

Peaceful Societies

Alternatives to Violence and War

Bruce D. Bonta

Foreword by Dale Hess

CENTER FOR GLOBAL
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In memoriam
Bruce D. Bonta
1941-2021

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Foreword

By Dale Hess

I would like to start with an Acknowledgment of Country. I live, work, play and worship on the lands of the First Nations Peoples. In my case it is the Boonwurrung People of the Kulin Nation. For millennia they have been the traditional custodians, caring for the lands and waters in the region surrounding Narm-Narm (Port Phillip Bay) in southern Victoria, Australia. However, the arrival of European settlers has had a devastating impact on them. Much of their land and culture has been lost to them through colonization; their families, communities, and connections to their ancestors have been destroyed; their children have been taken from them; they have suffered the injustice of racism, and economic, social, psychological, and spiritual deprivation. I lament these injustices and recognise their pain, and seek ways to promote reconciliation, mutual trust, and solidarity in our common journey. I pay my respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

I am honoured to be asked to write the Foreword to this book by my friend, Bruce Bonta.

I was a fellow student with Bruce in eighth grade and throughout high school. I learned a lot from him. He was very knowledgeable about classical music and quite skilled in backyard badminton.

Bruce loved studying history and he loved books. One day, as a high school student, while browsing in a bookstore, he came across a copy of Morrison and Commager's two-volume classical history of the United States,¹ which he purchased. This turned out to be a very useful purchase. Our high school United States history teacher, in order to keep ahead of the students, read an outside book in addition to the required text. By coincidence the outside book he chose was the same Morrison and Commager text that Bruce had bought. The teacher was keen to encourage class participation and recitation. Every time there was an interesting and funny story connected to the lesson, Bruce's hand would shoot up and he would entertain the class with the story, much to the annoyance and frustration of

¹ Morrison, Samuel E. and Henry S. Commager. 1956. *The Growth of the American Republic*, 2 Vols. New York: Oxford University Press.

the teacher who had desperately wanted to tell the story himself. Sitting on the other side of the room I had a good vantage point to watch events unfold and see the level of the teacher's frustration rise. This little drama made the class very enjoyable.

Bruce continued his study of history at Bucknell University in central Pennsylvania. There he learned how ideas, values, events, and relationships influenced the dynamics and cultures of societies. He developed his research skills and critical thinking to evaluate historical evidence and to identify common themes. At Bucknell he met another student, Marcia Myers, who shared his passion for history. They found that they also shared another common interest, the love of nature and the importance of conserving this wonderful gift. In 1962 Bruce and Marcia married.

A third area of interest for Bruce, besides history and nature conservation, was books and libraries. He worked as a librarian in Washington, DC, at the Library of Congress, in Waterville, ME, at Colby College, and in University Park, PA, at The Pennsylvania State University. Bruce earned a Masters Degree in Library Science from the University of Maine.

It was Bruce and Marcia's return to central Pennsylvania that offered them the opportunity to purchase a remote farm that allowed them to draw these threads together. Their farm was set in woodlands one and a half miles from the highway. In this setting immersed in nature Marcia developed her observational and writing skills as a naturalist, documenting the cycles of the natural habitat and its wildlife. Bruce enjoyed being grounded in a setting of natural beauty and working as a reference librarian at Penn State. There were also challenges. Maintaining the long driveway into the property, particularly at times of heavy rain and snowfall, meant Bruce had to learn new skills such as how to operate heavy equipment. There were cultural challenges, too, with pressures on the land from logging interests, developers, and hunters. These pressures led Bruce and Marcia to reflect on what their vision of peacefulness and living in harmony with others and with creation meant for them. They discovered what Barbara Deming calls the two hands of nonviolence.² They

² The two hands of nonviolence: one hand is held up and shows an outward facing palm signifying, 'stop, I will not cooperate with your violence, injustice, or oppression'; simultaneously the other hand is lower and shows an open palm facing upward as it reaches out. It signifies that 'I respect you and reach out to your humanity.' Deming, Barbara. 1971. *Revolution & Equilibrium*. New York: Grossman Publications. The image is similar to the Buddha Mudra Abhaya.

consistently promoted a message of land stewardship and found there were other landowners who were receptive to their message.

What does peace mean? There are various ways of approaching the meaning of peace. Bruce was influenced by the great Indian leader, Mohandas Gandhi, who believed in the inherent goodness of human beings and their capacity to live nonviolently.³ Humans, Gandhi felt, have the capacity to resolve or transform conflicts through the principles of nonviolence which can be applied to all levels of relationships, from those between individuals to the family, to the community, and to nations. Nonviolence as a way of life would lead to peace with justice, respectful relationships, development without exploitation, and care for the environment. These ideas influenced the renowned peace researcher, Johan Galtung,⁴ and the philosopher and environmentalist, Arne Naess.⁵

The Quaker economist, Kenneth Boulding, approached peace from a systems point of view. He examined the institutions and structures that would minimise the probability of war and lead to a stable peace.⁶

Bruce's interests, however, were more closely aligned with those of sociologist, Elise Boulding, Kenneth's wife. She studied the cultures of peace.⁷ Gradually Bruce's fascination with the anthropology of peaceful societies grew to become the focus of his major research project as he approached retirement. He was inspired by the careful research of anthropologists such as Douglas P. Fry, Clayton and Carole Robarchek, Robert K. Dentan, Leslie Sponsel, Alberto Gomes, and others. Their work is described later in this volume.

Bruce wanted to tell others about what he had discovered and decided to write a book about peaceable societies. This book was later published as *Peaceful Peoples: An Annotated Bibliography*.⁸ Bruce shared with me his proposal for the book and his desire to create a website to share his research more widely. I was flattered that he asked for my opinion because I knew next to

³ Gandhi, Mahatma. 2008. *The Essential Writings*. New York: Oxford University P.

⁴ Galtung, Johan. 1996. *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*. London: Sage Publications.

⁵ Naess, Arne. 1988. "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises," *Ecologist* 18: 128-131.

⁶ Boulding, Kenneth. 1978. *Stable Peace*. Austin: University of Texas Press. Boulding,

Kenneth. 1962. *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory*. New York: Harper Brothers.

⁷ Boulding, Elise. 2000. *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

⁸ Bonta, Bruce D. 1993. *Peaceful Peoples: An Annotated Bibliography*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.

nothing. I was excited by the ideas he was suggesting and happily encouraged him to pursue them. We talked about various books and ways to get started.

His interest in other societies and exploring new places to study nature led him to travel widely. A particularly important trip was the four-month stay in Peru in 1985 with Marcia, Bruce's mother and his son Mark. It provided the opportunity for Bruce to visit the Andes, the Amazon rainforest, and the coastal desert in addition to the time he spent working in the library in Lima.

Bruce became a highly respected independent scholar and authority on peaceful peoples. He attended conferences and corresponded with other researchers. Sadly, he passed away in 2021 at age 80.

We will miss his presence, which was characterized by gentleness, humility, and a respect for others. His insights enriched our understanding. He kept us in touch with the pulse of research in this field.

He was keen to show that peaceful societies do exist, and he collected documentary evidence to prove his case. We are fortunate that the website Bruce created, and his research are still available online at the following link: <https://peacefulsocieties.uncg.edu/>. The website is now hosted and maintained by the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

The existence of peaceful societies is important.

Peaceful societies serve as exemplars for others to adopt, or to learn from and be inspired by to create their own models. They offer us hope.

Their existence demonstrates the truth of the quote by Kenneth Boulding⁹, **'anything that exists, is possible'**.

⁹ Boulding, Kenneth. 1957. *Segments of the economy, 1956, a symposium: the Fifth Economics-in-Action Program sponsored jointly by Republic Steel Corporation and Case Institute of Technology*. Cleveland: H. Allen.

Introduction

I have always been an awkward proponent of peace: I'm not a soapbox orator. I am most comfortable in quiet conversations or even quieter, in writing projects. I used to walk into neighborhood bookstores and, noticing signs indicating the sections of books on warfare and military history, would ask the clerk at the desk (making a jerk of myself of course) where are the peace books located? Gets people to think that of course we all know what peace is, but why don't we celebrate it as we do warfare and its history? But my foray into peaceful societies in the early 1990s changed my attitudes a bit. There are numerous ways of looking at peace and nonviolence, I learned. Why not figure out different ways of reaching out to others? Sometimes more recently I've had some successes. One example will suffice.

The conclusion of the annual Christmas Bird Count for the Juniata Valley Audubon Society here in Central Pennsylvania has always been an evening dinner, when birders can get together and talk about the birds they have seen and counted during the day. My wife Marcia and our three sons are all more avid birders than I am, but I enjoy the ambience of our forest life and watching the birds around the house. At one bird-count dinner a few years ago, the pleasant lady sitting next to me at the large restaurant table, after learning I was a retired Penn State librarian, asked a polite question. "So, Bruce, what are you doing now?" I suspected she was thinking ahead toward her own retirement, though she had professed that she loved her job as an outdoor educator. But I had to answer the question. I replied that I run a website related to peaceful societies and write about them from time to time in other venues.

I was prepared for her next question—I've heard it many times. "But what exactly are peaceful societies?" I gave the lady the same reply I've given so often: "isn't it sad that we have to ask questions like that." I added that if I had said that I study violent societies, or that I maintain a website on the history of wars, she would have understood instantly. "The sadness, to me, is that the peaceful societies are so little known," I said. Unlike most people, she didn't change the subject, instead asking me for more information. Her husband, my wife, and the others around the table continued their conversations—about birds—so I went on to explain to the lady how

warfare and violence have come to be accepted as the norm by most people and the existence of their opposite, societies where violence is strongly condemned, is virtually unknown.

Unlike many previous occasions, when these kinds of conversations end in awkward silences, this lady continued to ask questions and we conversed for the next hour or so about the conditions that foster peacefulness among groups like the Paliyans and the Piaroa, the Ladakhi and the Lepchas. Finally, with desserts nearly finished, the count compiler began the closing ritual of the evening: tallying all the species and numbers counted by the birders within the count circle that day, in phylogenetic order of course, which ended the quiet discussion of peaceful societies.

The curious lady did not bring up any of the familiar arguments—that violence supposedly exists in all human societies—perhaps because she was just too polite to contradict me. In any case, when people want to argue that all human societies are intrinsically violent, they simply draw their samples from the ones that have strong histories of violence and warfare (ignoring the ones that do not, of course) and look for data from among that large group. This, that, or the other thing causes violence to proliferate in human societies.

But a big question remains for this book to address: is it possible to draw conclusions about the possibilities of building a more peaceful world by studying the peaceful societies? In response, the book will attempt to demonstrate that the peaceful societies are inspiring and that they frequently shed light on difficult aspects of the paths to peacefulness; but there are no good, easy, or obvious answers. These groups of people do provide inspiration about possibilities, however. The careful reader should be inspired to look for ways forward on many different issues related to building a more peaceful world by studying these societies. If the Ifaluk can build a much more peaceful island by carefully changing the symbols they adhere to, maybe, just maybe, people in the United States could too. That sort of thing.

But looking at peaceful societies in hopes of finding unifying, universal characteristics—for instance, that they all treat women equally or that they all love and respect the earth—is simply a frustrating exercise. The only universal for the ten societies portrayed in this book is that they all are strongly opposed to violence and that they do all they can to prevent it. Other issues don't always fall together neatly. For just one example, most of the peaceful societies show a high regard for women but there are many contradictions. To mention the Ifaluk Islanders again, women on this highly peaceful island have a lower social status than men do. When they walk past men indoors, they bend over at the waist to show their deference. More about this later.

Furthermore, while warfare and violence are easy to quantify and study, loving, peaceful behaviors are much harder to come to terms with. Peacefulness by its very nature is unquantifiable, in contrast to violence. Homicides can be counted but hugs are much harder to record effectively. The number of murders per 100,000 people per year is the standard way to measure the violence or nonviolence of a community or a society or a state. The best we can do to get a grasp on the realities of nonviolence in the peaceful societies is to look at the ones with very effective values opposing warfare and violence, ones where there is strong evidence that they rarely if ever react (or in the past tense, reacted) violently to conflicts, in order to see what is outstanding about each one of them, and to see what they suggest. It may not be measurable science but it may, to people who are receptive to new ideas about promoting peace, suggest other ways of approaching the violence that characterizes much of the world we live in today. The peaceful societies do suggest alternatives to violence and warfare.

The choices of peaceful societies to include in this book were driven not only by the available literature about their peacefulness but also by what their experiences might say to readers in the rest of the (more violent) world. For each society has had many positive and negative experiences, but some have tended to stand out above the others. Those more outstanding events are examined and related to the lives of outsiders and, for some, to the experiences of Americans. Those comparisons with the outside, broader world are examined in the “Intersections” that close out each chapter—where the salient features of that society are examined against the broader literature. In essence, they examine how the peaceful people intersect with the rest of humanity, at least for one factor.

For instance, since we’ve already mentioned the Ifaluk, how can a mega-society such as the United States learn anything from a few hundred Micronesians living on an extremely isolated island in the Pacific? The answer is to look at their respective attitudes. In the United States, the willingness to fight is a defining characteristic of the country. Fighting and warfare to defeat our enemies and defend our freedoms is a commonplace observation of most American small town newspapers. The difference between Ifaluk and America is not so much that one is a small, isolated, island society and the other a huge metropolitan country. The difference is that one distances itself from its past, treats violence as something that people simply don’t do any longer. Its stories serve as reminders of the way people were in ancient times but are no longer. They no longer believe in their past. The American nation, instead, glorifies the stories of its founding and seeks to keep them

current, part of the fabric of contemporary life. America continually tries to reinvent itself in the image of its myths. The world is a violent place and we must remain violent in order to retain our free, democratic way of life. Or so we tell ourselves. The Ifaluk don't prove America wrong but they do challenge Americans to rethink the place of our mythology in our country today.

It is possible to change, to become a people that cherishes peacefulness, as the Ifaluk and some other societies have done. An important first step would be to focus on the positive stories of our accomplishments. We could celebrate, with our fireworks on the Fourth of July, our freedom of religion, our Bill of Rights, and our peace movements that have courageously stood up for non-killing approaches to international relations. We could cherish our history of activism that has sought social justice for the poor. We could honor, with our rockets and firecrackers, American pioneers in the movement to change the world through peaceful nonviolence, such as Thoreau and King did.

Of course, churches, community organizations, and government agencies already implement many programs that help build a more peaceful and just world. Numerous organizations promote respect and support for others rather than repression and violence. A couple should be mentioned briefly. The DEEP Network, which their website [globaldeepnetwork.org] says stands for "The Dialogue, Empathic Engagement & Peacebuilding Network ... a global community of peace workers, researchers and policy makers committed to a peaceful and ecologically regenerative world," is an organization founded by Alberto Gomes, a scholar who has done extensive fieldwork among the Orang Asli societies of Malaysia. An equally important group, the Center for Global Nonkilling, seeks, according to its website [nonkilling.org], "to promote change toward the measurable goal of a killing-free world." Founded by Hawaiian political scientist Glenn D. Paige, CGNK has many accomplishments, not least of which are the numerous important works they have published, several of which are cited in the references of this book. There are many other worthwhile organizations out there.

Important as all these individuals and groups certainly are, people need to re-examine their own attitudes toward violence. Peace is possible. Peaceful societies do exist. One or more of them might serve as inspirations for changes in other, more violent, societies. Elise Boulding, one of the leading American peace scholars and activists of the past century, often advocated for envisioning a more peaceful world. Dr. Boulding was very supportive of this author in the early days of the Peaceful Societies website. She graciously consented to serve as website patron. She agreed that the evidence presented by

the peaceful people is overwhelming—developing and maintaining a peaceful society is certainly possible. There are many ways of achieving such a goal if true peacefulness is to be achieved. But there are far more ways of achieving that end than the 10 societies portrayed in this book exemplify. And far more ways of interpreting the data than just those proposed by this author. This book represents just a beginning.

I. Avoiding Violence, the Lepchas

A Mythic Peace Treaty

After Gyad 'Bum Bsags, the eldest son of a Tibetan prince, used his powers to singlehandedly raise the four major support columns of a Buddhist temple, a letter fell from the sky. It said that Gyad, or a member of his family, would enter a region to the south of Tibet known as Sikkim—today a state of northern India—and foster goodness in the world. So Gyad, his father, and his brothers traveled off in search of Sikkim. These mythic ancestors of the Tibetan Buddhist Bhutia people began their migration into the land of the Lepchas.¹

Gyad 'Bum Bsags—some sources suggest his name was Khye Bumsa or Khye Bhumsa—had a variety of adventures and misadventures with his family and followers during their journey toward Sikkim. At one spot, the old prince, his father, died and a lama had to perform the funeral rites. At another, a Bhutanese man challenged him to wrestle, since the strength of Gyad had become widely known. In the match, Gyad ripped an arm off the challenger. The Bhutias were not to be messed with. In revenge, the Bhutanese man sent an evil spirit to kill Gyad but the new leader of the Bhutia people sacrificed a yak, which persuaded the spirit to leave him alone. Gyad stayed with his followers near the border of Sikkim at a place called Chumbi for three years.

But he was not able to have any children, he decided to proceed into the unknown mountains and seek assistance from a Lepcha leader there named Thekong Tek, who might be able to help. Once in Sikkim, he encountered an

¹ The mythic history of the movement of the Bhutias into the land of the Lepchas is told by several sources: Mullard, Saul. 2011. *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*. Leiden and Boston: Brill; “Kabi Lungchok” in the Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabi_Lungchok; “Lepcha Festival Celebrates Peaceful Coexistence.” Peaceful Societies website, News & Reviews, September 2, 2010: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2010/09/02/lepcha-festival-celebrates-peaceful-coexistence/>

old man and his wife who denied that they knew anyone by that name. But Gyad was suspicious so he tracked the old people to their house where he found them sitting on their thrones—he had found Thekong Tek and his wife after all. Over drinks of chang, Gyad discussed his problem and the elderly man agreed to help. So Gyad returned to Chumbi where his wife soon gave birth to three sons in succession. After the birth of the third, Gyad decided to return to Sikkim and give a feast of thanks to Thekong Tek but, as it happened, Tek had decided to journey north to visit the Bhutia chief.

They met at a place called Dong tsa dong, or Kabi Lungchok, where the two leaders held a great feast to celebrate their friendship and eternal peace. They reinforced the friendship between the two peoples with a number of oaths, a treaty of blood brotherhood, and sacrifices of animals. They called on the gods and the ancestors to witness this declaration of eternal peacefulness. As the Bhutias continued migrating south into Sikkim, Gyad and his descendants extended their rule over the land that had been the exclusive domain of the Lepchas, but a peaceful harmony was maintained and extended.

This meeting place, Kabi Lungchok, located along a main highway about 11 miles north of Gangtok, the state capitol of Sikkim, is today marked by stone monuments, the Lungchok at Kabi. It is the site of an annual celebration called Pang Lhabsol, one of Sikkim's foremost festivals, held by the Lepchas and the Bhutias to mark the eternal peace declared hundreds of years ago. During the festival celebrated there in 2010, a man told a reporter, "Kabi Lung-chok holds significance for the treaty of blood and brotherhood signed by Khye Bhumsa and Thekong Tek in the presence of the guardian deity. Today is special to offer prayers for unity, prosperity and lasting peace for the Sikkimese people."

Relations between the notably passive Lepchas and the somewhat more aggressive Bhutias have remained very positive over the years—and the centuries—since the Lepcha people signed that peace treaty and ceded control of Sikkim to the invading Buddhist people. But a lot more goes into constructing peaceful conditions within the Lepcha society. About 45,000 Lepchas, mostly farmers who raise a variety of crops and keep some livestock, live in the Dzongu Reserve of North Sikkim, in other areas of the state, in West Bengal state to the south of Sikkim, and across the borders of India in Bhutan and Nepal.

