

Anthro Notes

National Museum of Natural History Bulletin for Teachers

1995 Vol. 13 No. 3 Fall 1991

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGING

"What is one of the good things about being an old person?" --Pat Draper, Anthropologist

"There is nothing good about being old. An old person can just sit and think about death. If you have a child who takes care of you and feeds you, you have a life." --!Kung informant, western Botswana.

Old-age is often considered to be a unique biological characteristic of modern humans. Physical anthropologists tell us that like most other mammals our distant ancestors rarely if ever lived beyond their reproductive years. One evolutionary explanation for old age holds that females who lived longer but whose fertility was curtailed in later adult life were more successful at rearing their last born children, and may have contributed to the reproductive success of their earlier children.

Today, however, many of us live in societies that are grappling with the "problems" of the elderly, and in which the elderly seem increasingly divorced from the productivity and success of everyday life. How similar or different are the lives of elders in modern, complex society as

opposed to the lives of elders in more traditional, simple societies? Are there more elderly in our society than in others? Are the elderly in other societies happier or better cared for than in America? How old is "old"? What defines an old person? a "middle-aged" person? Is old age a "good" time of life? Are elders respected, or given special status? Why or why not? What kinds of circumstances make for a happy old age or an unhappy one? These and other questions have given rise to a new cross-cultural study of aging, being carried out in seven different locations.

THE CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY

Central to anthropology is a cross-cultural perspective which asks the question, "How does the human experience differ from one society or cultural tradition to another?" As many times as this comparative question has been asked, researchers have had to grapple with the problem of what aspects of experience to compare across societies. For example, in the U.S. older people value independence. They and their younger kin go to great lengths to arrange for the financial and residential



independence of older people from younger kin. However, in many traditional societies independence of the generations is neither valued nor a practical goal. Therefore, a cross-cultural study of how elders achieve independence in old age would be ill advised. The Project A. G. E., described more fully below, attempted to avoid such pitfalls by investigating the meanings attached to old age by members of each of several selected communities.

Project A.G.E. (Age, generation, and experience) is a long-term, cross-cultural study of aging funded by the National Institutes of Health through the National Institute on Aging, and directed by C. Fry (Loyola Univ. of Chicago) and J. Keith (Swarthmore College). This research project was designed to minimize the opportunity for western or American assumptions about successful aging to be imposed on respondents in other culturally distinct communities. The study involves seven different anthropologists and locations in five cultures: !Kung villages of Northwestern Botswana (Draper); Herero agro-pastoralist villages of Botswana (Harpending); four neighborhoods in Hong Kong (C. Ikels); Blessington, Ireland, a suburb of Dublin (J. Dickerson-- Putman); Clifden, Ireland, an isolated seaside town in County Galway, Ireland (A. Glascock); Swarthmore PA, a suburb of Philadelphia (J. Keith); and Momence IL, a small rural community situated a two hour drive from Chicago (C. Fry).

The seven communities were deliberately chosen to maximize diversity in the sociocultural variables: size, social complexity, economy, mobility, scale and technology, all thought to influence both the sense of well-being of the elderly and their participation in society.

The focus of the project is not simply to study "aging" but to understand how culture shapes the structuring of social roles across the lifespan. All researchers but one had previously carried out fieldwork as participant observers in the culture under study. Each researcher spent at least one year in the research site. Before any formal interviewing was done for Project A.G.E., each researcher spent several weeks in the community eliciting information about the vocabulary and semantics of age

terminology, so that the basic interview questions could be framed in terms comprehensible to the respondents. The plan called for 200 interviews at each location; 150 subjects evenly divided by sex and (adult) age category, and an additional fifty from the two oldest age groups. Questions about aging were phrased in such a way that differences in people's attitudes about aging (both within and between cultures) could emerge.

Questions in five different categories concerned:

1) terminology and differentiation ("What do you call people of different ages, and how are they different? What are the best and worst aspects of each? What age group are you in?")

2) transitions between age groups ("What happened to you to change you from your former age group to your present one? How will you know when you have moved into the next age group?")

3) feelings about age transitions ("Do you like your present age? How do you feel about entering the next age group?")

4) evaluative questions about the age groups ("In what age groups do you know the most or least people? What age group are you most comfortable with? What are the best and worst ages to be?")

5) past and future questions ("Are you better off now than you were 10 years ago? What do you imagine about your life five years from now?")

PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH AMONG THE !KUNG

These and related questions were readily answered and yielded abundant interesting data in the two American sites, in Hong Kong, in the urbanized Irish community (Blessington) and among the Herero. In contrast, the more rural Irish (Clifden) and the !Kung were alternately puzzled, irritated, and amused by the age questions. Many grew visibly anxious at not being able to provide answers. Since both the Irish and the !Kung are famous (at least in anthropological circles) for their talkativeness, this result in two independent

communities was puzzling. The informants knew the researchers well and appeared comfortable with them, and great care had been taken to phrase the questions in the local idiom. Moreover, aging and senescence were familiar to every informant. What, then, accounts for the relative failure of this approach in these two sites?

What informants in these two communities share is a low "salience" of aging categories. That is, although age terminology may exist, people do not categorize or identify particular people by their age, nor do they readily generalize on the basis of age. For example, a !Kung informant was asked, "What do you call people of different ages?"

Respondent: "Oh, they have all kinds of names. There's John, Sue, Jane, George..."

PD (Pat Draper): "No, I mean, when people have different ages, how do you distinguish among them?"

Respondent: "Well, that's easy. Come on over here and I'll point them out to you. See, there's Jane and Sue is over there. John isn't here now but George...."

In this society, personality, residence, sex, health are more important than age in distinguishing individuals. From start to finish, interviews with the !Kung were like pulling teeth.

PD: "So, you say that for women you would use four age terms...young, ...middle-aged, ...elder..., and aged. ...For example, let's start with the young women. What is it about the young women that makes them alike? What do they have in common?"

Respondent: "What do you mean alike? They're nothing alike! I've already told you that. Some of them are hard workers, others are lazy, some of them have children, others have no children. What makes you think they are alike? They are all different."

