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The terminology of Javanese kinship


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There is no doubt in the minds of those who know the Javanese that the general subject of social relations is a prominent one in Javanese thinking. They seem to be particularly interested in relationships between individuals, within the greater whole of society, and how these individuals interact. And within this general subject the topic of kin relations—who is a member of the family and how he or she is related—is of the highest importance. Hence it is a matter for surprise that it has not yet had the detailed attention that it deserves. The two publications that devote space to kinship are Koentjaraningrat 1957 and H. Geertz 1961. Although Koentjaraningrat’s book is entitled *A Preliminary Description of the Javanese Kinship System*, only Chapter VI, ‘The Network of Kinship’, deals directly with this subject, and (as far as I know) no subsequent publication has appeared to remove the need for the word ‘preliminary’. Further, Hildred Geertz’s book *The Javanese Family* relegates ‘Javanese Kinship Terminology’ to Appendix I, a mere six pages. Apart from the limited coverage, one also notes that Koentjaraningrat’s study ‘is limited to a description of the kinship system of the Javanese of South Central Java, and especially of those on the higher social levels in that region’ (Koentjaraningrat 1957:1); in other words, his information is relevant in the first place to the aristocratic circles of Yogyakarta. And as is now well known, the information provided by the Geertzs applies to Paré, and thus reflects the features of usage in this part of East Java. So it could be argued that the limited nature of both these studies leaves room for further comment and exploration. Ideally, this should come from a social scientist or ethnographer, perhaps, but the approach adopted here will be to look at terminology in the first place—a matter of great interest for lexicography, and yet it has to be observed that the *Javanese-English Dictionary* of E. Horne (1974) makes nonsense of certain kinship terms, rendering it all the more necessary to ‘put the record straight’; examples will be given below.

In order to meet the requirement of being ‘scientific’, one has to identify and take account of the variables that could affect the use of different terms. These variables are three in number. The first relates to geographical area: this is because, as we are aware, over the area in which it is spoken the Javanese language displays a range of dialectal variation. In contrast to what has been regarded as ‘standard’, i.e. the
idiom of Surakarta, there exist variant words characteristic of other regions, although it is true that no proper survey is yet available. The designation gw (gewestelijk, i.e. dialectal) in Pigeaud's dictionary of 1938 shows no more than that a word was then regarded as non-standard.¹ We know that such variation is both large-scale, corresponding to the regions of Javanese culture (Hatley 1984), and small-scale, as neighbouring villages sometimes possess different terms for certain objects or concepts. Until such time as a full survey is available, it would be best to note where a particular term is used, being especially precise if there is reason to think that the term is non-standard.

The second variable relates to social class. This also has to be taken into account in view of the possibility that, for example, upper class usage should differ from lower. For the concept of class here we can adopt the views presented by Koentjaraningrat in various publications, mainly his Kebudayaan Jawa (1984), where the upper class is designated bendara or priyayi and the lower is termed wong cilik, the former representing the aristocracy and intellectuals and the latter the population of urban kampungs and the rural peasantry.

A third variable that should be mentioned is time. This is because over time there is a possibility that shifts in usage will occur, so that what was applicable, say, 30 years ago may no longer apply at the present time. There is no doubt that linguistic usage is constantly shifting, so that one's data have to be documented also in relation to time.

Using these three variables, it is now possible to specify the target of this investigation. The region in which kinship terminology will be studied lies not far to the north of Yogyakarta, a village in the vicinity of Muntilan in the first instance, and in the second a village near Sleman. Muntilan lies in the province of Central Java (Kabupaten of Magelang, former Residency of Kedu), and Sleman is in the Special District of Yogyakarta. Despite the administrative border following the Krasak river, there is no clear cultural or dialectal divide at this point, as both places turn out to belong to one area, stretching from Yogyakarta northwards toward Magelang. Neither village is more than three km. from the main road, so there is no high degree of isolation from contact with the outside world, as in the case of villages high on the slopes of the mountains, for instance.