Out of all the numerous characteristics that foster peacefulness in the different societies portrayed in this book, probably the outstanding one for this society is that they are passionate about avoiding violence. Their culture suppresses aggression and competition almost completely. Cooperation is

such an essential aspect of their village life that differences between rich and poor normally do not become too great. Assistance with farm work is repaid with help in return; only people who do not happen to own their own land are paid in wages. The exception for the farmers is that they pay money for assistance with raising their primary cash crop, cardamom.² Later in this chapter we will discuss a recent conflict that the Lepchas handled by avoiding all signs of violence. But other background is necessary first.

One way the Lepchas foster peaceful family and village relations is by effectively avoiding quarreling, which they strongly disapprove of. The people are highly tolerant of one another's sexual activities; they feel very little jealousy toward others. When adultery occurs discretely, the aggrieved spouse will not pay attention; only if it is practiced openly and flagrantly will the partner appeal to the elected leader of the village. Disputes also may occur, though very rarely, over land boundaries. In fact, the only aggression that the Lepchas exhibit is toward supernatural beings, and it comes from the spirits. When Lepchas have had to deal with aggression from outsiders, they have historically retreated and hidden in the forests. In their mythology, they get the better of their enemies by cunning rather than by violence. Furthermore, theft and crime are rare in Lepcha villages, though petty thievery, such as stealing raincoats, umbrellas, and slippers is increasing. In the remote villages, people rarely lock their houses. Theft remains an alien aspect of life. However, lying—perjury—is considered to be a very serious crime, one which casts a permanent stain on a family's reputation that lasts for generations.³

Quarrels are a concern for the entire village, which used to hold a ceremony annually to prevent them for another year. The first action of any lamaist ceremony was to invoke and then destroy the quarrel demon, though it appears as if those ceremonies are no longer practiced. However, when quarrels do occur, mutual friends may prepare feasts to try to end the problems. If they fail, exorcisms are tried against the malevolent spirits that are causing the problems. Conflicts that cannot be resolved within families or the larger patrilineal groups are referred to ad hoc groups of village elders who attempt to resolve the disputes. Only rarely, if conflict resolu-

² Gorer, Geoffrey. 1967. *Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, 2d edition. New York: Basic Books.

³ Gorer, Geoffrey. 1967. *Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, 2d edition. New York: Basic Books; Sharma, Anita. 2013. *The Lepchas of Dzongu Region. in Sikkim: A Narrative of Cultural Heritage and Folklore*. New Delhi: The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage and Aryan Books International.

tion at the local level is unsuccessful, will the parties to a dispute refer it to the next larger government level, the Panchayat.⁴

On a more positive note, the Lepchas are very generous with one another: whenever one anthropologist gave someone, an adult or a child, a gift that could be divided, such as a pack of cigarettes, the recipient would carefully divide the contents with everyone else present. They do not quarrel about the ownership of material objects and even children of three or four years old will reciprocate gifts from a visitor with gifts of their own. And in the category of unique attributes, anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer noted that love for the Lepchas is based on the satisfaction of mutual needs for food. If youngsters were asked if they loved their parents, they would respond that they do because they are well fed. A young man named Rigya admitted to him that he did not get along well with his new wife at first, but then he realized, when he came back to the house after a day of work and she had food ready for him, he loved her. He thought, “this is my wife and I am pleased in my belly.”⁵

Culture, Beliefs and Rituals

Fully understanding a peaceful society requires at least a brief description of the culture and beliefs that foster it. Similarly, understanding a relatively violent society such as that of the United States would require an examination of such rituals as the annual Super Bowl Sunday, the culture of gun ownership, and beliefs in the benevolence of American power and control over the rest of the world. Those are all, of course, facets of very complex issues, so it will suffice for now to describe briefly some cultural beliefs that undergird the relatively peaceful ways of the Lepcha people.

First of all, the word “Lepcha” is a misnomer, the mispronunciation of a term used for them by recent migrants to Sikkim from Nepal. They call themselves “Rongpas” (“Ravine Dwellers”) or Mutanchi Rongkup (“Mother’s Loved Ones”). Their animist beliefs predate the introduction of Buddhism. To some extent they continue to this day their nature worship and belief in spirits. The Long Chuk, the upright stones used by the Lepchas in

⁴ Gorer, Geoffrey. 1967. *Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, 2d edition. New York: Basic Books; Sharma, Anita. 2013. *The Lepchas of Dzongu Region in Sikkim: A Narrative of Cultural Heritage and Folklore*. New Delhi: The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage and Aryan Books International.

⁵ Gorer 1967 p. 84.

their religious activities—such as at Kabi Longchuk mentioned in the previous section—symbolize the huge bulk of Mt. Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak located in northern Sikkim. The massive, awesome mountain is eternally white and pure, an inexplicable but tangible presence that represents their conception of God. They use the Long Chuk to invoke the gods, appease the spirits, and sanctify everyday activities.⁶

The Lepcha shamans have traditionally preserved their ritualized knowledge of the cycle of life. High priests and priestesses of their faith, referred to as “Bon” or “Bone,” are seen as emissaries of the Mother Creator. They used to be present for all of the Lepcha rituals. They made offerings to appease the demons and spirits that kept alive the sacred Lepcha knowledge and culture. But the gradual disappearance of the shamans has lessened the remaining sense of identity in the society.

Dorjee Tshering Lepcha, who sits on his floor cross-legged every morning chanting, asking the spirits to forgive him for any intrusions he might make that day against nature, serves as a good example of the minority who remain committed to their traditional faith. He plays a tune on his flute to welcome the day and to add to the sincerity of his plea in advance for forgiveness. The room where he performs his daily ritual is spare, with only an altar in evidence. It is garlanded with leaves, fruits, and flowers, a small stool where he puts the manuscript for his daily prayers, and a cushion on which he sits. For human relationships with nature are extremely important to those Lepchas. Their prayers include all creatures, every blade of grass, every leaf, and all the waters from the lakes, from the rivers, and even from heaven. “Lepchas lived there peacefully, their habitat protected from strangers who found the peaks that wove their way along the ridges of Mayel Lyang an impassable cloak of protection,” one scholar wrote evocatively. Mayel Lyang is a term for the land of the Lepchas.⁷

Their history over the past several hundred years has been one of retreat and accommodation to invading peoples. As mentioned already, the Bhutias—Tibetans—began moving south into what is now Sikkim, bringing their version of Buddhism with them nearly 500 years ago. Many of the Lepchas converted to the new faith. When faced with the invading Tibetans, the Lepchas shifted their patterns of life to accommodate the invaders

⁶ “Lepcha Nature Worship [magazine article review],” *Peaceful Societies*, August 3, 2006: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2006/08/03/lepcha-nature-worship/>

⁷ Little, Kerry. 2008. “Lepcha Narratives of their Threatened Sacred Landscapes.” *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 3(1) February: 227-255 [quote from page 238].

and to avoid conflicts—as Gyad and Thekong Tek had solemnly agreed. The Red Hat monks, the leaders of the Tibetan immigrants, established an aristocratic order above the local Lepchas.

In the nineteenth century, the British East India Company obtained a portion of Sikkim, which became a territory of Britain; then, in 1861, it became a princely state in the British realm. Christian missionaries began proselytizing and a number of families converted to Christianity. In the 20th century, Hindu Nepalese migrants began moving into Sikkim and became the majority population.

The Lepchas face different administrative situations in the three countries in which they live— India, Bhutan, and Nepal—and they are, themselves, divided by the different religious faiths they have adopted. Their language, “Rong,” has its own script which is preserved in old manuscripts. The script is kept alive because many books, magazines, and newspapers are published in it. Although their original language is recognized and taught in Sikkim (though not in Bhutan, Nepal, or the West Bengal state of India), a lot of Lepchas no longer speak their native tongue.

It must be emphasized that the Bhutias and the Lepchas are minority peoples in Sikkim, which is controlled by the majority Nepalese peoples, most of whom are Hindus. The Bhutias and Lepchas attempt to maintain a strong minority voice in the legislature to protect the rights that were guaranteed to them by the state constitution, though the majority Nepalese people feel the Lepcha-Bhutia interests should be represented in proportion to their population. The major political group representing the two minority peoples, the Sikkim Bhutia-Lepcha Apex Committee, argues that they are being treated like refugees in their own land but the state government of Sikkim dismisses that argument as so much nonsense. The Bhutias and Lepchas have seats reserved in the legislature, the government maintains. “We have shown magnanimity, and no Bhutia-Lepcha can deny that fact,” one official said in 2006.⁸

But the head lama of the Pemayangtse monastery, Yapo S. Yongda, who is also the head of the Assembly of Monasteries of Sikkim, was quoted in 2006 as saying, “the peaceful way of living is slowly and gradually disappearing.” He based his observation on the fact that the monasteries are being

⁸ “Lepcha Nature Worship [magazine article review],” Peaceful Societies website, August 3, 2006: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2006/08/03/lepcha-nature-worship/>; “Lepcha Culture Vibrant, but Threatened.” Peaceful Societies website, August 28, 2008: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2008/08/28/lepcha-culture-vibrant-but-threatened/>

increasingly neglected and some of them in the more rural areas were showing a lack of maintenance. Some had only a few monks and were literally falling to pieces. Yongda, commenting about the lack of public funding to help maintain the monasteries, argued that the state's ecclesiastical department was not spending money on Buddhist development as it should. "The spiritual path should be taken care of, if you want to keep Sikkim as a peaceful state, an example to others," he argued.

Christian missionaries, with relatively greater funding from outside sources, are making headway in Sikkim. They have the money and resources which the Buddhists lack to build schools and develop social programs. One monk, describing the increasing conversions, said, "our people are very simple and can be easily taken away Even some of my family have converted because of money." The Buddhist monks were not entirely without hope. Tashi Densapa, Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, which houses a large collection of materials taken out of Tibet when the Chinese invaded in 1950, expresses a more positive outlook. He indicates that some young people were starting to show an interest in Buddhism, even if the religious values of the Buddhists have been neglected by the state in favor of development priorities.

In 1980, Yongda took the positive step of setting up a school that taught modern subjects as well as an hour of non-violence each day. And while he may complain about the lack of public assistance for monasteries, another monk expresses opposition to state support for the monastic school at which he teaches. Acknowledging that rich Buddhists send their children to the Christian schools and only the poor send their young to the Buddhist ones, this man believes that the Buddhists have to compete in the education market.

Despite outside domination and internal religious divisions, issues they are attempting to overcome, the Lepchas are attempting to maintain their traditions, as a recent article explains. Rip Roshina Gowlong begins by praising Gorer's 1967 book about the Lepchas but she criticizes his discomfort with the Lepcha way of practicing two, and sometimes three, mutually contradictory faiths at the same time.⁹ She does not see the acceptance of different faiths simultaneously, at least from the Lepcha perspective, as particularly contradictory, and she explains why. The difference is that Europeans conceive of religious beliefs in a comparative, hierarchical fashion, while the

⁹ Gowlong, Rip Roshina. 2013. "Identity Formation among the Lepchas of West Bengal and Sikkim." *Studies of Tribes and Tribals* 11(1): 19-23.

Lepchas view faith from a more holistic perspective. Lepcha belief systems cannot always be understood in rationalistic terms.

The Lepcha religion is a mixture of the pre-Buddhist Bon faith and the Buddhism that the Bhutias brought with them from Tibet. They worship a variety of deities simply because they have always done so. They believe that the happiness of the gods and goddesses is essential for preserving the health of communities, cattle, and crops. It is not important for them to explain why they worship as they do. Even asking them why they believe what they do is, in their view, irrational. They believe that their ancestors descended from seven brothers who lived in seven separate huts in heaven. Each was a deity guarding a different crop. Those deities wore traditional Lepcha clothing; they had goiters similar to those that bother the Lepchas today—caused by a lack of iodine in the water. Muns, the female priestesses, and Bongthings, the male priests, still practice in contemporary Lepcha communities, demonstrating the continuing coexistence of Buddhism and the pre-existing Bon faith.

The recent introduction of Christianity further complicates the religious landscape of Lepcha communities, though it did not take hold during the British administration of India and Sikkim. Since the Lepchas form only a small minority in Sikkim and Darjeeling, their religious identifications provide important markers of their identity. Attempts to unite them as Lepchas have conflicted with their own identities as Buddhists or as Christians. The latter, the Christians, have exhibited feelings of superiority over the people who identify as Buddhists. To this day, this cleavage hampers those who strive to preserve an overall sense of Lepcha cultural identity.

Gowloog pointed out that the Buddhist-Christian divide, noticeable in the Darjeeling area of India, is not as prevalent in Sikkim since outsiders have been prohibited from living in, and to some extent from even entering, the Dzongu Reserve, the mountainous area of North Sikkim that is inhabited primarily by Lepcha people. In that more or less closed section of north central Sikkim, Lepchas have cherished their own religious beliefs without being much influenced by Christians or Hindus. In sum, Sikkim has been more closed off to outside influences and westernization than the Darjeeling area in India's West Bengal state.

But the divide between Buddhist and Christian Lepchas seems to have begun dissipating over the past 20 years or so. Attitudes of the Buddhist Lepchas toward the Christians are softening, and the Christians are reaffirming their Lepcha identity by participating in traditional events and games and by wearing traditional clothing during festivals along with their Buddhist colleagues. A related development is the growing sense of solidarity be-

tween Lepchas in Sikkim and those in Darjeeling. Hundreds in Darjeeling attempted to march into Sikkim to show their support for their brethren to the north, who are facing the construction of hydropower dams in the Teesta River basin. (More on that to follow.)

Several factors have been promoting a Lepcha consciousness. The Lepcha Association attempted to build ethnic identity by focusing the attention of the people on their own language during the 1971 census of India. They visited villages and urged the people to declare on the census forms that their native language was Lepcha rather than Nepali. Also, the use of the Lepcha language has not diminished in Sikkim, primarily since the government has recognized it as one of the four official languages of the state. However, Lepchas living in Darjeeling have lacked an official imprimatur of their language.

The Dam Builders and their Opponents

One of the most important issues to face the Lepchas so far this century has been the threat from potential dam builders, who view the major rivers of Sikkim as sources of hydropower. When the state announced in 2004 that it was planning to erect power dams across the Teesta River and its tributaries, many Lepchas started organizing to try and stop the work. The hydropower projects threaten the river valleys, which the people view as sacred. Not just essential for the ecosystem, not just good for tourism, not just important for supporting the lives of the people, but intrinsically sacred. Lepchas formed an organization that tried to negotiate with the government, then adopted Gandhian techniques of passively fighting the destruction. The development added important elements to their traditional peacefulness.¹⁰

Lepcha leaders began to actively protest the construction of a hydropower dam on the Teesta River in 2007. The projected dam, the first of many proposed for the river and its tributaries, would have involved diverting the river down an 18 km tunnel to provide the height necessary for generating electric power. Dawa Lepcha, General Secretary of a newly formed environmental and social organization called the “Affected Citizens of Teesta,” told the press that their group had asked the appropriate authorities to review the project. Their appeal had been ignored, he said, so they began a hunger strike.

¹⁰ The story of the dam opponents can be traced through the Peaceful Societies website: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/tag/affected-citizens-of-teesta/>

The people argued that the project would threaten the Kanchenjunga National Park, which protects the world's third highest peak on the border of Sikkim and Nepal and is sacred to the Lepchas. The president of the group, Athup Lepcha, said that they were seeking to protect and preserve the environment with their protests. The protesters began their hunger strike on June 20th, 2007. More than one press report referred to the strikers as "satyagrahis," a term which carries a lot of meaning in India because of its association with Gandhi.

The Dzongu Reserve, which the Lepchas believe would be threatened by the dam project, is an especially important area for them. "Dzongu is a holy place, where our age old culture and traditions are still intact," said Ajuk Lepcha, President of the Kalimpong Lepcha Association. "We believe that our souls rest here after death. We will not tolerate any dislocation and threat to this place."

The government of Sikkim argued that the 280 megawatt power project posed no threat to the environment of the area nor to the Lepcha culture. A government statement released in response to the publicity generated by the hunger strike was predictable: "All measures have been taken to ensure that the damage to the ecology is mitigated and as a special safeguard for the preservation of the Lepcha culture the union ministry of environment and forest has barred the developers of the project from setting up any labour colony within the Dzongu region." In response, the Lepchas further strengthened their peaceful protests, announcing in early July 2007 that they would be erecting a temporary blockade of a major highway in Sikkim to protest the Dzongu project. The blockade was to last for two hours. A blog post by one Lepcha person proclaimed, "We are peace loving people and let the government handle it peacefully. Government should come forward for solution rather than staying back and supporting the destructors."

Turmoil in Sikkim, and particularly among the Lepchas, grew over the next months as the leaders continued and developed their peaceful protests. Many people in the North Dzongu were resentful that the government of Sikkim was ignoring their protests. The opinions of supporters and opponents of the proposed projects clashed. One landowner said she treasured the peaceful Lepcha lifestyle, which she argued the dams would destroy. "First kill me and my four children and then go ahead with the projects," she declared. Repeated meetings between the government and the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT), were unproductive.

On July 21, 2007, the Chief Minister of Sikkim, Pawan Chamling, went to Dzongu to confront his critics among the Lepcha community and to de-

fend the proposed dams. From the press reports, it was obvious he was quite outspoken in his comments. He blamed the opposition on his political opponents in Sikkim. “Their agitation is meaningless as the proposed hydel projects would boost the state’s economy and create an employment opportunity for the educated unemployed youths of the state.” He vowed that the state government would not back down from its commitment to building the dams—for the welfare of all the people, he argued.

Mr. Chamling also pointed out that the dam projects, once they are in operation, will generate revenues for the state of 20 billion Indian rupees per year (US\$493 million). He decried the continuing hunger fasts by members of ACT, Dawa T. Lepcha and Tenzing Gyatso, which he said are “sponsored by opposition parties who are using the innocent Lepchas to further their vested interests.” The government continued to be defensive about the possible harm to the natural environment of northern Sikkim. A report on July 23rd mentioned that the project would disturb land within one km of the Kanchenjunga National Park, and people in Dzongu feared that it would harm the forests and their important bird area. But a government official denied that the dam building would have any impact on the park. He said that “the projects near the national park have been found to be quite viable.”

The two Lepchas who were enduring the hunger strike were being kept alive in a hospital in Gangtok, where they were being force fed through nasal gastric tubes. The government of the state continued to appeal to ACT to give up the fast and to try once again to resolve the issue through negotiation. The government reiterated its commitment to protecting the Dzongu. Supporters of the Lepchas, meanwhile, were burning effigies of bureaucrats, getting themselves arrested for their activities, and blocking major highways with their protests.

While protesters demonstrated and politicians argued, the first huge dam on the Teesta River, a 510 MW project referred to as Teesta V, was set to be completed in December 2007. Meanwhile, however, the Affected Citizens of Teesta decided on Tuesday, August 21, to temporarily suspend the indefinite hunger strike by Dawa Lepcha and Tenzing Gyatso Lepcha. Instead, they switched to what they called a “relay hunger strike.” The two men responded to a personal appeal from Mr. Chamling to end the protests in favor of dialog.

Meanwhile, protests kept springing up in other areas inhabited by Lepchas. A group in Kalimpong, in West Bengal, calling themselves the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, began their own indefinite relay hunger strike on August 23, in solidarity with the ACT movement. The leader of the newer group explained that everything the Lepchas believe in originates

in the Dzongu, which is threatened by the proposed dams. "For us, there is no heaven and hell. When we die, our soul[s] returns to Dzongu," he explained. Still another group, the Lepcha Youth Association, also began a hunger strike the same day in Kalimpong.

And despite his promises of dialog with the Lepchas, Chief Minister Chamling continued to maintain his hard line stance about the need to build dams. "My development is in tune with the government of India's guidelines and the environment and ecology of Sikkim. There will be no compromise," he told one reporter. He expressed his willingness to meet with the protesters and he indicated that his government is following all rules in developing the dam projects.

A few weeks later, the secretary for Public Relations of Sikkim, M.G. Kiran, supported the viewpoint of the Chief Minister. Referring to ACT, he said, "We do not yet know what their problem is. These are benign projects and we can handle them well." The Lepcha were not convinced by the politicians. Contradicting the official statements, an official affidavit revealed that the contractor for the nearly completed Teesta V project had "grossly violated the terms, conditions and guidelines" established by the national government agency that is responsible for overall monitoring of dam construction in India. According to the report, the contractor had dumped excavated material "into the river Teesta obstructing its free flow causing thereby huge damage to the forest and environment."