Throughout the study, informants failed to identify age as the key part of the questions.

PD: "If you were at your village one day, and there wasn't anyone to talk to, and you were sort of lonely, wishing for conversation, what age person would you most like/not like to have visit you?"

Respondent 1: "Why would I be alone at the village? If I were alone, I wouldn't want anyone to visit me."

Respondent 2: "Well, I would prefer that someone I knew would visit me."

Respondent 3: "I don't like to be visited by a Herero."

Respondent 4: "Anyone who visits me is welcome. I don't refuse anyone! Children, old people, young adults, they are all welcome. If I have tobacco we will sit together and smoke and talk."

Questions about how many acquaintances an informant had in each age group were unanswerable by !Kung informants who had no indigenous system of counting above three, and rarely use "foreign" number systems except for counting cows. The questions about past and future were defeated by the strong theme of empiricism and practicality in !Kung world view.

PD: "If you could be any age you wanted to be, what age would you be?"

Respondent: "It is not possible to change your age. How would that happen?"

Questions designed to elicit cultural norms or individual feelings about moving from one age to another were also unsuccessful.

PD: "...what happens, for example, in a woman's life to move her along?"

Respondent: "Age, just age."

PD: "Is there nothing else you can tell me about what happens that makes the difference between, say, a middle-aged woman and an elder woman?"

Respondent: "Well, you see, it is the seasons. First it is winter and dry, then the rains come and then that season is past and then the winter comes along again. That is how it happens that you get older. Now do you understand?"

In addition to these problems, the short question and answer format of individual interviews violated the normal rules of discourse among the !Kung. In their conversational style several people

participate in turn, each speaking for several minutes. Nevertheless, a small number of informants (far below the 200 target sample) did become interested in the issues and provide interesting and informative data on this topic (see below).

PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH IN RURAL IRELAND

Like many communities in rural Ireland, the population of Clifden has been dramatically affected by emigration. If children are excluded, over 25% of the adult population is over 65, in contrast to 19.1% of the adult population of Swarthmore, another study site. In addition to questions of the type posed to the !Kung, residents of Clifden were asked to sort a series of cards on which were written a brief description, e.g. "a widow who lives in a nursing home, with married children and grandchildren." Age was not mentioned on the cards and respondents were asked to sort the cards into age categories and were asked questions about their categories. Over half of the respondents could not complete this task, since, as in the !Kung example, people rarely think of each other in age categories, and generalization based on age has a low "salience". One Irish woman began to ask questions about a card which described a hypothetical person as "A married woman, daughter takes care of her and her husband, has great-grandchildren."

Respondent: "Ah, about what age was she when she married? If she married quite young, she wouldn't be that old."

AG: "I can't say, you have to use what is on the card."

Respondent: "Well then, was her first child a daughter?"

AG: "I don't know, she is not a real person."
Respondent: "How old was her daughter when she married?"

AG: "I can't say, all I know about her is what is on the card."

Respondent: "Ah now, it wouldn't be possible for me to say who this person is without knowing something about her."

Respondents had little trouble naming "women living on Bridge Street," but experienced considerable difficulty in naming "older women living in Clifden." Questions about "How does your health compare to other people of your age" were answered in many cases by responses such as "I couldn't say, really. Everyone's different and there's no way to say just one thing." In addition, as among the !Kung, the standard questionnaire format violated the normal rules of discourse, which among the rural Irish is indirect and allusive. For example, the local people communicated in various behavioral ways the irritation they felt with the probing nature of the card sort: they moved away from the table, looked away, crossed their arms, changed the tone of their voice. All these behaviors disappeared when the card sort and the interview were finished.

Despite methodological problems, such as the evident absence of a universal age category of "old" and the difficulty people in many societies experience in being asked to categorize people into age classes, the study has yielded interesting results.

AMERICA'S ELDERLY ARE NOT UNIQUE

In the US, society's treatment of the elderly and the problems of eldercare are prominent issues for politicians, community organizers, public health workers, authors and TV producers, religious leaders and even the courts. We often imagine that the problems of our society are unique, that we have more elders than ever before, that they are lonelier, more childless, more single and therefore more dependent on strangers than in other societies. The study, however, suggests that the proportion of individuals over 60 (19% in Swarthmore, 30% in Momence) in the American study sites is not greater than in some of the other sites. In Clifden, Ireland, for example, more than a quarter of the adult population is over 65, and the proportion of elderly among !Kung and Herero adults is slightly larger than in Swarthmore.

Nor are Americans less likely to have children. In America we often hear that declining birth rates coupled with greater

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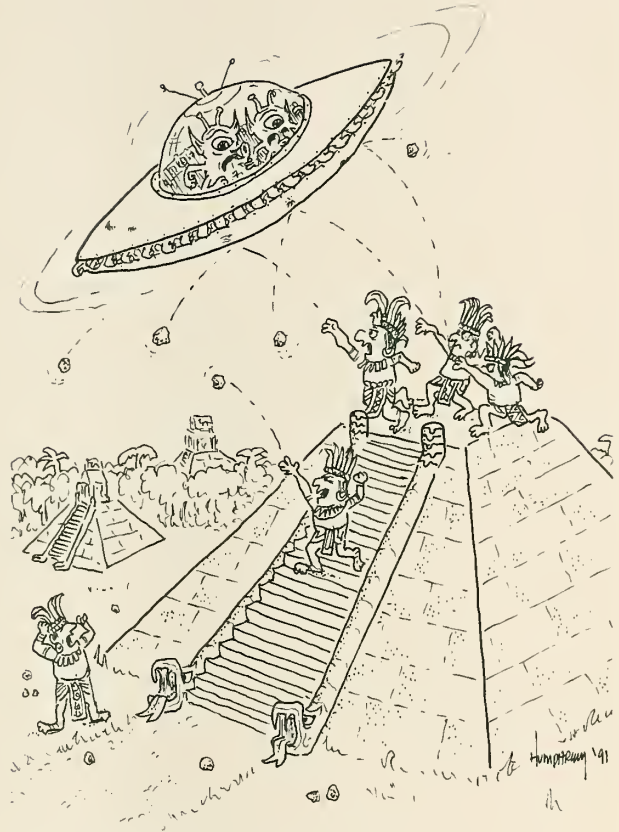
BOOK REVIEWS

Feder, Kenneth 1990. Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology. Mayfield Publishing Co.

