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A Correspondence Concerning the Naigroeg Subset of the Nacirema People: Naigroeg Customs, Language, and Eccentricities

By Christopher Turner

Horace Miner (1956) wrote a piece about the “Nacirema” people that has endured the test of time in the field of anthropology and education. Miner detailed the barbaric cultural traditions of Nacirema¹ to showcase the presumptuousness of ethnographic practices at the time when studying the languages and cultures of “others” who are perceived as different, strange, or savage. This satire, which explored the mysterious and horrifying practice of dentistry in America, was an entertaining style of cultural self-reflection, one I encountered in an ESOL endorsement course at UGA, taught by a wonderful professor in 2021. Miner’s satire put into perspective what, and how, terms could be harmful when describing cultures other than our own. As an person from a multi-generational American household, I can understand the rationale behind what 1950s Americans were thinking when they went to the dentist. Thinking of the Nacirema as a separate culture, though, and describing their strange practice in more base terms, forces the reader to “barbarianize” them.² As educators, when working with students and families from languages and cultures other than our own, we must come with this attitude: we cannot fully understand the rationale behind what we deem primitive without proper immersion and a respectful orientation toward difference. That is not to say that no practice is primitive but that it is easy to often deem harmless cultural practices as such. In the spirit of Miner’s piece, I have written an updated version called “A Correspondence Concerning the Naigroeg Subset of the Nacirema People: Naigroeg Customs, Language, and Eccentricities.” While there are modern undertones in this piece, an outdated ethnographic style of writing like that of the original piece is adopted to honor the brilliance of Miner. Of course, “Naigroeg” is “Georgian” spelled backwards. I hope my work does the original satire justice and that one can read it with the same enjoyment.

¹ Miner calls his cultural subjects the Nacirema, which is “American” spelled backwards. He does this in order to create the satire but also to “trick” the American audience into barbarian-izing their own culture.

² I recognize that not all readers may be able to grasp so easily this satire as their experience is not similar. That is why writing our own satires in the same style, as I have, can help broaden the message to more audiences.

A Correspondence Concerning the Naigroeg Subset of the Nacirema People: Naigroeg Customs, Language, and Eccentricities

A colleague of mine has just returned from a long expedition to a land of unique culture and language. He detailed to me, in a recent meeting, this culture, with all its eccentricities and customs. I have chosen to take this old friend at his word, despite how foreign and unusual the following information may seem to the humble reader. Before reading on, I would urge you to consider the modern lens in which cultures should be studied. In said studies, the ethnographer is not to be too quick to marginalize and “otherize” the people who are the subject. No culture is inherently less than another. Differences in population size, religion, economic style, daily routine, or any other aspect of “culture” indicate just that: difference, not superiority. Cultures different than your own must be viewed in light of what they can become given the right support for their already existing capabilities. The words used to describe cultures can contribute to this unwarranted superiority. Lesser studied cultures should be termed unusual, not weird, intense, not cruel, and underdeveloped, not primitive. That being said, I do believe the practices and the culture of the Naigroeg is quite unusual, intense, and underdeveloped.

The culture of the Nacirema people, first studied by Miner (1956) has received much further exploration. But much about this specific Naigroeg subset of the Nacirema is still unknown. What is known, though, is quite unusual. Miner (1956) first detailed the Nacirema practice of scraping their faces with rough stones daily for the sake of smooth skin. The Naigroeg, though, seem to follow this practice seldom. In fact, most of them are thoroughly whiskered. They also often eat a fruit known here as a “pitch.” Many of the Nacirema know it as a “peach.” While the Nacirema tend to use this as a hieroglyphic symbol for their “asses” it has remained simply a pleasant snack for the Naigroeg. The “pitch” is not the only food unique to the Naigroeg. Another is BBQ. This may not jump out to us, but it is believed that to compensate for a lack of understanding of spelling, they decide to spell what many places know as barbecue, as “BBQ.” The list of odd food names does not end here. They have named a popular pastry after shoemakers (cobbler), a stew after their port city of Brunswick, and a strange combination of cheese, peppers, and tomatoes “redneck caviar.” No fish eggs in sight! The most significant of these cuisines, though, is the “peanut.” It is used in their country’s butter, oil, and candy. In fact, one of the Nacirema’s past chieftains was a Naigroeg who cultivated these nuts. Interestingly, these people have an addiction to boiling these nuts for hours in salt water before eating them, sometimes shell and all! As food is the centerpiece of this culture, so too are the activities that surround it.

