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Holy Cow!

INDIA'S SACRED COW REVISITED

BY GAURI PITALE

Surreal World: Dhrangadhra

JUNE 2011 VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

NICOLE BELLOTT



**“Neverstoplearning;knowledgedoubleseveryfourteenmonths.”
(D’Angelo)**



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I am a cultural anthropologist trapped in the body of a biological anthropologist. So it should come as no great surprise to my colleagues that I can be easily found engaged in deep conversation—with myself. At first glance it may appear that I'm talking to myself, but in reality, it's them. Although my several anthropological personalities are able to maintain pleasant conversations, they do spend a great deal of time arguing with one another. Usually the disagreements focus on the usefulness, or uselessness, of statistics in anthropology (depending upon who's leading the argument) and attempting to answer that overarching question that always seems to provoke a fight: "Is there theory in biological anthropology?"

Not long after one of their most recent spates, an archaeologist appeared, followed closely by a linguistic anthropologist. To the alarm of all, a Poltergeist in the form of a population geneticist wheedled his way in. Turmoil ensued. My biological anthropologist cried that there was, "Not enough room for the five of us!" my archaeologist complained that someone was touching her in an inappropriate place and threatened to sue, and my cultural anthropologist and The Poltergeist were eyeing each other up with suspicion, brutally accusing each other of gross violations. My linguistic anthropologist, who had quietly removed himself from the vicious confrontation, spent his time diagramming the sentence structure of the verbal onslaught and secretly hoping that Dawn wouldn't implode.

Since that time, my cultural and linguistic anthropologists have been steadily dating, and my archaeological and biological anthropologists have quickly become BBFs. Though I am still trying to get both couples to go on a double date, all four of my personalities seem to be adjusting quite well despite the crowded conditions. The chaos subsided when they quickly realized that although they didn't have to agree with each other, they did have to live together. However, their quandary was made easier because they didn't have to go through the trouble of creating new relationships—they just had to be willing to expend the effort in maintaining them; the path to unity was laid out ready-made for the four before they even arrived. The Poltergeist, on the other hand, faces a whole new set of challenges.

The Poltergeist, by all accounts, is a brilliant, though disgruntled, worker. He has attempted to collaborate with Native research subjects on numerous occasions in the past. Failing miserably each time, he strenuously focused all his efforts on forming pseudo-friendships that were devoid of shared tears and joy, inside jokes, compassion, and, most poignantly, meaningful conversations outside the realm of scientific research. What The Poltergeist neglects to understand is that rather than creating professional affiliations, he needs to commit himself to the very lengthy, sometimes difficult, and always exhilarating process of creating and maintaining RELATIONSHIPS. My cultural and linguistic lovers are holding hands and discussing their future together, and my archeological and biological best friends are planning their joint adventures. The Poltergeist remains alone. However, my fifth personality recently showed up—a clairvoyant Applied Anthropologist—and I remain hopeful for the future of not only my resident geneticist, but for all of my many personalities. Progress, Not Perfection.

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A woman in the streets of Dhrangadhra holding her young son
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On the Cover
"Indian cow"
by Nicole Bellott



Two young women carrying large bundles on their heads pause to have their photo taken. A sense of pride in daily life and work was commonly expressed by the locals of Dhrangadhra, who readily posed for photographs.



A woman in the streets of Dhrangadhra approaches photographer Nicole Bellott and her camera, holding a young boy in front of the lens to be photographed. Many of the locals in Dhrangadhra were eager to be photographed and share bits of their lives and culture with the American students participating in Temple University's Study Abroad Program.




Editor: Anne Patterson | Design: Eric O'Connell and Eva Crawford

Nicole Bellott is a senior undergraduate student studying socio-cultural, visual, and urban anthropology at Temple University. An avid yoga practitioner and lover of Indian philosophy, she spent the summer of 2010 at Temple University's Summer Study Abroad Program in India, where she lived and studied for five weeks. Bellott's passion for photography and interest in documenting culture is reflected in her series of photos from Dhrangadhra, India.

A rural town in the desert province of Gujarat, Dhrangadhra has a diverse population of Hindus, Muslims, Jains and other religious and spiritual practitioners. Temple University's Summer Study Abroad program in Dhrangadhra was designed to introduce students to Indian culture through participant observation, interviews, and the exploration of life histories. The program is run by Dr. Jayasinhji Jhala, a visual anthropologist, professor, and Dhrangadhra native. Jhala told his students that the goal of the program was to force them out of their comfort zones, and directly into Indian life.

With a camera, notebook, and pen at hand, Bellott spent much of her five weeks in Dhrangadhra capturing the visual essence of Indian culture. Pride is a central theme captured in Bellott's series of photographs: her images representing family, caste, and heritage primarily communicate the sense of pride in all aspects of life that Dhrangadhra locals displayed when faced with a camera.



From the second I stepped off the plane in Ahmedabad, India, I felt a difference. Already drenched in sweat and delirious from over 20 hours of traveling, I was eager to explore the country I would call home for the next five weeks. A two hour drive to Dhrangadhra, a small town in the state of Gujarat where I'd be housed in the Ajit Niwas Rajmahal, the palace and home of the Jhala royalty, remains one of the most breathtaking experiences I have ever had. With no road rules, speed limits or lanes, my driver sped down the dusty path, weaving around slower motorbikes and vehicles, beeping the horn incessantly, sometimes even driving head-on towards large trucks, just to swerve out of harm's way at the last split second. Meanwhile my senses were put into overdrive, engaged fully in the sights, sounds, and smells of India, all of which were new to me. It was a photographer's dream to capture such vibrancy and liveliness. Every where I looked Indian women dressed in the most colorful, striking fabrics were going about their daily lives while cows, goats, and wild dogs roamed everywhere in between. I didn't know what to direct my attention to first, but it was hard to ignore the sun, blazing hot and blinding, over an almost gray, but clear sky. It was then that I realized it was only 6 am; my sense of time had been thrown out the window. In fact most of my preconceived notions were tossed out the window the second I stepped foot in India.

Curious faces, both young and old, met me at every turn. Every one in town wanted to know more about the American students, the only Americans that some of the townspeople will ever meet. Everyone wanted their photo taken, especially young children, some of whom were quick to grab the camera and turn it towards me. With light-colored skin and hair, I was obviously an outsider; yet never did I feel like an "Other" to the residents of Dhrangadhra. In fact, I felt more accepted by the kind and hospitable strangers I met along my journey than I do by most Americans. I was consistently invited into people's homes, introduced to entire families, shown wedding photos, given tea promptly, and of course, fed until I could no longer move. Keen to

Surreal World: Dhrangadhra

teach me their traditions and morals, many showed me dances, taught me songs, games, how to cook like a Gujarati woman, how to behave like a Gujarati woman, the lessons never ended. Despite not knowing how to speak Gujarati myself, and most of the Gujaratis not knowing English, I found myself communicating, truly communicating, without any words spoken. I think this is one of the most valuable lessons I learned, that humans, with a little extra effort and awareness, can communicate without language.

Amid what seemed to an American to be chaos, I sensed something quite the opposite in the busy streets of Dhrangadhra, a feeling that I could not describe just then. It was a feeling of calmness despite the commotion all around me. A feeling of serenity, a world at peace... I came to realize over the course of five weeks, that this feeling or attitude is embedded in the Indian way of life. Quite contrasted to the consumerism of the Western world, the attitude that to be successful one is constantly on the move in search of more money, and better "things"; the Indian pace of life seemed much slower, much more laid back, and much more content with the present moment. In America I have always felt anxiety about the past, anxiety about the future; but in India I was able to rest my mind in the present moment. A philosophy of being grounded in our present time and space was understood by Indians. This philosophy, with its roots in the ancient tradition and discipline of yoga, is what I've yearned to integrate into my own American life, with my main project in India evolving into an exploration of yoga as a mindset, and the multidimensional way in which it is ingrained in Indian life. I found a sacred-ness to the every day actions of the people in Dhrangadhra. They woke up with intention, did puja (worship) with intention, cooked dinner with intention, and went to bed feeling fulfilled. To me, this is the essence of yoga. To live each day inspired by the flame of intention and purpose.

Overall, my time in India has inspired a whole new wealth of creativity. As far as anthropology goes, the field work I did there has solidified my choice to pursue visual anthropology, not only a passion, but as a lifelong career. I learned how to put all the "anthropological" jargon and theory to action. Anthropology, to me, is not just a professional science, but a way of seeing the world. I hope to return to Dhrangadhra some day and continue my studies of a community both sacred and kind.

News From Around The World

MALTA

Student Censorship

Mark Camilleri, a graduate student at the University of Malta, has recently been acquitted of publishing pornographic material in Malta. Another student wrote the story which Camilleri published in the student-run newspaper. Students, led by the Front Against Censorship, protested both the banning of the newspaper and Camilleri's criminal prosecution.

PAKISTAN

Bin Laden's Death

The United States government announced that Osama bin Laden has been killed in Pakistan and that his body has been buried at sea. However, government officials have not provided evidence for bin Laden's death at the time of this writing.

UNITED KINGDOM

Wedding Fever

The marriage of Prince William to Catherine Middleton still has people reeling. The BBC has a fabulous audio slideshow on royal wedding dresses that discusses history, fashion, and culture of the various dresses, beginning with Princess Charlotte's silver dress in 1816. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13207649>



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Online Museums

Don't Call It Jam!

The quaint online Museum of Marmalade, also known as the, "world's first Museum of Marmalade," includes a recipe for marmalade, an A to Z collection of facts, a MarmaGallery and various advertising images. <http://www.marmaland.com/>

Ouija History

The Museum of Talking Boards chronicles the history of Ouija Boards in United States history. The site includes data on superstitions associated with these boards, an interactive talking board, a lineage of Ouija Board manufacturers, and even an online gallery. <http://www.museumoftalkingboards.com/>



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June Featured Publication

Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford (JASO)

Free issues of JASO are available, with older issues from 1970 to the present accessible as downloadable PDFs in their online archive. In addition to the journal, JASO also provides free PDF access to its Occasional Papers. <http://www.isca.ox.ac.uk/publications/journal-of-the-anthropological-society-of-oxford/>

June Issue Database

Speech Accent Archive

George Mason University's online Speech Accent Archive provides 1,410 audio samples of accents from both native and non-native English speakers around the world. In addition to audio samples, biographical data for speakers are also included, such as birth place, native language, age, gender, and age the informant began speaking English. <http://accent.gmu.edu/>

Curriculum For Public, Private, and Homeschool

Ancient Civilizations

The British Museum offers some of the best curriculum available for primary (elementary) through secondary school. Topics include, but are not limited to, Roman Britain, the Middle East and Islamic World, the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, and Ancient Egypt. Materials consist of downloadable PDFs, Word documents, and PowerPoint presentations; online tours; and stunning interactive websites. This is a truly amazing resource. http://www.britishmuseum.org/learning/schools_and_teachers.aspx

Holocaust and Genocide Studies

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum offers materials including classroom-ready lessons with online videos, downloadable PDFs, and maps; downloadable teacher guides; and online exhibitions on the Holocaust and genocide in Africa. <http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/lesson/>

Holy Cow!