A news story on October 24, 2007, offered a ray of hope. It reported that Chief Minister Chamling had met with some Lepcha leaders and indicated his sympathy for their cause. The Lepchas stated in the memorandum they gave him that the Dzongu is a sacred place for them that should be protected forever. He responded that he was "committed to protecting the sanctity of Dzongu and that no development work will be done at the cost of the culture, tradition, and identity of the Lepchas." The Lepcha delegates who met with the Chief Minister indicated they were pleased to have had a personal meeting with him and the vagueness of his comments was not too surprising.

Six months later, in March 2008, the Lepchas resumed their hunger strike. Acting still under the aegis of ACT, the hunger strike replaced the so-called relay hunger strikes they had started in August 2007 in response to expectations that the government was going to participate in productive talks. Dawa Lepcha said, "these power projects are a threat to our existence and the Khangchendzonga Bio-sphere Reserve and Khangchendzonga National Park." Two days later, a former minister, Tseten Lepcha, joined the hunger strikers for a symbolic two-day protest. Mr. Lepcha said he be-

lieved the state government had failed to heed the protests by the people over the previous nine months. "I am joining the hunger strike for 48 hours as I am a member of the Lepcha community," he stated. The Dzongu Reserve is a sacred place for the Lepchas, so a power project should not be built there, he argued.

By June of 2008, the situation remained unchanged. The leaders of ACT were still in a hospital in Gangtok with feeding tubes stuck down their throats. Dawa Lepcha, interviewed in the hospital, decried the entire project and what he saw as its destructiveness. He argued that the state is rich in biodiversity, which the dams would help destroy. "If they are allowed to go ahead with the hydel projects, they will ravage, plunder and destroy everything," he said. But he was especially agitated about the prospect of desecrating the Dzongu, much of which consists of the Kanchenjunga National Park.

"They plan to build four dams inside the Kanchenjunga National Park, two inside the Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve and two on the border of the reserve. Most of Dzongu falls in the Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve. The biodiversity of the entire region is at stake," he maintained. "We Lepchas are nature worshippers. Many of our holy lakes and springs are in Dzongu. We cannot let our sacred land be destroyed." He provided sound arguments along with his passion. "By building seven dams in the Lepcha-protected area, and allowing such a large influx of migrant labour, the government is violating its own laws. There are only 7,000 Lepchas in Dzongu. With just one project, we will be outnumbered. Our culture is under threat," he said.

His hunger-striking colleague on the next hospital bed, Onchuk Lepcha, had similar things to say. "If the land is taken by industrialists, we will be refugees in our own land. It hurts us to see Dzongu being destroyed." He explained how politicians were brow beating the Lepcha people into submission. The fact is, he said, that the politicians and the large land owners stand to make money off of the construction. "People in our villages are innocent. They don't understand the value of our land. Others can take advantage of them. That's why the educated Lepcha youth are fighting. We know the dangers."

But late in June 2008 the Lepchas won their first major victory. A letter from P. Wangchen, chief engineer and secretary of the state power agency addressed to the Affected Citizens of Teesta requested the group to call off the hunger strike. He said he was canceling the planning process for four of the proposed dams in the Dzongu. His letter indicated that plans for the 90 mw Ringpi dam, the 33 mw Rukel dam, the 120 mw Lingza dam, and the 141 mw Rangyong dam had all been abandoned. "Ringpi and Rukel are located inside Khangchendzonga National Park" his letter stated. "The gov-

ernment took a conscious decision not to allot these projects to any developer to conserve the environment and ecology of the area.”

The two activists who had been enduring a hunger strike in a hospital in Gangtok called off their action as a result. The vice-president of ACT, Tseten Lepcha, responded to the announcement by expressing his appreciation to the Chief Minister of the state for personally intervening in the situation. He also thanked the two other Lepcha organizations, the Concerned Lepchas of Sikkim and the Sangha of Dzongu, plus other groups and political parties that had provided assistance in their challenge to the state. However, the activists did decide to continue a relay hunger strike and other satyagraha actions as a way of protesting other much larger dams that were still in the planning stages.

A positive spinoff from all this negotiating took place later in 2008 when four college graduates, Gyatso Lepcha, Kachyo Lepcha, Tenzing Lepcha, and Dupden Lepcha, began a project of encouraging local homeowners in the Dzongu to open their homes to tourists as homestays. They said that their plan would increase employment and provide a boost to the local economy—other than by building big dams. The initiation of the homestay movement fostered pride among the residents of the reserve and it led to a revival of the traditional Lepcha cuisine—tubers, roots, and buckwheat pancakes—not only for tourists but also for members of the younger generation. The advent of homestays and the tourists they attracted helped promote ancillary businesses such as car rentals, tour operators, guides, and business at local shops.¹¹

By June 2009, a year after the government caved in and cancelled four of the smaller proposed dams, it was still insisting it would build a much larger dam, the 300 megawatt Panan project, which ACT still opposed vehemently with its relay hunger strikes. “We [will] continue keeping up moral pressure on the state government till it categorically declares annulment of the proposed mega project,” said Dawa Lepcha, still the general secretary of ACT, on the second anniversary of their hunger strike. He added that his organization was considering taking legal actions to try and stop the dam-building.

Things changed at the beginning of October that year. In August, ACT had charged the state government with a variety of illegal actions and the government appeared to be taking a conciliatory stance as a result. The

¹¹ Pezarkar, Leora and Kritika Sarda. “Lepchas & the Battle They Won.” Live History India website, November 24, 2017: <https://www.livehistoryindia.com/snapshort-histories/2017/11/24/lepchas-the-battle-they-won>

government sent ACT a letter in September 2009 that proposed a resumption of talks about the situation. It also requested that the group stop the hunger strike. As a result, Dawa Lepcha said the group decided it would suspend its hunger strike in order to build confidence between itself and the government. It also wanted to foster further initiatives that might help resolve the issue. Mr. Lepcha called the relay hunger strike a very successful strategy since it brought attention to their cause not only in the state of Sikkim, but throughout India and internationally. It awakened “the voice of the people” against the hydroelectric power projects, he maintained.

Throughout this drama, however, good news seemed to inevitably be followed by qualifications. In mid-October, 2009, at the resumption of negotiations between Affected Citizens of Teesta and Sikkim, government representatives greeted ACT at the opening meeting by justifying the power projects. The Chief Minister repeated his statements of the previous years by justifying the dams as being essential for the broader needs of the people. His government wanted to proceed with building the dams in order to ensure proper economic development and to generate revenues for Sikkim. He maintained that his government was taking into consideration concerns about the natural ecology of the affected region of northern Sikkim, the Dzongu.

Mr. Chamling argued that since he had a lot of respect for the views of opponents, he had invited ACT to work with members of his government to see if their differences could be ironed out. For its part, ACT said it was keeping its options open if the negotiations failed. The Chief Minister said he had never intended to cause problems for the Lepcha, though the meeting the previous week was the first time he had met with ACT since their hunger strikes began more than two years before. He asked the organization to forget what had happened and start negotiations afresh. “Whatever the State government can do to pacify your concerns, we will do,” he told the ACT representatives.

He asked ACT to place all of its concerns and grievances before the Chief Secretary so the negotiating committee could consider all options. He emphasized that the government was actively working to develop North Sikkim. Athup Lepcha, the president of ACT, said he hoped the state government would be willing to address the issues that the organization, and the Lepcha people in the Dzongu, were concerned about.

A few weeks later, at the annual general meeting of the Affected Citizens of Teesta, some members opposed the decision by the leaders to suspend their hunger strike. Dawa Lepcha disagreed. He felt that ceasing it promoted an effective negotiating stance with the state government. “Many people

might be of the opinion that we have surrendered our protest by withdrawal [of] the relay hunger strike but this is wrong. We have come a long way and [we] still have a long way to go before we go to sleep," he said.

He welcomed the initiative of the state government to take the matter, finally, to the negotiating table. "We are hopeful [we will] get a positive response from the government [which] would let us to live in our land peacefully," he said. He cited major victories his organization had already won, including an earlier decision by the government to cease planning four other dams along the Teesta River, which also would have harmed the spiritual values and ecology of the area.

A year later, in October 2010—and how many years after the Lepchas had begun protesting?—the government caved in once again on a different dam project. The story differs from the earlier ones because a different organization was leading the fight to preserve the sacred rivers and the mountainous region of the state. The Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC), had joined a group of monks from the Pemayangtse Monastery in West Sikkim to petition the state government. They asked Pawan Chamling to cancel the so-called Lethang hydroelectric power dam project on the Rathong Chu, a river draining Mt. Kanchenjunga. The petitioners argued that the Rathong Chu is the most sacred river in Sikkim and the proposed 96 MW project violated their religious beliefs. An earlier power dam proposal for the same river had been cancelled by the state government in 1997 after the Lepchas and the Bhutias expressed their opposition.

Tseten Tashi Bhutia, convener of SIBLAC, argued that even the name "Lethang" was a misnomer, since power dams are normally named for the rivers they block and this one was on the Rathong Chu. Few people were aware of which river was involved. He said that it was entitled to being considered sacred under the provisions of the Places of Worship Act. He said that since no money had yet been expended on the project, it would be easy to terminate. On October 13th, 2010, the Standing Committee of the National Wildlife Board in New Delhi decided to reject 13 ill-advised projects in India that would have had an adverse impact on wildlife or protected areas. The Rathong Chu project was one of them. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chaired the Board; the Union Environment and Forests Minister, Jairam Ramesh, chaired the Standing Committee. India's Wildlife Protection Act required the board to approve all projects that involve lands in or around national parks.

Mr. Bhutia quickly wrote to Mr. Ramesh to express the appreciation of his group for the cancellation. He did not miss an opportunity to urge that two

other proposed dams on the same river should also be cancelled—the 97 MW Tashiding and the 99 MW Ting Ting hydropower projects. He argued that his group is not opposed to other economic developments but the dams threatened to destroy their ancient beliefs, their heritage, and the religious sanctity of their landscape. He wrote to Mr. Ramesh again on October 21, expressing for the second time his group's opposition to the two remaining dams. He reiterated the sacred character of the Rathong Chu, his major reason for opposing the projects, and he elaborated briefly on the ecological harm that they would do. The river valley is an important focus area for biodiversity in the state, a fact which various experts have testified to in the past.

Five years later, in 2015, the former leaders, having at least temporarily stopped the state from destroying their sacred Dzongu, were moving on with their lives. Dawa Lepcha had become a member of a political party called the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), a group that opposes the work of Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. Tenzing Gyatso, the guy in the other hospital bed with tubes down his throat, was back living with his wife, working his fields, and planning to modify his house to better accommodate homestay tourists.¹²

But the state, temporarily stymied, was not about to give up. A review published in January 2017, more than 10 years into the struggle, indicated that the government of Sikkim was still plotting to build more dams in the Teesta watershed. Two had already been constructed. The arguments by both sides were familiar, though a new wrinkle had been added since Mt. Kanchenjunga, on the western border of the Dzongu, had recently been enrolled by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. This designation gave the Lepcha another bargaining chip in its protracted conflict with the government.¹³

The author of the review quoted a local farmer, Sonam Lepcha, who spoke about the value of preserving the Teesta River and its tributaries: “Dzongu is the place where our race (Lepcha) was created and [Kanchenjunga] is our mother mountain where our souls ultimately get salvation.” He added that Lepchas firmly believe that after they die their souls will travel up the River Teesta to the sacred mountain.

¹² Roshan, Nikhil. “The Nature of Belief.” In *Vikalp Sangam*, September 21, 2015: <http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/the-nature-of-belief/#.WpRIgnxG3IV>

¹³ Parvais, Athar. “Locals Step Up Protests against Large Sikkim Dam.” *India Climate Dialogue*, January 25, 2017: <http://indiaclimatedialogue.net/2017/01/25/locals-step-protests-large-sikkim-dam/>

Avoiding Violence with the Gorkhas

With the troubles about the Teesta River dams receding after 2010, a different, and in some ways even more serious, threat arose early in 2013. The difficulty occurred in West Bengal, a much larger and more diverse Indian state south of Sikkim, where a sizeable minority of Lepchas live in the hills near the northern border. The conflict, which prompted violence repeatedly, occurred among three groups of actors: the Lepchas, with their peaceful ways of handling conflicts, the Gorkhas who are steeped in militarism and violent approaches to dealing with disputes, and the government of West Bengal. The Gorkhas had been demanding a separate state of Gorkhaland for many years. Both they and the Lepchas were deeply affected by an announcement from the West Bengal state government at the end of January 2013.¹⁴

The Chief Minister of the state, Mamata Banerjee, met with members of the Lepcha community in Kalimpong, a town located just a couple miles south of Sikkim and a center of Lepcha culture. The meeting prompted Bimal Gurung, the leader of the major Gorkha organization, called the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), to declare that the Chief Minister had a divide and rule policy. The Gorkhas resented any implication that the Lepchas might have their own needs.

Mr. Gurung was not in the least subtle in his response to the meeting held by the Chief Minister with the Lepchas. "You must be ready for the next phase of the agitation. Bullets will fly. We are ready to face police bullets as this is what they will do. She [the Chief Minister] will send in the police force and their bullets, she will reopen old cases (against the agitators), we know all about it and we are ready to take bullets to achieve statehood," he declared. Ms. Banerjee announced at a news conference on January 31 her decision to honor a request from the Lepcha people to form a Lepcha Development Board, which will work for the development of the Lepchas living in the hills of West Bengal. Details about the board were to be announced later, but the chair and vice chair would be appointed from within the Lepcha community. The Chief Minister's proposal was approved by the state cabinet on Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2013.

¹⁴ "Conflict in the Hills of West Bengal." Peaceful Societies website, February 14, 2013: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2013/02/14/conflict-in-the-hills-of-west-bengal/>

The proposed Development Board would seek to improve Lepcha education, preserve their culture and language, and support their cottage industries, agriculture, tourism, and horticulture. The board would also attempt to promote better health among the Lepchas by creating rural and mobile medical facilities. The proposed agency would be named the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board. A senior official in the government, doubtless realizing the political repercussions of the decision, emphasized that the board, to be based in Kalimpong, would not have any political powers. The leaders of GJM reacted immediately. One of them said the decision was arbitrary “and an encroachment on the powers and functioning of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) Sabha.”

The GTA had **been formed** in 2011 as a semi-autonomous body in the northern hills of the state as a way of trying to bring peace to the region by partially satisfying demands for independent statehood by the Gorkha people. The GTA agreement did not provide for carving out a separate state from West Bengal. However, the memorandum of agreement signed by the Gorkhas and the state government did provide for including minorities, such as the Lepchas, in the new GTA, but as of January 2013 the organization did not include any Lepcha members. The GJM refused to recognize the needs of the Lepchas.

Early in February, the Lepchas in Kalimpong and the rest of West Bengal anticipated Gorkha reactions to the government decision and they decided to keep a low profile. The president of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association and the coordinator of the Lepcha Rights Movement both refused to take calls. Doriji Lepcha, president of the Lepcha Youth Association, indicated he had heard the news, but, he said, “I am not the right person to comment on the development.”

Tensions rose due to the standoff between the state government and the Gorkhas. Mr. Gurung, who also was the chief executive of the GTA, announced that he would step down. It was his way of threatening new rounds of agitation in the West Bengal hills. He also suggested that the agitation that was developing in Darjeeling, the major city in the district, might not remain peaceful and that the members of his organization might be preparing to take up arms. The Gorkhas—also spelled Gurkhas—are Nepali/Gorkhali speaking citizens of both India and Nepal who have a long tradition of fighting. They first demonstrated their fierce fighting ability against the British Raj in Nepal in the early 19th century. The English, realizing their fighting spirit, enlisted them into army units beginning nearly 200 years ago.

Today, the Gorkhas in India number about 10,000,000 people and live in a number of North Indian states.

Mr. Gurung continued to make threatening speeches. Referring to numerous earlier periods of agitation for a separate state, he said that the current opposition to the government's latest proposal would be their "final movement." "It is my promise to you that this is the third and final agitation towards creation of Gorkhaland," he told a meeting of GJM workers. Then, the GJM announced a 12 hour, dawn to dusk, general strike in Darjeeling and adjoining regions for Saturday, Feb. 9. Mr. Gurung sought to lay the blame for any violence that might develop from the shutdown on the government. He said, "our agitation will be peaceful but the government will try and make it violent." He blamed the Chief Minister of the state. "It looks like Mamata Banerjee is inviting us to start an intensified Gorkhaland agitation.... It seems she has no intention of normalizing the situation and is hell bent on disturbing the harmony."

As strains continued to grow during the first week of February, GJM activists prevented the principal secretary of the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, Saumitra Mohan, from entering his office in Darjeeling. A spokesman for the GJM accused him of not conceding to their demands. The next day, Lepcha activists decided to launch an action of their own. The Lepcha Rights Movement began an indefinite hunger strike in the town of Kalimpong to show support for the government's decision to form the Lepcha Development Board.

Bhupinder Lepcha, a leader of the Lepcha Rights Movement, in announcing the hunger strike, said that the Lepcha Development Board was being politicized by the Gorkhas, and it would not harm anyone. It would improve the education of the Lepcha people, including instruction in their own Lepcha language. Mr. Lepcha added that the Lepchas had never demanded a distinct territory, and all they wanted were some rights. "We are innocent people and we are not into politics. We only wanted [the] right to education, employment guarantees, and preservation of our culture."

The 12-hour strike by the Gorkhas in Darjeeling virtually shut down the city, but the threats of violence did not materialize, and of course the hunger strike by the Lepchas was peaceful. But violence from the Gorkhas continued to threaten the Lepchas—and the government.

In March 2013, the Trinamul Congress, the political party headed by Ms. Banerjee that ruled West Bengal, started to hold meetings to explore the issues relating to development in the hills of the state. Trinamul's stated objective was the overall development of all the people living in the hills, in-

cluding the Lepchas and the Gorkhas. In other words, the government was trying to indicate that their proposals for more development were not intended to undercut the Gorkhas.

Mr. Gurung decided to counter this move by the state government by going to New Delhi to meet both the national president and the home minister of India. Observers were hopeful that, if things went well in New Delhi, a proposed 48 hour general strike might be put off by the GJM.¹⁵ The GJM delegation, led by Mr. Gurung, met in New Delhi with home minister Sushil Kumar Shinde and argued their case for Gorkhaland. They blamed the current problems in the state entirely on Chief Minister Banerjee. They pressed their long-standing demand for tribal status for the Gorkha community in the West Bengal hills. The home minister evidently listened carefully to the GJM demands. In response, he asked the delegation to call off the announced general strike, which was scheduled for March 14 and 15, and again for March 21 and 22. The GJM promised to review the matter with their committee when they returned to Darjeeling.

But matters quickly turned more serious when a meeting of 10 to 15 Trinamul (also spelled Trinamool) Congress members taking place in a hotel in Kalimpong, was disrupted by a group of thugs. Just as the Trinamul members were about to hold a news conference, around 30 people, believed to represent the youth wing of the GJM, assaulted them with sticks and iron rods. Two people were injured, four of the attackers were arrested, and the police reportedly attempted to catch the others.¹⁶

Some of the leaders of the Bhutia and Lepcha communities in Kalimpong were targeted by the attackers. Chewang Bhutia and Bruno Lepcha were

¹⁵ "Trinamul Plans Hill Meeting in Protest Season." *The Telegraph*, March 4, 2013: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/trinamul-plans-hill-meeting-in-protest-season-gurung-to-visit-delhi-today-to-meet-president-and-home-minister/cid/329688>

¹⁶ Gazmer, Deep. "Gorkha Janmukti Morcha Leaders Meet Shinde over Gorkhaland." *The Times of India*, March 6, 2013: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Gorkha-Janmukti-Morcha-leaders-meet-Shinde-over-Gorkhaland/articleshow/18823598.cms?referral=PM>; Gazmer, Deep. "TMC Leaders Attacked in Kalimpong." *The Times of India* March 7, 2013: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/TMC-leaders-attacked-in-Kalimpong/articleshow/18841663.cms?referral=PM>; Gazmer, Deep. "Another Arrest in Trinamool Assault Case." *The Times of India*, March 8, 2013: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Another-arrest-in-Trinamool-assault-case/articleshow/18857307.cms>

covered in blood and rushed to a hospital after the attack. A Trinamul official in charge of the Darjeeling area, Gopal Chhetri, expressed the government's anger at the attack. "There is no democracy in the Hills in the misrule of the GJM party. Our leaders and supporters are intimidated every other day and today they were even attacked," Mr. Chhetri said. An official for the GJM denied that his group had anything to do with the violence.

