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ABSTRACT

A volume devoted to aging and the aged in Third World societies focuses on ethnographic case studies from Papua New Guinea, China, India, the Sudan, and Mexico. The first of five articles, "Sweeping Men and Harmless Women: Responsibility and Gender Identity in Later Life" (Dorothy Ayers Counts), examines the perception of gender over the life cycle through a focus on the Lusi-Kaliai people of Papua New Guinea. "Cultural Alternatives for the Vulnerable Elderly: The Case of China Past and Present" (Andrea Sankar) considers the elderly in China who have "fallen through the cracks"--e.g., childless and single elderly. "The Family Life of Older People in a Changing Society: India" (Sylvia Vatuk) concerns the effects of urbanization on the aging in India. "Aging, Power, and Status in an East African Pastoral Society" (Elizabeth H. Andretta) looks at a society in which the elderly are not a special status group. "Familial and Public Contexts for Aging: Growing Old in a Rapidly Changing Mexican Village" (Jay and Joan Sokolovsky) argues that societal transformation does not in itself preordain disastrous consequences for the elderly. Notes on contributors conclude the volume. (LP)

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INTRODUCTION

AGING AND AGED IN THE THIRD WORLD: PART II
Regional and Ethnographic Perspectives

JAY SOKOLOVSKY
JOAN SOKOLOVSKY

This second volume devoted to aging and the aged in the Third World focuses on ethnographic case studies from five areas of the world: Papua New Guinea: China: India: the Sudan: and Mexico. In general these studies seek to explore how culture creates a distinct perceptual, social and economic environment within which people age. The authors have drawn upon their extended fieldwork and intimate knowledge of specific small-scale communities to illuminate the process of growing old in the Third World. These culture-specific studies, while centering on particular ethnographic examples attempt to place their data within broader societal and theoretical contexts.

In the first article Dorothy Counts examines the perception of gender over the life cycle and challenges Gutmann's concept of the "normal androgeny of later life". This issue is explored through her work with the Lusi people of west New Britain (an island dependency of Papua New Guinea) and by comparisons with other indigenous Melanesian populations. An important contri-

bution of Court's study is her focus on women in later adulthood, a much neglected topic in aging studies of non-Western peoples (see especially Cool and McCabe 1983; Brown and Kerns 1985; Sankar this volume). She finds, in contrast to Gutmann, that parenting is not always the key factor in shaping perception of gender identity over one's lifetime. Rather in those Melanesian societies where gender is thought unchangeable, stable responsibilities other than parenting control sex-role identity in old age.

The second article by Andrea Sankar fills a much needed void in the aging literature. While most writers dealing with old age in China have concentrated on the typical societal contexts for aging (Sher 1984), Sankar here focuses on the alternatives for those elderly who have fallen through the cultural cracks. Universally the most vulnerable aged (holding health and economic status constant) appear to be those who proceed through life without adequate kinship networks. In pre-revolutionary China it was the childless and especially the single female aged who stood as anomalies within the traditional system of ancestor worship and clan affiliation. Sankar documents the solution found by a group of never married women who in Hong Kong centered their lives around a Buddhist vegetarian association providing a religious family of fictive kin bonds. The experience of these women is contrasted with those vulnerable "five guarantee" elderly living in the People's Republic of China. In her conclusions Sankar tries to anticipate some of the changes for these "five guarantee" aged in the light of a shift away from a commune oriented peasantry.

The next article by Sylvia Vatuk concerns one of the most pervasive changes sweeping the Third World, that of rapid urbanization. All too little has been written about the life of the aged in non-Western cities despite the potential such locales have for transforming the relation between generations (United Nations 1977; Velez 1978; Ikels 1980). After World War II, Rayapur, the Indian community under consideration was swallowed up as a neighborhood of the burgeoning city of New Delhi. The author focuses on the changes in "filial response" (see Rubinstein and Johnson in the first volume) related to urban life and general modernization of the once rural

village. With a long standing history of high density agrarian living India's Hindus developed a traditional view of the life cycle (the ashrama system) which calls for persons in old age to seek a spiritual turn to god preceded by a renouncing of material concerns - that is to relinquish control over family property. This ideology is appropriately tied to the developmental cycle of the patrilineal joint family and the premise that in exchange for conforming to the ashrama model old parents will be served by their resident sons and daughters-in-law. Vatuk stresses that to understand the current situation of Rayapur's elderly one must look beyond the overt form of family living arrangements which has been remarkably stable. Instead she traces how the new urban economic order has greatly shifted the inner dynamics of inter-generational reciprocity away from the interests of the aged.

In the article by Elizabeth Andretta we are dealing with a type of society which in the African context has often been viewed as a prototype for a gerontocratic culture (Hinnant 1985). Yet the Murle of the southern Sudan stand as an important variant among pastoral nomads of East Africa. Lacking much ritualization of the life cycle, strong age sets or ancestral cults their cultural system does not specify old age itself as a special status bounded by potent ceremonies and political authority. Of the five cases analyzed in this volume the Murle's culture provides the vaguest separation of old age from the rest of the life cycle. While men in early elderhood lack the extreme power and aura of prestige found in other pastoral groups, late elderhood here is not marked by the typical ritual retirement to a socially marginal position. Instead a relatively balanced generational system emphasizing continuity in adult roles and management of material resources provides a relatively secure place for elderly males in Murle communities.

As is generally the case in other patrilineal, polygamous societies older women among the Murle do not fare as well as their male age peers. Similar to the situation in pre-socialist China described by Sankar childless women here were in a truly precarious position. Nevertheless, older women overall seem to have better alternatives for late life than that described for other

East African pastoral groups. Not only is there a greater chance of remarriage for widows but it is more likely that aged Murle females can become important diviners and ritual healers.

Jay and Joan Sokolovsky in this volume's final article argue that societal transformation does not in itself preordain disastrous consequences for the aged. Rather, the authors maintain that it is the macro and micro elements of a community's political economy which determines the ability of a cultural system to react to changes potentially harmful to the elderly. This issue is explored by analyzing, how in a Mexican peasant village rapid change has impacted on the life of the elderly. Despite significant modernization the familial and public contexts for aging have not been dramatically altered. In this community of Amatango the elderly have not suffered the same dramatic drop in status and quality of life described for many other peasant villages. Such a situation is related to the fact that with an adequate economic base strengthened by the agrarian reforms of the 1930's the village was able to retain and later employ its most traditional forms of social organization to carry out the modernizing changes on its own terms and initiative. Consequently, the surviving contexts of Indian identity and ritual have remained valued social niches in which the elderly continue to proudly dwell.

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SWEEPING MEN AND HARMLESS WOMEN: RESPONSIBILITY AND GENDER IDENTITY IN LATER LIFE[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Although anthropologists often depend heavily on older consultants who have both the leisure to answer endless questions and the knowledge with which to satisfy the seemingly insatiable questioner, most ethnographic studies have devoted at most only a few pages to the roles, attitudes, and experiences of the elderly, or to the process of aging itself. This neglect is explained partially by the fact that in the societies anthropologists characteristically study, growing old is a luxury that most people cannot expect to enjoy. In the industrialized world, between 75 and 85 percent of us reach the age of 65, but only about 1 in 10 people born in a tribal society lives past the age of 60 (Weiss 1981: 55-56). Formerly there seems to have been little perceived reason for anthropologists to devote much time and energy to studying a group that represented only about three percent of the population. The increase in the size and visibility of the aged minority in industrialized

countries has changed this perception. Students of gerontology have turned to other cultures for comparative data and for insights into the aging experience. Cross-cultural studies suggest that both contrasts and parallels exist between industrialized and non-industrialized societies. As Cool and McCabe observe, (1983:56):

> The implicit challenge to anthropology in the area of gerontology is to question existing theories of aging by putting them to the cross-cultural test and to formulate cross-cultural models of aging as a universal phenomenon which transcends the immediate socio-political situations of industrialized nations.

In this paper I will attempt to evaluate models which have been offered to explain the sometimes dramatic changes in gender role behavior that occur in old age and to test these hypotheses against the experience of aging as it is understood by the Lusi-Kaliai people of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea.

It has been argued that cultural rules giving men dominance over women are widespread if not universal (Ortner 1974; Friedl 1975; Reiter 1975; Kessler 1976). The activities of women, especially those of child-bearing age, are curtailed and at least some of the functions, offices, and privileges available to their male peers are denied to these women. However, it is widely reported that women enjoy more authority, fewer restrictions, and more opportunity for achievement and recognition as they age past the child bearing years (Keith 1980; Brown 1982). Both women and men are said to undergo marked changes in their behavior and to find that society's expectations of them change as they grow old. There seems to be, as Keith observes, "...a universal shift among old men from more active to more passive orientations" while the "...loosening up of previous constraint is the compensation available especially to old women in many cultures" (Keith 1980: 350-351). Gutmann calls this change the neutralization of gender differences, and suggests that it is a normal part of the aging process (Gutmann 1969; 1975; Gutmann, Grunes and Griffin 1980). His cross-cultural research leads him to conclude that

behavioral dimorphism of the sexes is associated with, and may be a consequence of, parenthood. When parental responsibilities end, women and men move toward what he calls " -- the normal androgyny of later life" (Gutmann, Grunes and Griffin 1980:122). It is not just role behavior, but the very qualities that lie at the heart of notions of gender, that are transformed by the process of aging.

> Thus, neither sex is the final custodian of the qualities that we choose to call "masculine" and "feminine." These qualities tend to be distributed not only by sex but by life period. Men are not forever "masculine": rather, they can be defined as the sex that shows the trait arrangement that we call "masculine" before they show the arrangement that we call "feminine": and the reverse is true for women (although older women do not by and large acquire the murderous aggression that is biologically available to young men). In sum, the particular constellations that we associate with maleness and femaleness do not pertain to biological sex as much as they pertain to parenthood; and they lose their distinctiveness and gender specificity as the psychic structures predicated on parenthood are phased out, with varying consequences for men and women (Gutmann 1975:181).

This is a fascinating notion, the idea that gender is a developmental process rather than a static category and that gender transformation may unfold as an aspect of the aging process. Cool and McCabe comment that although gerontological studies in the United States suggest that in old age sex role differences level out because men and women grow more alike as they age, there is little cross-cultural data that specifically refers to this phenomenon (1983:60). In fact, however, recent research in Papua New Guinea provides a continuum of examples of the variety of ways in which gender transformation may occur as an individual moves through the life cycle. Examples of societies at one end of the continuum are the Asmat and the Kapauku. Here we find a transformation

which brings an old woman relief from the domination of her husband and the freedom to speak her mind in public (Van Arsdale 1981; Pospisil 1964). Pospisil notes that gray hair brings to a Kapauku man "...an eclipse of his independent position, makes him a member of the son's household, and gradually decreases his status" (1964:59). In contrast, a woman becomes ever more emancipated from the powers of her husband and worthy of respect from the younger generation as she grows older. Beginning with menopause, she is released from the food taboos that are attached to her fertility and, "...in this respect [she] is even equal to a man" (Pospisil 1964:60).

Other Papua New Guinea peoples, for example the Hua (Meigs 1976), the Etoro (Kelly 1976), the Bimin-Kuskusmin (Poole 1981, the Hagen (Strathern 1972), and the Sambia (Herdt 1981) view gender as transmittable and transmutable and expect transformations to occur at any time during the life cycle: it may happen in the womb; it may occur in childhood (as with the Sambia): or it may take place in old age. Strathern observes that Hagen men claim that women are incapable of the singlemindedness and reasoning powers that are required for political action, and say that a woman who shows exceptional ability obviously began life in the womb as a male, "...only happening to be born female" (1972: 161). The Bimin-Kuskusmin claim that a fetus's genital sex changes repeatedly during the course of gestation, the sex at birth being determined by the last influence before delivery (Poole 1981). The arbitrariness of one's physiological sex is recognized when a man reminds his wife's brothers that they are behaving "like the women that they should have been." or when men comment, "We must treat our sisters well, for they might have been born our brothers" (Poole 1981:125).

Among the Bimin-Kuskusmin, a few women undergo a final transformation in old age. These women, who have during their lives embodied the ideals of virginal purity and maternal fertility, are chosen by men to be ritual leaders who preside during male initiations. Because the elderly woman is post-menopausal, she can neither bear children nor pollute. Her fertile fluids become as the semen from which they originated and she can, therefore, promote fertility and growth without

pollution. During the initiation ceremony, the ritual leader is dressed as a transvestite representing the hermaphroditic ancestors, and after her death a hole is drilled in the soft spot at the front of her skull (considered by the Bimin-Kuskusmin to be the male navel) to allow knowledge to enter and to mark her skull as belonging to a woman. Then it is enshrined with other male sacrae (Poole 1981:154).

Gender categories may be defined by criteria other than -- or in addition to -- genital appearance and behavior. In discussing Hua notions of pollution and male pregnancy, Meigs notes that in addition to the criteria named above, gender classification may also be based on fluids that are associated with sexuality. These include menstrual blood, vaginal secretions, parturitional fluids, and sperm. Meigs says:

> As these fluids are transferable between the two genitally different classes, this classification permits cross-overs: where a genitally male person is classified as female through his contamination by female fluids, and a genitally female person as male by means of transfer of pollution out of her body (Meigs 1976:405).

As a result of their transfer of sexual effluvia and the cross-over of classification, both men and women experience gender change. Old women become socially equivalent to males, for they may live in the men's house, they are privy to male secret knowledge, and they must observe rules that are normally limited to young men. Old men, on the other hand, take on some aspects of female social status. For example, at weddings they eat with women and children in a space that is segregated from the other men. They are placed in the category of polluting people that includes children, fertile women, and post-menopausal women with less than three children (Meigs 1976:402). Meigs clearly demonstrates that, for the Hua, gender is experienced and transmitted along with the sexual fluids that define it. She says:

> A person's gender does not lie locked in his or her genitals but can flow and change with

> contact as substances seep into or out of his or her body. Gender is not an immutable state but a dynamic flow. Such a view permits most persons to experience both genders before they die (1976:406).

While these examples do not give an exhaustive coverage of the variety of gender concepts that may be found in Melanesian societies, they do suggest that notions of gender are conceptually separate from genital sex in these societies, and that such notions may be related in complex ways to the process of aging. The extreme male-female oppositions that are reported in some Melanesian societies seem to fade in old age as people enter gender categories that have no parallel in our own society.

There is, then, cross-cultural evidence that it is common for people to experience a change in gender role identity as they enter old age. There are at least two different models to explain the dynamics of this change. According to Gutmann's model, middle age and the end of the ability (of women) to reproduce biologically signals the end of the years of parenthood during which people are responsible for dependent children. Then people are free to express the energies and aspects of personality that were previously bound to the service of parenthood. As a result, women and men become more alike as they develop toward a state of equality which Gutmann sees as being both androgynous and normal in later life (1975:170-71).

The model described by ethnographers who have worked with New Guinea societies is different. Some (for example Pospisil 1964), see a similarity in the gender roles of the very young and the very old. Others argue that gender is not necessarily either static or defined only in terms of genital sex. Instead it may be transmittable, transmutable, and subject to transformation. This change occurs, especially in old age, when the polluting effluvia of a woman has either dried up or been transmitted to her husband. These ethnographers attribute transformations in gender identity, behavior, status, and personality to changes that are rooted in biology and essence rather than to changes in social status such as occur, for example, with the end of responsible parenthood.

It is my intent in this essay to evaluate the usefulness of these models in understanding the process of aging as it is experienced by the Lusi speaking people of coastal Kaliai in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, and to suggest an alternative model that more nearly explains the Lusi-Kaliai experience.

THE LUSI-KALIAI

There are about 1000 Lusi speaking people who live along the Kaliai coast of northwest New Britain. They are normatively patrilineal and virilocal people whose initiated but unmarried young men, widowers, and very old men live in village men's houses. Most of the data for this paper were collected in Kandoka village, the largest Kaliai village and the second largest community in the Gloucester-Kandrian area of West New Britain Province.

The Aging Process

The Lusi recognize a number of named stages in the development of the life cycle: maseknga 'new born'; kekele 'child'; iriao 'youth' and tamine vilala 'maiden'; tamine/tamone uainga 'married woman/man'; tanta pao 'new person' or 'parent of dependent child(ren)'; tamparonga/taparonga 'elder female/male; tanta taurai 'decrepit person' or 'dependent person'.[2]

The simplest Lusi term that may be glossed as 'old' is moho. People as well as things become old and worn out, and occasionally a person will refer to his age in this way. Far more frequently the Lusi- Kaliai describe their age/condition by the terms that are best glossed as 'elder' (taparonga/tamparonga) or 'decrepit' (taurai).

People are not classified as elders because of their absolute chronological age -- in fact, most older people do not know how old they are.[3] They are, however, acutely aware of their relative age and of the category and activities appropriate to their contemporaries, and to the progress through the life cycle of their kin in the adjacent generations. It is the changing status of these people -- parents and children -- that defines an individ-

ual as an elder, for this status is a relational one. Specifically, a person becomes an elder when his parents are dead or socially defunct and when his children marry and he becomes a tuvu 'grandparent' (this term may be glossed either ancestor or grandparent/grandchild). These changes are expected to occur coincidentally. My Kaliai consultants observed that by the time a person is a grandparent, his own parents are likely either to be dead or decrepit and dependent.

The Lusi terms for elder, tamparonga for a woman and taparonga for a man, are terms of respect, and are commonly used by younger people as terms of address and reference. Although no one expects that the achievement of elder status is, in itself, enough to make a foolish person wise, elders are generally expected to be the stable, responsible members of the community. As long as elders are active they are ultimately accountable for the behavior of their children, even those who are married, and the other younger members of their kin group. A married woman may go home to her mother (this is how the Kaliai phrase it) and a man can look to his father to help him obtain a bride, initiate his children, and pay compensation if he is on the wrong side of a quarrel. These options are not available to an elder, for his/her parents are either dead or dependent: an elder has no one else to look to.

There is ambiguity in the status of elder. The Kaliai share with other New Guinea people (for example see Kelly 1976; Gell 1975; Goodale 1980 and 1981) the notion that the reproduction of human life and society has a cost. The waxing strength and knowledge of the younger generation is accomplished at the expense of the waning capability and mental acuity of their parents. People specifically attribute the weakness and senility of the very old to the fact that their vitality has been expended into their children. Older informants warn that if a man marries before he is old enough to grow a full beard, his strength will be spent into his children and he will never achieve his own potential growth and abilities. They also say that if the first born child of a marriage is a girl, both parents will age prematurely.

Under normal circumstances the fact that little girls learn, grow, and mature faster than little boys does not mean that women age more rapidly than men. Instead, tall, skinny people are said to show the signs of old age sooner than do short, heavy-set people who retain the full-fleshed, plump liquidity that the Lusi associate with youth.

The birth of a person's first grandchild is especially significant, for grandparenthood marks the movement of the person into the status of elder and the beginning of the decline into old age. It is not long thereafter, people say, that a person's strength and keenness of thought begin to diminish.

The years spent as an elder are the prime years of life. Physical strength decreases, but this is offset by the norm that no elder should do a strenuous task if there is a younger person available. The elder years are a time when a person can rest from hard labor but still be active, vital, and respected. Younger people are expected to honour elders, and both women and men readily make their opinions known in public meeting. These are the years when a woman is no longer burdened by pregnancy and the care of tiny infants. She directs her daughters and daughtersin-law in the preparation of feast foods, the care of pigs, and the production of pandanus mats which are the ceremonially distributed woman's wealth. However, embedded in the enjoyment of heightened authority, respect, and responsibility is the knowledge that one's prestige and faculties will soon decline and the fear that the knowledge possessed by the individual may be lost, not only to the person but to the society as well. Therefore the elder has the duty to pass on knowledge, especially secret knowledge, to others so that it will not die with him. He is also obliged to begin deferring to the judgement of younger kin so that when the elder's strength and abilities are spent others will be trained to take his place or, as the Lusi would express it, to "take his bed." My consultants observed that persons who exercise authority invariably make enemies and risk being the victims of sorcery. This is the cost of leadership that must be paid by an elder, but when a person's grandchildren are born the risks of sorcery begin to seem oppressive and he

starts to think with longing of a peaceful old age, and of the time when he can withdraw from those activities that are likely to offend others. So, it is when a person is an elder and at the peak of his powers and influence that he must also begin to prepare for his ultimate decline and death.

Once a person is classified as being an elder, people begin to look for and note the physical changes characteristic of old age. These include failing eyesight, dry slack skin, white hair, loss of teeth, and mental decline including forgetfulness, inability to concentrate for long periods of time, and the condition called vuovuo -- a term used to describe the mental processes of both the very young and the very old, and which incorporates concepts of childish lack of reason and of senility.

Although awareness of the inevitability of eventual decline is embedded in elder status, a person may continue as an elder for as long as he actively meets his responsibilities. A person may continue to be an active and responsible elder long after his spouse's death, for elder status is held without respect to gender, marital status, or the continued maintenance of a domestic household. The status depends upon the individual's ability and willingness to function as an independent, responsible person, and it may be lost by a person's failure to act. While most Lusi-Kaliai are sympathetic with persons who are incapacitated by chronic illness, they express impatience with people who retire from active life and become dependent solely because of their advanced years. Their attitude toward maintaining physical ability and independence is aptly summarized by the phrase "use it or lose it".

The decrepit elderly do not make up a high percentage of the population of a Kaliai community. Fewer than two percent of the people of Kandoka village (7 of 360) were decrepit. Of these, six of the seven were women, and five of these women were widows. There is little apparent difference in the life styles of widowed elders and widowed taurai. Widowers reside in their men's houses and are provided with cooked food by younger kinswomen and affines, while widows live with their children or other

kin, often sleeping in the cook house which is attached to the family's sleeping house. The difference between elder and taurai lies in the independence and well-being associated with self-support. Elders continue, with the help of children and grandchildren, to garden for themselves. Widows provide most of their own food, water and firewood, while the widowed of both sexes participate in ceremonies, often direct their younger kin's activities, and are involved in community affairs. In contrast, decrepit people depend on younger kin to supply their needs and do not supervise their children or participate in community activities.

The treatment accorded a decrepit person depends largely on the relationship that exists between the old person and his caretaker. Some taurai are cared for lovingly by their children and grandchildren. Others complain that they are neglected, and younger relatives are especially impatient with older persons whose dependence is considered to be the result of voluntary inactivity. People are also more likely to resent demands on their resources by dependent elderly if there is no direct kin link between young and old. Villagers cite the tragic death of Mary[4] in 1976 as an example of the fate awaiting the aged who do not have their own children to care for them. (The following case studies of Mary and Karl are adapted from Counts and Counts n.d.) Mary, a widow who appeared to be in her seventies, was blind for the last ten years of her life. During these years, she required help in meeting her most basic needs. Someone had to lead her to toilet, to bring her water and firewood, and to provide and prepare her food. Mary's days were spent huddled in a little cooking house, near but separate from the household of her stepson, and she often could be heard crying that she had no water to drink, no food to eat, and no one to help rekindle her fire. Technically Mary's care was the responsibility of her step-children, but both of them had large families of dependent children. Mary's stepchildren frequently gave their children the task of caring for her, but because no one in the stepchildren's families was directly related to Mary, they resented the added burden of her care. The fact that she had no children living in the village to take responsibility for her

probably led, at least indirectly, to Mary's tragic death.

One day everyone in the village, including Mary's step-children, went to their gardens, leaving Mary alone in the small cook house where she slept. Apparently Mary's fire went out, and when she attempted to rekindle it she fell into the burning embers. She lay there unconscious and undiscovered for several hours, until people returned from their gardens. She died of her injuries a few days later.

There was no assignment of culpability for Mary's death, and no-one suggested in my hearing that her step-children had neglected her in order to speed her death. Rather, Mary's neighbors commented that she would not have complained so much or have died the way she did had her own children lived in the village and cared for her.

The Lusi do not now have any formal procedure for hastening the death of a decrepit old person. In the past the elderly widows of important men were killed at their request because, their descendants say, they had enjoyed the prestige and plenty associated with marriage to a bigman and could not tolerate being dependent (Counts 1980b). Widow-killing was defined as homicide by colonial authorities and is no longer practiced. It is, however, possible for a decrepit person's kin to hasten his social death by conducting mortuary ceremonies in his honor while he is still living. In 1981 and 1982 these rituals were performed for Karl by his children.

