and closed porches as given might indeed create a major change from living in and with full view of everyone towards a more private and excluding way of life.

However, despite the new possibilities for privacy and indoor life, the Nayaka continue to live outside and in full visibility as far as possible. The strict division of space, and the assigning of a specific role to each of the rooms, proves irrelevant in Nayaka everyday use of them. In practice, different spaces (or 'rooms') are used for whatever use is felt necessary; this varies according to the need at any given moment. But what is more important is that, everyday life still took place, even today, outside. No matter how many rooms there were in the new houses, no one stayed indoors during the day. Daily activities intended by the builders to be conducted indoors, in private, in designated rooms, are still being performed outside, in public, between houses rather than within them. People mostly did sleep in the houses, especially on cold or rainy nights, but first thing in the morning, they went outside and spent the whole day outside, performing tasks or leisure activities together with others. This is easily done in the dry season, when one can just sit on the terrace between the houses. But sitting on the open terrace is usually impossible in the rainy season. Perhaps this is the reason for the widespread phenomenon of rebuilding of porches in Nayaka villages, by Nayaka, as soon as the external builders have left the village.

In all rebuilt villages, a great many porches, especially those frequently used, have been significantly enlarged and broadened. These extensions stand out from the lines of the house and are so big that they sometimes exceed the size of the original house. The porches consist of a mud platform and a roof built of spare tiles left from the building projects, as well as nylon sheets and,- against the state forest laws- bamboo poles and grass, if there are some left within easy reach (see Figures 6, 7). These enlarged porches have become the most noticeable architectural feature in Nayaka villages. In the rainy season, it was the enlarged porches that allowed the sitting together of many people, working, cooking and in fact, the continuation of living-together outside with others. Standing out in a landscape of newly-built 'modernized' houses, the

porch has become a stubborn reminder of the dwellings and behaviours that these new houses were supposed to modify. The open terrace and the enlarged porches are still the centre of everyday life, while the closed houses are used for storing what little property they had, and sleeping (see also Denton et al. 1997: 127 for a similar case where people built traditional houses next to their new externally built ones. They lived in the former and used the latter as a storeroom and as a display for visitors coming to observe the 'development achievements').

Quite similarly, when the wind blew, people erected low 'shields' made of mats or nylon, whichever was at hand. These temporary constructions indeed blocked, to some extent, the visibility between the various hearths but were only high enough to protect the people sitting around the hearth and allowed the continuation of being outside, moving from hearth to hearth, from porch to porch, talking freely with everyone around, despite the weather and instead of secluding themselves in the new protective houses.

The phenomenon of enlarging externally-built porches is not exclusive to the Nayaka, as other social groups were seen extending their externally-built porches to some degree. However, Nayaka's extensions were especially large, and enable full visibility of the people and activities inside, and the use of the built houses was minimal.

In addition to the porches, Nayaka kept adding extensions to their houses, when the need arose. Those were built in a traditional fashion: half-walled or unwalled, using bamboo poles and nylon sheets (in the absence of enough vegetal material for walls and roofing). The extra rooms are sometimes so spacious that dwellers use them for all their needs: they slept in them and lived in them, while the original brick and mortar house became an unused inner room, opened rarely for sleeping in on extremely rainy nights or accommodating visitors. In other cases, when a whole new house had to be built, for example if there was nowhere to stay in a relative's house, it was more similar to the traditional houses than the new ones. All own-built houses were built with a frame of bamboo poles and nylon sheet walls. These houses, big or small, were always one-space houses, unlike the brick and mortar multi-room houses. They were much more open, some missing two or more walls, and others walled only to half the height of the house, creating no significant separation between in-space and out-space (see Figures 8 and 9). As was the case in the 1970s, this is by no means due to a lack of building ability. The Nayaka with whom we lived are trained in building mud-brick and cement-brick walls, as they are sometimes employed for these jobs in the service of neighbouring villagers and are trained by the external organization in order to assist in the building projects in their villages. Should they wish to do so, they have the ability to extend and build their houses with closed and thicker walls. The choice of materials is also not simply a result of 'their poor circumstances', as buying nylon sheets is more expensive than using the soil

around them for bricks. It is a deliberate choice. Those materials were chosen for their elasticity and easy modification to changing needs. Like the woven bamboo walls of the 1970s, nylon sheets offer much more flexibility than bricks. They can be - and are- easily removed at a moment's notice in order to create an extra room when visitors came to stay, a roofed porch when it rained or a wind block around the sitting area. Houses are still perceived by Nayaka more as dynamic than a permanent thing. While for the developers the 'house' serves as a symbol of stability and durability, a steady point from which one leaves, to which one returns and in which one settles, this notion is still far from that of the Nayaka, in spite of all interventions. Over and over again we can see that Nayaka resort to, or retain their own ways of dwelling and living. By differently using and modifying their built environment, the Nayaka present resilience and continuity in their living habits as they continue to dwell to a large extent according to their own ways.

