

TWO ANTHROPOLOGISTS-THE SAME INFORMANT:
SOME DIFFERENCES IN THEIR RECORDED DATA

In mid-summer 1924, Dr Elsie Clews Parsons 'invited' me to make a field trip for the Southwest Society to study the Laguna split-off to Isleta. 'The idea,' she wrote,

came to me in connection with you this month while I was making some very interesting comparisons between Northern Tewa and their split off two hundred years ago to first mesa. I have almost decided to go down for a month, Nov.-Dec. to the Northern Tewa.... How about it? But even if I didn't go, why not you? Leave behind a good nurse,

and she concluded, with a completely unwarranted optimism, 'and everybody will profit.'

This article was presented as a paper at the Annual Meeting of the AAA in Washington D.C. in December 1982. It was written to satisfy the request of the chairman of the session somewhat cryptically entitled *Women Emeritae*. As a subscribing member of the AAA since 1922, I am still not sure what this title meant. I did, however, feel that my work in Isleta in 1924 and Dr Parsons' in 1925 with the same informant did pose interesting problems and suggested interesting answers. Because of illness I was unable to be present at the meeting, but I was told that the standing-room-only audience applauded with unusual gusto at the close. My paper, which was the last to be scheduled, was read by Professor Gloria Levitas, who edited my *Notes On An Undirected Life—As One Anthropologist Tells It*.

In December 1922 I had married Walter Goldfrank who, most comfortably for me, had fathered three sons, then aged six, nine and twelve. Our daughter was entering her fourth month when Dr Parsons' letter arrived. With my advancing domesticity, I had put anthropology on the shelf. We were now living in the suburbs, and since moving there, I had seen virtually nothing of the anthropologists - not even Dr Boas, whom I had served, if you can call it that, as secretary from October 1919 to August 1922 - and whom I had accompanied in 1920, 1921 and 1922 on three short field trips to Laguna and Cochiti pueblos; the first of these had been shared by Dr Parsons and Grant LaFarge on their way from Zuni to Albuquerque, which was also our final stop-over.

My husband, most generously, seconded Dr Parsons' suggestion, and in November I left for Isleta. In my *Notes on An Undirected Life* (1978) I tell of the frustrations I suffered there and my good luck, after a week of rejections, in finding one Isletan man willing to be seriously interviewed by me. But a night of unwelcome interruptions persuaded him to continue our talks in Albuquerque, some eight or ten miles away. There he lived with friends and worked with me in my hotel room for some two weeks - and usually for three sessions a day.

I was certainly lucky - how lucky I did not realize at the time. I had not read Dr Parsons' 'Acoma, Isleta and Santa Ana' (1920), nor her 'Further Notes on Isleta' (1921), most probably because they did not deal with 'my' pueblos. Nor had she mentioned them in our few and far-between contacts. In either case I would certainly have been better prepared for the difficulties I encountered in Isleta.

In her 1920 paper - the information on Isleta was collected in 1919 - Dr Parsons' opening sentence reads: 'The following data were got during a stay at Laguna', and she continues: 'On Isleta, my informant was a Laguna man...whose family had moved to Isleta and who had grown up and married there.' And she leaves it at that. The opening sentence of her second paragraph reads: 'The clans (*daatinin*) of Isleta are Day (*tü*), Bear, Lizard, Eagle, Chaparral Cock, Parrot, Goose, Corn', and she adds: 'The clans are matrilineal and exogamous' (pp. 56f.). In her 1921 paper, the opening sentence reads: 'The following notes were made during a brief visit to Isleta and at interviews with an Isleta woman at Albuquerque, in a hotel room, safe from observation.' But despite the fact that this informant 'spoke English in the vernacular...dressed as an American, and had worked for years in Albuquerque', she 'resisted all endeavours to learn from her not only words of ceremonial import but clan names or the native name for the town.' And it was in this 1921 paper that she again listed the clan names she had recorded in 1919 along with those noted earlier by Bandelier and Lummis.

