

Poetics and Politics

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DANIEL LOPEZ

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Larry Evers: It's my pleasure this morning to welcome Danny Lopez. I'll make my introduction very brief because you've all had a chance to read the article in the Tucson Weekly which does a good job of introducing him. I was trying to remember when Danny and I met. I think it was in the late 1970s at a time when he had returned here to the University of Arizona to pick up his university education again and enroll in some classes. Since about that time I've been able to talk with him regularly and especially once a year to enjoy his performances at Tucson Meet Yourself with a young group of dancers that he works with. We had a chance to talk a little bit this morning and I shared with him the list of questions we set for ourselves in the class and talked about those a little bit, so I think we can get right into that but I did want to say welcome; we're happy to have you here sitting in the front of the class. I see Ofelia has moved to the corner as promised.

Ofelia Zepeda: The technician told me to move here.

Larry Evers: At one point in your life you were working for the mines--ASARCO--and you decided to give that up and take your life in another direction that involved poetry, language maintenance issues. Will you talk about that change?

Daniel Lopez: I guess the change came about as my own kids were growing up here in Tucson. I was living in Tucson at

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the time. Also at that time we were called the Papago tribe of Arizona. I was just growing up, and I called myself a Papago, but I didn't know anything about being a Papago. I could speak the language but other things like the songs, the ceremonies, the singing, the storytelling, I didn't know anything about them. I had no interest in that. I had other things on my mind when I was younger, especially when I was in the service. I was drinking Budweiser and Michelob, and doing all those things like shooting pool. I didn't care about who I was and where I came from. But seeing my own kids and other kids growing up in Tucson--that said something to me--that I should go out and learn something about where my people came from, learn something about the things that are still there, the things that were still there at the time, and talk with some people who still had the knowledge of ceremonies, and songs, and stories. I could bring it back to the kids in Tucson. So that's when, I guess you should put it, the calling came about.

Excuse my nervousness. I'm a little old boy from the desert, and I'm not used to city life. I am shaking now. I stopped at the school this morning and some of the teachers were telling me, "Good luck, hang in there, you'll be okay," and I said, "Thanks, I'll need it." I'm glad I didn't turn back on the drive to Tucson; I didn't turn the car around and go back the other way. But I'll be alright, that's the

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way you get off to a start I guess.

Larry Evers: Frances Manuel has been an important person to you. When you started thinking about Papago things were there people that you turned to?

Daniel Lopez: Well, one of them was Frances Manuel, my mother-in-law, because she was there. I could go to her anytime I felt like going. Then on the other hand there were my folks, but they were living way out on the reservation in Big Fields. I did see them maybe once or twice a month when I would go out there, go home and sit down with my folks. There was so much knowledge that they could have given me all this time but I guess I just didn't care. Frances Manuel always was and still is a very important person in my life in the area of O'odham culture, the stories, the songs, the dances. She told me a lot of things just as my own mother has and still does today. Frances Manuel and my Ma and other people who are deceased now, such as my Dad and other people on the reservation who were the elders then, helped me but most of them are gone now.

Larry Evers: There is one piece that you sent to us, it has the name Sweetmouth. Will you talk a little bit about who Sweetmouth is?

Daniel Lopez: Yeah, well, he was my Grandpa. Remember my people had O'odham names before Christianity came and made

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that change. That's why I've got Lopez. I'm not even Mexican, you know! Those names were given to us because of the baptism. We had to be baptized in the Church, so we could have a straight road to heaven when we die, you know. We're told all these things. I do make stabs at Christianity because that has really changed my people, my community, Big Fields.

I know from what my mother tells me that my grandfather, my ba:b, you know, that's from my mother's side, would not let his kids go to school when the missionaries first started a school out there. He would not let his kids go and for that reason my Mom says that she doesn't know how to speak English. Later on Grandpa let some of his older children go but my mother was not wanted there because, my mother says, he was afraid that they would start to control their way of thinking about things in the area of religion, language. I can see that change that some of our people have today. But because everybody else started sending their kids, I guess Grandpa kinda broke down and sent the older children to the mission school there. This was before they moved to the main area where they are now at today, at Topawa village, the headquarters of the Catholic mission on the O'odham reservation. I do make my stabs at Catholicism, but then I think too it's our own fault because we went this way. We let the Roundhouse go,