Karl, who is approximately eighty-five years old, is probably the oldest man in Kandoka. His wife, Gretchen, is about ten years younger. The two old people have not shared a house since 1971. Now Karl sleeps in his men's house with the initiated but unmarried boys and young men of his kin group, while Gretchen, lives in her own house with a widowed kinswoman. The children of both women live near-by, and their grandchildren take turns sleeping in the house with them and providing them with water, fire-wood, and food. Karl's daily round seldom hints of his former status as the leader of his village. He babysits his grandchildren and great-grandchildren,

does household chores around his men's house -- including keeping the ground in front of it swept clear of debris -- and sits reminiscing with other old men. Not only does Karl suffer from physical disability, but he is generally regarded as failing in mental acuity as well. On those occasions when he attempts to act as director of ritual events in which his sons are involved, he is gently pushed aside and ignored. During 1981, Karl's sons publicly acknowledged their father's disengagement from active life when they held the first stage of Karl's ololo "mortuary ceremony". With the completion of his final mortuary ceremonies in 1982, Karl is socially defunct and he sits, as my consultants say, "waiting for death." His sons have concluded the complex system of debts, obligations, credits and social ties that were begun for Karl by his father and grandfather and upon which he built his reputation as a bigman. He no longer has any business; it is finished. The final ololo marks the culmination of Karl's life: his physical death will be "something nothing" and will be followed by only minimal funerary rites. There will be no public mourning; only the private grief of his family.

SEXUALITY, PARENTHOOD, AND AGING

There is a complex relationship that exists between Lusi notions of sexuality, physical health, and aging. As noted above, people attribute the disabilities of old age to the fact that a person's vitality has been given to his children. Parents pass on their vitality to their children in at least two ways. The physical strength of parents is expended in the labor required to bear, feed, and care for children. And the essence, aisuru, of adults is spent in the sexual activity which is necessary if there is to be a next generation.

The physical changes associated with aging -- especially increasingly dry, slack skin; a wrinkled, dessicated appearance; and loss of vitality -- are specifically considered to be the result of sexual activity, and both women and men are vulnerable to the contaminating power of menstrual blood. Menstrual blood and the sexual fluids and odors resulting from sexual intercourse are all considered to be mali, 'contaminating'. My elder male

consultants recounted that their fathers had warned them to sleep in the men's house to avoid both contamination by menstrual blood and too frequent contact with their wives. It is thought that frequent sexual activity depletes a man's aisuru, vital essence or sperm, and results in premature aging.

My consultants maintained that sexual activity does not cause women to age. However, consider the effects of sexual activity which are explicitly described in the Kaliai myth "Akro and Gagandewa." In the story, Gagandewa's mother suspects that her daughter is secretly married because of the physical changes in the girl. She says:

> Gagandewa, the look that you have is not that of a virgin but that of a married woman. Your eyes have lost their lustre. Your skin is no longer bright and smooth with oils as it was. You have the dull eye, the long neck, and the dry, dirty skin of a married woman (Counts 1980a:38).

Gagandewa is pregnant and, in fact, frequent sexual intercourse is said to be debilitating to women precisely because it is likely to lead to pregnancy. A woman who is too frequently pregnant is likely to be weak and sickly and to age prematurely because of the physical strains of pregnancy and childbirth and the hard work involved in caring for several small children. On the other hand, a woman should not be childless, for the expulsion of the mixture of old blood and sexual fluids present in her abdomen and its replacement by new blood after childbirth is essential for her good health. Ideally a woman should achieve a balance between too many children and none at all, for either extreme renders her vulnerable to disease and premature aging.

Menopause and the end of reproductive life does not change the status of a Lusi woman. Although most female elders are near the end of their child-bearing years there is no special term for menopause and no special significance attached to it. The older women who were my consultants said that women generally welcomed the end of pregnancy and child bearing. However, neither

change of status nor special privilege is associated with the end of fertility and menstruation.

Middle age brings an end neither to sexual activity nor to the responsibilities of parenthood. My consultants considered sexual behavior to be an intensely private and personal matter, and opined that some people remain sexually active until very old age. As one consultant said, "Some old people itch for sex'; others don't." Unlike the neighboring Kove (Chowning n.d.:18), the Lusi speaking Kaliai do not consider it to be shameful for a grandmother to continue bearing children. It is assumed that adults of both sexes and all ages have an intense interest in sexual activity and that adulterous affairs are common, but grandmothers are expected to choose partners their own age and to be circumspect if they commit adultery.

If people continue sexual activity into dependent old age they are, my consultants said, likely to be the subject of gossip and to be scolded by their younger kin who must provide for them. My Lusi consultants spoke with amusement of an elder (nearly dependent) man in a neighboring village who had married a young woman and fathered five children. One informant commented that the man was now bent, dessicated, and a taurai, decrepit old person', presumably as the result of his sexual activity. There was, however, no suggestion that the man was, because of his age, incapable of fathering children and, therefore, likely a cuckold, or that his sexual activity was shameful.

Women may continue to become mothers long after they can on longer bear children because, for the Lusi, the relationship of mother is established by her nurturing the child rather than by pregnancy and childbirth. This is true for both birth children and adopted children. Adoption is very common in Kaliai. Most married couples give at least one of their children in adoption and most persons, either as individuals or as part of a couple, adopt at least one child during the course of a lifetime. Children are desired. A house without them is said to be empty and lonely, and elderly people say that without children they would feel old and without purpose. Parenthood is also an investment in the future, for

children are the major source of social security in Kaliai.

Children, including those adopted by elders, are expected to provide labor and help as their parents become decrepit. It is for these reasons that middle-aged and elderly couples and widows continue until they are in their sixties to adopt grandchildren or the children of young relatives who have more offspring than they can easily care for.

RECAPITULATION: THE LUSI MODEL

Two stages of advanced age are recognized by the Lusi-Kaliai: elder and dependent old person. The terms for elder tamparonga and taparonga distinguish between female and male. The term for dependent old person, taurai, does not. Elderhood is a status denoting social age rather than functional or chronological age, and is considered by the Lusi to be the prime of life. It is also the time of life when people begin to note the physical signs of aging and to plan for eventual retirement from active social life.

The Lusi perceive there to be a link between sexual activity, aging, and health, and comment that there is a positive connection between a preoccupation with sexual intercourse and premature aging. Menstrual blood is considered to be potentially contaminating, but a woman's status does not change because of menopause, and neither sexual activity nor responsible parenthood necessarily end with the cessation of fertility or with the achievement of elder status. People continue to adopt and care for young children until they themselves become dependent. Then, the children they have nurtured reciprocate and care for their needs.

The Lusi model, then, differs from the model offered by Gutmann and from those derived from the Melanesian societies in which gender is transmutable. The Lusi consider gender to be consistent with genital sex. It does not appear to be transmittable or transmutable, although, as we shall see, the dependent old are, on occasion, released from the constraints of stereotyped

gender role behavior and placed in a neutral gender category. These changes do not, however, significantly affect every-day life, as they do in the models offered by Meigs, Poole, and Gutmann.

Birth order and relative age are at least as significant as is gender in structuring the content of interpersonal relations. First-born children are the most important issue of a marriage, and older siblings have authority over younger ones, regardless of sex. I have seen a woman order her adult younger brother to get up and give her a desirable seat. When the man smilingly protested that he did not have to move because he was there first, his sister replied, "I'm older. You're younger. Move!" He did.

By the same token, younger people are expected to defer to their elders. Women are generally expected to be deferential and submissive to their fathers and husbands, but some women are out-spoken, ambitious, and fearless in defense of their own interests. Women who are outstanding for their assertive behavior are often the first-born daughters of village leaders, and people specifically attribute their uncharacteristic behavior to this fact. As she ages, an aggressive and ambitious woman may have considerable authority in her own right, especially if she is married to a bigman. A village leader's wife has a set of obligations that parallel those of her husband. For example, he is responsible for organizing the ceremonial exchange of valuables and pigs that is required when people marry, initiate their children, and honor the dead. When a leader announces his intention to sponsor a ceremony, his wife must collect for distribution a supply of pandanus mats equivalent to the shell money to be given by her husband, and she is also responsible for the preparation and distribution of huge amounts of feast food. All ceremonial guests (there may be several hundred) must be well fed for the duration of their visit, and there should be enough pork, fish, and vegetable dishes for visitors to carry some home after everyone has eaten. As a woman ages, she becomes more experienced in ceremonial procedure and she builds a network of women whom she has helped and who will reciprocate when she needs mats and cooked foods. Eventually the women who were her advisers die

or become dependent and withdraw from active life, and her daughters marry and call on her to help them meet their responsibilities. If her husband is the primary village leader, a maroni, she is increasingly obliged to provide the female wealth items and foods that he requires if he is to pursue his career successfully. Although she cannot make a name for herself as the female equivalent of a maroni, an elder woman may direct and organize economic exchange activity, both in her own right as a senior female and as the wife of an important man.

CONCLUSION

The character and lives of Lusi women and men do not change dramatically as they grow older. There is no transformation of gender identity or role behavior. Decrepit men do not become more passive than their female age-mates. Elder women do not, as a group, dominate elder men and it is unlikely that a shy, retiring young woman will suddenly become an assertive and aggressive tapa-ronga, or that an aggressive, ambitious man will passively withdraw from village life as he moves into elder status. People of both sexes who have organizational skills and leadership ability are at their prime during their elder years. An elder woman may enjoy autonomy and independence, but her activities as a tamparonga do not represent a radical departure from her way of life as a young woman. A post-menopausal woman continues to do the same kinds of things she did when she was younger, except that as she becomes a senior female she assumes increasing responsibility for the behavior of her juniors, and she assists her younger female kin to meet their obligations.

A post-reproductive woman is not perceived as being less feminine than one who is still fertile. As far as I am able to ascertain, the Kaliai consider gender and genital sex to be inseparable and have no categories for people whose behavior or gender identity does not conform to their physical appearance. The Lusi-Kaliai notion of gender, unlike that of some other New Guinea peoples, seems to be that it is a stable, non-transmittable attribute that is consistent with, and defined by, genital appearance, and that is fixed in the womb. There is,

however, some anomaly. Post-menopausal women are like children and men in that they are not inherently mali: they do not produce menstrual blood. Although this does not change a woman's every-day life, consultants did say that this loss of mali makes it possible for men, on occasion, to invite a decrepit old woman to remain in the village when the spirits are abroad and, in an emergency, to enter the men's house and touch the sacred paraphernalia that men have hidden there. Conversely, old men frequently act as baby sitters and even take over the chore of sweeping the plaza in front of their men's house, a task usually reserved to women. These are, however, exceptional circumstances that do not define the role of a taurai.

The Lusi model of aging is quite different from that described for the Hua, the Bimin Kuskusmin, and other New Guinea groups who perceive gender as being a processual quality, defined in part by fertile fluids, that is potentially reversible in old age. It is more similar to the Kapauku model, as described by Pospisil, in which the "status curves" of people over the age of fifty-five and children under the age of seven are close together (1964:60). However, the differences between active and reproductive Lusi women and men are not as extreme as those described by Pospisil, and the childlike, androgynous aspects of old age do not appear until people become dependent. There are no certain birth dates for Kaliai born before 1949, when the Kaliai Mission was established. However, if the birth dates estimated by the Kaliai priests are close to being accurate, elders continue active participation in village life until the age of sixty-five or seventy. This is significantly older than the fifty-five years estimated by Pospisil as being the age when elderly Kapauku become like children and, presumably, become dependent members of the community.

The Lusi model, while different from that posited by Gutmann, is not entirely incompatible with his. Elder Lusi women do enjoy more authority than younger women. This is not because they become androgynous or undergo a change in personality and behavior that coincides with an end to the parenting of dependent children. Rather it is because they become adults

who are responsible for themselves and for the younger members of their community as well. The Lusi-Kaliai data suggest that in societies where gender is conceived of as being stable throughout the life cycle, it is responsibility rather than parenting that should be stressed in a model that seeks to describe and explain the androgyny of extreme old age. For it is not until Lusi cease to be responsible, and become -- like children -- dependent on others, that they are seen as childlike, neutral, and socially irrelevant. Then their deaths, like those of infants, are mourned only by close kin and do not disturb the fabric of Lusi society.

NOTES

1. This is a substantially revised version of a paper entitled "Tamparonga": The 'Big Women' of Kaliai" that was presented at a symposium on middleaged women organized by Dr. Judith K. Brown for the 1982 meetings of the American Anthropological Association. The research on which this paper is based was conducted in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. In 1966-67 my research was supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation; in 1971 it was supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the University of Waterloo; in 1975-76 it was supported by the Canada Council and University of Waterloo sabbatical leave; and in 1981 my research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and sabbatical leave from the University of Waterloo.

2. In 1981 there were 360 people in Kandoka village. Of these, 25 were nursing infants, 198 were children and teenagers, 11 were unmarried young adults. There were 3 newly married couples with no children, 39 parent couples and 3 single parents (1 man, 2 women), 33 elders (18 women, 15 men), and 7 decrepit elderly, 6 women and 1 man.

3. The elders' birthdates, which were estimated by Kaliai mission priest, ranged from 1910 to 1937 for women and from 1915 to 1933 for men. Of the people who were considered decrepit, only one was the same age as or younger than the oldest elders.

4. Names have been anglicized and changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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CULTURAL ALTERNATIVES FOR THE VULNERABLE ELDERLY: THE CASE OF CHINA PAST AND PRESENT

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INTRODUCTION

Support for the aged has traditionally fallen within the domain of family responsibility. Children and grand children were, with few expectations, the only means of support for elderly individuals until recently. Social structures exist today in industrialized countries to care for those elderly without sufficient social support or for those who have exhausted their source of support. Nevertheless, their situation is not altogether secure; for, those without support are more vulnerable to health problems (Blazer, 1982) furthermore, lack of adequate social support is the single greatest predictor for the likelihood of institutionalization (Weissert, 1981). In the Third World, limitations of resources and the priorities placed on development which will enhance the lives of future generations allow few resources for the creation of formal support structures to care for the elderly. As the family and especially the role of women changes to meet the new demands created by economic transitions,

the family's ability and sometimes commitment to caring for its elderly members is diminished. While this trend will affect all elderly, those who are widowed or divorced and especially those without children will be especially vulnerable. This group is likely to increase. Its absolute numbers will grow as the proportion of elderly in the world's population increases and as family structures change leaving more people permanently single, divorced, or with few or only one child, as is the goal in the People's Republic of China. Most of the elderly put at risk by these changes will be women (Peace, 1981). They tend to outlive men and will make up a greater portion of those living to old age. This number will increase if mortality rates continue to drop (Manton 1982). If women follow traditional patterns and remain at home, they suffer from an erosion of their characteristic roles and status. This, however, is not always the case. For example in societies such as the USSR grandmothers make a significant indirect economic contribution by providing childcare which allows young mothers to work and by standing in lines to purchase food for the family. If these women have worked outside the home, they suffer from economic discrimination which is reflected in their earnings while working and their pensions in retirement, if they indeed qualify for pensions (Peace, 1981).

The vulnerable elderly can be expected to increase as a group but they are not a new phenomenon. There have always been the widowed -- depending on religion -- the divorced, the childless, the single. We shall focus on the childless married and permanently single elderly in Chinese society. An examination of traditional ways of coping with this problem should provide us with insight into flexibility of cultural forms in adapting to the individual's needs and circumstances. Such an understanding will serve as a resource in developing plans for the future.

THE VULNERABLE ELDERLY IN CHINESE SOCIETY

The case of the childless and single elderly in traditional Chinese culture offers us sharp and interesting contrasts. If one is to think of a gerontocracy, most

likely, China first comes to mind. Chinese culture, however, is not consistent in its treatment of elderly despite this quick and ready association. Because of the traditional requirements of ancestor worship, those elderly who face death without children suffer not only physical and social deprivation but are thought to be a potential cause of family misfortune.

In traditional Chinese Society Ancestor worship, the practice of honoring the memory and spirits of relatives, did not consistently make harsh judgments against the childless. Men were considered to be full members of the family into which they were born, and as such could sometimes receive ancestor worship even if they died childless and unmarried. Men who died in early adulthood without producing heirs could still be honored as ancestors on the basis of their potential contribution to the family heritage. In practice this depended on the local custom and the strength and internal cohesion of the individual's lineage. In some parts of Kwangtung the situation was less bleak, for there the elderly bachelors were cared for by the lineage. Southern Kwangtung came closer to approximating the Chinese cultural ideal of the extended family than any other area of China. Some lineages were so large as to constitute single surname villages. In some of these large and powerful lineages, elderly bachelors were allowed to live in the lineage hall at lineage expense. It was possible for such a bachelor to posthumously adopt a nephew to carry out his ancestor rights.

For women the situation was grim. They did not belong to the family of their birth; they were destined to leave to become a wife and mother for another family. In this strictly patrilineal society, women had little right to draw on the kinship ties of their natal families. Should they die before marriage, they could not legitimately be worshipped by the family, having never been a member in the first place. A woman only gained her social and often personal identity through becoming a man's wife, and finally another man's mother. No daughter, married or unmarried, was supposed to die in her natal home. Were a married daughter visiting her natal home to die there, her spirit had to be led back to her husband's home, where it would then be properly cared

for. In the case of an unmarried woman, there was no place for the spirit to go; it remained in the home, causing trouble for the inhabitants. The seriousness of this problem increased with the age of the single woman at death. Very young children -- boys or girls -- often were not worshipped, nor did they necessarily become Hungry Ghosts, ghosts whose spirits are not worshipped. According to some informants, these infants had been specifically sent to punish the parents by their early death and thus did not possess real souls. The spirit of a woman near or past marriageable age, however, could legitimately seek retribution from her family for not discharging their duty to find a husband for her. The ghost of such a daughter could haunt the family no matter where the woman died, but its power was greatest if she died in her natal home.

The soul of a socially mature unmarried woman was believed to become a Hungry Ghost because it could have no permanent resting place nor receive ritual attention in either a woman's natal home or the lineage ancestor hall. The woman had not contributed to the prosperity of either her family or the lineage, and thus was not entitled to recognition in death. The soul tablet could be kept in her family home in some out of the way place, but this arrangement was considered to be an impermanent one.

Having been denied a permanent resting place and proper care, the soul of such a woman could cause misfortune and sickness for her remaining family members until they satisfied her demands for attention. Several cultural solutions existed to placate the ghost, and thus ensure the security of the family as well as the well-being of the woman's soul. The most effective and common measure was to arrange a ghost marriage for the deceased woman. There were many varieties of ghost marriages, some involving the spirits of unmarried dead men, others involving married men. In the ghost marriage, a woman's soul was appeased by finding for it a place to rest in her "husband's" family. This solution stopped her from making trouble for her natal family. Although her soul would probably not receive specific ancestor worship, it would be included in the family's general observances of all ancestor rites. Some areas established

maiden's temples, where the soul tablets of unmarried women could be placed. This was not a frequent practice and seems to have been confined largely to the south of China and Taiwan. These solutions primarily ensured the safety of living relatives and secondarily gave relief to the individual woman's soul. They did not address the needs of the living woman. Few legitimate cultural roles existed for single women.

Many problems faced by single individuals were also confronted by childless couples. In spiritual concerns their plight was less serious. Membership in a lineage organization often guaranteed the couple at least minimal ancestor rites. In some areas a nephew could be adopted by "spirit adoption" to care for the ancestor rites of the deceased (McGough 1976:167). Spirit adoption refers to the practice of the deceased individual's spirit "adopting" a living nephew who then performs ancestors rites for the relative's spirit. This practice varied from region to region and depended on the lineage to which the couple belonged. More important were the problems of physical maintenance in old age. Very few extended families had enough surplus income to support elderly childless relatives. If a wife failed to bear children, families who could afford it purchased a concubine. When the fault was thought to lie with the husband, peasant mothers-in-law were known to encourage discreet affairs which ended in their daughters-in-law's pregnancies.

In some cases, contracts were arranged between an invalid husband and a poor man by which a husband could "rent" out his wife for periods of up to ten years. The first son born from such a liaison went to the renter and the rest of the children went to the original husband (McGough 1976:85).

Because sons were the only culturally legitimate heirs in a family responsible for the parents' care and ancestor worship, couples who bore only daughters often considered themselves childless. Theirs, however, was far from a desperate situation, for many different forms of uxorilocal marriage existed.

Uxorilocal marriage meant that a daughter remained at home and the husband, usually for lack of money, agreed to reside with her. Agreements of this type varied from area to area and according to the needs of the specific situation, but the details of such arrangements were usually explicitly stated in contracts drawn up at the time. Uxorilocal marriage took roughly three forms. The most common form was for a son-in-law to agree to care for the wife's parents until their deaths, after which he could take his children and wife and return to his own lineage. In this form the husband retained his surname and the right to his wife's property (Ibid:56-7). Other forms involved arrangements where some children took the mother's surname and some the father's. In these forms, the husband had to change his surname to that of the wife's and become an adopted son as well as son-in-law. This, however, created a problem of technical incest (Ibid:56).

Truly childless couples could adopt a niece and invite in an uxorilocal husband for her (Ibid:171), or purchase a slave girl and marry in a husband for her. In these cases, the same variety of arrangements with the husband as discussed above applied.

For married couples a variety of forms of adoption and uxorilocal marriage for daughters, multiple marriages for either husband or wife existed to help cope with childlessness. All of these forms lay within the boundaries of the kinship system. The alternatives required forethought and planning, but they did not dictate a distinctly different lifestyle for those who chose to follow them. Although the family structure was the dominant form of social organization, it was flexible enough to encompass a great variety of deviant forms and still admit the individuals involved to the categorical rights and responsibilities of family membership.

Peasant families faced great difficulties in caring for their permanently single, elderly adults. At the same time, there were very few social alternatives to the family. Often, the success of the single individual in solving the problems of aging and death without children depended on his or her ability to form fictive kin

relationships, which could provide the emotional and material support found in family membership.

THE SPINSTERS OF GUANGDONG

In Guangdong - a province in the southern most part of China, a popular movement involving resistance to marriage arose among women silk workers and lasted from approximately 1865-1935. These women's adaptation to the problems of old age and death will provide important insight into the ability of a traditional cultural system to meet the needs of its members. The spinsters of Guangdong were in a structurally vulnerable position. They foreswore marriage and the family in return for a life of independence in which they relied on their own labor power and the support and assistance of their "sisters". Throughout their adult lives they sought to establish a socially legitimate place for themselves. To this end, they utilized an archaic custom to sanctify their adult status, to secure their soul, and protect their families. Their careful manipulation of traditional fictive bonds such as the "godmother" (kai ma) bond and their elaboration of informal affective ties expressed in the sisterhood, which some formalized through vows, allowed them a greater measure of security and legitimacy than one would expect in traditional Chinese society. While these forms were sufficient to sustain them within that culture, its changes and the changes of the world around them placed strain on the sisterhood bond. No new members were recruited to the movement after 1935; their initial economic base in the silk industry was destroyed when the industry collapsed; those who moved away from their area lost the support and acceptance of their local culture. In adapting to meet the new challenges, some groups chose to strengthen the sisterhood bond by establishing a religious family. This also provided considerable secular advantages for the aging spinsters. Among those groups who did not, there was mixed success in coping with old age.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The women among whom I did my fieldwork did not have access to the traditional and customary arrangements for care in old age for they had been members of an anti-marriage movement. The movement was located in three xien, or districts, surrounding the city of Canton in Southern Guangdong and lasted approximately from 1865-1935. Women laborers in the silk filiatures of the area were the main members. A combination of unique cultural institutions in the area, high wages, and social unrest combined to allow the emergence of this singular event in Chinese history. Relying on the support of the sisterhoods, which formed among adolescent girls sleeping away from home in girls' houses, women workers initially took vows of celibacy not to consumate a marriage until all members of a sisterhood were wed. To some extent this was also in the husband's interest for the wife continued her productive labor until pregnancy, sometimes coming up to ten years after the wedding. As women's wages increased and their autonomous life either within the girls' house or in factory dormitories confirmed both their commitment to their sisters and their reluctance to take up the often subjugated position of wife and mother, women began pooling their wages to purchase concubines who replaced them as wives and mothers. These women continued productive labor and returned home to take up their role as first wife and technical mother after menopause. This arrangement was fraught with problems. Eventually, many women decided to abjure marriage completely. Instead, they took a vow of permanent celibacy and went through a ceremony called the sou hei in which they declared their intention to remain unwed and assumed adult status as spinster. This vow also released their parents from responsibility to see them wed. The vow was significant because it fixed a woman's soul and prevented her from becoming a Hungry Ghost.

After the sou hei ceremony women moved from their homes and lineage neighborhood to spinster houses where they and their sisters planned to retire.

In the late 1920's the silk industry collapsed throwing tens of thousands of women out of work. They left the area seeking work as servants in the cities.

After the Japanese invasion of the area in the 1930's it was no longer safe for women to live alone in the countryside and what was left of the movement died out, with very few women taking the sou hei vows after this time.