This informative book presents the essentials of the scientific method employed in professional archaeological work and explains how archaeology differs from revelations and irresponsible creations. It is a compact, eminently readable book with many examples, including a review of the Cardiff Giant of central New York, a fraud of the later 1800's; and the Piltdown, England Hoax, or why "The First Englishman" has the lower jaw of an ape.

A large part of the book refutes various wild ideas about the original peopling of America. They were not from Europe, the Near East, China, outer space, or North, South and Southern Africa. Subsequent to the original penetration of North Asiatic Mongoloids about 15,000 B.C., neither the high cultures of South America, Middle America, nor North America were the result of the intrusion of people with high culture from Europe, Africa, or Asia. The interpretation that "The Mound Builders" were a superior group of people from the later "savage" Indians is false. Feder however makes the mistake of thinking the Smithsonian Mound Survey of the 1880's was the major force in certifying that the Indians were the Mound Builders. Rational thinkers had thought that for decades.

The book also relates such famous sites and artifacts as Mystery Hill and Newport Tower in New England, the Grave Creek engraved disc, and the Davenport, Iowa, tablets. Other fallacious concepts such as Atlantis, psychic archaeology, the ideas of Barry Fell, scientific creationism, the Turin Shroud, and Noah's Ark and the Flood are all discussed and dismissed as preposterous as serious archaeological explanations.



Williams, Stephen 1991. Fantastic Archaeology: The Wild Side of North American Archaeology. The University of Pennsylvania Press.

This volume by Stephen Williams, a distinguished archaeologist at Harvard University's Peabody Museum, is one result of some 45 years' concentration on the study of American archaeology from the first migrant invaders into the North American continent. It has the broadest coverage and is the most intensively researched study of the multitude of demonstrably false interpretations and contrived fakes made in the recent past for money, fame, or notoriety or to form an insecure, sandy foundation for an ethnic group or sect.

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Williams emphasizes how responsible professional archaeologists investigate new sites or artifacts to test the validity of statements about them by innocent finders or manipulative quacks, rogue professors, and downright scoundrels. Fakes or frauds have been found in at least thirteen states; in some of them their manufacture almost seemed to be an industry. In Canada, perhaps the most famous misinterpreted find was the Beardmore relics, which were genuine Norse items but not evidence of Norse presence in 11th century America, a view which the uncritical curator of archaeology in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto had accepted. Williams also comments on many well-known and lesser known artifacts of non-Indian manufacture and on misinterpretations by laymen and professionals about the antiquity of humans in the New World, or on intrusions of civilized groups from the Old World bringing real "culture" to the "savage" natives.

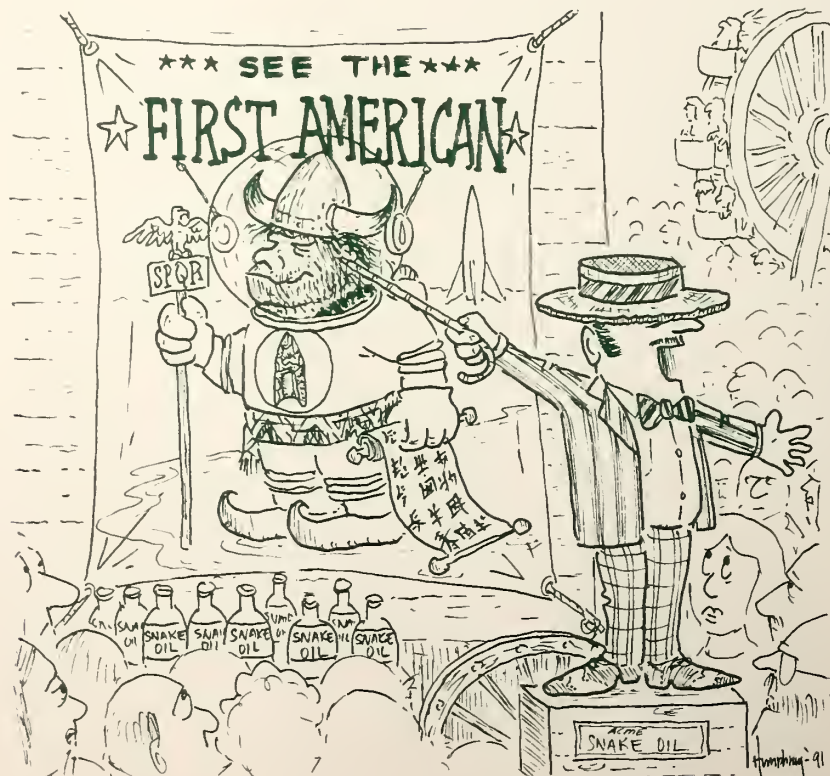
Williams is particularly critical of some former Harvard professors, including Leo Wiener who was one of the early instigators of the idea that Africans had an important

influence on prehistoric American cultures. This is simply not true. Non-Harvard professors from North Carolina and California are included in his presentation of individuals incapable of evaluating evidence.

This is a book to cherish and enjoy. The book demonstrates once again how many ways there are for people to mislead other people, particularly in areas where emotions become involved in objective assessments of scientific evidence.

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TEACHER'S CORNER: RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ARCHAEOLOGY

The Education Resource Forum, a display of instructional materials designed to help educators to incorporate archeology into their classroom strategies, was exhibited at the Society for American Archaeology meetings in New Orleans in April 1991. An accompanying resource guide, listing more than 100 publications, resource guides, teaching manuals, posters, games, and computer simulations that comprised the exhibit, is available free of charge from the Smithsonian Institution. To obtain a copy, write to the Anthropology Outreach and Public Information Office, Department of Anthropology, MRC 112, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

Assembled by education committee members of the Society for Historical Archaeology and the Society for American Archaeology, the Education Resource Forum is coordinated by the Intersociety Work Group (IWG), a committee representing national agencies and professional organizations involved in archaeology education for the public. The IWG hopes to make the display available for regional and national meetings of groups that also are interested in sharing instructional materials relating to archaeology. In addition, the National Park Service plans to publish an annotated version of the resource guide in spring 1992. Write to: National Park Service, Archeological Assistance Program, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127.

