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## Contents

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF COSMOPOLITANISM AND MULTICULTURALISM IN AMERICAN SOCIETY* CANTINE, PAMELA ANN	1
THE HOLISTIC OTHER: HERETICAL CHALLENGER TO RATIONALISM* ERICKSON, BARBRA	5
THE ALCOHOLIC OTHER* KETTNER, KAREN	8
THE PROCESSES OF MULTICULTURALISM IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE* MARKLEY, KAREN	11
<i>UM HAPI QAA'ÖNIWTI</i> (YOU REALLY HAVE BECOME CORN): THE HOPI CONCEPT OF SELF ORR, DOUGLAS W.	15
DEATH OF APOLLO SWEET-CLARKE, CHARYSSE	21
RESPONSIBILITY AND REVENGE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITY LEADERS IN THE ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION WANDERMAN, JUDITH	26
REFLECTIONS ON ETHICS AND APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATIONS NEWSLETTER FROM 1961-1985 WHITNEY, KEVIN PRINCE	32

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# UM HAPI QAA'ÖNIWTI(YOU REALLY HAVE BECOME CORN):THE HOPI CONCEPT OF SELF

Douglas Orr

## Introduction

This paper will show that corn permeates every aspect of Hopi life and is a reflection of the Hopi self. To present the Hopi self, the following topics concerning the Hopi will be discussed in order: early culture and personality studies, a general description of the Hopi, a three-fold discussion of history, social organization, ceremonial life cycle, *Kachinas*, ceremonialism, world view, and finally a discussion of corn as self. Due to the breadth of information on the Hopi, descriptions of their world will be brief, yet relate the most important aspects of each.

## Culture and Personality

According to Laura Thompson, "Hopi Personality... achieves a *nice* adjustment between the expression and control of psychic forces" [emphasis added] (1950:95). The preceding quote is only a sample of the subjective writings of early culture and personality writers. Ruth Benedict provided the first look at the Pueblo personality when she wrote *Patterns of Culture* (1934) about the Zuni Indians, an Indian tribe very closely related culturally to the Hopi. Her study provided an analysis of the modal personality of the Zuni, stating that they were modest, gentle, and cooperative. On the other hand, Dorothy Eggan describes the Hopi as having a maladjusted personality in her book *The General Problem of Hopi Adjustment* (1943). In *Socialization, Personality, and the Structure of Pueblo Society* (1945) Esther Goldfrank followed Eggan's views and added that the Hopi personality had the following attributes: tension, suspicion, anxiety, hostility, fear, and ambition. An opposite rendition of the Hopi personality was presented by Laura Thompson and Alice Joseph in *The Hopi Way* (1965), which placed the terms strong, poised, law abiding, peaceful, and protective upon the Hopi personality.

This study, however, is not an exercise in culture and personality but an analysis of the symbolic self. According to Jacob Pandian,

The semiotic concept of the self denotes the fact that individuals create and recreate conceptions of 'who they are' and 'what they are' in relation to their self-conscious interpretations of socially relevant and meaningful interaction with others and in terms of their goals, motivations, and intentionalities that

change in response to a variety of life experiences (1995:1).

So, instead of providing a modal personality or a description of personality types, this study will analyze the Hopi symbolism that relates to who the Hopi think or believe they are.

## The Hopi

The Hopi, a subgroup of the Pueblo Indians, inhabit the desert region of Northern Arizona and New Mexico. They currently inhabit small villages atop mesas on their reservation in Northern Arizona. Although the Hopi are a Pueblo Indian group in all aspects of culture, they are genetically related to the Shoshoneans.