My informants worked as servants in Hong Kong after leaving the Canton Delta. Although they had all established spinster houses in the Delta region, they were afraid to return there for retirement. Many of their houses had been confiscated by the People's Republic and there was a rumor that cadres were forcing the elderly spinsters to marry widowers who needed someone to care for them.

The spinsters of Yan Gap vegetarian hall[2] where the fieldwork was primarily based and perhaps five thousand other spinsters living in Hong Kong in 1975-1976 had chosen to either join or form a Buddhist or Taoist vegetarian hall. A vegetarian hall, or zhai tang, is a residential establishment whose inhabitants devote themselves to prayer, meditation, and the maintenance of a strict vegetarian diet. A similar number of women had established secular spinster houses like those in the Canton Delta. Although the movement had not been religiously based, joining such a religious association offered many benefits for the retired. The property on which the halls were built was tax free; the religious association offered an on-going although minimal source of income through the performance of rites and the production of ritual paraphernalia. The women became members of a religious community and achieved an identity which defined them to the outside world and made sense of their "strange" life style. Importantly, they also secured for themselves care in old age and ancestor worship. While the movement flourished, paternal aunts had recruited their brother's daughters. These daughters had taken the sou hei vow, and inherited their aunt's property. In turn, they cared for the aunt in old age and worshipped her soul after death. With few new recruits to the movement, the spinsters were hard pressed to find care in old age. Some became servants and relied on their employers to care for them when they retired; others formed fictive bonds which were often unreliable. Some contributed heavily to relatives' families expecting old age care in return. Entering a religious association

provided solutions to many of the problems of the aging spinsters. Membership in a vegetarian hall also meant becoming part of the religious family of the hall, which served to establish fictive kin bonds. In some cases these bonds strengthened the sisterhood bonds already present.

ETHNOGRAPHY

The women of Yan Gap vegetarian hall were members of several overlapping sisterhoods. Some members had known each other since childhood. In 1962 members inherited a Buddhist vegetarian hall. Together with their sisters the two original inheritors decided to expand the hall to form a home for twenty-five members. When completed, it was a large modern structure which could accommodate fifteen full time residents and numerous guests (sixty-five slept there during one festival). It was situated on a hillside above the neighboring monastery on an island near Hong Kong. From the terrace one could look into the monastery and into the valley below. There was a garden and an orchard on the property where members grew some of their own food. The rest they purchased in the nearby fishing village with funds from their general account. The money to support the hall came from subscriptions, festival donations and the money which the head nun earned by performing rites. A general fund to which all members contributed when the hall was formed was used for the initial expansion and renovation. Money from the initial fund was also used to purchase real estate in Hong Kong from which they derived a small monthly income. They led a simple life in which attention to ritual structured much of every day with four prayer sessions, the first beginning at 4:30 a.m. The members performed most maintenance functions themselves.

Locating the vegetarian halls was a difficult task when initiating the fieldwork. It was in seeking help from local residents that I first encountered the prejudice against my future informants. The association of lesbianism with the marriage-resistance movement colored some people's perceptions. The strongest stigma, however, derived from their status as elderly women who had no descendants and were unmarried. "Why do you want to study

them?" I was repeatedly asked, "They are just lonely women with no grandchildren." That anyone could consciously choose such a fate was unthinkable to most of the people with whom I initially spoke. The bleak picture painted by these unknowing outsiders stood in sharp contrast to the sometimes cheerful, usually peaceful, and comfortable, apparently satisfying, and happy ambience I experienced during my stay there. The spinsters were quite aware of these discrepancies and had their own considered opinions about the nature of life for a single older woman. They had relatives and friends who were married and the comparisons were clear to them. This is how they typically described the differences:

Informant 1

> . . . here you have many old friends and the certainty of compassion and the same style of life. We can tolerate each other's ways. Some of the members are younger; they will continue to work for quite awhile and will increase their savings and provide for Yan Gap.

Informant 2

> Even if you have children, they grow up and leave you. Your husband will die and then you will be all alone and your children will visit you on special days, but you must prepare for them and clean up after they leave. But if you have sisters, they will always be with you.

The life these elderly women led was the culmination of years of planning and preparation. Unable to rely on the structural and affective security of the family they had consciously constructed a life with relationships, resources, and values which would sustain them in old age without children. In some ways this preparation was initiated when they took the sou hei vow to signify their choice of spinsterhood. While it served the immediate purpose of achieving adult status, it also protected them in death. Yet the very real insecurity of the spinster's position was also underlined at this time. Like any unmarried woman, even a small daughter, the spinster could not die in her paternal home. To avoid

this possibility as well as to begin building for her old age, the spinster built a spinster house with her sisters. Sometimes she moved there soon after the ceremony as a bride would change residences; sometimes she worked elsewhere and held it ready for her retirement. Thus, from the initiation of adult status, a spinster was consciously and explicitly aware of the need to plan for old age. Although the necessity for such a plan did not determine the life course of my informants, it was an important factor in many key decisions and helped structure the nature of the relationships they formed. Women forged strong alliances early in their adult years which they hoped would sustain them later. Some chose to become part of a brother's family and contributed regularly and heavily to the family's welfare. Some relied on intimate lesbian couples or triads. The majority chose the large sisterhood and built those relationships into strong bonds.

The bonds had to be strong for they involved substantial economic commitment, enough sentiment to sustain one, and the trust and consideration needed to care for one in sickness and old age. Through the years many relationships could not bear this weight; sisterhoods broke apart and reformed. Some never achieved a stability sufficient to accommodate the strains of old age. Some sisterhoods broke apart and were never reformed, or some members were excluded. Other women who had chosen to rely on the master-servant commitment were bitterly disappointed when their employers, citing lack of space in modern Hong Kong housing, sent them to old age homes. Despite the very real problems and dangers of forging this novel approach to old age, my informants and many like them felt they had achieved a close approximation to the cultural ideal of old age.

THE EXPERIENCE OF OLD AGE WITHOUT CHILDREN

The women of the vegetarian hall were nuns and lay women whose lives were structured by the religious rituals they practiced, by the subsistence demands of their religious life style and by the network of social ties through which the religious community operated. They were also old with their ages ranging from

fifty-five to eighty-three and the average seventy. Although the religious life set the explicit structure, living out, experiencing their old age was a conscious meaning inherent in their daily life. Old age also provided explicit significance to their achievements, their future plans and dreams and their satisfaction. Although they were single, old childless women,[3] they felt theirs' was a very good old age. Many were aware of and delighted by the deep irony of their accomplishment.

They were secure financially and emotionally. The bond of sisterhood was more important to some members than others. Some had numerous outside relationships, others had a special sister, a sworn sister. Most, however, indicated that the bond amongst themselves which they had managed to nurture and sustain despite tensions, conflicting loyalties, jealousies and intrigues was a fulfilling aspect of their lives. It assured the companionship and intimacy and compassion which they asserted were missing in intergenerational settings. Some members expressed considerable pride that this bond which was strong and intricate enough to sustain them in life would ensure that in death they would be remembered and acknowledged. Here the superimposition of the religious kinship structure over the sisterhood bond strengthened the mutual commitment by making the members ritual brothers[4] as well as fictive sisters. They pointed to sisters who had already died and were being worshipped as ancestors as proof of this accomplishment.

The hall they had built was a great source of pride to the sisters. Through their collective work and contributions they had enlarged the original two room structure into a lovely home, grander and more elegant, they asserted than the homes for the wealthy where they worked as servants. They were delighted that they could pass their old age in such relative splendor. In building the hall, members utilized their savings which had increased through joint business ventures such as real estate speculation which they had undertaken as a group sometimes in conjunction with sou hei women outside the hall. Ideally, members conceived of the hall as an undifferentiated possession. As the Sifu, or head nun, said, "All I have will go to Yan Gap, it is my home, I have nothing for myself." In reality not all members were so clear

in their commitment. It was a source of some tensions when members held back money for other purposes such as private investments.

They were able to indulge themselves. With no children to provide them with choice morsels of food, or assure special leisure time they performed this honor for themselves. They purchased and prepared special delicacies. Ritual celebrations as well as meals for visiting members who were still working were delicious affairs utilizing the talents of the Sifu, formerly a cook. They enjoyed smoking, flower gardening, frequent games of mahjong, and gossiping. They purchased good quality furniture and household items for their private bed spaces and for the common rooms.

They had respect. It was not the natural respect accorded parents and elders through filial piety. It too was an achievement for which they had worked. When they inherited the hall, none of the sisters had any claim to status within the religious community.[5] Their association was seen as marginal by the larger community and subject to challenge by envious but secure and established members of the religious community. The sisters worked concertedly to gain legitimacy. One studied for and took the vows of the Buddhist Sangha, becoming a nun. In so doing, she went a long way in securing the status and legitimacy of the hall. This was also a move which helped them establish their financial security. As an orthodox establishment, they could solicit contributions from the faithful for their maintenance and for the upkeep of the hall. All the members worked together to expand the premises and to establish a ritual cycle and performance acceptable to the community. Eventually the hall attracted followers and with them respect from the lay devotees and acknowledgement from the religious community.

They had descendants. The descendants were primarily fictive relationships. The more devout members attracted followers who hoped to learn from them and benefit from their rigourous ritual observances.[6] Often however these relationships were fleeting. Pilgrims to the nearby monastery seeking a special relationship to the religious community would pledge themselves as followers or as

adopted sons or daughters to the Sifu or one of the inheritors of the hall or to a lay woman noted for her devoutness. Sometimes this individual came regularly assuming the role of respectful son or daughter or grandchild. Such relationships could not be relied upon in old age however.

Membership in the vegetarian hall provided structure, security and significance for the spinsters. It was not a simple utilitarian association. Some spinsters, especially members of the larger Taoist halls which could range up to five hundred women, did regard their vegetarian hall affiliation in largely practical and functional terms. The hall offered them a safe and secure refuge at a time when they were old and without a family. The religious significance for many in such halls was minimal. This attitude did not intrude on the devotions of the women at Yan Gap although, some of them were unclear as to the nature of their religious convictions. One belonged to two halls, one Taoist and one Buddhist and could not decide which represented her beliefs or needs better. Others sought a deeper religious significance than was possible in the hall, and regularly attended devotions led by more profound sifus, usually male. But the choice of vegetarian hall life was religiously significant to them. It represented a personal commitment and in that way it differed from woman to woman. Members had their own patterns of devotion, adherence to the vegetarian diet, and active participation in the rites. They even differed in their sense of responsibility to the management and development of the hall. Such secular tasks when organized around a religious structure accrued a religious significance.

The beliefs of Buddhism as well as the religious life of the hall, served to complement and give significance to the spinsters' old age. The merit the women gained through their devotions, particularly the devotions of the Sifu was in part shared with other members and lay supporters and followers not members of the hall. Thus, a woman's life gained in significance for others in her daily life as well as in her specific religious activities. There was a more immediate and direct effect on old age -- the promotion of longevity. The religious practice in the hall contained elements of folk Taoism.

Maintaining the vegetarian diet gained for the members religious merit in Buddhism, and according to folk religion, it also increased longevity, especially by the consumption of mushrooms which figured heavily in the diet. The multiple meanings of this life and the ritual practices for old age were explicitly recognized in the ceremony in which monks and nuns and lay people prayed for the health and longevity of elderly people.

The sisterhood with its overlay of traditional religious kinship, substituted in many significant ways for the emotional, material, and spiritual security of the family for the elderly women. It was least adept at coping with an area which typically is a source of stress and ambivalence within the family (Harrell, 1981) -- senility. An eighty-three year old member of the hall, Sister Six, suffered from senile dementia. Until her stroke, she was minimally able to care for herself, dress, bath, and was content. She was unable to recognize most people and showed extreme disorientation. Those who had known her the longest and possessed clear memories of her capabilities and contributions, tried to protect and defend her. They would dress her in prayer robes and sit her in the shrine room, her beads wound around her hands, asserting that it would do her good even if she were not aware of where she was. They defended her clumsy and sometimes obstructive attempts to participate in the hall life by, for example, closing all the windows on a hot day when guests were expected, saying she just wanted to feel useful and be a part of all the activity. They felt that keeping her active would help her live longer. Others who had known her less well or not at all before the disease, had little patience with her bizarre behavior. They sought to isolate her, fed her in her room, and prevent her from leaving. Some ridiculed her calling her a walking ghost, which she understood with a scream of denial. One slightly sadistic woman took out her frustrations with the other members by cruelly taunting Sister Six when others were not around and refusing to feed her if she was left in her care. Those whom she troubled were forthcoming in expressing their own fears that they would be like her some day.

The possibility that they could become so dependent on their sisters frightened many. As long as

they functioned, even minimally, they felt they contributed to the group. But once they ceased contributing and became instead a burden, they feared the affective ties of sisterhood might not sustain them. This was especially a vivid concern as the group aged and few young members joined. For those younger women who were members they feared the burden would be intolerable. Although they had made provisions for such problems by recruitment and fund raising, still the very real problems presented by Sister Six were a grim omen of possible future problems.

SUMMARY

This singular group of women drew upon strengths and bonds developed over a life time of living on the margins of society to not only provide a secure old age for themselves, but to go far beyond it and approximate their conception of a model old age. To be sure not all women in their circumstances were so successful. Sometimes deep emotional conflicts split sisterhoods apart and they never reformed. Sometimes many sisters died young leaving a few or one to live out their lives in relative isolation; others made bad investments or used poor judgment in selecting a vegetarian hall. The secular sisterhoods were especially vulnerable for they had no community to support them or to provide stimulation, nor any recruits and became increasingly isolated and withdrawn as they aged and became enfeebled.

Elderly women face more severe problems than men: widowhood, the empty nest and lower income. These problems render them more vulnerable, making them in general the poorest group in a society (Peace 1981). My informants by remaining single avoided some of the problems traditionally faced by elderly women alone. They did not suffer the grief and loss of widowhood or the abandonment of children maturing. Although they were more at risk because they lacked descendants, they also did not have to bear all the burdens of their married counterparts. In this case study we have examined the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the solutions developed by the spinsters for coping with an old age without children. The sisterhoods embodied both the necessity of adequately replicating the family structure in order to

insure the single individual's emotional, spiritual and economic security, as well as the remarkable strength of their peer bonds in meeting the full range of demands of the elderly.

OLD AGE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Abolishing the evils of patriarchal rule and the control of the old was a high priority when the Chinese Communist Party seized state power in 1949, vowing to destroy all vestiges of feudalism. The implied and explicit power accorded the parents, in particular the father, over the lives of the children was abrogated. Within a few years, however, the new leaders were faced with some unsettling results of their decrees as the numbers of abandoned elderly grew. The new constitution made the care for elderly parents, or grandparents if children were dead, obligatory for sons. Failure to carry out this responsibility was a crime punishable by imprisonment. Whose genuinely childless elderly were included in the state's welfare protection plan known as the "Five Guarantees": guarantee of food; housing, clothing; medical care; and burial. Costs for this program are born by the local commune or brigade. We cannot adequately understand the position of the vulnerable elderly however without to some extent appreciating the changes in the lives of all elderly.

Although the elderly have relinquished an absolute control over their children's lives, a high degree of economic interdependence between parents and children continues to exist which gives the elderly a say in daily family affairs. The extent and significance of this interdependence differs between country-side and urban area. Workers in urban areas are employed by the government. Elderly in the cities tend to live with one of their children or to rotate among different children. After retirement which is sixty for male workers and staff, (non-manual laborers) and fifty for women workers, and fifty-five for women staff, most people are entitled to a pension. Workers who after liberation were not employed in government industries are not eligible for pensions. Now most urban workers are employed in government industries and are thus eligible for pensions. The

pension is determined by the number of years worked after the establishment of the Republic and by one's contribution to the state. Those who have worked more than ten years but less than fifteen, receive forty percent of their former salary, while those who joined revolutionary work during the anti-Japanese period, i.e., prior to 1945, receive ninety percent of their former salary. Although the amount of the pension can make a considerable contribution to a family, often it is not large and the parent is dependent on the children. Parents may make significant non-economic contributions to their children's household by providing child care, standing in food lines and overseeing the household. In urban areas individuals do not own their own homes or apartments, nor until recently did they have control or influence in securing a job for a child, thus the parents lack the real material power accessible to the elderly in the countryside.

The economic organization of the countryside where ninety-five percent of China's people live, is such as to allow elderly parents to make significant contributions to the family income. Peasants own and build their own homes; thus, control over the family homestead represents a considerable resource. In the collective system of production as an individual aged the work points he or she was allotted decreased according to physical ability. Women usually left the work force abruptly in their early fifties. Men undertook a phased reduction in amount of work they performed. Leaving the communal work force did not amount to a withdrawal from productive labor. Elderly peasants entered the private economy by engaging in handcraft and cashcrops, usually raising pigs. This could amount to a considerable proportion of the family income. According to Davis-Friedman, elderly who worked entirely in the private-sector could earn up to fifty to seventy percent of the wages of the ablebodied man employed full time in collective labor (1979:38). (This estimate was based largely on the income of elderly women.) In addition, they undertook household labor freeing mothers with small children for communal labor. Most of the elderly contribute a minimum of ten years of productive labor to the household after retirement from the communal work force (ibid).

The social and cultural role of the elderly has changed in important ways. They still receive and expect respect. Celebrations are held on their birthdays marking the attainment of an additional decade. One area of change however, has been the erosion of the father's authority. In part this is due to the system of accounting which was used by the team according to which the workpoints of a family were allotted to the head working male. When the father retired from the fields, his son assumed nominal leadership of the family (Parrish and Whyte, 1978). This did not entail a complete shift in authority; however, for the father still remained head of the household. Because the cost of building is steep, families tended to remain together and to add on to existing structures if possible. This joint residence allowed the father to retain some authority within the family. According to the research of Parrish and Whyte, the most significant change in social relationships has taken place between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Although the parents still have a large say in the selection of a son's wife if the couple will live in the parents' household, the mother-in-law can no longer expect absolute obedience from her daughter-in-law. Women are now able to make a major contribution to family income by their work in the fields which has improved their status in the household. It also means they must leave the household and their mother-in-law's supervision to carry out their work. Parrish and Whyte describe the change this way; "Women start out their married lives in a more secure position today, but they cannot look forward to a leisurely old age where they can boss a younger woman around...(1978:244)."

THE VULNERABLE ELDERLY

The number of those who could be considered vulnerable elderly is not large at present. More children survive to adulthood so that parents can rely on them for assistance. In Guangdong only six percent of all people over sixty in the countryside make use of the Five Guarantees (Ibid). Not all those who are eligible choose to take this support. Some prefer to rely on their own powers of subsistence. Others receive help from neighbors and relatives. Some develop the fictive kin ties character-

istic of the spinsters. Davis-Friedman (1979) reports that women are especially adept at this strategy. A woman facing old age without children will align herself with a younger man without a mother to care for him or a young couple with children and no grandparents. She will make herself useful to them as long as her strength permits. The assumption is that this help will be reciprocated when she becomes frail. As Davis-Friedman points out and as my research confirms these bonds lack the strength and obligations inherent in blood ties and can be broken unilaterally.

THE RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM

Since approximately 1980 the economic structure of the countryside has undergone a rapid transformation which in part explicitly acknowledges the income potential implicitly integrated into the family economy. A structure known as the "responsibility system" is replacing the communal mode of production. Its implementation and organization is not uniform throughout the country but basically it recognizes the individual household as the main unit of production. Households or groups of families now contract with the team to produce certain specified amounts of food stuffs. If they produce beyond the specified amount they either receive a sizable bonus or can keep the entire surplus and sell it to the state. If a household produces less than the stipulated amount, it must make up the difference. The state continues to own the means of production and while peasants can use the land, machinery and water, they can not sell or transfer these rights. The team continues to plan production goals.

Within this new system the potential contribution of the elderly to the household economy is greatly enhanced. All available labor is needed and used. Families which have extra labor have the opportunity to make considerable profits. One peasant and his family reported in the press sold 16,000 jin of grain to the state which was equal to the entire amount of grain produced by his team the previous year (Beijing Review; 2/15/82). In such a system the contribution of the elderly is real and explicit.

This system may eventually increase production for the whole country and indirectly improve the general welfare, but at the moment it appears to pose a possible threat to the most vulnerable members of society: the five guarantee households including elderly with no descendants, cripples and the disabled, widows and orphans. They have traditionally been supported by the team, but in many areas as profits beyond the contracted amounts are kept within the family, there is less surplus for the five guarantee households. To compensate for this problem teams and communes have devised various strategies. Some extract a certain percent of profits to devote to welfare funds. Others designate certain plots of land as five guaranteed land and auction off the right to till the land with the excess produce being kept by the producer. In some areas cadres have taken over responsibility for supporting the five guarantee households. In very poor areas the five guarantee households are thought to seriously suffer. Clearly a restructuring of the welfare system will be needed to harmonize with the new production system. Concern of the adverse effect on weak elderly can be seen from the stories occurring in the press stressing model accounts of care for the vulnerable elderly. Largely these stories feature young people helping out or "adopting" childless elderly (Beijing Review; 11/29/82; 1/3/83; 10/18/82).

It is possible that this innovation could adversely affect the status of the elderly within their family as their previously unofficial yet substantial contribution which secured for them a position of real influence has now become the open and legitimate mode of production. Erosion of this exclusivity could effect them if there was adequate labor to replace them. Another trend in social planning seems to work against this however -- namely the one child family.

The implications of the one child family will be profound on the elderly of the future. It will affect notions of death, and ancestor worship (which despite official disapproval remains strong) as well as care in old age and conceptions of what constitutes a good old age to which one can strive.

Communes are presently experimenting with pensions for peasants and old age homes for those without children to decrease the anxiety produced by the one child family campaign (Ibid;10/26/81). But this problem takes low priority in face of more immediate concerns.

Although it is not clear at this point how the status of the elderly will be affected by the responsibility system and the one child family, it is obvious that the changes will have serious consequences. Possibly, faced with an increased demand on the family production unit which cannot be supplemented by increasing the number of children, the status and power of the elderly will grow as they are able to make productive contributions. As long as they are able-bodied this development may bring satisfaction and prolongation of the period of useful productive contribution. But how this system will affect those no longer able to contribute is unclear.

CONCLUSION

The sisterhoods appear to be a singular phenomenon yet their example may be relevant to the elderly in the PRC today, and specifically to those considered "vulnerable elderly." The sisterhoods are not as singular a phenomenon as they at first may appear. Non-kin associations have long been popular in Chinese society in the form of territorial associations, secret societies, or guilds. Those associations provided mutual assistance to their members. In some associations the members could become seriously committed to each other and in such cases support for elderly and/or destitute members could be forthcoming. What is unusual in the case of the sisterhoods is that this was an association formed exclusively for and by women. Although women had been members of the other types of associations such as the territorial associations, there had been few associations formed by women for the purpose of mutual support.

The example of sisterhoods also serves to dispel the myth of homogeneity which pervades many discussions of the practices, beliefs and institutions in non-Western societies. Even in a gerontocratic society like China

where the cultural rules explicitly described the rights and duties of the elderly as well as proscribed deviations from that role with supernatural sanctions, the traditional forms were flexible enough to accommodate people's real needs while maintaining their cultural legitimacy.

Beyond increasing our understanding of cultural solutions to life cycle problems, an examination of traditional forms of association such as the sisterhood can provide us with models which may contribute to the resolution of current and future problems. The idiom of kinship which in the past substantiated the ties of mutual obligation and commitment may no longer be required. Instead, solutions are moving into a more public arena. There, policy decisions concerning the care of the elderly may make use of traditional models. For example, Charlotte Ikels reports that communal living arrangements provided for elderly couples in public housing in Hong Kong are among the most popular solutions for care in old age when family resources are not sufficient or available (1979).

The elderly in the PRC are not now facing serious problems. In fact, Deborah Davis-Friedman reports that the government there has been remarkably successful in dealing with the problems of both the family based elderly as well as the vulnerable elderly without family (1983). The number of childless elderly is not expected to rise. The need for government intervention in the care of the elderly may increase, however, if the one child family is a success. In such a case one couple would be responsible for the care of two sets of aging parents. Such a prospect, whose likelihood is uncertain at this point, would overwhelm the average family unless there was a substantial increase in the standard of living or unless the government stepped in to provide help. Some form of government support to traditional, non-kin based forms of peer associations may provide a possible solution to such problems.