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we let the medicine man go, our storytelling and other things because this other group was telling us: "Don't do that, that's taboo," and so forth. I still have those conflicts today. So often they'll invite me to say something to young people that are bringing up their children. They want to have baptism, and they want to hear the culture part, and I just tell the people that are there I don't know why they like me, but as long as I'm here I might as well speak my mind. I tell them that I don't go to church, but I still pray in my own way. I try to do that every morning when I go outside and I face the sacred mountain. Sometimes it's still dark. Sometimes it's cold, sometimes it's windy. I talk to I'ita or I meditate, or I sing, to start off my day right. So you can't say that I don't pray, but Grandpa was very traditional. Sweetmouth was his name until he got the name Pablino, or Jose Pablino. Sometimes he would change it around because that was something he was not used to. Sometimes he'd be Jose Pablino and sometimes he'd say that's the other way. But his name was Al I'owi Cinkam, The One With The Sweetmouth, and he was in charge of ceremony. That comes out in that poem "Village Progress" for he always walked in front of the dancer because he was the one that carried on that ceremony many years. When he died his son was supposed to take over, my uncle, but he never did because of drinking.

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Larry Evers: Is it possible to say something about his name in O'odham? Why Sweetmouth?

Daniel Lopez: I asked my Mom one time and she said, "I don't know, I guess he liked to eat candy." You have a name you were given when you were an infant, but later on, when you do something, or the way you looked, your name often got changed. The other name that was given to you when you did something or because of the way you looked stayed with you and became stronger. There's a man who died some years ago. He was called Dirty Ears, even though he had a Christian name. He was just probably about my age. I don't know, I guess he never cleaned his ears and somebody called him Dirty Ears. He just became that. Everybody called him Bi:bdagi Na:nkam, Dirty Ears. And so, there's a lady called Walking Bar. They call her that in English. I guess she was like a bootlegger, and she always had a bottle in her purse. If anybody ever needed a bottle, she just took it out of her purse. So the people just called her Walking Bar. If you do something, you may get a name from that. The kids do that in school.

Ofelia Zepeda: Danny, what about your own name, Wainam O'odham?

Daniel Lopez: Wainam O'odham? Yes, that's from my uncle, the guy I just mentioned. I guess once we lived in the cotton fields. Years ago that was one of the main ways of

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earning money for a lot of the families on the reservation. I guess somebody took me to a movie, and I guess they showed a robot walking around with hands all stiff. I came home, and I was walking around the camp and I was imitating that tin man or that metal man. So my uncle started calling me Wainam O'odham, which means Man of Steel or Man of Iron, something like that, Wainam O'odham. He always called me that whenever I saw him, "Hey, Wainam O'odham, what are you doing?" I thought that was kind of a neat name, better than some of those names I heard.

Ofelia Zepeda: Danny, I want to ask you about something that I know you talk about a lot. You mention the position you take regarding religion, whether it's the Catholic religion or any other religion, the way it has affected tribal community. But the other thing is the school system. You and some of the other older people who have worked in the school system for a long time have conflict that has arisen when you try to bring that traditional information or that cultural information, whether it's through stories or it's through songs, into the school system. I know you worked in that area when you were living here in Tucson and more so now that you're back on the reservation. I know there's some specific things you do with some of the songs so they can be used in the schools.

Daniel Lopez: Well, at the school where I work today I'm

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supposed to have a bilingual classroom. Then I have all these things that my kids are supposed to do before the end of the year, the skills. You know sometimes I don't have time for the cultural part, because I'm trying to get my kids to pass to the fourth grade. They're third graders. It's kind of hard to do for me. Yet everybody thinks my class is supposed to be really strong in the bilingual area, but my class does do a lot of singing, they hear some stories, stories that I do because I'm a storyteller. We try to do other things with those stories. They're not done just for the listening part. They involve writing and talking about it. They ask me questions. I know years ago that wasn't allowed. When I went to Phoenix Indian School as a second grader, I wasn't allowed. I couldn't talk O'odham, and that was the only language I could speak. Later on at St. John's High School, outside of Phoenix, the Indian boarding school there, again we were not allowed to talk our language. Our privileges got taken away if we got caught talking our language.

Ofelia Zepeda: At one point, when you were still living here in Tucson, there were certain songs that other people didn't allow you to use, especially the songs that somebody else owned. The songs were not yours, and people won't allow strangers or children or other people to sing them unless you buy them or they give them to you or something

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like that. So you had to create school songs. I guess they turned out to be, I don't know, generic songs, I guess. It's a way of going around the system, not only the community but also the school.