INDIA'S SACRED COW REVISITED

By Gauri Pitale and Dr. Andrew Balkansky

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Introduction

The sacred cow of India is a topic that has attracted the attention of lay people and academics all over the world for decades. The sanctity of India's cattle has led to heated debates among anthropologists, ecologists, and economic theorists, who dispute the origins and purpose of a belief that has characterized Hindu society, not always favorably, for several centuries.

Why is the cow so sacred to Hindus? Many a scholar has tried to unravel this mystery by proposing theories backed by ecological, economic, or religious understandings of the taboo on cow slaughter or beef consumption in India, but a consensus has not yet been reached.

The cow's divine status among Hindus began to gain worldwide, undesired attention in the 1960s. At that time, economists and agronomists from western countries noted that while the Indian people were suffering from severe nutritional stress, millions of unproductive cows roamed the Indian landscape, alive and well (Harris 1989).

This paper aims to explain the sacred cow controversy described above by tracing the arguments constructed by four

scholars of varying backgrounds, each with a different approach and a distinct theoretical conclusion to the situation of the sacred cow in India. As an epilogue, present day circumstances pertaining to Indian farmers, as evidenced by the past decade of written media, will be considered so that the Indian cattle complex can be more holistically understood. Finally, an attempt will be made to predict the future of India's sacred cattle by taking into account India's population growth and the economic and ecological problems India's farmers are currently facing.

Indian Cow from an Ecological Perspective

Though the Indian cow has long attracted the attention of economists and agronomists, Marvin Harris was one of the first anthropologists to approach the study of the Indian cattle complex from an ecological perspective. When the rampant malnourishment of many Indian citizens became apparent, most western scholars openly criticized the humanitarian repercussions of the Hindu ban on cow slaughter. However, Marvin Harris, a cultural materialist, instead proposed an ecological justification for the untouchable Indian cow. Harris, formerly a Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, and author

of *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture*, belonged to the neofunctionalist school of thought, which asserts that cultural adaptations are a result of the ability of people living in certain environments to maximize the returns from their ecological surroundings without exceeding the carrying capacity of the land in question (Orlove 1980). Thus, Harris proposed that revering the Indian cow was helping Hindus better utilize their own landscape.

In 1966, Harris published "The Cultural Ecology of India's Sacred Cattle," an article that aimed to clarify why cows are sacred in India. Therein, Harris argues that the taboo on beef consumption does not exist for theological reasons, but because the resultant number of "useless" cows are what keep the Indian ecosystem in balance (Harris 1989). The article provoked many debates among scholars from a variety of disciplines; to understand the responses, it would be valuable to understand the content of what Harris proposed.

The central point of Harris' paper is that cattle and humans have a symbiotic relationship in India rather than a competitive one and that, as a result, the suggestion that people in India might be underfed because of the ban on beef consumption

must be fallacious. According to Harris, the presence of cattle slaughter injunctions in India is a product of the ecological balance that these injunctions lend to Hindu society, rather than a result of ahimsa, the principle of non-violence, which gained momentum during the Indian independence movement that lasted for almost 90 years from the first Indian rebellion of 1857 until the time India gained independence in the year 1947 (Harris 1966). To emphasize the point, Harris states, "ahimsa itself derives power and sustenance from the material rewards it confers upon both men and animals" (1966:52).

Exactly what can living cows offer the Indian people? A look at the contribution of cattle to the production of milk reveals that most of the milk consumed in India actually comes from water buffaloes (Harris 1966), which have a longer lactation period, provide more milk on an average daily basis, and have a higher maximum yield than Indian cows do (Freed et al. 1981). Thus, the notion that Indian cows are kept alive primarily to provide milk cannot be substantiated. However, Harris' attempt to provide ecological justification does not stop there. As he states in his paper, "Cows contribute to human material welfare in more important ways than milk production" (1966: 53). According to Harris, what India's bovine population importantly contributes, while avoiding slaughter, is traction.

People on the Indian subcontinent have been privy to crop-tending techniques since prehistoric times. Today, farming is a popular occupation in India, with slightly more than half of the country's work force making a living from the agricultural sector, making it a dominant player in the Indian economy

(Abrol n.d.). Since the agricultural cycle in India is dependent on plowing, some form of traction is needed to plow the farmer's land in time for the seeds to be planted. Throughout India, it is particularly the zebu bulls that fulfill this function, as small-scale farmers are too poor to afford tractors (Harris 1989). Since plowing is dependent on seasonal conditions and must be carried out within a very limited time frame to be effective, it is critical that each farmer have access to bulls, ready to tread the fields at a moment's notice (Harris 1966). Thus, live cattle are essential to the sustenance of Indian farmers because their footsteps improve crop production (Harris 1966). Harris writes, "It would seem, therefore, that this aspect of the cattle complex is not an expression of spirit and ritual, but of rain and energy" (1966:53). Indian farmers also make use of the cattle they own for hauling, transportation, and irrigation (Harris 1966).

In addition to their kinetic contributions, Harris points out that Indian cows act as petrochemical industries (Harris 1989). Cattle dung is an important source of energy in India and is frequently used as domestic fuel. The slow-burning quality of cattle dung is often stressed, as this makes the excrement particularly useful in the preparation of domestic products, such as clarified butter, or ghee (Harris 1966). Every year, cows and oxen in India excrete about 700 million tons of recoverable manure. According to Harris, half of this dung is used as fertilizer by Indian farmers and the other half is turned into fuel that provides heat for cooking. Coal is not abundant in India and large-scale deforestation projects have further diminished India's resources. As a result, cow dung is one of the most important sources of fuel in rural India.

Apart from its usage as fertilizer and fuel, dung is often smeared over the dirt floor of houses in India and dung droppings are collected and sold by sweeper castes in rural areas (Harris 1989).

To further his argument in support of the ecological function live cows serve in India, Harris calls the Indian cow an "indefatigable scavenger" (Harris 1989), pointing out that in contrast to cattle in western countries, cows in India primarily consume garbage and farm products that are inedible to humans. Therefore, the cost of keeping cows on farms is not prohibitively expensive, as it often is in western countries (this rule does not apply to working bullocks and nursing cows, which are given better food and more attention, as this will yield a better product for their owners in the long run) (Harris 1966).

Last, Harris explains how naturally deceased cattle prove useful to Indians. Despite the strict taboo that exists on the



consumption of beef, a dead cow is never wasted in India, as today, the country is occupied not only by Hindus, but also by Muslims and Christian groups that do not revere the cow. Dead cattle meat, therefore, is often consumed by people in India and cattle hides contribute to the success of the Indian leather industry (Harris 1966).

Harris makes a valiant effort towards explaining how the sanctity of the Indian cow is essentially tied to the ecological pressures that Indian agricultural society has faced since its inception. Be that as it may, it is pertinent to consider the ideas that scholars from other disciplines have put forth to elucidate the role that Indian cattle play in the economic as well as the religious life of Hindus in India.

Indian Cow from an Economic Perspective

In response to Harris' ecological explanation of the Indian cattle complex, several economists proposed a different manner of viewing the Indian cow and the function that cattle serve in Indian society. In 1971, Alan Heston wrote an article titled "An Approach to the Sacred Cow of India." Within the article, Heston approached the study of the Indian cow from an economic perspective.

Heston's most potent critique of Harris' study is that Harris proposed ideas that lacked the support of any empirical data. Heston claims that Harris never bothered to determine the quantity of cattle in India and believed that the Indian ecosystem was in balance because he viewed the usefulness of Indian cattle purely from the perspective of a single farmer (Heston 1971). Heston states,

Since Harris does not look at the specific facts at the farm level, let alone the overall figures for India, he is evidently led to believe that because the peasant has reasons for what he does with cattle, the existing number of cattle is appropriate for present conditions (1971:192).

Heston's assertions are corroborated by A. K. Chakravarti, former Professor of Geography at University Saskatchewan, Canada, as a part of his study carried out in 1985, which estimates the number of surplus and deficit cattle in India based on their uses in the Indian agricultural system. Under the term "surplus," Chakravarti considers those cattle and buffaloes that are unfit to work due to old age, or unable to bear calves and provide milk and kept alive for religious reasons only. Chakravarti's study revealed that 1.85% of the total cattle population, and 1.32% of the total buffalo population, were surplus animals that served no ecological or economic purpose while alive (Chakravarti 1985). Thus, Heston was correct in the assertion that surplus cattle populations exist in India.

The reason for the continued existence of surplus Indian cattle, according to Heston, can be traced back to the Hindu taboo on cow slaughter and beef consumption. Thus, Heston argues that Harris is mistaken in stating that the composition of the cattle population in India is not related to the beliefs of the Hindu people. Contrarily, he believes that if the surplus Indian cattle were to be removed, it would lead to the freeing of land that could be used by humans and this would benefit the Indian economy on the whole (Heston 1971).

In 1974, Corry Azzi, Professor of Economics at Lawrence

University, responded to both Harris and Heston, again from an economic perspective. Azzi suggested, "Heston's application of economic theory is incorrect," and that Heston's as well as Harris' methods lack objectivity and clear understandings of the economic and social complexities that characterize Indian culture (1974:317). According to Azzi, Harris' claim that the practice of ahimsa does not affect the composition of cattle in India is just as misleading as Heston's theory that removing large amounts of useless cattle from the Indian landscape would yield better economic results. More so, Harris claims that despite the existence of a large number of cattle in India, the Indian ecosystem is in balance, but Azzi counters that there is no objective manner through which one could ascertain whether a system is operating optimally (Azzi 1974). Consequently, Azzi states, "Although Harris provides interesting insights into Hindu cattle allocations, his methodology is faulty because implicit ethical statements appear to be conclusions of descriptive work" (1974:321).

The most fervent response to Harris' work came from Fredrick Simoons, Professor of Geography at the University of California, Davis, who asserted that the protection of the cow is viewed by secular Hindus in India as being motivated by religion exclusively, and not as a practice that results in any economic benefit (Simoons 1979). According to Simoons, "what Harris has done in his early articles is assemble a *mélange* of opinions on the sacred cow to create an unreal composite view, a straw man to be ridiculed for failing to appreciate the economic importance of the cow" (1979:468). Simoons attempts to trace the origin of the sacred cow concept in Indian history. While trying

to construct a very brief history of the Indian subcontinent, Simoons opposes the idea that the ban on cow slaughter came about as individual Indian farmers recognized its potential ecological advantages (Simoons 1979). Rather, Simoons claims, making Indian cattle sacred was probably a “deliberate action taken by the early Indian states to further their political and economic ends,” or the result of the religious turmoil that affected the Indian subcontinent sometime between the fifth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. (1979:469).

Simoons also believes that Harris’ interpretation of the Indian cow situation ignores any evidence that contradicts his own views. According to Simoons, Indian farmers do view wandering cows as a nuisance and large amounts of beef do go to waste as a result of the Hindu belief in the sacred cow. Further, Simoons argues that the opposition to cow slaughter hinders the improvement of cattle quality and that the need to maintain goshalas, old age homes for cattle, diverts funds from more nationally beneficial projects. Hence, Simoons argues, cattle do compete with humans for survival in India (Simoons 1979).

