

decades of fieldwork among the Saramaka, but really ranging across several centuries—often in the form of dizzying time-travel instigated by Tooy Alexander, Saramaka obiaman, philosopher, trickster and merchant of astonishment—*Travels With Tooy* is an ethnographic tour de force; it is a powerful meditation on anthropological knowledge itself; and it is a riveting narrative rendered (as none other than George Lamming notes) in a style as lucid and cordial as the best contemporary fiction. If you have not read it yet, I promise you will not easily put it down.

Conceptually, *Travels With Tooy* is a beautiful evocation of the intersections between several different, but connected worlds—worlds that are linked both in terms of a *longue durée* of structural relations (after all, Suriname's Maroons were always part of "our modern world"), and in the more intimate sense that Price so beautifully conjures up: a fortuitous intertwining of the lives of very differently positioned individuals, enabled by mutual respect, curiosity and friendship. Although Price has portrayed individual Saramaka *savants* before, here he achieves what few other ethnographers have even attempted (and then usually not done very well)—namely to refract a whole world through the story, imagination, and not the least relationships with humans and spirits, past and present, of one single person. But of course, as one of our jurors remarked, for that you also need a ritual specialist of Tooy's caliber—and he certainly is as rare and, I would add, as much of a *character* as Victor Turner's Muchona the Hornet. Though Price is quite explicit in assuming authorship over the book—with all the ethical and moral quandaries this implies—*Travels With Tooy* is also very much Tooy's book, and who knows? Perhaps Rich Price won't even have to move to Cayenne to fulfill Tooy's dream that they might one day join forces and combine their respective knowledge and skills in Tooy's *obia* practice. I think they have done so already.

The result of their labors, at any rate, is an enchantingly rich and richly enchanting book. Surely a benchmark not just in the anthropology of religion, but in our discipline as a whole—and I am glad that we can add SAR's Geertz Prize to the others it has already garnered. Richard Price could not be at the awards ceremony in Philadelphia, but I trust he was with us in spirit, conveying his remarks to us through the good offices of his University of Chicago Press editor, and now medium, David T Brent.

Please send column ideas, news and items of interest to Jennifer Selby at jselby@mun.ca.

Society for Cultural Anthropology

JEAN M LANGFORD, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Spring Conference in Santa Fe

The long-awaited SCA spring conference will be held on May 7 and 8, 2010 in the historic

La Fonda Hotel in Santa Fe. The overwhelming response to the call for papers (twice what could be accommodated in the program) promises an exciting spectrum of work on the theme of "Nature/Cultures: Entangled Relations of Multiplicity."

In addition to papers, the conference features a photography exhibit as well as a showing of the film *Sweetgrass*, directed by Ilisa Barbash (curator, Peabody Museum) and Lucien Castaing-Taylor (anthropology, visual and environmental studies, Harvard U). This film on shepherders and sheep in Montana has been praised as an "intimate, beautifully shot examination of the connection between man and beast" (Manohla Dargis, *New York Times*), and "a film of subtle shifts and slowly dawning disclosures" (Andrew Schenker, *Artforum*).

Plenary speakers include: Debbora Battaglia (Mt Holyoke C), "No Longer an Earthling"; Judith Farquhar (anthropology, U Chicago), "Information Databases, Knowing Traditions"; Stefan Helmreich (anthropology, MIT), "Nature/Culture/Water"; and Sarah Whatmore (geography and the environment, U Oxford), "Affective Environments: Thinking through Flooding."

Donna Haraway (history of consciousness, UC Santa Cruz) will deliver the David Schneider Memorial Lecture "Staying with the Trouble: Xenoecologies of Home for Companions in the Contact Zones," in conversation with John Law (sociology, Lancaster U). In her abstract Haraway writes:

David Schneider and I took up dog training together in the early 1980s in California. Whipped into tolerable shape by the writing of master trainer and philosopher Vicki Hearne, through the many emails we exchanged over the course

of our flawed efforts to learn the choreography of obedience, David and I formed a life changing companionship with each other, as well as with his George and mine, and my partner Rusten's Sojourner and Alexander Berkman. George, Sojourner and Alexander taught us to stay with the trouble because they deserved no less; they made an ethical claim on us rooted in their capacity for response in what I might as well call "the open." I miss David deeply; speaking at SCA in his honor is terrifying because I am claiming him as kin—ancestor, mentor and fellow human who was undone and redone by the details of training together, of becoming with a nonhuman partner. Most of my own work these days asks what it could possibly mean to inherit the histories of companion species on a blasted earth where getting on together is still the task. I read Derrida's words—"Inheritance is never a given; it is always a task. It remains before us"—through the lens of David Schneider's queries about

the very idea of kinship. In that spirit, I turn to urban chickens on two continents, Asian water buffalo in Australia, and Churro sheep in the Navajo Nation and California. Multispecies contact zones in these stories are where the tools for inheriting the trouble so as to leave more quiet country might be forged.

Companion species "break bread" together at table; it's in the word itself—*cum panis*, with bread. Who is on the menu at this table is a question of ethical, political and ecological urgency... I want to ask what it might mean for human-animal studies in the ethnographic mode to face those who come before, so as to leave quieter, less wild country to those who come after. In other words, what might it mean to inherit the past thickly in the present so as to age the future? ...If we are not all to be poor in world, in multispecies webs, we have to do much better than Heidegger's open! That requires companions' eating well, never a pretty sight.

Learn more about the conference program at <http://sca.culanth.org/meetings/sca/2010/intro.html>.



Santa Fe, NM. Photo courtesy Jean M Langford

Contributions to this column should be sent to Jean M Langford, Department of Anthropology, HHH 395, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455; fax 612/625-3095; langf001@umn.edu. The SCA website is found at <http://sca.culanth.org>. For a direct link to the website for Cultural Anthropology go to www.culanth.org.

Society for East Asian Anthropology

JENNIFER HUBBERT AND GORDON MATHEWS, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Junjie Chen, contributor of this month's column, is the recipient of the 2009 Theodore C Bestor Prize for the Outstanding Graduate Paper in East Asian Anthropology.

Performing the Family Planning Project in Post-Socialist China

By Junjie Chen (U Illinois-Urbana Champaign)

One summer morning in 2005, I traveled to a township seat near the eastern edge of River Crossing village in north-east China. At the courtyard in front of the new, five-story main building, a shiny, black Nissan Infiniti sedan had just arrived from the county authority. Escorted by several local officials, two county government officials began to review the township government's preparation for a showcase "On-the-Spot Presentation on Family Planning," to be held that afternoon.



During the scheduled showcase event, an inspection party—comprised of officials at several levels of government—would come to examine "on-the-spot" the township's achievements in implementing the state's birth control policy. That day, journalists and news reporters would also follow the inspection party's entire review tour. The event would be publicized across the province via newspaper and television. Through satellite TV and the Internet, the showcase presentation might reach national and even international audiences.

Writ large, this image-managing event encapsulates China's recent, post-socialist transformation since the 1990s. Over the past three decades, China became notorious for its stringent population control policy. However, around the turn of the new millennium, the post-socialist Chinese state became preoccupied with constructing an internationally acceptable image of its population policy. While eagerly participating in the capitalist world economy, the state also revised its birth policy, claiming to provide rural women with more "humane services" for their reproductive health.

In this paper, I interrogate the township government's showcase presentation on family planning by unpacking layers of interrelated discursive, symbolic and sociopolitical forces that came to converge at and shape the event. I first question the local authority's quasi-cult-like discourse of "Bearing Fewer Children, Prosper Quickly" beneath its seemingly "modern" and graceful verbal and visual articulations, undergirded by the post-socialist state's obsession with its contemporary version of commodity fetishism. Starting from this perspective, I came to see the showcase presentation as a ritual performance. Following Maurice Bloch, I treat this ritual as a form of ideology that highlighted implicit discourses and values underpinning the state's everyday practices, thus serving to legitimize the local government's continuous claims on what might otherwise be village women's private experiences of reproduction.