Puebloans are renowned for their pottery. Since the introduction of pottery to the Hohokam and Mogollon peoples, circa 300 B.C., this tradition of creating pottery that is more likened to works of art than utilitarian usage has been continued by the Puebloans of today. The Hopi and Zuni pottery each have their own style and while the Zuni pottery is more famous than the Hopi, neither can be judged as superior. Although the Hopi are proficient potters, they have not stopped making baskets, which are also regarded as excellent works. (Brew 1979:516-7)

The pueblos (houses) are a tradition that is particular to the Pueblo Indians, hence their name. The attached buildings have two stories with the upper set back from the first to form a terrace. This terrace serves as an aboveground street and is reached by ladders. The adjacent row houses are inhabited by matrilineally linked families. Houses in most villages had neither doors nor windows, access to the interiors being limited to holes in the roofs reached by ladders. The focal point of the village is the plaza. In the center of the plaza is a *kiva*, it is a clubhouse for men, while the dwellings, which belong to the women, are given over to domestic chores. (Haurg 1986:425)

Hopi farming is one of the most specialized in the world. At one time it is believed that corn made up 80% of their diet (Driver 1969:60). They grow a hardy strain of corn that matures quickly and is not harmed by the extremes of desert temperatures. But the key to the corn's survival is deep planting. Using a digging stick, or dibble, the planter makes a narrow hole 12 to 16 inches deep. The damp subsoil at the bottom is loosened, 10 to 20 seeds are dropped in, and the earth is packed down. The farmer then paces off five feet and repeats the process. Deep planting permits the seeds to receive the benefit of all the moisture in the soil and the shoots develop strong root systems, providing anchorage that protects the stalks from being blown away or washed out by storms. This method has allowed the Hopi to survive for

centuries in the harsh environment of the desert Southwest.

## History

### Prehistory

Hopi oral tradition begins with the myth of Hopi creation. According to this myth all human life began in the underworld. Here everything was good, everyone was at peace, and there was no sin. Then there was an outbreak of great sin and the Chief took his high priests into a secluded area to pray. They were looking for a way out of their sinful world. During their ceremony a sparrow, hawk, eagle, swallow, shrike, mockingbird, and chipmunk helped them find and travel to this world from the underworld. Once here, the hole that they came out from was sealed underwater so no one could go back. (James 1974:2-8)

After many years, the people again became troubled and the mockingbird was asked to give them different languages. This split the people into different tribes: Navajo, Supai, Paiute, Apache, Zuni, Utes, and *Bahana* (white people). In splitting, each group chose which food would be the main part of their staple diet. The Hopi chose corn. As the tribes traveled to different places to settle, the Hopi further divided into clans by the animals they encountered: Bear, Strap, Bluebird, Spider, and Greasy Eye Cavities of the Skull (now extinct) clans. (James 1974:17-32)

According to current archaeological research corn first appeared in the Southwest about 1,500 B.C., but was not harvested until circa A.D. 1. Between then and A.D. 1,300, the Mogollon culture period was prevalent in the Southwest. This culture period is marked by a corn and squash based horticulture and the beginnings of large settlements. During the period between A.D. 900 to A.D. 1,150, regional integration occurred in the Southwest with large scale trading between settlements. It is believed that the Hopi formed as the tribe they are today about A.D. 1,300.

When the Spaniards came, one clan believed they were the lost brother tribe, *Bahana*, so they let the Spaniards build missions. Out of fear of the Spaniards weapons and military, the Hopi allowed themselves to be enslaved, their alters to be destroyed, and their ceremonies stopped. The Hopi then discovered the evils of the priests of the mission, so they hung and burned the priests. The Spaniards came back many times, but the Hopi never attacked them again, they only defended themselves. The Hopi eventually moved onto the mesas as that area was the best defense against the Spaniards. (James 1974:44-58)