The example of the spinsters might also serve as a restraint on our interpretations of others' quality of life based on statistical portraits. The childless single elderly woman is considered to be the most disadvantaged of the disadvantaged. Her position is extremely serious,

but the extent of despair and destitution which this description conjures up may not be entirely accurate. Those single, childless women who have survived to old age have undoubtedly developed strengths and skills which have facilitated their survival. Unlike men, few could expect to make a living wage and rely on that for security. Instead they entered into quasi-family work arrangements such as servanthood which created reciprocal bonds, sometimes more valuable than their actual wage. The ability to develop these bonds, and in some cases the bonds themselves served the woman well into old age, is a skill which helped these women live out a single old age. The strength of women to manage the problems of a single old age appears to be substantiated by Davis-Friedman who reports that many more men than women populate the old age homes of the PRC, (1983). (An additional factor here may be the influence of sexual restrictions on relationships between related men and women no matter what their ages. This discourages older men from forming fictive kin relationships with younger women and their families.) Thus demographic descriptions of single childless elderly women does not necessarily foretell a life of destitution or even despair.

A distinction must be drawn, however, between support in the declining years of old age and maintenance during the period of decrepitude. In such cases where all forms of reciprocity breakdown and the responsibilities are one sided, non-kin commitment is strained and often will not support the totally dependent elder. Thus although non-kin ties may effectively substitute for the family in providing support and security in old age, only kin ties appear likely to sustain and endure the care for the decrepit in an informal context.

FOOTNOTES

1. The specific sisterhoods under discussion are made up of six to ten members. The strength of the commitment among the members in any particular sisterhood varies according to such factors as length of acquaintance, employment relationship, common religion, common village background, emotional attachment, and the effect of outside social pressures produced by the frequent political upheavals of early twentieth century China. In the most general terms a woman recognizes another woman as a sister if she too is a spinster, and as in the case of most spinsters living overseas, an amah or domestic servant. The spectrum of possible relationships falling under the term "sisterhood" stretches from casual friendship towards ever greater commitment and solidarity and sometimes to lesbian marriage.

2. Many spinsters who migrated to Hong King in the 1920s and 1930s, looking forward to retirement, chose to establish or join zhai tangs. The choice of retreating to a religious institution in old age was an established pattern in China for both single individuals and those without descendants. The spinster' choice of the zhai tangs was, in this respect, less radical than the choice of the secular spinster houses which they had established in Kwang-tung. Nonetheless, the zhai tangs constituted a form of association significantly different from the spinster house.

   Newspaper accounts and government documents report that during the early 1900s zhai tangs were established in Hong Kong at a rapid rate. The proliferation of zhai tangs in Hong Kong is directly attributable to two factors: the increase in the migration of single women, including the sou hei, and the arrival of the Great Way religion a sect of Taoism. The sou hei amahs, on migrating to Hong Kong, sought associations with other sisters to replace the protective support of the women's organizations in the villages.

Apart from the security offered to single women in the zhai tang, Great Way had always attracted a large number of women -- even in China where most of the converts were wealthy widows. Similarly in Hong Kong, migrant Chinese women continued to join Great Way zhai tangs. Most of the Chinese women who migrated to Hong Kong prior to 1920 were wives and concubines, not working women. Separated from the strict control of the extended family, these women could go out in public and form relationships outside the family. This freedom was especially important to young widows. In the 1921 Census the Hong Kong government noted a trend for widows to remain in the colony instead of returning home to China. These widows, especially the wealthy ones, were among the few women who had any control over their own money, besides the kept-women and prostitutes who were unlikely to enter zhai tangs. All of the Great Way zhai tangs started in this early period in Hong Kong which I visited were established by wealthy widows either alone or in conjunction with high-ranking male members of the religion.

Buddhist zhai tangs did not become popular until the late 1930s. Prior to this time women who desired a Buddhist retreat joined one of the numerous monasteries or nunneries in the colony.

The high religious merit attached to the celibate state by both Great Way and Buddhism was another attraction for women. Most of the women interested in the chai t'angs in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia were also celibate. By Chinese custom, widows and deserted wives are not supposed to remarry, and the sou hei women had already taken a vow of celibacy. Celibacy has a long history in China. Early Taoist believers who sought longevity believed that celibacy or certain limited forms of sex were necessary to preserve the body's natural vital forces. This idea is not unique to the Chinese, but possibly its elaboration and the philosophy surrounding it are. Although the texts dealing with this subject are aimed mainly at men, celibacy was popular with some women.

3. Although theoretically all the members of the sisterhoods were spinsters who had taken the sou hei vow, in reality this was not always the case. During the nineteen twenties when wages for women were high and the marriage resistance movement had achieved its greatest popularity, married women sometimes deserted their husbands and children to rejoin their sisters. This was a particularly prevalent occurrence when a woman had been forced by her parents to marry. One member of Yan Gap proved to have such a history. From the beginning I was told that all the members were spinsters. One by one members quietly revealed to me the story of the married member and asked me not to make known that I knew of this. When I met her, she very soon also told me the story of her life, indicating I should not openly speak about it.

4. The religious kinship system of Buddhism uses only male kinship terminology. The women who became nuns and lay members of a religious establishment adopted this system.

5. The hall which the spinsters inherited was part of a religious community consisting of the nearby monastery and its three satellite zhai tangs. Members of the halls and monastery were related by religious kinship. Members were also related by this system to other monasteries and nunneries in the immediate area and more distantly to other religious establishments throughout the island.

6. Lay supporters of a religious establishment in Buddhism are entitled to a portion of the merit accrued by the Sangha and initiated lay followers who reside there and participate in religious rites. The proportion to which the supporters are entitled is related to the nature of their contributions and support for the establishment.

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THE FAMILY LIFE OF OLDER PEOPLE IN A CHANGING SOCIETY: INDIA

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One of the key issues in the study of developing societies relates to the impact of various forces of "modernization" upon the status and roles of the elderly. In most discussions of this issue it is assumed that in "traditional" -- particularly agrarian based -- societies, extended family systems provide a functional division of labor between the generations, and an accepted structure of authority and prestige, that assure the old person a high level of support, respect and care. As urbanization, industrialization, and related social processes progress, they are seen as causing the gradual disintegration of such family structures, bringing about the increased isolation of the nuclear family unit. Old people, according to this scenario, are increasingly left behind by their geographically and socially mobile offspring, and they no longer receive either the physical care or the emotional support, attention, and deference that were formerly their due. Furthermore, in the "modern" milieu, they no longer have the skills and knowledge that make them useful to others, and they

are increasingly considered social and economic liabilities, by their own offspring and by the community at large.

One of the aims of the study reported on nere was to determine to what extent the hypothecated disintegration of the traditional family structures is actually occurring in contemporary urban India, especially insofar as living arrangements and provisions for the care of elderly parents are concerned. Another was to look beyond family structure or the composition of households within which old persons reside, and examine the quality of life, the problems and stresses, as well as the satisfactions, of the family environment for Indian men and women in this age group.1 In fact there is already considerable evidence from a variety of published reports that most older people in India still live in a family setting, with their children or with other relatives, whatever other kinds of changes the Indian family may have undergone in recent decades in terms of structure and organization (see, for example, Vatuk 1982a: 84-91; Goldstein, et al., 1982: 4). However, it is not self-evident from the quantitative data on living arrangements of the elderly that are available from various parts of the sub-continent that their material and affective needs are being fully met, or that they actually receive the kind of obedience, respect, and loving care that is commonly associated by social scientists with the extended family. Some studies of Indian and other South Asian old people, based upon interview data, have suggested quite convincingly, in fact, that even those who remain in a family setting often suffer from feelings of being neglected or mistreated, and worries about their own or their children's well-being (e.g. Harlan 1964; Raj and Prasad 1971; Goldstein, et al., 1982).

The research upon which this report is based was carried out in a neighborhood of New Delhi, India, during an eighteen month period from September 1974 to February 1976. THe study employed anthropological techniques of participant observation, supplemented with a limited census-type survey of every household in the neighborhood. This neighborhood, which I have called Rayapur, had almost 2900 inhabitants in 1975 and is very mixed in terms of caste, ethnicity, language,

occupation, education, and economic status. At its core -- historically and socially -- is a group of almost 1100 people whose ancestors for many generations back have lived on the site, when it was an agricultural village. Since before 1947 this village was gradually incorporated into the city of New Delhi, its cultivated lands lost to development, as the metropolitan area increasingly encroached upon its hinterland to accommodate the post-Independence refugee influx and subsequent population growth. The indigenous Villagers, as they refer to themselves still, are outnumbered almost two-to-one by those they call the Outsiders, most of whom are fairly recent migrants from adjoining rural districts or from elsewhere in North India. Although I have some data on the Outsider category of Rayapur residents, my research concentrated primarily upon the Villagers, and it is these with whom I will be dealing here.

When Rayapur was still an agricultural village, all but a fraction of the cultivable land was held by members of the dominant Raya caste. Most of the other indigenous inhabitants of Rayapur belonged to service or artisan castes -- such as Barbers, Potters, Leatherworkers, and Sweepers -- the individual families of which were in most instances linked to specific Raya families by hereditary patron-client ties. The few Brahman families in the village had similar relationships with Raya families, in which they performed their traditional occupational and ritual services for their patron in return for annual shares of the land-owner's produce. Some of the low caste, Untouchable, residents of the village worked as agricultural laborers on the land itself.

Relatively few Villagers have left Rayapur since it became part of the city of New Delhi -- an important factor in their remaining a localized community is their continued ownership of house plots, and in some cases other land, within the original habitation area of the village. Out of 168 Villager households, Rayas occupied 76 in 1975 -- forty-five percent of the total. However, since Raya households are on the average larger than those of other castes, the representation of the caste in the Villager population is closer to fifty percent. Furthermore, their numbers in Rayapur as a whole

are augmented by 132 of their fellow caste members who reside in the neighborhood as tenants, or Outsiders. These migrants are, in most cases, closely related by blood or marriage to one or more Raya Villager families -- they have selected Rayapur as a place to settle because of such kinship connections. Thus Rayas continue to constitute the dominant caste group in Rayapur, numerically as well as socially.

When Rayapur was an agricultural community, the patrilocal extended family was the normative domestic as well as productive unit, and at least within the dominant, landowning Raya caste, a significant proportion of families seem to have conformed to this pattern, if retrospective reports can be relied upon (see Vatuk 1982b: 126-135; Ghosh 1969,1974). Land, houses, and livestock were held in corporate ownership by male agnates who, according to customary law, became equal co-parceners of their family estate at birth. An ideal farm family would consist of an older married couple or widowed person, their married sons, sons' wives, and grandchildren. Sometimes the senior-most generation would consist of a set of brothers with their respective wives, so that in the middle generation cousins might be found sharing in the ownership and management of an undivided family holding. Women in such a family had no ownership rights over productive resources, such as land. Daughters and sisters of male owners had the right to be maintained until marriage, and to have their marriage expenses paid out of the family resources; wives and widows had the right of maintenance until death.

With this type of family system, old people could reasonably expect to spend their declining years in a family setting. Among Rayas, family property was rarely formally divided among a set of brothers until after the death of their father. Even if brothers disagreed among themselves, or if, because of conflict among the women, separate "hearths" were set up within the extended family household, productive activities continued to be carried on cooperatively. In the rare instance of partition of property during the lifetime of elderly parents, the latter would almost invariably be accommodated within the household of one or the other of their sons after the separation. It is probable that in those

castes that did not own land or other substantial property, the co-residence of two or three generations of adult males with their wives and children was far less common than it was among the Rayas. However, even in service or artisan families elderly parents were sheltered and maintained by their married sons. While brothers might divide the family home to provide each of them a separate living space, along with a division of tools and clients for their occupational specialty, they would rarely leave their parents to fend for themselves in the wake of such a family partition.

When the land belonging to Rayapur began to be annexed by the city of New Delhi in order to build housing for its growing population, the owners of the land were compensated in cash at rates based on current market value. Since the process of acquisition took several decades to complete -- and over a period in which land values increased sharply -- the various Raya families in the village benefited very unevenly. Furthermore, the sizes of the original holdings varied greatly within the Raya caste, as did the ways different families handled their new found wealth. For these reasons there is today a far wider range in terms of economic standing among members of the caste than was the case when land acquisition first began to get underway. Some of the former landowners have become quite wealthy by urban Indian standards, while others are on the edge of poverty. The majority, however, maintain a middle-class life style, in terms of living accommodations and facilities, consumption standards, and educational goals. The non-Rayas among the Villagers are generally less well off than the Rayas. Unlike the members of the dominant, landholding caste they received no cash payments to compensate them for the loss of a traditional livelihood that acquisition imposed, and few among them have managed to attain even a reasonably comfortable standard of living.

When one discusses the problems and stresses of family life for the elderly, it is clear that the economic factor should be taken into account. Economic scarcity often is found to underlie some of the more serious and seemingly irresolvable conflicts between the generations that one may observe in these families. On the other hand, there

are certain recurring patterns of intra-household tension and issues that regularly tend to create conflict between the generations in this society, regardless of economic level. I will describe and try to account for these before considering the issue of the impact of economic deprivation upon the situation of older people.

In this community -- and in Indian culture generally -- the onset of old age is linked with the time at which one's children reach marriageability. Particularly significant as a transition marker in the adult life cycle is the marriage of the first son, and the coming of the daughter-in-law, which initiates a new reproductive sequence in the family. From this time on a man or woman is expected to begin to assume the kinds of age-appropriate behavior thought to be suited to the life stage of "old age" (burhappa), and to turn to certain activities and preoccupations considered appropriate for the old (see Vatuk 1980). Such expectations are imposed upon the parents of married sons regardless of the exact chronological age of the individual, even when this is generally known. The marriage of the first son takes place for a Rayapur woman any time between forty and sixty years of age, and for a man generally five or more years later, on the average. Since daughters are usually married at a considerably younger age than sons, in families of children of both sexes, regardless of the precise order of their birth, one or more daughters are usually married before the first son weds while at this time most Rayapur men and women would not consider themselves -- nor would they be considered by others -- as truly "old" (burha or burhi), there is a clear cultural recognition of the significance of a child's marriage as a transition marker for the onset of old age (burhappa). Those individuals who have begun to marry off their children ought then to be the appropriate sample for a study of the family life of older people. But since there are individuals in this society, as in all societies, who either never marry or who have no living children when they reach late adulthood, in order to provide any kind of quantitative analysis of household data one can not avoid resorting to a chronological age limit. I have therefore taken for the following analysis of living arrangements of older people all individuals who fall within the age ranges of

45 and over (for men) or 40 and over (for women). These ages were chosen because no man or woman among Rayapur Villagers whose reported age is below these has a married child, while over three-fourths of those who fall within these age cohorts for each sex have one or more married children -- or have had a married child who is now deceased. By taking such a relatively low set of ages for the beginning of the older age cohorts I also hope to make it possible to clarify somewhat better the developmental aspect of family living arrangements than would be possible if I chose the more standard 60 or 65 year basis.

Of the 1073 Villagers of all ages who were living in Rayapur in 1975, 100 men and 102 women fall into the "older" age category, as defined above. Of these, 170 persons -- 81 men and 89 women -- have one or more sons, and thus can potentially enter into an extended family household arrangement of the culturally prescribed pattern, if they do not already live in such a household. Of the remaining 32 individuals, 13 have one or more daughters, while 19 are childless or have lost any children they may have had through death. Of the latter, four persons (two married couples) had a married son who has since died, and another, an elderly widow, had a married daughter until recently.

If we look at the households of those villagers who have one or more sons already married (there are 51 men and 59 women in this category), we find that all but 11 have at least one of their married sons living in their household. Only 11 of the men and women who have married sons do not live with them. Two married couples among these live alone, while the rest have unmarried children (including in every case an unmarried son) still living in their household. Most of the married sons of this latter group of people still live in Rayapur -- a few have left to live and work outside of Delhi or in another part of the city. Of those still in Rayapur most remain in the family home, but maintain an independent household within one room or a set of rooms set aside for their exclusive use.

Closer examination of the families of these 100 individuals who have married sons -- including atten-

tion to marital status, age distribution of offspring, and whereabouts of those sons who do not live in the household -- allows us to discover certain patterns in the data on living arrangements beyond those already shown in Table 1. First, it is significant that no widow or widower with a married son lives alone or with unmarried children only. Furthermore, no only son lives apart from his parents. However, in those cases in which an individual has two or more married sons (61 persons out of the total of 110), the chances are about two to one that only one will remain in the parental home. Generally the first son to marry will stay with his parents until some time after the marriage of the second -- then he and his wife (or in some instances, the second brother and his wife), will set up an independent household apart from the rest of the family (see Table 2).

TABLE 1

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF OLDER VILLAGERS
WHO ARE PARENTS OF ONE OR MORE MARRIED SONS

	Married Son or Sons in Household	Unmarried Children Only In Household	Spouse Only In Household	Total
Men	45	4	2	51
Women	54	3	2	59
Total	99	7	4	110

TABLE 2

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF OLDER VILLAGERS

WHO ARE PARENTS OF TWO OR MORE MARRIED SONS

More Than One Married Son in Household	One Married Son Only in Household	Unmarried Children Only in Household	Spouse Only in Household	Total
22	31	6	2	61

It is therefore evident that the dominant pattern of living arrangements for the elderly conforms to the traditional expectation that those who have sons will live with at least one of them -- and his wife and children -- in old age. There is no evidence in this data of a tendency to isolate old people from the family environment. However, it is also clear from these data that the popular stereotype of a large and complex three or four generation family, headed by an elder patriarch and including a set of several brothers with their respective wives and offspring, does not become a reality for the majority of aged villagers. Partly for demographic reasons -- since only 142 out of the 202 men and women in our older age cohort have more than one son -- and partly because of the fact that married brothers rarely remain together in the same household until their parents' death -- at least in the contemporary, urban milieu of Rayapur -- most households of older people will develop eventually into the so-called "stem family" form, with the elderly couple or widowed person, one married son, that son's wife, and their unmarried children. Occasionally such households also include one or more unattached adult relatives, such as the father's unmarried brother or widowed sister.

Though few older people actually live in large extended family with several married sons, nephews,

and their wives and children, there are some households in the community that conform to this type, and they are clearly thought of still as models of the ideal family. There are three lower caste households that include three married couples each (parents and two married sons), and one of Brahman caste. But all of the remaining large and complex households in the village are found among Rayas. One of these is the household of Tika Ram. His family spans four generations and 17 persons; it occupies the largest household in Rayapur. Tika Ram is a widower, about 70 years of age. Three of his sons, all in their 40's and 50's, live with him. The eldest of these is a widower also, and himself the father of a married son. The others have wives and children ranging in age from 8 to 18 years. Significantly, the expenses of this household are covered from rents on property held as an undivided family estate. The only currently employed member of the family is Tika Ram's eldest grandson, who works in a Delhi government office.

Another large Raya household is that of Hari Kishor. Generally regarded as the richest villager in Rayapur, the head of this household, in his middle fifties, is the father of three married sons. His wife, Chandar Devi, a woman of strong personality, rules over her daughters-in-law and grandchildren with a loving but firm hand. His two elder sons are employed -- the youngest had recently completed his M.A. degree at the time this research was being carried out. In this household also, the regular expenses of the household are taken care of out of earnings from investments and rents from jointly-held property, managed by Hari Kishor as senior co-parcener.

At least three different factors seem to be at work in those families that succeed in remaining intact after the sons marry, rather than becoming truncated as one or more sons sets up an independent household -- the more usual pattern. First, as I have noted above, most such households are to be found among the Rayas. This caste has long had a tradition of large extended family households, associated in the rural setting with land ownership and an agrarian economy. While there is considerable reason to believe that the average size and overall incidence of such households has significantly declined since Rayapur became urbanized (see

Vatuk 1982b; Ghosh 1969, 1974), the cultural model of the ideal family persists and probably constrains members of this caste more than others from resorting to household partition when intrafamily tensions and competition for resources arise. Members of such large families as those of Tika Ram and Hari Kishor consider their ability to continue living together a source of considerable pride, and this alone must provide considerable motivation to iron out differences among their respective family members when conflict threatens to lead to attempts at separation.

A second factor is economic. Fully one-half of the 14 households of villagers in Rayapur that include two or more married brothers (or cousins) with elderly parents (or parent) have either substantial amounts of jointly-owned property, or substantial earnings from a jointly managed business. In the other seven, expenses are met through pooling separately earned income. These latter households differ also from the former in that they are, on the average, at an earlier phase of the family developmental cycle, one or more of the married brothers in the household being still childless. All of the lower-caste households, and the one Brahman household, with two or more married sons falls into this latter group. All of those with income from jointly-held property are Raya households. The experience of other families in their economic stratum leads one to predict that most of those households that subsist on the pooled wage earnings of their male members will not survive intact for long. There is a strong likelihood that as the years go by, and the children of the brothers become older and more numerous, separation of one or more of the married brothers from the parental household will occur.

Thirdly, one cannot discount personal factors: some parents have the forcefulness of personality and the managerial skills to keep a family unified in the face of circumstances that would lead to dissolution in other families. Such factors are of special significance in helping to explain the existence of a few large households among families of the lower economic strata, in which jointly-owned property or businesses are not present to motivate the individual members to compose their differences and remain together.

Now let us turn to those older people in Rayapur who have no son, and who therefore cannot conform in their old age to the traditional norm of patrilocal extended family living, either now or in the future. Most people in this situation, realizing their future plight, begin to make arrangements while they are still relatively young and vigorous to ensure that they will have some younger person in their home, in old age. For those who have a married daughter it might appear that to move in with her would be a second-best choice for a sonless person. However, this option is rarely chosen. While people in Rayapur generally agree that daughters are likely to be loving and generous caretakers of their elderly parents, to be in the position of depending upon a daughter and her husband for the material necessities of life, and to live in the intimacy of their home, is regarded as shameful and demeaning. It is believed that one ought always to give open-handedly and unstintingly to a daughter at every opportunity, but under no circumstances ought a person with self-respect take anything from her, or from her husband or in-laws. The rare old person who, despite these strictures, is found to be living with a married daughter in her conjugal home, is described by others as a "poor soul", who "has no one" -- the implication being that it is inconceivable that a parent would allow himself (or herself) to be put in such a position if it were not an absolutely last resort solution to destitution or infirmity. In Rayapur there are two such individuals -- a widow and a widower, respectively -- both of whom are over 70 years of age, poor, and infirm.

A somewhat more acceptable alternative for the individual or couple without sons is to marry their daughter to a man who is willing to live uxorilocally, in their home. This arrangement, however, is more attractive to a girl's parents than it is to most prospective grooms. It is often difficult to find a young man willing to become a member of his wife's household. The position of ghar jamai ("son-in-law of the house") has low prestige socially, and it places a man under the control of his wife's parents (and even, perhaps, of his wife) in a community in which he is inevitably an outsider, given the prevalent practice of village exogamy in this region. Therefore, only a couple with substantial material

resources can usually succeed in making a match of this kind for their daughter. It has not proved a viable solution for any of the sonless villagers currently living in Rayapur, although there are at least three young Rayapur men -- each of them one of a set of several brothers -- who have gone to other families elsewhere in Delhi as in-marrying sons-in-law.

Adoption (god lena) or fosterage (rakh lena) is the most commonly chosen option for those who have no son or are childless. Since the primary purpose of these devices is to provide a substitute for the absent son, so as to ensure a secure old age, female children are rarely taken into another's home, except in situations where they have been orphaned and need an adult caretaker. Adoptive sons, on the other hand, usually have living parents. If an individual or couple has daughters, but no sons, the preferred adoptee seems to be the daughter's son. Two couples in Rayapur have already made arrangements of this kind -- taking the daughter's son into their home as a young child, arranging and financing his marriage, and keeping him and his wife in their household as they would a son of their own. Two of the remaining four villager couples who have daughters only are contemplating such an adoption in the near future as insurance against a lonely old age.

If a couple is childless, or if none of their daughters has a son to spare, another male relative may be adopted. Non-relatives are almost never considered for this purpose. From the point of view of a man's agnates, the most agreeable choice is his brother's son. Such a choice has the advantage of ensuring that ancestral property stays within the patrilineal group. However, there are instances in which a sister's son of the husband, or a brother's son of the wife, is selected for adoption. While it is more common in such cases to adopt an infant or young child, sometimes a widower or an older couple who have delayed making provisions for their later years will adopt an adolescent or young adult kinsman. In such cases an explicit agreement is usually sought with the adoptee, providing that in exchange for inheritance of his adoptor's property, he will live with and care for him until his death.