Daniel Lopez: I used to work with the young men down there in Sells Gregory Gym. We had a little group there, a dance group. We went out to different places. Of course the songs that I taught them were all from my village, from my area. It's not just my village but we have certain villages that are like related villages. After a while I started hearing complaints, they never came to me directly, but they would always come through somebody else. "Why were these kids, these Sells kids, learning these songs and yet they're not from our area?" I began to hear those kinds of complaints. I felt bad for the kids, you know, and I thought, you know, I wish there were just a set of songs that these kids here or any kids could use without anybody complaining. So I started to just put songs together. In the old culture there were people who were called songdreamers who heard songs in their sleep or in their dreams. They were these songdreamers, that was their song. It seems in the old culture each community had their own songs or songdreamers. There were plenty then. I'm not a songdreamer, not yet, but I have put down songs just like you do poetry. You go out and you think. I'd go to some

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place, to some mountain or some hill, and sit out there, or just out in the desert. Think and make up lines because our songs are so short and so simple. They seem like they're hard, but they're not when you know what the lines are. They become very simple. So I did that and I put about eight songs together. That's why now when you go to schools, say like in Sells, you'll hear a certain song, and you go to Santa Rita you'll hear the same song, or over to San Lucie over by Gila Bend, you'll hear the same song over there. That's because of that, and I released the songs to the school district, to any school system on the reservation. That took care of that problem.

Luis Salazar: Can you give an example of one of those songs?

Daniel Lopez: That Lady Mountain song. That Lady Mountain song, that's one example right there. And that Lonely Mountain song. That's the one that has to do with that mountain over by San Lucie village, the village by Gila Bend. There's a mountain over there called Lonely Mountain. I always heard about that mountain from storytellers. They would mention that mountain over there, and I always wanted to see how that mountain looked. So one day I went there to that community. I was there, and I asked the ladies who were working with me there, "Where's that mountain Wi'ikam Do'ag? And they said, "Right there." And I just stood

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there, and I just admired that mountain. It's kind of flat on top, but I told them I wanted to go there if I could. They said, "well, yeah, we'll take you over there." So they took me through the wash. On the way a lot of the ladies turned back. It was hot, it was very hot. Only about four of us made it to the top where the ruins are. Fortalesa ruins they're called. That other, that Lady Mountain song is way out here on the western part of our reservation. If you're ever driving through Sells, and you're getting closer to Ajo, and if you look south, there's the shape of a lady sitting there. I used to go there and just stay there in that old village that's there, just spend a day, or a few hours. Just sit there and just look at that lady sitting there, that's how that song came about. Later on when I tried to go out there to do some more thinking, there was a young man that was living there because his community I guess kicked him out so he just went and lived there in that area. That's how that one came about. Just by observing nature, the morning, the mountain, the hawk, the saguaro, that's how those songs came about. (You can do it too.)

Luis Salazar: You mentioned that when your children were growing up you turned to the culture more. Has your interest influenced your children?

Daniel Lopez: I have to shake my head because, even though there's the teaching at school, to me they don't get the

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reinforcement from their parents. We can only work with them in the school. The parents also have to do their part whatever it is; whether it be in discipline, cleanliness. The parents or the guardians have to do their part. A lot of the kids don't speak the language because they just have so much in the school system, especially in my class, then I have to move other things. I don't know how it's going to be at the next level with their next teacher. How much interest is that teacher going to have in that area of language and song and dance? Even today, when I meet with the kids in my village, I have to speak in English because they can't understand the O'odham language. But you go to the western part, a lot of the kids you can converse with them in O'odham. There's a couple of kids in my village, tiny little kids, and they speak O'odham better than I do, but the rest of the kids, it's English.

Larry Evers: It always interested me that you worked outside the school, too. There is a group you've worked with outside the school over the years. I've heard the point of view expressed that the place for language and culture to be studied and thought about really is outside the school in home settings and community group settings. Is this something you're trying to do with that group?

Daniel Lopez: Well, yeah, the kids you're talking about are from San Xavier, and I used to work with them a lot, but I

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don't anymore. I have another group in the village since I'm now over there on the reservation. Yeah, I feel it's important that you have to try and teach something to the kids in their own community. But it's hard when you're a new teacher, and you have all these extra hours you have to put in at night at the school. There's just so many things that have come up lately, deaths and things like that, that take up a lot of time. Just yesterday we tried to meet with all the singers in the village, and we only got four people. We're trying to relearn some of the songs that I know a couple of words and somebody else will know a couple of words or a line here. We're trying to put all those together so we can have all the songs in our community, in our village area. But I guess today people are too busy doing other things. For me it's very hard. Maybe somebody else can do that.