Accounts of the Hopi written in Western History begins in 1540 when Francisco Vásquez de Coronado traveled into the area and overpowered them in battle. Even when the Hopi and Navajo joined forces to defend themselves from Antonio de Espejo in 1583, the Indians still lost in battle to the Spanish. As soon as the Spanish left, the Hopi and Navajo went back to their own lifestyles. In 1598, when Don Juan de Oñale traveled into the Hopi land and demanded submission to Spain and the Hopi superficially obeyed. From 1628 to 1680 Spain set up missions in the Hopi area and forced them to become Christians. The Hopi again superficially obeyed until the Pueblo Revolt in 1680 when the Hopi and Navajo joined to force missionaries away, killing most of the priests and burning the missions. In 1681, the Spanish Governor of New Mexico tried to retake the Hopi area but failed. The most tragic period in Hopi history was the Reconquista in 1693, when Don Diego de Vargas slaughtered many of the Hopi people. In 1700 the Hopi town of Awatowi was destroyed by the Hopi for their sins, most of the Hopi in the town were Christians. Governor Cubero of New Mexico invaded the Hopi area in 1701 and the Hopi submitted on the surface only. By 1757, the Navajo raids on the Hopi were so intense that the Hopi asked Governor Don Joachin Codallosy Rabel for help, but none was given. The Mexican Period in the Southwest lasted from 1823 to 1846. By 1823, the raids by the Navajo stopped and in 1846, the Americans reach Sante Fe, New Mexico. Finally, in 1860, Kit Carson arrived and Fort Defiance was built. (Brew 1979:519-22)

When the Americans came and built a fort, the Hopi believed them to be *Bahana*. Then the boarding schools were started and the Hopi believed that in having their children learn the way of the *Bahana* there would be peace. But when one village was having a ceremony and kept their children home, soldiers and police came in the night and took the children.

### Social Organization

Although a Hopi Tribal Council exists, each village elects its own chief and it is he, not the council, who dictates pueblo policy. The chief of the village does not have absolute power. The people of the village must agree with what he is doing. The base structure of Hopi social organization is the clan. "A Hopi clan consists of one or more matrilineal lineages which descend, theoretically at least, from a common ancestress" (Thompson and Joseph 1965:34). Each clan has a symbolic animal and ceremonial responsibility. Although the ceremonial responsibility of each clan may either remain static for many years or change regularly, the clan animal always stays

with the clan and can be seen in their oral tradition, as described above. Clans are based upon a matrilineal system, but this fact is not acknowledged by the Hopi. A male Hopi must marry outside of the clan in which he was raised and he will then belong to both clans, the one he came from and the one into which he married into. The Hopi woman never leaves her clan group. (Connelly 1979:539-53)

### Ceremonial Life Cycle

When a child is born, the father sets the child upon the road of life, symbolized by the cornmeal that the father sprinkles in a path, as the naming party carries the child to the edge of a mesa. There the father's mother and her mother pray over the child, presenting it to the rising sun, and then bestowing a name upon the child. When a child is eight or nine, both boys and girls are initiated into the mysteries of religion as members of *Kachina* cults. Sometime between the ages of 16 and 20, girls pass through a four-day ceremony of grinding corn in a darkened room, from which they emerge with their hair in two fat buns above their ears -- the squash-blossom hairstyle that signifies they are of marriageable age. A boy's puberty ceremony is more elaborate, involving tests of strength and courage as well as a mock battle between some of the grown men and the initiate. In this encounter the boy is always victorious, his triumph symbolizing his readiness for full tribal membership. An adolescent boy could now sleep in the *kiva* and, if he so chooses, leave it during the night, wrapped in a blanket and bound for a *dumaiya* (a tryst with the girl of his choice). Silently, while everyone else in her house is sleeping, he will make his way down the ladder and creep to her side. If she likes him, she will welcome him into her arms, where he can remain until shortly before the household wakes. Usually this occurs with more than one girl and sometimes, of course, a girl will become pregnant. This, however, is no shame for the girl. She must choose her favorite among her several lovers, name him as the probable father, and the two will marry. Parents object only if they consider the partner an unsuitable candidate for marriage. One stricture is inviolate, the boy and girl should never be members of the same clan.

Once the match is decided, the girl goes to the boy's home, to remain there for three days and demonstrate such household skills as grinding corn for her prospective mother-in-law. As the girl works in the house, mock fights occur outside to draw the girl out. When the girl comes out of the house, both she and the boy have their hair washed in a single basin, a ceremony symbolizing the mingling of their lives. Then the two young people will make their way to the edge of the mesa to solemnize their union by offering

prayers to the sun. When they are finished praying, they return to the boy's house, where the girl's hair is put in braids which will be worn all her life, except when she is pregnant.

While the couple stays at the boy's house, a marriage costume is made for the girl. When it is completed they leave the boy's house and move into the girl's mother's house, where they will reside the rest of their lives.