Culture is largely comprised of traditions, especially those pertaining to daily and familial practices. In more civilized cultures, the most fit and promising citizens are honored. The opposite seems to be true of Aigroeg, where the most elderly and burdensome are placed on pedestals of importance. They call these people “granddaddy” and “grandma.” It is rather rare to see a family gathering in which these people are not placed at the head of the table, a sign of respect and authority. Most of the actual food at these gatherings are recipes for dishes that have been passed down and taught by these grandparents for centuries. While it is endearing to see such reverence, it also shows a reluctance to modernization! As one of the locals put it to my colleague: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” While every culture reverences tradition and custom to a certain extent, it is rare to find one in which new customs are opposed as readily as in Aigroeg. It is rare to find, there, eateries, brands, and people that did not also originate there. Their feeding

halls are stocked with their capital's own Coca-Cola. Their villages are lined with houses of waffles and "Chick-fil-A." This is another example of their odd spelling. Chick-Fil-A means filet of chicken. This restaurant is especially unique in that it not only specializes in the acquisition, cooking, and sale of chicken but also employs cattle! These cows are plastered on billboards and television commercials, accompanied by their strange rules of spelling and grammar. I wonder if the cattle endure discrimination due to their unique culture, with a quirky syntax that can often create stigma and separation. Further investigation needs to be performed on this topic. Furthermore, this organization is only open six out of seven days a week! The Naigroeg often complain about not being able to acquire this "godly" chicken on Sundays. These same people, though, pride themselves on "Chick-Fil-A honoring the Lord's Day." What walking contradictions! Humble reader, I, especially at this point in our correspondence, implore you to recall my further instructions about the lens we are to view other cultures. It is about to get particularly peculiar.

This chicken franchise does not simply participate in the food business. Every year, they put on large events called "bowls" that fill stadiums with hundreds of thousands of people. My colleague attended this game and was shocked that there was not a single bowl in sight! The content of these games is even more surprising, dare I say barbaric! The game played is called "football." But they hardly use their feet! Rather, they intensely calculate how to hit other players so as to "lay them out." In Aigroeg, there are a few main teams for sports. Their teams perform well at higher levels. While their playing of football is unique, they also practice several sports common throughout the world. Their baseball team, the Braves, won the highest award last year. Their name and mascot reference a people which they conquered many centuries ago. Though my colleague believes this name to be offensive, many say it shows respect to the "brave" people who were once their adversaries. They have a basketball team named after one of their most common birds, the hawk. What most of the world calls football, they call soccer. How peculiar! This team goes simply by the name "United." I have come to know through Aigroeg experts that this is one area of the world in which despite political or religious differences, most individuals still have cultural pride and unity, an admirable trait for an underdeveloped culture. All these sports, though, pale in comparison to the popularity of football. In detail, I will explain the complex rivalries and teams that comprise the Aigroeg football scene. I will try to explain, the best I can, how people running around hitting each other like savages constitutes a multi-billion-dollar industry.

On the professional level exists the Falcon, yet another bird in which these people take pride. Alluding to the great importance given to success in Aigroeg, many citizens have disowned this team due to their poor performance. Winning is the rule, not the exception. The Falcons do not win. Some even despise the Falcons as much as they despise the Nainrofilacs. Besides the Falcons, there are college football teams. The fans often call them the names of animals. In most places, would it not be an insult to be called a "dawg?" Here, it is a term of pride and endearment! "Dawg," of course, is their unique way of spelling "dog." The two most popular teams are the University of Aigroeg and the Aigroeg Institute of Technology. The former is referred to as UAG, and the latter is AT. Their animosity rivals that of Rome and Carthage. They live side by side, have intermingled families, eat at the same houses of waffles, worship at the same churches, and fish in the same ponds. Yet, their hate is boundless. The one time a year they gather to compete, arrests for assault and public indecency skyrocket. In rare instances, there have even been murders! Currently, the UAG fans have quite a leg

up on the IT fans in terms of performance in this savage sport. They have even awarded their headmaster the name “Smart” as a term of endearment. My colleague was fascinated that these people are so advanced in some respects yet so undeveloped in others. If I may note one small detail of this language it is the strange usage of cuss words. While the Naigroegs view it perfectly acceptable to say dawg (for dog), Chick-Fil-A (for filet of Chicken), BBQ (for barbecue), and soccer (for football), it is considered extremely taboo to use cuss words, even less harsh ones such as “damn,” “hell,” “ass,” or “shit.” A mother would respond to her sons using such words with the following (and still undeciphered) phrase: “Stop being ugly, y’all!”