Indian Cow from a Religious Perspective

The 1980s saw a shift in the Indian attitude towards cattle as anthropologists began to demand that the holy status of Indian cattle be understood from a religious perspective. The earliest proponents of this idea were Freed et al. (1981). Stanley A. Freed, formerly a Curator in the Department of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, and his co-authors were extremely critical of past anthropologists and

economists’ failure to approach an understanding of the cattle controversy ethnographically. Thus, these authors provide the results of an ethnographic study carried out in an effort to determine the cattle versus buffalo ratios, as well as the sex ratios of both species in a North Indian village that they decided to give the fictitious name of “Shanti Nagar” (Freed et al. 1981).

The study carried out by Freed et al. in one Indian village provides a framework for how ethnographic studies can be carried out all over India so that the cow controversy is further investigated in hope of being resolved. The significance of Freed et al.’s study extends beyond the realm of the raw data they collected; these authors were the first to ask why the cow controversy has continued for so long without any attempt to carry out holistic ethnography.

Though many of Freed’s findings are congruous with Harris’ claims, the team also felt that it would be counterintuitive to propose an understanding of the Indian cattle complex without considering Hindu religious beliefs. In conclusion, the authors assert that, “the proposition that human behavior can be reduced to techno-environmental determinism says much more about the culture of anthropology than it does about the behavior under anthropological analysis” (Freed et al. 1981:489).

Freed et al.’s study received a positive response from Professor Vinay Srivastava of the Department of Sociology, Hindu College and Professor S. L. Malik of the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. Srivastava and Malik (1982) applauded Freed et al.’s (1981) effort to comprehend the Indian cattle complex from a religious, ecological, and economic perspec-

tive. The authors claim that the cow controversy can only be settled once substantial, holistic, ethnographic fieldwork has been carried out. Most importantly, an understanding of the history of Hinduism as a religion would be required to grasp when and how Indian cattle gained the sanctity that characterizes them in the present day (Srivastava and Malik 1982).

One of the most recently published anthropological papers about the sacred cow controversy is by Frank J. Korom, Professor of Religion and Anthropology at Boston University (2000). Korom, author of *South Asian Folklore*, expands on the idea that the Indian cattle complex cannot be understood by anthropologists without considering the religious and symbolic meaning of the cow to the Hindu people (Korom 2000). Rightly, Korom states, “the ‘sacred-cow controversy’ as it has come to be known, continues within the halls of academe, and seems to bear little on the average Hindu” (2000:184).

The cow is a unique and deeply felt religious symbol for Indian Hindus. To disregard this fact in approaching the sacred cow controversy would lead to a flawed conception of how an average Indian Hindu feels about this animal. Korom is the first investigator to explain how the Indian cow ascended to the lofty position she maintains in the Hindu religion. He traces the apotheosis of the Indian cow from the earliest known Hindu religious texts, the Vedas, and takes into account the archaeological evidence of the Harappan period and the literary sources of later periods. Korom also pays close attention to the symbolic significance of the cow in Indian mythology and its use by Gandhi as a symbol of the Indian independence movement

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black blazer over a white collared shirt, is holding a large white sign. She is looking down at the sign. The sign contains the text:

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(Korom 2000). Korom describes his motivation for doing so as follows: "Given the fact that the cow is such a powerful and pervasive image in India, it would be unwise to separate ecology from theology in this instance" (Korom 2000:196).

Discussion

What exactly does the Indian cow mean to Indian people?

In my own experience, as a native Indian, the sacred cow is not often on the minds of the Indian populace in urban environments, though Harris is right that cows sometimes wander the streets of large cities and occasionally obstruct traffic on busy streets. Nevertheless, the holiness of the cow is understood and accepted by people of all religions in India. Cattle on streets are rarely viewed as a nuisance by the Indian people because they are revered. The notion that the Indian cow serves an ecological function is one that has trickled down to lay Indian people, since the 1960s and 1970s, and it was one that I was taught by my parents while growing up.

The religious position of cattle in Indian society remains relatively the same as it has since the time that the cow controversy came to light in the anthropological world. Yet, several social, economic, and ecological changes have taken place in India in the past few decades. To fully understand the cow's importance, we must look at the conditions under which present day Indian farmers operate and the financial pressures they face.

That India is facing an ecological crisis is amply clear to agronomists (Korom 2000), but what are the reasons behind this crisis? Starting in the late 1990s, the Indian government came to

recognize the financial duress that the farming profession as a whole was under. This realization was the result of an increasing number of suicides among farmers all over India. Statistics from the Indian government indicate that about 200,000 farmers have committed suicide within the past thirteen years (Lerner 2010).

Why are Indian farmers committing suicide? The answer lies in the adoption of the "Green Revolution" by Indian farmers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Indian government, aided by advisers from the U.S. and other countries, encouraged farmers to attempt growing crops with high yield seeds, chemical fertilizers, and irrigation. As a result, almost all Indian farmers abandoned their traditional techniques of farming and started using Green Revolution methods (Zwerdling 2009). What the Indian government, as well as the farmers, failed to realize was that these Green Revolution techniques would eventually raise both national and individual debts while also placing unsustainable pressure on the environment. In the present day, studies reveal that the Green Revolution is heading for a collapse (Zwerdling 2009).

Of utmost importance to the success of crops grown using non-traditional planting techniques is the availability of water. When the Indian government introduced the Green Revolution, they all but coerced farmers into abandoning the crops with which they were familiar for higher yield crops such as wheat, rice, and cotton. At first, these new crops did lead to higher yields; however, they could not be sustained by natural rainfall. Thus, farmers in India began to dig wells to use groundwater to irrigate these crops. This system worked well initially, but groundwater levels soon began (and

continue) to drop at a dramatic rate: as fast as three feet every year (Zwerdling 2009). The cost of drilling deeper wells and the lack of a sufficient water supply, coupled with the increasing debt they are facing as a result of lowered yields in the present day, is likely responsible for the spate of farmer suicides all over India (Waldman 2004).

During these troubling times, it is significant to note that the milk production industry in India is also undergoing change. In 2003, Zubair Ahmed, a BBC reporter, noted the triggering of a "White Revolution" in Baramati, India, onset by the automation of the milking process. The automation of the milking process was seen by local farmers as a boon to their income and standard of living. Farmers noted that automated machines were helping them to better and more efficiently milk their cows, resulting in improved cow health. Significant to note is Ahmed's statement that "In a country like India, where labor is abundant and wages low, technology and automation are generally seen as suspect. But Baramati's poorest, its struggling low-tech dairy farmers, surprisingly embraced technology as a lifeline" (Ahmed 2003).

Conclusion

As globalization proves inevitable and technological advancements abound, for better or worse, will the cow remain sacred to Hindus? This question has almost certainly crossed the mind of any Indian familiar with recent changes to the social and cultural milieu of the country, which began when the Indian government initiated economic reforms that led to the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991. The introduction of non-traditional techniques of farming in the last forty years has caused

ecological and financial problems that plague Indian farmers in particular and the Indian economy as a whole. The automation of cattle milking in India, though new, might also result in drastic changes in the manner in which cattle are viewed by Hindu society and Indian people.

Though it is impossible to predict what the future holds for India's cattle, its transition to the realm of the profane feels probable as Indian dairy farmers begin to view these animals from a non-traditional and western perspective. On the other hand, a resurgence of militant Hinduism in India is concurrently gaining popularity, and its leaders might decide to use the sacred Indian cow as its official symbol. If this happens, it could result in the cow being elevated to an even holier status in Hindu society than it holds today. In the meantime, the sacred cow controversy remains a subject deserving of in-depth anthropological investigation, as the social, economic, and religious situation in India continues to transform at a rapid pace. The fate of the Indian cow remains to be seen.

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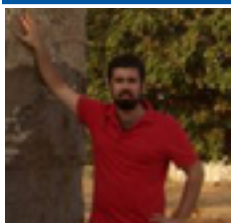
CODESRIA: Four Decades Promoting Social Sciences Research

By João Figueiredo

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Edited By Deborah Shepherd

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It is impossible to write a column about the social sciences in Africa without eventually referring to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)¹. CODESRIA has played a key role for such a long time in the development of the research about Africa by African scholars that it has become iconic. Established in 1973 in Dakar, Senegal, CODESRIA has been promoting free speech and dialogue between African social scientists for almost forty years (Beckman et al. 2007:10, 18). With a clearly Pan-Africanist agenda, CODESRIA aims to facilitate the collaboration of social scientists throughout the continent, evading the barriers posed by language divisions, gender, generational and sub-regional inequalities (CODESRIA 2007). One overarching aspiration drives this organization from the outset: to rally African social scientists into a collective effort to overcome colonial divides and shape the intellectual agenda according to which Africa is studied and policies are taken (Beckman et al. 2007, CODESRIA 2007). Achieving this goal is by no means a small task. A number of serious challenges have been posed to the Council throughout the years; some have been successfully dealt with while some still defy the younger generation of social scientists.

Historically, the particularities of the higher education system in Africa have always conditioned the production of knowledge in the continent (CODESRIA 2007:2-5). CODESRIA addressed the shortcomings that resulted from this fact and adapted itself to the changing conditions in African universities. From the 1970s onwards, when the Council was established, political instability, economical crises, and the rise of autocratic interference from governments left Africa with narrow-sighted and under-financed universities (Beckman et al. 2007:11-12, CODESRIA 2007:2-5). Later, a shift towards a purely commercial

founders of CODESRIA felt that another kind of issue also had to be dealt with. The locally rooted production of a meaningful body of knowledge about Africa was being threatened, they reasoned, not only by the decadence² of the main African universities, but also by the adoption of Western imported epistemologies³ that didn't do justice to the complexity of the daily life on the continent (CODESRIA 2007:22). CODESRIA thus promoted the production of "integrated, holistic knowledge about social realities in Africa" mainly by stressing in its research programs the importance of qualitative methods and historical contextualization (CODESRIA 2007:5). At an epistemological level, the linguistic divisions across the African continent also posed serious difficulties to widespread collaborations between scholars. Nevertheless, such a broad collaboration was accomplished by adopting four working languages: English, French, Portuguese and Arabic (CODESRIA 2007:33). CODESRIA now produces ten peer-reviewed journals, an annual average of 30 books and 20 monographs, and has become a quickly growing online repository of postgraduate theses (CODESRIA 2007:11, CODESRIA 2009).

CODESRIA THUS PROMOTED THE PRODUCTION OF "INTEGRATED, HOLISTIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SOCIAL REALITIES IN AFRICA

logic in the academic milieu also had a negative impact on the production of knowledge in the social sciences (CODESRIA 2007:2-5). The Council mitigated these problems with a diverse offer: basic formation courses and summer schools in research methods and writing skills, post-graduate scholarships, and exchange programs (CODESRIA 2007:11-13).

At the time of its creation, the

While some historical, epistemological and linguistic problems and barriers have been addressed and lessened by Council policies, some new or recurring challenges still encourage a new generation of

scholars to contribute solutions (CODESRIA 2007:13-24). One of them is the expansion and rapid development of information technology. While new technologies make possible the growth of distance-learning in Africa and facilitate the collaboration between African scholars and Africanists elsewhere, they might also promote an undesired artificial homogenization of knowledge (CODESRIA 2007:17). Can CODESRIA once again provide a solid example, this time in the promotion of e-learning and responsible cyber research?