The simplest of all Hopi ceremonies is for death. A man's body is wrapped in deerskin, a woman's in her marriage costume, and a cotton mask, the symbol of the rain cloud, is laid over the face. The body is then placed in a sitting position, with the head bowed between the knees. Then the corpse is carried out along the mesa to the spot where a grave has been dug. No one speaks as the body is lowered into the grave. A bowl of food, usually corn, is placed on a nearby rock and the burial party walks back to the pueblo. For four days the women of the household mourn, visiting the grave daily and placing bowls of food and feathered prayer sticks on it. The women then return to their lives in the village and the soul of the deceased emerges into the world below to live among the *Kachinas*.

### *Kachinas*

Of all writing on the Hopi, their *Kachinas* have been written about the most. Daily life is permeated with and controlled by the *Kachinas*, spirit ancestors of the Hopi people who intercede with the gods on the Hopi's behalf. The large number of dances and other religious ceremonies held each year at the Hopi pueblos are prayers to the gods to ensure rain, fertility, and harvest.

*Kachina* means three things: (1) a spirit the Hopi believe in, (2) a masked impersonator, and (3) a carved and painted likeness -- the *Kachina* doll. To the Pueblos the dolls are not idols to be worshipped. They are lessons to be studied and they hang on the wall at home as constant reminders. Most Pueblos recognize *Kachinas*, but the Hopi pantheon is the largest, more than 250. *Kachinas* were Supernatural beings encountered after the Hopi had emerged from the dark underworld. The spirits once lived with the people and taught them how to conduct ceremonials.

*Kachinas* take many forms: demons, ogres, animals, birds, and clowns. Mudheads, the best-known Hopi clowns, entertain at ceremonies: mocking tourists, anthropologists, neighboring Indians, or themselves. In legend, the name Mudhead derives from their punishment for incest that left them covered with mud.

## Ceremony

All Hopi life is based on their ceremonies. Ceremonial societies perform a religious function that, in Hopi theory, includes all life and all people. The ceremonies are not static. They must change as the people change; it is considered healthy. The importance placed upon balance in the memberships of societies is seen in initiation rites. "The four men's societies, *Wuwuchim*, *Singer*, *Horn*, and *Agrave*, are involved in both *Wuwuchim* and *Kachina* cult initiation. If any of the societies does not receive sufficient initiates pledged by their kinsmen it may refuse to participate and the initiation must be postponed to a future year" (Connelly 1979:548). During the ceremonies *Kachinas*, mythical heroes, and numerous gods are venerated: the sun, god of germination, third mesa, god of death, earth, spider woman, dawn woman, star god, twin war gods, and others. Religious syncretism between Christianity and Hopi religion does not exist. (Frigout 1979:564)

"Hopi ceremonial organization is based on the year as a temporal unit and the village or mesa as a spatial unit" (Frigout 1979:564). The ceremonial importance of each village varies according to its cultural conservatism and its antiquity. In principle, each traditional village organizes its own ceremonies following a general model that permits variation. The ceremonial cycle is annual, consisting of two major periods, that of the masked and unmasked ceremonies, the masked being the *Kachina* ceremonies. The great ceremonies last eight days, grouped in sets of four plus a preliminary day for a total of nine days. Short ceremonies last four days with a fifth preliminary day. (Frigout 1979:564-567)

*Kivas* are ceremonial chambers that are constructed separately from the dwellings. They are either subterranean or semisubterranean and are rectangular. Ceremonial access is by means of a ladder passing through the trap door constructed in the roof and resting on the floor of the *Kiva*, near the fireplace. (Frigout 1979:570)

An essential element of Hopi ceremonial life is also the making and use of *pahos*. *Pahos* are sacramental objects that symbolize the thread that exists between people and the great spirit. Another element of Hopi sacramental activity is corn meal. It is intended to be a meal for supernatural beings only. It is used for opening or closing paths that lead to spiritual involvement, to bless *Catsinas*, people, and places. It is a cleansing and nurturing process; it symbolizes the fertilization of the ceremonies, the blessing of the string of people, and places. Corn meal can be made from white or blue corn and it is ceremonially ground to a fine meal to be stored in a small pouch. It is spread with three fingers by the person performing a blessing.

