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Delfina Cuero: Her Autobiography, an Account of Her Last Years, and Her Ethnobotanic Contributions. By Florence Connolly Shipek.

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**Delfina Cuero: Her Autobiography, an Account of Her Last Years, and Her Ethnobotanic Contributions.** By Florence Connolly Shipek. Menlo Park, California: Ballena Press, 1991. 98 pages. \$19.50 cloth; \$12.50 paper.

This short, yet powerful book represents the collaborative efforts of Florence Connolly Shipek (the ethnographer who recorded and organized the interviews), Rosalie Pinto Robertson (the interpreter who translated from the indigenous language into English), and Delfina Cuero (the subject of this moving autobiography). Together these three women have produced a work of outstanding quality. It is a book that recounts, through an evocative personal narrative, the tragic political, demographic, and economic events during the first decades of this century that forced Delfina's family, along with many other members of the Kumeyaay (or Diegueño) people, to leave their homes around San Diego, California and seek refuge amidst other Kumeyaay in the rugged mountains of northern Baja, California, Mexico.

It is ironic in the extreme that at the very moment that European immigration into the United States was at its peak in the Northeast, in the diagonally opposite corner of the same country, the native inhabitants of the region were being forced to leave the land of their ancestors. Sadder still is the realization that the "huddled masses" were coming to this country for the same reasons that the Kumeyaay were leaving it. That is, just as foreigners were immigrating to the United States in search of political asylum, economic betterment, and freedom from religious oppression, racism, and exploitation, so, too, the Kumeyaay sought refuge in the indigenous areas just south of the border in the hopes of enjoying these same liberties and opportunities.

In the poignant words of one who can speak about such experiences by having lived through them, Delfina explains that, as the coastal areas became increasingly filled with Mexicans and "Mericans," as she put it, her family—along with other Kumeyaay who never had been enrolled on the reservations of San Diego County—saw no other option but to gradually move south and east in order to continue leading the traditional Indian lives they previously had known. What accentuates the tragic irony of all this is that their movement into Mexico did not represent a conscious political choice reflecting the preference of one country over another, for, at the time, the Kumeyaay were not even aware that their territory had been bisected by an international bound-

ary. Rather, they simply knew that in the southeastern portion of their traditional territory, it was still possible to hunt, gather, garden, and work occasionally for a rancher in a region that was at that time relatively free from outsiders. In moving, however, they unknowingly drifted across "the line," as they would later call it, a boundary that previously did not exist when they ranged between summer and winter foraging areas in the Kumeyaay homeland. In subsequent years, that boundary would make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to return permanently to their relatives in the country of their birth.

In fact, the author's overt rationale for gathering the data on which this book is based was to assist Delfina in proving her American citizenship. Since no documents could be found indicating that she had been born in the United States, Delfina tried to describe in minute detail the life she had led as a girl in and around San Diego shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, in the hopes that this testimony might suffice as evidence of her citizenship. Moreover, the book points out that, being illiterate, Delfina could not have obtained her knowledge of the area by having read newspaper reports or other written documents; the only way she could have acquired such detailed knowledge of indigenous lifeways in San Diego during the early 1900s was to have been part of this dispossessed Kumeyaay community.

The result is the inspiring human story of an indefatigable spirit who, time and again, endured hardship with resolve, looked to the future with hope, and recalled a painful past without the bitterness that often accompanies such memories. At the same time, it is a document of unparalleled value to anthropologists, historians, ecologists, ethnobotanists, and people of all backgrounds interested in hearing the authentic voice of Native Americans, unobscured by the heavy hand of theory, as it speaks to us about an Indian history that is neither romanticized nor disparaged.