Although adoption may be marked by public ritual, it is in many cases an informal arrangement between the parties concerned. In some instances an older person who has failed to make provision for his old age simply attaches himself at some point to the household of a brother's son -- or remains with a brother, rather than setting up an independent establishment, when their parents die. There are in Rayapur seven men -- all either widowed or never-married -- who have followed this pattern, and two others died during the period of my research. The one individual in the elderly category who lives entirely alone is also supported by his deceased brother's son, although the latter lives separately. He was never adopted or fostered by his uncle, but has assumed this responsibility of support because he is the old man's closet living relative. A Leatherworker by caste, this man has no property of any kind, a fact which is doubtless related to his failure to have been able to make more formal arrangements for old age security.

I have been discussing up to now the situation of old people in Rayapur in terms of living arrangements. Rayapur Villagers themselves, however, do not think about the problem of old age security precisely in such terms. They generally assume that they will remain in their own home until they die: the issue for them is who will stay (or come to live) with them and "serve" (seva karna) or take care of them in later life. The central question, for a person who has no son, or whose son becomes estranged or departs from home after marriage, is "who will serve me in my old age?" (burhappe me seva kaun karega?). The notion of "service" to the old is broadly construed. It implies not only the provision of shelter and the material necessities of life, but also deference, attention, and love. Entitlement of the old to service from the young is based upon a notion of reciprocity -- it is something owned to parents in return for the nurturance they provided their child during infancy and childhood. The fact that the proper relationship between elderly parents and their adult sons is conceptualized in this manner seems to create a number of difficulties, most of them revolving around unfulfilled expectations, for old people seeking satisfaction in their actual family situation as the years go on. Complaints are regularly heard from the old that

nowadays young people no longer know how to serve their parents properly, certainly not in the way that they themselves served their parents or parents-in-law when they were young. Although old men and women in Rayapur rarely express direct criticism of their own sons or daughters-in-law -- except in cases of extreme and blatant neglect or mistreatment -- tales of others' unfilial sons and heartless daughters-in-law are popular subjects of conversation, as are certain "horror stories" of helpless, ill old people in Rayapur -- in most cases these stories center on childless widows or widowers, recently deceased -- who were reportedly the victims of maltreatment or abandonment by their kin in the period before their death. Whether these stories are apocryphal or literally true it is impossible to determine, but their telling gives expression to a widespread dread among the able aged of the possible consequences of physical and/or mental decline in late life.

The notion that young people ought to "serve" their elders is woven into a conception of the latter stage of life as one in which the individual should withdraw from active involvement in the practical affairs of the world, including responsibility and concern for the support of a family and the day-to-day management of a household (see Vatuk 1975, 1980). This conception is consistent with that provided in the traditional Sanskritic texts, according to which a man's life is divided into four stages, or asramas. During each stage, appropriate activities and attitudes, and proper kinds of interpersonal relationships, are prescribed by the Hindu lawgivers. While most Indians today are not directly familiar with these texts through reading them personally, the broad outline of the asrama scheme is generally known and serves as a guide for age-appropriate conduct among men and women of all social strata, whether literate or not.

The ideal life course described in the texts begins in late childhood with a boy's initiation: from the time of this ceremony until his marriage he is to devote himself to learning and to remain celibate and obedient to his religious teachers. The second stage of life -- during which a man is accompanied by his wife -- is one of procreation; and rearing of children. It is the only time

of life in which he ought to be sexually active. His efforts should be devoted to the support and management of his household, and to participation in community affairs. The third stage of life begins when a man's sons mature in their turn, marry, and begin to bear offspring. Now he is supposed to turn over all family responsibilities to his adult sons and begin to concentrate upon religious contemplation and the practice of austerities. Whether he remains in the home, or leaves his family to take up the life of a hermit, he should try to detach himself from household and community affairs, in preparation for the final stage, in which he will renounce the world and all its pleasures, and prepare himself spiritually for death. Just as the texts prescribe, older people in Rayapur feel that it is appropriate that in one's later years one's primary preoccupations should center around spiritual matters. Part of the duty of a son and daughter-in-law is to free his parents from worry over mundane matters related to their own and the family's survival and well-being, so that they can turn their attention inward, and toward God. However, in order to do this, the older person must be willing to renounce control over household affairs to the younger generation. While it is not realistically supposed that this renunciation of control will be sudden or absolute, once the son reaches maturity a man or woman's mode of handling the transition to old age is evaluated in terms of how fully he or she has been able to detach himself, mentally and behaviorally, from the desire to continue to control the running of the household, the activities of junior family members, and the allocation of material resources among them. Since, as we have seen, the overwhelming majority of men and women live in old age in a household with adult children or other junior relatives -- and since in almost all cases it is a household that they themselves have managed for many years, rather than one which they have joined in their declining years -- the issue of how, and how rapidly, to transfer control between the generations is one that few escape having to deal with at some point in life. In those cases in which old people express dissatisfaction with their family situation, and unhappiness with their general lot in old age, struggles within the family over the issue of control are commonly at the source. The ability to retire gracefully from a central, managerial position in the household is one that is

culturally valued and rewarded, but is in practice relatively rarely found. In general, older men appear to be able to handle this transition more successfully than older women; in part, probably, because as they age they become more peripheral to the household's day-to-day routine, spending increasing time outside of the home with peers in the village and within the caste community in other villages. Most older men seem content if they receive deferential treatment and are consulted, at least formally, on important matters, such as large expenditures, the schooling of grandchildren, or travel of women of the family. They do not necessarily insist upon directing in detail the day-to-day running of the household. Older women find it much more difficult to refrain from exercising control over the most minute details of household management until very late in life.

The typical sources of tension or conflict between women of senior and junior generations in an old person's household are summarized by them under the heading of "work and food" (kam aur khana). Older women expect that their son's bride will take over all of the more onerous household chores, freeing them to pursue the kind of religious and social leisure activities that they have had no time to indulge in earlier years. They expect a daughter-in-law to be hardworking, submissive, obedient, and responsive to the demands made upon her. The usual division of labor in such a household has the junior woman doing most of the "inside" work -- cooking, cleaning, laundry, and childcare -- while the mother-in-law acts in a managerial capacity and handles all "outside" tasks, those that require dealing with shopkeepers and craftsmen, for example, as well as care of milch animals. Most daughters-in-law accept their role assignment, but chafe against having to obey detailed instruction about how and when to carry out each task. They also tend to perceive their mother -in-law as overly demanding in terms of the quantity of work expected, and insensitive to their need for an occasional respite from their labors. On the other hand, older women feel that the modern young women is incapable of -- or unwilling to perform -- the kind of hard and sustained labor they remember having carried out in their youth, and hence they feel burdened by having to continue to perform some inside tasks that they feel they should be relieved

of at this time of life. This kind of problem is exacerbated when there is more than one daughter-in-law, since the older women must then play, in addition, an intermediary role between them. This issue of "work" creates the greatest difficulties for older women in terms of their attaining the kind of ideal old age they strive for. Such women, when among peers, commonly chide one another about being "too much bound up in the household affairs". However, at the same time, they generally share a conviction that if they do not take a detailed interest in the household, important matters would be improperly handled: meals would not be ready on time, food supplies would be squandered, fuel wasted, men sent to work without a hot bath in the morning, and so on. In this way they rationalize as unavoidable their failure to withdraw into contemplation and repose by handing over the key to the household's food supplies -- and the managerial role that these keys symbolize -- to their daughter-in-law until very late in life.

The allocation of food within the household -- a major area of feminine responsibility in the Indian family -- also provides a source of friction for older women. Even in well-to-do households, there is an assumption that food is a scarce commodity and that it must be allocated on the basis of certain priorities, not equally, or according to appetite. Generally males have a greater claim than women, not only to larger quantities of food -- due to their larger physical size -- but to the more expensive luxury items, and those thought to have special health-giving properties, which the family cannot afford to purchase in sufficient quantities to satisfy everyone. The situation of the old is ambiguous. While the concept of "service" to the elderly includes the idea that one ought to give preference and priority in food allocation to one's parents, the older person himself, it is felt, ought to develop an indifference to food as to other sensual pleasures, restricting his diet to the minimum necessary to keep body and soul together.

Young married women generally are the last to eat, and hence must often make do with whatever is left after others have taken their fill. They have no claim for specialty items, unless these are saved -- or secretly

purchased -- for them by their husbands. Not only is the food distributed at regular meals a possible source of dissatisfaction or dissension within the family, but the allocation of special items like milk, fruits, and sweets, may become a highly emotional issue, especially when the children or the wives of different brothers are concerned. The ability to control food is an important part of the older woman's power, and she rarely accepts with equanimity the threat to this power that can occur when special items are bought out of her sons' privately retained funds and distributed only within their elementary families.

Another major area of friction within the families of older people in Rayapur, often a source of considerable distress for the elderly, concerns the extent to which they can continue to control the behavior of junior family members. Particularly important here are the maintenance of "traditional" standards of deportment for young women of the family. Young married men are in practice subject to little restraint in terms of their activities outside of the home, although those who engage in such disapproved activities as smoking, drinking, meat-eating, or illicit sexual relations generally refrain from pursuing them at home, out of respect for their parents' wishes. But the older generation generally places considerable importance on being able to limit the physical mobility, the dress, and the kind and extent of social interactions permitted to their sons' wives. They also may consider it their legitimate right to determine what activities the couple may engage in together outside of the home, as well as the amount of privacy they are allowed inside the home. Older parents often require that their son and daughter-in-law seek their permission before going out to a movie, for example, or to visit the sons' work associates in their homes. There is often, then, a struggle between parents and an adult son over the latter's wish to directly control his own wife's behavior, rather than leaving this area of concern to his mother and father. In general, the substance of this struggle is the more liberal, modern standard of conjugal togetherness and the relatively greater freedom for women that are favored by the younger generation.

Thus far I have emphasized various aspects of the problem of competition for control and management of household affairs between senior and junior generations in Rayapur families. I have described some of the areas of difficulty that arise when old people display reluctance to relinquish authority over the young, although they wish to be relieved of work, cared for, and deferred to by their sons and daughter-in-law. However, in many families the issue is more complicated than this. From the perspective of many elderly parents the most serious source of their discontent is the failure of their offspring to accept the responsibility that is the other side of the coin of control. That is, by fully supporting their own wives and children, along with their parents, to the best of their ability. In many Rayapur families, young adult married men who live in their parents' household are unable, or unwilling to exert the necessary effort, to find employment. Or, if employed, they are reluctant, or unwilling, to contribute a sufficient proportion of their earnings to the maintenance of the parental household. Such young men attempt to play the role of dependent "child" insofar as financial matters are concerned, while also -- unreasonably. from the parent's point of view -- expecting to be allowed complete freedom of lifestyle for themselves and their own wives and children. In such a situation the older parents feel doubly burdened. They resent having to continue to concern themselves with the necessity of supporting the family, educating children and grandchildren, and financing marriages and other ritual events, while failing to receive the unquestioned obedience, respect, and material assistance that their cultural traditions lead them to expect from a dependent child. Such a situation is not limited to those well-to-do families -- examples of which were given above -- in which jointly held property provides a regular income. In such families it is usual for young couples to live rent-free and with all of their regular expenses, including food, covered by the household head. Those who earn, retain all or most of their earnings for luxury items for their own wives and children, or save for future eventualities. Those who do not earn depend for their luxuries, as well as for necessities, upon the family income.

However, even in families without such substantial resources, young married men often fail to contribute -- or they contribute inadequately -- to their own and their children's support. While in well-to-do families such an arrangement may be tolerated by older parents since it provides a motive for married sons to remain in the household, rather than setting up housekeeping independently, in poorer families it may mean real hardship for the elderly. From the perspective of the latter, an "ideal" son should hand over all of his earnings to the household pool -- whether this be managed by his father, his mother, or himself -- to be used to cover the expenses of all members. Such an arrangement comes closest to that of the agricultural farm family, in which all contribute their labor and the needs of all are met from the farm proceeds. In fact, few families in Rayapur operate in this way. The contributions of earning members to the expenses of an extended household are highly negotiable, and it is quite common for the relative contributions of father and son, or of two brothers, to be widely at variance, both absolutely and relative to their respective total earnings or numbers of dependents. Many parents assert that they do not know exactly what their working sons earn. Even if they do know, few feel in the position to insist upon what they would regard as a fair share. Most prefer to put up with an unsatisfactory compromise, in which the son contributes what he wishes, and they try to make up the difference from their own earnings. They are quite aware that their sons and daughters-in-law may well decide to separate from the family at the point when they feel they are giving more than they receive to the larger unit. And although there are rare cases in which elderly parents have themselves precipitated such a separation because they no longer felt able or willing to support the family of a non-contributing son, most older people in this position persevere, both because their own long term material interests will not be served by alienating such a son, and because they have invested so much symbolic and emotional significance in the maintenance of a solidary, undivided family unit.

Although I have suggested above that older men in Rayapur seem to be able to handle the transition to old age with less overt stress than do most older

women, it is also true that in many ways the latter is in a more secure and central position in her family than is her husband. Old men in Rayapur, having completely lost the kind of role that would have been theirs in an agrarian economy, adjust to the new urban setting and the wage economy -- in which most of them have little opportunity, and some no financial need, to participate -- by withdrawing from the family, by becoming marginal members, as the traditional Hindu texts recommend. They allow their sons -- where these are responsible and capable adults -- to run their own lives and manage the household according to their own wishes. In return for this non-involvement, they demand only that their physical needs be met, their whims humored, and the proper deference and attention paid their opinions and advice. For most young people this is an acceptable arrangement. One of the implicit agreements between an old man and his son is that the latter will not engage in a direct confrontation with his father over matters upon which they may disagree. To be silent, or to verbally assent to what one's father says, is to be respectful. But once obeisance has been paid in this way, there is little reluctance to act against the father's wishes, or to simply fail to follow through with the course of action he has advised. Thus a modus vivendi between the generations of men is reached, but at the expense of the older man's central family role.

For the older woman the situation is very different. Unlike her husband's role in the modern age, the role of the elderly woman is a continuous one. She is called upon to do today very much what she was socialized to do from youth onward, although changing times have brought about some labor-saving devices and have freed her from the field work or other occupational tasks that used to take her away from continuous preoccupation with household chores. The patterns of conflict with her daughter-in-law are very much the same as those that colored her own relationship with her mother-in-law: although some of the specific issues are new, they continue to revolve around the allocation of work, food, and other resources, and the enforcement of standards of female modesty, just as they did in the past. She has clear guidelines to follow, and although she feels the pressure of changing values and the pull of new strivings for independence on the part of her

sons and daughter-in-law, she knows that keeping her family together and accommodating to a gradual transfer of control between the generations have been the major concerns of women like her for generations.

I have argued here, and supported my arguments with some generalizations from my study of Rayapur families of older people, that one has to look further than the living arrangements of the elderly in developing societies if one wishes to assess the nature of the impact of urbanization and industrialization upon the older segment of the population. My findings from this study of a community of urbanized Villagers in the city of Delhi are in general accord with those obtained by Harlan and his students in surveys of rural Punjab, and also with the more recent study by Goldstein and his research team in Nepal (see Harlan 1964, Goldstein et al. 1982). As these authors also point out, the simple fact of living in an extended family setting does not assure an older person a position of respect or a life of ease and freedom from cares, even in a culture like that of South Asia in which the obligation to support an elderly parent is strongly felt. While, as I have shown from my data from one urban neighborhood, most Indians continue to conform to the traditional prescription that parents should find security in old age by ensuring that they have a son -- or acquiring a surrogate son -- and seeing that when he marries his wife joins their household, many older individuals nevertheless find their goal of repose and contentment in the later years an elusive one. One of the issues that I have not dealt with in detail is to what extent the problems faced by the elderly in this urban Indian setting are a product of social change -- urbanization, industrialization, modernization, and the like -- which has destroyed, or made inoperable, the traditional value system. I would argue that some of the difficulty experienced by older people in making a successful transition to later life arises out of factors inherent in the traditional rural social structure. Conflict and tension between women in the extended family, between father and son, or between other male kinsmen of adjoining generations over the division of work responsibilities and managerial prerogatives were certainly present in Rayapur long before the advance of the city and the introduction of modern occupations and aspirations. Some confirmation

of this is provided in the writings of those social scientists who have done research on older people in rural India (e.g. Harlan 1964, Raj and Prasad 1971, Hiebert 1981), although of course none of these cited studies can be said to have concerned wholly "traditional" village communities, in the sense of communities still untouched by modernizing forces. On the other hand, it is clear from the specific kinds of problems that I have described as arising for older people in Rayapur Villager families, that many of these can be directly traced to the new economic order, and to new values, both of which are currently affecting vast numbers of urban dwellers in India and elsewhere in South Asia, and in the developing world generally.

FOOTNOTES

This paper is a revision of a longer paper prepared for a conference on The Elderly on Changing Societies, held at Case Western Reserve University in March 1982. I would like to express my thanks to Melvyn Goldstein for arranging this conference and giving me the opportunity to gather together some of my data on the issue of the family life of older people in India. I am also grateful to him and to the other participants in that conference for their useful suggestions and constructive criticisms of that original version of this paper.

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AGING, POWER AND STATUS IN AN EAST AFRICAN PASTORAL SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

Questions concerning the status and treatment of older members of society have always been a central concern of social gerontologists, many of whom have noted that growing old in the United States is almost universally equated with a loss of status (Tissue 1979, Ward 1979, Williamson and Munley 1980, Cowgill and Holmes 1972).

The low esteem with which the aged are held by the wider popular culture in the United States is often contrasted with the respect, and even reverence, given the aged in many African societies.[1] The high status of the aged in these societies has been attributed to a variety of factors including their structural position as ritual intermediaries between powerful ancestral spirits and their living kinsmen (Middleton 1960, Fortes 1959, Kopytoff 1971), their exclusive role in managing group rituals, and their privileged control over valuable group

resources such as land, cattle and women (Spencer 1965, Gulliver 1963).

It is this last set of factors, control over key group resources, that is the subject of this essay on the pastoral Murle of the southern Sudan. Old age and seniority bring only token amounts of respect for elderly Murle. Furthermore, power, and its accompanying status, does not emerge from association with supernatural forces. Rather, the relatively high status experienced by elderly male Murle comes from their control over key social transactions and can be attributed to their position as brokers in the maximum number of cattle and women exchanges that are made. However, in contrast to much of what has been written about other East African pastoral societies, I argue that older Murle are not primarily successful because they hoard these scarce resources, but because they act as facilitators in mobilizing and directing social exchanges.

There is, however, another equally important cultural principle which accounts for the relatively secure position of the elderly in Murle society. This is the emphasis upon continuity in adult roles. The Murle, unlike many East African societies, do not have an age grade system which would serve to differentiate adult roles on the basis of age, nor do they have the concept of retirement. In East African societies, such as the Arusha, Borana, and Nyakyusa, where an age grade system is in operation, at a certain ritually designated point, elders are effectively stripped of their accumulated statuses and power resources. They are moved to the final, socially marginal position of "retired elder" and no longer allowed to actively participate in political and economic discussions and decision-making activity. Elderly Murle, on the other hand, never face social retirement.

THE MURLE

There are approximately 45,000 Murle living in Jonglei Province in the southern Sudan. Linguistically they form part of an isolated language group of Murle-

Didinga speaking peoples (the Masongo, Suri, Tirma, Tishena, Mursi, Longarim, Murle and Didinga) whose range is limited to the border areas between southwestern Ethiopia and southeastern Sudan (Tucker and Bryan 1966). Their area is bounded on the north and east by Nilotic speaking peoples (the Nuer, Dinka and Anuak) and on the west by Cushitic speaking peoples (the Geleba, Konso, Kaffa, Sidamo and Borana).

At present there are three separate groups of Murle people living in the Sudan: 1) the Murle living in the vicinity of the Pibor, Veveno, Lotilla and Kangen rivers; 2) the Murle of the Boma plateau; and, 3) the Longarim of the Boya Hills.[2] According to Murle oral tradition, this present tripartite division arose as a result of a dispute over the distribution of oribi soup cooked during a time of famine. Those groups not receiving a portion of the soup became angry and went away. Barda alem eeci anyaket naron, the Murle say: we are divided by the throat.

Despite these present geographic divisions with their accompanying social structural differences, the Murle consider themselves to share one overarching cultural system cemented together both ideationally by a common language, name, and oral tradition, and institutionally through visiting, intermarriage and family migration.

This essay focuses on the position of the aged among one of these sections, the pastoral Murle of Pibor.[3]

THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL GERONTOLOGICAL MODELS OF AGING TO THE MURLE CONTEXT

The terms "old" and "aged" are often used without benefit of definition, especially in descriptions of non-western societies. The Murle themselves have no term to describe older members except matuwoc, and this term is reserved for those who are physically frail, and often senile, and can no longer perform most everyday tasks. Matuwoc is not a discrete social group, but rather a generalized, informally defined category of people who are perceived as being at the end of their lives. There were

very few matuwoc in Pibor, probably because the annual cycle of transhumance into the transient dry season camps and back into agricultural settlements during the wet season is physically grueling. It is acknowledged that many older people die during the long dry period when groups must remain mobile to be within reach of both food and water. This is not because matuwoc are left behind and abandoned as people move into the dry season camps. It occurs because the available food supply drastically falls and people must turn to foraging for food such as wild fruits and grasses. Available food continues to be shared, but many physically weak individuals die.

Aside from matuwoc, the Murle make few age distinctions. A Murle expression, roget kiti be, life is like a mountain, it does not move, succinctly states their position. There are few ritually recognized or linguistically marked transitions in Murle life. Although there is an age set system, there is no corresponding system of fixed age grades through which the sets pass in their life course. Briefly, an age set system is a group of men, or women, of the same age who have been recruited to the group on the basis of age alone. In a linear system, a set typically remains open to new recruits for a seven to fifteen year period after its inception, after which time it closes and a new set forms. Men remain members of one set throughout their lives. Although for the Murle, set identity becomes socially less important as an individual ages. A Murle age set is easily identifiable by its distinctive name, hairstyle, scarring pattern, and bead color.

An age grade is a cluster of social statuses attached to one social category; for example, warrior, elder, and retired elder. Individual age sets pass through these consecutive age grades at ritually designated intervals. Entry into each grade carries a unique set of rights and obligations appropriate to the grade. For example, among the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, only members of the elder grade can hold political office (Wilson 1967).

Although the Murle have a well-developed age set system, there is no corresponding system of fixed grades which would serve to differentially allocate prestige and

status to the various sets. There is, then, no socially or ritually demarcated grade of elder and a man's social status does not primarily emerge from the criterion of age. Other Murle-Didinga speaking peoples, such as the Masongo, Tishena, and Suri, and neighboring southern Sudanese people such as the Nilotic Nuer, also lack the concept of an age grade system. This situation contrasts sharply with that of many Kenyan peoples such as the Masai, Samburu, and Arusha and with many Western Cushitic speaking peoples living in Ethiopia, such as the Konso, Sidamo and Geleba, all of whom have an age grade system linked with a politically strong council of elders.

Thus, when I speak of the Murle aged, I am artificially creating a category by separating out the four senior age sets of the society during the time of my work. In 1981 these were: the nyeriza, men in their fifties; the nyakidimo, men in their early sixties; the lonoroket, men in their middle to late sixties; and the nyilim, men in their early seventies. These men shared no privileged grade membership, nor were they allocated any special political or ritual functions on the basis of their age set affiliation. I have set them apart because men of nyeriza and above are biologically old. The life expectancy in the southern Sudan is only forty years.

This is not to say that men of nyeriza and above do not control a disproportionate share of group resources, especially cattle and women; they do. But this privilege arises from their respective positions within their own localized koroks, or herd-managing groups, and is not supported by a community or society-wide institution such as an age grade system.

While acceptance into the youngest age set signals entry into manhood, the Murle have no socially demanded retirement. Thus, social gerontological theories, such as disengagement and activity theory, which are designed to account for changes in the status of the aged once they retire from previously held social positions, are not applicable. The assumption made by these theorists is that retirement, however culturally defined, always occurs; in other words, according to them, there is always a point at which individuals must relinquish previously held positions to younger members of society.

This argument was most forcefully stated by Cumming and Henry in their concept of disengagement. In Growing Old they describe aging as "...an inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social system that he belongs to" (1961:17). Cumming and Henry believe this process to be mutually beneficial to the aged and to the wider social group. The elderly voluntarily relinquish their former roles making way for younger replacements as their outlook becomes increasingly inwardly focused. Aging, then, is a process of increasing detachment for the elderly, who gradually sever their ties with the wider society.

This increasing severance of social ties has been documented in several East African age set societies. Legesse (1973) provides an example in his description of the age set system of the Borana, neighbors of the Murle living on the Kenyan-Ethiopian border area. He relates how members of the gada moji, the senior-most age grade, are stripped of the outward symbols of their former prestige and power, such as titles and special statuses. At the same time, they are given ritual positions and surrounded by elaborate taboos which serve to separate their lifestyle from others and to associate them with supernatural forces.