The four major cycles of Hopi ceremonies are *Wuwuchim*, *Soyal*, *Powamu*, and *Niman*. *Wuwuchim* is defined as *Wu* meaning to germinate and *Chim* to manifest. This ceremony celebrates the whole process of creation. In Hopi spirituality, every object has two aspects, the material and the supernatural. This characterizes the two halves of the Hopi universe, based on the path of the sun in the visible world during the daytime and the invisible one during the hours of the night. (Frigout 1979:564)

*Soyal* (*so* meaning "all" and *yal* meaning "year") is the second great ceremony of the year. It opens the door for the *Catsinas'* return from the San Francisco Peaks and corresponds to the winter solstice, the return to the sun as the Hopi call it, which has been slipping away as daylight becomes shorter. For each village, the purpose of the ritual is to open the *kivas* for the *Catsinas'* return. (Frigout 1979:564)

*Powamu* symbolizes the last phase of creation. *Wuwuchim* laid the pattern of life for the coming year, *Soyal* agreed to it, and *Powamu* purifies it. *Powamu* portrays life in its full physical form. The reenactment of the three phases of creation are now completed. *Wuwuchim*, *Soyal*, and *Powamu* are the cornerstones of Hopi ceremonialism as they synchronize the path of the sun and of humankind together. (Frigout 1979:564)

Closing the entire cycle is the *Niman* or *Catsina* going home ceremony. Considered to be a summer solstice celebration, *Niman* coincides with the beginning of harvest of the early sweet corn. At the end of this ceremony the body of an eagle is ceremoniously buried in a special cemetery, with all the pomp and solemnity of a human burial. (Frigout 1979:564)

## Hopi World View

The Hopi world view is dictated by their conception of the bipartite universe. This is described by Titiev as...

the concept of a dual division of time and space between the upper world of the living and the lower world of the dead. This is expressed in the description of the sun's journey on its daily rounds. The Hopi believe that the sun has two entrances, variously referred to as houses, homes or *kivas*, situated at each extremity of its course. In the morning the sun is supposed to emerge from its eastern house, and in the evening it is said to descend into its western home. During the night the sun must travel underground from west to east in order to be ready to arise at its accustomed place the next day. Hence day and night are

reversed in the upper and lower worlds...  
(Titiev as quoted by Hieb 1979:577)

Essentially the Hopi universe is sustained in a bipartite structure of cotton masks and clouds, the living and the dead, rain and life.

In ceremonies, songs, prayers, masks, and altars the concepts of space, time, color, and number are interrelated. This system of correspondences is an elaborate system that orders what is significant in the Hopi world by relating their various domains. This forms a system of symbolic classification for the Hopi self. The fundamental structure of this system is a spatial orientation of the four most distant points reached by the sun in its apparent movement during the year along the eastern and western horizons. These four cardinal directions, northwest, southwest, southeast, and northeast, are supplemented with two directions of height, above and below, which are considered to the Hopi to also be primary directions. For every direction there is a corresponding color and almost every ritual emphasizes these Hopi beliefs four or six times in space, time, or both. (Hieb 1979:577)

Space, time, color, and number all interrelate with each other in the Hopi self. Space, for the Hopi, is a quadripartite one where up and down have been added. For example, an altar used at almost all ceremonies consists of various objects laid out in a horizontal pattern of six points. Time provides the Hopi with a ceremonial calendar and is viewed as a quantity or sequence where there is a fourfold expression throughout a ceremony. Color for the Hopi is expressed in six primary colors: yellow, blue/green, black, white, red, and grey. All the colors correspond to one of the six primary directions and relate to different colors of corn kernels: Northwest - Yellow, Above - Black, Northeast - White, Southeast - Red, Below - all colors (grey), and Southwest - Blue. Number is seen by the Hopi to be either a quantity or sequence. The numbers four and six provide the structural principle for dividing and classifying reality, and nearly everything is ordered by these numbers. (ibid. 1979:578-579)