When I have time to meet with the kids they play toka. They compare it to hockey. I would like to have the boys play kickball, throwing the ball with their toes, the wooden ball, having a race, or a relay race. We have tried to do those things but again because of school being in session I don't have time. I've got meetings scheduled at the Early Childhood Center, rodeo's coming up this weekend, I have to get wood, the parents want to do a sale and I'm involved in two parents' groups this weekend. I don't know who's going

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to pull me apart first, which way do I go, who do I help first, you know. It's a very busy time. And then the other thing is parent involvement. There's just a group of parents I see every time we meet. It's parents I don't know where they're at or what they're doing with their child. Where's their interest or is there any interest?

Larry Evers: I'll take it back to a subject you were talking about a minute ago. That was the subject of village ownership of songs. I was thinking of the comparison to copyright. Probably it stops way short of that. Villages don't have copyrights on songs, but how do you think about song ownership beyond that? It's associated with a village; it's associated with a song maker, you have said. Are there any associations with animals? Are songs owned by animals in any sense?

Daniel Lopez: Ownership. I know years ago that you just didn't sing anybody else's song. Say, for example, Santa Rosa village area and our area because, I hate to use a word like envy or opponent, but we would go down and have foot races with them. Then a lot of things started out at the talk. You know losers always talk a lot. When we lost we did that. We'd say they cheated, and when our side won they'd do that. You know, the name calling and things like that. So we just didn't sing another village's song. Just like yesterday I was telling the group out there what I

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think is going to happen in the future. I have all these songs that belong to my mother-in-law, but the thing is if I don't do anything these songs are just gonna disappear because nobody else is singing these songs. They don't know them, and in order to preserve those songs maybe not right away but later on down the line, I must teach them these songs. I think some of the people who are older than I are beginning to realize that things are disappearing because a lot of times we don't share things even within a community. We've been trying to invite one of our singers to come over to our little song meeting sessions but he hasn't come around yet. To me he's not coming over, because we want to question him on some songs to help us. These songs are used for our ceremony every summer in our village, but again he's not coming around to explain those songs to us. We hear those songs, and we just kind of follow but we don't really know what those words are saying. But again in the future I'm going to teach some of those songs to the people in my village or those who are interested. Many songs are just being lost today and even some of the songs that pertain to ceremonies. There's a man that we have in our village who sings certain songs that are related to what we call the Wi:gita ceremony. Now his daughter has good control over him because he's very elderly. We've been wanting to go to record those songs, so we can carry on those songs after he

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dies. I guess we're afraid to really approach his daughter because we think right away her answer is going to be no. I'm still trying to put up some courage to go and talk to her and explain: when your Dad goes that's it for the songs. They sing these songs every time somebody who was involved in a ceremony dies so that these songs are used. They did that when my father died. They came and sang those songs. They have those young men who twirl those bull roarers. They're called wewgidakud. That is what we call them. As for the songs that I made, when I go someplace and hear them and they don't acknowledge, then I feel cheated a little bit, you know. A lady, my cousin, was just telling me a few weeks ago that she heard this "Lady Mountain song" sung by a Pima Indian over by Phoenix at some gathering over there. She said he sung that song. I kinda laughed. When I sing somebody else's song, I try to acknowledge that person. If I know who the songdreamer is, I'll say this is the song of Mockingbird Man, who lived many years ago, or this is the song of so and so and I'm going to sing it. If I don't know whose song it is, I just say I don't know the origin of this song, but I hear it in Big Fields or I hear it in Santa Rosa. It's better to say that because they belong to a songdreamer in an area, in a certain village, and I think that's very important. What's that other part?

Larry Evers: There's lots of parts. Just what you said now

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makes me wonder how what others have recorded in earlier times figure into your song group? Have you gone over to the Arizona State Museum or other places and gotten tapes and tried to work with them at all?

Daniel Lopez: I wish Underhill, this book here [Singing for Power] has a lot of songs in it and I wish that somebody had . . . . I don't know if there were any recorders then, but I wonder how this song sounded. I know that today recording is very, very important for the people. I know a lot of people don't like it; sometimes I don't like it for people to stick a tape recorder in my face and say, "Hey, sing me this song." Even my own mother, if she says, "No, I don't wanna put this on tape right now," I say, "Okay, it's okay, Mom." But it is important, because I wish that I could hear lots of tapes today, especially in my area, so we could have this ceremony. That's what I want to do someday is have this ceremony on a small scale in my own community but where are the songs? They're not there. Don Bahr, I think Ofelia worked with him, but anyway I was glad Ofelia gave him some tapes, because I was listening to a speech but I couldn't really make it out. So what I did was I turned to a book, that book by Bahr, is it Rainhouse and Ocean? They asked me to give this speech at the ceremony in August, and I said, "Golly." There was just four days left. I said, "Gee whiz, you mean I have to do a speech in four days?" They said,

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"Well, we couldn't get anybody else, and we invited Harry Rios from Three Points but he doesn't know if he'll be here." And I said, "Gee whiz, can somebody help me at the village?" and that guy said, "Well, we'll ask around and see if anybody knows it."