Seemingly, in asking me to work along similar lines (in her 1920 paper, she was fully cognizant of the Laguna split-off to Isleta), Dr Parsons must have believed that naiveté and ignorance might, by some good fortune, succeed in eliciting the types of information she had been denied—and this despite her broad

Esther S. Goldfrank

experience and knowledge of Pueblo social and ceremonial life. But my ignorance had one advantage. I did not question the validity of the information given me by Juan Abeita (Dr Parsons' pseudonym for him in her *Isleta, New Mexico*, of 1932). I just wrote and wrote. In *Isleta*, Abeita had concentrated on myths, but in Albuquerque - and much to my delight - he had no hesitation in discussing aspects of the social and ceremonial organization of his native village.

Almost sixty years have passed since I returned from *Isleta*. Not too surprisingly, my hand-written notes have disappeared and, in the typed-up notes still in my possession, the entries are not dated, so I do not know the order in which they were obtained. However, among the topics on which Abeita gave information were the *Isleta* corn groups, which he frequently referred to as 'clans', the moieties (*shifun* and *shure*), medicine societies, birth, marriage and death—enough to indicate here the breadth of the subjects he raised and why, given the limitations of time, I was not impelled to question what he said or inject comparisons with what I knew regarding analogues from my fieldwork elsewhere.

Dr Parsons did not come to the Southwest while I was there, but as soon as I had typed up my notes I sent her a copy. And the following November she did to go *Isleta*. On the 27th of that month she wrote to me:

Dear Esther:

I stopped off at Albuquerque and motored to *Isleta* and within ten minutes kidnapped [Abeita] without his daughter who had to stay to care for the grandfather. [She then took him to Taos where he had spent his young years] for a week's visit to relatives and detective work I hope. A word about [Abeita] as informant. He is frank enough; but of accuracy he has no sense whatever.... He has a very striking imaginative turn of mind, something I have never seen before in a Pueblo Indian. Of course how much is cultural and how much personal it is difficult to decide.... It is tempting to think that we have here a blend of Plains and Pueblo. [She concluded:] In view of [Abeita's] psychological make-up our joint notes are bound to show many discrepancies.... Within a week I will send you a more detailed report.

[Signed] E.C.P.

Although Dr Parsons no doubt intended to write to me again 'within a week', it would seem that she held up this letter to include in it a little over a page of comments. At the top of the first page she wrote the single word 'Clanship', and under it: 'There are 7 matrilineal groups, unconcerned with marriage.' Then one beneath the other she listed them along with the direction with which each was affiliated, viz.: '1. White Corn-East; 2. Black Corn-North; 3. Yellow Corn-West; 4. Blue Corn-South; 5. All Colors Corn-Zenith and Nadir'—and rising at an angle and in handwriting, 'as actual as any other group'; then

again beneath this entry, '6. *Sichu*, a split off from All Colors about 30 years ago.' And finally, '7. Eagle and Goose, 2 alternating groups which split off from All Colors in 1923.' (This repeated the list given in her 1921 article.) Parsons then noted:

These seven groups have solstice ceremonies, White Corn which come[s] one day ahead of the others, *Sichu*, one day behind. Individuals appeal to their own matrilineal group chief in connection with their personal ritual, child birth, curing, burial. These groups do *not* have particular functions as you indicate (Yellow-growth of corn, etc. in charge of summer solstice; Blue-pregnancy; Black, death; All Colors cazique. I consider that these groups are *not* clans in the Pueblo sense, but ceremonial organizations to which children are given with the rule that they follow the mother's group, quite analogous to the rule alternating the children of a family between the *shifun* and *shure*.

In an undated response I wrote to Dr Parsons:

I got your letter some days ago.... I was not surprised to learn that the corn mothers and clan heads were one person, but it seems surprising to me that the functions he [Abeita] so clearly outlined do not adhere to them. He had said to me that in matters of birth, death, etc., the person desiring aid would approach their own clan mother first, but that he in turn would call upon the one whose affair it was to function. In regard to the clan of all colors, is it true that officials are adopted into it, and then give up their former affiliations with the other corn divisions? He also said that the cacique's wife was adopted into this division. She functions at cures. I did not inquire about the wives of other officials. You say it is a real division. Did you investigate whether the members of it could trace their descent from some official, past or present, in the village?

With respect to the two Isleta medicine societies, Town Fathers and Laguna Fathers, I wrote:

The division of medicine men into Laguna and Isleta, I also got. I enquired a bit into the Laguna division and was told that the oldest member was a Laguna man [this refers to the group that emigrated from Laguna in 1879 and settled in Isleta, maintaining their separate identity, but as I soon found out, sharing their activities and sometimes even retaining their previous identity] but that the ranks had been filled with Isletans, so I imagined this had originally been a real Laguna group.