Another recurrent problem is the lack of financial support (Beckman et al 2007:39-40, CODESRIA 2007:39). While the quest for funding is one perpetually linked with scientific endeavor, the members of the Council fear that today's active social scientists in Africa will abandon their academic pursuits in favor of more financially rewarding short-term consultancies (CODESRIA 2007:14). While the type of knowledge produced by consultants appeals to donors interested in short term returns and narrow fields of research, it is not the outcome of the holistic methods promoted by CODESRIA. Will this foreign-induced *cash-and-carry* research ethos pervade all the African academic scene, or will the joint efforts of scholars throughout the continent allow them to guide the research agenda concerning Africa (CODESRIA 2007:22)? During the next few years CODESRIA will surely employ its resources and influence to promote the second outcome.

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Social Science Across the Globe



Spirit Possession, HIV/AIDS and Female Factory Workers

By Mary-Anne Decatur

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In most developing countries, economic growth since the 1970s has been fueled in part by urban factories that rely on the labor of young unmarried female migrants from rural villages (Kusago 2000:3). This article will focus on these factories in Malaysia and will examine how anthropological research on spirit possession may elucidate the ways in which HIV/AIDS is understood and discussed among female Malaysian factory workers and Malaysian society more generally.

Female Factory Workers in Malaysia

Manufacturing has become one of the most popular forms of employment for women in Malaysia, and approximately a quarter of employed women work in the manufacturing industry (Root 2008:409). Furthermore, factory workers in Malaysia have historically been predominantly female. Roughly 95% of new manufacturing employees were women throughout the early and mid-1980s (Kaur 1999:19). This gender disparity has decreased over time, but women continue to represent over half of unskilled factory workers (Sivalingam 1994:21). Factory work in Malaysia is thus very much a 'feminine' profession.

Women frequently work in these factories for only a few years, and their wages may be insufficient to meet even their own cost of living. These low wages mean that roughly 15% of female factory workers simultaneously hold other jobs,

perhaps as seamstresses and food vendors (Root 2009:907). Despite these economic hardships, female factory workers have been portrayed in Malaysian popular culture as sexually unrestrained and profligate pleasure-seekers (Ackerman 1991:199).

Some factory workers certainly do engage in conspicuous consumption but generally to a lesser extent than university students and young middle-class professionals. Nonetheless, these working class female factory workers have come under scrutiny in ways that middle-class women have not (Ong 1987:181). Female factory workers have become a symbol of social transgression.

Spirit Possession and Social Boundaries

The anthropologist Aihwa Ong argues that the entrance of large numbers of women into the workforce in the early days of the Malaysian manufacturing boom was experienced as a form of moral disorder and social chaos. Anxieties over social discord translated into fears of filth and overt sexuality that had to be disciplined and regulated (Ong 1988:35). Female factory workers were thus seen simultaneously as vulnerable to moral chaos and as dangerous disseminators of immorality.

In the wake of this societal transformation, a series of spirit possessions occurred among young female factory workers, leading to work slow-downs and temporary factory closures. A spirit possession

is an event where an external force, such as a ghost or divinity, is believed to take complete control over a person for a period of time (Boddy 1994:407). These spirit possession incidents in Malaysian factories were marked by loss of consciousness and violent convulsions in the victim, as well as aggressive behavior (Ackerman 1991:204). In one incident from 1980, described by Ong, twenty-one female factory workers based in Pontian had to be removed from the factory in ambulances as some screamed, 'I will kill you' to factory supervisors (Ong 1988:32). Ong argues that these mass spirit possessions were triggered by anger toward factory supervisors and fears of defilement.

Spirit possession in Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s was framed around concerns of pollution that arose when social boundaries and spaces were transgressed. Dangerous spirits capable of possession are traditionally believed, in Malaysia, to occupy swamps and bodies of water. Moreover, menstrual blood is perceived to be polluting and the object most likely to anger spirits. In these new factories, female workers viewed the modern toilet tanks as horrifyingly 'filthy' spaces inhabited by potentially dangerous spirits (Ong 1988:31-2). Physical spaces in the factories, like the toilet tanks, were therefore experienced as dangerous sites of pollution.

The new factories also pushed social boundaries as large numbers of unmarried female workers mingled unattended with male supervisors. Spirit possessions were thus trig-

gered, at least in part, by fears of moral vulnerability. Holding Islamic classes on factory grounds has been a popular method to deal with these forms of 'moral chaos' and 'defilement' faced by factory women (Ong 1988:35). Moral vulnerability was therefore seen as a risk factor for spirit possession and reaffirmation of social boundaries through religious practices was experienced as a form of treatment. In present day Malaysia, similar issues of moral vulnerability and social boundaries among female factory workers can be seen in understandings of HIV/AIDS and its prevention.

HIV/AIDS and Social Boundaries

The Malaysian Ministry of Health deemed female factory workers at high risk of HIV infection as early as 1993, and a 2001 survey by the Ministry of Health reiterated this high-risk label. The anthropologist Robin Root argues that this perception of increased risk stems from discourses within Malaysia that conceptualize factory women as vulnerable to moral risks (2008:407).

Since 1986 when HIV was first reported in Malaysia, over 86 thousand cases of HIV infection have been recorded. The major route of transmission in Malaysia has historically been intravenous drug use among men, and 90% of people in Malaysia living with HIV are male. Moreover, less than seven per cent of men or women known to be HIV positive have been factory workers despite factory work comprising over 27% of total employment (PT Foundation 2011; Hassan et al. 2010:21). Female factory workers are therefore not among those most affected by HIV infection in Malaysia, but these women are nonetheless seen as especially at risk.

Many in Malaysia conceptualize HIV infection in moralistic and religious terms. In a 2009 study of staff members at Universiti Putra Malaysia, almost a third of respondents believed that HIV/AIDS is a punishment from God (Tee and Huang 2009:183). It is then not surprising that female factory workers seen as 'morally vulnerable' would also be

perceived as particularly at risk for infection. This morally-based understanding of illness transmission can also be found among female factory workers themselves.

Root's research in factories of Penang State, Malaysia found that 80% of the women interviewed did not categorize HIV as a sexually transmitted disease. Sixteen percent of women interviewed believed that HIV infection could not occur through sex with a non-stranger, and 14% stated that infection could not occur through sex with a religious person. Furthermore, 64% of the women interviewed believed that religion could protect against HIV infection. Religion was posited to protect against infection because it orders and reinforces social boundaries and thus promotes avoidance of mixing between men and women unrelated by blood or marriage (Root 2008:420-3). Similar to spirit possession, 'defilement' through the breaching of social boundaries and spaces is believed to increase risk of HIV infection. Reaffirming these social boundaries through institutions like religion is, therefore, promoted as a form of illness prevention.

Conclusions

Many in Malaysia experienced the entrance of mass numbers of young unmarried rural women into the workforce in the 1970s and 1980s as a deeply problematic social transgression. Female factory workers faced suspicion from the general public and had to manage their own concerns over moral and social boundaries. These issues became symbolized in fears of defilement and pollution and were embodied in incidents of spirit possession experienced by female factory workers. Today, similar concerns over morality and social boundaries can be seen in understandings of HIV/AIDS that place risk of infection as an issue of moral and social transgression.

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Illness Obscured:

Amidst these fears of HIV infection, Root found other health risks that were either downplayed or obscured from the factory workers. Electronics manufacturing is associated with several potential health risks, including exposure to solvents or radiation and chemical poisoning. Fifty-four percent of the female factory workers interviewed by Root reported having a chronic or acute cough and eleven percent reported suffering from asthma. Despite these health issues, a third of the women also indicated that they were uncomfortable consulting the factory doctors due in part to concerns over confidentiality. Root concludes that despite the 'safety first' rhetoric promoted within Malaysian factories, many women seem to lack knowledge of their occupational health risks (2009:908-909, 915).



Social Science Across the Globe

**CENTRAL AND
SOUTH AMERICA**

THE CENTRAL AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY NETWORK

By Alejandro Cerón

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The Central American Anthropology Network (Red Centroamericana de Antropología)(1) was created with the aim of building a Central American Anthropology with its own identity that is focused on the different cultures and problems in the Central American region. To date, its main work has been to organize eight conferences with the participation of specialists and students who carry out research relevant to Central America (Ascencio-Franco 2009:3; 2011).

In 1987, the Costa Rican Anthropology Society wanted to organize a regional meeting to explore the possibility of creating a Central American Anthropology Association. With that aim in mind, its representatives met with some anthropologists at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala. Although there were anthropologists in all of the Central American countries, at that time only Guatemala and Costa Rica offered Anthropology as an undergraduate major, so they organized five workshops in different countries to explore the idea. There was interest in improving how Central America is understood as a region, and anthropologists shared concerns over the political persecution of their profession and the lack of support for anthropology programs. (Bolaños-Arquín 2009; Ascencio-Franco 2011)

Moreover, Central American anthropologists were concerned about the

presence of foreign anthropologies and urged for doing away with “assimilationist indigenism” inherited from the Mexican tradition, which was sympathetic to the indigenous people in a paternalistic way and focused its work on studying indigenous cultures in order to then assimilate them to an ideal national Mestizo culture. They also called for eliminating American “culturalism,” considered by some as “anthropology of the occupation,” a term used in Guatemala to emphasize the physical presence of American anthropologists and their local followers. Under the influence of these researchers, anthropological research was aimed in the 1930s at designing policies of penetration and, beginning in 1944, focused on countering the social changes promoted by the democratic government. Starting in 1956, they became the dominant interpreters of Guatemalan social and ethnic realities and served as a stepping stone for the social policies implemented by the military governments (Pérez 1988:57; cited in Ascencio-Franco 2011).

There were several meetings and workshops between 1987 and 1992 during which participants created the conditions for the first Central American Anthropology Conference (Congreso Centroamericano de Antropología) in 1994. Some Mexican anthropologists and institutions working in Chiapas played a key role in those years (Bolaños-Arquín 2009; Ascencio-Franco 2011).

In the first conference, Andrés Fábregas laid out the main challenge for Central American anthropologists: “redesigning anthropology” by linking the “reflection about our peoples’ historic trajectory, the social structures that characterize us today, and the intercultural dialogue that has been practiced for a long time” (Fábregas 1996: 9; cited in Ascencio-Franco 2011).

This kind of regional anthropology, based on an “analytic and humanistic tradition” aims to support anthropologists’ commitment to the recovery of cultural legacy of indigenous peoples as well as the pluri-cultural heritage of the mestizaje that has existed since colonization. There are solid intellectual traditions in Mexico and Central America, but the challenge is to translate them into concrete regional projects (Fabregas 1996: 12; cited in Ascencio-Franco 2011).

