Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia
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Time Is Disease, Suffering, and Oblivion

Yanesha Historicity and the Struggle against Temporality

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"What do you [remember] about this business?" the King said to Alice.
"Nothing," said Alice.
"Nothing whatever" persisted the King.
"Nothing whatever," said Alice.
"That's very important," the King said, turning to the jury.

—after Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Following Comaroff and Comaroff's invitation "to disinter the endogenous historicity of local worlds" (1992:27), this essay aims at understanding ways of making and unmaking history that differ from our own. It addresses the issue of how the Yanesha people of eastern Peru, as well as other Amazonian indigenous peoples upholding "millenarian ideologies," conceive of time, space, the past, and the future. According to Yanesha thinkers, time is not homogeneous. The present era is a time-riddled period in between a timeless past and an equally timeless future. It began with the loss of immortality and the introduction of differences, two events that inaugurated time and history. It is, thus, an era in which the Yanesha began to experience the miseries of the human condition: suffering, pain, death, and oblivion. But it is also an era ruled by alterity, hierarchy, and inequality.

The Yanesha, I argue, are engaged in a struggle to put an end to the afflictions of time and the agonies of history. In this essay I analyze the means through which they fight time and history. Two aspects are of particular interest to me. First, how do the Yanesha construct their past? What do they remember and, above all, what do they choose to forget? Second, how do they imagine their future and, more particularly, what role do they attribute to their own agency in achieving their
imagined future? In brief, this essay is concerned as much with Yanesha historical consciousness (see Hill 1988), or historical vision (see Rappaport 1998), as with their historical imagination (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992).

The Heterogeneous Nature of Time

Unlike other Amazonian peoples, the Yanesha, an Arawak-speaking people living in the Andean piedmont (see map, figure 1.t), have a highly structured notion of time, conceived of as a linear sequence of events organized in fixed eras. This is expressed in their myths, which generally begin with the expression *ahaut,* “in the past” or “in ancient times,” followed by a phrase indicating with more precision the point in time to which it refers, such as “when Yompor Rref, the malign solar divinity, still illuminated this earth” or “before women began to give birth to human beings” or “after Yompor Ror, the present solar divinity, ascended to heaven.”

In addition, mythical events are grouped in three distinct eras. The first is the era of primordial creation, when Ya’u Yos, Our Grandfather Yos, created the world and all the good beings that inhabit it, and his envious classificatory brother Yospero perversely mimicked his creation by giving birth to all evil beings. This era ended with the creation of Yompor Rref, the first solar divinity. His ascension to heaven marked the advent of the second era. This was initially a period of fear in which the malignent Rref enjoyed harassing people by throwing stones at them. It was also a time of social and biological chaos in which people were immersed in a Hobbesian “state of Warre” and women gave birth to objects and nonhuman beings. Harmonious sociality was achieved after a woman stole the knowledge of *coshamanats* sacred music and the preparation of manioc beer from the land of the murdered ones. Biological order was obtained after the birth of the twins Yompor Ror, Our Father the Sun, and Yachor Arrare, Our Mother the Moon. These two events inaugurated a brief period of absolute harmony—the Yanesha golden age—in which divinities, humans, animals, plants, and things, all of them immortal and in human guise, shared this earth in peace.

The ascension to heaven of the Sun and the Moon, and the defeat of the previous Sun and his banishment to the sky of a higher earth, put an end to this paradisiacal period, giving rise to the third, present era. This event was preceded by what can be called a second creation. On his way to the hill from which he was going to ascend to heaven, Yompor Ror changed the landscape and the beings he met with his divine transformational powers. After he ascended to Yomporesho, the celestial realm, this earth and its inhabitants acquired their present form. Animals, plants, and things lost their human shape, and the divinities abandoned

![Map of Peru with Yanesha territories and important landmarks.](image-url)
this earth or hid in lakes and mountains, no longer sharing their lives with their human creatures. Worst of all, out of ignorance, laziness, and indifference, humans lost the opportunity of following the divinities and becoming immortal. As a result, they were left behind to experience illness, hard work, suffering, and death. It was thus that Yaneshya people became *drummatenesh*, "mortal beings," and that this earth became *romme patso*, "the earth where people die."

It was thus, also, that the Yaneshya began to experience the effects of "real" time. Yaneshya thinkers and myth tellers conceive of time as a linear sequence of events, but not as a homogeneous continuum. The first two eras, corresponding to the times of creation and re-creation of the cosmos, are thought of as a closed cycle. They are eternal and, therefore, timeless times that are hermetically sealed and closed to the present-day Yaneshya (see Wright 1998:104, for a similar view among the Baniwa). Yaneshya people conflate these two eras under the expression *ahuat mella*, or "ancient sacred times." The period when humans and divinities lived together is seen as a *mellapo*, a "timeless period when the earth and its inhabitants were in a sacred state" (Smith 1977:107). Death was unknown in ancient sacred times. Ancient sacred peoples (*mella achen*) could fight, could be defeated, transformed, locked up, or deprived of their mystical powers, but they could not be killed and they never died. They continue to live, and will always live, on other earths, in other skies, or hidden in this mortal earth.

In contrast, the present era is a time-riddled era, a period in which the Yaneshya are subjected to the afflictions of time: illness, suffering, death, and oblivion. However, according to Yaneshya millenarian beliefs, as there was a beginning of time, there will be an end of time. This will happen when, out of compassion for the suffering of their mortal creatures, the divinities send a savior, which will mark the beginning of a second *mellapo*, or sacred timeless period. This divine emissary will make people immortal (*mellainochter*) and take them to the abode of the higher divinities. The end of time will not be a peaceful event. It will be a cataclysmic occurrence marked by earthquakes, floods, and conflagrations, a veritable end of the world as we know it in which only a few will be saved. This will inaugurate the fourth and last era of human existence, an era of happiness and harmony devoid of the hardships of work, disease, and death, but also characterized by the full satisfaction of the life of the senses, including plenty of food, drink, songs, dances, and sex. Conversion to Adventism (since the 1920s) or Evangelism (since the 1940s) has not eradicated these messianic expectations, but has rather accentuated them.