On Friday that week, police in West Bengal announced the arrest of additional people who had allegedly been involved in the attack. The national government indicated a willingness to get involved and agreed to send several battalions of troops to help the state police restrain the growing threats of violence. The GJM leaders, still in New Delhi, argued that the whole thing was a conspiracy by the West Bengal government to create a state of terror in the hills so they could deploy their troops. According to Jyoti Kumar Raj, the assistant secretary of GJM, "there is no trouble in the Hills whatsoever. The deployment of security forces is a ploy of the state government to create panic and terror." The Lepchas, who were simply asking for some development assistance from the state and were willing to endure hunger strikes to dramatize their plight, appeared from the news reports to be pawns in the power play between the government and the Gorkha leaders.

The trouble that arose in January, February and March 2013 simmered throughout the spring and summer months, but conditions deteriorated even farther in August. At the end of July, the GJM, not finding West Bengal state willing to meet their demands for more independence, called for an indefinite strike, referred to as a "bandh" in India, to start on August 3. Then the group called off the strike, but reinstated it when the government sent troops into Darjeeling. "The state government is using force to quash our democratic movement. We won't relent under pressure and [we will] go on an indefinite strike from Saturday," Mr. Gurung said.¹⁷

¹⁷ Gazmer, Deep. "GJM Hardens Stand as Central Forces March into Darjeeling." *The Times of India*, August 2, 2013: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/GJM-hardens-stand-as-central-forces-march-into-Darjeeling/articleshow/21541113.cms>; "Desperate Gurung Claims His 'Hukumat.'" *The Times of India*, August 24, 2013: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Desperate-Gurung-claims-his-hukumat/articleshow/22017712.cms?referral=PM>; Ravidas, Rajeev. "Lepchas Wary of CM Plan." *The Telegraph*, August 27, 2013: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1130827/jsp/siliguri/story_17276309.jsp#.UiCBEX_pzxE; Gazmer, Deep. "Mystery Poster slams GJM." *The Times of India*, August 30, 2013: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Mystery-poster-slams-GJM/articleshow/22150881.cms>

The Lepcha response on August 15 was to present a folk dance in Kolkata during the festivities celebrating Indian Independence Day. Nine days later, the Gorkha organization ratcheted up the tension. Mr. Gurung publicly declared that the GJM was adopting a policy of “hukumat,” a Hindi word which means “supremacy.” His speech was a reaction to the arrest of three GJM men, all of whom were carrying weapons. Police evidently had evidence that they were involved with an incident of arson earlier in August.

The Gorkha hukumat declaration prompted the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association to announce a conciliatory move. It had earlier said that it had invited Chief Minister Banerjee to visit the hills, but the group said it would rethink that invitation. The convener of the Lepcha Tribal Association, Bhupendra Lepcha, said that the group had invited the Chief Minister a couple months earlier, but, “in view of the present situation,” he decided to convene an executive committee meeting to reconsider the invitation.

Meanwhile, other Gorkha groups were beginning to turn away from the GJM. The bandh in Darjeeling had continued for so long that by mid-August 2013 it was imposing a considerable hardship on people who were not allowed to violate the strike by going out of their homes when they needed to. The Gorkhaland Joint Action Committee decided to lessen its support for the bandh, in part because of the way Mr. Gurung had made his latest announcement without even consulting other Gorkha leaders.

Two days later, it became clear that the Chief Minister was definitely not going to back down from her planned trip to the hills. But the Lepchas were having second thoughts: they suspected that she had political motives for her actions. They were nervous about being caught in the middle between the state and the GJM. Both were more powerful, and certainly more aggressive, than they were.

Lepcha leaders began avoiding reporters but ordinary Lepchas in Darjeeling were nervous. “We fear the chief minister’s insistence on holding the felicitation [ceremony] in Darjeeling may convey the message that the hill society is divided,” one Lepcha individual said. This might provoke the Gorkhas. One GJM leader said that his organization had not firmly decided how to respond, but they might just prevent the Lepchas from appearing for the Chief Minister’s presentation. She might find herself making her announcements to no audience. Other Gorkhas suggested different strategies.

On August 30, someone in Kalimpong put up some anti-Gurung posters around town, but others, presumably GJM supporters, quickly ripped them down. Confronting this sort of agitation that afternoon, a group of about 200 people, mostly Lepchas, held a peace vigil at the Trikone Park near the

Kalimpong police station. They demanded that normal, peaceful conditions must be restored to the community. Nima Lepcha said that the vigil, which he called a “Shanti Dhama,” would continue until peaceful stability could be restored. “We want peace and normalcy to be reinstated in the Hills,” he said. “For this the bandh has to be withdrawn. Let the situation be peaceful as it was before. We do not want uncertainty and fear to prevail in the Hills. The present agitation has made the situation highly volatile.”

It should be remembered that the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MYLDB), was, in fact, formed by the state government in 2013. The Gorkhas threatened and sometimes acted violently throughout the troubled year, at times shutting down entire communities with their strikes. Meanwhile, the Lepchas continued their Gandhian approaches of repeated sit-ins, demonstrations, and hunger strikes. Strife continued between the assertive Gorkhas and everyone else who appeared to get in their way. Their threat of violence was always present—give way to our demands or we may have to punish opponents with violence.

The story of the Gorkhas and the Lepchas needs to be brought up to date, though more briefly. In succeeding years, the threats were there but not as fervently expressed.

Intersections: Bringing the Story Up to Date

The story of the violence and nonviolence exhibited by the major actors in 2013 is intriguing and challenging because it is still highly relevant today. For one thing, it involves more than just a group—the Gorkhas—that will not stop until they get their own way. But more than that, it includes another group, the Lepchas, that derive their power precisely because they do not threaten, much less carry through on any threats of violence. That other group is also in a central role—and still is in the minds of major actors—and it continues its pervasive commitment to peacefulness, while quietly agitating for its own agenda. And of most interest, the peaceful society quickly gained what it was asking for and the threatening one did not. Skilled political decision-makers saw strategic advantages from supporting the peaceful group and not the violent one. Fascinating differences in a world where strategic decision-making is sometimes employed (though not always, unfortunately). These issues have implications for experts and decision-makers in Washington and other leading world capitals.

The history of the demands by the Gorkhas, and the creation of the development boards, needs to be brought up to date briefly to make the story

clear. Mamata Banerjee lost no time in expanding her new-found political tool to other minority groups in the hills of West Bengal—and in the process taking supporters away from the Gorkhas. On January 21, 2014, she announced that a development board would be established for the Tamangs, a large community in the Darjeeling District. Other groups such as the Sherpas started sending petitions to the Chief Minister saying that they, too, wanted a development board like the Lepchas.¹⁸

The following January when she announced the formation of the Sherpa board at a public event in Darjeeling, Gorkha leaders in attendance lost no time in denouncing the move. Roshan Giri, a Gorkha official who was sitting on the speakers' platform with the other dignitaries, said, "This is a divide-and-rule policy. If a board is formed for the Sherpas, similar boards must be set up for all hill communities. The (Sherpa) board should be brought under the GTA."¹⁹

The Gorkhas ratcheted up their threats in September 2016 to correct the injustices, as they saw them, perpetrated against them by the state government. For the first time since the dramas of 2013, they threatened to again call a general strike. But this time around, the Lepchas were not involved in any significant way. Gurung challenged government-issued figures of development rupees given to the Gorkhas themselves and used the dispute to issue his call for a bandh. The real problem for the Gorkhas was that their electoral support was waning, and new elections were coming up. The Gorkhas were scared they might lose their popular support—best to appear tough for the voters. The state government under Mamata's firm control was increasingly winning support, especially with the minority groups who were seeing development efforts coming to their communities rather than just talk and threats.²⁰

By April 2017, the government of Ms. Banerjee had set up 15 different development boards with a wide range of priorities for minority groups within the state. Two months later, the GJM instituted a strike throughout the hills—it was in its 17th day by July 1—and already the people were getting very tired

¹⁸ Arnab Ganguly. "Lepcha-Like Board for Tamangs." *The Telegraph*, January 21, 2014: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1140122/jsp/siliguri/story_17849962.jsp

¹⁹ Vivek Chhetri. "Mamata Announces Board for Sherpas." *The Telegraph*, January 23, 2015: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1150124/jsp/siliguri/story_9953.jsp

²⁰ Devadeep Purohit and Vivek Chhetri. "Gurung Issues Strike Threat, CM Dares." *The Telegraph* September 23, 2016: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1160924/jsp/bengal/story_109953.jsp

of the restrictions on their movements. The issue, still, was the demand by the Gorkhas for their own statehood. The shutdown had curtailed tourists from visiting the hills—they had begun returning after the strife of 2013. The Gorkha people would attend rallies demanding their own state, then sneak off to the back doors of shops to stock up on foods without being seen. As in 2013, the strike prompted incidents of violence. A vehicle owned by the Lepcha Development Board in Kalimpong was set on fire; masked men threatened some employees of a fire station and destroyed their fire engines.²¹

But throughout the five-years following the troubles of 2013, while the Lepchas were sometimes in the news for other issues, that supreme political manipulator, Mamata Banerjee, was still clearly grateful for the role the Lepcha people had played in working with her to create the first development board. As a result of the renewed troubles of 2017, some of the other boards she set up over the years have weakened, especially under the pressure from the GJM and its strikes. An observer was quoted in late May 2018 as saying, "There is no little doubt that the chief minister holds the members of the Lepcha board in high esteem," though she may not have as high a regard for the other boards, especially since some of them have been caving in to the demands of the Gorkhas.²²

A 68-page development report issued in 2018 indicated that after five years of existence, the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board (MLLDB) is proving its value to the Lepchas. It has evidently been instrumental in re-creating an interest in their traditional language, culture and dress. The report points out that many men now are resuming wearing the original Lepcha men's hats, perhaps a minor step but significant symbolically.²³

So far, Chief Minister Banerjee has appeared to handle the continuing crisis with the Gorkhas with aplomb—she is a very skilled and experienced politician. But the demands of the Gorkhas for their own state will probably

²¹ Rajeev Ravidas and Vivek Chhetri. "Govt Sacks Leader from Lepcha Body." *The Telegraph*, April 30, 2017: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170501/jsp/siliguri/story_149174.jsp; Vivek Chhetri. "In Darjeeling, a Hint of Strike Fatigue." *The Telegraph*, July 1, 2017: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170702/jsp/bengal/story_159709.jsp

²² Vivek Chhetri. "CM Glare on Hill Boards." *The Telegraph*, May 28, 2018: <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/cm-glare-on-hill-boards-233590>

²³ Mukerjee, Prakriti, Reetu Sogani, Nawraj Gurung, Ajay Rastogi and Krystyna Swiderska. 2018. *Smallholder Farming Systems in the Indian Himalayas: Key Trends and Innovations for Resilience*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development, IIED Country Report. Available at <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17618IIED.pdf>

not go away. Neither will the quietly persistent demands of the Lepchas to be left alone to cherish their peaceful traditions. Will their continuing use of Gandhian approaches to their inter-cultural problem—a highly peaceful people living as neighbors with a society that cherishes its history of solving its problems through aggression and violence—be able to thrive? Will international actors as well as the government of India and its state governments continue to foster the diversity that its Adivasi (tribal) peoples need in order to survive and prosper?

And what are the implications of these events to the rest of humanity? Readers should remember that even though the Lepcha/Gorkha/West Bengal dispute is an internal matter, it exists within one very large, important Indian state. West Bengal is a significant actor in its own right, with a population of more than 90 million, almost twice the population of Colombia. Its capital city, Kolkata, formerly named Calcutta, was the capital of the British raj in India. Breakaway movements can have international implications, as the history of Yugoslavia certainly testifies or, more recently, the breakaway sentiments in the Crimea from Ukraine. The internal strife that roiled Colombia for many decades obviously is a good example of the need to pay close attention to internal issues that threaten stability and peace.

By way of conclusion, we might wonder how much the traditional styles of conflict and violence of wanna-be break-away groups such as FARC and the Gorkhas would be unnerved by powerful, but peaceful people such as the Lepchas. Such nonviolent groups can't and won't threaten, but their moral powers are significant, at least in India, which is still under the influence of Gandhi's ideals. What would happen if the peaceful groups were not there? Would the state inevitably confront and crush any and all challenges? India, which has at least six highly peaceful societies described in detail in the Peaceful Societies website, is not unique in having peaceful challengers to the ways of much more powerful interests. Plus, powerful actors in India have to contend with the heritage of Gandhi in trying to influence popular thinking. The peaceful societies may gain additional stature in numerous nations such that their style of avoiding violence could make them significant actors on the international stage, in contrast to the Gorkhas and the FARC of the future world. The Lepchas are already on that stage.

2. Anger Control and the Ifaluk

Beliefs in Peacefulness

The Ifaluk, the people living on a small atoll in the Outer Islands of Yap State, in the Federated States of Micronesia, love to tell the story of Maur, a chief in mythic times, and how he incited his people to conquer Woleai, a neighboring island. It seems as if Maur went to Woleai where he found a wife, Itemeng, and with her they had a son, Legagiliwau. But the people of Woleai were jealous of the outsider winning the love of their woman so one day they attacked Maur, beating him and leaving him for dead.

During the night, Maur regained consciousness and tied up his wounds. At dawn, he swam out to sea holding onto a piece of driftwood and only returned to his family after dark, where he slept for the night. Before leaving again the next morning, he took pieces of coconut leaves, tied them to the wrists of his wife and his son, telling them to always wear them. As he swam out through the surf with his piece of driftwood, a Woleai man happened to see him in the water and cried out a warning that Maur was still alive. But the other men only laughed at him, denying that he could possibly still be alive, so they didn't bother to go out in a canoe to search for their enemy.

Maur swam as only humans can do in folktales, 40 miles east across the open ocean, twice the width of the English Channel at its narrowest part, all the way back to Ifaluk. When he got to his own island and was recognized, he summoned the men to come to a meeting. He told the assembly how the people of Woleai had tried to murder him and how they had left him for dead. He declared that he would remove his loincloth. If he got an erection and it pointed to Woleai, then that would be a confirmation of his story. The men must go across to the neighboring island and kill them all. He took off his garment and it happened as he had predicted—his erection pointed across the water toward the guilty island. Readers with a bent for psychological analysis can have a hay-day with this one.

In any event, the case was settled. Maur ordered the Ifaluk men to cross over to Woleai and kill every man, woman and child, except for his wife and

son, who would be wearing the coconut leaves tied to their wrists. The Ifaluk men fabricated many spears and canoes before setting forth over the ocean to carry out the orders of their chief. They murdered them all, bringing back only the woman and the boy. Edwin Burrows tells this grisly tale of the way things were in mythic times in the western Pacific Ocean in his book *Flower in My Ear*.¹

After a few more pages describing the mythic attack on another neighboring island, Burrows explained the meaning of the tale. In 1947, when he first visited, the front post of the men's house on Ifaluk had an 18-inch wooden phallus mounted on a supporting beam. It pointed, of course, straight at Woleai. But there is a significant difference between the founding mythology of the Ifaluk and that of many other societies. The Ifaluk Islanders decided to get over their violent past. One of Burrows' informants, a man named Tom, made it clear to the visiting scholar that the events described in the story had occurred long ago. "‘Before, before,’ he said, raising head and eyes as if to point to a very distant past. ‘Not now. Now all same one people’ (p. 77)."

Tom was emphasizing the fact that the Ifaluk were very different—they didn't fight any longer. The Ifaluk have their faults, as all people do: their island is not a utopia. They have a male-dominated society that would repel many outsiders. But it is not a violent place—they absolutely reject violence. Thus, the difference between Ifaluk and many other societies and nation states is not so much that the one is a small, isolated place and the others are larger and more cosmopolitan. The difference is that the one distances itself from its past, treats violence as something that people simply don't do any longer. Its stories serve as reminders of the way people used to be in ancient times. People such as the Ifaluk no longer believe in violence and they are proud of it.

And they still have the wooden phallus mounted on the beam of the men's house and it still points at Woleai, a reminder of the change they have embraced. A Peace Corps volunteer, who only identified herself as "Dr. Rosemary," visited Ifaluk Island in 2015, an experience that she briefly described in a blog entry posted on June 2 that year.² She included many pictures with her blog posts about her year in the Yap State of Micronesia,

¹ Burrows, Edwin Grant. 1963. *Flower in My Ear: Arts and Ethos of Ifaluk Atoll*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, p.72-74

² "Post on OI trip Ifalik," in the blog "Yap Island and Dr. Rosemary," June 2, 2015: <https://yapislandrbd.blogspot.com/2015/06/060215-post-on-oi-trip-ifalik.html>

which began in August 2014. Her visit with the Ifaluk, a small community of gardening and fishing people, was part of a trip beginning on May 13 to the Outer Islands of the state.

Dr. Rosemary spent much of her day on Ifaluk examining women who had female concerns. After she taught the woman health assistant on the island how to do clinical breast exams, they then examined about 30 women who came to them in the course of a long day. Fortunately, she had some time left to tour the island, guided by a young girl who took her to the elementary school and through the village. It was a very hot, humid, tropical day. One of the highlights of her visit occurred when Joe, a Health Assistant from another nearby island, suggested that she might want to walk to the men's house and "pay homage to the chief."

It was clearly intended as a joke on her, since she evidently already knew that the central support pole of the men's house was decorated, from top to bottom, with a carved turtle, a lizard, and an erect human phallus. Dr. Rosemary asked the chief if she would be allowed to take a picture of the post, which he agreed to (see her photo no. 10 of the 13 she posted with that day's blog entry). Others had told her that if she did get to visit the chief and she did take a picture of the totem pole, it would bring her bad luck, or at least it would represent a serious cultural breach. Dr. Rosemary wrote that since it was OK with the chief, she felt it would be fine for her to take the picture. This symbol of the violence that they once experienced in mythic times, and the peaceful conditions that have replaced it, is evidently still cherished on the remote atoll.

In another publication, Burrows said more about the myth of violence in the island's past, but he framed it within a broader discussion of social relationships.³ He described the hierarchical system on the island and he suggested that the practical importance of the ranking system is the maintenance of law and order—subordinates defer to superiors and nearly all have a sense of pride in their positions. This system seems to be responsible for the almost complete absence of crime on the atoll. The highly placed chiefs virtually never display any overbearing conduct or haughtiness. The attitudes and behaviors of the Ifaluk can more properly be called kindness than non-aggression, a more negative phrase to Burrows since the Ifaluk themselves emphasize the positive values of their peacefulness most of the time.

³ Burrows, Edwin G. 1952. "From Value to Ethos on Ifaluk Atoll." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 8 (Spring): 13-35

The major display of kindness is courteous speech, a particularly important attribute of the chiefs. The people believe that they will enjoy long life if the chiefs speak kindly, setting the tone for everyone else. For instance, at the conclusion of a meeting in which the chiefs scolded and exhorted everyone to follow a certain behavior pattern, they then cracked jokes to remove the sting from the meeting. The legends about violence in their past, Burrows was told, were certainly not the way they acted in recent times. They gave and received only kindness and hospitality when they visited neighboring islands.

Burrows never heard any expressions of anger, even when people had had too much to drink. The only valid, and occasional, expression of violence, employed when someone was under severe stress, was to act violently toward a building—to burn it down, perhaps. The most salient feature of Ifaluk society is that their actual behavior matches their ideals—they are as kindly (and non-aggressive) in actuality as they believe they are. The strong belief in kindness among them and their firm prohibitions against any displays of anger combine to produce a social system that includes both a successful governing structure and a highly peaceful society. More about their anger control later, but some other facets of life on the island need to be clarified first.