Since 1994, there have been seven conferences that have showcased an impressive quantity and quality of research and important contributions to the understanding of shared problems such as violence, migration, the impact of natural disasters, health degradation, destruction of cultural heritage, and environmental degradation by policies that have increased poverty and social exclusion. Key research topics have included: the struggle of indigenous peoples and workers resisting state policies and trans-

national corporations' influence, religious traditions, education projects and community building. There has been some interest in starting a regional doctoral program and in working on regional research projects as well as academic exchanges between students and faculty in regional institutions, but the main challenge that the pioneers of the network defined remains. Developing a Central American anthropology with its own identity requires a deeper analysis and reflection from regional anthropologists, and more importantly, there is a need to aim for theoretical and conceptual synthesis and for the formalization of regional research projects (Bolaños-Arquín 2009).

ENDNOTES

1. This column is based on two papers by Gabriel Ascencio-Franco (2009; 2011) and one by Margarita Bolaños-Arquín (2009) from which I have excerpted and translated freely. The author would like to thank Gabriel Ascencio-Franco (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) and Andrés Álvarez (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala) for

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Inauguration of the 2009 Conference.

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Social Science Across the Globe



YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN SCANDINAVIA



By Adrienne DiTommaso

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Edited By Deborah Shepherd

Proofread by Jane Mulcock

As long as there have been permanent, settled communities, there has been homelessness. Though there are worthy and effective grassroots programs as well as government initiatives to reduce adult homelessness across Europe, a survey of the existing literature suggests a paucity of accessible studies concerning youth homelessness. This article aims to briefly summarize some of the issues of youth homelessness in one European region, Scandinavia, and to present the relevant research and possible solutions to the problem of homeless youth.

While the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland are known for their social services and welfare programs, youth homelessness remains a real problem in these nations. Surprisingly, statistics regarding homeless youth are difficult to come by in some of these nations due to their methods for classifying young people. In Sweden, youth are not considered independent from their parents and therefore are not counted as individuals but as members of a family¹. The existing statistics claiming that the homeless population in Sweden was around 17,800 in 2005 thus only counts adults and not children or teens, meaning the actual number of homeless could be much higher, the proportion of which are youth being unknown. Social scientists in Denmark, as early

as 1995, commented on similar misleading ways of measuring homeless youth populations. In a report to the European Federation of Organizations Working With the Homeless (FEANTSA), Tobias Børner Stax summarizes another issue: "There is hardly any recent literature on the topic- nor are there any political discussions indicating an existence of a problem...the topic, at present, is not acknowledged as a problem, nor is it considered a potential problem"². Researchers in Sweden and Denmark both recommend that comprehensive national surveys be undertaken to measure the true extent of youth homelessness³.

Characteristics of youth who become homeless fall into the typical categories of runaways, "unruly" offspring thrown out of their homes by their parents, and children of homeless adults. Interestingly, as the Scandinavian nations incorporate immigrants from new EU member states, as well as a growing number of refugees from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an increasing number of homeless youth accompany these immigrant populations. Illegal migrants also represent a large portion of homeless youth in Scandinavia⁴. It has been a challenge for legislators to develop policies for utilizing the social welfare system to aid these populations, to integrate them into

mainstream Scandinavian culture, and to keep them off the streets. Legislation of the past five years has sought to prevent these homeless immigrant youth from resorting to gang violence and involvement with drugs⁵. These policies have mainly focused on allocating a percentage of low-income housing to homeless families and funding grassroots programs that use the 'Housing First' approach, which advocates increasing social welfare by establishing independent tenancy⁶.

In a study surveying homelessness across Europe, Benjaminsen and Dyb explain that in Denmark, "municipalities have to refer 25% of public housing that becomes vacant to socially vulnerable groups [and] social support has also to be made available"⁷. This has been a smart first step in addressing youth homelessness, though it has created "socially vulnerable" communities which suffer from poverty and social isolation. Research also points to the need for the cooperation of governments with educational systems to provide long term chances of escaping poverty and homelessness. A 2007 longitudinal study of at-risk Finnish adolescents revealed that programs supporting "partnerships" and institutionalized educational care helped to stabilize the youths' life situations into the participants' early 20's⁸. The need for cooperation between various

social welfare agencies and actors inside and outside of the government clearly makes the issue of combating youth homelessness a complicated problem that will take patience to solve.

Though Scandinavia by no means has an overwhelming problem with youth homelessness, the above information shows that it is a real and potential social justice issue across the region. Much more research must be done to identify the size, demographics, and characteristics of homeless youth populations, with special emphasis paid to the growing numbers of immigrant and illegal migrant youth. Hopefully in the near future, this research can be utilized by Scandinavian legislators, non-profits, and faith-based organizations to create effective and efficient solutions to youth homelessness.

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Sidebar:

The following organizations and NGOs work with local and national governments and private citizens to combat youth homelessness across the European continent.

European Federation of National Organizations working with the Homeless. Contains a comprehensive listing of national organizations fighting homelessness, especially among children and teens.

<http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=1150>.

The following print resources give more insight into homelessness in Europe, with some important sections on youth homelessness:

Hohn, Charlotte, Dragana Avramov, and Irena Kotowska, eds., *People, Population Change and Policies*. 2008. Springer Publishing.

Shinn, Marybeth. 2007. *International Homelessness: Policy, Socio-Cultural, and Individual Perspectives*. *Journal of Social*

ADVERTISING WITH POPULAR ANTHROPOLOGY



Social Science Across the Globe



Discourse and Melodrama, The Changing Role of Syrian Soap Operas



By Michael Schen

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Edited By Deborah Shepherd

Proofread by Jane Mulcock

I have always been a little suspicious of anthropologists who do not watch television. The glow of the phosphorous screen has replaced the hearths of pre-modern times as the place where families gather to listen to morality tales and learn cultural norms (Christmann 1996). Whether or not this is a good thing is up for debate, but television watching is a reality that social scientists began researching in recent decades as a key cultural medium (Abu-Lughod 1993, 1995, 2005; Armbrust 1996). Much of this research has been done in the Middle East, particularly in Syria. The changing subject matter of Syrian television serials (*musalsalat*), as well as the public debate they engender, reveals local and regional tensions.

Musalsalats originated in the 1990s, as the centerpiece of evening entertainment shown during the holy month of Ramadan (Christmann 1996). They were broadcast after sundown, when the fasting of Ramadan gives way to family gatherings and large evening meals. The earliest Syrian *musalsalat* featured local themes and depicted critical periods in the history of the nation. The most famous of these dramas, *Damascene Days*, broadcast in 1992, revolved around a Damascus neighborhood during the years right before Syrian independence from the French Mandate. *Damascene Days* generated a vigorous national

debate due to its themes of urban versus rural dynamics, which are reflective of sociopolitical tensions in modern-day Syria (Salamandra 2005).

In a 2005 article for *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, Christa Salamandra reflects on her early research on *musalsalats* and how the field of study must change to reflect their new cultural context. Since the 1990s, demand for Syrian produced television programs rose among the many Arab satellite television channels founded since the end of the last century. This new media landscape changed both the production value and themes of *musalsalats*.

The rise of Syria as a regional "Hollywood" (Lancaster 1998) changed the dynamics of television production both within and outside the country. Egypt, long considered the capital of Arab media production, responded by increasing production of television serials (Salamandra 2005:12). Writers and producers complained that the influx of money from Persian Gulf countries and an increasingly crowded market favored less controversial subject matter.

Given the new prominence and regional reach of the medium, Salamandra advocates a revised approach to studying television programs in Syria, noting the similarity of her approach to the traditional

participant-observer model of ethnography. Because of the necessity for long-term contact with producers, actors and writers, she emphasizes the exploration of the cultural texts of production in addition to an analysis of the product itself.

Musalsalat and the stories they tell "function as a medium of collective and public self-reflection, criticism, irony and sarcasm (Christmann 1996:1)." Although producers and writers resent the effect the new market has on their opportunity for social commentary (Salamandra 2005), there is evidence that the form still has potency.

Like *Damascene Days*, a Syrian show broadcast during Ramadan 2010, *Ma Malakat Aymanukum*, which took its title from a Quranic verse, sparked heated debates among its viewership. In keeping with the changing scope and exposure of the medium, however, the debate around *Ma Malakat Aymanukum* played out on a regional stage and involved the show's depiction of sexual misconduct, religious hypocrisy and terrorism (Hürriyet 2010). Unlike the local tensions of earlier *musalsalat*, the discourse of contemporary works now occupies a regional stage and addresses a wider audience.

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ADVERTISING WITH POPULAR ANTHROPOLOGY



Social Science Across the Globe



The Native American Mascot Controversy



By Robert Muckle
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Edited By Deborah Shepherd

Proofread by Jane Mulcock

The use of Native American imagery in sports, particularly as it relates to mascots, nicknames, and logos is a controversy that has been simmering since the 1960s. The controversy revolves around the issue of whether sports teams should cede to the wishes of many Native Americans and others to abolish the mascots, nicknames and logos. The rationale of those in favor of abolishment usually encompass a variety of reasons, including that the mascots, nicknames, and logos are demeaning, humiliating, and promote misinformation, stereotypes, and racism. Those who are in favor of retaining the images and names typically claim that the images and nicknames are a significant aspect of their own organization's traditions, that Native American peoples should be honored by the use of their images or names, and that it would be too costly to change. Those who are opposed to change also often refer to the issue as trivial.

Many professional sports teams use Native American images or names, such as the Washington Redskins, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, Chicago Blackhawks, and Edmonton Eskimos. The controversy occasionally receives national attention in the world of professional sport, especially when one of the teams is involved in a national championship, however, the protests are mostly not very intense, sustained, or widely supported.

This situation in educational institutions, however, is substantially different. Lobbying efforts and protests against the use of Native American imagery and nicknames tends to be much better organized, has much wider support, and has resulted in many teams associated with school, colleges, and universities changing their mascots, logos, and team names. An overview of the controversy in educational institutions is provided in *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook*, edited by C. Richard King (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

The mascot controversy is of considerable interest to anthropologists and other social scientists for a variety of reasons. Social scientists may contextualize the mascot controversy within larger studies of ethnicity, racism, stereotypes, native activism, and popular culture; and within more recent areas of anthropological interest such as the appropriation of native cultures.

Beyond a purely scholarly interest, anthropologists have become involved with the issue for other reasons, several of which were outlined in a letter from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign to the University's board of trustees regarding the use of "Chief Illinwek" as a mascot (this is an example of a mascot that has recently

been retired). The letter, reproduced in *The Native American Handbook Controversy: A Handbook* states, in part:

The Chief: (i) promotes inaccurate conceptions of the Native Peoples of Illinois, past and present; (ii) undermines the effectiveness of our teaching and is deeply problematic for the academic environment both in and outside of the classroom; (iii) creates a negative climate in our professional relationships with Native American communities that directly affects our ability to conduct research with and among Native peoples; and (iv) adversely affects recruitment of Native American students and faculty into our university and department.

As an example of how the mascot promotes inaccurate conceptions, some anthropologists liken the Chief representing the local Native Americans to someone dressed in a kilt and playing bagpipes representing Italians or Germans. These scholars also point out that the music and dances associated with the mascot appear to be derived from the Boy Scouts movement, Wild West shows, and early Hollywood movies.