In brief, the Yaneshya conceive of the present, time-riddled era as an interlude between a timeless past and a timeless future. From their viewpoint, time is not homogeneous—a characteristic that Turner (1988:48) has already pointed out as central to Amerindian conceptions of temporality. In Yaneshya thought, the present era is the age of time and history. It began with the loss of immortality and will end only with the restoration of immortality. It is, thus, inextricably associated with the miseries of the human condition but also, as we shall see, with the nefarious consequences of alterity. Yanesha people are engaged in a battle against the ravages of temporality, and they fight to transcend the human condition. Their fight against time and history assumes two forms: the struggle against oblivion and the quest for divine salvation. These, however, are not different phenomena but two sides of the same coin. There is no remembrance of the past that is not linked in one way or another to the hope for immortality, and there can be no salvation without remembrance of the past. Yaneshya historical awareness is nurtured by these two drives.

**Memory of Significant Others**

Among the Yanesha, what Danièle Dehouve (1999) calls the struggle against oblivion ("la lutte contre l'oubli") has little to do with the West's obsession with not forgetting. Based on the oft-quoted dictum of Santayana that those who cannot remember their past are condemned to repeat it, Western societies have embarked on a crusade to remember that involves not only the ruling classes but also all kinds of social segments and interest groups. This is manifested in the proliferation of museums, libraries, and archives of all types that have benefited from the development of new electronic means of storing vast amounts of information. The urge to remember is associated with the atrocities committed during the twentieth century in the name of political ideologies of diverse types. Simon Wiesenthal's 1989 appeal not to forget the Shoah, the Nazi massacre of the Jews, and to "build a defense against repetition" through remembrance, finds echo in Carolyn Forché's 1993 anthology of "poetry of witness," entitled precisely Against Forgetting. In it she asks us to fight the "diseased complacency" of oblivion and protest against violence, for "The resistance to terror is what makes the world habitable" (32, 46).

I suggest that the Yaneshya's struggle against oblivion is more about remembering the past to remind us of who we are than to remind us of the barbarous and unacceptable. In other words, it is more about ethnic awareness and identity than about political conscience and mobilization. Hill (1988:10) has already underscored the fact that "social otherness" is a central concern in indigenous representations of the past. Whitten (1988:301–302) has further argued that these representations often deal with social relationships with "significant others," who are classified in terms of relative cultural similarity and political power. Amer-
Indian historical consciousness would be mostly about alterity and power. This certainly holds true for the Yanesha, among whom this concern is manifested in a series of myths that are set in the present era and that refer to three significant others: the cannibalistic Pano people, the authoritarian Incas, and the rapacious white men (Santos-Granero 1988b:41).

As I have argued elsewhere, Yanesha memory of the past is kept alive not only through myths (terrpariñats) and songs (morriñats) but also through such means as topographic writing, ritual performances, and bodily practices (Santos-Granero 1998). Analysis of the discursive and nondiscursive means by which Yanesha people have kept the memory of these significant others, and a comparison with what we know of their relationships with them from historical documents, can reveal, I suggest, what the Yanesha consider important to remember. It can also reveal the ways in which Yanesha historical imagination proceeds in the construction and reconstruction of the past, for as Aurore Becquelin has argued, forgetting is “the motor of historical creativity” (1993:34).

Memory of the Pano-speaking peoples is preserved in the myth of the Muellepén, a cannibalistic people that each year came upriver along the Palcazu River to attack and eat the Yanesha of the Cacazú valley. Yato’ Caresa, also known as Yato’ Po’sholl, was a powerful melíñanti spirit in charge of defending the Yanesha. To prevent Muellepén attacks, he used to post guards upstream from the confluence of the Cacazú and Yoncollasso rivers, which was the limit of Yanesha territory. He painted his Yanesha warriors with a magical ointment that made them invulnerable, allowing them to kill their enemies. Once, however, while pursuing the Muellepén at night, Yato’ Caresa did not have time to paint his warriors, and all of them were killed. Alone, and fearing that if he escaped he would not be able to resurrect his warriors, Caresa surrendered his mystical powers, allowing the Muellepén to kill him and cut his head off. Holding his head in his hands, he returned to the Cacazú valley, where he mysteriously hid with his followers in a lake known as Cacasaño.

Some of the elements of this narrative are corroborated by archaeological and documentary evidence. There is evidence that the ancestors of Pano-speaking peoples displaced the proto-Yanesha from the Ucayali River, pushing them upriver along the Pachitea and Palcazu rivers to their final location along the Andean piedmont (Lathrap 1970:155). There is also plenty of historical evidence that in colonial times the Pano continued to wage war against Yanesha and other Awajun-speaking peoples. Such was the case of the Pano-speaking Conibo, who lived at the confluence of the Pachitea and Ucayali rivers, and Cashibo, who inhabited the interior lands of the left bank of the Pachitea River. These peoples practiced funerary endocannibalism, which in some cases involved eating the body of deceased kin (Maroni [1738] 1988:80), and in others the cremation of the deceased and the ingestion of his or her ashes mixed with fermented beer (Huerta [1686] 1983:121).

Colonial sources state that the Conibo chopped off the heads of their enemies and ripped their hearts out to display them in their homes as a sign of their courage (Rodríguez Tena [1774] 1977:60). It is also said that they drank their enemies’ blood mixed with fermented beer. None of these sources, however, asserts that the Pano ate war prisoners. Hostilities between the Yanesha and their Pano neighbors were so intense that well into the nineteenth century the Palcazu River continued to be a poorly inhabited area, a no-man’s-land that acted as a buffer zone (see, for instance, Ordinaire 1892).

Interestingly enough, the myth about the Muellepén omits what was the most important feature of Panoan raids against Yanesha and other Awajun-speaking peoples: the capture and removal of women and children to be taken as wives, adopted, or kept as slaves (Amich 1973:298). Neither this nor other Yanesha myths referring to confrontations with ancient cannibalistic peoples make any reference to the abduction of women and children. Instead they stress the military, male aspects of the relationship, extolling the bravery and battle feats of Caresa and his warriors. In fact, an associated myth narrates how the Yanesha organized a war party to punish the Muellepén for the death of Caresa. They attacked them on the Sungaroyacu, a tributary of the Pachitea River where the present-day Cashibo live, and killed everybody except for a chief and two children, a girl and a boy. This, the myth teller asserted, explains why today there are so few Cashibo left.