Individuals who wish to inquire about the availability of the exhibit, or who wish to donate instructional items for inclusion in the Education Resource Forum, should contact KC Smith, Museum of Florida History, 500 South Bronough Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250; (904) 487-3711.

One selection from the resource guide is reprinted below.

GAMES AND COMPUTER SIMULATIONS

Adventures in Fugawiland: A Computer Simulation in Archaeology by Doug Price and Gitte Gibauer (1990).
Mayfield Publishing Co., 1240 Villa St.,

Mountain View, CA 94041
Order #: IBSN 0-87484-948-9
Audience: high school and up

Bafá Bafá

Simile II, P.O. Box 910, Del Mar, CA 92014
Audience: Grades 5-8

Dig 2 by Jerry Lipetzky (1982)

Interact, P.O. Box 997-S2-91, Lakeside, CA 92040. Order #: 5030
Audience: Grades 6-9

Fun with Hieroglyphs by Catharine Roehrig. Metropolitan Museum of Art (P.O. Box 255, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028) and Viking Books, New York, NY.

Order #: D113OE

Audience: Elementary and up

Mummy's Message by Tony Maggio (1989)

Interact, P.O. Box 997-S2-91, Lakeside, CA 92040. Order #: 5062
Audience: Grades 6-9

Mystery Fossil: A Physical Anthropology Laboratory Exercise for the Macintosh by John Omohundro and Kathleen Goodman (1990)

Mayfield Publishing Co., 1240 Villa St., Mountain View, CA 94041.

Order #: IBSN 1-559340-019-3

Audience: High school and up

Puzzle by John McLure (1972)

Interact, P.O. box 997-S2-91, Lakeside, CA 92040. Order #: 3061

Pyramid Explorer's Kit (1991)

Running Press, 125 22nd St., Philadelphia, PA 19103. Order #: 80318

Audience: Upper elementary and secondary

Rafá Rafá

Simile II, P.O. Box 910, Del Mar, CA 92014.
Audience: Grades 5-8

Time Capsule by Don Eells (1978)

Interact, P.O. Box 997-S2-91, Lakeside, CA 92040. Order #: 5030
Audience: Grades 5-12

Talking Rocks by Robert Vernon

Simile II, P.O. Box 910, Del Mar, CA 92014
Audience: Grades 5 and up

KC Smith

Museum of Florida History

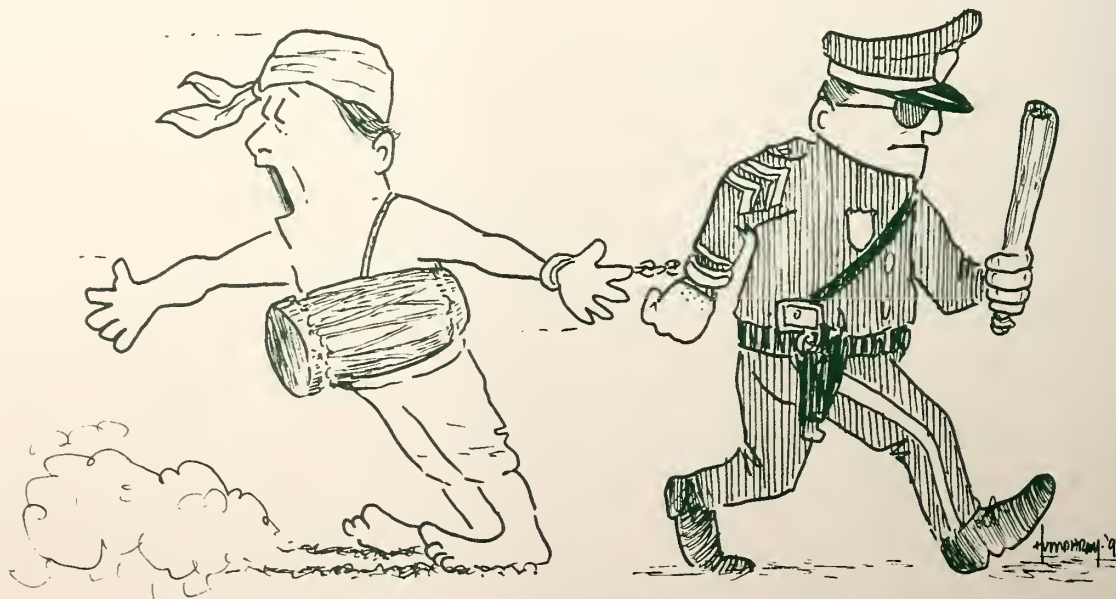
THE POETICS OF POWER: SUMBA AND BEYOND

In literature class, we tend to teach poetry as isolated texts that we analyze to derive meaning. As a result, poetry is often seen as a marginal and somewhat effete literary form whose audience is largely intellectuals. We forget that poetry in most societies is a performance art in which text, expression, motivation, and the audience interact to create events of great emotional, political, and social power. To what extent is verbal art, the performance of poetry, central to the understanding not only of the poem but also of language and other culture forms?