Protests by anthropologists about the use of Native American mascots extend far beyond individual or department protests. The American Anthropological Association, for example, adopted an anti-mascot resolution that states, in part:

"We, the members of the American Anthropological Association, call upon all educators and administrators of educational institutions to stop promoting the stereotypical representation of American Indian people through the use of sports mascots. The persistence of such official sanctioned, stereotypical presentations humiliates American Indian people, trivializes the scholarship of anthropologists, undermines the learning environment for all students and seriously compromises efforts to promote diversity on school and college campuses" (minutes of 1999 American Anthropological Association Business meeting).

Anthropologists are not the only group, in addition to Native American peoples, who are advocating the abolition of Native American mascots, logos, and nicknames. In *The Native American Mascot Controversy* King lists more than 100 organizations who support such changes. This includes prominent Native American groups such as the American Indian Movement and National Congress of American Indians; associations of academics such as the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Society, and the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport; state boards of education, including those of Michigan, Minnesota, and New York; associations of journalists including the Native American Journalists association, Asian American Journalists Association, National Association of Black Journalists, National association of Hispanic Journalists; and religious organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, Presbyterian Church, USA; and United Methodist Church.

Undoubtedly one of the most important organizations to abolish the use of Native American mascots, logos, and nicknames in the past few years is the National Collegiate Association (NCAA). In 2005 they created guidelines for the use of Native American mascots, which read, in part:

"Mascots, nicknames, or images deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity, or national origin should not be visible at championship events controlled by NCAA

Universities with hostile or abusive mascots, nicknames, or imagery are prohibited from hosting any NCAA championship events...

NCAA suggests that institutions follow the best practices of institutions that do not support the use of Native American mascots or imagery; i.e., not scheduling athletic competitions with schools that use Native American nicknames, imagery, or mascots.

Those in favor of abolishing Native American mascots point out that stereotypical images of African Americans or Latin Americans are no longer acceptable in mainstream North American culture, so why is it still okay to promote stereotypes about Native Americans? They also express frustration at times with those who fail to appreciate the negative aspects of Native American mascots through regular channels, and thus resort to other means such as satire and parody. Such was the case with a University of Northern Colorado intramural basketball team with Native American players who changed their name from "Native Pride" to the "Fighting Whites". The new name was a parody of Native mascots in general and of a nearby high school's "Fighting Reds" in particular. It received national attention, and as often happens with satire and parody, some people didn't like, or understand, the intent.

While the controversy continues, there seems little doubt that those who favor the abolition of Native American mascots, logos, and nicknames are winning the battle, at least in regard to teams associated with educational institutions. Some reports indicate that more than 1,000 educational institutions have dropped mascots, other imagery, and nicknames associated with Native Americans. Examples of

colleges and universities that have done so include Arkansas State University, Bradley University, Colgate University, College of William and Mary, Dartmouth, Dickinson State College, Eastern Michigan University, Eastern Washington University, Mankato State College, Marquette University, Miami University (Ohio), Montclair State College, Seattle University, Southeast Missouri State University, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, St. John's University, Stanford University, Syracuse University, University of Illinois, University of Louisiana-Monroe, University of Massachusetts, University of Oklahoma, University of Tennessee, and West Georgia University.

For those interested in learning more about the Native American Mascot controversy, *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook*, edited by C. Richard King is highly recommended. Many articles on the topic have appeared in each of the *American Indian Quarterly* and the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. Recent articles on the topic have also appeared in *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* and *International Journal of Sport Communication*..

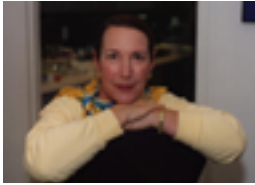


World Cuisine

THE CASE OF KASHK

By Sheilah Kaufman

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Whenever I needed information on Jewish customs, holidays, or foods, my friend Gil Marks was always there to provide me with fascinating stories, recipes, and information. Gil Marks is the author of numerous books, including the James Beard Award-winning *Olive Trees and Honey* and the recently released *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*.

THE CASE OF KASHK By Gil Marks

Kashk is a Middle Eastern fermented grain and dairy product. The first record of the word was by the 5th century Armenian historian, Elishe. Being principally a nomad and peasant food, kashk, a word of Persian origin, was ignored in ancient Persian writings. However, the Talmudic equivalent of kashk was kutach, initially appearing in the Mishnah nearly four centuries earlier. Israeli Jews referred to it as kutach ha'Bavli (Babylonian kashk), denoting its origins and center of popularity to the east. The Talmudic accounts reveal that kutach was well established in the western end of the Fertile Crescent two millennia ago, but not then commonly made in the Levant. The Talmud claimed three things about kutach, in the process revealing the mixture's ingredients and nature, "it clogs the heart, on account of the whey; it blinds the eyes, on account of the salt; and it weakens the body, on account of the fermentation of the flour."

Ancient food technology was devoted to preserving scarce resources for as long

as possible and not necessarily creating the most sophisticated and flavorful fare. In the Middle East that primarily meant the two staples, a combination of basic pastoral and agricultural cultures—dairy products and grains (varieties of barley and wheat). Together, the pairing provides nutritional elements lacking in the other. Although whole kernels could be stored for many months, if fractured, a common occurrence during threshing of hulled grains, the oil inside became prone to spoilage. In the time before the advent of pasteurization, cooling systems, and hygienic conditions, raw milk was particularly unsafe. Among the predominant methods for preserving foods in ancient cultures was fermentation, such as beer. Almost all dairy products were consumed in a fermented form, notably cheese, butter, buttermilk, kefir, and yogurt. Fermentation could generally only extend the shelf life of dairy products for a few days or so; additional processing was necessary for long term storage.

Classic kashk was typically prepared during the summer after the grain harvests, but while there was still a surplus of milk as well as heat from the sun for aiding both fermentation and drying.

Families set aside part of the harvest or purchased large amounts of wheat or barley to last for the year. First the grains or bulgur were cracked between two rotating stones, then slowly stirred into warmed acidified whey from sheep or goat yogurt or into buttermilk (about 62% moisture). Salt was added to the doughy mixture (*hamma*), then it was transferred to porous clay vessels to ferment, kneaded occasionally, for at least three days and sometimes up to two weeks. During drying, the heat destroys most of the yeasts and lactobacilli. When properly fermented and the liquid absorbed, the thick mixture was formed into small lumps and spread out on trays to dry in the sun, a slow, thorough drying of at least a week or more. The kashk balls were stored in clay vessels or sacks until needed.

During the fermentation, lactic and acetic acids and other compounds are produced and the pH significantly lowered (about 4.5), which decreases further during drying (3.5). The acid (about 1.8%) combined with the salt and the low-moisture content (9 to 13%) when effectively dried, all act to suppress pathogenic bacteria and





food spoiling microorganisms, thereby preserving the milk proteins and grains for two or even three years. The acid and fermentation also give the kashk its distinctive sour, nutty, yeasty flavor and smell, varying according to the types of lactic acid bacteria used.

Kashk was easy to produce at home, relatively inexpensive, long-lasting, light-weight, portable, and quick to cook. The predominant use of kashk was reconstituted in water, then simmered into a thick, lumpy porridge or with available vegetables into a soup, both typically consumed with bread. It was also ground into a powder to sprinkle into soups as a thickener and flavoring. In liquid, the brownish lumps whiten somewhat and crumble easily, remaining relatively intact with minor cooking. Some people, unfamiliar with the process for making kashk, have mistaken the small kashk lumps for crusts of bread. Kashk was sometimes an everyday food in the Middle East, providing much needed nutrition and protein (a mean of 13% protein content), but in particular was an essential part of the cached winter food supply and a vital resource in times of famine. The porridge was principally breakfast food but, depending on necessity and preference, often served as part of or the entirety of any meal, especially during the winter. In addition, the porridge, considered by its proponents to be very healthy and nutritious (whey contains much of the calcium), was commonly

served any time of the year to nursing mothers, infants, the sick, and the elderly. Kashk was also ideal for shepherds, nomads, soldiers, and travelers of all sorts, requiring just a small vessel, fire, and some water to produce a filling meal.

Although members of one culture become accustomed to or even grow to enjoy the flavor of a particular fermented item, that food is all too often offensive to other communities. While kutach was much beloved among Babylonians, it was typically met with scorn by Jews living on the other side of the Fertile Crescent in Israel. The Talmud noted that Rabbi Yochanan, from Tzipori (near Nazareth), "would spit every time he was reminded of Babylonian kutach."


In the 9th century, the dish first appeared in Arabic, pronounced kishk, in a medical compendium of Abdul-Malik Ibn Habib of Andalusia. It was also commonplace in the Levant. Sir Richard Burton in *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1855) provided a description of how kishk was prepared in 19th century Arabia, explaining, "This is the Kurut of Sind [one of the four provinces of Pakistan] and the Kashk of Persia." Classic kashk also survives in the Turkish tarhanas (from the Persian tar "soaked" and khan "food"), a term which first appeared in the 14th century. Turkish versions frequently contain assorted

seasonings and vegetables. During the subsequent Ottoman domination of the Balkans, the dish spread to that area as well, with the transposition of the letters r and a, pronounced trahanas and trachanas by the Greeks. Trahana soups are still widespread in the Balkans.

Throughout most of history, kashk was a home production run by women and children, although in the later twentieth century, commercial manufacturers, primarily in Turkey and Greece, emerged. Commercial kishk powder is sold in some Arab countries. Nevertheless, in some parts of the Middle East, this process continues at home annually to this very day. In particular, residents of rural areas of Turkey and Kurdistan still process their own tarhanas along with bulgur every year and consume an average of eight kilos tarhanas per person in contrast to the much more expensive rice at the rate of only three kilos.

During the course of its long history, kashk took on a variety of new forms. In Iran, kashk became dried whey or dried yogurt (without any grain), while in other areas it took on the meaning of cooked cracked grains without the dairy. When the latter type of kashk made its way to eastern Europe, it became kasha, used in Slavic languages for any type of cooked cereal, while in Yiddish it came to mean exclusively buckwheat groats. When stuffed into intestines, it became kishke.





Persian Eggplant with Dried Yogurt (Kashk-e Bademjan) (6 to 8 servings)

In Iran, kashk now refers to either dry whey, which has to be reconstituted by soaking in water and pureeing, or a liquid ready-to-use form with a consistency of sour cream. Yogurt is not a substitute.

8 small eggplants, peeled, or 2 large eggplants, peeled and cut into ½-inch thick slices
About 2 tablespoons kosher salt for sprinkling
About ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil
2 medium yellow onions, chopped
2 to 3 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
¼ cup water
Salt and ground black pepper to taste
½ to 1 cup liquid kashk (thick reconstituted dried yogurt)
2 tablespoons minced fresh mint or 1 tablespoon dried

1. Sprinkle the eggplants with kosher salt, place in a colander or on a wire rack, and let stand for at least 1 hour. Rinse the eggplant under cold water, then press between several layers of paper towels, repeating pressing several times until it feels firm.
2. In a large, heavy pot, heat ¼ cup oil over medium heat. Add the eggplants and cook, turning occasionally, until tender, about 10 minutes. Remove the eggplants.
3. Add the onions and sauté until golden, about 15 minutes. Remove half of the onions and reserve. Add the garlic and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the tomato paste and stir until slightly darkened, about 2 minutes. Add the water, salt, and pepper.
4. Return the eggplants and stir and mash until smooth. Or transfer to a food processor and process until smooth. Add the kashk and simmer until heated through and the flavors have melded, about 15 minutes.
5. In a small saucepan, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil over medium heat. Add the mint and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Drizzle over the eggplant and sprinkle with the reserved onions. Serve warm with pita bread or lavash.