The information is thus taken from a rural setting, which immediately introduces our second variable. The social class is unambiguously the wong cilik of Koentjaraningrat, that is, the rural proletariat consisting of agriculturists, labourers, craftsmen and others. The people themselves, however, sometimes refer to themselves as wong sing ora duwé, 'the have-nots', presumably in contrast to wong sing duwé, 'the haves'. The significance of this designation is that people perceive that they lack the means to advance in the modern world, either by acquiring the goods
pertaining to modernity or by paying for an education or training enabling them to break out of the circle of poverty.

Finally, the information is relevant to the time when the observations were made, initially in 1983, and again in 1986, and not any other time. There is therefore a certain discrepancy possible in theory, if comparisons are made with details collected by others at earlier dates.

Having set out these principles applying to a description that claims to fulfil scholarly standards, it is also necessary to formulate the goals one is aiming at. The description hopes to be more than a mere list of terms with glosses; its value should lie just as much in the patterns it reveals. Aims thus include identifying underlying principles and showing which relationships are regarded as significant by citing the term used, the assumption being that where an item is functional in a culture or social system a term will also exist to designate it, and conversely where no such function exists a term for it will also be absent. However, alongside this assumption it also happens that situations or relationships can be covered more by theory than by practice: e.g. a rule may apply to a case which in fact does not occur. As always, it is the informants' opinions which are final; these can be supplied as given by informants, in order to provide a basis for interpretation. Such an interpretation remains secondary, and the conclusions drawn must be clearly traceable to the data of direct observation in the field in order to be of any use.

In view of the vastness of the social environment, there have to be ways of classifying the people we meet. There are several ways, but possibly the most basic distinction to be made is that between awak dhéwé, 'one of us', and wong liya, 'someone else'. The criterion is simply whether a person is related to the speaker or not. Another expression for wong liya, suggesting that a person is not related at all and therefore a complete stranger, is liyan drayan. So this leads us to seek a definition for relatedness and what constitutes belonging to the family.

A term of general application to describe 'relatives, persons related to oneself' is sanak-sedulur. This is suggestive of variety: relatives, no matter how related. A term which can be translated with 'family' is brayat, but again the borders are unclear; it can refer to a nuclear family or household, or be extended to include the descendants of a common pair of ancestors, e.g. great-grandparents, hence what is termed a kindred. Sometimes the word premili (or permili, pamili, from Dutch 'familie') is also used for a vaguely defined group of relatives.

Membership of a brayat is reckoned in both lines, through males and females equally, so that it can be called bilateral. There are no family or clan names passed down in either line, but when a father gives his son (or possibly son-in-law) an adult name at his marriage, this may include an element of his own name (e.g. Natawiharja: Natasaputra), or a father
may give his sons names which all resemble each other (e.g. Hartaya, Haryata, Haryana).

Each Javanese individual has in the course of his or her life several names. A man begins with a childhood name (jeneng cilik), gets an adult name (jeneng tuwa) at maturity, will have a nickname (paraban), and will be known to friends and neighbours by his teknonym (ketelah nganak), which is taken from the name of his eldest child, either son or daughter. The same applies to a woman (jeneng cilik, paraban, ketelah nganak), with the difference that she does not receive a jeneng tuwa of her own but shares her husband’s; her jeneng cilik is then not used again except within the immediate family, for example by her siblings. Hence, while descent is definitely bilateral, there is a stress on males because of their role as bread-winner and head of the household. Further, it should be noted that in Java children do not suffix the name of their father, as is done in some parts of Indonesia in imitation of the Arab practice (using bin ‘son of’ or binti ‘daughter of . . .’), and perhaps now also under the influence of the Western system of family names.

Those who marry into the family as husbands or wives are also members, being termed kadang katut, and that bond becomes even stronger when the couple have children, as those children are unambiguously members by descent. (In special circumstances even intimate friends can be ‘adopted’ into the family, assuming relationships appropriate to their place by age within the birth-order.) There is no sharp limit to family relations (sanak-sedulur), but in practice beyond the degree of third cousin (mindho, see below) the link has been forgotten. Those who have lost touch with their relatives are said to be kepatèn obor, lit. ‘their torch has gone out’, a metaphor suggesting that they no longer continue the line of descent.