The volume is divided into six parts. It opens with an enticing preface by anthropologist Lowell John Bean, an expert on the Cahuilla people who border the Kumeyaay to the north. Linguist Margaret Langdon, who has developed both technical and practical orthographies for the systematic transcription of Diegueño languages, has prepared a helpful pronunciation guide to the numerous Kumeyaay terms included in the text. In the introduction, Florence Shipek provides the reader with the cultural and historical background necessary for a full appreciation of the autobiography, which comprises the bulk of the work. These four

sections were originally published by Dawson's Book Shop in 1968 as a separate book entitled *The Autobiography of Delfina Cuero* and subsequently reprinted by Malki Press in 1970. In addition to these sections, Shipek has written, for the present edition, a two-part epilogue that gives a summary account of the rest of Delfina's life, as well as an ethnobotanic compendium listing Delfina's Kumeyaay identifications and uses of numerous coastal plants found in San Diego's Mission Bay Salt Marsh Reserve and Torrey Pines State Park.

The volume is especially important because we have so little ethnographic information on the native peoples of Southern California's coastal regions. The physical accessibility of these districts meant that, early on, these were the areas that were hit first and hardest by the European invaders. Later—since these regions provided a rich environment for ranching and agricultural enterprises and subsequently offered prime real estate for the building of cities—the coast and nearby valleys were expropriated slowly but thoroughly from the Indians.

Delfina's description of the relationships between her people and the natural environment on the one hand, combined with her account of the relationships between the Kumeyaay and their social environment (composed of the interactions among themselves, with other Indian groups, and with non-Indians) on the other hand, makes her story a particularly valuable contribution to the literature. We are given not merely an impersonal description of a ceremony, or a faceless account of economic exploitation, or a simple explanation of what plants and animals were gathered where and in what season. On the contrary, Delfina offers us a richly textured narrative, an intimate, highly specific, and radically personal view of culture *qua* "lived experience"; indeed, it is a fundamentally phenomenological perspective. For example, we are not just informed that the Kumeyaay ate honeybee larvae; we are told, "They were real greasy and tasted sort of like peanuts; they were real good" (p. 33).

Delfina's narrative guards against the facile anthropological characterization of gender roles in technologically simple societies, stereotypes that often fail to capture individual variations. For instance, Delfina distinguishes herself from other Kumeyaay women in that she never learned to make baskets or pottery. "When I was young, I was different, I always believed in looking for plants, food and herbs, and different things. I never took time for ollas and baskets, I've always worked like a man" (p. 36).

But by far the most heart-rending chapters of Delfina's story are her emotional accounts of the inexorable disintegration of Kumeyaay social and religious life. She was forced to experience this insidious process as she witnessed the breakup of her family and the death of whole meaning systems and the people through which they lived. Delfina does not talk much about the wider political and economic context in which these processes were occurring; she does not have to. For the reader cannot help but see clearly, albeit in the background, the outline of three familiar figures—greed, exploitation, and disenfranchisement—which for centuries have constituted the ubiquitous trinity that enables one people to dominate another.

The book raises important questions not only for local ethnography and area studies but also for larger theoretical issues. Having been fortunate enough to know and work with many of the Kumeyaay elders, including Rosalie Robertson, I believe it is important to comment on the following. In numerous ways, Rosalie fulfilled the "traditional functions of a *Kwaaypaay* (village leader) and of the *Kuchutt Kwataay* (tribal leader) from whom she was descended" (p. 69). Among other things, this included caring for the elders, hosting ceremonies, and tending to matters of tradition that were of cultural concern to the Kumeyaay people as a whole. It must be stated, therefore, that much of the success of this book is attributable specifically to Rosalie Robertson's involvement with it. That is, although she was the interpreter, Rosalie was not just any bilingual speaker; she was, in fact, one of the most active, knowledgeable, and widely respected traditional Indian leaders in an area encompassing Southern California, northern Baja, and western Arizona. Furthermore, the interpretive task required not simply the translation of words but a cultural fluency with the traditional Kumeyaay world that Delfina was describing, as well as an ability to reinterpret all of this back into meaningful English equivalents. Few, if any, other Kumeyaay had this degree of bicultural proficiency and sophistication. Consequently, Rosalie informed me that in some places she supplemented Delfina's descriptions by explaining to Delfina certain aspects of Kumeyaay tradition with which she was not familiar—especially as these related to ritual matters.