Kishk Soup (Ash-e Kashk/Shurabat al Kishk) (6 to 8 servings)

This basic soup is enriched with chopped carrots, potatoes, and other vegetables and lamb or goat.

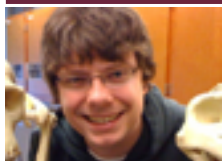
1½ cups (9 ounces) kishk/trahana
7 to 9 cups water or vegetable, chicken, lamb, or beef broth
¼ cup vegetable oil, olive oil, or clarified butter
2 medium onions, chopped
Salt and ground black pepper to taste
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley or 2 teaspoon dried mint (optional)

Soak the kishk in 1½ cups water for at least 30 minutes. In a large, heavy pot, heat the oil over medium-low heat. Add the onions and sauté until soft and translucent, about 10 minutes. Add the kishk and stir to coat. Add the remaining water, salt, and pepper and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the kishk is tender and the soup slightly thickened, 10 to 15 minutes. If using, stir in the parsley. It is usually served with pita bread and can be garnished with crumbled feta or halloumi cheese.

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Sex, Gender, and Diet in Primatological Perspective



By Elliott Forsythe

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Edited By Danielle Kuehnel

Proofread by Kamden Summers

Everyone enjoys the holiday season, unless you have the misfortune of enjoying the festivities with an anthropologist! Many of us in the anthropological world, particularly those of us with a primatological interest, have an unhealthy obsession with food, or more appropriately stated, an unhealthy obsession with feeding. Given our unnatural fixation on feeding, we are uniquely capable of analyzing every bite you take, every chew you make, and of course we are completely comfortable asking you to lean back and open up while we analyze your teeth ad nauseam. While we appreciate your cooperation in these activities, we are also trained voyeurs, so it is best to just accept that you are sharing a meal with a freak-of-academic-nature, and let us do our thing!

During the holiday season, my family is (un)fortunate enough to have two practicing dental anthropologists at the dinner table, myself and my wife, so everyone is on their best masticatory behavior; lips are tightly shut, food is finely trimmed, and not a word is peeped while chewing is underway. Even with this added layer of unnatural cloaking, my wife and I can't help but over-analyze every aspect of the holiday feast, and this year was no exception. While traveling home from our holiday celebration, the topic of gender differences in food choice and food processing came up in our post-holiday banter, and we were left wanting for an effective explanation of the feeding patterns we observed.

While perusing the holiday feast, I noticed that the men and the women who circulated around the breakfast buffet were making different food choices with some level of consistency. I made a mental note of this observation, and then stuffed my gullet with delicious food and let the observation simmer. During our travel-banter, my wife reminded me that her research had uncovered similar gender differences in feeding behaviors among the hunter-gatherer populations of the American Southeast (Forsythe and Prowse 2010). When we got home, I started throwing open some source books and journals, all of which confirmed that such differences were a rather commonly discussed topic in the archaeological literature (see Larsen 1998, Schmidt 2001, Ambrose et al. 2003). Males and females frequently differ in their diets in predictable ways, but it remains unclear exactly why such differences exist.

One possibility is that, within human societies, males and females differ in their diets for cultural rea-

sons: Men and women have different expectations placed upon them regarding what foods they will eat and also how they will eat those foods. Ethnographic data supports the idea that men and women differ in food preference in ways that are easily explicable in terms of ideologies of food, and additionally, men and women frequently have different roles in food procurement and processing, and these role differences manifest themselves in ideologies of "manly" and "womanly" foods (Berbesque and Marlow 2009, Marlowe and Berbesque 2009, Berbesque et al. 2010).

While the cultural explanations are effective and sufficient to explain sex-based feeding differences within human societies, they become ineffectual when the gendered dietary patterns of humans are situated within the broader framework of sex differences in diet among primates. Like human societies, primate troops are consistently observed to exhibit sex-based differences in food consumption, and the differences obviously lack an ideological underpinning, since primates presumably don't have complex ideologies about food, gender, or feeding like those observed among human societies. Among primate troops, sex-based differences in diet are usually functionally explicable; for example, females might consume more insects during lactation as an adaptive mechanism to maximize protein ingestion to offset the substantial protein costs of feeding young with protein-rich milk (Herrera and Heymann 2004). Of course, morphological differ-



Sooty Mangabey

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ences between males and females are also important determinants of sex-based differences in diet among primates—males, generally being bigger, have different abilities than generally smaller females, and as such consume foods more appropriate to their morphological abilities.

A fascinating article recently released in the American Journal of Physical Anthropology has shed some new light on the topic of morphologically explicable sex-based differences in diet among primates. McGraw et al. (2011) analyzed the consumption of foods by Sooty Mangabeys in Tai National Forest, located in the west African country of Côte d'Ivoire. Sooty Mangabeys have long been noted for their reliance on hard-to-masticate food items, and this study found that this was indeed the case: The mangabeys frequently chewed foods with the consistency of prune pits (even a cursory consideration of the masticatory forces involved in chewing such items makes my jaw hurt!) However, the use of these hard-to-chew food items was not randomly distributed among the members of the sooty mangabey troop. A clear trend toward sex-based differences in the utilization of these demanding foods was observed by the authors: Females consumed these foods less frequently than males, and more excitingly, males and females differed in how they processed hard food items. Males used more chews to process a hard food item than females, implying that they invested more effort in pro-



Sooty Mangabey

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cessing such foods. The reasons for these differences in food-processing are unclear, but one possible explanation is that the morphology of females offers them a biomechanical advantage over males that allows them to chew a particular food item less intensively than males to achieve the same result, giving the idea that females are the superior sex an entirely new meaning!

So who cares? These results suggest that some of the gender differences in diet observed among human societies, which undeniably are underlain by ideological factors and gender stereotypes related to food and feeding, may also have some biomechanical explanation. It is possible that some of the differences in food choices I observed during the holidays while analyzing my family's feeding behaviors are underlain by some functional difference(s) between the males and females making those choices. Do I have any idea what these differences might be? No; but I can guarantee that I will be watching my family members filling their plates and their stomachs next holiday season with an entirely new perspective, and I might just ask Santa for "family dental impressions"!

Send your questions and comments to eforsythe@popanthro.com.

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Meet W. Scott McGraw and the Sooty Mangabey

Sooty Mangabeys (*Cercocebus atys*) live in numerous countries in western Africa. Due in part to hunting and habitat clearance, they are considered one of the most endangered primate species alive today. They are highly terrestrial and are heavily reliant on fruits, seeds, and insects for sustenance. As discussed in this column, the use of hard food items is frequent, and varies by sex. Sooty Mangabeys are very commonly used in research related to HIV, and some important advances in HIV research have been made using these animals as models (Gron 2008). For more information on Sooty Mangabeys, visit Primate Info Net at http://pin.primate.wisc.edu/factsheets/entry/sooty_mangabey.

W. Scott McGraw received a PhD in anthropology from Stony Brook. His research focuses on the behavior and morphology of primates, especially those inhabiting Africa's West Coast. He currently holds a dual appointment in the Departments of Anthropology and

Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology at Ohio State University, and is also a Co-Director of the Tai Forest Monkey Project. More information on Dr. McGraw can be found at <http://anthropology.osu.edu/faculty/pages/mcgraw.php>.

The "Other" World Dance Department

Kathakali: Dance Drama from Kerala, 17th Century to Present



By Anisha Rajeev Kumar

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Edited By Danielle Kuehnel

Proofread by Kamden Summers

The sun drifts down behind the coconut trees as evening set in the open-aired theater. A breeze gently wafts the oil lamps that outlined a circular stage area, and the townspeople quietly rustle in their seats as they await the performance. The ponani, the main vocalist, begins to sing as the chenda drum accompanies him with the steady beat. The performer opens his eyes. His eyes, drawn out with black kohl, shift from side to side with the drum beat. His cheek muscles, painted green, move in a highly controlled manner as he uses intricate facial expressions. As the performer's feet, adorned with strings of bells, move gracefully under his large white skirt, his golden crown glistens in the lamps' light. The townspeople watch in hushed silence as the performer depicts the story scenes of the Pandava brothers in the famous Indian epic, the Mahabharata. The audience will return to the theatre every evening for the remainder of the Utsavam, or festival period in Kerala, India. The performances that generations of Keralites have witnessed for four centuries are of the dance drama art known as Kathakali.

Kathakali began in 17th century Kerala, the southernmost state in India, as a highly stylized form of classical dance drama. It incorporates drama styles from Koodiyattam, a Sanskrit theater form, and from Kalarippayattu, a martial

art form in Kerala. To preserve the unique cultural heritage of Kathakali, several patrons established the Kerala Kalamandalam, a teaching center for the Indian performing arts, in 1930. Though patronage dwindled during the mid-1900s as India underwent political and economic changes, Kathakali still remains in Kerala for the native people and foreign tourists during the festival celebrations.

The performers in Kathakali depict various mythological stories using five artistic elements: facial expressions (Natyam), dance movements (Nritham), physical enactment (Nrithyam), vocal accompaniment (Geetham), and instrumental accompaniment (Vadyam). The art requires intense concentration and physical stamina from 8 to 10 years of training; the dancers even undergo specific training to learn how to control their eye movements. One of the most fascinating aspects of Kathakali is the intricate makeup and attire of the performers. There are five categories of makeup and attire that identify the type of characters that the performer depicts: pacha (green), kathi (knife), kari (black), thaadi (beard), and minukku (shiny). Green makeup is used to depict noble characters and heroes, while red face makeup and beard is used to identify villains and demons. Almost all Kathakali performances use similar costumes so that the audience members can

easily identify the various characters in the familiar myths and tales.

Kathakali is an important art form that has preserved the Hindu religion and culture for hundreds of years. During the time of the feudal system in Kerala, Kathakali performances provided entertainment and religious education for illiterate sharecroppers who could not read the religious scriptures. In the 21st century, Kathakali continues to preserve the cultural stories from the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The visual appeal of these performances makes them a widely enjoyed tradition in annual festivals in towns across Kerala.

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Book Review

MODERN WICCA:

A History from Gerald Gardner to the Present by Michael Howard.

Llewellyn Publications. Woodbury, Minnesota. 2009. ISBN: 978-0-7387-1588-9. 338 pages. Soft cover book, \$19.95.

Book Review by Siobhan Idir

Edited by Jessica Hardin

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In *Modern Wicca: A History from Gerald Gardner to the Present*, Michael Howard examines the question of whether the Wiccan religion is an extension of ancient traditions, or, rather if it is a religion that was originally created by Gerald Gardner, from various religious and occult sources. Tracing the development of the religion from the 1930s to the present, Howard clearly connects the development of Wicca with changes in Euro-American culture during the 20th century. The author explores numerous perspectives on the practice and philosophy of the religion and shows the reader that whether or not Wicca is based on ancient traditions, the strength of contemporary Wicca is its adaptability and inclusivity. This book is a valuable source for anthropological research or for anyone interested in learning about the history and contemporary Wicca.