In regard to the Isleta group of medicine societies I am not altogether surprised. It was not the natural thing to think of them in the groupings he gave me, but he gave it over so many times that I thought them correct. In your 1919 list you have duck or goose. Do you believe that originally these were divisions under the corns? He never mentioned a split-off to me, nor have I any note on your last division [*Sichu*].

My first paragraph on my Isleta data reads:

In regard to the informant and the question of ceremonial pattern. It would seem that anyone so full of detail would be bound to mix-up sequence. However, the question I should think most important would be whether or not certain formulas appear in the ritual rather than the order in which they are used. The association of a person in the form of the sun, Lake Youth, Salt Youth, etc., I don't think so very novel, and the fact that people may impersonate these beings is certainly borne out by the kachina dances. In regard to the deer ceremonial before hunting, he is probably confusing an impersonation with the actual appearance of the deer, although he himself is convinced it is a real animal.

I concluded with what, after these many decades, seems unusually presumptuous coming, as it did, from an ex-secretary with limited field experience to an anthropologist some twenty years her senior whose scientific work was esteemed by the numerous eminent anthropologists with whom she had been cooperating closely for years, who in addition had taught at the New School for Social Research, and who for years had edited the *Journal of American Folklore*. But obviously undaunted by this history and encouraged by Dr Parsons' conviction that, whatever my failings, I should feel free to speak out frankly, I did. To this already controversial letter, I added a list of some twenty items which was headed, without any adornments, by the simple sentence: 'The following details I would like checked.' And though it may be hard to believe, Dr Parsons mailed these three pages of questions and comments back to me, and in the margins alongside fifteen of them, she had written her responses.

Here I only cite my first question and Dr Parsons' responses. I wrote: 'Do the corn mothers not officiating, act as helpers to the one who is—or has he his special trained helpers?' Alongside in the left margin, Dr Parsons wrote: 'Each corn mother has his own helpers.' And in the right margin she wrote: 'no, corn mothers do not act together.' My comment continued: 'I asked this question, but could not be sure of the answers. If the informant could be persuaded to give the Spanish names of the incumbents, it would be easy to determine.' To this suggestion, which underlined my wishful thinking more than my astuteness, she made no comment. But as soon as her field notes were typed up,

she sent me a complete copy. Unfortunately, not long afterward she asked me to return the whole of it since it was her only one. This I did, and since xeroxing was still a not commonly available technique, without making a copy for myself. Only when her *Isleta, New Mexico* appeared some seven years later did I have a reliable basis for a comparison of my notes and hers.

It is of interest that Dr Parsons had no hesitation in questioning data given her on Isleta clanship in 1919 by a Laguna man married to an Isleta woman and a year later by an Isleta woman employed in Albuquerque. In the 1921 article she had written: 'It was impossible for me to verify my earlier list of clans or the similar lists made by Bandelier and Lummis.... Informants stated most positively that they did not have clans... of that kind at Isleta.' Then she listed four 'divisions' given her in Albuquerque 'that are theoretically oriented and associated with corn of different colors', to wit: white corn, east; black corn, north; yellow corn, west; blue corn, south. She added also corn of all colors, nadir and zenith, but noted that in the case of this last there were no social divisions to correspond to these directions. She also added: 'My informant appeared to think that marriage was allowed within these divisions, but she could cite only one such endogamous marriage' - in the white corn group, 'on the part of the leading man...' (pp. 153-4).

As already stated, Dr Parsons had written to me on 27th November, 1925—almost surely after she had read my undated letter to her: 'I consider these are *not* clans in the Pueblo sense...' (see above); and in her *Isleta, New Mexico* she wrote:

These groups are...all inclusive; everybody belongs to one of the seven. Theoretically he or she belongs to his mother's group, but not merely from birth;...he or she has to be adopted ritually into the group. [A] group, not the mother's, may be selected for the child by the parents...(p. 269).

Intrigued by the many differences in our notes, I almost immediately made a comparison of the variants of ten folktales given to Dr Parsons and myself (Goldfrank 1926: 71-4), and I concluded: 'The story-teller is not bound to retell the tale as he heard it, but has the pleasure of revamping it.' It may not be irrelevant here to mention that Professor Barbara Babcock of the University of Arizona - who is well-acquainted with Helen Cordero, the outstanding potter in Cochiti, particularly famous for her 'story-teller' - told me recently that Cordero had said it was her grandfather's ability to vary the details in retelling a story that had made him so interesting to listen to.