For the sake of completeness another kin group could be mentioned, even though this is not common in the countryside. This is the trah⁴, an organization open to all who can show themselves to be descended (in any line) from an ancestor from the rather distant past, a figure prominent in history or religion. An example is the Trah Ki Ageng Mangir, who is a well-remembered figure from the early history of Mataram (16th century).

From an anthropological point of view it is curious that there does not seem to exist a term referring exclusively to the nuclear family. The word somah can be used for counting nuclear families for statistical purposes, and each somah has one head, indicated by the Indonesian term kepala. In Javanese, the only way to indicate the nuclear family is to say Pak Anu saanak-bojoné, ‘Mr X with his wife and children’. A group of slightly wider composition is wong saomah, ‘everyone under the same roof’, and this can include not just parents and their children but also spouses of children, siblings of parents, grandparents and even a servant, all providing they are not independent (in the sense of having their own
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hearth). The term kulawarga for 'family' also exists, but this is either literary and formal or influenced by Indonesian keluarga, the term for family in both broad and narrow senses.

The following step is to show how relationships within the family are defined by referring to the relevant term. The best way to do this is by means of a diagram. It should be noted that a distinction has to be made between terms of reference and terms of address, as in a few cases these differ. (All terms given are Ngoko or basic Javanese; for Krama, polite, and Krama Inggil, honorific, see below.)

Javanese Kinship Terms (Reference)

The diagram takes Ego as point of reference. In an upward direction, father is bapak and mother is simbok or mbok. Parents' siblings (aunts and uncles) are distinguished: the terms vary as to whether the sibling (male or female) is older or younger than either father or mother. An elder brother of father or mother is pak dhé; an elder sister of father or
mother is mbok dhé (dhé being an abbreviation from gedhé, ‘great’). The term siwa (from si uwa) for an elder sibling of either father or mother, while still used by some families, is being replaced by pak dhé and mbok dhé or bu dhé. Note that pak dhé and bu dhé do not apply to grandparents, as asserted by Koentjaraningrat (1957:84 and 1984:273); the normal Central Javanese usage is also the same as the East Javanese (Geertz 1961:155). A younger brother of father or mother is pak lik; and a younger sister of father or mother is mbok cilik or bu lik (lik being an abbreviation from cilik, ‘small’). In practice, however, both are reduced to just lik.

The term paman for a younger brother of father or mother, although found in the literature (Koentjaraningrat 1957:79 fails to make a distinction between older or younger here), is now very rare. Likewise, the term bibi (not bibiq as Koentjaraningrat 1957:79) for a younger sister of father or mother has ceased to be used.

Ego is a prunan (nephew/niece) to a pak dhé or mbok dhé, and Ego is keponakan to a pak lik or bu lik. While the term keponakan is well known, it is curious that both Koentjaraningrat and Geertz fail to mention the term prunan, which is by no means archaic (vo, verouderd) as Pigeaud (1938:483) suggests, but common in our area.

One’s grandparents of either sex are referred to as simbah (or mbah); to specify the sex, the Krama Inggil terms kakung (‘male’) and putri (‘female’) are often used, out of deference to their age. The term for grandparent is extended to include all great-uncles and great-aunts. A great-grandparent is mbah buyut; the terms for higher generations, up to a distance of seven from Ego, exist more in theory than in practice.

Returning to one’s own generation level, there is asymmetry here: an elder brother is one’s kangmas, an elder sister mbakyu, but both younger brother and sister are adhi.

The children of all the siblings of either father or mother are termed one’s nak-sanak (English ‘first cousin’), and are the same to one’s own siblings. It is striking that this term is lacking in the account provided by Geertz for East Java, where the terms for lower generations (see below) move up one place, so that we can conclude that there is a major difference between Central and East Java on this point.