The myth also omits the importance that Panoan polychrome pottery had in the trading networks centering on the salt mines of the Cerro de la Sal. Although this kind of pottery reached the Yanesha through the mediation of the Asháninka along the Ucayali-Tambo-Perené fluvial axis, they must have known that it was manufactured by the same people who raided them along the Ucayali-Pachitea-Palcazu fluvial axis.

Selective memory, or rather selective forgetting, also plays an important role in the myth of Enc, a semidivine figure that represents the Inca people (Santos-Granero 1991:73–74, 247–249). Enc was born of a Yanesha virgin impregnated by an envoy of Yato’ Yos, the creator god, who wanted to provide his mortal creatures with a loving and compassionate leader. When Enc became a man, he decided to find his divine father. To stop Enc from ascending to heaven, Yato’ Yos sent his daughter Yachor Palla to marry him. Enc was a tyrant. He demanded from the Yanesha’s priestly leaders a constant supply of feather tunics. If they failed to bring them, or if the feather tunics were not well woven, he beheaded the leaders and replaced them with their eldest sons. Enc gave Yanesha men stone axes and
forced them to clear gardens for him. He did not feed his workers, but if one of them was found stealing food from his gardens, Enc ordered his decapitation. He paid his workers in gold and silver, which they rejected, as they had no use for it. Finally, he obliged his followers to impose a fidelity tax on their wives. Those who were found guilty of adultery were also beheaded. According to the myth, the creator god grew tired of Enc's crimes and punished him by depriving him of his mystical powers.

It is impossible to know the exact character of the relationship between the Yaneshu people and the Inca Empire. However, archaeological and early colonial documentary evidence corroborates many elements of this narrative, suggesting that the ancient Yaneshu experienced some form of Inca domination. We know, for instance, that to reinforce their domination, Inca rulers used to take as secondary wives high-ranking women from the peoples they conquered. Like Enc's mythical Yaneshu wife, these concubines had the title of *pallu*. We also know that the Incas obtained prized tropical forest products through a diversity of means, including colonization of the lowlands, subjection of Amazonian peoples, and establishment of trading relationships (Saignes 1985). Chief among these products were coca leaves, hardwoods, and feathers; of the three, feathers seem to have been the most important. For instance, we are told that the Chupaychu, Andean neighbors of the Yaneshu, had to provide the Inca annually with 120 persons to gather feathers as tribute, whereas they provided only 60 for the cultivation of coca leaves (Ortiz de Zúñiga [1662] 1967:306). The most skillful Chupaychu feather specialists were sent to Cuzco, where they were exclusively devoted to making feather tunics and feather-ornamented weapons.

The Yaneshu remember mostly the authoritarian, coercive aspects of their relationship with the Inca Empire—a relationship marked, according to myth, by despotism, economic exploitation, sexual policing, and an outrageous curtailment of personal autonomy. Omitted are a series of elements that we know made a great impression on the imagination of other Amazonian peoples that had close contact with the Incas. There is no mention in the myth of Enc, or in other related oral narratives, of such normally awe-inspiring Inca technologies as stonework, architecture, hydraulics, and metallurgy. And there are no references to objects obtained from the Incas in exchange for Yaneshu labor or Yaneshu products, except for a contemptuous reference to Inca gold and silver. No mention is made of copper and bronze axes, which are so prominent in the mythologies of other Amazonian peoples (Renard-Casevitz et al. 1986), and which we know were important objects in the long-distance trading networks linking the Andes with the Amazonian lowlands (Lathrap 1973; Myers 1981). At most, the Incas are credited with giving the Yaneshu stone axes. In brief, there is no memory of the numerous exchanges made with Andean peoples, exchanges that we know persisted long after the Spanish conquest (Tibesar 1950). The only thing that Yaneshu people "remember" is a "nonexchange" or "antiexchange," namely, receiving useless stuff (gold and silver) for valuable work.

References to the white men (*ocamesha*) appear in various myths. The Yaneshu attribute their origin to Enc's folly. On his way to heaven to retrieve his wife, who had abandoned him, Enc opened the magical gates that kept the white men locked in. He was in such a rush that he did not bother to close them. He told his four sons to lock the gates, but they did not obey him. The white men came out in great numbers. They killed Enc's sons Enca Capa and Huascar and took all his silver. It was thus that the Yaneshu people were forced to share their lands with the white men.

However, if it is true that the appearance of the white men was linked to Enc's fallibility, their success was, according to myth, the direct consequence of the fallibility and lack of devotion of the Yaneshu themselves. It is said that Yompour Yompur, one of the brothers of the present-day solar divinity, whose body was half stone, told the Yaneshu to take care of him because otherwise the white men would take him with them. When the white men came to see Yompur singing and dancing, the Yaneshu panicked and abandoned the divinity, who could not walk. The white men took Yompur to their land, where they still venerate him. For this reason, Yaneshu myths tell us, the white men multiply while the Yaneshu grow fewer each day.

In another myth it is said that when Yompour A'pen contractor Our Father Milky Way, was about to ascend to the heavens, he asked the Yaneshu people to follow him. As they would not, he asked them to allow at least one of their children to follow him, so that he could become as powerful as the divinities and could one day come back to this earth to make the Yaneshu immortal. But the Yaneshu did not allow even this. In contrast, some white men followed Yompur A'pen. They are now visible as bright stars in the summer night sky. This explains, according to myth tellers, why nowadays the white men have extraordinary creative powers and can invent marvelous things, such as cars and other machines, whereas the Yaneshu have no money and are as poor as orphans.