However, disengagement is an anathema to the Murle. Elderly Murle do not turn away from social life, refocusing upon life in another world. They dread death. The place where the dead dwell is called nyagi (west) and, in opposition to jen (east), the prestigious place of origin, it is an evil place. The dead become mininit, spirits who bring only misfortune and death to their living kinsmen. There is no burial or ritual treatment of the corpse. It is abruptly disposed of outside the homestead and left for animals to eat. The few funeral activities that exist are directed toward the living.

The job of the nanbi, or funeral specialists, is to ritually cleanse the living from the pollution which accompanies death, and to ensure that the new spirit is safely chased away and cannot return to his former homestead. Thus, the Murle worldview is this-world oriented. Elderly Murle fight to remain active partici-

pants in the affairs of the living, for death holds no compensation.

The second conceptual tool offered by social gerontologists, activity theory, is both a descriptive and a prescriptive approach to retirement. Working broadly within a symbolic interactionist framework, activity theorists such as Maddox (1963) suggest that the key to adjustment in aging is to remain active. They suggest that as some roles are taken away from the aged, due to mandatory retirement or ill health, the best way to retain a maximum amount of "life satisfaction" and suffer a minimum amount of status loss, is to seek compensatory activity (Lemon, Bengtson and Peterson 1972:515).

As already stated, the Murle make no provisions for mandatory retirement. Older members of society continue in the same occupations they have pursued throughout their adult lives. The only occupational change, from that of cattle herder to primarily cattle manager, occurs early in the life cycle when a man is in his late thirties.

However, even if the aged sought opportunities for compensatory activities not related to cattle, there would be little available to them. In many non-western societies the compensatory activity offered to the elderly is ritual. Several cross-cultural studies have suggested that in societies where the aged are able to substitute ritual knowledge for physical prowess they have been able to retain considerable status (Simmons 1945, Maxwell and Silverman 1983, Gutmann 1974). Similarly, many African studies have suggested that the power of the elders in their kinship networks emerges from their privileged position as a link between the living kinsmen and dead kinsmen who become ancestors (Fortes 1959, Sangree 1974). Elders, then, who retain exclusive access to ancestral shrines buttress their secular control over younger kinsmen with supernatural sanctions.

This is not the situation for the Murle. Association with the dead, as already discussed, is something to be avoided. The aged are not associated with the dead, and if they were it would not bring increased status.

In Murle society, association with the supernatural, in general, is treated with ambivalence at best. The only ritual position open is that of naare or diviner, individuals who heal the sick and predict the future. Diviners gain their power as a result of an initial involuntary possession by kwolo spirits. Those who practice this art have learned to harness the powerful kwolo through magical songs learned while apprenticing themselves to an established diviner. The position of naare can be lucrative, but it brings little increased status and it is open to both males and females of all ages. Elders also lack any special effectiveness in speaking on behalf of their kinsmen to the divinities, Tammu and Bore. These distant gods make their will known to all through physical signs such as fire, rain and rainbow, and the occurrence of generalized misfortune such as flood and drought.

The only supernatural sanction available to elders is the ability to bless, amayuk, and to curse, aturia. While every adult can either bless or curse a neighbor or kinsman, these actions by elders are considered to be more powerful. Thus, a father whose son has returned home after a long absence will spit water upon him and rub ash from the family fire on his forehead and cheeks while wishing him long life and good fortune.

Similarly, the curse of a senior kinsman, especially a father or abu, the head of the herding group, carries particular weight. In speaking of older kinsmen, the Murle use the word kanolle, which has multiple meanings: I respect, I obey, and I fear him. When justifiably angered, an elder can utter the curse of death, katurian daak. Even a diviner cannot undo this curse without the aid of the person who sent it. Curser and cursed must become reconciled, and the elder must call back his curse for the victim to live.

This reconciliation is often accomplished through the timely intervention of other kinsmen or neighbors acting as witnesses. The accursed must beg forgiveness and pay dilen, forgiveness payment, to the elder. If the elder accepts the payment, then restoration of relations can begin. According to custom, the elder must take some grass and hit the man he cursed all over his body while saying, "Let my talk come out of your

body." He then throws the grass away out into the bush and the curse goes with it. This procedure is similar to that performed by the nanbi or funeral specialists, as they cleanse the kinsmen of the deceased from the dangerous pollution stemming from their association with the dead.

The Murle believe that the curse of a father's sister is also especially powerful. A father's sister will curse her kinsmen if she feels slighted, particularly if her sons do not receive a share of the bridewealth cattle from the marriages of daughters of her natal homestead.

However, cursing and blessing is not limited to elders, and a younger kinsman will use a curse against his elders in the face of unreasonableness or unfairness. For example, if a man is continually denied help from his elders in obtaining the prerequisite number of cattle necessary for a bridewealth payment he may curse them. All in all, supernatural support for authority and status for elders in Murle society is minimal.

A third gerontological approach links the status of the aged to the degree to which they are able to form a cohesive self-interest group and generate their own sub-cultural set. Arnold Rose (1965) suggests that the aged in the United States form a discrete sub-culture within the wider culture by creating a distinct set of values surrounding individual goals and behaviors.

Applying this approach to the African context, one can look at gerontocratic societies such as the Samburu (Spencer 1965) or Sidamo (Hamer 1970) to see the aged working as a self-conscious interest group able to impose its will upon the wider society. In gerontocratic societies there is a stratification of power and prestige based upon age criterion alone. In the African context this is most often linked with an age grade system. Among the Samburu and neighboring Arusha, two Kenyan peoples, members of the elders' grade control the mechanisms of political power, such as the local parish assemblies, by right of their elder age grade affiliation. Similarly, among the Nyakyusa of Tanzania,

only members of the elder grade can assume all administrative and military offices (Wilson 1967). At the ubusoka, or "coming out" ceremony, new village headmen and chiefs are installed in office as their age set moves into the elder grade. At the same time, the previous set occupying this ruling grade is moved out of office. Wilson remarks, "At any one time there are three age-grades: that of the old men who are retired from administration but whose leaders have certain ritual functions to perform; that of the ruling generation which is responsible for defense and administration; and that of the young men and boys who have not yet "come to fight," but who fight when necessary under the leadership of men of their fathers' generation, though in their own age units" (Wilson 1967:221).

But elderly Murle cannot look to their peers for support, at least not for the kind of support which conveys status. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Buul, or age set membership is most important when the Murle are young and unmarried. As a man becomes older, marries, and establishes a family, his age set ties become increasingly less important while his ties, rights and obligations to his korok, the herd-managing group, grow in importance and increasingly supplant ties to age mates. Power relations in Murle society are built within the context of the korok, not within the age set system. As discussed, the Murle lack a system of fixed age grades which would channel and stratify power and prestige along age lines. But if, on the other hand, age alone with its accompanying privileged grade membership does not exist for the Murle, then neither does the concept of retirement and the low status position of retired elder. Until they reach the last, relatively short period of physical frailty, Murle elders retain what personal power they have been able to build throughout their careers.

Much of the tension between age sets reported in a variety of East African societies, such as the Mesakin (Nadel 1952), Samburu (Spencer 1976), and the Mursi (Turton 1973), arises from competition between sets over access to positions of status and power associated with a particular age grade. This tension is heightened at periods of transition when sets are passing between

grades. Transitions in life are always difficult, both for the individual and for the wider social group. This is true even when these transitions are tightly controlled in socially recognized rites of passage (Turner 1969). Age grade transitions cause even more tension, Foner and Kertzer report (1978:1087), when: 1) the time for set movement between grades is left vague, and 2) when transference in or out of adjacent grades is abrupt and involves significant changes in acceptable behavior, lifestyle and status.

Tensions are further heightened when the set occupying the most prestigious grade attempts to prolong its stay, thereby blocking entry to the coveted grade by the adjacent junior set. Among the Samburu of Kenya, Spencer notes, the overall effect of the age grade system is to hold members of the warrior grade, the moran, in a "state of social suspension." He continues, "The elders control all significant activities and treat the moran as juveniles, and the moran respond by indulging in various deviant behavior though ultimately innocuous activities" (Spencer 1976:155). Nadel, too, in his examination of witchcraft among the Mesakin, a southern Sudanese society, concludes that witchcraft accusations between a mother's brother and his sister's son reflect real social tension arising from competition between their respective age sets over access to a coveted grade affiliation. In this case, tensions rise from the unwillingness of the mother's brother's age set to move out of the prestigious grade of warrior/herder to make room for the entry of the adjacent junior set of sister's son (Nadel 1952).

The Murle, on the other hand, share one social category of adulthood undifferentiated by age grade distinctions. Thus, tensions between age sets in competition over access to prestigious grade affiliation is eliminated. Power struggles, however, are not entirely absent in the Murle context, but they occur within the localized korok, or herd-managing group. The Murle concept of power is essentially remunerative and largely based upon the two key korok exchanges involving women and cattle. Elders serve as the catalyst initiating these transactions by acting as cattle and marriage brokers both among themselves and on behalf of their junior kinsmen.

A man's herd and his offspring grow together. As his daughters marry and bring in bridewealth in the form of cattle, a man redistributes these animals to secure additional wives for himself, his brothers and his sons. Dowd (1975) has suggested that the paradigm of exchange is the best indicator of the relative position of the aged in the wider society. Those aged who maintain a high degree of status are those who are able to continue as powerful exchange partners. To a large extent, status and power for elderly male Murle emerges from their control over the exchanges of key group resources. As a man grows older his management skills with respect to amassing and redistributing cattle are increasingly in demand. If he is successful, the network of relations over people and cattle he controls expands. Thus, power and status emerge from a man's position within his korok or herd-managing group.

LIFE ON A MURLE KOROK

The herd-managing group, or korok, takes its name from the wet season homestead. The Pibor Murle do not live in villages; instead, their homesteads are purposely scattered throughout a wet season settlement. A settlement, or kutur, is a bounded, named, territorial unit. Kuturs vary in size, but usually extend from five to ten square miles within which are built twenty to thirty seasonal homesteads, or korok.

The Murle change wet season settlement affiliation frequently over the years and for a variety of reasons, usually associated with their cattle. A man will visit several settlements examining the quality of the pasture and agricultural land, the availability of water, and the population density before deciding upon resettlement. These criteria, rather than the bonds of kinship, determine where a korok is built. The Murle also practice a yearly cycle of transhumance into wet season settlements for agricultural activity at the beginning of the rainy season in late April. They come out again in a series of mobile cattle camps for the dry season, which begins in October.

Although they exploit agricultural, hunting, fishing and gathering opportunities, it is pastoral activity which is afforded cultural priority. A man without cattle is nyalam, an object of scorn and pity. The Murle share with many of their East African neighbors a love for their animals which exceeds their economic value. Cattle are the true center of life. They are used as objects which both define important social groups, and serve as one of the important mediums of exchange which link these separate groups together.

The korok, as already discussed, is a wet season homestead, but its social significance lies in the fact that the group of people who reside together there comprise the central social structural unit in Murle life. The korok under its head, or abu, is the smallest independent social, economic and political unit in Murle society. Although most frequently there are a number of additional dependent people living temporarily or semi-permanently within any given korok, these people are considered to be kernoi, guests or outsiders, because they do not share in rights to the group's herds.

The core of the korok is recruited through an agnatic principle and supported through a rule of patrilocal residence such that fathers, sons and brothers remain together throughout their lives. But the basis of the korok ultimately is not descent, but shared rights in a commonly held heard of cattle. Korok members live together under the leadership of the eldest brother of the senior living generation. He is the abu or head of the group. Full, and sometimes half brothers, live together with their wives, children and assorted dependent relatives.

A korok grows to its maximum size with the social maturity of the senior generation as male members take additional wives and their sons marry and begin a third generation. Larger korok contain between thirty and forty adults, whereas smaller korok hold only ten to fifteen.

The korok divides upon the death of an abu, or at the death of the last of his brothers, as various groups of siblings and patrilateral parallel cousins from the next generation hive off to form their own

independent homesteads. The key factor in determining the number of new korok formed is herd viability. Thus, successful elders are those under whose management group resources increase. Although there is no normative rule preventing a young man in his thirties from establishing an independent korok and becoming his own abu, economic constraints make this extremely rare. Men of this age have few cattle as what stock might have been available to them has been diverted into a large bridewealth payment, usually forty head of cattle, needed to secure a wife.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

There are primarily four ways of building a herd: 1) through inheritance from one's father, 2) through sharing in the distribution of animals received as bridewealth payments from the marriages of women of one's korok, 3) through the exchange of breeding animals with designated exchange partners, and 4) through natural accretion. Three out of the four models listed above involve exchange, and it is the elders who mobilize and direct these transactions.

As a young man enters the juniormost age set his father gives him a special ox. This animal has enormous emotional importance for a young man. It is a symbol of his new identity with the herd, and with his peers, for young men now spend most of their time in the company of their age mates and cows. At this time a father also transfers several more ordinary animals from his stock to that of his son. These animals are the core of the young man's future herd. In this polygamous society, a man divides his responsibility for his herd during the wet season among his various wives, allocating to each the task of milking and housing a portion of them. This division constitutes the basis for a future allocation of animals among sons of these different wives. Many of these animals are transferred to various sons while their father is still alive.

However, an elder never relinquishes control over all his cattle, but instead retains a residual herd under his direct ownership. Yet, even considering this residual

herd, by the time a man's age set becomes the last, or the next to the last living age set, the major portion of his herd has been transferred to the next generation. The aged are often cattle poor in relation to their son's generation. Nevertheless, they retain considerable status.

This is because status and power do not emerge primarily through hoarding animals, but rather from exchanging them, and elders, especially toward the end of their lives, are at the center of the maximum number of cattle transactions both within the korok and among koroks. No cattle negotiation is more important than that involving the exchange of cattle and women and it is here, in their role as marriage brokers, that the power of the elders becomes most apparent.

ELDERS AS MARRIAGE BROKERS

Women and cattle, as separate categories of value, intersect at marriage, as women are exchanged for bridewealth in cattle rather than directly exchanged for other women. Murle bridewealth payments are quite high, ideally forty head of cattle, making marriage the largest cattle transaction in this society. Due to the number of animals involved, marriage negotiations call upon the maximum resources of the korok, and thus activate the maximum links in an elder's social network.

The bulk of the animals required for a bridewealth payment, in the case of the first marriage for a young man, comes from the growing herd of the groom and his father. But all adult males on the korok can be expected to contribute a few animals. When this is not enough, korok elders can call upon the resources of members of related korok to whom they have a horizontal tie of agnation.[4] Once the necessary cattle are committed the marriage ceremony can begin.

The Murle word for marriage is tinkawin, which literally means cattle negotiation, and that is what it is. Participation in the marriage ceremony on the part of the agnatic relatives of the groom signals their willingness to donate part of the bridewealth cattle and,

conversely, attendance on the part of relatives of the bride is tantamount to demanding to receive a portion of the cattle received.

The two sets of potential in-laws sit in rows on opposite sides of the groom's parents' house separated by two sets of impartial witnesses, called bacok. The elders do not speak directly to each other in this transaction, but rather negotiate through their respective witnesses. Thus, potentially acrimonious discussions are kept essentially peaceful. Although convention sets the standard number of animals to be given, both sides bargain over the age, sex and relative worth of each animal that is promised. The witnesses are called upon to note the distinctive features of each animal to be exchanged.

Because a marriage payment represents a serious depletion of the herd, the timing of successive marriages also is regulated by the senior generation. Elders must be careful not to dangerously diminish the herd through too many burdensome bridewealth payments until an adequate number of cattle have returned to the korok through the marriages of female members of the group.

Not only does mobilizing cattle payments require the elders' direction, but in the bride's korok, the redistribution of these animals requires managerial skills and provides the aged with the opportunity to allocate the most precious of the Murle rewards, cattle. Disputes over overlapping rights to bridewealth cattle are the biggest source of friction within the intimate korok group. Not everyone's legitimate demands can be met at every marriage. The elders, under the direction of the senior elder, or abu, of the bride's korok negotiate the cattle distribution.

In return for his services as chief negotiator in a marriage transaction, the abu always receives several head of cattle. Next priority is given to the full brothers of the bride. They have the highest moral right to the cattle if they have not secured a wife. Beyond this, members of the senior generation who have been called upon on other occasions to donate cattle in bridewealth payments of male members of the korok have a right to some cattle. Finally, the married

sisters of the bride's father can come with their sons and demand a share. The abu's negotiating powers are tested by his ability to juggle these conflicting claims, granting some requests on the spot and promising others priority in receiving cattle at the time of a future marriage. Thus, both the processes of amassing and distributing bridewealth cattle requires transactional skills.

Even with the best of conditions a man cannot hope to marry before he is in his thirties. Thus, there is a long period of bachelorhood at the same time that a significant proportion of the members of the senior age sets are polygamous. A random sample of fifty men living in different korok and belonging to the four senior age sets revealed that 33% had more than one wife.

Older men not only take additional wives for status reasons, but as an adaptive strategy as well. A young and vigorous woman assumes much of the daily physical labor around the korok. It is her responsibility to provide firewood, prepare and cook the meals, build all the structures on the homestead, and provide the bulk of the horticultural labor. In discussing the Quigiktamiut Eskimo of the Belcher Islands, D. Guemple calls this type of marriage a "renewal activity" (1969:67). By marrying a young woman and beginning a new family, elderly Eskimo renew their participation in the variety of activities associated with the socialization and rearing of children, and thus identify with younger men. The same, to a certain extent, can be said of elderly Murle, who, by adding younger members to their households remain active in the various tasks of socializing the next generation.

Potential conflict between polygamous elders and their junior, bachelor kinsmen is minimized in Murle society in a variety of ways. First, overt tension between different age sets over women is focused upon the two youngest age sets, who were the mudec and the dorong in 1981. The mudec ranged in age from their mid-teens to late twenties. The dorong were in their late twenties through mid-thirties. Members of the youngest set are morally forbidden to seek wives until members of the immediately senior set have all obtained them. When the moral rules alone are not enough to discourage the amorous adventures

of the youngest set, the adjacent set can resort to the use of physical force in the form of stick fighting to coerce their juniors into submission. Although, in theory, these encounters are highly structured, each side meeting in equal numbers at a prearranged time and location, on occasion, groups of the senior adjacent age set, the dorong, ambushed lone members of the juniormost set, the mudec. No attempt was made to seek parity. Rather, the older set, the dorong, sought through random terror attacks to thoroughly intimidate their juniors, and ultimately to bar them from marrying out of turn.

Second, many elders obtained a second wife without making an additional bridewealth payment. Therefore, they did not place themselves in direct competition with younger men over access to the limited cattle resources of the group. For example, one of the most common ways for an elder to obtain an additional wife without paying cattle is through the levirate, the remarriage of a widow to her dead husband's (usually junior) brother. This is the preferred course of action for a woman, and because of the large age discrepancy between a husband and wife, widows are common. The levirate is extended to any male of the same generation of the deceased husband who is of the same korok, for the purpose of this secondary marriage pattern is to uphold the original exchange of a woman for cattle. Finally, elders who cannot obtain another wife through the levirate, and who do not choose to use group resources to obtain another wife, often seek a concubine as an alternative.

Marriage negotiations for the Murle are virtually indissoluble. True divorce rarely occurs because it requires that the bridewealth be returned plus any additional animals born from the original animals included in the return. As noted, bridewealth is widely redistributed among the members of the bride's korok, and even beyond. It would be virtually impossible to trace these animals after a number of years. However, women can and do run away from unhappy marriages. They cannot remarry, but they do become concubines of men of their own choosing. Widows who are not taken in by younger brothers of their dead spouses join this category as well. They are

called simply, naa ci avu, a woman who sits. This is because they only "sit" on a korok or homestead. They do not share in rights to the group's herds, nor, more significantly, do their children. There are always young men who haven't the resources to secure a wife and, therefore, seek to establish a relationship with a naa ci avu. Similarly, there are many old men who choose not to use group resources to obtain additional wives, perhaps because their herds are too small or because there are too many men on the korok who have not yet secured one wife.

In summary, elderly male Murle can potentially enjoy a position of relatively high status within their own korok if, toward the end of their lives, they control a social network built upon the judicious exchange of cattle and women. But what about elderly women who control fewer resources than their male counterparts?

ELDERLY WOMEN

The roles of mother and grandmother carry high status in Murle society. A childless woman, on the other hand, remains throughout her life in a very precarious position. Survival for elderly male and female Murle necessitates continued interaction and support within a viable korok. For an older widow, adult children are the most reliable source of support. Although any child will take his mother into his korok, it is the special responsibility of the youngest son to care for his widowed mother.

In a survey I conducted of older widows living in one wet season settlement, 20% lived with a daughter, 70% lived with at least one son, and 10% lived with other relatives. The women living with daughters had no sons, and the women living with other relatives had no living children. According to Murle custom, a brother can be expected to take in his widowed sister if she has no children. A man loves and honors his sister for it is her bridewealth in cattle that makes his own marriage possible. However, in my survey, I found no widows living with their brothers. The majority of the childless women in the survey were living in the compounds of offspring of

co-wives of their deceased husbands. Thus, older women benefit from the polygamous unions of their husbands, not only in the increased help available from a second, younger wife with physical tasks on the korok, but in the increased chance of additional offspring who can be appealed to as a source of support.

Childlessness for a Murle woman is a pitiful state. Thus, every opportunity available to produce progeny is exploited. If a woman's husband dies while she is still within her reproductive years, she will either marry one of her deceased husband's brothers, or take a lover of her own choosing. In either case, children of this union will be considered legitimate descendants of her deceased husband.

As already discussed, the preferred secondary marriage for a widow is to her deceased husband's brother. However, most often when a man dies his young and attractive wives are readily retained by his brothers, but an older woman is often less fortunate. For example, an acquaintance of mine named Meeri was a childless woman of forty when she was widowed. Her deceased husband's brother did not want her and she was forced to move, although her younger co-wife remained with him. Meeri became a naa ci avu, a woman who sits, a concubine on a neighboring korok, but her future remains uncertain.

Boyoi, on the other hand, was also a widow in her forties and had been alone for many years. She built her own korok where she lives with her dependent children. She supports herself with fees she receives from her occupation as a naare or diviner. The position of diviner is open to both males and females, although the majority are female. Boyoi is the most powerful type of diviner, a naare o goo, or fire diviner. A fire diviner can not only diagnose illness, but through possession by powerful kwolo spirits she can cure as well.

However, the most secure life for an adult woman is on the korok of a grown child. Like men, Murle women never reach a stage of mandatory social retirement. A woman continues, as long as it is physically possible, to share in all the daily responsibilities in the korok. Even very old women continue to plant fields of sorghum

and corn during the rainy season. But an old woman living on the korok of a grown child is sheltered and protected as well. Grandchildren are expected to run errands, fetching firewood and water for their grandmothers. Not as much of the day is spent in the fields and grandmothers left behind in the compound watch the babies and other young children while their mothers work in the fields. Thus, while old women who have living children can expect to be well cared for in old age, a childless woman is in a far less secure position. Old age alone brings only a minimum amount of respect and support.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay has examined methods used by successful elderly male and female Murle to secure positions of status and power in their old age. It was found that old age alone brings little respect or status. Nor can the Murle aged look to supernatural support for positions of prestige, as is the case in many African societies where elders control access to shrines of socially important ancestors. Those successful male aged who achieve security do so as a result of their control over two key group resources, women and cattle.

This situation is in contrast to that of many gerontocratic East African societies where elders, by right of age grade affiliation alone, are afforded status and power. The Murle completely lack an age grade structure, defining instead only one social category of adulthood. The Murle do have age sets, groups of age peers, but these sets do not pass through successive, fixed grades, such as youth, warrior, elder and retired elder. Thus, older Murle cannot look to their age set members for status support. In the absence of an elder grade, they lack a society-wide institutional support structure, such as that available to the Samburu, Arusha, Sidamo and elders in other African age graded societies.

However, the absence of a formalized age grade system was also seen to have certain advantages for the elderly. The Murle do not have the degree of conflict and tension between age sets seen in other African societies, such as the Mesakin and Mursi, where sets are

pitted against each other in competition over access to a prestigious grade. Further, the Murle also lack the concept of retirement. In gerontocratic, and other types of African age graded societies, where elders rise to positions of power when their set is ritually installed in the appropriate grade, there comes a point at which they are formally removed from office to make way for the next set to enter. Unlike the ruling elders, retired elders are placed in a socially marginal role. This is certainly the case for the Borana and Nyakyusa.

Many social gerontological theories, such as disengagement theory, activity theory, and sub-cultural analysis, have focused upon prescriptive and descriptive accounts of the lowered social position of retired elders. All assume that retirement is inevitable. But Murle elders do not retire. They continue throughout their lives to hold what power they have personally been able to attain.