All children are anak. Moving down a generation, the children of Ego’s nak-sanak are misan (English ‘second cousin’) to one’s own children, so one’s own misan are related through common great-grandparents. The meaning given by Horne (1974:460) for misan, ‘second cousin, i.e. child of one’s grandmother’s first cousin’, is confusing. Going down another generation, the grandchildren of Ego’s nak-sanak are mindho (English ‘third cousin’) to one’s own grandchildren, and so one’s own mindho are related through common great-great-grandparents. At this point a family relationship ceases to function, although it is true that terms exist for descendants up to seven genera-
tions removed from Ego, symmetrically with the seven generations upwards, the terms also being the same from buyut up to gantung siwur. Thus putu is grandchild, buyut is great-grandchild and so on. These terms cover all relatives of the same generation level.

One might speculate that the term misan, being from pisn 'once', and mindho, being from pindho 'twice', as used in East Java might represent the more original system for designating these degrees of relationship, so that nak-sanak as found in Central Java forms a more recent insertion. Further evidence, however, is lacking. Both Koentjaraningrat and Geertz give the forms misanan and mindhoan, with a suffix -an, but these were not recorded in our area.

It is now time to check on the appropriate terms of address. This is an important matter, as in social contact one should be able to use the right term of relationship as a token of respect; interestingly, there exists a verb, njangkar, meaning 'to address without the proper title, by name only'. Use of the correct title shows that we are able to accord the person addressed his or her proper place in the social world.

The following list gives the term of reference followed by the term of address, which functions as a title. Note that some terms are used for politeness' sake to persons who are not related at all. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Address/Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bapak</td>
<td>pak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simbok</td>
<td>mbok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pak dhé</td>
<td>pak dhé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbok dhé</td>
<td>mbok dhé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siwa</td>
<td>wa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pak lik</td>
<td>lik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bu lik</td>
<td>lik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kangmas</td>
<td>kang; mas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbakyu</td>
<td>mbakyu; mbak; yu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adhi</td>
<td>dhik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simbah</td>
<td>mbah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anak</td>
<td>nak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>putu</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that when speaking to a second person, the term used to refer to a third person is the one which would be correct from that second person's viewpoint, not from one's own. So, for example, when I speak to you about 'Mbak Mar', I mean your 'Elder Sister' Mar, not mine – to me she may be something different.

As far as cousins are concerned, the principle of seniority has to be applied in deciding what term of address to use. On the level of one's own generation, nak-sanak use the terms for siblings (i.e. elder/younger
brother/sister), depending on their ‘seniority’, rather than their relative (actual) age. So the children of one’s pak dhé and mbok dhé are addressed as mas and mbakyu, and the children of one’s pak lik and bu lik are addressed as dhik. Similarly, people who are misan to each other will address each other as mas/mbakyu or dhik, and will address each other’s parents as either pak dhé/mbok dhé or pak lik/bu lik, again depending on seniority, that is, on birth-order in the first generation. And the same is repeated with people who are mindho to each other, depending on birth-order in the great-grandparent generation.

This principle is expressed in the phrase awuné tuwa, lit. ‘their ashes are older’, which means that on each successive generation level people are ‘classified’ as older or younger siblings according to their line of descent from older or younger siblings in the first generation. A term that was given for ‘branch’ of a family, i.e. lines descending from different siblings, is ombyokan (lit. ‘bunch’). The principle of seniority will be seen to be relevant to the rules governing the choice of marriage partner (see below).

For the sake of completeness, Krama and Krama Inggil equivalents of kinship terms (where such exist) can now be listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ngoko/Krama</th>
<th>Krama Inggil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bapak</td>
<td>rama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbok</td>
<td>ibu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbah</td>
<td>éyang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anak</td>
<td>putra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>putu</td>
<td>wayah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adhi</td>
<td>rayi</td>
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</table>

Affinal relations now have to be discussed. When a person marries, he/she and those around him/her enter into a new relationship, which of course brings the need for new terms, as follows.

bojo: husband; wife (thus: spouse)

ipé: brother/sister-in-law (both sibling’s spouse and spouse’s sibling);
this can be further specified: mas ipé, mbakyu ipé, or adhi ipé

maratuwa: father/mother-in-law; this can be specified with bapak or ibu

mantu: son/daughter-in-law

bésan: one’s child’s parents-in-law (i.e. parents of a child’s spouse);
according to Koentjaraningrat (1957:80) also ‘child’s sibling’s spouse’, but this is not confirmed by the dictionaries or by informants

pripéan: spouse’s sibling’s spouse, i.e. the relationship of persons who are said to padha ngalap, have taken a sibling as spouse;
N.B. not pripé, as Koentjaraningrat 1957:80; the meaning given by Horne 1974, ‘in-law(s)’, is unhelpful.