Dr Parsons liked this paper, but after some thought of publishing our complete data jointly, she opted for separate presentations. Hers was given in *Isleta, New Mexico* (pp. 200-466), and what she said there was quite similar to the points she had made in response to those I had raised in my undated letter

to her while she was still in the field (see above). But except for a most generous recognition of my labours in Isleta and the problematic character of our single informant, she made no reference to my data nor to our differences. My notes just rested on the bookshelf, but I did give typed copies to a number of anthropologists in the hope that they or students under their guidance would utilize them in their classrooms or in the field. And some have done just that.

At this point, I would like to add a few footnotes to document the value of follow-up studies on the structure and changes in the history of even such small complexes as Isleta—virtually unnoticed except by anthropologists, local traders, and, at widely separated times, by U.S. government officials.

I do not know whether Dr Parsons returned to Isleta after 1925, when most of her time was spent with our shared informant in Taos country. As already noted, it would seem that her *Isleta, New Mexico* was based virtually entirely on her 1925 researches. The same can be said of the short chapter on Isleta in her *Pueblo Indian Religion* (1939: 923-32), except for the inclusion of certain citations and, most interesting for my present purpose, the third footnote on page 928, elaborating on a statement underlining the peaceable character of Isleta's Town Chief. This reads: 'And yet in a recently acquired picture he is represented holding a bow and arrow' (see Parsons 1962: 171, picture 79). In so far as I know, and vague though it is, this is the first reference in print to the paintings Dr Parsons, at the suggestion of W. Matthew Stirling, then head of the Bureau of American Ethnology, had begun to buy in June 1936 for \$5.00 each from an unusually talented Isletan artist. And her reticence on this arrangement is also evidenced by a remark she made to me in the spring of 1940 after dinner at her New York house to which Professors Wittfogel and Duncan Strong had also been invited. Turning to me she said, without any preamble: 'Esther, you were certainly a good sport to turn over your Isleta notes to me.' But she gave no hint then that she had been receiving a substantial number of paintings from this Isletan artist. Only after her death in December 1941 did I learn from Gladys Reichard, her literary executor, that along with these more than 140 paintings, Dr Parsons had completed a sizeable manuscript - a long introduction recapitulating much of what she had published previously on Isleta, her correspondence with the Bureau, and certain of the artist's statements (some of which he had written on his paintings in pencil) contradicting data given to us by our joint Isletan informant - surely a unique contribution to Pueblo ethnological research.

When Gladys told me about this manuscript, she had added that it was dedicated to me and Julian H. Steward, 'to whom I owe the opening of Isleta.' Years later, as already noted, I learned that it was Mat Stirling who had first written to Dr Parsons about the artist - and also years later, Julian told me he had

never been in Isleta. Manifestly, memory can mislead even a highly experienced recorder.

For years Gladys had been trying to get financial help for publishing this important manuscript. And it was 1953 before I saw the pictures which Dr Parsons' family had, in 1949, turned over to the American Philosophical Society to be filed with her other papers. Alone in their stacks, I looked at each and every one of them. It was an experience never to be forgotten. And it was nine more years before the BAE distributed this unusual manuscript along with 140 of the artist's paintings, some twelve of them in colour, thanks to the generosity of the Bollingen Foundation (see Parsons 1962).

Two years after *Isleta Paintings* was published I learned that the artist had died in 1953. In 1936 he had written to the BAE: 'I don't want any soul to know as long as I live that I have drawn these pictures.' And, of course, as Editor, I had kept faith. But in 1964 I felt the situation had changed. The artist had been dead for over a decade, and it is clear from his 1936 letter that, except for himself, he had not sought to protect anyone else in Isleta or elsewhere. Having learned of his death I felt it was only just that this unusually talented Isletan be identified and recognized for his unique contribution as artist and commentator on the social and ceremonial life of his village.

