

ANTHROPOLOGY IN PRACTICE

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President's Report

Sometimes a few well-chosen words lay bare the essence of a situation far better than do page after page of tightly-reasoned analysis. Consider the following, a masterful example from the pen of Clifford Geertz: One of the advantages of anthropology as a scholarly enterprise is that no one, including its practitioners, quite knows what it is" (*Available Light*, 2000). Geertz's observation provided a fine place to begin the course on social and cultural theory I offered last term, pointing as it does to the discipline's split

personality, part scientific in character, part humanistic. In my estimation, it also speaks to the present state of affairs in SAAM, an organization given to wrestling with an identity crisis all its own. I am reminded of this whenever the executive convenes. All agreed that facilitating the exchange of information has been, and must remain central to SAAM's purpose, especially in cases of marginalized and/or dissident points of view.

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SAAM speaker Silvia Martins,
January 2, 2006

More problematic is whether, as some urged, advocacy also entails collective commitment to practical action on behalf of select initiatives—in issues pertaining to the Aboriginal community, for instance, or to people with disabilities. Admittedly, reaching consensus on collective courses of action, let alone on which causes to adopt, is no mean trick. Yet sticking with the more limited conception of advocacy hardly undermines an activist agenda altogether. On the contrary, it allows SAAM to be different things to different people, for some a public forum for education and debate, for others a catalyst to more engaged citizenship, and so on. By all indications, we have been doing this all along. Hence, the advantage highlighted in Geertz's remark.

As for attracting new members ... any suggestions?

On an entirely different note, SAAM has been privileged this year to sponsor a number of excellent public presentations, each on quite different topics of local and global interest. Leading off the program at the September AGM was George Fulford's talk on Aboriginal language retention in northern Manitoba. (More about that appears in later pages.) A second autumn session featured a screening of the award-winning film "Lost Boys." It documents the personal struggles of young Sudanese men made orphans and refugees by war and then brought to the U.S. in hopes of rebuilding their lives. Afterward UW student Michael Mayen, himself a Sudanese refugee, spoke to the situation of Winnipeg's

"lost boys and girls," a community of some 200 whose own experiences of adjusting to new surroundings made for interesting comparison with the situation depicted in the film. Yet further comparative perspective, though now on a totally different subject, was offered in January's presentation by visiting Brazilian anthropologist Silvia Martins. She provided an in depth look at the critical question of indigenous land rights in that country's northeast, detailing in particular the less cumbersome—by Canadian standards, at least—approach of state policy with respect to recognizing rights and implementing claims. One, possibly two more presentations will round out this year's program. On February 25, consultant Linda Larcombe will speak about successful partnerships and partnership-building between First Nations communities and anthropologists. And in what we expect to be a most appropriate wrap-up, an invitation has been extended to recently-retired UM professor Raymond Wiest to offer a retrospective on his career-long commitment to applied anthropology in the developing world. Word has it he's accepted. Stay tuned for details.

On a final note, I'd like to use this page to extend personal thanks to members of the executive for their various contributions during the year, and especially to Doug Hamm, SAAM's webmaster. He has done a commendable job of sprucing up our presence on the web—check it out at <http://www.saaminc.org/> — keeping the site up-to-date with news of

presentations and other items of interest. Equally noteworthy is Doug's brand new initiative—still in the trial stage—to facilitate the exchange of information and opinion via an electronic bulletin-board. For the curious among you, the address is <http://s15.invisionfree.com/SAAM/index.php>. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome.