Raising Children to be Peaceful

The gentleness that characterizes human relations among the Ifaluk begins right in the birth hut. At one birth, the newborn's first cry was immediately labeled by onlookers as peevish—"It's pissed off," they said, a behavior pattern that the child would subsequently be taught to avoid.⁴ From the time they are born, infants are loved and protected, given the breast at the slightest whimper, held virtually all the time, and never restrained. However, in the 1950s at least, the infant is washed every morning at dawn in the freezing-cold waters of the lagoon, immersion in which is painful even to adults. This contrasts to the immediately previous state of sleeping between the parents, wrapped in warm blankets. The infants protest with lusty crying.

This kinesthetic learning experience teaches the child that there is a pleasure/pain rhythm, that the child's world is both satisfying and threatening. When the next baby is born, the period of indulgence suddenly ceases for the small child: crying is suddenly ignored, needs are frustrated, the par-

⁴ Lutz, Catherine. 1985. "Cultural Patterns and Individual Differences in the Child's Emotional Meaning System." In *The Socialization of Emotions*, edited by Michael Lewis and Carolyn Saarni, p.37-53. New York: Plenum.

ents and other adults no longer seem to be concerned. The child goes through a period, after it has been usurped by the new baby, of aggressive behavior, temper tantrums, crying, whining, and other negative behaviors. Those experiences prompt the child to accept the cultural beliefs in benevolent and malevolent ghosts who both protect and harm, cure and make ill, cause pleasure and pain, provide security and anxiety.⁵

While the belief in malevolent ghosts is formed in Ifaluk children from the time they are infants by experiences that teach them that there is pain along with pleasure, negative along with positive experience, the persistence of these beliefs in adulthood is confirmed to the Ifaluk by their adult experiences. Since the expression of hostility or aggression is completely forbidden by their culture, they have to project their anxieties onto the ghosts. Since men are intrinsically good, they believe, the Ifaluk think that their hostile actions and thoughts are caused by the evil ghosts around them. They can thus more easily reject their hostile thoughts, since they are caused by the alien ghosts, which thereby confirm their belief in their own peacefulness. It is the ghosts that cause the trouble. The question remains, however, as to how people who are all so good and peaceful can produce ghosts that are so malevolent. They learn the answer in infancy, when their loving parents plunge them into the frigid waters—the evil ghosts are derived from the evil in the souls of everyone, including parents, including oneself.⁶

Ifaluk adults do not bother talking to infants much since they feel that the babies do not understand much. They presume that the ability to gain intelligence begins at about two years of age, and quite a bit at around five or six; Ifaluk adults talk and lecture their children about correct behavior (intelligence) as the children are felt to reach the age of understanding. But since not all adults teach their children evenly, the youngsters do not all achieve equal measures of intelligence/proper values.⁷

Ifaluk children are not allowed to cry—they are bathed, fed, and held at all times in an effort to make them always comfortable. Until they reach five or six they are not held accountable for their actions, so any kind of behav-

⁵ Spiro, Melford E. 1953. "Ghosts: An Anthropological Inquiry into Learning and Perception," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 48 (July):376-382.

⁶ Spiro, Melford E. 1953. "Ghosts: An Anthropological Inquiry into Learning and Perception," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 48 (July):376-382.

⁷ Lutz, Catherine and Robert A. LeVine. 1983. "Culture and Intelligence in Infancy: An Ethnopsychological View." In *Origins of Intelligence: Infancy and Early Childhood*, 2d edition, edited by Michael Lewis, p.327-345. New York: Plenum.

ior is tolerated. When they are weaned, at about age two, the children are believed capable of learning a bit of their social rules, though their educability is believed to be quite limited. Children learn their incorrect behavior from their peers, adults believe, and parents have the responsibility of correcting those bad examples. While children learn by example, the Ifaluk also believe that it is important to lecture them on proper behavior. Their parents lecture at them in a form of stylized preaching; the children, they believe, listen, inevitably understand and learn, and obey the rules of correct behavior because of the adult discourses. They do not place much faith in the physical punishment of children, since they feel it might produce people who are not able to control their tempers, who may not have the ability of speaking properly, and who may be aggressive as they grow up.⁸

The Ifaluk believe that children may be taught proper values after about the age of five or six, and they accept the notion that, as parents, they are responsible for instructing their children to adhere to proper island standards of behavior. They think that the proper indoctrination of their children in understanding *metagu*, the proper fear of justifiable anger, is a critical element in their socialization. This instruction will inhibit their misbehaviors. Adults indicate to children that they should beware of the *metagu* that comes from strangers outside the house. While they believe that the children will experience *metagu* naturally, they feel that the process should be encouraged. One way they assist this process is by displaying justifiable anger whenever the child misbehaves. Another is to socialize them to believe they are *metagu*, afraid, in the presence of strangers or large groups of people.⁹

Adults teach children that a special kind of ghost will “get them” if they wander away from the house or misbehave, and they go so far as to have one of the women dress up in a costume and impersonate the ghost, which appears menacingly at the edge of the compound, threatening to kidnap and eat the wayward child. When the child reacts in terror, a protective adult will tell the ghost that the child will not misbehave any more so go away. Antisocial and aggressive actions are firmly imprinted in the child as *metagu*, and associated with the parents' justifiable anger in response. The

⁸ Lutz, Catherine. 1985. “Ethnopsychology Compared to What? Explaining Behavior and Consciousness among the Ifaluk.” In *Person, Self, and Experience: Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies*, edited by Geoffrey M. White and John Kirkpatrick, 35-79. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁹ Lutz, Catherine. 1983. “Parental Goals, Ethnopsychology, and the Development of Emotional Meaning.” *Ethos* 11 (Winter): 246-262.

appropriate behavior which they teach their children is calmness. The child hears repeatedly that calm people are not assertive, aggressive, or disruptive, they are sensitive to other people's needs. Good people are aware of their potential for doing wrong, so they behave calmly, never aggressively.¹⁰

The Ifaluk do not often discipline their children with physical punishment—they prefer lecturing to spanking. They fear that children who are hit could 'go crazy,' kill themselves, or become aggressive toward their parents. They would grow up to have a short temper and would not be properly gentle adults. When the Ifaluk refer to a person as quiet, calm, and gentle, they are paying the highest compliment. The antithesis of gentleness is bragging, show-off behavior—actions by a person which seek to elevate the self above others. That is, the antithesis of proper Ifaluk behavior that they develop in their children from the time they are infants.¹¹

Retaining their Traditions

One of the most serious issues facing the peaceful societies, the Ifaluk more than some of the others, is preserving their society and its values in the face of the threats posed by modernization. A couple visitors to the remote island in the past quarter century have provided contemporary portraits of Ifaluk. Richard Sosis, an anthropologist who did field work on the island in the 1990s, discusses the traditional culture and values of the Ifaluk Islanders in an article that is available on the eHRAF website.¹² The major point of his article is to provide descriptions of fishing by Ifaluk men. The author concentrates on fishing—men's work—because he was not allowed to observe the Ifaluk women working in their taro patches.

But in the course of his article, Sosis indicates that Ifaluk is still very much cut off from the mainstream—the atoll has no roads, no motor vehicles, and no electricity. A supply ship run by the government of the state of Yap reaches the islands about every eight weeks. The ship, the only regular means of transportation, brings medical supplies and food to all of the outer

¹⁰ Lutz, Catherine. 1983. "Parental Goals, Ethnopsychology, and the Development of Emotional Meaning." *Ethos* 11 (Winter): 246-262.

¹¹ Lutz, Catherine A. 1988. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll & Their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹² Sosis, Richard. 2005. "Ifaluk Atoll: An Ethnographic Account." New Haven: HRAF: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/ehrafe/citation.do?method=citation&forward=browseAuthorsFullContext&id=or21-050>

islands of the state. Sosis writes that “Yap State is unequivocally referred to as the most traditional state in [the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)], and Ifaluk the most traditional atoll in Yap State (p. 13).”

The chiefs on Ifaluk like it that way and they are openly trying to slow down the Islanders’ acculturation to modern ways. Residents of neighboring islands turn to the Ifaluk to show them how to fabricate traditional goods, such as fishing nets, ropes, and looms. The chiefs prohibit western clothing; shirts, shorts, and sunglasses are also banned, in favor of loin cloths for men and lava lava skirts for women. The chiefs also prohibit people from owning motor boats.

Of the two inhabited islands of the atoll, Falachig, the one to the north, is less traditional than Falalop, its neighbor to the south. Modern facilities such as the elementary school and the medical dispensary are on Falachig. The channel between the two is only a hundred yards across and it is easy to wade even at high tide. The residents of Falachig to the north view their neighbors on Falalop as superstitious, while the people on the southern island see the folks to the north as regrettably forsaking their Ifaluk traditions.

However, Sosis notes that in 1997 the chiefs were getting elderly, and the sole remaining magician, who is in charge of the ritual practices of the islanders, was nearly 70. He had not taken an apprentice. While the Ifaluk are nominally Roman Catholics, missionaries have never been allowed on the island, so the rituals associated with their fishing and daily activities still play an important role in their lives. The author speculates that their cultural ways might soon be lost.

Much of what he records is familiar from the accounts by earlier anthropologists. Sosis describes the nature of cooperative labor on the atoll. He explains how the men will be directed by the chiefs to contribute to the work of re-thatching a house for someone. All of the families will contribute specified amounts of thatch to the project and they will turn out for a few hours, when directed by the chiefs, to do the work. Once the old thatch is removed from a needy house, teams of men will bring bundles of new thatch to the building, others will toss them up to the men on the roof, and other men will sit on the roof and tie them on. A thatching event typically takes an hour and a half. The owner of the house provides cigarettes to everyone who participates, as a form of payment. The patterns of the past certainly continue.

Sosis also describes how the Ifaluk handle people who shirk their duty to assist others; he tells how one slacker was treated. Although the man needed to put a new roof on his own home, he realized his name was associated with laziness everywhere on the atoll. If he asked the chiefs for assis-

tance, few people would heed their call to come to help him. In addition, he did not have the money to purchase the cigarettes that he would need to give as payment for the help of others.

Furthermore, the chiefs had forbidden the author from giving the man money, despite his frequent requests for help from him. All the man could do was to put plastic sheeting temporarily over his house to protect its inhabitants. After five months of this, the man had saved up enough thatch to make the new roof, so he asked the chiefs for their support. They granted his request, and with the help of some of his wife's relatives and a small number of others, the house was re-thatched. His helpers grumbled when he paid them with taro and breadfruit rather than with cigarettes, as was customary. The bottom line of the Sosis visit: traditions were being strenuously maintained by the chiefs, the unquestioned authority figures on the island.

A traveler who visited Ifaluk in September 2013 also confirms in a blog post published in June 2016 that Ifaluk still adheres to its stable, traditional values.¹³ Marina, a young woman from St. Petersburg, writes in her blog GipsyTrips.com that her visit to Ifaluk was the highlight of the two-and-one-half month segment of her world travels when she sailed east out of the Philippines through Micronesia. The island looked quite clean to her; the people and their chief seemed quite happy to have the visitors (she was evidently traveling with companions) in their midst for three days. They treated her very well.

Marina notes that life on Ifaluk is quite traditional. Alcohol is forbidden and the men and women still wear their traditional clothing—loincloths on the men, skirts but no tops for the women. Many of them speak English. The islanders spend their time fishing, making canoes, and fabricating bags from the leaves of palm trees. The visitor writes that the island has a hospital with one doctor, a Catholic church, and a school. The Ifaluk also have gardens where they raise flowers that are made into crowns for celebratory occasions.

They are constantly trading and giving presents: Marina gives people cigarettes, coffee and food and they give her coconuts, fish and handmade items such as lava lava skirts in return. The lava lava (also spelled lava-lava or lavalava) is a skirt made out of a single square of cloth, commonly worn on some Pacific islands. The exchange practices also include the children, who give the visitors sea shells. Without money on the island, the people rely on barter.

The islanders all gather together in the school to wish their visitors well and to give them flowers when they are ready to leave. All 750 of them

¹³ "The Happy Isle of Ifaluk," Peaceful Societies News and Reviews, June 30, 2016: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2016/06/30/happy-isle-ifaluk/>

shake hands in farewell. The author refers to Ifaluk as a “fairy tale” island—a really special place for her. Marina can’t say enough good things about her visit—how hospitable, happy and friendly the Ifaluk are to her. “Locals are very beautiful and open!” she writes.

The Changing Climate

Since one of the purposes of this book is to explore the ways that global forces affect the search for peacefulness, a grave threat to the future of the Ifaluk needs to be reviewed. Global climate change. Several articles in recent decades have described this incredible danger to the people and to their isolated, but very low-lying island. The small island nations of the world, and particularly the tropical coral atolls, may or may not survive, depending on the speed with which the world’s seas continue to rise. The fate of the Ifaluk Islanders, and the people of numerous other low-lying islands, hangs in the balance on decisions made in the rest of the world.

The Micronesian Seminar, a non-profit group known as MicSem, posted to its website in 2009 a report by Francis Hezel on the effects of rising sea levels on the low-lying atolls such as Ifaluk.¹⁴ The report indicates that high ocean waters were a particular problem during the period of November 2007 through March 2008, when exceptionally high tides flooded the islands. Scientists attribute the problem, in part, to the closeness between the earth, moon and sun during that period and the spring tides that occur twice each month when those three bodies are in alignment. When those conditions repeated a year later, at the end of 2008, a significant storm system caused even higher tides, with their attendant wave and salt water damage.

Some politicians in the island nations, while urging world leaders to do more to stop global seas from rising, are also preparing their people for the very real possibility that they may have to abandon their lands and move elsewhere to survive the rising ocean waters. But at the present time, islanders are trying to cope with the damage caused by droughts, salt water flooding, and wave surges. A major concern is the danger to agricultural crops. The MicSem report describes the damage from storm surges and waves in late 2007 to low-lying areas on various islands in Micronesia. On some of the more mountainous islands,

¹⁴ Hezel, Francis X. “High Water in the Low Atolls,” Report number 76, March 2009, in the series “Micronesian Counselor,” Micronesian Seminar (MicSem): <http://www.micsem.org/pubs/counselor/frames/highwaterfr.htm?http&&www.micsem.org/pubs/counselor/highwater.htm>

damage was confined to low-lying coastal regions, but on coral atolls such as Ifaluk, the entire landscape has suffered.

Late in 2008, the outer islands of Yap state, including Ifaluk, reported extensive damage from waves and storm surges. The waves uprooted coconut trees along the shores, destroyed seawalls, eroded coastal areas, washed away private and public buildings, and swept debris and garbage inland. Probably the most severe damage came from salt water intrusion into the taro plantings of the islanders. The report indicates that the taro crop on Ifaluk was virtually destroyed by the storms in 2009.

Taro is not the most highly preferred vegetable food in the Federated States of Micronesia. Breadfruits are. But since breadfruit only ripens a couple times per year, it is only available for six or seven months out of twelve. Taro is the fall-back crop for the rest of the year. Often referred to as the potato of the Pacific, taro is mostly grown in pits in low, swampy ground. It requires fresh water around its roots, so salt water intrusion and storm surges tend to kill the plants, which take several years to replant and grow. The residents of islands such as Ifaluk, left with nearly 100 percent loss of their plantings, may have to wait about five years, free of storm surges, for their taro crops to come back again.

Building salt-water resistant containers for the taro patches with concrete and other building materials, such as some islanders have done, or growing the crops in raised beds, may not work on many of the more remote atolls. The construction materials are heavy and expensive. On some of the islands, residents continue to plant taro in their traditional pits. But the low-lying pits are especially subject to salt water intrusion from below. It is not clear if the people could afford to change, or if there will even be enough fresh rainwater to flush the saltwater out of the plantations. Rainfall has been diminishing in recent years and drought conditions have been developing in the islands.

But the author of the report says there is no evidence—yet—to suggest that very many residents of the atolls are giving up and moving away to larger population centers. The outer atolls of Yap State, which of course include Ifaluk, lost a total of only 500 people in the 11-year period from 1989 to 2000, and the atolls in other states of the FSM gained population during the same period. The people of the outer atolls, evidently, are not about to give up, unless they are forced to evacuate.

Francis Hezel the author of the report, urges island leaders to address the immediate issues that face the people, the most severe of which is the threat to their taro cultivation. There are no quick fixes, but measures can and should be taken to protect the major food source of the islanders. “Un-

less we are willing to simply write off our outer islands, we must all be engaged in active planning on short and long-term strategies for the islands," he writes. "This is essential if we hope to preserve the viability of life in the atolls that are so dependent on the crop that is being threatened."

In December 2009 the major media in the world focused on an international conference in Copenhagen, where world leaders were negotiating possible solutions to the crisis caused by global climate change. The fact that the United States and the other developed nations were ignoring the pleas from the low-lying Pacific atolls prompted *Time* magazine to send a reporter to Ifaluk and to publish his report as an example of the problems that nations such as the Federated States of Micronesia are facing.¹⁵ The reporter interviewed people on a couple of the Outer Islands to get their perspectives on what is happening. The article confirms earlier reports: these small atolls are already confronting serious problems.

The reporter discusses the situation with Manno Pekaicheng, one of the chiefs on Ifaluk. The chief places the blame for the rising seas directly on the developed countries. "The big countries are contaminating the whole universe," he says, "and it's getting us before it gets them." Mr. Pekaicheng was not able to go to Copenhagen himself, but he proposes a solution to the reporter. The rich countries should either send them a ship that they could live on, or give them enough money so they could purchase land somewhere else. Since neither appears to be happening, he says he is putting their fate in the hands of God—and he hopes that the countries that are causing the problem will assist them.

Henry Tasumwaali, a spear fisherman on the nearby atoll of Falalis, points out the principal taro patch on his island. He shows the reporter the wilting taro leaves, similar to the ones on Ifaluk, which are brown and yellow due to rotten roots that were damaged from extremely high waves the previous year. Mr. Tasumwaali tells the reporter, "There is nowhere we can go. When the wave comes again, maybe we will wash away from our island, swimming like a sea turtle in the big ocean."

The *Time* reporter speaks to Andrew Yatilman, the Director of the FSM Office of Environment and Emergency Management, who is, himself, from the island of Satawal. They converse about the future of the low-lying atolls.

¹⁵ Nobel, Justin. "A Tiny Pacific Island Faces Climate Change," *Time*, December 14, 2009:

http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1929071_1929070_1947456,00.html

Yatilman sums up the attitudes of the Islanders with: “A captain will go down with his ship, and that is the mindset of these people, they will go down their islands.”

Ifaluk Conceptions of Emotions

One of the best ways of figuring out how the Ifaluk are able to maintain a stable, peaceful society is to examine their own ways of understanding the emotions related to their social relationships. Fortunately, a couple of the half-dozen anthropologists who have done in-depth studies on the island have indeed focused on the concepts the Ifaluk have about themselves and their relationships with others. The question is, how do the Ifaluk understand their world? How do they view the concepts that support their peacefulness, such as their conceptions of anger? A look at some of their words and what they mean provides good clues.