While we can appreciate the ethnographic value of Rosalie's contributions, her presence raises important questions about the relationship between Rosalie's and Delfina's voices in the production of the text. When Rosalie speaks about the ability of her great

uncle to cure snake bites, the addition is set into the main body of the text but is meticulously set apart from Delfina's narrative through the use of brackets (pp. 48–49). However, several pages later (pp. 51–53), Delfina's description of how an old relative of hers related the way in which he had acquired shamanic curing power through dreams is very similar to Rosalie's account of how her own uncle obtained the ability to heal. (For this latter account, see Levi, "Wii'ipay: The Living Rocks—Ethnographic Notes on Crystal Magic among Some California Yumans," *Journal of California Anthropology* 5:1 [1978]). This leads the reader to several possible conclusions: (1) Rosalie is repeating an account she learned from Delfina; (2) Delfina is recounting a story she heard from Rosalie; (3) both are repeating a narrative they learned from the same third person; or (4) each of their accounts merely represents different versions of a culturally stereotyped narrative regarding the way in which shamanic power is acquired. Noteworthy here is the complex series of relationships that exist among anthropologist, interpreter, and informant in the documentation of ethnographic materials.

Several salient ethnographic issues are also raised in connection with the girls' initiation ceremony. Delfina stated that she felt she had missed an important part of a woman's essential education because she grew up during a time when her people had already ceased having the girls' initiation ceremony. In a footnote to Delfina's statement, Dr. Shipek astutely observes that when Europeans forbade the practice of the indigenous religion, "They did not know that they were destroying the total educational, moral, and ethical system, which was frequently completely integrated into the 'religious' ceremonies" (p. 43–44).

The significance of this observation was poignantly illustrated during my own fieldwork, when an elderly woman told me that her grandmother had, as she termed it, "graduated." I failed to comprehend the meaning of this word in this context, since, according to my understanding, her grandmother had never even gone to school. My ninety-year-old friend then explained that what she meant by this expression was that her grandmother had gone through the girls' initiation ceremony, successful completion of which was viewed, in my friend's eyes, as equivalent or analogous to having received a formal education.

Although in reference to the above, my data corroborate Dr. Shipek's, her next sentence needs to be understood in reference to more specific regional qualifications. For Dr. Shipek goes on to

write, "I have been conscious for some years that many of the presently old women of this region had lost their first child, that they were unwilling to discuss the event, and also that none of the living old women had gone through the initiation ceremony" (p. 44). Dr. Shipek's comment should be understood to refer exclusively to the so-called Southern or Eastern Diegueño, since among the Northern Diegueño a "roasting," or girls' initiation ceremony, took place at Mesa Grande circa 1934.

In 1977, I interviewed two elderly women (one from Mesa Grande and one from Santa Ysabel) who described going through this ceremony, which lasted four days and was led by the aged wife of the local *kwaaypaay*. This was not only the last time this ceremony was performed; it was also the first time it had been conducted in many years. Consequently, many of the initiates were, in fact, young women, not girls. At the conclusion of the ceremony, a photograph was made by Edward Davis showing the initiates with their faces painted and wearing willow wreaths around their heads. (A copy of this photograph, obtained from the granddaughter of the woman who directed the initiation and with whom I worked at Mesa Grande, is in the author's collection.) The point here is to highlight the significance of regional differences among the various Diegueño groups, not only in regards to language and culture, but also concerning the differential maintenance of specific rituals. Whereas many ceremonies that were no longer performed among the Northern Diegueño were still continued among the Southern and Eastern groups, in regards to other religious practices, rituals that had already died out among the Southern and Eastern Diegueño peoples were still conducted in the Northern group.

Much of the ethnographic richness of the book can be credited to the inclusion of a plethora of native terms. At least two of these words are worthy of further comment. Based on her grandmother's account of the girls' initiation, Delfina describes this ritual but does not provide a Kumeyaay name for the ceremony. Next, she says that her grandmother and husband had face tattoos. Then she talks briefly about the boys' initiation ceremony. At this point, she says, "They made a *tu:nak* [a hole in their nose] with a sharp stick. It was to make them clean" (p. 40). Of interest here is that I recorded the word *tu:nak* as the term for the girls' initiation ceremony, which was usually the time when the girls were tattooed, just as the boys had their noses pierced during their initiation. Waterman notes that the girls' adolescence ceremony was

termed *atanuk* ("The Religious Practices of the Diegueño Indians," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 8:6 [1910]). Further research might indicate whether these are different words or whether *tu:nak* relates to some common aspect conceptually related to both boys' and girls' initiation ceremonies.