Barnett Richling

Up [with] the Anthropologist: Facing Local and Transnational Initiatives to Apply [my] Anthropology

by Raymond Wiest

The relationship between our research objectives and the real life “fieldwork” scenarios we consciously drop ourselves into can be full of surprises. It is no surprise that these things are related; even the “structural-functionalists” of decades gone by appreciated the relationship of observer and observed, though their written ethnography often forced time to a standstill and the observer aside, betraying any sense of dynamism and dialectic because the epistemology of the time coped with observer bias through adherence to logical positivism and scientific methodology. Today we openly acknowledge and give

substantial attention to the complex intertwinement of researchers and the researched; much recent written ethnography builds centrally upon researcher reflexivity, sometimes to an extent that the ethnographic gaze is more navel than social, more revealing of the gazer than the gazed. For me, it is important to strike some balance between reflexivity and representation of “others”. Although never yet addressed more than superficially in formal terms, my research experiences always have been coloured strongly by a monitoring of my own self-awareness in relationship to my research objectives.

I recently returned from about six weeks of fieldwork in Anchorage, Alaska, and another nine weeks of fieldwork in Acuitzio del Canje, Michoacan, Mexico - the third year of a three-year SSHRC research grant. These most recent experiences “in the field” have shaped new relationships and redefined responsibilities and opportunities, giving reason to reflect critically on my role as observer and interpreter of local events, relationships, and symbols, and pointedly ponder the relationship between local initiatives desirous of applied anthropology and my own research objectives and limitations. Since my research in one community of Mexico has considerable time-depth - passing 39 years since my first arrival there in 1966 - I've had reason to reflect on changes that have reshaped my relationship with the community.

My experience among these villagers in Anchorage, Alaska

sharpened my sense of “social class”, making me rethink my representation of the community. It drew out an important difference between these transnational migrants and the representations coming from the majority of writers on Mexican labour migrants in the US. Social class always needed to be reckoned with, despite the difficulties of representing it adequately when speaking in local terms (e.g., a village or town), but not until now did it appear necessary to differentiate communities like Acuitzio from Mexican agrarian communities in general. Although there are overlapping Mexican agrarian scenarios, structures, and processes that have been taken for granted and unquestioned in the literature to date, I would argue now that the majority of migrants from Acuitzio who venture to Alaska (and a few other locations) are relatively privileged in terms of social class; they bring to bear a significant social capital uncharacteristic of rural Mexican migrants. To explain why this is so must remain the subject of another project underway, but I note it here as part of a new social “reality” of the community characterized by discourse around self, community, class and national identity. Perhaps the greatest difference between earlier years and now is the rising consciousness within the community of relationships beyond the town, i.e., an explicit sense of identity consciousness, struggles with contradictions, and self-analyses of transnational labour migration impacts that, interestingly, parallel my own analyses and writings of earlier years. What are some practical implications of the relationship between my research

agenda and initiatives within the community, i.e., how is this affecting applied dimensions of this project?

The marked shift in outlook of migrant labourers coincides with the politicization of migrants abroad, the organization of expatriate workers in places like Chicago, that has given rise to “three for one” programs – joint initiatives characterized by migrant aggregate contributions that are matched by Mexican municipalities and the federal government for agreed-upon projects to be undertaken in their Mexican communities of origin. Upon noting this project’s first introduction to Acuitzio in 2004, my attention was drawn immediately to the general mistrust in the population – naysayers bearing ages-old arguments that such projects are designed to benefit individuals and certain families rather than the community as a whole. As usually is the case, without clear demonstration of the objectives or realization of something concrete, suspicions dominate; history is on the side of good reason for public suspicion. However, the meeting I was invited to in fall 2004 focused on community projects – reparations to the performing arts centre in the town, a library, and other facilities in the community (my own suggestion was to address garbage disposal by initiating and supporting a recycling program). Recognizing the long-standing characteristic mistrust in “peasant” agrarian communities, a prominent state government official, in the context of the fall 2005 formal announcement of future “three for one” projects in Acuitzio, publicly addressed very

explicitly the historic problem of lack of confidence. And on this occasion more than thirty computers were distributed to three schools, a concrete act that caught the imagination of people in the community and gave renewed meaning to 1960s anthropologist Charles Erasmus' claim for the significance of "demonstration effect" in culture change. Mobilization of senior women in the town was formally recognized, along with announcement of property donation and public ceremony to lay the cornerstone for a planned senior citizens residence. In these well-attended public events, the attending anthropologist, active as just another photographer of the event, was deeply surprised by public acknowledgement for "being a pioneer in the study of migration of Michoacanos to the United States".