The Hopi prayer is perceived as reciprocity between two realms. Prayer is defined as an exchange, for example in making a prayer offering to *Kachinas*, the Hopi feeds them so they will reciprocate with rain for the Hopi crops. Since nature, the dead, and the living are interrelated in Hopi belief, this system of reciprocity is a pervasive element of the Hopi self. (ibid. 1979:580)

#### Corn as Self

Corn is in every aspect of Hopi life. It can be seen in all and oral tradition. Corn is the main part of the Hopi diet. This symbol, corn, is

the most important for the Hopi as will be shown in a discussion of their metaphors.

According to Mary E. Black, corn and people are used metaphorically three ways:

- (1) the developmental cycles of corn plants and humans, from birth through death,
- (2) structural attributes, or parts of the body of both humans and corn, and (3) appropriate behaviors and attitudes towards others. (1984:279)

When analyzing the use of corn as a metaphor in the developmental cycle, Black points out five comparisons: "(1) emergence/birth, (2) taking sustenance, (3) to see is to live, (4) *qatungwu/soona* dichotomy, and (5) the continuational perfection of *hikwsi*" (1984:280-2). The emergence/birth comparison is seen in the Hopi belief that humans emerged from the underworld to this world as corn. The taking sustenance comparison is seen when the Hopi interrelate feeding and drinking to make both a child and corn grow, and if sustenance is not given both will die. The 'to see is to live' comparison is in the belief that to be alive, a person's eyes must be open, so the corn is said to be alive when it has kernels or eyes. The *qatungwu/soona* dichotomy is seen in the Hopi belief that when humans die their *soona* (substance) goes underground and leaves an empty *qatungwu* (shell or body) above as corn. The continuation/perfection of *hikwsi* (soul) comparison applies to humans and corn as they continue towards perfection after death. (ibid. 1984:280-2)

The Hopi metaphorically use the same terms for parts of the body and parts of a corn plant, with the first three examples mentioned above, *qatungwu*, *soona*, and *hikwsi*. Black lists common Hopi morphemes that include the following: *qatungwu* (body or plant), *soona* (life), *hikwsi* (soul), *öä'at* (backbone or stalk), and *maa'at* (hand or cluster of leaves). Each one of these morphemes are used interchangeably to either describe the corn plant or the human body. (ibid. 1984:282)

The respect that the Hopi have for corn is also used when engaged with people. Corn is respected as something that gives life and exerts qualities that the Hopi wish to express themselves. (ibid. 1984:283)

In addition to the people and corn metaphors, Black has identified two subsets that include "young corn plants are maidens, and corn is our mother" (1984:282). "During ceremonies, corn plants are almost always referred to in song as *manatu*, unmarried girls or maidens, instead of as *humi'uyi*, corn plants" (ibid. 1984:282). Many different prefixes may be added to *manatu*, including color of corn crop, awaiting rain, and



awaiting pollination/fertilization (ibid. 1984:282-5).

"We call the corn 'mother'. It nourishes us, it gives us life, -- is it not our mother?" This was stated by a Hopi man reflecting on the relationship between humans and corn. Humans must take care of the corn so the corn will grow and continue to live. Corn plants must mature and give corn for the humans to grow and live. The Hopi know and understand this relationship, so corn is their 'mother'. (ibid. 1984:286)

#### Conclusion

Corn is an aspect of self for the Hopi that has been integrated with every part of their existence. Corn plays an extensive role in Hopi oral history. Hopi ceremonial life is infiltrated with actual corn, corn meal, and corn symbolism. Hopi world view is based on corn symbolism. And finally, it has been shown that in using corn metaphors when relating to themselves, the Hopi have identified themselves as corn.

For the Hopi, corn is not merely a staple. Corn is not on a religious curiosity, mystery, or for that matter something to be worshipped. The Hopi have identified corn as themselves, becoming one with it.

To illustrate corn as self, the Hopi father says it best. A father whose son has just been initiated into the *Wuwuchim* society says to his son, "*Um Hapi Qaa'öniwti*" (you really have become corn) (Kennard 1972:471).

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