Note further that the spouse of a pak dhé is of course mbok dhé and vice
versa, and similarly with a *pak lik*; the spouse of anyone termed *mbah* is automatically also *mbah*.

The terms of address for these affinal relations are:
- *bojo*: *mas* to husband; *dhik* to wife
- *ipé*: *mas*, *mbakyu* or *dhik*, depending on the nature of the link — if through an older sibling or husband, then *mas/mbakyu*, if through a younger sibling or wife, then *dhik*
- *maratuwa*: *bapak* to father-in-law; *ibu* to mother-in-law
- *mantu*: *nak*
- *bésan*: *mas/mbakyu* to parents-in-law of a daughter; *dhik* to parents-in-law of a son
- *pripéan*: *mas*, *mbakyu* or *dhik*, depending on the link, as with *ipé*.

When a man and a woman marry, they may choose someone related or unrelated. In the latter case there is no question of prohibitions, but if they happen to be related then their actual relationship is relevant for determining whether the union is approved or not.

As a general principle, when relatives marry the man should be *awuné tuwa*, i.e. descended from an older sibling. Otherwise he would have to address his wife as *mbakyu*, ‘elder sister’, and that is considered impossible.

As far as degree is concerned, it is thought that *nak-sanak* cousins should in fact not marry, but may and often do, providing that their relationship is not what is termed *pancer lanang*, ‘via the male line’, i.e. descended from two brothers, and of course provided the man’s line is senior. If the relationship is *pancer wadon*, ‘via the female line’, i.e. descended from two sisters, there is no problem, again provided the man’s line is senior.

Interestingly enough, at the next degree, that of *misan*, there exists a strict prohibition on marriage (although the nature of the sanctions against it is unclear). At the degree of *mindho*, however, there is no restriction, providing the man’s line is senior. This is in fact the preferred kind of marriage, as indicated in the saying *misan dadi bésan, mindho dadi bojo*, i.e. ‘second cousins become parents of spouses, third cousins become spouses’. The purpose of this is said to be to *ngumpulké balung pisah*, ‘gather up the scattered bones’, i.e. to bring the different lines of descent together again. The fact that a prohibition comes at the *misan* level may confirm our supposition that the *nak-sanak* level is a later insertion, as one would expect a restriction on marriage at the closest degree of relationship.

Horne (1974:45) gives the expression *awuné tuwa*, although the explanation is not entirely clear. Geertz (1961:59) gives *pancer wali* for our *pancer lanang*.

The term *bésan* mentioned above refers to the relationship of the parents of two people who marry: the parents of the bride and bridegroom are *bésanan*, i.e. stand in the relation of *bésan* to each other. The
fact that in Java this relationship has a name seems to show that it is socially relevant; no special duties are indicated, however, and the relation is one of mutual respect. Apart from this, the bésan relationship has a significance in defining two prohibited patterns of marriage. These are:

1. a relationship termed tumbak-tumbakan, whereby the parents would become bésan twice, the son of each side taking the other’s younger sister, thus:

   parents  $\Delta + O \leftrightarrow \text{bésan} \rightarrow \Delta + O$  parents
   
   son  $\Delta$  $\Delta$  son
   
   daughter  $O$  $O$  daughter

2. a second relationship, termed dhadhung pinuntir, lit. ‘rope given an extra twist’, which is doubly prohibited. Here the two sets of parents would again become bésan twice, but the daughter of each side takes the other’s younger brother, thus:

   parents  $\Delta + O \leftrightarrow \text{bésan} \rightarrow \Delta + O$  parents
   
   daughter  $O$  $O$  daughter
   
   son  $\Delta$  $\Delta$  son

It is also said that children who are nunggal suson, i.e. have been fed from the same breast, or who are nunggal welad, i.e. whose umbilical cord was cut with the same bamboo knife, may not marry, presumably because they count as brother and sister. However, it is interesting that kembar dhampit, twins of opposite sex, are said to be bojo paringané Pangérän, ‘God-given spouses’, and hence should be married, although my informant could not recall such a marriage ever having occurred in practice.