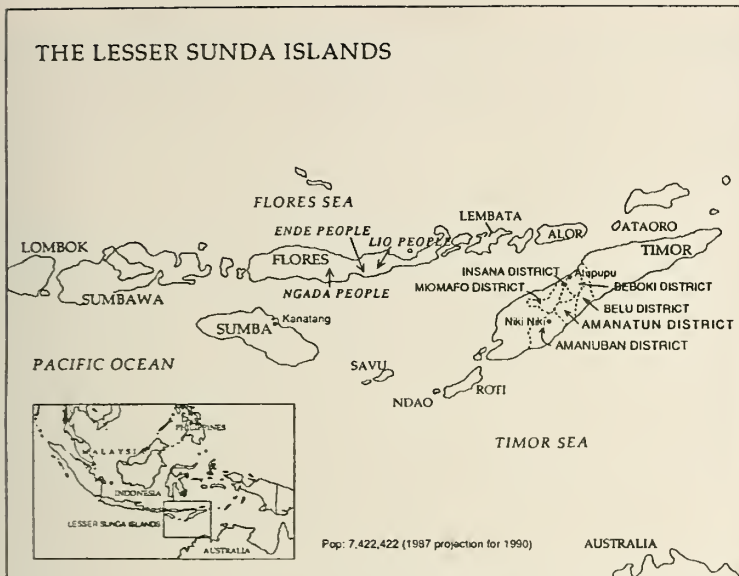
In Indonesia, an island nation stretched out in a 3,000 mile arc between China and Australia, one can find elaborate and sophisticated traditions of poetic performance among the 350 language groups. The leather shadow puppet shows of Java, the masked dances of Bali, and song duels of Sumatra are among a few of the most famous. For many Indonesians, however, speaking poetry is not only an aesthetic experience, it is an exercise in spiritual and even political power. People employ verbal art to comment on, legitimate, and even establish authority for key social institutions such as law, religion, medicine, and politics. But as the Indonesian central government seeks to modernize and create a homogeneous "national culture," it has run into conflict with local minority groups' traditions of poetic performance.

When I returned to the Weyewa highlands of the eastern Indonesian island of Sumba in the summer of 1988, I learned that the lively and elaborate ritual speaking events that I had studied for the past ten years had been officially banned as 'wasteful' and 'backward.' The whole series of ceremonial performances by which men use a poetic speech style to construct the most authoritative and sacred texts in their culture is now against the law. Nonetheless, I had no trouble getting research permission to study this illegal style of communication, because, as one official in the Ministry of Culture informed me as I cleared my papers, I was studying linguistic and literary forms, "you know, the grammar and poetry." Indeed, the couplets on which this ritual style is based are not against the law; the regional government has even asked me to prepare a textbook for elementary school children in order to teach them how to read and write in their own language using these couplets as the text examples. Nor were the myths banned that these performances enact. Again, the Ministry of Culture showed a real interest in printing some of these texts for educational purposes, in order to develop an emerging category--a national folklore.

What are banned are the poetic events as performances. On the one hand, the poetic texts as marginal, aestheticized objects, are safe, but on the other, the poetic texts as action are viewed as dangerous. Why? What is it that happens when people actually use



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language in situated action? What is the role of poetic and aesthetic activity in social life?

Government officials seem threatened by the view of poetics as a shaper and inscriber of social life; they seem more comfortable with the view that it is a marginal, derivative albeit pretty feature of the social world. But as many recent articles and books have forcefully brought home, strict attention to the referential content of words overlooks the "meta-messages" about social relationships, social situation, and personal feelings also conveyed in a message. Deborah Tannen has argued vividly that the style through which messages are transmitted is often the crucial factor in making or breaking human relationships. In her recent 1990 best-seller, *You Just Don't Understand*, Tanner analyzes men's speech to show that it is designed to assert and establish dominance, while women's speech style promotes co-operation and compromise. Style--the manner in which communication is accomplished--is not a parasitic or marginal aspect of the communicative process, but part and parcel of it. The message of ritual Weyewa poetic performance is the centrality and authority of the ancestral spirits in the lives of the Sumbanese, a message that challenges the sovereignty of the secular Indonesian state. By banning ceremonial performances, the Indonesian government asserts its

dominance as the only legitimate authority in peoples' lives.

WEYEWA RITUAL SPEECH

In my research (see Kuipers 1990), I have been particularly interested in how the Weyewa manage to use a poetic style to create authoritative texts, which they say represent the true 'words of the ancestors.' According to Weyewa ritual leaders, these texts provide a kind of charter of the rights and the obligations that these people have to their ancestors and to their fellow descendants.

When I first arrived on the island in 1978, I studied this remarkable parallel style of speaking by

focussing on its use in divination, prayer, and myth recitations. Weyewa encouraged me to focus on the couplets themselves, and I memorized over 1500 of them in order to become a performer. In each couplet, the first line parallels the second in rhythm and meaning. For example,

ndara ndende kiku
horse with a standing tail

bongga mette lomma
dog with a black tongue

This couplet refers to a 'good orator,' because such a person would be lively and high spirited like a horse with a 'standing tail.' Effective speakers are also often likened to dogs with 'black tongues' since the latter are considered good barkers.

I soon learned, however, that in order to understand and transmit the deeper messages conveyed by ritual speech, I had to look past the formal poetic patterns of the couplets, and the (often very enchanting) references of the metaphors, and pay close attention to the stylistically important but often ignored "filler material" that poets used to connect the couplets and verses to one another. Using pronouns, conjunctions, and other connecting phrases --or by strategically omitting such connectors--these performers make poems that are more than isolated objects of beauty; they create sacred objects of ancient authority.

Among this rural agricultural people, the importance of creating spiritual coherence through poetic speech is especially clear following a misfortune--the death of a child, a fall from a tree, a crop failure. This is viewed as a result of a broken promise to the ancestral spirits and a neglect of the 'words' embodied in the ritual speech of the ancestors. Divination is the first stage of atonement in which a specialist performer tries to identify the broken 'word' or promise to the ancestors through poetic dialogue with the spirits. If the victims have the feasting resources and the determination, the second stage usually occurs a few hours or weeks later. It is a spectacular, all-night ritual dialogue in which the broken promise is re-affirmed. The final, climactic stage is when the promise is fulfilled and the charter myth of the founding of the agnatic clan (on the father's side) is told. It is here that the 'true voice of the ancestors' is revealed.