Although already recognized and well accepted in this community, these public events marked a turning point for me. People who accepted and supported my presence seemed now to have a clearer understanding of the relevance of my work, and political actors who had previously received my introductions with naive courtesy, now clamoured for interviews, or arranged for media interviews, to learn more of the anthropologist's story - why I chose this place, my view of labour migration and the potential of these projects for the community, my view of local politics, etc. The audience of curiosity and interest suddenly widened, a change I attribute more to a new consciousness in the community over anything I had done. There were other things happening too. The many photos

I had left with villagers over the years since 1966 were being brought to me to recall earlier days. My photographic record of events, persons, edifices, etc. took on new importance. Previous private appreciation of the photographic record was turned into public recognition of its historic value to community. My children's generation is now eager to assemble a richer historical record, in part to fulfill its needs for imagery in support of a new emphasis on tourism - restaurants, expositions, cultural activities, etc. The videos that I left in the hands of the only individual then capable of safeguarding these films were now being remembered and requested more widely. A native son who became a world-class photographer, an avid mountaineer and advocate of ecotourism, asked to collaborate in presentation of photos and a film on the community. Suddenly all that history and the legacy of my work was becoming a focus of attention. These local initiatives are not isolated; they are part of a new momentum among transnational workers from across central Mexico to formally recognize the economic and cultural contributions of expatriate workers through formation of migrant labour associations recognized and supported by state governments, to use this recognition to advance cooperative projects designed to benefit Mexican communities highly dependent on migrant remittances.

New attention to the anthropologist's work has led to new expectations. Some are consistent with planned dissemination of information,

e.g., press interviews, public lectures, and written commentary for migrant association publications. Some are pressures to reprioritize planned projects for delivery of results sought in support of local initiatives; these are projects based largely in my photographic record, are consistent with the overall research plan, but that distract from the immediate research agenda. Still other expectations arising from the new community-centred enthusiasm are contrary to the anthropologist's program of research, both procedurally and ethically, such as sharing with municipal government workers my contact information on transnational migrants. Although interested in assisting with organization of migrant associations, I found it necessary to firmly explain the importance of confidentiality and anonymity in our work. Fortunately, the line I could draw between support of municipal initiatives and protection of the data collected was appreciated and respected, but the request renewed my resolve to remain vigilant, to speak and write with caution but at the same time remain open and accessible, and to not lose sight of my own research agenda. After all, it seems to be serving this community well.

*Raymond Wiest, Professor Emeritus-elect, Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, recently retired after teaching and researching this department since 1968. Ray was a previous President of SAAM, and is co-editor of the SAAM publication, **Globalization and Community: Canadian Perspectives.***

Editor's corner

This will be a very small corner this time, since other contributors have done my job so well! Dr. Richling and Dr. Fulford have provided a nice summary of our last meetings, and Dr. Richling also presented the main ideas discussed in our executive meeting.

This last executive meeting gave us a renewed sense of purpose. SAAM remains a lively association, and the diversity of our interests is well reflected in the different presentations that provoked our reflexion over the last few months. Our next speakers will be an archaeologist (Dr. Linda Larcombe) and Dr. Ray Wiest, whose retirement was celebrated recently by a crowd of friends, colleagues and former students. Far from abandoning the ship, Ray Wiest is still very much immersed in research and we look forward to his presentation, the last of this academic year.

I had the pleasure to include in today's Newsletter contributions from Menno Wiebe and George Fulford. I hope that their example will inspire others (that includes students as well as non-academics) to contribute their thoughts to our next Newsletter.

Jean-Luc Chodkiewicz

Book review

A Native American Theology. Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley and George E. Tinker editors, Orbis Books 2002

Three American Native authors combine their writings by presenting a cross-cultural theology for a non-native reading audience. In their various viewpoints, separately rooted in different Native identities, the authors, Kidwell, Noley and Tinker, attempt to cast the spectrum of Native theology.