But what happened when I went to some of the people, they were over at the Roundhouse for a meeting. I said, "I'm supposed to do this; you think you can help me, John?" "Well, I used to know it but I don't any more." Then I asked another guy. He said, "Well, I know one but it's not the kind like you guys use here." Gee whiz. These guys when they're drunk they say they know this and they know that then all of a sudden nobody knows anything. So it was a good thing I had my book. I went to that page, and I was trying, you know, I began to study it. I memorized that long speech. You've got other things to do besides sit there all day and look at a book, you've got to chop wood, and go meet with the kids, and things like that. I didn't memorize the whole thing, and I will try to listen to the tape that Ofelia gave me, but it's not too together. But I did memorize part of it. The big day came, and they led me out to the circle. I explained that this is the way it is and this is what happened. They put me out there in the circle, and I sat there in the center. I said I tried to ask all these knowledgeable people and they gave all kinds of

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excuses. So, I said, along the way I expect I'll have to pull the book out and read the certain parts I don't remember. It changes. It repeats in certain areas, but the directions and the colors they mention are different. The endings change, especially the ending speech. The west was an entirely different ending. So anyway, I started off the speech, and I was coming to the part I didn't know, so I'd stuck the book under my belt and I pulled it out. I already had it marked, and I read the parts I didn't know, you know. I was glad that was written some years ago.

Now, they're already talking about having the ceremony again, but to this day nobody's approached me and said, "Danny, we want you to do the speech again." They should tell me now if they want me to do that. To wait to the last day makes it hard. This summer I want to go someplace to go to school, but I should be back round that time when they have it. But somebody should let me know today, so I could start thinking about it and go someplace and sit under the tree and hear the speech.

Susan Stevens: Do you perform by yourself or do you perform with a group?

Daniel Lopez: Sometimes I have to sing by myself, but it's group singing. In the old culture it was group things, like group dancing, group singing, because it's the group that makes up the, you know . . . . The men and the women, the

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voices blend in, and you get the harmony. That's where the beauty is in the singing of our songs.

Susan Stevens: Are you planning on singing tonight?

Daniel Lopez: Yes, I was just telling Larry that I'd like to do a few of the songs, because that's where the poetry is, to me, in song. Whoever put those songs together, the songdreamer, fifty or a hundred years ago, they are very beautiful in the O'odham language. I try my best to put them into the English language. I think sometimes there is a gap. I was talking with a folklorist last year, one time, about what happens, and she kept saying, "Well, they were done by a linguist over there on the reservation so it's all right," you know. How does she know it's all right? Does she speak the language? But I do that, I sing a lot because I have to. If you are a singer you have to sing the songs. Especially as you get more songs and you get older you'd better practice those songs or else you're going to get mixed up. A lot of the songs are not written or recorded. I'm trying to work on that part, to write some songs down, to translate them, and also the recordings. When we go sing someplace, I record our group, so those kids can have those fifty years from now.

????: Did you learn some of those songs when you were a child?

Daniel Lopez: No, I wasn't interested. I really wasn't. I

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was more interested in reading about Joe Louis and Joe DiMaggio and playing basketball or, you know, making a ball out of a sock or something and throwing it at a can, or something like that. Riding horses.

????: Did you hear a lot of singing when you were young?

Daniel Lopez: Oh, there was a lot of singing because at certain times when they have social dancing at the round house, anybody can participate. I heard a lot of songs, even during ceremonies you heard songs, but I didn't understand it, even though I spoke the language. It was the words, I didn't understand them. Again, there were some things you were told, you weren't supposed to be around, you know, especially during the curing ceremonies. You know, "Be quiet, play over there."

????: You mentioned before that you sang some songs that belonged to the mother-in-law, and how your mother would sing sometimes. Are women also songdreamers or is that primarily something that is done by men?

Daniel Lopez: Women have just as much power as menfolk, I'll say that right now. I'm just speaking for myself, I'm not trying to speak for the whole O'odham Nation--I can't do that, they have their own thinking over there. I'm saying what I know, what I feel. But women have that power too, women medicine men. One of my first cousins today is a

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medicine lady, and she goes all over the place today. Even though I don't get along with her at times, she still is a medicine person. Oh yeah, songdreamers, ladies, yes.

????: You talked about songdreamers and you say that you don't do that yet, but what is the difference between a songdreamer and a singer?