Changes

While we can see Nayaka actively opening - or re-opening - their newly-designed spaces, one specific space is going through an opposite process. The cooking areas are becoming more and more closed and hidden. An interesting aspect of this is that people did not necessarily start cooking in the rooms assigned by the developers as a 'kitchen'. They continue cooking outside, but - and this is the important point - not in full view. They cook behind their houses, in the half-closed porches of the external houses (but not in their traditional-style open ones), and behind partitions made of tin plates or mats. Eating is also done in hidden areas in small groups of relatives. By contrast, right after eating people leave the half-closed porches or come out from behind partitions and barriers to sit around the fire places in the middle of the terrace or in the open porches, in full view, where everyone can see them. This is where they spend most of their day, along with the rest of the people in the village. It is only the cooking and eating practices that are now confined to hidden places.

While this seems an extreme change in dwelling habits, the reasons for this phenomenon are complex. The process of secluding cooking area does not stem directly from the external dwelling habits instructed to the Nayaka, nor from a 'natural process of adaptation' to dwelling norms as a result of living in a newly-built environment that dictates to them (as they do not usually use the 'kitchen' as such and still cook outside -despite all the instructions they have received). On the contrary, it is a result of a great deal of cultural continuity in the ways in which Nayaka relate to the changes in their lives.

The reason for the contrast between Nayaka's hidden cooking spaces and the great visibility of their everyday conduct lies in the nature of the objects inside the cooking area, the food. Unlike before, most of what Nayaka eat today comes from nearby towns and markets, not from the forest. While gathering food in the forest is forbidden by the laws of nature protection,

Scheduled Tribes are entitled to monthly food rations and discounts from the government. Groceries brought from town were immediately hidden in closed cooking spaces. In contrast, what little food that was still occasionally brought from the forest, despite prohibitions (such as wild yam, fruit and edible greens), was never hidden, rather placed in the open porches and always shared with other people and eaten in larger groups of people, accompanied by loud calls to more people to join the meal. Food from the forest was also cooked in different - and open - fireplaces, usually those hearths around which everyone sat together during the day. In a manner very similar to that of market-bought food, kerosene - the liquid fuel distributed also by the government through ration cards and frequently used for cooking on portable stoves - was seldom shared and always stored inside houses or in closed cooking areas, where it was inaccessible and invisible to others. Fuel that was collected in the forest such as firewood, however, was piled outside between the houses where everyone could see and freely use it.

Nayaka do not share food that did not come from the forest, but still happily share food that does. Things from the forest, including those beings consumed as food, are viewed as co-subjects, sharing the forest environment with the Nayaka (Bird-David 1990; 1999; Naveh 2007: 41-76). Food from the forest is regarded as forest-giving and forest-caring to the people, and embedded in their intimate relationship with the forest. Perceiving themselves as the children of the forest, and therefore as siblings, they shared what they considered was given to them (Bird-David 1990). This perception of the forest and forest beings as relatives and co-subjects still exists today (Naveh 2007: 41-76; Lavi 2012: 28-65). However, due to deforestation and prohibitions against hunting, gathering and staying in the forest, they can no longer rely on it for their livelihood. Naveh (2007), who has studied sharing and non-sharing behaviour among a different group of Nayaka, argued that non-forest products are not perceived as part of a mutual caring relationship and therefore are not shared. He stresses that those items are objectified and perceived through a utilitarian approach, as a product of individual labour and a personal possession (Naveh 2007: 239-42). While the question of Nayaka's notion of 'personal-ness' requires further study, it can be said that they were indeed much more reluctant to share non-forest products, and that their behaviour regarding such products stands in great contrast to the open and direct sharing of forest products (this phenomenon is known among other groups of hunter-gatherers around the world; see, among others, Hart 1978: 349; Ingold 1996; Endicott 2005: 83; Kohler 2005a: 41-4).

Traditionally, not sharing food, especially when directly asked to, was socially unacceptable (Bird-David 1990: 193; 2009: 280). Once directly asked to share, a person had to comply. People who wished not to share something had to hide it to evade any direct requests. In a way, this is still what they are doing today. They are hiding things that they do not want to share (products

from the outside), and freely presenting things that they do share (products from the outside), and freely presenting things that they do share (products from the forest). Since what they do not wish to share is usually food (and this is the main and most consistent non-forest everyday entity coming to the villages), it was the cooking areas that became hidden and eating became a practice not-done-together. This indeed creates a spatial change in the village as a result of an outside intrusion, but it does not oppose 'traditional' practices and norms, and it is definitely not the change that the development agents were aiming for (as the dwellers do not use the room called 'kitchen'). Rather, it stems from maintaining aspects of traditional conduct (sharing and not sharing behaviours) within the new circumstances.

Conclusions

Houses and dwelling habits can reveal a great deal of information about their dwellers and builders. This article examined a case study in which the house is a locus of juxtaposition between two very distinctive cultures of very different social groups. In this case it not only serves to reveal its own builders'/dwellers' culture, but also to shed light on the differences and complex relations between the two groups involved. Through the houses we were able to learn about each group's habits and norms, perceptions and definitions of Self and Other, as well as issues of influence and resilience.

