

LIDU GONG

COMMENTS ON *THE OLD PEOPLE* (A. J. PERRY)

Relationship is all that the world is about. The meaning of every part of human life hangs on how it is related to other parts of human life. A knot is meaningless by itself; it is its purpose that brings it into existence and gives it its meaning. The same is true to a story. It is the story behind the story that makes a story a story. *The Old People* reminds me of another two stories: *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Lord of the Flies*. The story behind these three novels is the interaction between human beings and the natural world. The difference is they use different symbols to illustrate how human being, as part of nature, is subject to nature, understands and respects nature, makes use of nature, and exerts impacts on nature.

A knot tied with a purpose is not just a function of the world but its fate p. (p. 112)

... each of them on its own and all of them as a whole.

Any entity is an entity in itself and at the same time belongs to an entity it is subject to. It is not self-sufficient. A cell, for instance, is not merely a cell, but also part of an organism which is part of a larger organism. A human being is the most developed organism, but compared with the human society, an individual is just a cell no matter how physically,

biologically and psychologically complicated he or she is. *'Repeating patterns in nature are a necessity, not a coincidence'* (Bruce, 2004) The repetitive process of knot making, from making fire to digging holes till making knots, over generations is a phenomenon, while *fate* determines the inseparable wholeness.

Over time these knots will have been joined to each other to form a rope of tribute that is exactly as long as the hole digger's contribution to the art of hole digging. (p. 7)

Time is one indicator of the relationship between things. That's why history is important for us in understanding the inherent connections between things.

... no request for a digging tool should be made using words that are spoken – which would be the worst kind of speaking. – the hole digger will simply take his rope of gathered knots and coil it over his shoulder in the direction of the sun ... (p. 21)

the young knot maker will never be taught the way of knot making but will have to learn instead through careful observation. ... the young knot maker must learn to tie his knot not by watching it being made but by noticing everything else: by observing the things around it. One by one he will come to understand not just the functions of his knots but their many meanings as well (p. 22)

After so many years making knots there will be little that can surprise him in the ways of knot making. (p. 42)

This kind of learning practice seems primitive but it is experiential and essential -- Learning as being rather than learning as doing in 'modern' sense. Learning as being is learning directly from life itself where the master teacher lies. It's holistic learning.

In time the generations flow from one to the other like brine into mud. (p. 20)

How things including human being going from evolution to revolution.

The knot maker, when asked to tie a knot ... will first make sure the person doing the asking is worthy of the tying. If it is a fishing net to be made the knot maker will be sure to remember each of the fish that this fisherman in need of a net has ever caught ... when ... and where ... and how. (p. 28)

Evolution to revolution is from nature's choice to human choice. By making the right choices we determine our destiny as individuals, as communities, and as the whole human race, and as the whole planet.

Against the ancient light he will open his eyes and as the wisdom of the generations courses through him like blood through umbilical cord he will come to see what must be done to make the waters flow once again. (p. 70)

Life does not begin with birth. And because they know that birth is not the beginning of life (p. 72)

In time the blood will be buried and the knot will fall away. The seed will outgrow its hole. The child whose knot is being tied will become strong and firm and will grow into a man who can dig holes (p. 30)

This is about sustainable whakapapa and how it works. This indigenous feature is reflected in a Māori whakataukī: *E kore au e ngaro he kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea.* (I will never be lost for I am a seed that was sown from Rangiatea) This is the source of knowledge and power.

Remembering all the hands that have contributed to the making of his rope the knot maker will take the end of the rope that is being held out to him by the seeing man. This is the knot that will make his rope a rope ... (p. 42)

Remembering is an important way of getting connected contemporarily with the ‘colleagues’ and historically with ancestors. On the physical dimension, a rope is a rope made out of the strands that were made out of the threads that were made out of the fibers that were taken from the trees that were planted ... but when we go beyond to the metaphysical level, a rope is not a rope. It stands for a purpose based on the previous purpose and goes on to the next purpose. That’s the *fate*.

*And so this is how the Old People begin to dig their hole: first they make a **fire**. Because no fire should be given to a person who does not have a true connection to **silence** (p. 76)*

*The Old People will **never ask** that a fire for a hole be made outright (p. 76)*

*This was in the very beginning, **before fire**, when the only thing was **silence**. And this **silence** was so **silent** that no thing could come forth. (p. 93)*

*From the **silence** came the darkness and from the darkness came the night. (p. 93)*

***Silently** the knot maker turned away. From the sun. From the day. From the light (p. 118)*

*At this the Old People will be averting their eyes to the story being told and listening in wordless **silence**. ... and that **silence** must always be respected. For only **silence** has no ancestor. (p. 124)*

'Fire' as a start of human endeavour symbolises passion, inspiration, enlightenment or anything that sparks imagination, motivation, innovation, and creation. 'Silence', on the other hand, signifies innate wisdom and the origin of wisdom. This echoes Tao in Taoism and Kore as the beginning of the universe in Māori worldview.

As he slept on his stone slab in the darkest and deepest part of the cave it happened that a different kind of voice came suddenly to the knot maker: the voice that comes from beyond. With his eyes closed he saw its light and in the glow of this light he came to see for the first time how the humble fibers could be made into the threads that become strands and the strands that become rope and the rope that can be used to make knots. In this way the knot maker travelled the long journey from fiber to rope, from deep within the narrowest passageways of original darkness where the

voices meet and the fibers of the world are joined. (p. 108)

This description reveals the multidimensional reality, and the invisible world determines and patterns the visible world. Only the inward journey brings into consciousness the third dimension: *With his eyes closed he saw its light...* This reminds us of an ancient sage who deliberately destroyed his own eyes in order to see clearly. The order of the visible world - *the long journey from fiber to rope* - reflects the vibration of the invisible world. Only the conscious mind serves as a correspondent to link the two worlds - *where the voices meet and the fibers of the world are joined.*

Here the voice from within came together with the voice from afar to tell him that this light was not to be looked at directly; that he should look instead to the many other things in the world that are not sun. And yet it was all so new and so wondrous. (p. 116)

The invisible world illuminates the visible world, and the third dimension brings light to physical reality - *all so new and so wondrous*. Spirituality or godly quality is shown through ordinary things and human beings in their everyday behavior - *light was not to be looked at directly; that he should look instead to the many other things in the world that are not sun*. When we want to identify the godly quality through ordinary things, we have to identify with our inner eyes rather than the physical eyes - *things that should be seen but never looked at (p. 118)*

Repeating pattern in nature is a necessity, not a coincidence, of 'fractal' evolution. ... 'Despite our modern angst and the

seeming chaos of our world, there is order in nature, and there is nothing truly new under the sun.'

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