Building upon these observations, I further foreground entrenched social contradictions in rural everyday life surrounding family plan-

ning during the nation's current post-socialist moment. I link the showcase event with the local authority's active accommodation of nearly impassable class gaps between elite oligarchy and the rank-and-file, without any foreseeable intention to counter the tendency. This reveals how the showcase event has simultaneously created a political and ritual space as a platform on which state agents and local elites could pursue their distinctive yet interlinked interests. This showcase presentation was highly emblematic of China's emerging post-socialist conditions—a living depiction of the state's birth control efforts in rural China, held in a context of the nation's active efforts to "globalize." China's current globalized discourse surrounding the "humane" family planning program in rural areas has to a large degree become "showbiz," manipulated by the state and its local elites to seek their distinctive organizational and personal gains, regardless of how ordinary villagers might feel toward and view that program.

Given intensifying class gaps, it seems doubtful that the post-socialist Chinese state's embrace of the capitalist marketplace will prove to be the "gospel of salvation" for its ordinary subjects that its agents now claim. Taking the family planning program as an example, this paper suggests an engaged reading of China's emerging post-socialist conditions by foregrounding intensifying class-based social rifts and their serious real-life repercussions for ordinary peasants' daily lives, including reproduction. I hope this paper offers insight into the intensely human experience of China's post-socialism and associated globalizing efforts as they are reconfigured in the seemingly intimate space of reproduction.

Please send contributions to this column to Jennifer Hubbert (hubbert@lclark.edu) or Gordon Mathews (cmgordon@cuhk.edu.hk).

Society for Humanistic Anthropology

FREDERIC W GLEACH AND VILMA SANTIAGO-IRIZARRY, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

"Fraser's mother, Janice, was actually quite a happy soul but she had to hide it because, like all pseudo-intellectuals, she thought being cheery made her look stupid, which of course she was for believing that rubbish in the first place."

—Craig Ferguson, *Between the Bridge and the River*

Like many we know, we are huge fans of Craig Ferguson, best known as the host of CBS' *Late Late Show*. "It's a great day for America!" he proclaims at the opening of each night's show, having proudly become a US citizen in 2008. Not that he's some kind of jingoistic unreflexive nation-booster; indeed, from both his

commentaries and writing it's clear that he's more aware than most of both our shortcomings and strengths. But it is a great day, as ultimately is any day on which one wakes up alive and has the opportunity to, as the founding fathers put it, pursue happiness.

We've written before in this column about the value of finding and using humor in our work, and the kind of reactions we've gotten from audiences reflecting how uncommon that actually can be. Are we as a profession dominated by pseudo-intellectuals afraid to be seen being cheery? Is all of academia so situated? Certainly it can sometimes seem so, although we're not prepared to make the argument here (just suggest the question). And there may be no bigger laugh than when one catches oneself falling into the pseudo-intellectual trap of taking oneself too seriously....

In addition to his novel quoted above, Ferguson has recently published what we hope is only the first of his memoirs, *American by Choice*, in which he documents his life with all its mistakes and chaotic, sometimes nonsensical glory. Both books offer impressive—and often hilarious—insight into western culture and those of us who live in it. Less well-known perhaps is the series he wrote and hosted for Scottish television, *The Dirt Detective* (1994), in which he explored Scottish history through archaeology, historical sites and archival materials. The series is much better than most such efforts, in no small part due to the humor Ferguson brought to the presentation. Seeing this provided understanding to the otherwise odd fact, in the late-night TV world, that one of his recurring guests is an archaeologist, with whom he talks intelligently about the past.

We are such fans that we followed Craig in joining Twitter—which we, and he, had frequently derided—just to "follow" him there, to be part of what he calls his Robot Skeleton Army, looking forward (with humor) to the day when he directs his evil empire from a hollowed-out volcano island fortress. And with luck, puppet performances of popular music.... We know of other anthropologists who could say the same—although we won't name them!—with whom we solemnly declare that we do this only as an ethnographic exercise. As scholars of the US, that is certainly true, and it is equally true that as teachers of American young people it behooves us to stay attuned to American popular culture. But ultimately it's something more: it's a reminder to try and keep a sense of humor, especially self-disparaging humor, even in our most serious situations—and of course the reverse, that there is serious substance often of great import even in the most humorous situation. Craig Ferguson, as humanistic social scientists, we salute you!

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