It should be said that the Nayaka are usually quite happy with the new houses given to them by the external developers. While they often complained about the hardship of maintaining a concrete house and its lack of durability with respect to the local weather, they were, more often than not, happy to co operate with external housing projects. Their acceptance to receive the new buildings, though, did not imply that they used the house according to the explanations they received from its builders. However, while the developers expressed much frustration over what they described as 'Nayaka's inability to comply with the most basic requirements of housekeeping', Nayaka themselves do not see themselves as misusing the new houses. The great difference between the very basic notions of living, dwelling, house, family, ownership and property allows the Nayaka to accept and use the new structures, but in such ways that largely maintain, and continue their own unique ways of living.

And so, although development agents launched the housing project in order to hasten the Nayaka's social change and integration into the larger Indian society by teaching 'proper ways of living', the reality turned out to be rather different. Housing projects did not result in Nayaka adapting themselves and changing their ways of living according to the new ideas indicated in the design of their new houses. Instead, it resulted in the Nayaka actively changing and adapting their newly-built environment to suit their own norms and habits, changing what needed to be changed and using things differently according to their own notions.

Physical change imposed from outside did not create the intended social change. By contrast, social change coming from within did create certain physical changes, with the emergence of hidden cooking areas. This might hint at more general questions such as the mechanism of social continuity and change, the implications of development projects and the unexpected ways in which they take shape when delivered to people. The resilience shown by Nayaka can hint of a larger resilience against the extensive changes around them. If not other things, it can at least be said that Nayaka clearly do not adapt blindly to changes around them, at least not when it comes to the notion of dwelling which relates to some of the most intimate notions in life. To a large extent, they still lead a rather mobile and flexible life according to social relations: they tend to live outside in full view and share most things, actions and spaces with others. Since houses are not only an expression, but also the ground in which cultures are being assimilated and naturalized, as long as children grow up in an environment in which people live outside with others, even if there are more brick walls around, those practices and the cultural ideas behind them continue. As long as children spend their everyday lives in between houses rather than inside them, sharing things, actions and time with all around them, these ideas remain and regenerate. The traditional ways of using the new environment keep dictating and maintaining traditional ideas.

NOTES

1. For the classification and objectives towards STs, see for example the Ministry of Tribal Affairs: *http://tribal.nic.in/index.aspx* (accessed October 1, 2013).

2. We use 'traditional,' knowing it is a controversial word for its use (academic and popular) as the antonym of 'modern' and as the synonym of simple, undeveloped, stagnant and even primitive. Lacking a better word, we use 'traditional' *not* as a concept embedded with the above meanings, but only to relate to the ways in which Nayaka lived before the current changes and external interference in their lives. This is known to us through Bird-David's work with them (meaning, since the late 1970s) and the stories of the Nayaka about their own past experiences. Wanting to compare life before and after major external interventions such as housing projects, have described 'traditional' and 'contemporary' situations but are reluctant to relate to any specific form of dwelling as inherently inferior.

3. Apart from the Nayaka, the Nilgiri is home to other 'tribal' groups such as the Toda, Paniya, Kurumba, Kota and Irula.

4. For more information on the program, see: *http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/man-and-biosphere-programme/* (accessed August 10, 2013).

5. All these were somehow alleviated by the 2006 Forest Rights Act declared by the Central Indian government which restored some of the forest dwellers' rights. Nevertheless, even today forest dwellers in the Nilgiri are still facing hardship and conflicts in their everyday lives concerning their habitation and livelihood in forest lands. For information about the act see: *http://www.forestrightsact.com/the-act.* (accessed August 10, 2013). See also: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, the Forest Rights Act 2006 *http://tribal.gov.in/index1.asp?linkid=376&langid=1* (accessed October 1, 2013).

6. In Australia, for example, state housing projects in their earlier stages even went as far as to imitate an evolutionary process of sort, by gradually transforming the nomadic aborigines into settled house dwellers. This was done by providing 'transitional houses' a midway stage between 'traditional shacks' and 'proper houses', built to habituate its beneficiaries to — what was considered by its builders to be — proper dwelling norms (see Heppell 1979; Memmott 1988).

7. In rare cases, in the houses of the poorer workers the living room was sometimes used as a bedroom for some of the house's dwellers. On two of such visits the house's owners expressed their wish to have more rooms, a wish that was denied them due to its cost. The double role of the rooms in such a case (as both living room and bedroom) is more of a compromise due to a lack of choice rather than a representation of social perceptions and codes, as we saw in the case of the 'multi-functioned' room of the Nayaka house.

8. Registration was conducted by the organization involved with the rebuilding of the village, either directly by governmental officials or through the mediation of an NGO.

9. Not necessarily a man, as in many cases women are considered to be more reliable in terms of house ownership as they are not likely to lose, sell or misuse the shelter of their children. Tribal men are sometimes suspected by development agents to be more likely to be misled and to sell or lose their property due to debts, the influence of alcohol, or other negative reasons.

10. In Australia, Aborigines communities were accused of misusing the houses they were given, having over-populated them with whoever came along to visit and stayed. Moreover, their 'proper' maintenance was considered at risk since it was sometimes unclear who should take responsibility for the house, due to the frequency of dwellers changing (see for example Memmott 1988).

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