The Yaneshu contend that, thanks to the powers acquired from their divinities, the white men multiplied so much that they soon occupied most of the Yaneshu territory. By then most Yaneshu had become like the whites, losing their native language, their sacred songs, and their traditional dress. Worse still, they no longer worshiped the old divinities. Worried that his mortal creatures would disappear, the creator god sent his son Yompur Santo to make them immortal (Santos-Granero 1991:80–83). However, in his eagerness to help the Yaneshu people, Yompur
Santo came to this earth before finishing his period of acquisition of divine powers. When he arrived on this earth, he revealed himself to the only pious Yanesh man that was left. After the devoted man recognized Yompor Santo as a divine emissary, the Yanesh people started multiplying rapidly. Yompor Santo gathered all the Yanesh in Mecroaro, where he taught them how to live a correct and moral life. Yanesh built a large house for Yompor Santo and provided him with beautiful cotton tunics, feather crowns, and other ornaments. Unfortunately, Shellmex, Yompor Santo's classificatory brother and the first Yanesh sorcerer, betrayed his confidence. He ordered the decapitation of many of his followers and eventually killed Yompor Santo himself. As Yompor Santo lacked full divine powers, he failed to make the Yanesh immortal. Moreover, after dying he was not able to return to life as promised. Eventually the white men took his bones to the Andean town of Tarma; with them they made an image of him that they still worship.

Yanesh representations of white men in these and other oral narratives and songs are full of references to historical "events," but they also contain some significant omissions. The Yanesh version of the origin of the white men retains the fact that their arrival coincided with the demise of the Inca Empire. Attributing the origin of the white men to the fallibility of the Inca adds to the negative views that Yanesh people have about this personage. We find a similar anchorage in historical events in the myth of Yompor Santo, which is inspired by the historical figure of Juan Santos Atahualpa, a highland Indian who in 1742 led the Yanesh and their neighbors to a successful revolt against the Spanish (Varese 1973; Castro Arenas 1973; Zarzar 1989; Santos-Granero 1992b; Torre López 2004). Juan Santos claimed that he descended from the Inca, the Sun, and the Holy Spirit, and that he had been sent to eliminate Spanish oppression, recover his kingdom, and guide his people (San Antonio 1750).

He established his headquarters in Mettaro, which became a sort of "Land without Evil" or "new Jerusalem" for his large following, consisting mostly of Arawak-speaking peoples—the Yanesh, Añáninka, Ashéninka, Piro, and Nomatsiguenga. In Mettaro Juan Santos led an ascetic and spiritual life, surrounded by his personal guard and an elaborate protocol (San Antonio 1750). The rebel dressed like an Amazonian Indian. His followers constantly supplied him with fine coroñ tunics and other ornaments. Juan Santos died sometime in the 1760s. His tomb became an object of annual pilgrimages linked to the hope of his resurrection until 1891, when his remains were removed from the tomb and taken to Tarma by order of the local governor, presumably to suppress his memory and crush indigenous resistance (Castro Arenas 1973:148–149).

Together with these historical references, however, there are some important historical omissions that raise interesting questions about Yanesh historical awareness. According to myth, Yompor Santo appeared in a time when the white men had occupied Yanesh territory, and most Yanesh had become like them. This is partly validated by historical documentation. By the time Juan Santos initiated his revolt, the Spanish had been in the region for thirty-three years, founding numerous mission posts, a few military garrisons, and some big ranches, and reducing thousands of Arawak-speaking Indians to Christian life. But the myth makes no reference either to the Franciscan missionaries, who were the main colonial agents in the region, or to mission life, which we know Yanesh people disliked intensely. Likewise the myth does not allude to the economic exploitation to which the Yanesh and their neighbors were subjected by missionaries, colonial authorities, and large landowners, and which constituted an important element in Juan Santos's anticolonial discourse (Santos-Granero 1991). Even more puzzling is the fact that there is no mention of the fatal epidemics that decimated the Yanesh during this period and that generated much unrest and many rebellions (Santos-Granero 1987). But most striking of all is the omission of the revolt itself.

There is no mention whatsoever in the myth of Yompor Santo of a military confrontation with the whites. This is all the more surprising given that Juan Santos was one of the largest and most successful Amazonian insurrections against Spanish colonial rule. So much so, it kept Spaniards and Peruvians away from the region for more than a century. Rather than historical "facts," what Yanesh people remember, I argue, are the emotions, feelings, and moods resulting from their relationship with significant others. It is a "history of the senses" (Taussig 1993), rather than a history of events. These sentiments are linked with particular characterizations of others, which, as is generally the case, are sketchy and stereotyped.

Thus, in Yanesh imagination, Pano peoples are bloodthirsty, deceitful cannibals for whom Yanesh can feel only abhorrence and spite. They are the quintessential savages, the inferior "others like us," who deserve only extermination—a fear that, in myth at least, the Yanesh almost achieved. Inca rulers, personified in the semidivine figure of Encan, are mean, cruel, but powerful "others like us." They have no respect for personal autonomy and do not comply with the most basic norm of civilized life, that of reciprocal exchange. They represent the antithesis of legitimate authority, which in Yanesh political philosophy is always about love, compassion, generosity, and service—in other words, about giving life rather than taking it (Santos-Granero 1991). Finally, the white men are the "real others." They are an accident of history, the unforeseen result of the folly of a mean and irresponsible semidivinity. White men are opportunistic and powerful people who have consistently taken advantage of the Yanesh's fallibility and lack of devotion.
to deprive them of the divine powers that should have been theirs. But their main
defect derives from their main virtue. According to Yaneshía thinkers, the white
men are more devoted and pious than the Yaneshía; this allowed them to acquire
the powers of fertility and creativity of Yaneshía divinities. This is why Yaneshía
feelings toward the white men are so ambivalent.

Although Yaneshía historical memory is selective, favoring remembrance of
emotions rather than of events, it does not operate at random. The analysis of
what is remembered and what is forgotten in myths and in other, less structured
oral narratives and songs shows that, while the Yaneshía remember what makes
the others other, they seem to omit any suggestion that the others are superior. In
other words, they underscore cultural differences but obliterate power differences
that place them in a subordinate position. This they do by denying any intrinsic
superiority to others and attributing the others’ temporary positions of power
to forces from within their own culture. Thus, from a Yaneshía point of view,
the Incas are powerful not because of their technology, administrative acumen,
and military might but because they are semidivine children of the creator god.
In turn, the white men are powerful because they obtained Yompot A’penerí’s
fertility powers by following him to heaven; they captured and took with them
Yompot Yompueri and his powers of creation; and they stole the remains of the
divine emissary Yompot Santo. As we shall see below, negation of the power of
others is also found in processes of mimetic appropriation.