Effective speech is quite important for the Ifaluk—it represents a means of exhorting others to maintain their ethical values and a way of enculturating their children in those standards. They value good, polite talk. One of the most enthusiastically adopted aspects of Christianity is spoken prayer. The mature Ifaluk person, in their view, is able to effectively express opinions and feelings, thereby purging those that are not wanted. However, they totally prohibit any expression of inner feelings through violence or even through impolite or loud speech. The person who has angry inner thoughts and emotions may not even look irritated or angry. Their word *goli*, meaning 'to hide,' signifies their approach to concealing feelings of anger. Other emotions, feelings and thoughts are expressed openly, an indication, for the Ifaluk, of intelligence; such free expressions are a means of providing relief from mental stresses and are a perfectly natural process, they believe. Since they do not view emotions and thoughts as necessarily bad—they lack the Western concept of sinful thinking—they emphasize instead the control of disruptive actions.¹⁶

Anthropologist Catherine Lutz writes about another Ifaluk emotion—

¹⁶ Lutz, Catherine. 1985. “Ethnopsychology Compared to What? Explaining Behavior and Consciousness among the Ifaluk.” In *Person, Self, and Experience: Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies*, edited by Geoffrey M. White and John Kirkpatrick, 35-79. Berkeley: University of California Press.

fear—and her own experience of it.¹⁷ She awoke one night and realized that a man was entering her cabin, which had no door on it. It was an ordinary approach by an Ifaluk male who was seeking the possibility of a relationship. She admitted she had been on the island long enough to realize that men who want to initiate a liaison will see if a woman, in the dark of the night, will leave her cabin with him. But she was conditioned by her upbringing, where a stranger entering at night is a sure sign of danger, perhaps grave danger. She involuntarily screamed. The man fled in confusion and when her host family arrived seconds later, they roared with laughter. But they were proud of her that she had briefly displayed a healthy fear. One individual relayed the story onto many others—opinions of the visiting anthropologist quickly went up. The scream was a “proof of my sensibleness,” she writes (p.200). Fear is an important element in maintaining human virtue and goodness, the anthropologist observes.

Explaining a few other emotion words should help provide a context for their conception of justifiable anger. The Ifaluk think of *fago* (compassion/love/sadness) as a link existing between the needs of one person and the nurturing feelings of others. A woman expresses *fago* for the singer on the radio; a man indicates his *fago* for his son and reprimands his brother because of his drinking, since it appears that he doesn't *fago* his own life. Some Ifaluk personal names include the word *fago*, such as Lefagochang (meaning love and generosity), Fagoitil (love quickening), Lefagoyag (love binding), and Fagolimul (love and generosity). *Fago* is used to describe the feelings when a relative leaves on the inter-island ship, or when ones child gets a sudden, dangerous illness, or when siblings of the opposite sex have feelings of affection for one another. Sisters would not as likely use the word since there is no difference in their respective ranks, so they don't need to protect one another the way brothers and sisters do.

Fago promotes non-violence since the concept implies a feeling of love for the potential victim, which short-circuits violence. Children are raised with the constant feeling of *fago* for other children. When a toddler picked up a piece of coral and made a threatening gesture toward another, adults nearby immediately called out the need for him to *fago* the other. For those people, *fago* is linked to power: the higher one's position in the social hierarchy, the more one is expected to *fago* others. The chiefs *fago* precisely because they are intelligent and mature. Their *fago* is measured by the ex-

¹⁷ Lutz, Catherine A. 1988. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll & Their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

tent of their nurturance, by their well-behaved, calm demeanor, and by their gentleness.

In addition to *fago*, another Ifaluk word that is important for understanding their society is their concept of *maluwelu*, calmness. The word “*maluwelu*” is used to describe the lagoon when the wind is calm as well as the person who has a similar measure of calmness. The calm person is giving, which should be reciprocated with *fago* (compassion) as much as needed. The *maluwelu* person in essence creates *fago* in others. The emotion of *fago* is only brought to full flower by understanding and intelligence, the Ifaluk believe, by the mature ability of people to understand their language and social system. The Ifaluk appreciate a person who is *maluwelu* (calm), since that individual is gentle, compassionate, and does not frighten others.

The ways the Ifaluk think of anger represent one of the most interesting features of this fascinating society and one of the keys to its peacefulness. The Ifaluk concept of *song*, justifiable anger, differs from their other concepts of anger—and from anger as it is understood in many other societies. The word “*song*” is not used for feelings about unpleasant or frustrating events, in the same way “*anger*” is in English; it is only used to describe reactions to morally-condemned actions. *Song* is thus a prosocial concept which helps to maintain peace on the island, since it identifies actions that may disturb the moral order. In contrast once again, the Western concept of anger is that it is anti-social.¹⁸

The Ifaluk have words for emotions produced by other circumstances, such as annoyance at sickness, the feeling that develops in the face of recurring minor annoyances, the feeling that one might have when relatives do not live up to expectations, or the irritation at misfortunes or slights. But the word *song* is reserved for the actions of others that infringe on island moral values, when the rules are violated. The normal reaction to someone feeling *song* toward another, a condition which is spread through gossip and quickly gets back to the offender, is for the latter to then feel *metagu*, a fear of what that angered person will do.¹⁹

Justifiable anger, *song*, is often associated with the four chiefs of the major clans on the atoll, who are the final arbiters of morality and whose anger

¹⁸ Lutz, Catherine. 1990. “Morality, Domination and Understandings of ‘Justifiable Anger’ among the Ifaluk.” In *Everyday Understanding: Social and Scientific Implications*, edited by Gun R. Semin and Kenneth J. Gergen, 204-226. London: Sage.

¹⁹ Lutz, Catherine A. 1988. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll & Their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

about a transgression of island codes of behavior is important for maintaining the island's peacefulness. Thus, their emotional leadership is closely tied to their moral and political leadership. Anticipation of justifiable anger from others prompts everyone to adhere to the island's social codes, such as the value they place on sharing, in which everyone is expected to share anything they have with anyone else who passes by. A person who hoards food and eats it alone would be condemned by everyone. The stingy person is disliked almost as much as the hot-tempered one. When people share their food, or when they bring food to a communal event, they must bring the proper amount and share it or risk the justifiable anger of others. The Ifaluk will share a cigarette around a group, divide one fish among many people if there aren't any more, and share the work of household tasks. The stingy person is disliked throughout the island as much as the hot-tempered one is.

Justifiable anger tends to flow downward in the hierarchical structure, from the chief to the commoner, from the older to the younger, from the man to the woman. However, the person lower on the social scale can invoke *song* in return for affronts or for unwarranted attempts to change power structures, though no one seems to become justifiably angry at the chiefs, whose authority over island values is unquestioned. Thus, *song* is a powerful emotional concept on Ifaluk that helps maintain their peaceful values—there is almost no record of violence on the island in historic times other than that perpetrated by occupying outside forces. Justifiable anger is thus a symbol of morality, an ideological ploy, an act of subversion at times, and perhaps even a red-flag in daily socio-political life.

In her book *Unnatural Emotions*, Catherine Lutz examines in some depth the implications of *song* and the other concepts of the Ifaluk that serve to foster peaceful relations on the island.²⁰ She writes that the Ifaluk frequently use *song* to describe their reactions to others whose moral behavior doesn't meet community standards. People constantly discuss and react to the actions of others: a lazy husband who does little work, a gossip who starts a false rumor, the parents of an overly boisterous boy who don't calm him down—all are criticized for their lack of proper behaviors.

While interpersonal violence is almost nonexistent among the Ifaluk, whenever people become justifiably angry, they recognize the possibility of aggression and anticipate it, at the same time that they expect their mechanisms of self-control to prevent it. The angry person will be approached by

²⁰ Lutz, Catherine A. 1988. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll & Their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

others who will remind him or her of island values: everyone will laugh at you if you fight; reject your angry feelings because the other person (the object of the anger) is confused and crazy; remember that other family members will be frightened if you should fight.

Some of the Ifaluk are noted as being particularly skilled emotional counselors who take pride in their ability to resolve conflicts. They tend to be people who are not hot-tempered, people who do not become justifiably angry at the narration of events. Those counselors normally speak quietly, calmly, and politely, perhaps suggesting a solution to a problem or recommending that the angry person simply forget it. Since the person who is the object of the anger will soon enough hear about it anyway, he or she is likely to become anxious and fearful about the situation. Thus, apologies are given, or fines are paid, or gifts are sent to restore the peace.

Lutz provides some interesting sidelights in her book about Ifaluk emotions and their reactions to violence. She writes that when she was there, the people reacted with horror to stories of violence and murder in the United States. On several occasions since World War II, U.S. Navy vessels have stopped at the island and have shown American films for the islanders. But the violence displayed in those movies—people being beaten and shot—panicked the islanders, terrifying some into illnesses that lasted for days. Many subsequently refused to watch American films. They constantly reviewed and talked about the violent scenarios, reinforcing in their communities their safety from such horrors.

Contrasting Western Approaches to Anger

Anger, as defined in the English language, is very different from the Ifaluk conception of justifiable anger. Instead, we believe anger is an emotional condition that is usually temporary and is aroused by perceptions of unfair treatment. Ranging from low-level irritation to high level rage,²¹ it is justly blamed for conflicts within families, in social groups, and among societies.²² What causes it? That's an issue that sometimes provokes intense feelings among the people who write about it. Anger about anger, anyone? One

²¹ Robinson, Michael D. and Benjamin M. Wilkowski. 2010. "Personality Processes in Anger and Reactive Aggression: An Introduction." *Journal of Personality* 78(1): 1-7.

²² Tagar, Michal Reifen, et al. 2011. "The Positive Effect of Negative Emotions in Protracted Conflict: The Case of Anger." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47:157-164.

school of thought argues that anger is endemic to the human condition. All people experience it. It is biologically ordained. Darwin saw anger as a basic emotion, a fundamental condition of humanity. Proponents of this view describe different facial expressions that characterize anger across cultures, and indeed, that characterize some animals as well.²³ We are hardwired for anger, so proponents of this viewpoint argue—it is essential for our survival. It is unreasonable to deny it.²⁴

But others contend that the biological evidence is still not convincing. There are many discrepancies, inconsistencies, flaws and problems in some of the studies. Some of the data does not confirm the Darwinian suppositions, and more investigations need to be done before conclusions can be reached. Some of the skeptics are looking for new paradigms that might better explain the origins of anger.²⁵ One of the difficulties with the Darwinian point of view is that the beliefs people cherish do influence how they feel and act.²⁶ Our actions are based on more than our genetic inheritance. In essence, if people accept that anger is inevitable, then it will be so; but if they believe, as many of the peaceful societies do, that it is extremely dangerous and must be minimized all the time, then that may be their reality.

Whether or not it is genetically programmed in us, anger clearly leads to violence at times. One research study concludes that it “is a robust predictor of the likelihood of engaging in aggression.”²⁷ People who are inclined to anger tend to act more aggressively, though of course most expressions of irritation or wrath do not go as far as serious violence.²⁸ But the danger is

²³ Matsumoto, David, et al. 2010. “The Expression of Anger Across Cultures.” In *International Handbook of Anger: Constituent and Concomitant Biological, Psychological and Social Processes*, Ed. by Michael Potegal, p. 125-137. New York: Springer.

²⁴ Novaco, Raymond. W. 2010. “Anger and Psychopathology.” In *International Handbook of Anger: Constituent and Concomitant Biological, Psychological, and Social Processes*, Ed. by Michael Potegal, 465-497. New York: Springer.

²⁵ Barrett, Lisa Feldman. 2006. “Are Emotions Natural Kinds?” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 1(1):28-58.

²⁶ Hollon, Steven D. and Raymond DiGiuseppe. 2011. “Cognitive Theories of Psychotherapy.” In *History of Psychotherapy: Continuity and Change*, 2nd edition, Ed. by John C. Norcross et al., p.203-241. Washington: American Psychological Association.

²⁷ Robinson, Michael D. and Benjamin M. Wilkowski. 2010.

²⁸ Wilkowski, Benjamin M. and Michael D. Robinson. 2010. “The Anatomy of Anger: An Integrative Cognitive Model of Trait Anger and Reactive Aggression.” *Journal of Personality* 78(1): 9-38.

clearly there. To the peaceful societies, anger, like violence, is too dangerous to mess with.

Despite its obvious dangers, anger undeniably enlivens many artistic and literary expressions in many cultures—except, perhaps, the peaceful ones. Many powerful novels, plays, movies, and operas are enriched by expressions of anger. Overcoming and dealing with it entrances us. Numerous examples could be cited,²⁹ but it is probably enough for each of us to describe our own favorites.

Shakespeare's masterpiece "King Lear" describes the frequent, overwhelming anger of an irrational old man—who happens to be the King of England. The anger destroys him, his family, and nearly his kingdom. He angrily disowns his youngest daughter, Cordelia, when she refuses to give him a falsely flattering profession of her affection, then he denounces an older daughter, Goneril, when she tells her father that his followers are misbehaving. As his anger at everyone increases, his madness grows apace. At the climax of the story, Lear flees out into a stormy night. The fury of the wild storm symbolizes the rage within him. Later, near the end of act four, he begins to regain his senses as his anger starts to abate.³⁰ Anger is closely associated with madness in the play.³¹

In an early novel by Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby flies into great bouts of anger when he confronts injustice, aggression, disrespect, or abuse. Sometimes he controls himself effectively—when the situation is not too stressful—but sometimes he does not. He lashes out wrathfully at the Yorkshire schoolmaster, Speers, when he tries to beat a child; not long after that, he berates his uncle Ralph for cooperating with Speers. When a rival, Lenville, provokes a fight, Nicholas knocks him down, but with only mild feelings of irritation. Later, in London, Nicholas has a nasty fight with Sir Mulberry for threatening his sister Kate. In Dickens' novel, Nicholas gets far angrier at abuse of others than he does at personal insults. He strives for

²⁹ Potegal, Michael and Raymond W. Novaco. 2010. "A Brief History of Anger," Chapter 2 in *International Handbook of Anger: Constituent and Concomitant Biological, Psychological, and Social Processes*, Ed. by Michael Potegal, Gerhard Stemmler, and Charles Spielberger, p.9-24.

³⁰ Shakespeare, William. [nd]. "King Lear". In *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, Ed. with commentary by W. J. Craig, p.1050-1090. New York: Oxford University Press.

³¹ See also the analysis of King Lear by Keeping, J. 2006. "'Strike Flat the Thick Roundity O' the World': A Phenomenology of Anger in Shakespeare's *King Lear*." *Philosophy Today* 50(4): 477-485.

good, cognitive control over his outbreaks of anger, though he sometimes fails—which somehow seems natural and appropriate in the novel.³²

Later in the nineteenth century, anger forms one of the dominant motifs of Giuseppe Verdi's great oratorio, the *Requiem*. The central section of the requiem mass, in Verdi's telling of it, is the *Dies Irae*, the "Days of Wrath." Verdi graphically portrays God's anger on the Day of Judgment with the overwhelming opening bars of the section. When God speaks through four crushing beats of the massive bass drum, drawn quite tightly to signal divine tension, there is no doubt that God is VERY ANGRY. He has spoken in those four drum beats, one of the towering moments of all oratorio music. Can anyone misunderstand the emotion, or not be affected by the wrath of God? Anger is, in essence, closely associated with human religious belief.³³

These three themes—anger as irrational madness, anger as something that often can be controlled rationally, and anger as an emotion spurred on by divine intervention—do not by any means represent the many shades of thinking among the peaceful peoples, much less societies in general, about the parameters of anger and its consequences. But anger as a justifiable emotion that helps promote peacefulness appears to be a unique contribution by the Ifaluk.

Intersections—Words Build Peace or Violence

Of all the possible lessons the Ifaluk teach us, one of their most inspiring is the way their language cherishes and reinforces their peacefulness. In 2002, Prof. Glenn D. Paige published his insightful book *Nonkilling Global Political Science*³⁴ in which he discusses a similar concept in the United States but which is the reverse of the Ifaluk: the ways our English language is used to capture and verify the validity of violence. He writes (page 14) "Language reflects and reinforces lethality, contributing a sense of naturalness and inescapability." He goes on to provide a listing of words and phrases that reinforce the place of violence in American culture.

A few of his examples will give a sense of the whole. Paige starts by enumerating terms from the world of business, where people make "kill-

³² Dickens, Charles. [nd]. *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. New York: Burt.

³³ Martin, George. 1963. *Verdi: His Music, Life and Times*. New York: Dodd, Mead.

³⁴ Paige, Glenn D. 2002. *Nonkilling Global Political Science*. np. A copy of the book can be downloaded for free from the Center for Global Nonkilling website at <http://nonkilling.org/center/publications-media/books-cgnk-publications/>

ings” in the stock markets because the companies they have invested in engage in healthy “price wars.” He goes on to write that the U.S. launches internal “wars” such as a “war on poverty,” or on crime, or drugs, or whatever. If as a nation we want to rid ourselves of something, let’s make it into a “war,” to garner popular support. Paige goes beyond just listing many of the commonly-used terms in the United States that include words from the dictionaries of warfare and violence. He points out that, while Americans are increasingly conscious of the inadmissibility of sexist and racist words in polite conversation or writing, the culture does not—as yet—condemn words that validate killing. They occur everywhere in American English. A good-looking actress might be described as a “blonde bombshell;” a lawyer, Paige suggested, might be called a “hired gun;” in their baseball games, disgruntled spectators might holler to “kill the umpire.”

The argument here is obvious. Americans who want to foster a culture of peace in our country could take a page out of the Ifaluk book and look for ways to modify our love for violence terms. For instance, writers, journalists, and bloggers might try to consciously eliminate the violence-supporting words and phrases from their lexicons and substitute alternative peaceful terms and words. For example, in this book we have minimized using the negative word “non-violent,” which suggests that “violent” is the norm, in favor of the equally understandable and much more positive word “peaceful.” A small issue perhaps but one that may help build another tiny step toward a culture of peace. Here are some more.

All of us who are Americans and do some writing or speaking can watch for and avoid terms that validate violence in favor of peacefulness. Can we avoid using terms such as “hot shots,” or “gun shy,” “under the gun,” and “going great guns?” Occasionally today we still send correspondence via paper mail, so it doesn’t hurt to eliminate the old phrase to “fire off a letter.” And must we instead, today, “shoot” someone an email? What’s wrong with just saying “send?” As much as possible, can we find ways to change around the American obsession with the necessity of violence and warfare with an even more compelling language and symbolism for companionship, love, and peacefulness?

Another possible way of imitating the Ifaluk might be to begin reinterpreting our origins as a nation, much as the Ifaluk have done. Instead of singing a national anthem, the “Star Spangled Banner,” that praises a battle fought over a fort at the entrance to Baltimore Harbor during a war over 200 years ago, we might consider singing an equally patriotic song that celebrates the beauty of the country, “America the Beautiful.” Instead of par-

rotating the glories of the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, we could express our love for our country by singing about crowning our good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea. The present anthem focuses on the horrors of war while the other widely loved patriotic song exhibits a peaceful pride in a beautiful land. Like the Ifaluk locating their battle with the Woleai in the dim and distant past and saying that they no longer celebrate those former fights, changing the U.S. national anthem could someday relegate the supposed glories of warfare to the archives and instead celebrate our focus on brotherhood, goodness, and peacefulness.³⁵

³⁵ I should add here that I am, personally, a patriotic citizen by birth of the United States who loves his country for the many good things it has done and continues to do, as well as for the incredible beauty of the American landscape.

3. Conflict Resolution and the Semai

The Foundation of Semai Peacefulness: A Fear of Violence

Wa' Lisbet, as she is known in the village, sits in the lap of her Semai mother, Cat, feeling increasingly terrified by the woman's stories of depraved killers who stalk the streets preying on little children, who are of course special delicacies. Cat's younger sister 'Ilah helps tell tales to five-year old Elizabeth, daughter of anthropologist Robert Knox Dentan, who is doing fieldwork along the Waar River in Malaysia's Perak State in 1991. The Semai host family of the visiting anthropologist is loving the child in much the same way as they do with their own children—by treating her to stories of monsters that prey on children by gouging out their eyes and chopping off their heads. "Dad, is that true?" the kid asks her father later, after drying her tears. Well maybe not literally, but the Semai do believe that strangers can be very dangerous, he replies.¹

Dentan devoted his 2008 book *Overwhelming Terror: Love, Fear, Peace, and Violence among Semai of Malaysia* to the history and results of the slave raiding that the Semai and the other Orang Asli ("original people") endured during the 19th century and into the early part of the 20th. The Semai have since grown to number about 43,500 people living in small villages located in or fairly near the forested central mountains in Pahang and Perak states of the Malay Peninsula in Malaysia. They subsist on gardening, gathering in the nearby forests, fishing, hunting, trading in minor forest products, and in a few cases, some tourism.