As a practitioner of Wicca with over 40 years of experience in the neo-Pagan community and long-time editor of the *The Cauldron*, a respected neo-Pagan magazine, Howard has a unique perspective on the development of this religion. Like any good historian, Howard is steadfast in his discussions of the lives and actions of the major movers in the development of Wicca. He does not paint an overly idealized picture of the past or the present, but instead investigates the various developments of the religion and critically analyzes the arguments both for and

against change to religious practice. Howard does this in such a way that both Wiccans and non-practitioners can understand. By tracing historical developments, he also discusses much of the foundational philosophy and practice and how this has changed over time.

In order to understand contemporary Wiccan belief and practice, Howard discusses the life and beliefs of Gerald Gardner, the controversial founder of the Wiccan religion who worked to increase accessibility and knowledge of witchcraft. As Gardner and his followers claim, he set down the rules governing covens and synthesized the practices and beliefs of ancient Celtic witchcraft into the religion of Wicca. Of primary interest to Howard is the claim that Gardnerian Wicca is a faithful recreation of a prehistoric European witchcraft.

Howard begins his inquiry into Wicca ancestry by exploring Gardner's privileged beginnings and his many travels and experiences with different cultures and religions. Howard paints a picture of Gardner as a magnetic and compelling character who was initiated into many different cults and covens. According to many of his own initiates, Gardner was prone to attention-getting behaviors and stretching the truth (Howard 2009: 9, 58). Howard unflinchingly portrays Gardner as a product of his time. Even though he brought a religion that focused on a Goddess as well as a God into the

public eye and was responsible for initiating and training many High Priestesses, there was still a great deal of sexism in the structure of covens and within the religion itself (Howard 2009: 146), which was not changed until the feminist revolution of the 1960s and 70s (Howard 2009: 229).

In the 1950s, during the early stages of the religion, there was a great deal of argument and turmoil over who defined what Wicca was and how it should be portrayed to the world. Gardner viewed himself as the champion and public voice of an ancient and besieged religion. Publicity grabbing was a major part of these early stages and Howard provides a nuanced examination of the benefits and costs of these early attention-getting tactics. Howard describes the 1950s through the 1970s, after the repeal of the anti-witchcraft laws in the United Kingdom, as a time when many of the main figures in the religion were actively engaging the public and seeking initiates by writing books about the religion, founding museums, participating in interviews, and even televising rituals.

However, there were negative repercussions to this increased public attention. During this period, the media almost universally portrayed witches as evil satanic practitioners (Howard 2009: 138-139, 143). Wicca was often described as a conspiracy that was threatening to British (or American) ways of life. Socially

this had consequences for practitioners, for example, the young daughter of Monique and Scotty Wilson was temporarily seized by the state because she participated in rituals with her parents and it was assumed that she was forced to participate in abusive satanic rituals (Howard 2009: 169). Some members of the more public covens were investigated by the police and ostracized within their communities, losing their jobs and their reputations (Howard 2009: 144, 157, 202).

This discrimination created a great deal of tension within the Pagan community. Much infighting ensued, which was focused on the traditional demand for secrecy and the new approach of attracting members through public avenues (Howard 2009: 145-146). Gardner saw himself as actively fighting for the survival of a dying religion and believed that public attention and education was the only way to achieve this. Even though this caused trouble for practitioners, Howard points out the many ways that this publicity did in fact attract many new initiates. These initiates might not have otherwise heard of Wicca, and this expansion and publicity put Wicca on the path to acceptance as a legitimate religion.

Starting in the 1960s, Wicca moved away from the sexism of the previous era and was co-opted by the feminist movement as a religion that valued and revered women (Howard 2009: 227, 229-230). Heterosexism, or discrimination against non-heteronormative sexuality, was slower to change but today there are very few covens or community groups that would turn away non-heteronormative individuals. The religion also became more political in nature, with many adherents arguing that it is not enough to worship the Earth and value life through ritual; one must also take the moral responsibility of protecting the Earth and the life on it. Since the 1960s, politically-oriented organizations, like the Covenant of the

Goddess and the Pagan Federation, have formed to advocate for the legitimacy of Wicca as a religion and for the rights of Wiccans and followers of other pagan traditions.

As for the ancient roots of the religion, Howard conducts a detailed examination of past historical studies of the origins of Wicca and personal interviews with various Wiccan and traditional practitioners. He looks to Gardner's encounters with various religious and occult groups for the sources of Wiccan practice and doctrine. Howard conveys well the frustration of trying to gain information concerning religious and occult traditions that closely conceal their teachings and often their very existence. It is the traditional witchcraft of Britain that is the most difficult to obtain consistent and reliable information about and it is this very tradition that Gardner purportedly was preserving. Howard wrestles with this slippery subject for several pages offering various sources from personal interviews and written reports of historical English witches from the nineteenth and the turn-of-the-twentieth century. In his examination, he searches for the possible existence of traditional English witchcraft and the validity (or lack thereof) of Gardner's claims to preserving it. In the end, he concludes that many of these sources were likely erroneous. Howard argues that many practitioners who claimed to have come from 'original' witch families in England, may have done so in order to increase their status in the Wiccan community because they provided no proof of their assertions. Unfortunately, an emphasis on secrecy concerning coven members, places, beliefs, and ritual practices make it almost impossible to prove their validity.

Howard concludes there is almost no way to know whether Wicca is truly based on old and secretive English covens, let alone validate their connection to a larger system of pre-Christian Celtic religion or

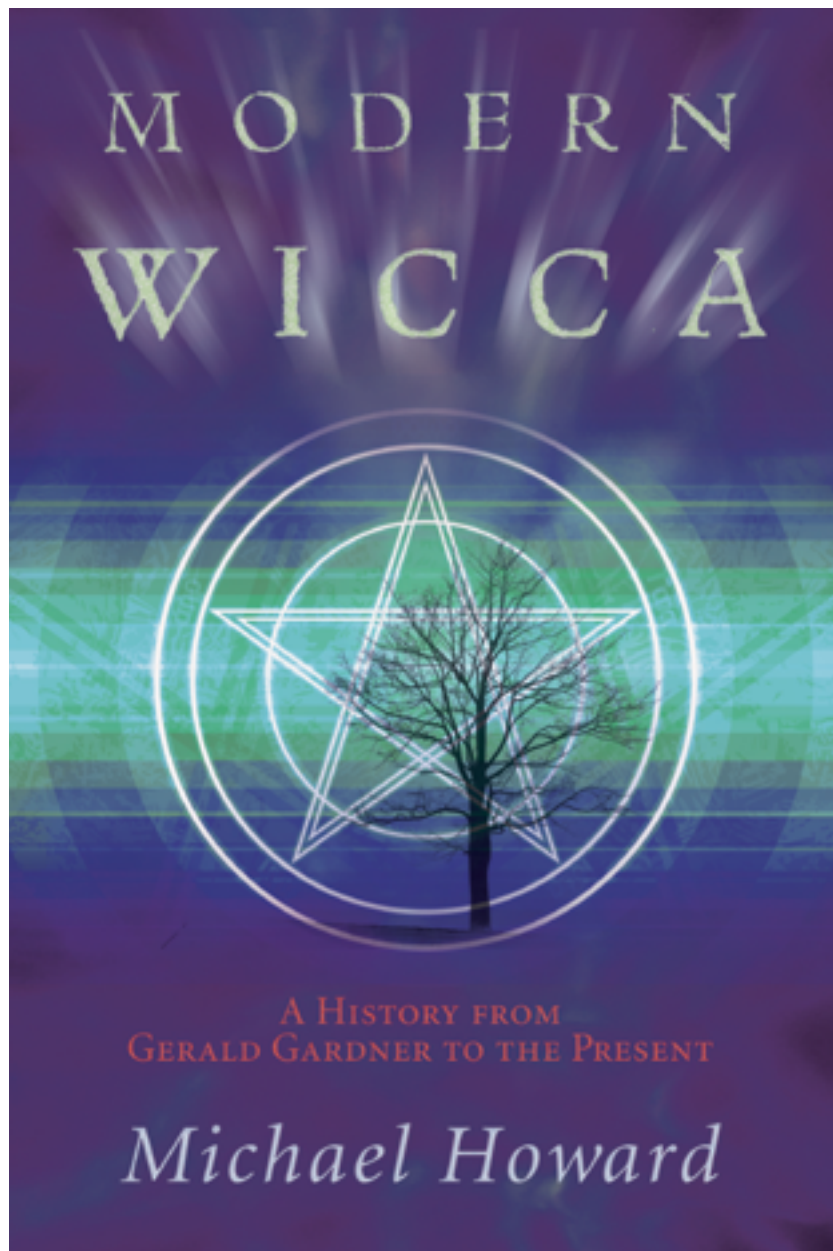
a prehistoric matriarchal spirituality, which some have argued is the foundation of the religion. He finally puts questions concerning the antiquity of the religion to rest and explores all the ways that Wicca resembles better known traditions. It is here that he shows the strong influence of the Golden Dawn, the Rosicrucians, the Free Masons, and the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) on the formation of Wicca. Howard discusses the many ritual practices and philosophies taken from the above sources and highlights how they were incorporated into Gardner's *Book of Shadows*¹.

Howard shows the reader that despite claims to the antiquity of the religion, it is really a religion built from many sources. He argues that some of these sources are older than others and traditional Celtic witchcraft may have contributed to it, but it certainly was not the only source. Therefore, the religion is not a faithful replica of a mysterious past, but is a modern religion pieced together from the practices and philosophies of many traditions.

Howard strives to provide a diversity of perspectives and it is clear that he is writing both to a Pagan and a non-Pagan audience. Exploring a diversity of belief and practice shows that there is a plurality of perspectives within the religion. In this way, he challenges many stereotypes of modern witchcraft, which either portrays practitioners as overly zealous tree huggers who are ill-informed and out-of-touch with reality or as mysterious and vindictive Satanists. Howard favors a more liberal perspective and generally lauds the recent changes in the religion. Ultimately, he sees Wicca as a modern religion whose adaptability and inclusivity has contributed to the increase in its adherents because of its applicability to their lives. Rituals, symbols, and philosophy from many religions, including Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and some Native Ameri-

can traditions, have been absorbed into modern Wiccan practice. It is thus not uncommon to find Wiccan rituals with a multiplicity of religious and cultural elements.

This book is a valuable resource for anthropologists who study neo-Pagan communities around the world, providing an historical basis from which to begin studying the Wiccan religion and provides a variety of sources and perspectives to explore. Wicca in the United States is different than it is in the British Isles. Both, in turn, are very different from the religion as it is expressed in South Africa, Australia, and India. There are many perspectives and many different groups, but Howard points to the fact that (at least in the U.S. and Europe) neo-Pagan festivals (like the Pagan Spirit Gathering) and websites (such as WitchVox) have become a unifying force in the religion. It is within these venues that Wicca is expressed and knowledge is shared. Anthropologists can gain a view of the current controversies and debates, such as the glamorizing of the religion, the loss of mystery traditions, the continuing legal battles for recognition and against discrimination by other religions, and the political nature of the religion from this book. Modern Wicca provides an important basis for the further study of Wiccan communities.



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