In 1967, the Smithsonian Institution published *The Artist of Isleta Paintings in Pueblo Society*, which, along with my Introduction, contained many of the artist's signed letters to Dr Parsons, along with her *Who's Who of Isleta*, to which a few items from *Isleta Paintings* were now added. I had refrained from including this item in the 1962 publication because I feared it might inadvertently lead to the identification of the artist, but in 1964, after learning of his death, I saw no reasons to withhold it any longer.

Both *Isleta Paintings* and *The Artist...* have been recognized as exceptional contributions to our knowledge of Isleta, and this not only from individuals directly connected with the Smithsonian Institution. It is enough here to cite from Edward P. Dozier's review of *Isleta Paintings* in *American Anthropologist* (1963). Part Pueblo Indian raised in a Pueblo village and long-time professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona, he wrote:

Isleta Paintings represents the only pictorial ethnographic account of Pueblo ceremonial life executed entirely by a native artist. It is unlikely there will ever be another collection quite like it, for Pueblo Indians who are...artists are rare. Perhaps most unlikely is the possibility that another native Pueblo artist will have the courage to venture on a project of painting ceremonial activities.

And Alfonso Ortiz, like Ed Dozier raised in an Indian Pueblo, and then at Princeton University, deplored, in his review of *The Artist of Isleta Paintings in Pueblo Society* (1968: 839), the

thinness of my data - that 'very little information is given of Lente's early life and even less of the dozen or so years by which he survived Parsons'. Nevertheless, he 'congratulated' me for my 'dedication' and 'labors' in editing both *Isleta Paintings* and *The Artist*, and he concluded: 'In Lente we had not only a talented artist but a resourceful and perceptive observer', whose paintings and letters, taken together, 'provide rich ethnographic fare'. In neither case was there any indication that I had sinned in naming the Leonardo da Vinci of Isleta Pueblo.

I can mention only two other Isleta follow-up studies here. The first is David H. French's *Factionalism in Isleta Pueblo* (1948). His account begins in 1870, when the Indian Agency in Albuquerque was officially established. In important ways he confirms data included in Parsons 1932, but he goes much further in underlining frictions created by the Agency's quick appointment of a governor and by a long statement by the 'big man' of the Pueblo protesting against the appointment in 1921 of a judge who, like the governor, took over duties regularly performed by village officials. And French notes that factionalism also developed with respect to hierarchical succession, most particularly in the case of the cacique, and because the long period between his nomination and accession might be disrupted by death, illness or claims of unfitness.

French concludes that in the not-too-distant past 'there was factionalism', but at these times the leaders 'were always able to agree, though not immediately'. But he also states that 'the influence of White culture has changed the attitudes of the leaders and the common people. The identification with the village and dependence on the village has decreased.' He gives much more, but this should be sufficient to underline present but not entirely new trends.

The second follow-up study I want to mention was made some forty years after I and Dr Parsons investigated Isleta society. Intermittently, from 1967 or 1968, sometimes together, sometimes separately, M. Estellie Smith and William Leap studied aspects of this pueblo. Smith's work was ethnographically oriented, Leap's more linguistic, but both touched on aspects that Dr Parsons and I had reported on. Among them, and in tapes sent me recently by Dr Leap, exogamy is clearly indicated for the 'corn groups' or 'clans', which terms, as in our time, were still used with easy exchangeability, and with the understanding that these were exogamous units. And also, as with us, the naming process exhibited variations. Yet, as Dr Parsons noted, the woman who gives the new-born child its name was preferably the mother's sister.

In this same recent letter, Leap also comments on the differences between the recordings made by Dr Parsons and myself concerning the functions of the headmen of the corn groups. Leap notes that on the tapes he sent me, the informant followed the Parsons line, but he also found that what I was told 'is a very accurate parallel of what our informants told us in 1968-70'. He then continued:

If so, and this is an important point - if he deliberately was not hiding facts about ceremonies, why would he deliberately distort facts about corn group ceremonies? Hence I do not think he was lying to you. So what was he doing? What could explain the difference, your data from Parsons?

- 1) Linguistic problems. He did not understand your question.
- 2) Pueblo theory of knowledge which says you know only certain things, and are less sure about other things....
- 3) Actual change in the system, and both reports are accurate.

Is there any way the BOTH explanations could be correct?

Without further data, I am willing to say that, on the basis of French's monograph, both explanations could be correct.

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[*Editors' Note:* A recent biography of Elsie Clews Parsons is reviewed on p. 68 of this issue.]

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