Despite the apparent age orientation of Murle social organization, power and status are built within the social framework of the korok, or herd managing group, and not within the age set system. The power of successful male elders in Murle society is directly attributable to their position as marriage and cattle brokers. A successful Murle elder is a man with a growing korok whose social network, built upon exchange relationships, is ever increasing. As Dowd suggests, the paradigm of exchange is the best indicator of the relative position of the aged in the wider society. Those individuals who continue to mobilize and facilitate the flow of strategic resources remain powerful.

Elderly women control fewer assets. Their best resource is grown children who can be expected to support them. But women, like men, are not forced into retirement, and even old women remain active and productive members of a korok and, therefore, are not considered a drain on group resources. Further, there are a few petty capitalist enterprises open to women which can offer them a measure of autonomy, including producing and selling items at the Pibor market, such as charcoal, or vegetables, or even becoming a naare, or diviner.

NOTES

1. In a recent article (1981), Anthony Glascock and Susan Feinman have challenged this rather simplistic statement. Using material from the Human Relations Area Files they found that support treatment for the aged in nonwestern societies is often found in conjunction with some form of nonsupportive behavior.

2. Both A. Kronenberg (1961:258-277) and Lewis (1972) consider that there is sufficient linguistic and cultural evidence to support the claim that the Longarim split off from the Boma and Pibor Murle sometime after the arrival of the group in the Sudan.

3. I am indebted to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society, and the Anthropology Department of the University of Pennsylvania for funding the fieldwork in the Sudan 1981-82 upon which this article is based.

4. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the ramifications on exchange networks of other units of Murle social structure. However, there is one larger grouping, the tatok, within which reciprocal rights to livestock are recognized. The tatok is formed through the fissioning of one korok at the death of the last of the brothers who founded the korok. At this point, members of the next generation separate, forming independent koroks. Some full brothers remain together under the guidance of the eldest who becomes the new abu, or head, but half-brothers and patrilateral parallel cousins commonly separate. While this generation is alive and previous korok ties remembered, elders have some rights in each other's stock. But tatok members do not pass on to their offspring rights in each other's herds.

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FAMILIAL AND PUBLIC CONTEXTS FOR AGING: GROWING OLD IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING MEXICAN VILLAGE.

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INTRODUCTION

When Leo Simmons, the progenitor of anthropological gerontology stated that "Change is the crux of the problem of aging" (1960:88), few seemed to question this statement. One has only to think about the situation of the Ik of Uganda, where enforced change from hunting and gathering to sedentary agriculture has turned their society into a leaky lifeboat and the elderly into shark bait (Turnbull 1972). On the other hand one could point to the studies of the Peoples Republic of China (Treas 1979; Davis-Friedman 1984; Sankar this volume), Samoans (Holmes and Rhoads 1983), or the famous Abkhasians (Benet 1974; Palmore 1984), which have demonstrated that significant cultural change has not been a totally negative experience for the aged in third world countries. A careful examination of the history of the Abkhasians reveals that the substantial alterations in their societal structure since the end of the 19th century have in fact improved what was

already a strong situation for the elderly. (Inal-Ipa 1982).

It is now clear that, for the elderly, societal transformation itself does not necessarily imply a decline in the quality of life. Rather it is the interaction of change with the pre-existing political economy, social organization and ideological system which mediates the consequences of change for the elderly. This paper will consider the implications of such factors for understanding the place of the aged in a Mexican Indian peasant community undergoing change.

SAN GREGORIO AMATANGO

As a prototype peasant village, San Gregorio Amatango seemed almost too good to be true. When we first began to study the community in 1972, its operating cultural features closely approximated what Robert Redfield claimed to be the case for the famous Mexican village of Tepotzlan in 1927.[1] Situated just 50 miles east of downtown Mexico City, Amatango is nestled against a rugged mountain wall adjacent to the archeological remains of Aztec forbears. It is one of the 27 pueblos in a municipal unit dominated by the city of Texcoco.[2] As a face-to-face agrarian community of about 2,000 self-identified indios, the bilingual Nahuatl and Spanish-speaking villagers combine subsistence agriculture and seasonal wage labor with the sale of decorative flowers and forest products in regional and national markets. Along with the three other Nahuatl speaking communities in the rugged mountain zone, Amatango remains culturally distinct from villages in the piedmont and valley areas stretching toward Texcoco. Persons there disparage the "backward" "Indios del Monte" (mountain Indians) and cling to a vision of themselves as mestizos, rural exemplars of national, urban behavior.

From the perspective of the aging, Amatango has many characteristics which have been linked to a beneficial situation for the aged: a relatively small percentage of elderly (3.5% over 65 in 1970); high levels of cultural homogeneity; a sedentary agricultural economy coupled with a preferred ideal of extended family organization; a "functional" definition of old age based

on one's place in the family developmental cycle and health functionality; an elaborate system of deferential bowing gestures towards elder relatives; retention of an Aztec system of local law which enforces a hierarchical age-authority system; a complex system of public political and ritual positions in which the aged have important roles. Culturally tying these features together is an Indian ethnic identity marked by material, ideological and social characteristics dating to the Aztec historical period (Sokolovsky 1982).

These patterns have persisted despite 500 years of continuing economic links to the urban centers of Texcoco (10 miles away) and Mexico City. However, over the last 20 years, elements of change, often associated with modernization, have begun to rain down upon the villagers' heads with increasing rapidity. This period has witnessed: village electrification; the building of a passable road, modern elementary and secondary schools, greater access to wage-based urban occupations, more modern farm technology and television soap operas beamed in from Mexico City.

Importantly, the community has not been a passive receptor of these changes, but has sought through its collective initiative to transform itself in terms of local concepts of a "civilized" place. Fortunately for the elderly, Amatango has been able to rely upon traditional aspects of belief and community organization to pursue this goal. To understand the community's ability to adapt in this way, it is necessary to briefly sketch the historical context of community transformation.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF AGING AND CHANGE

As a peasant community, Amatango has always been incorporated to some degree within larger political states. It was founded in the late 15th century when the king of Texcoco had an irrigation system developed on the basis of springs located in the mountain forests of the contemporary village. The establishment of this still functioning earth canal system actually made possible successful corn farming in this high ecological zone where clay-filled soils and early frosts

necessitated very early planting. During this time under Aztec dominion the community was required to maintain a temple dedicated to state gods, by communally working special fields set aside for that purpose (Pomar 1941:7). Access to the large mountain forest zone above its residential area favored the specialty production by Amatango's families of raw materials and finished products derived from the trees. These products included firewood, charcoal, shaped wooden house beams, maguey cactus fiber for weaving and many varieties of edible mushrooms. Some items, especially charcoal and firewood were sold as far away as Mexico City with the rest being traded in the large pre-Hispanic market in Texcoco or bartered for different specialty items in other peasant communities. Such entrepreneurial patterns have continued to the present day and represent a key economic strategy for the majority of three-generational households.

Very little is known about preconquest village life and the actual functioning of elders in the context of peasant families and communities. According to historical sources (Soustelle 1961) rural communities were led by conical clans called "calpulli" which controlled most aspects of life. The elder chief of the highest ranking clan (Calpullec) along with a council composed of other clan elders regulated the distribution of communally owned lands, settled disputes, saw to the training of warriors and the payment of taxes by the entire community. Elderly males and females, of any rank, had some special roles: men made ritual speeches and prepared corpses while women arranged marriages and served as midwives.

At the household level, elders appeared to command filial attention and respect approaching that of the ancient Chinese. Among a child's first lessons were admonitions about showing esteem toward elders (Simmons 1945:62). Marriage seldom occurred without parental consent and the father had the power to pawn or sell his children into slavery if his economic situation was severe enough.

In the process of Spanish colonization of Mexico, the Texcoco region as a whole gradually moved away from irrigated corn farming. The village lands in

the flat valley surrounding the city of Texcoco were turned into areas of sheep raising, wool production, commercial wheat farming and provided a cheap labor pool for textile mills in Texcoco and on colonial estates. However, peasant communities in the piedmont and higher mountain zone (where Amatango is located) generally continued corn farming and traditional specialty production. Over the succeeding 400 years and until the 1910 Mexican revolution, the region in which Amatango is located was dominated by a landed gentry who through land grants, outright usurpation and debt peonage, developed large agricultural and mercantile estates (haciendas) which controlled the best lands and irrigation resources.

The Spanish more intensively dominated the piedmont villages with their flatter lands and warmer climate, while impinging much less on the lives of the people of Amatango and the other four communities of the more rugged mountain zone. This fact largely explains the persistence of Indian (Aztec) cultural traits and identity in these latter peasant villages and the turning to more mestizo cultural patterns in the piedmont area.

Amatango was subject to a small hacienda in its mountain lands that set up a glass-making factory and grew wheat on high altitude fields. The village retained ownership of much of its irrigated lands although partial control was lost over communal forest, water and grazing resources. Other communities closer to the city of Texcoco were not so lucky and by 1910, many peasants there had given up subsistence agriculture in favor of wage labor in the city or on the haciendas. After the Mexican revolution, the villagers in the region sought to regain lands through the "ejido" program which involved the reclaiming of previously expropriated lands. By this process in 1930 Amatango was granted 1,955 hectares of high mountain lands consisting of mostly forest and pasture, although 40% of this area is arable and today produces barley, wheat, haba beans and potatoes.

These lands, although not very agriculturally productive, contain a multitude of resources which have fostered the viability of extended household organization and community solidarity by maintaining traditional agrarian pursuits and providing the raw materials for some new

patterns of economic adaptation. Pasture lands and the crops grown nearby (especially wheat and barley) allow families to maintain a substantial number of sheep, cows and mules. These animals, along with turkeys, chickens and pigs, serve not only as sources of wool, meat and farm labor, but also function as a traditional form of peasant investment which can be converted quickly into cash. For poorer families, the forest abounds in a type of stiff grass which can be easily gathered and made into household brushes for sale in regional markets.

Critically, as the populace steadily grew in the 1940s and 1950s and began to exceed the capacity of irrigated lands to feed the villagers, access to mountain forests permitted the widespread adoption of a new lucrative cottage industry. This innovation of producing sturdy wood crates was welcomed by Mexico City fruit merchants who continue to purchase all the community can produce. Combined with the pre-Hispanic traditions of making charcoal and wooden house beams, crate production permitted land poor villagers to resist permanent migration or dependence on factory labor. In addition, over the last two decades the community has expanded the communal planting, harvesting and sale of mountain grown barley for use in the maintenance of their 17th century church and their more recently constructed elementary and secondary schools.

Partly as a result of these factors, Amatango reached the 1950s as a highly integrated peasant enclave depending largely on traditions of social and economic behavior traceable to Aztec ancestors. It was during this decade, however, that there began a mutually reinforcing feedback between the local reaction to population pressure and the move by the state political machinery to build up the economic infrastructure of rural areas. One reaction was for young men increasingly to seek low-paying wage labor on nearby agricultural estates or in cities. Another was to experiment with a variety of locally based economic strategies. Besides crate manufacturing, these new activities included closer planting and double cropping of corn with wheat and barley as well as the planting of small plots of cash crops such as decorative flowers and fruit.

Yet the benefits from these changes were limited by an inefficient irrigation system, lack of a passable road for motor traffic and the low level of education among the populace. Fortuitously, it was at this time that the state government offered help toward fulfilling the community's needs. As a start, combining the traditional system of communal labor with materials provided by the state, Amatango built a stone reservoir which more than doubled the efficiency of its irrigation system. Next, with the help of a state engineer, the village constructed a small cement bridge over a ravine which had been a serious obstacle to most motorized vehicles. After these initial successes, local leaders sought other capital projects and began to talk about making Amatango the center of a new independent municipal unit. By the time we started field work in 1972, Amatango had established daily bus lines to Texcoco and Mexico City, had built a modern 14-room elementary school and was linked up to electrical power. Moreover, local leaders had just petitioned the National Political Party for funds to carry out a series of further "modernizing" projects. Upon a return to Mexico for a short visit in 1978, most of these requests had been largely accomplished; the road was substantially improved, a small medical clinic was almost complete, pipes had been laid for a potable water system and a secondary school was accepting its first students.

AGING IN A CONTEMPORARY PEASANT COMMUNITY

We can begin our discussion of aging in the context of such changes by briefly examining village demography. The population profiles for 1960 and 1970 as seen in figure 1a show a classic pyramidal configuration generated by the combination of high birth (43 per 1000 persons) and death rates (36 per 1000 population) but low permanent migration rates. Despite an infant mortality rate of 390 per 1000 births still existing in 1960, between 1921 and 1970 the population had doubled from 986 to 1824. With regard to the elderly, in figures 1a and 1b we can compare some recent demographic trends in Amatango with a nearby "proletarian" village, Tlaloc, where almost 40% of the primary occupations held by males involve non-agricultural wage labor outside of the community. In Amatango, this figure is only 11% (Mexico D.F., DGE 1970).

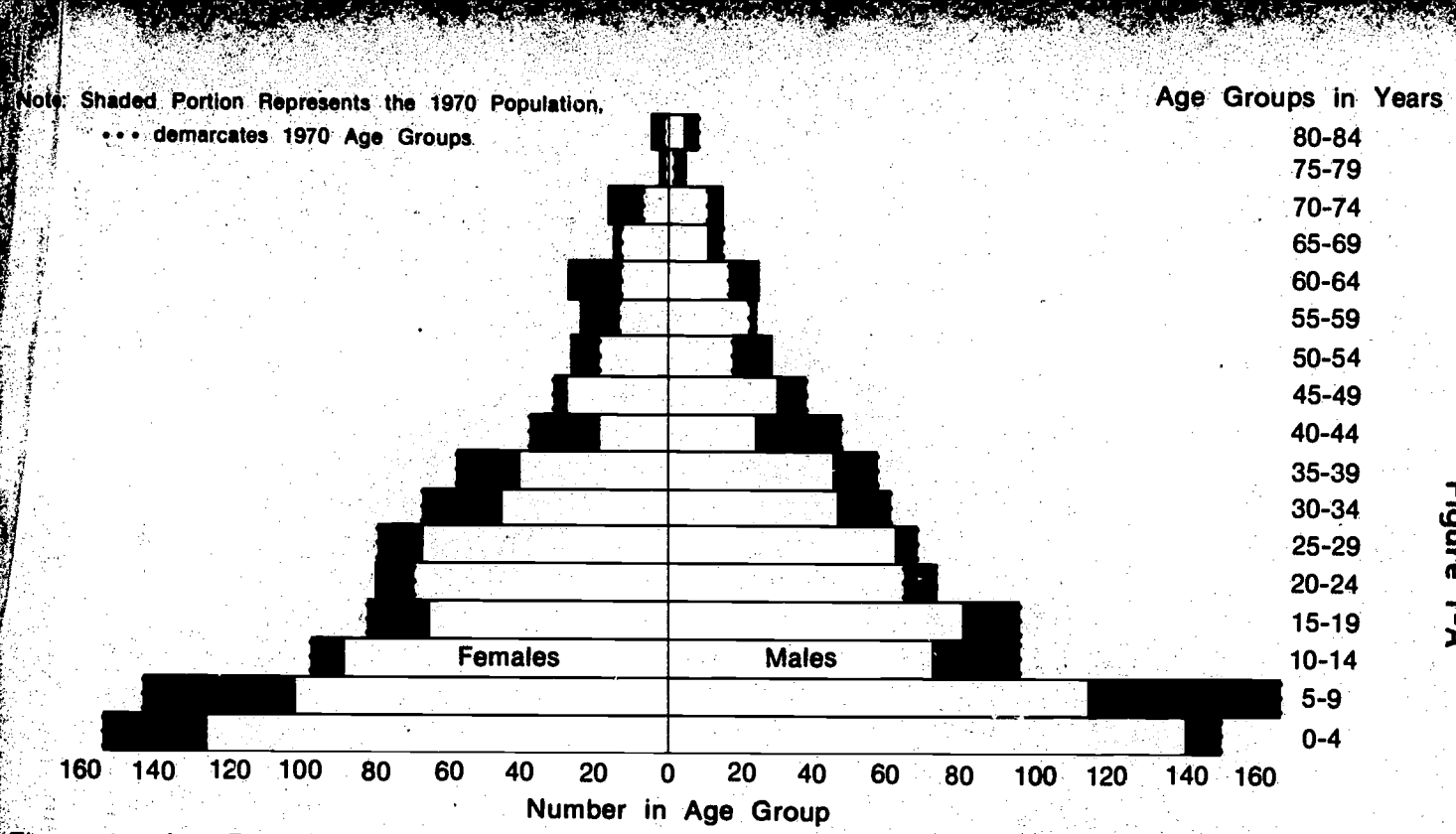


Figure 1-A

Figure 1a. Age Pyramid and Demographic Information, Amatango 1960 and 1970

	1960 (Total Population = 1559)	1970 (Total Population = 1824)
Percent 65 Years and Older	4.1	3.5
Old Age Dependency	7.6	6.7
Y[illegible]ge Dependency	76.5	84.1

Source: Perez y Lizaur 1970 : Mexico D.F. 1973

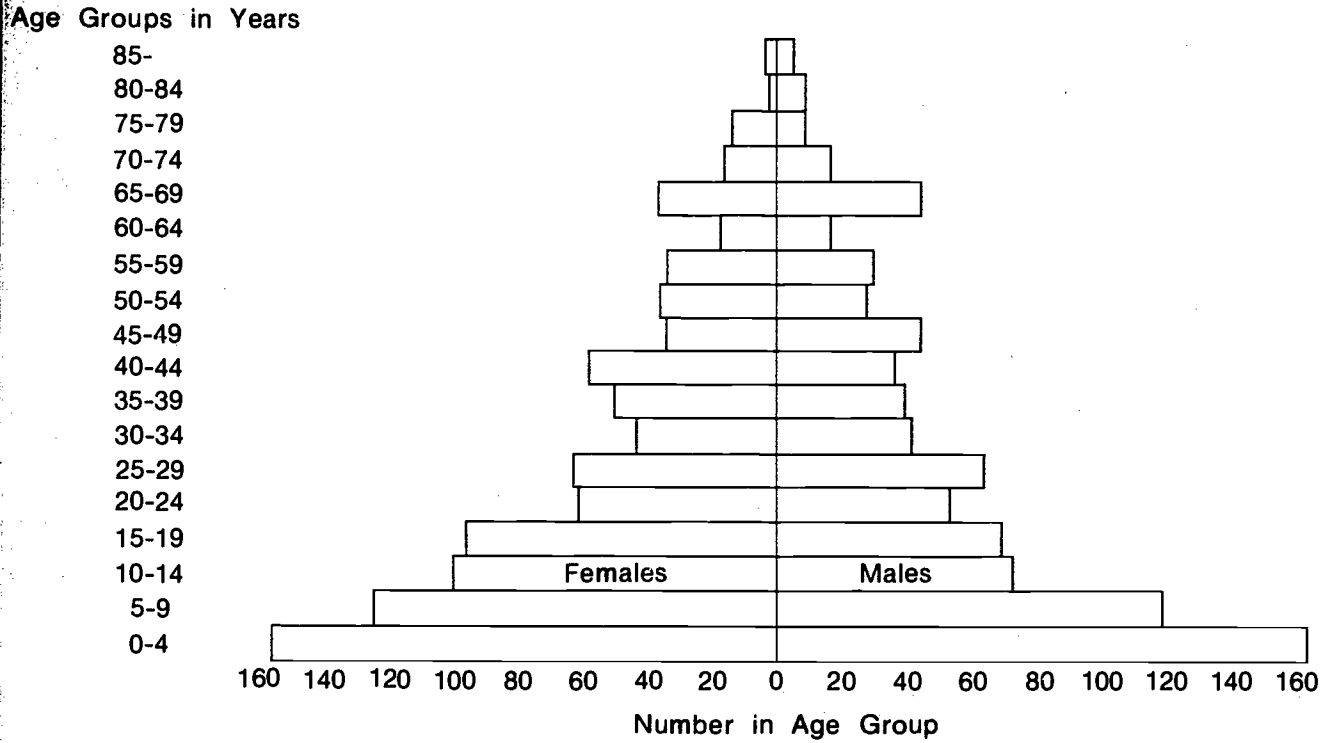


Figure 1b. Age Pyramid and Demographic Information, Tlaloc 1970

1970 (Total Population = 1837)

Percent 65 Years and Older	9.3
d Age Dependency	18.5
ung Age Dependency	76.5

Source: Gomez - Sahagun 1971

Figure 1-B

In 1970, those over 65 in Amatango composed 3.5% of the population, a decrease from the figure of 4.1% in 1960. A similar decline occurred in the old-age dependency ratio, (the percent of aged in relation to the population 15-64) while at the same time the ratio of dependent youths began to significantly rise. This was due to the continuing high rates of fertility coupled with a decrease in infant mortality. Thus, by 1970, for every 100 non-elderly adults there were only 7-8 aged persons to support, but 84 dependent children.

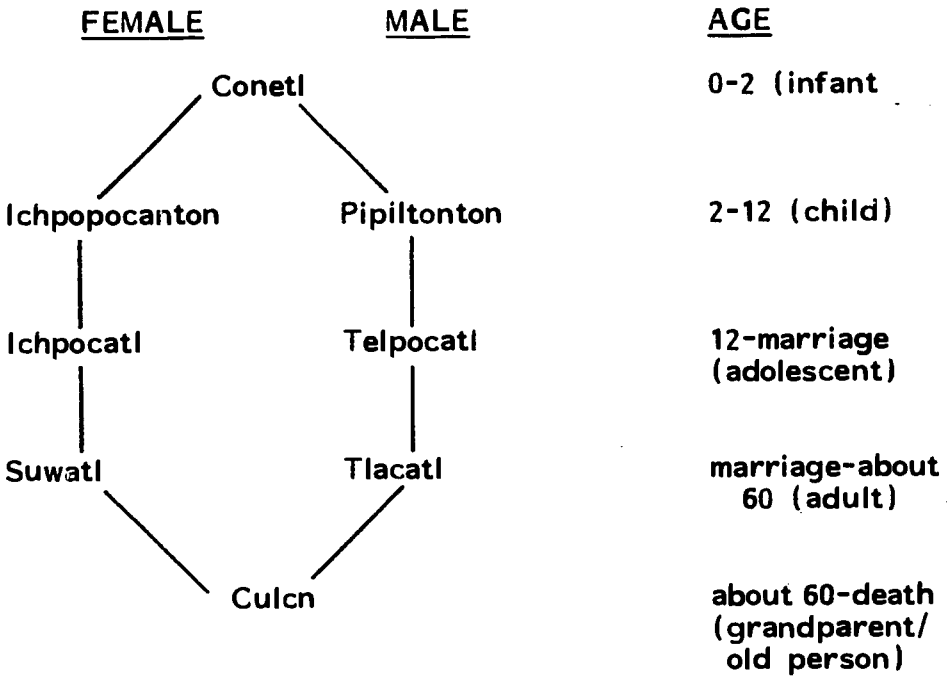
The demographic situation in Tlaloc shows the combined effects of slightly reduced birth and death rates, but more importantly, indicates substantial permanent migration of the population aged 20-40. Here in 1970, the percent of the aged and the old-age dependency rates were nearly triple that found in Amatango. Although we have no empirical data to confirm this, it appeared that when compared to Amatango, the actual support of the aged in Tlaloc left much to be desired. During casual visits to the latter community, frail elderly were seen carrying out tasks such as gathering firewood, activities the are almost universally allotted to younger relatives in Amatango.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE LIFE CYCLE

Movement through the life cycle and the perception of growing old is delimited by relatively few Nahuatl words (see figure 2). These terms demarcate the convergence of biological aging, the developmental cycle of the family and the cycles of ritual performance. Infancy ends at age 2 when children are first thought to comprehend the complex web of family ties in which they are embedded. Children from this time until about age 12 have minor household duties and will not be formally taught or be expected to carry out adult jobs such as plowing or food preparation. Adolescents must begin serious learning of adult roles and prior to marriage may be selected to assist in simple community rituals. Married adults not only must fulfill familial duties but labor in weekly public works projects (called faena) and accept the heavy

financial burdens entailed by sponsorship of cycles of religious festivals.

Figure 2. Stages of the Life Cycle as Expressed in the Nahualt Language in Amatango.



Individuals will attempt to retain the image of a fully functioning adult (Tlacatl-man, Suwatl-woman) as long as possible. However, it is recognized that sometime during the sixth decade of life, men and women must begin to give up total executive control of field and hearth to one of their married sons and his wife. People will begin to refer to such persons as old by generically using the term culcn (grandparent) for both males and females.