But many of them still obsess about the dangers posed by strangers. They not only have to cope with hostile neighboring Malay people who perceive them as different and thus somehow suspect, a condition endured

¹ Dentan, Robert Knox. 2008. *Overwhelming Terror: Love, Fear, Peace, and Violence among Semai of Malaysia*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p.180-18.

by many other indigenous societies around the world, but they also have to deal with the still-fresh memories of attacks by armed gangs who murdered and mutilated their ancestors, carrying off human prizes into slavery. While the Malays were not all necessarily the slavers, they controlled the power structures in the nearby towns and cities in the lowlands. Since resistance was futile, fear and flight became the paths to survival. Fear became engrained in the Semai worldview, an essential aspect of their nonviolence.

Clayton Robarchek, another American anthropologist who studied the Semai, discussed the importance of their fears to their culture of nonviolence in several of his publications, much as Dentan did. Robarchek wrote² that the Semai teach their children from the time of infancy to be afraid, with a special focus on a fear of thunderstorms as well as strangers. The people regularly endure violent tropical storms in their villages but they view the potential disasters they might cause as having been provoked by human transgressions of the proper moral codes. When a storm looms, people suspect that errant human behaviors must have angered Ngku, the thunder spirit, who summons his wife Nanggaa, a horned dragon who lives under the earth. The approaching storm portends the possibility that those demons may release landslides or other disasters on their villages.

A climate of fear grows rapidly in a Semai village as a storm gets near: adults run about shouting to Ngku that they're not guilty, screaming directives at one another to do different things, going out into the storm and pounding on the ground to try and drive Nanggaa back down where she belongs. They clip off pieces of their children's hair, pounding on it and burning it, hoping to appease the spirits who must be angry at one of their (perhaps unwitting) transgressions. The *terlaid*, the incautious behavior that causes disasters to occur, may have provoked the violence of the storm and the possible disasters of large trees crashing down on the village or unprecedented floods. Examples of incautious behaviors consist of such things as offending animals, perhaps through frivolous treatment of them, making fun of them, or even laughing at them.

According to Robarchek's analysis, these intense emotions are unconditioned stimuli imparted to the tiniest infants. The emotions elicit the responses of distress and arousal—fear of an unpredictable world. When the infants are only slightly older, parents begin a comparable process of imparting their fear of strangers to them, turning away and repeating their word for 'afraid'

² Robarchek, Clayton A. 1979. "Learning to Fear: A Case Study of Emotional Conditioning." *American Ethnologist* 6: 555-567.

whenever a stranger appears in the village. This fear of strangers is supported by the belief that bogeymen are around, that people will cut off your head.

If a Semai hears an unfamiliar sound while walking a forest trail, he or she may throw down the results of an entire day's worth of gathering and flee. They place no cultural value on bravery. Their fears represent their one display of strong emotions: otherwise, they show little affective involvement with others, a low level of emotion, and no tolerance for interpersonal violence. The cultural beliefs about storms and strangers and the ways they should respond define the behaviors of adults, which condition their children. Belief and affect interact to push the Semai into ever greater fearfulness.

They pass along those attitudes to their children. They teach nonviolence by inculcating in children a fear of aggression equal to their fear of thunderstorms and strangers. More than that, parents may threaten obstreperous children or pretend to hit them, but the blows always stop inches short. Since the young people do not see aggression in their parents, and their aggressive acts toward the parents are fended off with laughter or threats, they have nothing to imitate. When children refuse to do something the parents want them to do, the matter ends there. No one is punished. However, when kids fight among themselves, the normal indifference that parents exhibit toward children will change. A parent will snatch the angry child away from a game and take it back to the house. That way, they reinforce their taboo against anger and violence.³

The Semai have a strongly nonviolent image of themselves, each proclaiming himself or herself to be a peaceful individual, a person who does not get angry, someone who does not hit others. In fact, however, they do quarrel and get angry at times, but their disputes may involve other allies (family, friends) and the conflicts may include a lot of vicious gossip about each other. However, more aggressive expressions of anger are rare, and they almost never hit their children. The one exception to their nonviolence has been that in times of dire stress they have been known to abandon very elderly or sick people who can't move with the rest of the community, leaving them in a hut with only some food or water.⁴

Increasingly, however, young people are getting some education and a few have gotten university degrees. Some are entering professions as well as the labor pools in local towns. But many, if not most of them, still hold to

³ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1968. *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

⁴ Id.

their primary worldview, which is totally peaceful. In their minds, they contrast themselves with other neighboring, more powerful, societies which are not peaceful. They have a *we/they* view; they feel that the worldviews of neighboring peoples are only relevant to them as examples of more violent approaches to social relations that contrast with their own.⁵

Adapting to Changes and the Role of Education

Before going into more details about the peacefulness of the Semai, it is necessary to address one of the major concerns facing them, and the other small, indigenous societies around the world—that of encouraging their young people to get an education. How can the younger generation get educations so they can take advantage of the goods and services of the modern world, yet preserve the values and way of life they were raised with in the process? This issue will be covered in more detail in Chapter 6 about the Buid but it is certainly important to the Semai and many of the other peaceful societies. Researchers, government officials, and the members of the society themselves have different opinions on the many complex ramifications of the issue.

For instance, the authors of one study⁶ argue that the Semai might have to sacrifice their lifestyle and culture in order to achieve equality with the rest of Malaysia. Their basic concern is that the Malaysian government has articulated a goal of having a modern, completely computer literate, country by 2020. Aboriginal people like the Semai stand in the way of the nation achieving this seemingly worthwhile goal. The researchers focused on the small Semai village of Kampung Bukit Terang, in the Kampar District of Perak State. Computer literacy skills among the 39 Semai who completed questionnaires were on a par with their education levels. Out of the 39 people, 30 had no idea how to send emails or to use word processing software. Abilities to name computer parts were similar: 28 couldn't name anything. Abilities to use a computer mouse, to surf the Web, and to use search engines were all similar: 26 to 28, two thirds or more, did not have those skills. Correspondingly, nearly 70 percent of the respondents, 27 out of 39, either had never gone to school or had only attended through the

⁵ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1994. "Surrendered Men: Peaceable Enclaves in the Post-Enlightenment West." In *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence*, edited by Leslie E. Sponsel and Thomas Gregor, p.69-108. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

⁶ Hashim, Rugavah et al. 2012. "Digital Inclusion and Lifestyle Transformation among the Orang Asli: Sacrificing Culture for Modernity?" *Asian Social Science* 8(12): 80-87.

primary level, grade six or below. The remaining 12 respondents had gone to school through the secondary grades.

Because the Semai are excluded digitally from the rest of Malaysian society, they are also excluded economically. Officials tie the two issues together—their economic progress must be tied to their digital literacy and vice versa. The Semai could arguably achieve socio-economic inclusion if they had enough time and training. In other words, they would have to change, to abandon much of their forest-based culture and peaceful ways in order to join the mainstream of modern Malaysia—for their own good, of course. The authors do not compare the values of modern, contemporary Malaysia with those of the Semai village, and they do not show why the former are necessarily superior to the latter.

However, another recent study⁷ gives a very different picture of the Semai: the vital importance to them of continuing to enjoy their traditional forest and agricultural livelihood in the Malaysian highlands, even though they are surrounded by the modernity of the lowlands. The researchers describe how the Semai in a study village use various medicinal plants they find in a nearby forest to give them health and economic benefits. In the process, the people are able to preserve their traditional way of life.

The project was carried out in Kampung Batu 16, a village of 28 households with a population of 278 people located in the Malaysian state of Perak. The village consists of houses built on a slope above a river, though they are not too near it to avoid the dangers of high water. The houses are constructed mostly from plant materials obtained from surrounding forests. The Semai in the community practice both forest arboriculture and swidden, shifting, cultivation of crops such as tapioca. As part of their shifting agriculture, they allow their land to lie fallow for several years after harvests so it can redevelop natural vegetation before being put into crops once again. The villagers also raise fruits, medicinal plants, and trees that they utilize for timber.

The authors learn that the Semai in this village depend for most of their medicinal needs on traditional, native, wild resources. Only 16 percent of their needs are filled by plants that are not originally from Malaysia and are used with knowledge coming from outside their own traditions. Another interesting finding is that 14 out of the 37 plant species are used in rituals—healing, protecting, and harvesting. This demonstrates how the Semai asso-

⁷ Ong, Hean Chooi, Elley Lina and Pozi Milow. 2012. "Traditional Knowledge and Usage of Medicinal Plants among the Semai Orang Asli at Kampung Batu 16, Tapah, Perak, Malaysia." *Studies on Ethno-Medicine* 6(3) (December): 207-211.

ciate their well-being, health, and illnesses with the realm of the spirits. The most significant conclusion of the study is that the Semai, at least in this village, depend heavily for their health needs on the medicinal plants that they gather in the natural habitats surrounding their community. They are much less dependent on cultivated plants for medicinal uses. "This suggests that the forest is still an important source of medicine for the Semai," the authors emphasize.⁸

In trying to balance the desires to accept modernity and the worth of outside education against the value of preserving their culture, it is clear that the Semai, in that one village at least, continue to gain significant benefits from their traditions. The authors suggest that younger generations of Semai may become less interested in acquiring knowledge about the traditional uses of plants. Therefore, it can be argued, preserving the traditions and knowledge of subjects such as medicinal plant uses is essential before that knowledge is lost.

Recently *The Star*, a Malaysian news service, published a couple reports about the educational facilities provided for the Semai by the Malaysian government. One story reported⁹ that Nicol David, a well-known Malaysian sports figure, visited Ulu Tual, a Semai village in Pahang state. The purpose of her visit was to find out the needs of the people and to highlight the major development issues facing the Semai. Ms. David was evidently impressed by her reception: "The villagers have been so warm and welcoming," she said. "They are so open and willing to learn. You can see that they've got so much potential and that if we were to just give them a little bit of support, they would then go the extra mile."

The Semai villagers have been building a community learning center, assisted by the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC) in Malaysia. The learning center, called "cenwey penaney" (shoots of ingenuity), intends to teach the Semai children traditional, useful skills such as making bird snares and basket weaving. The head of the village, Yok Ek Chantan, said that while progress on the new center was not rapid due to financial constraints,

⁸ Ong, Hean Chooi, Elley Lina and Pozi Milow. 2012. "Traditional Knowledge and Usage of Medicinal Plants among the Semai Orang Asli at Kampung Batu 16, Tapah, Perak, Malaysia." *Studies on Ethno-Medicine* 6(3) (December): 210

⁹ Lee Mei Li. "Indigenous Lessons for UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Nicol David." *The Star*, Friday July 11, 2014:

<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/family/features/2014/07/11/indigenous-lessons-nicol-david-visits-orang-asli/>

the community was enthusiastic about it since it would be focused on continuing the traditions of the Semai.

Yok Ek discussed the issue of schooling for the children in the village. “We’ve tried sending some of the children off to boarding school but they don’t seem to fit in well with the rest of their classmates. We’ve also had some children who find it hard to ease back into the Orang Asli way of living after they’ve been away for some time.” The Assistant Coordinator of COAC, Jenita Engi, has been working with the villagers in the development of its cenwey penaney center. She said, “when it comes to the Orang Asli, every tribe has its own customs and cultures. I’ve seen many cases where city folks try to take the villagers out of their comfort zone to try and ‘rehabilitate’ them into one of them. That’s just wrong because we’re not listening to what it is that they really need.”

She added that the Semai were quite capable of doing many practical things, such as building their own homes or finding sources of income. Outsiders need to assist them in furthering what they already can do effectively. They should support them in continuing their own ways of life as they wish. But the children of Ulu Tual who do want an education have to walk 10 km (6 miles) to school every morning through rain forest conditions. During the rainy season, it is very difficult for many of the children even to make it to school. The news reporter for *The Star* felt, however, that formal education was often not a high priority for the Semai, since they would rather engage in activities that continue their traditional customs and lifestyles. The Semai children would prefer to “learn skills to enable them to find their living from the land.”

Five months later *The Star* sent a reporter back to Kampung Ulu Tual to do a follow-up visit and to review the schooling situation again, with a particular focus on how the children are actually able to travel to their nearest school. To judge by the more recent report, the situation is not getting much better.¹⁰ The department of education provides two pickup trucks, with drivers, to transport the children to the school in Senderut, another village. The kids begin climbing into the backs of the trucks by 4:00 am, they are so eager to be among the ones who are, in fact, able to go. The trucks are heavily overloaded, with about 30 children piled in each vehicle when they leave each morning. Even with the two badly overloaded trucks, the two vehicles are still not enough and once they are both filled, the other children don’t get to go. Every morning, children are turned away.

¹⁰ Tan Yi Liang. “No Easy Ride to School.” *The Star*, Sunday November 30, 2014: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2014/11/30/no-easy-ride-to-school/>

Simggol, a 39-year old father of two girls who had gotten on one of the trucks, shares his opinions with the reporter: “We are upset with the transport situation. To make matters worse, one of the two vehicles isn’t in a roadworthy condition ... it often breaks down.” He adds that the community has asked the education department for more vehicles. “Our children are really keen to go to school,” he says. When it rains, the four-wheel drive trucks can’t navigate the dirt track, so the children don’t go to school at all. And since the trucks are so overloaded, sometimes children fall off, but fortunately there have not been any really serious injuries, at least up through 2014.

Simggol goes on to say that education is essential for success and change. Although many Semai are uneducated, they should have the advantage of education open to them. He argues that “there are opportunities everywhere and being a rural community all we ask is for a ‘lift’ up.” He believes that the children in remote rural communities should have just as many educational advantages as those living in urban areas. He adds that since there are already over 100 school age children in Ulu Tual, the village should have its own school.

Another man in the village agrees that having a school in Ulu Tual would be the best solution. He expresses concern that the number of children attending school are diminishing due to the problems. If nothing can be done, he feels, the entire village could become populated with dropouts. Jenita Engi, the COAC official who coordinates a learning center in the village, said she was baffled that the school authorities haven’t opened a school in Ulu Tual. A nearby Semai village, Pos Betau, which reportedly lacks good communications with the outside world, already has a primary school with hostels for the students. Nearly half of the children in Ulu Tual had recently stopped attending school because of the difficulties with transportation. Ms. Engi argues that the children of the community would do well in their studies if they were ever able to attend school every day.

While news stories provide coverage of issues promoting, and inhibiting, the Semai from attending schools and the interest among some of them in preserving their traditional culture, a couple of scholars have also, fortunately, weighed in on the issue. Robert Knox Dentan and Juli Edo did not take a simplistic view of the Semai interest in education or of the difficulties involved.¹¹

¹¹ Dentan, Robert Knox and Juli Edo. 2008. “Schooling vs. Education, Hidden vs. Overt Curricula: Ways of Thinking about Schools, Economic Development, and Putting the Children of the Poor to Work—a West Malaysian Example.” *Moussons: Recherche en sciences humaines sur l’Asie du Sud-Est* 12: 3-34

Instead, the two anthropologists point out that many Semai children face a variety of factors that inhibit them from attending school, such as a lack of shoes, clothing, bags, stationery, books, and transportation. Nonetheless, the writers argue that Semai families are often enthusiastic about their children getting educated. They will go into debt to afford an education for a child.

Dentan and Juli amplify their arguments. While many of the Semai children, supported by their adults, appear to be eager to go to school so they might have more prosperity in their lives, the schools in or near their communities are run by outside authorities appointed by the state and they usually do not include much if any local involvement by the Semai people. The reason, according to an earlier research report,¹² is that Malaysia is more interested in converting the Semai to Islam than it is to providing the children with modern educational advantages within their own cultural contexts. A further issue is that the Semai frequently suffer in their schools from poor instruction, bullying by the majority children, and a lack of quality teachers and relevant materials. Furthermore, the teachers in the state-run schools often do not hesitate to use corporal punishment on the children, a practice which is part of the Malay culture but not that of the Semai. Maintaining the peacefulness of a society is not much of a concern to the Malaysian authorities.

In schools such as those endured by the Semai, the approaches and curricula transform the kids from “peaceable cheerful Semai children willing to make friends with other peoples who treat them well and eager to learn about the wider world into unhappy, aggressive, cliquish kids under so much stress that it is hard to do their homework, and with such low self-esteem that it becomes an enormous task for them to attempt accomplishing anything,” in the words of Dentan and Juli.¹³ So while the various news reports sound positive as well as negative about schooling for Semai kids, the background provided by the two scholars prompts at least a hope that Malaysia will go farther in respecting and supporting the traditions of their peaceful, minority society.

¹² Endicott, Kirk and Robert Knox Dentan. 2004. “Into the Mainstream or Into the Backwater? Malaysian Assimilation of Orang Asli.” In *Civilizing the Margins: Southeast Asian Government Policies for the Development of Minorities*, Edited by Christopher R. Duncan, p.24-55. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

¹³ Dentan, Robert Knox and Juli Edo. 2008. “Schooling vs. Education, Hidden vs. Overt Curricula: Ways of Thinking about Schools, Economic Development, and Putting the Children of the Poor to Work—a West Malaysian Example.” *Moussons: Recherche en sciences humaines sur l’Asie du Sud-Est* 12: para. 66.

But How Really Nonviolent Are They?

As already mentioned, the Semai have a highly nonviolent image of themselves. They see themselves as people who are non-aggressive, dependent, and nurturing. A self-image that allowed aggression would contradict their own definition of goodness. Their worldview, and the place of humanity in it, does not provide for any violence. They see themselves as helplessly surrounded by hostile forces, both supernatural and natural, and they are cautious in their daily activities in the face of all the dangerous forces out there. Security comes only from the sharing, peace and integration they practice within their villages.¹⁴

But how really nonviolent are they today? A look at some recent news stories about them provides a few good clues. A news story published on November 3, 2011,¹⁵ indicated that the Semai in a village in Perak State reacted in alarm when ten forestry officials came into their community. The forestry people had come openly armed and carrying handcuffs. The village headman resented the fact that the foresters had appeared to be favoring the complaints of neighbors that they, the Semai, had been planting gardens in the Chikus Permanent Forest Reserve. The Semai argued that they had the right to use the land without being hassled, and they resented the fact that their non-Orang Asli neighbors were being permitted to farm in the reserve. A local politician was particularly surprised at the needless show of force against the Semai by the officials.

However, not all Semai have retained their commitment to nonviolence. A news story in June 2016 about a successful Semai businessman, who had developed a tourist inn in Malaysia's Cameron Highlands, mentioned that the man, John Bah Tuin, had once gained some notoriety because of his willingness to fight.¹⁶ The report in the *New Straits Times* did not go into detail about his fight other than to mention that he had held off 10 highway robbers with the aid of a parang, a large knife like a machete used for clearing Malaysian vegetation. However, a blog entry, which is no longer available on the internet, did provide the details.

¹⁴ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1968. *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

¹⁵ "Semai Incensed by Firearms," Peaceful Societies News and Reviews, November 3, 2011. <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2011/11/03/semai-incensed-by-firearms/>

¹⁶ "Cameron Highland's 'Commando' Innkeeper." *New Straits Times* June 15, 2016: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/06/152154/cameron-highlands-commando-innkeeper;> "Changes in Semai Society," Peaceful Societies News and Reviews, June 23, 2016.

It seems as if Mr. Tuin was driving on a local highway one Saturday night when he stopped beside the road to use his phone. Suddenly, three vehicles pulled up and 10 men got out—highway robbers. Tuin laid into them with his parang. He managed to beat up the bandits, chopping off a hand of one of them in the process. He suffered some minor injuries himself in the fight, but instead of seeking medical care, he just went back to work at his business. He is now kind of a local legend.