Mimesis or the Art of Forgetting

Michael Taussig argues that through the magic of mimesis—what was once
called “sympathetic magic”—the copy is granted “the character and power of the
original, the representation the power of the represented” (1993:xviii). In other
words, through the magical replication of beings, objects, rituals, or bodily prac-
tices believed to be powerful, those who replicate hope to obtain power over
that which is replicated. Mimetic processes are best seen at work in colonial and
neocolonial settings—that is, in contexts of extreme power inequalities, whether
social, political, or economic. However, Taussig asserts that mimesis is not only
a mechanism of magically appropriating the power of the other but, above all, a
means to “explore difference, yield into and become the Other” (xiii). In this he
follows Walter Benjamin, who defined the mimetic faculty as a “compulsion to
become the Other” (Taussig 1993:xviii). This is true, I would suggest, if and only
if we analyze processes of mimetic replication from a synchronic point of view.
The minue we introduce time into the equation, mimesis can be characterized,
I argue, as a means to appropriate the power of the other while at the same time
erasiug the memory of such appropriation. This is also a way of negating the
power of the other.

There are numerous instances of mimetic replication among Yaneshía people,
particularly in relation to the Incas and the European missionaries, the most pow-
erful others of Yaneshía recent history. This phenomenon is consistent with what
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1993:369) has called “la voracité idéologique des
Indiens” (the ideological voracity of Indians), that is, the Amerindian openness to
hearing and assimilating new religious messages. But it is also a piece of what
Stephen Hugh-Jones (1992:43) has called the “consumerism” of lowland South
American Indians, that is, their fascination with foreign manufactured goods.

The most outstanding example of mimetic appropriation of Inca elements by
the Yaneshía is the wakas, the sacred sites or objects of Andean tradition. This is
particularly true of a specific type of wakas: those of ancient beings and divinities
transformed into stone, a theme that is common throughout the Andes (Zuidema
1989:457). Yaneshía mythology is full of references to ancient peoples and deities
turned into stone as a result of the transformative powers of the higher divinities.
Their stone figures are scattered throughout the Yaneshía landscape, forming part
of what I have elsewhere called their topographic history (Santos-Granero 1998).

Puebshéstor and Aarrarpeñ, two powerful melliareño spirits, were transformed
by the solar divinity as punishment for attempting to keep for themselves the fish
he had created for the Yaneshía. Today their stone bodies can be seen along the
Chorobamba River together with the stone sieves they used to capture the fish.
Yompot Carea transformed the bodies of his followers who were killed by the
cannibalistic Muellepen to spare them from being decapitated. They can still be
seen as elongated stone slabs submerged in a shallow strand of the Cacazú River
(see figure 1:2).

Yanesha people consider the stone figures of Puebshéstor, Aarrarpeñ, and Carea’s
warriors to be ominous, but they do not worship them. In contrast, the figures
of the divinities Yompot Yompere, his wife Yachor Mamas, and his classificatory
son Yemo nashení Senyac, who were transformed into stone by the angry solar
divinity before the heavens, were the object of elaborate rituals
(Navarro 1924; Smith 1977; Santos-Granero 1998). Until the 1920s their stone
bodies were sheltered in a large temple at Palmoso, a site along the Chorobamba
River, where they were visited and venerated not only by the Yaneshía but also
by the Perené Aшенinka and the Gran Pajonal Ašeninka (see figure 1:3). As in
the Andes, pilgrims attending the ceremonies held at the temple made offerings
of coca leaves, limestone powder, tobacco, and manioc beer to the stone divini-
ties. They also prayed to them, asking for health, fecundity, and abundance, and
above all for aid in achieving immortality. According to Richard Chase Smith
(1977). Yaneshas also made pilgrimages to visit the stone body of Yompor Efetar, another brother of Yompor Ror, whom the solar divinity transformed in Huancabamba before going to his sky abode. Yaneshas do not make any association between these sacred stone figures and the Incas. In fact, according to Yaneshas' historical chronology, these transformations took place before the appearance of Enc. With the passage of time, what began as a copy meant to extract the power of the original was appropriated as one's own. The fission of the original was forgotten: the copy became a new original.

Christian elements mimed by Yaneshas in colonial and postcolonial times underwent a similar process. This was the case of "St. John's fires." Both written and oral sources assert that the Yaneshas worshipped fires in their ceremonial centers (Navarro 1924; Barrios-Granero 1991:285). These fires had a divine origin. Priests claimed that they had found them during spiritual retreats into the forest. Known generically by the term cantiell, a word derived from the Spanish candela or "fire," sacred fires were kept constantly alight. People venerated them by making offerings, praying to them, and singing and dancing in their honor. Sacred fires were conceived of as manifestations of the strength and power of Yompor Ror, the present-day solar divinity, and were thus referred to as Yompor Poyorochen. Our Father's Portent. However, they were also attributed to other divinities of the yompor, or "our father," category. Among them oral sources mention Yompor Parehuanch, a divinity whose name derives from Padre Juan or

Father John. We know that in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe the feast of St. John was as prominent in the Catholic calendar as Christmas, to the extent that the liturgies established by the Church for the two festivals were very similar (Catholic Encyclopedia 1905). The central feature of the popular celebration of St. John's Day was the lighting of bonfires immediately after sunset. People burned old things in these fires in the belief that this act would purify and renew their lives. Yaneshas people mimicked the bonfires the Franciscan missionaries lit on St John's Day in the hope of appropriating their purifying powers. Copied in the context of eighteenth-century missionary domination, these fires continued to be worshipped in Yaneshas ceremonial centers until the 1950s. In the process, however, their Christian origin was obliterated from Yaneshas memory.