Significantly, it is only at the very beginning and end of the life cycle that sex-specific words are not used to describe persons of both sexes. This linguistic homology of old people with infants does not mirror

perfectly social reality, but it does reflect a lessening of expectations and the partial merging of gender roles. Once persons are accepted as culcn, they will be excused from communal work groups and most public ritual sponsorship. There is a noticeable lessening of social constraints on the behavior of older women and they are allowed greater latitude in social interaction especially with male age peers. By the time a woman is 60, she may be seen casually chatting with a group of men or guzzling a beer at a public festival, things forbidden to younger women.

As is typical for the life cycle of peasants (Cool and McCabe 1983), women in old age show a greater continuity in the roles they play than do men. Most elderly women, almost to the time of their deaths, continue a familiar domestic regimen centering on food preparation, weaving, nurturance of children and the care of small livestock. Continuing this work pattern keeps old women deeply embedded in a network of both same-aged and younger women from 4-6 households, who must cooperate to produce the huge quantities of food consumed on numerous ritual occasions.

Men, even after relinquishing control of their farm, will continue to undertake arduous work alongside sons until their mid-to-late 60s. It is after this point, when they can no longer easily plow or plant, that they switch to more sedentary tasks such as preparing cactus beer, repairing tools or collecting wild legumes from nearby corn fields. For males referred to as culcn almost any decrease in vitality will substantially diminish their value in exchange networks which involve demanding tasks such as rapidly planting corn, housebuilding or digging irrigation canals. No longer are they asked to join younger men in the cooperative labor used to perform the agricultural tasks of neighbors or the weekly village-wide work crews.

The only time we observed an instance of public ridicule of an elder was when Jose D., age 74, attempted to join a community work crew repairing a road. The group of men passed Jose's house and shouted that they needed to borrow a shovel. A few minutes later at the work site, Jose appeared with a shovel over his shoulder and with a

toothless grin announced that he was ready to begin digging. After mild laughter by the men, several began to taunt him and wrestled away the shovel. One said Jose was lucky to have walked there with such a heavy tool and that digging with it would surely cause his death. An angry Jose directed some weak blows with his fists on the shoulder and head of one of his tormentors, but the man just chuckled and pushed away the older man. Jose, wishing no further humiliation, returned to his house as the other men returned to work with a few muttering under their breaths, "crazy old man".

GROWING OLD IN THE FAMILY

Such events are rare as few older citizens will step much beyond accepted age-norms. Rather, the elderly in Amatango will consistently draw upon two base of support and prestige: the extended family and a hierarchy of civil-religious roles. Both of these systems are highly linked since individuals participate in community affairs as family representatives and not as isolated actors.

The household organization of the community centers on an ideal of patrilineal, patrilocal, three and four generation households. Although about 60% of dwellings actually contain nuclear families, clusters of agnatically related households form cooperating non-residential extended families living on adjacent lands. This kin-based network of relationships forms shallow patrilineages which are organized on the basis of three dozen exogamous patronyms (Mendez, Lopez, etc.).

One of the dramatic and consistently adhered to aspects of intergenerational kinship behavior is a formal system of deferential gestures. A villager upon seeing an older relative will, with respectful comportment, rush to that person's side, solemnly bend to ritually kiss their right hand and whisper the proper Nahuatl reverential term (e.g., Noculcn, my grandfather or Notiouchcouk, my older brother). Kinpersons of roughly equal age also ritually greet each other but with simultaneous and more perfunctory bows and hand-kissing gestures. This display of "sacred respect" (respecto) functions to regulate the

traditional lines of authority and maintain proper social distance within the kinship system. At the household level, intergenerational command of respect and authority is indeed a serious matter backed by the strength of traditional Aztec law. If a child acts disrespectfully or refuses to consistently obey his parents, he or she can be brought in front of village judicial leaders where formal charges of disrespect can be brought.

The sacred nature of this gesturing behavior increases with genealogical closeness and the age of the relative being greeted. Hence, one's grandparents, parents and godparents receive the highest levels of public deference. Despite the dominance of patrilineal descent, kinship ties generated through one's mother are also acknowledged by respecto behavior and have great practical importance. Maternal relatives comprise a significant portion of a household's total personal support network, which through the exchange of labor, tangible goods, and money facilitates the ability to carry out costly and time-consuming public ritual. According to older respondents respecto etiquette should extend bilaterally to the fourth degree of relationship, but it is seldom observed beyond second cousins who form the outer edge of a functional, cooperating kindred. This fact serves as a source of minor consternation to people over 50 who sometimes complained of a decline in "proper" respect shown by the younger generation.

This type of behavior clearly defines an Indian identity especially when performed in the urban market of Texcoco. While Amatango's people often are seen here in typical city dress and appear physically indistinguishable from the urban dwellers, it is only Indios such as themselves who will stop in the middle of any activity to run and kiss the hand of an older aunt. Such deference does not occur among residents of piedmont rural villages who regard such actions negatively as part of a constellation of "backward" traits associated with Indians.

To a certain extent respecto behavior masks an underlying tension and fear which embraces the realm of kinship. A system whereby a man's access to adult

roles and community status is largely predicated on inherited lands engenders not only filial conflict but also tension between brothers and certain male cousins (the sons of a father's brother). The total acceptance of respecto behavior is thought to help avoid the display of angry emotions among relatives, an act which itself can cause a specific illness or invite sorcery with its subsequent misfortune.[3] While any adult in Amatango can be a potential witch, the quest for a suspect usually begins among one's poorer relatives. Those who know you well are thought the most likely to catch you off-guard. Perhaps a cousin may be a secret tetlachiwe (witch) who can dislodge your soul with his powerful breath or construct a doll from bits of your clothes, which when impaled with cactus needles, will cause excruciating pain and even death. Despite this ominous possibility, it is a person's cousins who form the core of unremunerated reciprocal work exchange needed for agriculture, house construction and ritual sponsorship.

Significant changes in village life have not altered the fact that the life of the elderly is thoroughly embedded in the social matrix of surrounding households, headed by adult children, siblings and cousins. The high level of village endogamy (about 90%) imparts a particularly intense geographic density to the social networks of the aged, especially for males. While a women's agnatic kin group is more physically dispersed from her abode than a male's, this does not imply that females are more isolated in old age. In fact, due to their greater role continuity women past age 65 will typically maintain reciprocal support networks with more personnel and greater frequency of exchange than their male age peers.

Children are in constant contact with middle-aged and older adults, if not with a resident grandparent, then with great aunts and great uncles who must be proferred as much respect as one's parents. Relations of the very old with their grandchildren are especially important. Adolescent or teenage children are frequently sent to live with and help grandparents who might otherwise be living alone. In extended families, young children were observed sleeping in the same bed as a grandparent. This seldom seemed a matter of space, but

rather a case of mutual need. The children help to warm up old bones and the grandparent provides emotional security at night when various spirits and demons are thought to travel through the village.

Over the last 40 years economic change, especially the decline in per capita land holdings and the rise of new money-making opportunities, has stimulated some alterations in extended family life. A comparison of household organization in 1927 and 1970 (Table 1) does show some remarkable stability with about one-third of all residences at both points in time containing extended families.* However, over this period there has been a distinct shift from joint to stem extended households. In 1970 the percent of extended residences with two or more married sons had declined by more than one-half.

With regard to the living situation of persons 60 years of age or older (see Table 2), a clear majority (60%) reside in three-generational settings with 90% of these households having no more than one married son in residence. In only four instances did aged individuals live alone. One-quarter of the aged lived with unmarried children and 8% lived with just their spouse or some other relative, most typically a grandson.

For the aged the structural transformation of inter-generational association has involved the decline of quite large (10-15 persons) residentially-extended groupings housed in a single family compound surrounded by fifteen foot adobe walls. Enclosed within were the living quarters for several nuclear families, a common kitchen and grain bin, an Aztec sweat bath for the women and a corral for the livestock.

By the 1970's only a handful of such structures remained. The elderly today typically live in smaller extended households (6-8 persons) with one married son and his children. There is a growing tendency among young families to seek a greater level of privacy and independence, if only to be living in a distinct dwelling 30 feet across the courtyard of one's father's house. Despite this, most new couples will remain living with the husband's parents at least until their first child is born.

TABLE 1

Change in Household Composition, 1927 and 197

		Nuclear	Extended (Total)	Extended 1 Married Child	Extended 2 Married Children	Married Brothers	Single Person	Unknown	Total
1927	No.	95	61	39	22	6	2	7	171
	%	55.6	35.6	63.9 (extended)	36.1 (extended)	3.5	1.2	4.0	100%
1973	No.	213	126	106	20	3	8	7	357
	%	59.7	35.3	84.1 (extended)	15.9 (extended)	.84	2.2	2.0	100%

Source: Mexico D.F., DAAC, "Amanalco," 1927; Mexico D.F. DGE, 1973.

Table 2

HOUSEHOLDS PATTERNS OF PERSONS OVER 60, 1973, Amatango

Extended Households		Nuclear Households	Amalgamated Households	Living Alone
Elderly Parents or Parent	Elderly Parents	Elderly couple with unmarried children	Elderly person, with relative	
1 married son and family	2 married sons and family			
44	5	21	7	4
(54.3%)	(6.2%)	(25.9%)	(8.6%)	(4.9%)

This results in a patrilineal cluster of residences joining in certain common economic activities. Until the elder father undergoes significant physical decline, these households may not only cooperate in planting family lands, but also give any additional income to their parents who are expected to see to the needs of all family members. The dynamics of managing a joint budget is one of the most delicate issues of multigenerational households in a rapidly changing peasant context. With increased education, young men, and to a lesser extent women are obtaining salaried jobs in nearby towns and cities. By 1978, Millard found that in a sample of village men between 20 and 40 years of age, 80% were earning at least some money by laboring outside of Amatango (1980:8). However, this work did not dramatically increase the rate of permanent migration as the improved road and bus service permitted most city workers to return daily to the village.

In many cases the salaries sons now can earn might equal or exceed the annual income from a father's agrarian pursuits. This is particularly troublesome if a single unmarried son is bringing home a salary while a married son just works in the fields but requires more money for his growing family. Substantial conflict in such cases seems difficult to avoid but often stays under the surface until the father dies. It will be noticed in Table 1 that in 1970 there were only three fraternal joint families in the village of which all but one seemed in imminent danger of splitting up.

Counterbalancing the impact of wage-labor, new village-based economic strategies have been a crucial factor in fostering the vitality of three generational family life. The regaining of forest and irrigation resources has permitted the widespread adoption of wooden crate manufacture and the growing of decorative flowers. In 1973 almost two-thirds of the extended households with persons 60 years of age, were producing at least one of these specialty products. These two activities not only provide a fair amount of cash but are jobs which are best accomplished within a multigenerational domestic work unit. Moreover, the economic marginal utility of the aged, especially for males, has been enhanced as they are more likely to continue laboring

in these cash producing endeavors after their effectiveness in other agricultural work has diminished.

The continuing expectation of those facing old age is that they will be supported with respect in their own home by one of their sons who will inherit the house and the main irrigated plot of land adjacent to the dwelling. Although, by tradition the youngest son, known by the special Aztec work "xocoyote" should remain after marriage with his parents, villagers abide by no hard and fast rule. Any son can in fact be selected for this primary care-taker role. Similar to what Adams found for another Mexican Indian village (1972), in Amatango this aspect of generational succession is governed by wealth. The eldest son is most apt to stay on after marriage if his father has a good deal of land.

Flexibility in the determination of a primary heir contributes to the ability to cope with the uncertainties of generational succession brought upon by wage labor and out migration. Upon my return to Amatango in 1978 I found a slowly developing pattern of married daughters and their husbands becoming the resident support agents of elderly couples or individuals. At least five extended households were formed in this manner whereas five years earlier, no elderly had been in this residential situation. While this new living arrangement was still considered far less desirable than patrilocality, it was becoming accepted and a few elderly believed that these types of families might actually be run more smoothly than the traditional ones.

AGING BEYOND THE FAMILY

Besides the family, the most important source of prestige, respect and power during middle and old age derives from the carrying out of community ritual and civil responsibilities. Known in Latin American scholarship as either the "cargo" (literally, "burden") system or the "fiesta" system, this involves a hierarchy of ranked positions (cargos) occupied for short periods of time by specific households. (Cancian 1965, Smith 1977).

In Amatango community roles are loosely ranked with the higher ones generally requiring more money and/or time but yielding more prestige and authority. The positions are divided between cargos of the church and those associated with the municipal building; the former carry out costly folk Catholic ritual (fiestas), while the latter form the local government.

The religious hierarchy, which carries out an annual cycle of eight fiestas, consists of 32 men and their households who hold their posts for one year. There is an expectation that over a lifetime an individual will have undertaken at least one important sacred cargo and thereby be worthy of public esteem. These men as a group are led by a senior and junior fiscal, who take care of the material possessions of the church and provide elaborate meals for the priests who perform mass at every fiesta. Although this religious role is not the costliest it is the most prestigious, with election to the senior fiscal post predicated on prior service in at least two other major religious cargos and one significant civil position.

At the center of community authority and administration is the first delegado (commissioner), who serves for three years as mayor and justice of the peace. The second commissioner serves as his chief assistant by recording necessary documents, while the third is in charge of collecting fines and community taxes. The first delegado, referred to in Nahuatl as "altepetatli" (community father), is expected to oversee the community paternally, settle most levels of internal disputes, and protect local interests from any outside forces. He leads all village meetings and must solicit opinions from all present until a general consensus is reached. Other personnel in the political hierarchy distribute irrigation waters, protect community boundaries and organize the traditional system of unremunerated collective labor which carried out public works projects. It is this civil wing of community service that since the 1950's has initiated and carries out the series of modernizing projects of which Amatango is so proud.

The operation of such a system has traditionally acted as an informal age grading mechanism for males with ideally: teenagers and young married men (age

17-25) being bell ringers or political errand boys; older married men (26-35) serving as policemen or sponsors of simple ritual; middle-aged men (35-55) shouldering onerous religious duties or significant political positions; and, finally those approaching old age (55-70) being selected for the most crucial positions in the entire hierarchy. With respect to stratifying populations by age, cargo systems differ significantly from East African age-set organizations (see Andretta this volume). The former institution does not move men through a series of roles as a group nor is everyone expected to traverse all levels of the system. Consequently, unlike age-sets, the cargo system does not typically engender a sense of generational solidarity or shared roles which could give the elderly any power as a group.

Rather as seen in Table 3 detailing the participation in the cargo system of a small sample of older men, the holding of important and prestigious community positions is influenced by wealth. In terms of religious roles, almost all men, even nine out of ten of the poorer farmers have held some prestigious cargo and 85.8% have taken at least two such positions. However, less than one-third of this relatively land-poor group have attained the highest levels of ritual participation -- three or more religious sponsorships. This contrasts with the wealthier men, 91.7 percent of whom had accomplished this during their lifetime.

Participation in the political realm shows even greater distinctions based on land ownership. While the great majority of those with relatively little land have been elected to one important civil position, only 28.6 percent have ever had two or more political offices. In contrast, all but one of the large landowners have had three political roles over their lifetime.

In effect, wealth conditions the degree of public prestige and power men will garner as they age. Nevertheless, virtually all men had carried out at least once the sacred burden of ritual sponsorship which gives then lasting honor in the eyes of the community and the saints. By the time most males reach age 60, even those who are relatively poor will have shouldered some politically important responsibility. Moreover, unlike

TABLE 3

PARTICIPATION OF MEN 60 YEARS AND OLDER IN THE CIVIL-RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY, BY WEALTH GROUPS, AMATANGO

RELIGIOUS ROLES	Relatively Poor No. (%)	Relatively Wealthy No. (%)	POLITICAL ROLES	Relatively Poor No. (%)	Relatively Wealthy No. (%)
None	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	None	2 (14.3)	1 (8.3)
One Major Role	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	One Major Role	8 (57.1)	0 (0.0)
Two Major Roles	8 (57.2)	1 (8.3)	Two Major Roles	2 (14.3)	0 (0.0)
Three Major Roles	4 (28.6)	11 (91.7)	Three Major Roles	2 (14.3)	11 (91.7)
N =	14 (100%)	12 (100%)	N =	12 (100%)	12 (100%)

other peasant areas of the world such as rural India (see Vatuk, this volume) where distinct class formations are completely embedded in the local social order, Amatango's rich and poor share a common ideology and lifestyle. Men in the wealthier group discussed above did not form any permanent landlord-tenant relations with poorer village members. Not only did they all work in the typical round of agrarian tasks but they made an attempt to avoid giving the appearance through clothes or house style of being a class apart from poorer neighbors.

Besides sponsorship and administrative positions, the cargo system affords other opportunities to enhance public esteem in old age. All of the fiestas involve dance troops and elaborate processions. Elderly men, and to a lesser extent women, can volunteer to take roles as dance leaders, instructors, special musicians or simply as participants. A special honor is bestowed each year to several men over 50 who will guide sacred processions dressed as particular saints. Such activities proclaim not only moral uprightness and continuing prestige, but also that one is still actively involved in the life of the community.

Despite the emphasis on age, hierarchy and formal deference between generations in family formations, this pattern is not totally replicated in the public groupings that carry out ritual. Although the fiesta system performs an ad hoc age-grading function, it also provides one of the only community-wide arenas where males and females of all ages can participate as relative equals. This occurs in the large dance groups that perform at most fiestas as part of the community's "folk" version of Roman Catholic pageantry. Participants range in age from about 7 to the early 70s. Even in the case where teenagers recently introduced a new dance formation based on an urban model, middle aged villagers eagerly volunteered to dress up and perform as caballeros y caballeras (cowboys and cowgirls).

Although women participate in the processions, dancing and masses associated with each fiesta, they assume no overt leadership position. Older women generally operate behind the scenes directing the production and serving of huge quantities of special foods required

for successful ritual sponsorship. In accomplishing this they rely, and in turn support, a wide circle of female age-peers and younger women drawn from their bilateral kin network. The reciprocal flow of assistance stimulated by the annual cycle of eight fiestas provides a regular source of extrahousehold engagement for all but the most frail women.

Perhaps the most important change with regard to older people and the cargo system has been the reduction in their political roles. Almost from the beginning of the Mexican Revolution there has been considerable national pressure to both separate the two parts of the community hierarchy and promote younger and better educated leaders. The intention here was to establish a local power base tied to the dictates and patronage of the national ruling political party.

To a certain extent Amatango has been able to control these processes. While the civil and religious hierarchies are by national law separate, they are unified in the village under a single moral order. It is the political leaders who help the religious stewards collect monies for fiestas or who light skyrockets to scare away hailstorms brought by Aztec water demons called Nawake. More fundamentally, no person could hope to become first delegado without having successfully shouldered one of the major sacred sponsorship positions. Nonetheless, older men no longer retain overt political leadership roles. Prior to 1950 it was unheard of for a man to be considered for first delegado or senior fiscal before the age of 50 and persons chosen were often at least 60.[4]

Still today directors of the religious hierarchy (senior fiscal) range in age from 50 to 65 and these men exert great influence in public decisions. Yet, first delegados, holders of the most potent authority position, are now being selected from considerably younger men. Over the last 30 years all men elected for this position have been 41 years of age or less with the youngest being 31 years old.

Despite the steady drop in age of the community mayor, the village has sought to select men between 55-65 as the third delegado. In addition, still older

men are used as judicial go-betweens in difficult cases where parties initially refuse to abide by legal decisions of the delegados. By this pragmatic use of human resources, Amatango has put the prestige and authority accumulated over a lifetime behind political and judicial decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

Under conditions of "modernizing" change, the aged of Amatango have fared better than those in many other Latin American peasant communities. One reads, for example, that in the Colombian highland village of Aritama: "There is no room and no use for them. Old People are not respected, feared or loved. Their advice is not sought by the younger generation, nor are they thought to possess any special knowledge which might be useful" (Reichel-Dolmatoff and ReichelDolmatoff 1961).

While this is an extreme case, judging from other ethnographic studies (Holmberg 1961; Lewis 1963; Adams 1972; O'Nell 1972; Kagan 1980) the situation of the aged in rural communities of the region unfortunately seems closer to the conditions in Aritama than that in Amatango. All too commonly one finds a despairing elderly population rapidly bereft of support by a demographic vacuum caused by departing young adults and a cultural lacunae epitomized by the withering away of cargo systems.

One reason why the "traditions" benefiting the elderly seem to crumble so rapidly upon 20th century examination is that these structures of support were vastly weakened world-wide by the intensification of modes of capitalist penetration during the latter part of the 19th century. By the 1930's and 1940's when anthropologists got around to seriously studying peasant societies, in many communities described as "highly traditional" such as Tepotzlan in Mexico (Redfield 1930; Lewis 1963), Shamirpet in India (Dube 1955) or County Claire in Ireland (Arensberg and Kimball 1940), the underlying basis of economic and social cohesion had been already shaken by a long history of external control. For example, from 1850-1890 a series of laws were passed in virtually all

colonial and semi-colonial areas of the world, which individualized land tenure systems (Migdal 1974:134-6). Additionally a shift in state tax policies from acceptance of payment in kind to obligatory money payments forced rural dwellers into the market system as either cultivators of cash crops or wage laborers on larger holdings. To borrow Polanyi's (1957) terminology, local economic systems based upon norms of reciprocity were shifted to ones strongly dependent upon market exchange. In the process, not only was the communal land base of rural people destroyed but in many regions intergenerational relations evolved into an adversarial process.

This is exemplified by the case of Tepotzlan made famous by the studies of Redfield (1930) and Lewis (1963). Although overtly similar to Amatango in its Nahuatl Indian cultural patterns, Tepotzlan was forced by population pressure on a diminishing land base into a significant commercialization of agriculture even before the Revolution of 1910-1920. Eventual return of some communal lands after the Revolution did not reverse this trend. The growth of wage labor and commercial production, high levels of internal inequality and the loss of political autonomy to new organs of the federal government severely hampered the viability of both extended family systems and the indigenous community organization. By the mid 1940's, Lewis found that Tepotzlan's elderly had developed a most insecure place in that community. The custom of hand kissing deference was disappearing and even grandparents were addressed by more formal linguistic terms. Few elderly people retained any roles in a crumbling cargo system and many preferred to live alone (pp. 411-12). While there was still an expectation that children support their aged parents "there are cases of extreme neglect and the theme 'I would rather die than depend upon my children' is frequently heard" (p. 53).

Why was the situation for the aged more favorable in Amatango in the 1970's? Ironically, its isolated location and the mediocre quality of its agricultural lands protected the community from severe exploitation by a landed gentry in pre-revolutionary times. Thus substantial land and irrigation resources were retained and eventually expanded upon in the early twentieth century prior to the onset of the pressures which had

caused the demise of indigenous institutions and beliefs in similar villages. This economic strength helped sustain cultural features through which the aged have maintained societal value in the light of rapid change.

In fact, it is some of those very patterns of traditional life which have been used to carry out ongoing economic development projects. When in the 1950's, a rising population provoked the need for new sources of revenue and the development of village capital infrastructure, solutions were largely based on local ecological and social resources.

As a consequence of this, the familial and village niches providing roles for elder individuals were not dramatically altered. Particularly crucial has been the vitality of the cargo system which has not only served as a bulwark of Indian identity but also provided the organizational basis for community transformation. In other Latin American peasant communities either the total collapse of the cargo system (Adams 1972; O'Nell 1972) or the sharp separation of political and ritual components (Moore 1973) has severely limited the possibilities of maintaining public esteem in old age.

For Amatango, community solidarity bolstered by an economic base has enabled the village to change largely on its own terms. While many aged are ambivalent about such things as the new schools, which downplay the use of Nahuatl, they are still very much a part of the system that brought these changes about.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lewis (1963) presents a persuasive argument that even in 1927 when Redfield studied Tepoztlan, many important aspects of social organization, such as community-wide cooperative labor had already broken down.

2. A municipio is a Mexican political sub-division similar to the American township, while a pueblo is a politically dependent rural community. However, the pueblos in the municipio of Texcoco are comparatively independent, owning their own lands and forming distinct socio-political organizations.

3. People who cannot control anger are thought to be susceptible to an illness called muina which greatly weakens the individual and may even cause death.

4. Just after the Mexican revolution several very young delegados, under the age of 30, were selected to head the community but the village reverted to leadership by older men by the end of the 1920's.

5. For additional comparative discussion of aging in Latin American peasant communities see Press and McKool 1972 and Finley 1981. Other ethnographic information is to be found in: Gutmann 1967; Press 1967; Moore 1973; Velez 1978; Kerns 1980, 1983.

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