Daniel Lopez: They tell me that if you are laying there asleep, in your dream you hear a song. Or even in just your sleep a song comes you. I don't know if I started that term "songdreamer," but that's where they hear it, in their sleep.

????: When you think about your own work, do you think of yourself as a singer, or as a poet, or both? I just wonder what these words mean in terms of the work that you create?

Daniel Lopez: Singer, because when you mention the word poet, you think of people like Tapahonso and Momaday and Silko. They are the poets. I'm not even there, where those people are. When I got the list that came out on "Poetics and Politics" I thought, "God, and I'm going to go to this thing?" (Laughs.) You know, I was really scared, I was really scared, and I called a friend of mine. Jody Ross, one time he talked to me about that. I told him that I was going to Phoenix to a thing they were having to do with plants up there. These were all people . . . . Their

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education was way up there, and here I am, I don't even have a degree yet, and I am asked to make a speech. He said, "Don't worry about it, just do it. They have all this technical knowledge, but you have the knowledge that comes from your people." So that really put my mind at ease.

????: If a song isn't yours and you sing it, does it still have power for you?

Daniel Lopez: Oh yes. For me it does. Yes, it depends on what kind of song it is and what it's about. Oh yes. They make me feel good in the morning.

????: What does it do?

Daniel Lopez: Well, if I feel bad, or even if I'm sick, if I have a cold, or a headache, or something that's bothering me, one of my kids, you know, my own kids, or one of the kids in the classroom, something is bothering them and then it's beginning to bother me, you know, I go out and sing. I just kind of relax after that, it just kind of sets the day for me.

????: This is related to what you've just said. What have you discovered, what were the pleasures of looking at those songs and finally understanding them, what are some things that struck you as special?

Daniel Lopez: I guess, like I said, the poetry that's in the songs, the beauty, the way they describe things. Whether it's the little birds flying over our village or the

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clouds coming up in the east, it's just very descriptive if you can understand the lines. A lot of people hear the songs and they want to learn the songs, but you just don't learn the songs, you have to sit down and listen to the people, the singers, try to have someone explain the lines to you. To singers that's very bothersome. We have a young man that's coming to us when we meet, and he'll say "What does that mean?" I want to say "Just listen to the songs, you'll get it after a while." But I try to help the young guy out, he's just a young man. I don't want to discourage him. Again, if you're feeling bad, if you sing a song, or a certain song that you like, it does something to you. You sing it and they make you think. They make me think about how it was a thousand years ago when the Hohokam were here. What were their ceremonies like? We don't have many dances today, the tribal dances. We do have this thing called "chicken scratch," the Spanish music, but on the other side, what happened to our O'odham ceremonies and songs? You go to visit other tribes, and you see all these dancers in the plaza over in New Mexico, from the elderly to the little kids in the lines. The first time I saw that was over in this place called Cochiti. That just really made me cry, you know.

????: I have two questions. The first one is about the poem "Preservation" and I'll just read this part: "The

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sacred songs are buried grandfathers/I love to sing for they remind me of the long ago O'odham/Their dance chants were for the clouds/for rain was their constant concern." And then the last poem is about standing by the graveside and singing a holy oration for the dead. I wonder if you could say something about the importance of the ancestors?

Daniel Lopez: Well, that's where our stories came from, from them. Many of the songs that we sing today are from a man that lived probably about a hundred years ago. That's Mockingbird Man. Mainly we sing a lot of Mockingbird's songs in our village, because his songs were mainly about the mockingbird. I guess he was also a speaker in the rain ceremony and in that speech you have to be very eloquent. You talk fast, kind of like a mockingbird. As a matter of fact, they call it "mockingbird speech." So because of the ancestors, we still have the songs. And again, I don't know how old some of these songs are but I know that a lot of them belong to Mockingbird Man. My grandfather, I learned many things from him: how to chop wood, you know, just simple things, but I learned them from him. As Tohono O'odham, Desert People, our songs are mostly about the clouds and the rain. We were told, according to legend we were told, that one of the things you will have to do is constantly sing and dance for rain. You know, you'd better do that or you're not going to get any rain out here in the

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dry land. I was just looking at that last night, and thought about my grandpa and my father. I don't know if somehow something was telling me that's the way life is supposed to go. Thinking about that circle, I was thinking about myself, but I was also thinking about my Dad and also my Grandpa at that time. Seems like after you die, that's when people really praise you. They say all these wonderful things, just like in the poem "Little Crow," that's when everyone made speeches about Mr. Manuel. I used to go to the cemetery and stand where my Grandpa's buried. I used to think that this will be a beautiful place to be, right next to Grandpa, when I go, you know. I thought a lot about that because we're all going to be dying someday, hopefully not right away, but you never can tell. I got too much to do for now. Anyway, I guess that's what I was thinking.