In the short text below from the first phase of a "misfortune" ritual, a diviner humbles himself before the spirit by comparing himself to a jar with tiny lips and a bottle with a small mouth, but then proceeds to break out of the couplet frame by saying "take this rice"... "right there by you."

wíwi ána sádda

I am like a jar with tiny lips

máta ána nggósi

I am like a bottle with a small mouth

máma yása!

take this rice!

nenna

right there by you

Divination as a form of oracle gets its authority and legitimacy from the way in which the performer speaks directly to the needs of the suffering client. The client wishes to feel a sense of connection with the ancestral spirits from whom he feels alienated, and the diviner supplies this connectedness with the highly interactive language (e.g. "here!" "right there by you" "over there" "and then you said..."), despite the fact that the performance is a monologue.

Compare this short text then with the final stage of atonement for a misfortune--a 'blessing song.' In these songs the singer wishes to describe the moral foundation of

the whole clan as a kind of journey in which a prominent mythic ancestor establishes all the sacred practices and obligations--its ritual duties, marriage alliances, and village and house designs.

Nyákkana pasámakongge láwina

therefore the tip is matched

nyákkana pamérákongge pú'una

therefore the trunk is parallel

néwe wólo ínnangge

these deeds of the Mother

néwe ráwi ámangge

these works of the Father

Wé'e Maríngi O-oo

Cool Water O-oo!

tédamúni náwwangge

wait for this one [named]

Mbúlu Nggólu Wólangge

Mbúlu Nggólu Wóla

a lónggena kadíppu runda rangga

whose hair is silver dewangga cloth

kadíppu mbáli mbónnungge

a piece of gold from abroad

Unlike the more interactive and involved divination performance, the singer of this poem seeks to create the image of a detached monologue stripped of references to the "here and now," in which there is no opportunity for the audience's voice to intrude, challenge, and modify the authority of the text. It consists only of couplets, with few pronouns or other connective devices to link it to the actual social situation of use. The formalization process by which texts acquire authority and power is known as "entextualization," in which texts are increasingly patterned linguistically and poetically at the same time as they are increasingly detached from their context of performance.

But while the Weyewa describe this performance as an ancient, transcendent text from the 'voice of the ancestors,' in fact, it too, is linked to its social context of performance, but in more subtle ways. For instance, in the recounting of the tale, the speaker selects the names of certain ancestral figures who are related to the principal sponsor of the event, so as to make the sponsor appear more central in the history of the lineage.

The process of entextualization has relevance well beyond eastern Indonesia. One area where this attention to the role of poetic organization in social life seems relevant is in the analysis of medical discourse, where the immediate, situated speech of the patient-doctor interview is eventually recoded into the detached and scientific medical terminology of the physicians' report. Errors and misunderstandings often occur not only in the face to face interaction per se, but over the course of this entextualization process (see Kuipers 1989).

THE POLITICS OF FEMALE POETRY

The ban on ritual speech events is a powerful and effective challenge to the authority of the patrilineal clans. This has not silenced the women and other unpaid performers of ritual speech, who are often marginal to those clans. Women's ritual poetic speech is highly personal, spontaneous and often autobiographical. These poems are sung at harvest celebrations or in other intimate or family contexts. A performance in this style carries the message that the speaker is marginal to the power structure of the society as a whole. Since the ban on men's ceremonial poetic performances, women's poetic performances increasingly convey messages of political protest. More men are performing the poems in the contexts once thought of as "female" and in the process, conveying the men's own feelings of marginality to the central power structures of Indonesia. The changing nature of poetic performances once thought of as "female" calls into question the practice of fixing texts--through ritual, literacy, or law.

An example of such a performance is the following ironic song that tells the tale of a young woman who feels the power of a new kind of text--a love letter from a non-Sumbanese police officer luring her to the west Sumbanese capital for "education." When she has an illegitimate child by him, she urges her kinfolk to consider the 'words of the ancestors' and accept her back into the family. Part of the song's poignancy derives from the conflict between foreign modernity and the traditional authority of the patriclan. Accepting the girl back means to give priority to personal feelings, individual desires, and government

programs of education and religious modernization over the lineage's traditional right to demand brideprice from the policeman. As with many personal songs, the performance of this song was specifically solicited--in this case by me. The performer was a young woman who heard the song from a friend while attending junior high school.

Hitti-ki-po manna

Way back then

ku masi ana muda

when I was a young child

ammi nome polisi komidani

a police commander came visiting

na kirimo-ngga suratu

he sent me a letter

terima dua tangan....

I accepted it with two hands... 5

"kako-nggo-we ole

"go ahead my friend

ne kota Waikabubako

to the town of Waikabubak

wewe-nggu-ndi pãnde

and seek after knowledge

ne kantora mandyangga"

and high office"

ne pa-oro lénge-léngemo

What was truly the main source [of
problems] 10

ne zurata pa-tulita

was that letter which was written

After she became pregnant, then she returns to her village. In a scene strongly reminiscent of traditional orphan tales, she pleads for mercy from cruel kinfolk.

ku-ndunni bali oro-nggu

I returned in my tracks

ku-zangga bali ziwu-nggu

and I retraced my steps

mainda itto ole

come on my kinfolk

a paditto lolo lende

who share an umbilical cord 15

kata mata moro etawa

let us all see with open eyes

na ana woro ndobbanda

let us all gather together

ka nda tak inda-ka-ni koko

so that our throats feel no revulsion

ka nda talabbo-ka-ni ate

so that our livers are not blistered

ate-ku-mi na'a

look into your heart, older brother 20

a balleku malara

to reverse your pungent feelings

koko-ku-mi na'a

it all hangs upon your neck, older brother
kubbuku manili

to splash [water] on your hot feelings

lángoko pa-deito-ko-ngga zala

even if you bear resentment towards me
ku-ndara nggole wello

I am like a blameless fallen horse 25

lángoko pa-toddu-ko-ngga palu

even if you heap beatings upon me

ku-kari teba kadu

I am like an innocent hornless water
buffalo

ku-wúnggu wai-ko-ngga limma

I carry in my hand

li'i ukku a Marawi

the voice of the Creator's covenants

ku-billu wai-ko-ngga béngge

I stuff it in my waistband 30

li'i ukku a Mawolo

the voice of the Creator's law.