I suggest that, together with selective memory, the mimetic faculty conspires to obliterate and/or revert power differences with significant others in contexts of extreme inequality. In the short term, it constitutes a means of magically appropriating what are considered to be the mystical powers of others; in the long term, however, it becomes a means of turning the power of the other into one's own. Thus, if it is true, as Taussig (1993) asserts, that mimesis constitutes a means to become the other, seen from a diachronic perspective, it does so only to turn the other into oneself. In brief, whereas selective memory makes use of forgetting in order to attribute the power of the other to the forces of one's own culture, mim-
sics elevates forgetting to a state-of-the-art activity by appropriating the power of the other as if it had always been one's own. It is thus that the Yanesha obliterates from historical memory—or perhaps it would be better to say that they redress in historical memory—the crude realities of power and alterity. By forgetting, the Yanesha disempower the others, to empower themselves. This is why not remembering—as the King told the jury—is so important.

Raising Up the Memory of the Future

The Yanesha people's fight against time and history is as much about hastening the occurrence of the melápe, the end of time, as it is about selective remembering and forgetting. Until recently, this was achieved through the spiritual routines of the cornesbá, the Yanesha priestly leaders, and the ceremonial activities carried out by their followers under their direction.¹⁹ Yanesha religiosity, past and present, is very much founded on a messianic hope for salvation. Both the Yanesha divinities of old and the new Christian god left this earth promising that they would come back to rescue their children and grant them immortality. Central to the discourse of both past cornesbá and present-day Adventist and Evangelical ministers is the imminence of the god's return and, thus, of the end of time. In the following paragraphs I shall concentrate on the mnemonic practices involved in the more "traditional" quest of the cornesbá for salvation. However, the reader should bear in mind that such a quest is not a thing of the past; adapted to Christian discourse and ritual practice, it survives today.

Coshanháts sacred music is central to the Yanesha quest for salvation, as Smith (1977) has demonstrated in his insightful doctoral dissertation.¹⁹ Yanesha people stole the knowledge of coshanháts music from the land of the murdered ones—the land where the souls of murdered Yanesha live, located in the uppermost of the five planes of the Yanesha cosmos. The coshanháts celebration, in which household heads take turns inviting their kin, friends, and neighbors to sing, dance, and drink manioc beer in honor of the divinities, encapsulates the Yanesha ideals of mutual love and reciprocal generosity. However, only the divinities have the power to invent coshanháts music and songs. Because they are divine creations, these songs have powers of their own—the power to cure, the power to induce animals to multiply and plants to bear in abundance—extraordinary life-giving powers. But the powers of coshanháts songs are not confined to utilitarian, economic purposes.

More important, it is through coshanháts songs that the higher divinities remind Yanesha people of their promise of salvation and convey important messages related to the imminence of the end of time. For this reason the quest for divine revelation in the form of sacred songs and music was one of the most significant spiritual activities of the Yanesha priestly leaders of old. Through fasting, sexual abstinence, prolonged vigil, and the consumption of coca leaves, concentrated tobacco juice, and in some cases hallucinogenic plants, priests—but also other devout men and women—sought to excite the love and compassion of the divinities in order to obtain the revelation of a song.

The aim of these ritual practices, as Smith (1977:177) asserts, is "to accrue sufficient power to momentarily cancel the distinction between mortal and immortal, to suspend the truth of human existence long enough to enter the world of immortality and pure power, and to return with a song, a concrete symbol of that power, as well as an object imbued with the power to create order from chaos and to free one from the inevitability of death." Because each song is the result of an individual quest, the memory of a coshanháts song is always associated with that of the song seeker to whom it was revealed. It is also associated with the chain of persons through whom it was passed from generation to generation. Smith (1977:181) refers to these persons as "song custodians." Although some persons are credited with knowing a large number of coshanháts songs, there are no specialized song keepers as in other Amazonian societies (see, for instance, Hill 1993).

Until recently, every Yanesha man and woman knew one or more coshanháts songs. In a given settlement, however, only one person was recognized as the custodian of a particular song and, as such, had exclusive rights to perform it on public occasions. At the broader ethnic level there could be several custodians of the same song, learned from independent sources. Thus, chains of custodianship of particular songs involved all adult Yanesha, crisscrossed Yanesha social space, and united the living with the dead.

Songs are generally learned from same-sex parents, or from older same-sex members of one's extended kindred (Smith 1977:188). This, however, is not a rule, and the issue of who teaches whom is largely a matter of interpersonal sympathies and negotiations. Whatever the arrangement, the transmission and learning of songs establishes a link between past, present, and future custodians. According to Smith (1977:195), by performing a song its custodian "preserves the immortality of previous custodians and ultimately of the divinity whose song it is," and by transmitting it the custodian protects the song from oblivion and "fosters his own immortality by keeping the memory of himself alive." Before beginning to sing a particular song, its custodian tells the audience which divinity revealed the song to whom, and through which singers the song was passed down.

The act of recalling a song and the memory of its previous custodians is described by the term tustatethets, which literally means "to lift" or "to raise up" something, but which can be glossed as "to bring to life" or "to resurrect." Thus,
arrangement of a divine savior, the hope for the end of suffering, and the hope for an immortal life in a celestial sphere. I suggest that by singing *coshaminhats* sacred songs or Christian hymns, Yanesha people resurrect the memory of their divinities—past and present—and remind them of their promise of salvation. In so doing they strive to put an end to time and history, to the miseries of the human condition, but also, it should be stressed, to the vexations of alterity and hierarchical relations.

**Conclusions**

What are we to conclude from the Yanesha people's struggle against time and history? It would be tempting to see this as another example of a Lévi-Straussian "cold society," firm in its negation of history and minimizing change for the sake of social equilibrium and continuity. But even if we subscribe to Lévi-Strauss's original notion—which has often been distorted, as Teixeira-Pinto (1997:199–200) and others have pointed out—the Yanesha do not qualify as a cold society. Firstly, they neither feel "obstinate fidelity to a past conceived as a timeless model" nor legitimize every present practice on the basis that "the ancestors taught it to us," and secondly, they do not assume that "nothing has been going on since the appearance of the ancestors except events whose recurrence periodically effaces their particularity" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:236).