????: The other part of my question is about the language, the O'odham language. It seems to me that some of these [poems] you wrote in English and some you wrote in O'odham and translated.

Daniel Lopez: When I was doing this poem I tried to think, I just tried to put some thoughts together. I think that that's our mistake, or my mistake, that a lot of times the thoughts that come to me I don't put them down in writing or record them. I wish I had some of those thinkings that came to me even with that Lady Sitting Mountain. When I was just

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sitting there, and the thoughts that went through my mind. Then I would come back and put this down in English. Later when I was having Ofelia's class I would do some of those in O'odham.

????: Are there certain qualities of O'odham that are especially good for expressing certain types of things, things that could be better expressed in O'odham than in English?

Daniel Lopez: To me, again, this is just Danny speaking, there is sometimes a gap in a translation whether it be a story, a song, a certain part of a speech. To me something is lost there in that translation. Sometimes I don't have the feeling that I feel when I'm singing this song. When you try to talk it in English, it's . . . it's not there.

????: Yes. I was driving through that part of the desert yesterday on 86, and I noticed that there is a real power to that land out there, a very strong power. It seems that in your work this power is inherent in that land. The power comes through in the work, and I wonder if you could say something about that.

Daniel Lopez: I really like the place out there. One time somebody remarked that must be a lonely place out there, because I used to drive back and forth when I was still living in town and working out there, but I enjoyed it. I like to be by myself. I guess I'm a loner. I like to be by

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myself because I think a lot. When we're coming into Tucson on the weekend, my wife wants to listen to western music. I mean, it's all right. But, like this morning, I was listening to tapes because again we have this ceremony coming up in August. We have to kind of keep those songs in mind so I can know the songs when it comes. Thinking is a wonderful thing. Thinking about the future, how it's going to be, how it's going to be like after you're gone, especially in the area of culture, things that you'd like to accomplish in your community before you die, and your education. What I'd like to do during my lifetime! I just think a lot, and sometimes I listen to classical music, if I'm by myself. You can't do that when there's other people around or you're a weirdo, you know. I like listening to the sound of classical music, the softness, it just makes you think, relax.

????: You mentioned that there were some songs transcribed earlier by a white linguist. What role do you think that a class like this has, or that a group of linguists can have, for the O'odham people to keep their tradition, record it. I understand that for a team of recorders to go out and really try to get everything down can be really kind of intrusive. In what way could a linguist help you, without pushing too hard?

Daniel Lopez: Well, just referring to my own community, the

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people have to agree to that at the village meetings. They have to be willing to participate. Some will probably say, "No, I don't want to do that." Or another thing we have today is "How much are you guys going to pay me?" Well, you hear that a lot. But there are people who would probably just do it. But again, I'm not going to talk for them. I think, again, for my own self, things should be recorded whether it be by O'odham linguists or Anglo linguists, as long as we, the O'odham, have what is recorded. Because a lot of times things come over to the University. Sometimes we have a hard time getting hold of certain tapes that we need, or that I need, for my work, with the young people. A lot of people come out and talk. I don't mind doing that because I'm trying to think down the road, fifty years, a hundred down the road. Can I say some statements on there that the kids, that my grandchildren can learn something from years from now. Besides seeing Grandpa on a videotape, maybe they can hear a song off the videotape, something for the kids to have for the future. When people do this I ask for a copy, [aside to recorder] are you going to give me a copy, for instance? I say, am I just doing this for my good looks or what? Are you going to give me some money or what? I ask like that, because sometimes these are companies from Tucson and other places, they have money. I have to buy shoes too. I can't even afford a cowboy hat, I have to buy a

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cap. Cowboy hats cost about three or four hundred dollars.

Toby Langen : I'm a visitor to Arizona. Last time I was here was five years ago. The night before I left I heard you speak at the historical society, and you started off by saying that earlier in the day, your uncle, I think it was your uncle, had disappeared. Someone in your family was driving a big piece of machinery, and people had found that machinery abandoned. I don't remember. You went on and told stories and history all evening. I heard it in the shadow of that unfinished story that you had talked about at the beginning, I noticed that the story about Sweetmouth, it ends with three dots, it is unfinished too . . . . What I think I've been hearing today, hearing about your uncle, about your grandfather's grandson carrying on the work, is what we're hearing today to be taken as a continuation of that story that you started? Why did you have three dots there at the end? Is it on purpose?