This genre of 'personal songs' forms a category of ritual speech sharply contrasting with the authoritative discourse of collective ritual. Unlike political and religious genres, this song is not addressed to spirits but to actual specific individuals. Unlike ceremonial performances, the encounter is not conducted with close attention to reciprocity, exchange, and hierarchy. Most striking of all is the general assault on the traditional patterns of entextualizing discourse: i.e. the use of couplets, the creation and maintenance of a consistent ceremonial frame. She deliberately violates couplet conventions for emotional effect. For instance, the completion to the couplet beginning on line 15 should have been 'whose heads proceeded [down a single birth canal].' In ritual discourse, such an infraction results in a fine to the speaker of at least one cloth, and possibly supernatural retribution. Also, most distinctively, she switches into Indonesian --something unthinkable in ritual performances. One example of this is line ku masi ana muda 'when I was a young child' and line 5 terima dua tangan 'received with two hands.' In this context, in a ritual speech performance, such usages have a jarring, ironic effect. Unlike men's performances, such stylistic inconsistencies do not have the effect of linking the speech to the dialogue form of participation, but function instead to enhance its emotional expressiveness (see Irvine 1982, 1990) and evoke the inner state of the performer.

Taken together, these features contribute to shape a speech event that is neither a negotiation with implied dialogue or an authoritative monologue, but instead constructs what many Weyewa seem to regard as a challenge to the whole notion of fixing (or inscribing) the 'words' of the ancestors. When I played this tape to one Weyewa elder to ask for his interpretation, he said "she's lost the tracks, the trail of the ancestral spirits." She does not follow the inscriptions.

CONCLUSION

Examples such as the ones sketched here I hope provide a glimpse of the centrality of the poetic performance to an understanding of the role of language in social life. As long as we persist--like our Indonesian government officials--in walling off the stylistic features of language use from other arenas of culture, we will be stuck in a limited view of communication, and the relationship of language to arenas of power and social control will be obscured.

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("Aging," continued from p. 4)

longevity have produced increasing numbers of old people with only one or no surviving child to provide care in their parents' old age. Yet, here as well, Americans are not extreme. About 90% of the elderly men in the Swarthmore study and 82% of the elderly women had at least one child, in sharp contrast to the !Kung, among whom about 30% of the elderly were childless, although in the latter case, a number of parents had outlived their children--only 12-13% had never had a child. A similar pattern was observed among the Herero, 25% of elderly women were childless, but about half of these women had borne children who later died. In rural Ireland, more children survive but fewer adults have children. While only about 12% of elderly women were childless, fully 63% of elderly men had no offspring.

Americans also tend to think that the feminization of old age, and the tendency for older women, in particular, to be unmarried or widowed is an artifact of demography and is universal. The A.G.E. study suggests that customs and values surrounding marriage have a greater effect than demography on the household composition of the elderly. Elderly people of both sexes in Swarthmore were as likely to be married as were the !Kung. For example, about one-quarter of the women and a smaller percentage of the men in each group were widowed. The !Kung value companionship in marriage and will remarry after the death of a spouse. Among the Herero, on the other hand, while three-quarters of the elderly men are married, three-quarters of the elderly women are single, widowed, or separated. In this society, marriage sanctified by the exchange of cattle, is generally contracted between older men, who have the most cattle, and young girls. Only 6% of the women never married, but widows do not remarry, and, in any case, do not look to their husbands for care or companionship. In Clifden, Ireland, in contrast, only about a quarter of elderly men and women are married. While over half of the elderly women are widowed, almost half of the elderly men (44%) in this community have never married. This phenomenon has been variously attributed to emigration and the absence of economic opportunity in a

culture where men are expected to support wives and children. Unemployment among men is currently 35% and about three out of every five adults have lived overseas for at least one year.

It has been argued that the US is such a mobile society that even if older people do have children, they rarely live close enough to be helpful. Among the !Kung, the Herero, and in Clifden, a large proportion (77% to 85%) of the elderly who had children had at least one living nearby. This proportion was somewhat smaller in Swarthmore, but of the Swarthmore elderly with children, about 60% had at least one child living in Swarthmore or within one hour's travel time. While child mobility is greater in the American sample than among the !Kung or Herero, it is even greater in the Irish sample. Many of the children of Clifden residents have emigrated and live abroad. The study found that 90% of the older people with children had at least one child overseas.

WHO CARES FOR THE ELDERLY?

In all the study sites, families, loosely defined, provide the majority of eldercare, whether this is limited to economic assistance (provisioning) or extends to help with daily tasks. Yet both the definition of responsibility for eldercare and the type of care expected differ markedly from site to site. In the US, elders expect to be financially independent, even when they need help with daily tasks. In rural Ireland, where so many of the elderly, particularly men, are unmarried or childless or whose children live far away, and where economic assistance is provided by the state, daily or occasional help with living tasks is often provided by collateral relatives such as siblings, nieces and nephews, or simply by close neighbors. About one-quarter of the Clifden elderly have no close relatives at all in Clifden, and about a third of older men have only one close relative in the community, usually an older sibling. A third of the elderly in this community live alone. Among the !Kung, who have no government help or stored capital, food and other economic assistance, as well as help with daily tasks, is expected from adult children but may also be provided by other close relatives living together in a small village. The presence of two or more adult

children was correlated with an increase in the life expectancy of elderly mothers, but not of elderly fathers. Young children are not expected to care for the elderly on a regular basis. Because of remarriage, spouses are more available for care among the !Kung than among the Herero or Irish.

If demography accounts for all the differences in eldercare, why aren't the elderly Herero, with their high rate of childlessness and large number of old unmarried women, in trouble? Instead, the proportion of elderly Herero in the adult population, in general, and among women, in particular, is slightly higher than among the !Kung. Each Herero belongs to a cattle-holding lineage group, whose members are responsible for the economic well-being of its members. In addition, much as Americans and other societies derive great self-esteem from the care given to their children, a Herero draws more of his or her self-esteem from the care given to parents and older relatives. Since many elders are childless or have children away at school, young children are loaned or even fostered out to elders for the express purpose of providing care. Approximately 40% of all Herero children are reared by foster parents.