In order to complete the picture of relations, although not strictly pertaining to kinship, the following terms may be added. A step-child is an anak kuwalon, a step-mother is mbok kuwalon, and a step-father is bapak kuwalon. This kind of relationship is common enough in Javanese society, in view of the number of divorces and remarriages. A co-wife in a polygamous marriage, whether from the viewpoint of the first or...
second wife, is the *maru* of the other. This is, however, quite rare. An adopted child is an *anak pupon*.

For persons in an indirect family relation (‘actually not connected at all’), for example a spouse’s sibling’s spouse’s sibling, the following expression is applicable: *munthu katutan sambel*, lit. ‘the pounder has sambel sticking to it’, i.e. accidentally brought along but not actually belonging. The expression *mambu-mambu*, ‘just the smell but not the substance’ has a similar idea: only vaguely connected.

The function of kinship terms is to define the position of individuals within the network of consanguineal and affinal relations, so that a person knows in what category to place another with whom he has to interact. This in turn determines the behaviour that is expected from us, and what we can expect from others, based on a hierarchical structure ranging from high to low status. The higher the status, the more respect that is required; respectful behaviour is due to those who are older, whether by age or seniority, and who are less intimately associated. The converse is, of course, familiarity and intimacy. The terms of address serve to symbolize or summarize the relationship, in combination with the appropriate social behaviour and bearing. We have seen that more terms exist, and are used, in Javanese kinship relations than in Western, suggesting that relationships within the family are proportionately more important, perhaps not surprising in view of the nature of Javanese rural society.

This study has attempted to be relatively full, within its own frame of reference, giving all the cases that might occur. The terminology is that in use in a certain, identifiable community at a clearly defined time, but this does not imply that other terms may not be current in other areas or in other social settings; there is ample room for similar studies taken from different regions, so that comparisons can be made showing the distribution of terms.

There is also room for comparison over time, in view of the possibility that shifts are in progress whereby one term is being replaced by another, so that innovations are adopted from other areas or classes, and so the question arises as to who is more likely to be innovative or more conservative in the matter of kinship terminology.

For the time being, the above notes have pointed out some discrepancies with the existing literature and have supplemented their accounts with new information, in the hope of illuminating such underlying principles as seniority as a basis for understanding the functioning of the Javanese kinship system.
NOTES

1 In Pigeaud’s words (1938:1V): ‘Dialectische woorden en woordvormen, d.w.z. die, welke niet thuis zijn in de standaardtaal, het taaleigen van de stad Soerakarta, zowel als eigenaardige boerse of plattelandse woorden, zijn aangeduid als gewestelijk’.

2 For this term Pigeaud (1938) gives liyan kebrayan.

3 Gericke & Roorda (1901) give: ‘Braya of brayar, maagschap, huisgezin’.

4 For more information on the trah, see Sjafri Sairin 1982.

5 The si found in simbok, simbah and siwa is used to refer to one’s own family (‘our . . . ’). Mbok is used by the majority, while those who have pretensions to a slightly higher status, due to education or wealth, prefer bu for ‘mother’. In some families the term nuk is used for ‘mother’.

6 Pigeaud (1938) gives under misan: ‘1 gw neef of nicht (afstammeling v dezelfde grootvader, -moeder; 2 of pernah misan: neef of nicht (afstammeling v dezelfde over-grootvader, -moeder)’.

7 Certain kinship terms are used for politeness’ sake to persons who are clearly not related in any way: Pak (for an older man); Bu (for an older lady); Mas (for a young man); Mbak (for a young lady); Yu (for a young woman of low status); Dhik (for any younger person).

WORKS REFERRED TO