The publication of 204 pages presents a total of 70 short vignettes in 10 brief chapters. Inclusion of the wide range of topics, as an attempt to accommodate substantial cultural variation within the spectrum of Native identities makes somewhat of an eclectic first reading. Even so, there are several important, consistent themes running throughout, that give the book its character.

Taking a stance of theological discovery rather than of prescriptive faith, the three authors go in search for pre-European Native beliefs. Then, through a forum of dialogue, they test their findings within the widely diverse spectrum of elemental beliefs. Their introductory comment "we cannot allow someone else to remember or dream on our behalf," prompts innovative dreaming on their own.

Although specific identification with Christian theology is absent in the title wording it is clear from the opening pages that a search is underway for expressing the Christian faith story in the context of North American

worldviews. As a counterpart to Christian reliance on the biblical record and precedence in church histories, the authors look to native legends, rituals and ceremonies as information sources. The authors also regard their own elders as current custodians of traditional belief. They warn however, against mercenary pop-indian spirituality displayed outside the Native community and without Native assent.

The fact that Christianity has been presented all too long through European eyes reflects the disregard for the Christian message itself as thoroughly cross cultural in nature. Bypassing Indian Weltanschauung or over-riding it has reaped its esoteric rewards in Christian missions. Thus the authors seek reversal of this mission stance, advocating rebirth rather than assimilation of Indian cultures. Eradication of Indian cultures, including belief, is not seen as a prerequisite for embrace of Christianity. Issue is here taken with English colonizers who sought to employ the Christian faith to justify their invasion. Similarly, the authors lament conversion as a front for assimilation.

The dream of Native theological fulfillment lies, for the authors, in rebirth of Native cultural identity. That dream stands in courageous opposition to the overwhelming melting pot notion of the Euro-American mind set. The freedom of interpreting Christian theology through Native eyes emerges as paramount. An Indian hermeneutic is, for them, the issue in theological self-

discovery. The authors insist that Indian Christians can no longer “accede to being consumers of European theological ideas.”(p. 2)

Eschatological thinking, for instance, is not cast into a futuristic, otherworldly existence, but perceived as renewal of family based community life. Thus eschatological hopes are expressed in terms of Native cultural renaissance(p.153). It is via the ceremony that such renewal is achieved. Citing several legends, the authors portray destruction by earthquakes, severe weather occurrences, birth and death, as part of the recurring cycle of nature. Human participation in the renewal process is made possible by the immanence of the deity (p.153).

In part the authors rely on the Sioux lawyer-theologian, Vine Deloria Jr. who, in “God is Red” addressed the issue of cross-cultural Christianity already in the 60’s. If, as Deloria then observed, Christianity had not yet taken root on American soil, then the present theological cultivation of Kidwell, Noley and Tinker may well prepare a seedbed for the sprouting of indigenous Christian faith.

Students of missiology and church workers serving in native communities could derive great benefit from regarding this book as a much-needed Native feedback to their studies and proclamation.

Menno Wiebe

Time’s depth

*not everything
that could or should be known
can be gathered
on life’s surfaces*

*not all the data
nor meanings of the facts
of things quantified
can be learned externally*

*not everything
is embedded in soils upper crust
nor confined to single layers
underneath our feet*

*since planet earth
with all that percolates within
offers precedence of thought
in layered wisdoms
well below that path
where human footprints lose
their mark
against the fickle winds of time.*

Menno Wiebe

– in response to Sylvia Martin’s SAAM presentation, January 2, 2006

Understanding Language Shift in Northern Manitoba

by George Fulford

Language shift happens when the speakers of one language begin to adopt another as their mother tongue. It frequently occurs when the speakers of two neighbouring languages interact with each other in a situation in which one language becomes valued more highly than another. Over time language shift can lead to language death – the extinction of a living language. All of the 60 or so Aboriginal languages currently spoken in Canada are experiencing language shift (generally from the Aboriginal language to English); only three (Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut) are considered not to be endangered.