What happens when an elderly individual becomes frail and unable to care for himself or herself? In rural Ireland, behaviors that would signal end of independent living in America--leaving the stove on, forgetting to turn on the heat, inability to drive, falling down the stairs, not recognizing friends and family--do not endanger the person or others to the same extent as in America. Houses do not have second stories, most older people do not drive in any case, and shopping can be done on foot. Neighbors and the community's visiting nurses make sure that the chimney has smoke coming out of it on a cold day. An old man who does not really recognize his surroundings might be escorted to and from the pub, where he will spend the day in a warm corner. Inappropriate behavior is explained as "he's a bit mental, you know."

ARE THE ELDERLY HAPPY?

One of the striking contrasts is the degree to which elderly Americans described themselves as happy, while the younger

members of the American population were more negative in their self-evaluations. Americans place great emphasis on economic independence, and the elderly have this to a greater extent than the young and middle-aged. The elderly Irish of Clifden were also very happy with their lives, in part because they have a degree of economic security in the government dole, in part because they have access to good, almost free, low-tech health care. Two doctors and several visiting nurses make sure that every sick or frail individual is seen on a daily basis if necessary. The Clifden elderly also remember that life was much harder in this community 40 to 60 years ago, when they were young. The !Kung elderly, in contrast, rated their quality of life low, but only slightly less than the self-ratings of the middle-aged. Old Herero were at the opposite end of the scale in describing their age in the most pessimistic terms of any age group, despite what an outsider might see as a very high level of social support. In a somewhat rosy view of an imagined past in which old age was happily spent in the bosom of one's family, we tend to forget that modern society has mitigated many of the real discomforts of the elderly. The good to excellent level of social support routinely available in the two African sites cannot begin to compensate for the absence of furniture, mattresses, running water, central heat, antibiotics, eyeglasses, Tylenol and false teeth.

A source of unhappiness in the American communities but less so in Ireland or among the Herero or !Kung, was the degree to which American elderhood is marked by abrupt transitions, such as retirement or change of residence in order to be in a more manageable house or nearer to a child. Elders in the other societies more often continued their adult patterns of work, residence and social interaction into elderhood. The abrupt transitions that mark elderhood in America, and which are less pronounced in a rural community like Momence, are in part a corollary of the economic independence and wealth of elders. If private housing were uncommon and economic interdependence the norm, elders would find it easier to get help without compromising their cultural values.

(continued)

THE A.G.E. PROJECT

The comparison of aging in seven locations has demonstrated that the living conditions, concerns, and even the definition of the elderly are strongly conditioned by cultural values and societal variables. Very different networks have been developed for caregiving in each society. The relatively high status of elderhood in some societies (e.g. in China, or among the Herero, where the elders nominally control the ownership and disposition of lineage cattle) does not appear to be correlated with happiness among the elderly. Though elders in more traditional societies are more likely to remain situated in supportive families and familiar communities, they feel keenly the physical losses of aging under circumstances where there are few cushions or prostheses to ease their discomforts. Indeed there is a fine irony in the finding that traditional and modern societies satisfy different and mutually exclusive goals of the elderly: social connectedness in traditional societies and freedom from physical discomfort in more modern societies.

This article is based on the following publications:

Draper, P. and Buchanan, A. "If you have a Child you have a Life: Demographic and Cultural Perspectives on Fathering in Old Age in !Kung society" (AAA meetings

paper, to appear In *The Father-Child Relationship: Developmental, Symbolic and Evolutionary Perspectives*. Edited by B. Hewlett. NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1989.

Draper P., and Glascock, A. P. "Can you ask it? Getting answers to questions about age in different cultures." (unpublished manuscript)

Draper, P. and Harpending, H. "Work and Aging in two African societies: !Kung and Herero." In *Occupational Performance in the Elderly*. Edited by B.R. Bonder. F.A. Davis Publishers. (in press)

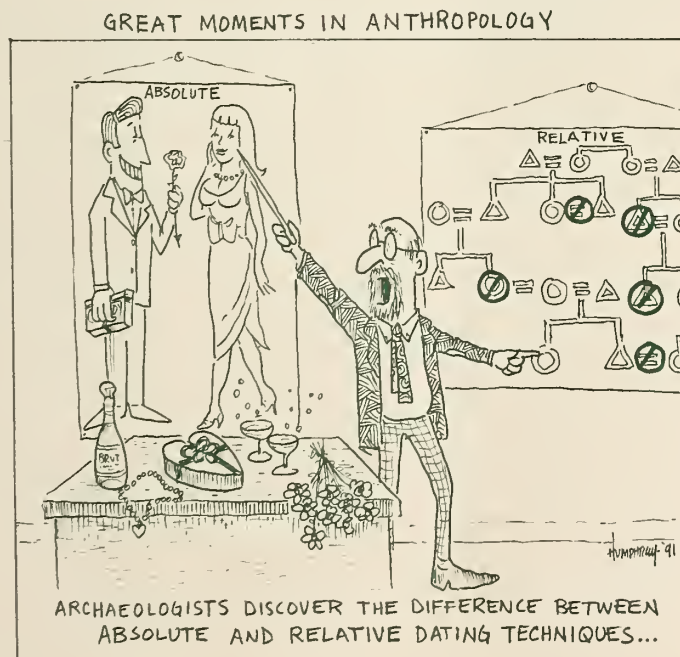
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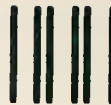
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ANTHRO.NOTES, a National Museum of Natural History Bulletin for Teachers, is published free-of-charge three times a year (fall, winter, and spring). Anthro.Notes was originally part of the George Washington University/Smithsonian Institution Anthropology for Teachers Program funded by the National Science Foundation. To be added to the mailing list, write: P. Ann Kaupp, Anthropology Outreach and Public Information Office, Department of Anthropology, Stop 112, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

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