Of equal or greater interest is the second term. Delfina recalls, "Grandfather use to tell me that in the olden days they never wore clothes like we do now: only a *t pa:ra:w* (loincloth) for men and bark aprons for the women" (p. 36). The fascinating thing is that local Mestizos in southwestern Chihuahua, Mexico, also use this term in reference to the loincloth that is still worn by many of the traditional Rarámuri (Tarahumara) Indian men who live in that region. This is because in Spanish the word for breechclout or loincloth is *taparrabo* (from *tapar*, "to cover"), although in the back-country dialect of the northern Sierra Madre Occidental, where the garment is still worn, Spanish speakers commonly pronounce the first *a* as a schwa sound and the *-abo* particle as if it were the diphthong *aw*. The word *taparrabo* would therefore be phonetically transcribed as *t pa:ra:w*. It appears that, in this instance, the word Delfina's grandfather used for *loincloth* was the local pronunciation of the Spanish term for this article of indigenous men's clothing. Furthermore, its presence in nineteenth-century California and twentieth-century Chihuahua suggests that, for several centuries, a similar dialect of Spanish has been spoken throughout northwest Mexico and the Southwestern United States.

In all, *Delfina Cuero* is an extraordinary book—of inestimable value to the specialist and of great interest to the general reader. Moreover, it is a document that I hope will be especially appreciated by present and future generations of the Kúmeyaay themselves. Few books could be used suitably in high school as well as graduate school, but this is one of them. Besides lending itself naturally to courses on the ethnography and history of native California, it is also a useful text for the teaching of broader anthropological topics, such as the relationship between native peoples and the state, or the transformation of national, ethnic, and gender-based identities in the context of changing cultural and physical environments. For a field methods course, it is an especially fine example of the "life history" approach—one that brings up many issues regarding the organization of ethnographic texts and the whole question of "writing culture," *pace* Clifford and Marcus. In bringing to center stage the all-too-seldom-heard



voice of Native American women, *Delfina Cuero* makes an interesting companion volume, for both thought and discussion, to *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984). Indeed, if *Delfina Cuero* gets the notoriety and wide readership it so justly deserves, it could well become a classic in American Indian studies, comparable to Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) and Radin's *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* (1920).

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**Disputing the Dead: U. S. Law on Aboriginal Remains and Grave Goods.** By H. Marcus Price III. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991. 152 pages. \$37.50 cloth.

American Indians have been engaged in a bitter dispute for nearly two decades with those who profit from the expropriation, curation, display, and study of native remains. Because of Indian demands for religious freedom and equal burial protection under law, federal and state legislatures have enacted measures in recent years to protect tribal burial sites from robbery and to force agencies—i. e., universities and museums—to return stolen remains and associated grave offerings to the next of kin for proper reburial. Price seeks to reduce the debate to a struggle over competing values between members of a pan-Indian movement that advocates the repatriation and reburial of Indian remains and members of the “scientific” community who want to study the contested remains to advance the knowledge of humankind. Price also summarizes common and state laws up to August 1989, as well as federal legislation and policies up to December 1990 pertaining to the issues of archaeology and the reburial of “prehistoric” remains and burial offerings. He asserts that the book “should prove valuable as a point from which to commence the study of laws in a specific jurisdiction” (p. 7).

Although Price, both an archaeologist and a lawyer, claims to want to analyze interethnic conflict, he seems more bent on constructing a conservative legal argument in favor of preserving so-called prehistoric collections, including human remains and burial objects, and antiquated archaeological and museum practices than on shedding light on multicultural conflict. Thus, issues pertaining to racial justice, or injustice, are ignored. Using para-