The Yanesha not only accept that things change, they preserve the memory of change in the present historical era in terms of "before" and "after" specific events, with special emphasis on those events linked to the appearance of new social actors. What they seem not to accept are the consequences that these events have on the interethnic balance of power. Thus, one of the main features of Yanesha representations of the past is the constant elimination of any reference that might imply that significant others are in some essential way superior—culturally, technologically, or politically—to themselves. This does not mean that they negate the existence of situations in which they occupy a subordinate position. On the contrary, as we have seen, Yanesha people are always ready to accept and even exaggerate their material poverty vis-à-vis powerful others. Such acknowledgment, however, is mainly a rhetorical device meant to underscore the unfairness and absurdity of history and, thus, reinforce the desirability of the *mellapo*, the end of time.

One might also be tempted to assert, following Terence Turner, that the Yanesha consider that "social agency in the full sense," meaning the "power to create or change the forms and contents of social existence" (1988:244), is not available to them—in other words, that they do not consider their society and culture...
to be "historical products of a collective social activity," but rather "fetichized products of super-human beings," as is the case among the Kayapó (1993:58). The fact that they tend to suppress the memory of their political agency, even with respect to their participation in the insurrection of Juan Santos Atahualpa, and that they tend to attribute major historical events to the agency of their divinities, would seem to support this view. However, I would argue that it is not that Yaneshia people deny their own agency, but rather that their notion of historical agency differs from that of the West insofar as it privileges spiritual over political agency.

Ever since the Enlightenment and Voltaire's call for "positive action" to improve the human condition and redress society's evils, social agency in Western thought has been associated with political action, which in its extreme manifestation assumes the form of revolutionary struggles. As they have demonstrated throughout colonial and postcolonial history, the Yaneshia do not shun political strife, even if this takes the form of armed confrontation. It seems clear, however, that they do not consider this type of agency a significant means of empowerment, at least not significant enough to preserve its memory in their narratives.

In contrast, they ascribe the highest importance to spiritual agency. They believe that their behavior, both individual and collective, vis-à-vis their divinities determines the divinities' course of action. From a Yaneshia point of view, political agency is always subordinated to spiritual agency. The best way to put an end to situations of inequality, exploitation, and oppression is to embark on a life of devotion aimed at exciting the divinities' compassion, so that they will grant immortality to their human creatures. This feature is, precisely, what most attracted Yaneshia people to Juan Santos Atahualpa. The myth of Yomporo Santo indicates that the divine emissary was sent to renew Yaneshia devotion to their divinities, and to announce the end of time. Interestingly enough, the myth says that he was recognized and welcomed by a corneshi, or Yaneshia priestly leader. In fact, the historical Juan Santos Atahualpa behaved in many ways as corneshi are said to have behaved, always searching for a divine indication of the coming of the mellapa. Historical documents confirm this particular aspect of the myth. Contemporary witnesses assert that Juan Santos led an austere life, avoided the company of women, chewed coca leaves, practiced fasts, and was counseled by an old "sorcerer" (Santo and García 1942) 1942:58; Loayza 1942:31–34). All these practices coincide with the asceticism: attributed to corneshi embarked on a quest for a divine acoustic revelation (Smith 1977). In this sense, it could be said that there was a mutual influence between Yaneshia priestly leaders and Juan Santos Atahualpa in which each served as model for the shaping of the other (Santos-Granero 2004:207).

Yaneshia spiritual agency does not preclude political action, but as I have argued elsewhere (Santos-Granero 1991), Yaneshia politics is always subordinated to religious principles of action. If Yaneshia people took up arms against the Spanish, it was not so much because they were enticed by the possibility of putting an end to Spanish exploitation, but rather because they were attracted by Juan Santos Atahualpa's promise of salvation. Their final aim was not the attainment of political freedom or equality but the elimination of oppression and hierarchy through spiritual salvation and the achievement of immortality. That they achieved the former but not the latter cannot be construed as indicating that the aims of Yaneshia insurgents were political rather than spiritual. What motivated—and still motivates—Yaneshia people to confront their oppressors is not a desire for temporal redress of social inequalities "in history" but the desire to obliterate alterity, hierarchy, and power by extricating themselves "out of history." In other words, the point is not to make history but, rather, to bring history to an end. Such messianic expectations are still in force, and have been triggered even by modern leaders who have not adopted a millenarian discourse.

In sum, what Yaneshia people remember is that time has not always existed; that they did not always suffer and die; that time and history came to be because of human fallibility; and that the only way to put an end to them is through spiritual action. This is the crux of the millenarian ideology and historicity of peoples such as the Yaneshia. They do not negate time, but fight against the ravages of time. They do not negate history, but contest the hierarchy and inequalities inherent in history. They do not negate their own historical agency, but endorse the idea that agency is meaningful (and memorable) not in order to make history but, rather, to unmake it.

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Notes

1. In a 2003 article in Current Anthropology, Hanne Veber called into question the much proclaimed "messianism" of the Asháninka—Arawak-speaking neighbors of the Yaneshia people—on the grounds that it seems to be more a projection of the theoretical biases of authors who have studied their society and history than a well-substantiated social phenomenon. In my comments on her article (Santos-Granero 2003:204), I argued
that whereas there might be doubts about the depth of the messianic beliefs and millenarian expectations of some of the regional groups that compose the Asháninka cluster, there can be no doubt that these beliefs are central to the Perené and Pichis Asháninka, as well as to the Yaneshas people—an assertion with which Veber (2003:208) agreed in her reply. The data presented in this article confirm the centrality of millenarian belief's both in Yaneshas conceptions of time and in Yaneshas historical agency.

2. Smith (1977:81) suggests that the names of the creator god and his evil classificatory brother may derive from the Spanish names for God and the Devil Dios = Yos, and Lucifer = Yosper. This Christian influence in Yaneshas theology has been adopted, however, to native Amazonian structures of thought, so that in the Yaneshas myth of creation God and the Devil appear as rival classificatory brothers, and creation itself as the result of their interpersonal competition of wills.

3. The Yaneshas people conceive of the cosmos as composed of five terrestrial planes, each with its own sky. This earth, the "earth where people die," occupies the second position from bottom to top.