In short, the Naigroeg people are unique in their affinity for facial hair, love for peaches and peanuts, odd accents of inflection and prolonged speech, honor of the elderly and adherence to family tradition, absolute loyalty to their homegrown restaurants and businesses, love for a sport that bears a name that does not describe it accurately, intense animosity between neighbors over a mere sport, and an odd and underdeveloped use of language. Again, I beg the reader once more to not judge these strange attributes but to explore them. It must be understood that cultural differences can be an opportunity for progress and understanding rather than a cause of conflict and division. So, let our review of the ritual life of the Naigroeg bear not hate and derision, but an attitude of intrigue and mission!

Reflection

This is an exploration of my own culture, that of a Georgia boy, who grew up in Roswell, “Naigroeg” in the early 2000s. My family, though, has been in the state, particularly in Macon, since the 1850s. All the attributes of the Niagroeg apply to me and my family. My dad constantly asks me to shave my beard. A family meal is not complete without a batch of boiled peanuts and my late Grandma Jean’s sweet tea, with a secret ingredient of love (and sugar). I sometimes draw out my sentences a little too long, speak a little too slow, and add a “w” or “l” where they don’t belong. I grew up learning recipes for fried chicken, butter beans, and other southern and Italian classics from my Grandma Betty and Grandma Jean. I frequent Chick-fil-a and Waffle House at least twice a week. I am a die-hard football fan and will root for the Dawgs ‘til I die. I have personally experienced the round end of a wooden spoon for using a cuss word. I am proud of my culture, but that does not mean I cannot recognize its peculiarities. After all, it is these peculiarities that make my culture unique. And it is my culture, too, that defines a large part of who I am.

My language and customs make up a large part of my daily life and I would not be Christopher Robert Turner, Ricky and Lynn’s son, University of Georgia Biology student on a pre-Med track, loyal friend, faithful Catholic, and proud grandbaby, without them. In recognizing, analyzing, and falling in love with the special aspects of our cultures, we can more easily respect the eccentricities of other cultures. This allows us to practice medicine, educate students, and serve tables in a truly inclusive way in this ever-more diverse world without losing what makes us, well, us. The class in which I wrote this paper that I, years later have decided to publish, came as a pleasant surprise. It opened my eyes to the complexities of multicultural education and to the necessity of “doing better” in how we not only approach those of other cultures, but also immerse them fully in ours without washing away who they are.

I hope to enter medical school after my studies at this great university are through. It is important, now more than ever, that we train our future physicians in how to not only interact with those of other cultures but also to give them the same quality of care we would give to people of our own. Furthermore, research shows that the southern accent is fading (Gruener, 2024). The research says that someone from Atlanta from the Boomer generation would have an accent similar to that of someone from deep in “the country.” That accent has largely faded from Atlanta and much of the South today. From reading this piece, I hope one can recognize that the way a people talk is vital to the breath of their culture. I believe this paper can draw some attention to the importance of the way we talk and the effect it has on who we are as people. If this piece could inspire just one timid reader to better embrace their upbringing, Southern ways, or Southern way of speaking but at the same time expand their ability to value and interact with other cultures, my mission would be accomplished. Simply put, though, and as my favorite hat exclaims: Georgia Til I Die.

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About Christopher Turner



Christopher Turner is a 3rd year undergraduate studying Biology, hoping to attend medical school after graduating from the University of Georgia. His research is conducted at the Clinical Neuroscience Lab at the University of Georgia, with a focus on vaping addictions and their effects on the brain. Outside of the hard sciences, he is fascinated by cultural, linguistic, and religious studies, which has given rise to this piece.