Language shift is not inevitable. Speakers of different languages living in neighbouring language communities often speak each other's language. They may code switch (i.e. in the same conversation move from speaking one language to speaking the other) or adopt words, phrases, and even elements of grammar from their neighbour's into their own language. But this does not usually change the character of their mother tongue. Sometimes "creolization" -- the formation of a new language based on elements from two mixed languages -- may occur (Michif - the Métis language - is an example of this, combining elements of French and Cree). But generally, neighbouring languages and their speakers maintain

rather than combine or lose their distinctive identities.

According to Fishman (1991: 6) "language shift is the by-product of unequal rates of social change and of growth in econotechnical power." When the structural inequalities between two speech communities disappear, language shift is generally reversed. When such inequalities remain or change very slowly, speakers of threatened languages may reverse language shift by making a conscious effort to use their mother tongue as the principal language in their homes, especially with their children.

Between September 2004 and December 2005, researchers at the University of Winnipeg, University College of the North, and the School District of Mystery Lake investigated language shift among families in which an Aboriginal language and English were being spoken. George Fulford (University of Winnipeg Anthropology Department) was the principal investigator; William Dumas (Aboriginal Education Consultant, School District of Mystery Lake), Peter Geller (Dean of Arts, University College of the North), and Peggy Martin (Speech and Language Pathologist, SDML) were co-investigators. The research team also included three full-time researchers, staff and administrators from the School District, four prominent Cree elders, and members of several Thompson community organizations. The project received funding from the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada as well as Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Researchers surveyed 61 parents who were recruited through outreach with local schools and community organizations; the goal was to determine patterns in the use of English and Cree in their homes. Detailed observations of language use were recorded in the homes of 11 families within our survey population to determine levels of Cree and English language mastery among children younger than eight years of age.

Survey respondents came from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Inuit, Dene, Nakota, Ojibwe and Michif, but the majority were Cree. Although income levels were widely distributed, respondents were more educated than the general population. Comparing our survey results to data from Statistics Canada, our respondents reported higher rates of speaking an Aboriginal language at home than most other urban Aboriginal populations across Canada, but lower rates than found in Aboriginal reserve communities.

Forty-one percent of parents participating in home visits reported mastering at least a basic conversational level of Cree. Our researchers observed many parents introducing Cree into conversations with those children and their younger siblings at home. Researchers found that children and most parents had only a beginner's level of language mastery. English was the dominant language used in all homes which the researchers visited. When Cree was used, it was done so sporadically, generally with Cree words being inserted into English sentences.

Parents involved in home visits expressed deep concern about the loss of Aboriginal languages. They saw a direct connection between mastery of an Aboriginal language and a positive sense of Aboriginal identity and self-esteem. They wanted to become more involved in their children's education and recognized a need for bilingual and/or immersion programs for their children to attain mastery of Aboriginal languages. Parents also recognized a need for classes to improve their own mastery of Cree and other Aboriginal languages. Finally, they reported that participation in our research project heightened their awareness about the importance of using their Aboriginal languages at home, and this helped foster a renewed sense of community and pride.

Our research team presented a final report to School District of Mystery Lake trustees in December 2005. Among our recommendations were that the School District establish preschool programs with a focus on Cree, offer Cree immersion classes to elementary school students (a bilingual Cree/English program is already in place at one school), and offer affordable Cree language classes to adults. The preschool program would likely require dedicated start-up funding from the Province of Manitoba. Aboriginal-language immersion programs could be funded if the Province applied formulas currently in place for French language programs, while adult Aboriginal language programs could be funded using the formula for English-as-a-Second-Language classes for non-English

speaking immigrants. The federal government could show leadership in Aboriginal language revitalization by implementing the recommendations of its Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005) regarding the protection and promotion of Aboriginal languages.

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