4. Smith (1977:107) asserts that the root *mell*, found in the terms *mella* and *mellapo*, "looks suspiciously like the Spanish mil (one thousand), the root of *milenio* (millenium), a period of one thousand years which, according to Christian thought, Christ will reign when he returns to earth." He asserts, however, and I agree with his view, that even if the Yaneshas borrowed the root from colonial missionaries, "the underlying concept of millennium is, I am convinced, indigenous." The root *mell-* is used in many different contexts, always related to notions of eternity, immortality, and sacredness (cf. Smith 1977:107–108). It is found in the noun *mellanioleti*, the invisible powerful spirits that inhabit this earth. These beings are immortals, they have existed and will exist forever. It is also found in the verb *mellanichte*, which means to turn something or someone into a mellanioleti spirit, and by extension refers to the capacity to "immortalize" or "to sanctify," a power exclusive to the higher divinities. In more secular contexts, it is also present in the adjective *mellashe*, which means "very ancient, old and worn out."

5. I was first told this myth in 1977, while on a trek along the forest trail linking Huachisho to Muerrato. This is the area where Yaneshas people use to fight against the invading Muellepes, and where I took the picture that appears in figure 1.2. In addition, I took notes on three versions of this myth in 1982–83 and recorded a complete version in 1983 from a myth teller of Muerrato, renowned for his knowledge of Yaneshas historical tradition. These different versions are very much alike in structure and content.

6. I heard—and noted down—three versions of the myth of Enc in 1977, 1978, and 1979. The first two versions were told by young people and were fragmentary; the last was a very complete version told by the son of a renowned shaman. In addition, in 1983 I recorded two complete versions from well-known myth tellers living in different settlements. All versions agree as to the main events of the story, and present the same omissions.

7. Elsewhere I have argued that Amazonian peoples' representations about the Incas varies according to geographical distance, with those closest to the Andean range having a more direct experience of Inca domination having more negative views than those living farther to the east (Santos-Granero 1992:279–295).

8. Information on the origin and past deeds of white people appears in a variety of myths. Here I focus on four: Enc, Yompor Yompuer, Yomper, and Yompor Santo. On the myth of Enc, see note 5 above. In 1983 I took notes on two abridged versions of the myth of Yompor Yompuer, and recorded one complete version narrated by one of the oldest myth tellers of Muerrato. I noted down two versions of the myth of A'pener in 1977, and in 1983 recorded a complete version told to me by the same man from Muerrato. I wrote down one fragmentary version of the myth of Yompor Santo recounted to me in 1979, and three more complete versions during the 1982–83 period. In 1981 I recorded a full version told to me by the son of the last priestly leader of the Palmaso ceremonial center. With greater or lesser detail, the diverse versions of each of these myths narrate the same events.

9. Enca Capa and Huascar are the names of Inca rulers. Huayna Capac was, according to Inca mythical history, the twelfth Inca ruler. Huascar and Atahualpa were his sons. At Huayna Capac's death, Huascar and Atahualpa fought for control of the Inca Empire. Atahualpa defeated Huascar, but later he was captured and executed by Francisco Pizarro.

10. The distinction between Yaneshas priestly leaders (cornesha) and tobacco shamans (pallier) began before contact times. In the early eighteenth century, only seven years after the establishment of Franciscan missions in Yaneshas territory, Spanish chronicles already reported the existence of sorcerers/enchanters (brujo/encomiendos) who worshipped and offered sacrifices to the Sun (San Joseph [1716] 1750:44). Worship of the solar divinity Yompor Ror was central to the activities of the historical cornesha mentioned in Yaneshas oral tradition, as well as in colonial and postcolonial documents (e.g., Navarro 1914). Indeed, this is one of the most important traits differentiating them from tobacco shamans, whose main mystical relationships are with animal familiars and jaguar spirits. In addition, historical sources say that these "enchancers" were central in instigating Yaneshas people to oppose the missionary presence (San Joseph [1716] 1750:35), suggesting that they already played an important role as supralocal political leaders. There is evidence, however, that the role of priestly leaders acquired its "modern" trait—e.g., adoption of some elements of Catholic theology, appropriation of the knowledge of iron forging techniques, and building of large ceremonial temples—in colonial times and, especially, after the revolt of Juan Santos Atahualpa in 1742 (Santos-Granero 2004:206–248; 1988a). Like most Yaneshas social and cultural practices, the cornesha priest/temple complex was a work in progress, the product of multiple internal developments and external influences. This is probably true of most native Amazonian peoples, the difference being that we know much less about their histories than what we know about Yaneshas history.

11. Much of the following discussion on the mnemonic aspects of custodialship and performance of cosahianas, sacred music and songs, is based on the dissertation on the topic by Smith (1977:Chapters 5–6).
12. These venues, published in Spanish but probably translated from English, were copied from a small mimeographed hymnbook used extensively by Yanesh members of the Peruvian Evangelical Church (Iglesia Evangélica Peruana).

13. Lévi-Strauss does not contend that cold societies are "peoples without history"; he actually asserts that the fact that "all societies are in history and change . . . is patent" (1966:33–34). Instead he is concerned with how different societies react to the realities of the "common condition" of history—a legitimate concern from my point of view, and one that I share.

14. In the late 1960s, Moisés Gamarra, a Peruvian mestizo who had adopted native attire, language, and customs, began to exert great influence over both Yanesh and Asháninka leaders. He spent most of his time visiting their communities and denouncing the injustices experienced by native people. Gamarra insisted that the only way to eradicate these injustices was through political action. He opposed the government and advocated "a small war against Peru." He admired the historical figure of Juan Santos Atahualpa and asserted that native people "should follow his example." Although, as far as I know, Gamarra never adopted millenarian ideas or images, his profile fitted Yanesh and Asháninka paradigms of messianic leaders: unknown origins, claims to indigeneity, adherence to traditional customs in the face of rampant acculturation, great knowledge of sacred music, command of the ways of the white men, introduction of new social practices (in this case emphasis on formal education and techniques of personal defense), and, last but not least, subversive discourse. As a result, some Yanesh started regarding Gamarra as a possible divine emissary. His sudden disappearance in the late 1970s—some say he married a Swedish woman and now lives in Sweden—reinforced these suspicions.

References