Daniel Lopez: I'll have to talk to that secretary who did that. I don't remember who did it. But, yeah, that is supposed to be continued, yeah. There is a purpose for that.

???? : I have the feeling from reading that the songs kind of come in groups. I was wondering if you ever find one, and it's hard to figure out where it belongs, if other songs go with it. How would you know that, by the tune or

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by the words?

Daniel Lopez: By the words. There are songs for plants, you know, it depends on what kind of plants. There are some songs about the saguaro, songs about the ocean, and in the rain dance, the summer dance, the songs come in a sequence. There's the songs that relate to the evening that the medicine man sings, and at that point the medicine people will come into the circle and that's when they start their work. Then after that I don't know the sequence. There are mountain songs, cloud songs, ocean songs, eagle songs, and then towards the end, frog songs. I forget what they call that thing we call the komo'ol, a centipede. I don't know what they call it. It's a little black komo'ol. Millipede, probably millipede. There are some beautiful songs about that millipede, about how it's walking under the clouds, and he's bringing the rain. Then we have the morning songs, toward morning we start singing about, you know, the clouds coming over Baboquivari Mountain because that's to the east, and usually around four o'clock the ceremony ends. The next night there's another set of songs that they sing, but it's the words.

????: I wondered about this song, the corn song that we have in the packet. I liked it because it has this frenetic quality of everyone running around. I'm wondering is this a song that would be sung with other songs? And

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when would it be sung? And also, in the song it talks about "we ran to here" and "we ran around over there." I'm wondering where here and there are in your mind.

Daniel Lopez: I think this is a song that is from the man that we call Mockingbird Man. I think that this is one of his songs. I'm not sure, but when this dance is done the dancers come in with their cloud symbols or the bird symbols. They run into the circle, and I guess that's why they say you run here and you run there, you know. In the old culture that was very strong, where you run in from a certain point, you know. You ran in, then you ran over there, then you danced in the circle. And also, when you got through dancing, the dancers ran out, I mean they just didn't run, but they stayed in formation running out. It says, "You came here and you danced, you came here and you ran around there." I don't know how to explain it unless you could see the dance. The thought about the edge of the world is in what I'm going to do tonight. That song talks about that little plant growing to the edge of the world. You know the old, old thought, I guess not only in O'odham but in other cultures like that, there was an edge, some place of the world. Anyway, the song goes this way, maybe this will clarify things:

[Sings several verses.]

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And if you could hear that with the men and the women singing and their voices really coming together, it's beautiful. One thing we're lucky, we're really lucky in O'odham that we have this way of reinforcing the language because we do say the words in the song. We're not just making sounds. You know, like in English you sing "God bless America." You say the words. I don't know if Ofelia would agree with me, but maybe with the young kids coming up that are beginning to like singing, maybe this is a way of language learning for them. Because what I do with my kids in the classroom when I have time is I'll try to explain the words on the chalkboard. This means that, and that translates to that. They name a mountain, I'll say this mountain is over by the Gulf of Mexico, or this mountain is over in Mexico. Or this word means this, you know. These birds that are mentioned are rainbirds or whatever, you know. I don't know if I'm right or wrong to do this, we'll see in the future.

Larry Evers: I wanted to ask you about this dove song. The saguaro seems to be speaking. I'm just interested in you as a singer speaking for the saguaro, how does that work?

Whose voice is it?

Daniel Lopez: Well, the saguaro's, because in the O'odham culture, saguaro is a person. This goes to a story. I

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never thought of it but it's a story about a little girl who was kind of neglected by her mother because she was always playing the women's game, running from village to village. So she had this little kid, this little girl or this little boy, some people say a boy, anyway, a child. As the child got older, he or she began to get lonely and she tried to follow her mother, but every time she would get to this village, her mother would have gone to another village. So she felt neglected until finally she did meet up with her mother, but she was too busy playing the game. She was excited to see her mom there. Her mom just didn't pay any attention to her. So she just went and stood on top of an ant hill, and she sang a song. She started sinking into the ground. Well, by the time the parent had come over, she had already sunk into the ground. Later on that day on that spot the first saguaro grew. So O'odham people call the saguaro a person. Even today my mom will say, "that person, the o'odham," because it's a person. So it's the saguaro that's singing these words with the dove coming and sitting up with the white flower. Later on when it ripens they say it's the first fruit before the people get to have it. It's a little short song. This would fit in the category of saguaro songs. It says:

[sings several verses]

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That part is beautiful. It says that every time you breathe, clouds come out of your mouth. Again, like the pouring of cloud and rain and water, and saguaro, being a source of food for the desert people, it's beautiful. I think it's beautiful poetry.