One explanation of this disjunction between a strong belief in peacefulness and instances of severe reactions to violence was provided by Robert Knox Dentan in his landmark 1968 book on the Semai. While they have a long tradition of fleeing from confrontations or fighting, when they are taken out of their traditional, nonviolent villages, they can change. As an example, Dentan referred to the Malayan Emergency of the 1950s when the British trained some of them to be soldiers. The Semai men were quite able to fight and kill communist enemies. One man, describing his experiences to the anthropologist, told him casually, “we killed, killed, killed (p.58).” Dentan guessed that it was as if the Semai at the time were able to compartmentalize their highly nonviolent village life and their lives as soldiers in the rainforest. “Back in Semai society,” he wrote, “they seem as gentle and afraid of violence as anyone else. To them their one burst of violence appears to be as remote as something that happened to someone else, in another country (p.59).”¹⁷

Not only are the Semai not entirely nonviolent, it is clear that at least some of them do not completely accept their traditions of nonviolence. A news report in a Malaysian news service in November 2017 described the headman of the Semai village of Kampung Tual A and his supportive attitudes toward a recent learning center that the villagers, with help from the Centre for Orang Asli Concerns, had built.¹⁸ The purpose of the learning center is to expose the Semai youngsters to their rich traditions as well as to the formal subjects of the classroom. The learning center serves about 100 children from two settlements in Kampung Tual known as A and B. It was opened in April 2014.

The leader of Kampung Tual A, Harun Siden, said that it was essential for the young people to understand their roots and their Semai identity. “Otherwise, they won’t know or they will forget who they are.” He serves as one of the teachers at the center most afternoons. He teaches the histo-

¹⁷ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1968. *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

¹⁸ “Orang Asli Young Shoots Start Education with Lessons in Roots and Identity.” *The Malaysian Insight*, November 12, 2017: <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/22481/>

ry, culture, and language of the Semai, and he shares folk stories. He frequently holds his classes outdoors, sometimes to a riverbank where he relates Semai folktales. He believes that the lessons he presents help instill in the children a stronger sense of self confidence, which he argues they will need when they leave the village. When they attend the local school, they are sometimes teased and bullied. “They don’t know how to defend themselves and they want to run away [from school]. We must teach them to defend themselves. They should not run,” he argues.

While conclusions are hard to draw from this kind of sketchy evidence, clearly some Semai openly reject their traditions—like the businessman using his parang to fight off a gang of ten attackers—while others question it, such as Haren Siden, and still others support it avidly, like Kampung Batu 16, the village where the people still rely heavily on their traditional medicinal plants.

Lessons to Be Learned from the Semai

Alberto Gomes, an anthropologist who has studied the Semai and the other Orang Asli societies for many decades, suggested at a conference in November 2011 that new images of social and economic relations are needed, ones which abandon human-centered paradigms and focus, instead, on the interdependence of people with the natural environment. Equality, sustainability, and peacefulness, in the new model he proposed, are intertwined.¹⁹ His analysis is so relevant to the thrust of this chapter that it is worth reviewing them in detail.

Gomes argued that numerous alternatives to the exploitative capitalist model have been developed over the years, most recently a de-growth theory from several European economists. What is needed, those economists have suggested, is not more proposals for utopian systems. Instead, they ask for practical examples of existing societies that will offer clues about modifying prevailing systems. In his paper, Gomes offered such prac-

¹⁹ Gomes, Alberto. 2011. “Alter-Native ‘Development’: Indigenous Forms of Social Ecology,” paper presented at the 2011 annual conference of the American Anthropological Association in Montreal at the paper session “Challenging the Legacy of Innate Depravity: The New Tidemark of the Nonkilling Paradigm;” the paper was also published under the same title in the journal *Third World Quarterly* vol.33(6), 2012: 1059-1073; and “Peaceful Societies Exemplify Ecocentric Living [Panel presentations, part 2],” *Peaceful Societies*, December 8, 2011: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2011/12/08/peaceful-societies-exemplify-ecocentric-living/>

tical examples from his Orang Asli research, in hopes of promoting economic, social, and environmental justice.

He did not argue for a return to some Arcadian past but he did maintain that the indigenous peoples in Peninsular Malaysia such as the Semai do provide a useful contrast with capitalist societies. The Orang Asli offer “a critique of modes of living that bring about and reproduce poverty, inequality, violence and ecological degradation.” Gomes maintained that the prevailing state societies, infused with their capitalist ethics, exemplify the 4-Gs—growth, glut, greed and grievance.

Regarding equality, the first leg of his model, he pointed out that the Orang Asli villages do typically have leaders, but everyone has more or less equal access to power. Most village decisions are made through consensus. People maintain their interdependence through their firm beliefs in sharing. The speaker observed that during his field work among the Orang Asli, he frequently witnessed people sharing things. People would not necessarily reciprocate such gifts, relying instead on the certainty that almost everyone readily gives to others. Thus, one person’s individual gift would be repaid by another, from someone else, in time. Anthropologists refer to this process as “generalized reciprocity.” Children are socialized to share their things with others, and people who do not share properly feel the scorn of the entire community.

Furthermore, equality is enhanced in Semai society by the fact that the people all have equal ownership of the land, and equal access to its resources. They fish and hunt, cultivate crops and gather forest products, all within a village territory called a *ngrii*, which is demarcated by natural features such as ridges and streams. The only exclusive ownership of products within the territory is of crops that individuals have cultivated. But even then, ownership is not really a human-centered conception. Instead, the supernaturals own the land and its resources. People only have the right to use the products from the earth: they do not have absolute control over any portion of it.

Leading into the second phase of his model, sustainability, Gomes pointed out that before the Semai cultivate any land, they will clear a tiny area, perhaps one square meter. They will then announce loudly to the nearby ground spirits (*nyani kawul*) their intention to grow something. The requestors will then learn, in their dreams, the responses from the spirits to their requests. Good omens, picked up in the dreams, suggest that the requests have been granted, and the farmers can then go ahead with the cultivation, though of course proceeding with considerable care and respect for the land.

The implication is that any destruction of the land could anger the spirits, who might visit their wrath on the people. Gomes did not argue that

this kind of belief system would work in many other societies, of course, but the message—basing a human need for food on an underlying respect for the earth—is powerful. He pointed out that Orang Asli people such as the Semai, who have an abiding respect for nature, are more likely to live in harmony with it. Many perceive the forest as a benevolent parent. Furthermore, the Semai are not alienated from nature, even though many of them now work at wage jobs and live only on the fringes of natural forest ecosystems. They persist in engaging in their traditional, forest-based, subsistence activities, though sporadically.

Semai religious beliefs help cement their ties to nature. They believe that the human soul, the *kenah senlook*, is both an integral part of a hunter and an essential aspect of nature and its laws. Those laws require the human to take only what is needed, and to respect all animals, spirits, and anything else connected with the natural environment. Breaking such laws, like acting disrespectfully toward an animal, or killing more than is needed at the moment, could drive away the *kenah senlook*. That would lead to bad luck and misfortunes.

The peacefulness of the Orang Asli, the third phase of Gomes' model, is fostered by factors the anthropologist had already discussed, such as their generalized reciprocity and their egalitarian ethics. The Semai are able to generally maintain peaceful relations with outsiders through caution, by keeping a distance, and by flight when necessary. Gomes discussed how they sometimes use what he calls "sly civility"—processes employed by people with unequal access to power. The less powerful Orang Asli will dissemble, feign ignorance, or banter effectively in order to disarm potentially threatening strangers.

At a presentation he gave in July 2017, Gomes shared a number of additional observations about the Semai.²⁰ He advised his hosts—he gave his paper in Malaysia—that it was important for people to better understand them and the other Orang Asli societies. Professor Gomes argued that those people are not respected as well as they should be by the broader population of Malaysians. The indigenous people are widely considered to be primitive. Urban children need to learn about them so such misconceptions can be corrected. Dr. Gomes, who is an emeritus professor at La Trobe University in Australia, urged in his talk in Petaling Jaya, a satellite city of Kuala Lumpur, that it is important to eradicate the stigma that many Malaysians hold about the Semai. "There are a lot of Orang Asli lawyers and

²⁰ "Educate Our Kids about the Orang Asli, Says Anthropologist," *Free Malaysia Today News*, July 14, 2017: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/07/14/educate-our-kids-about-the-orang-asli-says-anthropologist/>

doctors, but the moment they say that they are Orang Asli they are considered inferior,” he said.

He maintained in his presentation that Malaysians should be inspired by the concepts and values that are cherished by the Semai. As Director of the Dialogue, Empathic Engagement, and Peacebuilding group, the DEEP Network, a world-wide peace organization, Prof. Gomes singled out Orang Asli concepts of giving, empathy for others, and a sense of community as particularly important. But they do suffer a lot of discrimination. The Semai living in the Tapah area near the Cameron Highlands, for instance, have told him how the medical staff at area hospitals discriminate against them.

He argued that modern urban people could learn a lot from the Orang Asli, whom he described as having peace-loving societies with a profound respect for the environment. They accept the idea that they are an integral part of nature—destroying it means harming themselves. Furthermore, they “treat others with respect. If one were to go to their village, they will include the person as one of them. It is truly an inclusive society,” he said. Unfortunately, they have their share of social problems today, such as drug abuse and alcoholism, particularly among their youth. Many young Semai have become ashamed of their native culture and are increasingly alienated from it, stigmatized as they are by the Malaysians. Orang Asli youths have become lost: many don’t want to be part of their own cultures but they are not accepted by Malaysians either.

Another problem the Orang Asli face is that their views of land ownership differ from those of the majority. They cherish their historical and spiritual connections to their lands so that if and when the Malays take their lands away from them, they lose their identities, which affects their mental and social well-being. If someone purchases a fish, he said, he or she will buy five, one for personal consumption and the other four to share with their neighbors. “It is the sense of giving that cements their community,” he concluded.

Avoiding and Resolving Conflicts

The headman of a Semai hamlet builds a temporary shelter near his durian grove so he can spend the night there and maybe even catch the person who is stealing his fruit. But as he builds the shelter, he makes sure to tell everyone what he is doing. He wants to be certain that the thief won’t come, since of course they would both want to avoid any confrontations. As Clayton Robarchek points out in a 1979 journal article, the Semai try to avoid such conflicts from arising, but when disputes do come up, they have

ways of handling them in the village. One of their approaches, which he describes carefully in his article, is to request the headman to convene a type of conflict resolution meeting called a *bcaraa'*.²¹ Just as the point of the shelter in the durian grove is to avoid rather than provoke a confrontation, the point of a *bcaraa'* is to resolve a conflict, not to pass judgment on someone accused of breaking the rules. The peacefulness in their society depends both on avoiding conflicts as much as possible and on resolving them quickly and effectively when they do arise.

The *bcaraa'* typically begins near dusk at the house of the headman, where people gather to socialize and begin to discuss the events that have produced the conflict. The proceedings open when one or more senior people in the village give long speeches about the importance of group interdependence and unity. They will remind the others of how much they depend on one another for food and assistance. They will stress the need for harmony within the group.

When the principals to the dispute speak, they do not confront one another directly, and no one presents evidence. The principals present their sides of the story, especially the reasons for their actions, as they try to win their arguments through effective presentations—much as lawyers in an American courtroom might do. The facts of the case are already well known. Others will carry on the discussion, often not rebutting the well-crafted points made by earlier speakers but presenting their own points of view. Arguments that have already been clearly refuted may be presented again and again, depending on how much people need to talk out their feelings. There is little if any emotion during these speeches—rather the people try to present their viewpoints as forcefully and clearly as possible. The Semai believe that people who are intrinsically in the right will be better able to argue their cases than those who are not.

As long as people want to go on talking, the *bcaraa'* continues, sometimes for hours, sometimes even for days. Ultimately, everyone becomes talked out and no one has the urge to say anything more. The village has reached a consensus on what has happened and why. The headman may impose a modest fine against the person who is primarily responsible for the dispute, though he will often refund a portion of the fine right back to the individual paying it. The fine symbolizes the need to chastise the person who has been primarily

²¹ Robarchek, Clayton A. "Conflict, Emotion, and Abreaction: Resolution of Conflict among the Semai Senoi." *Ethos* 7 (1979): 104-123.

responsible for the problem, while the refund indicates the continuing importance to the community in providing nurturance to individuals.

The headman will lecture the guilty person, or frequently, guilty people, since more than one individual may have caused problems. Since the matter has been thoroughly discussed, the issue is settled. It cannot be raised again. The headman lectures the group one last time to re-emphasize that group unity and harmony have been preserved. The result of the *bcaraa'* is to effectively remove emotions from the parties to the dispute as well as to bring about a resolution of the conflict itself. It reintegrates the whole village, which was threatened by the dispute, and it serves to reconcile the parties. It reaffirms that the group is mutually interdependent and that correct, peaceful behavior is essential. The parties to the dispute feel relief that the matter is settled and finished. If it is late at night, the people can simply roll up in their sarongs and go to sleep on the floor.

In another article describing the *bcaraa'* process, Robarchek described how a man had infringed on the territory of others by planting durian trees where he had no right to plant them.²² The Semai had been growing the trees and harvesting the crops to sell to the lowlanders so they could afford to buy the consumer goods they wanted. The man's neighbors were becoming angry that he was infringing on their traditional land rights. The headman of the village called for a *bcaraa'* to try and resolve the issue. It proceeded much like the other one mentioned already.

The conflict resolution assembly concluded by admonishing everyone to not infringe on the lands of other people, though it allowed the man who had done the tree-planting to keep his trees. It was more important for the group to keep its harmony than to treat the guilty individual too roughly. Robarchek concluded in that article that this was an example of the group choosing to avoid violence, even though the offense committed by a member of the village was serious; instead, they decided to reaffirm their traditional values of mutual support and unity and they acted on their decisions. They were aware of the material gains that the guilty man enjoyed because of his actions, but they placed a higher value on the peacefulness and cohesion that they wanted to pass along to future generations.

Robarchek concluded that Semai strategies for peacefulness are fundamentally based on successful resolutions of conflicts that don't disrupt group solidarity; on individuals looking to the group for their security and

²² Robarchek, Clayton A. 1989. "Primitive Warfare and the Ratomorphic Image of Mankind." *American Anthropologist* 91 (December): 903-920.

nurturance; on people believing that their needs and frustrations can be dangerous; and on villagers viewing their own community as safe, secure, and good while the outer world is seen as unsafe, hostile, and dangerous. While human societies are affected by environmental, biological, deterministic, and materialistic factors, the ability of people to establish their own cultural patterns to produce peaceful conditions through their own decision-making and initiative should not be overlooked.²³

However, Robert Knox Dentan and two other scholars who are themselves Semai, Juli Edo and Anthony Williams-Hunt, have taken issue with some aspects of Robarchek's analysis.²⁴ They don't dispute the fact that the Semai are able to maintain peace in their communities because they can effectively resolve their conflicts. Those three scholars, instead, describe how the Semai developed their formal, conflict resolution meetings in the last century by modifying Malay practices. The authors maintain that the Semai commitment to peacefully resolving disputes is based primarily on their own earlier, traditional beliefs and strategies. The three argue that the formal conflict resolution meetings, known as *bcaraas'* (or variant spellings), in fact represent a fairly recent development. The *bcaraa'* is not practiced in all Semai villages. Although the Semai live entirely within a Malay context, they are not necessarily submissive to the will of the dominant society; when they need to settle disputes they often solve them in their own fashion.

The focus of the three authors is on the history of conflict resolution among the Semai of the Cameron Highlands of Peninsular Malaysia. A Semai leader became invested with authority over a large number of villages and he developed a new system of land ownership in which people began planting rubber trees and harvesting the cash crops for their overlords. The rubber plantations remained fertile, which prompted the Semai to settle and continue to farm the same areas rather than to move about as they had been doing before. But settling in permanent villages affected their conflict resolution strategies. Previously, they had preferred to resolve disputes informally. The parties to conflicts would separate, gossip, or try to shame the individuals that the community felt were primarily at fault. People lived in spread out settlements, so it was easy to avoid others with whom one had disagreements.

²³ Robarchek, Clayton. 1990. "Motivation and Material Causes: On the Explanation of Conflict and War." *The Anthropology of War*, edited by Jonathan Haas, p.56-76. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁴ Edo, Juli, Williams-Hunt, Anthony, and Dentan, Robert Knox. 2009. "Surrender, Peacekeeping, and Internal Colonialism, A Malaysian Instance." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 165 (2&3): 216-240.

Although informal approaches to conflict resolution still prevailed in many cases, once the Semai settled closely together into villages they accepted, at least at times, the more formal *bcaraa'* meetings, derived from the Malay court system that the Semai leader had introduced. The village headman, or his agent, would interview people to gather all the facts in any dispute, particularly to find out which individuals seemed to be the most to blame for a problem. He would seek to form a consensus within the community so he could make a judgment, and would then try to persuade the people involved to accept his resolution of the matter. Or he might convene a *bcaraa'*.

But to this day, villagers frequently get sick of interminable meetings, the three authors write, which can go on and on for several days and nights, and the *bcaraa'* will simply dissolve without a matter being settled. The *bcaraa'* is still used, but it is employed as a court of last resort—it takes time out of everyone's day or evening. The Semai continue to maintain the *slamaad*, the general peace, within their villages or between their communities. Their traditional strategies of avoiding conflicts—by joking and temporarily withdrawing from others—are still widely practiced. Communities will only schedule a *bcaraa'* if bad feelings persist.

Financial restitution is still an important aspect of healing. In their previous, traditional, system of conflict resolution, a wronged individual would seek a gift from a guilty party. Typically, the person who had been wronged would ask for a substantial gift but after lengthy negotiations, the individual who had admitted his or her guilt would give a very modest present, which would then be accepted. The dispute would be over, feelings of justice accepted, the psychological hurts resolved. The token gift would conclude the matter.

Intersections: Retreating from Conflict and Potential Violence

The tendency of the Semai to retreat from the conflicts that might produce violence will be seen as cowardice by many readers. We need to confront that view—that the brave are virtuous and that cowards should be condemned. Only cowards would not stand up and fight. The notion that we must fight for our beliefs and our rights is a lesson that is passed down to most children in most of the world's major societies. How can anyone respect cowards such as the Semai? But the evidence from the Semai, and from some of the other peaceful societies, is that that perspective misses the point.

The preference—the passion—to avoid violence at all costs, by fleeing from it if necessary, can also be seen as an act of sanity, as an act of courage, and as an act of strength. While such an argument might appear to be

parroting an impossibly idealistic Christian maxim—the turn the other cheek thing that some deeply religious people seem to remember at times—arguably it requires more strength to hold onto one’s temper during a confrontation than it does to let things escalate into violence. The latter, the resort to fists or knives or guns or nuclear bombs during a confrontation, is perhaps the easy approach, the way of weakness, while approaching a conflict with a quiet determination to resolve it peacefully is often the more difficult choice. The gentleness of spirit that the Semai, the Paliyans, and the others described in this book display is the result of a commitment to gentleness representing cultural strength, not weakness. Christian leaders would argue for the same gentleness of the human spirit but within a framework of their religious beliefs.²⁵ And often the gentle approach yields better results.

For the non-confrontational style of resolving conflicts exemplified by the Semai is very different from the confrontational approach espoused by most of the world’s major—and more violent—societies. The different beliefs about conflict and approaches to them need to be summarized. The ways the world’s major societies handle conflicts reflect their worldviews about the inevitability of violence and warfare, much as the approaches that the Semai take are a reflection of their beliefs.²⁶

One of the beliefs held by many people is that conflict is normal and to be expected by all humans everywhere. Small societies such as the Semai, in this view, must rely on the superior authority of the large, all-encompassing states to prevent violence and warfare—or so most people believe. All societies have to deal with violence, many argue—it seems to be inevitable. Just look at the news any day you wish.²⁷ Another belief that is widely proclaimed in much of the world is that the threat of punishment is the best, if not the only, way, to prevent crime and violence. Punishment, after all, is seen as the end result of justice, the results of the offender’s violations of the proper social and moral standards.²⁸ Similar arguments would be made about the necessity

²⁵ Barnes, M. Craig. 2017. “Faith Matters: Choosing Gentleness.” *Christian Century* 134 (25), December 6: 35.

²⁶ Bonta, Bruce D. 1996. “Conflict Resolution among Peaceful Societies: The Culture of Peacefulness.” *Journal of Peace Research* 33(4): 403-420. Available as a PDF at <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2015/11/Bonta96.pdf>

²⁷ Ferguson, R. Brian. 1984. “Introduction: Studying War.” In *Warfare, Culture and Environment*, R. Brian Ferguson, editor, p.1-81. Orlando, FL: Academic; Knauff, Bruce M. 1987. “Reconsidering Violence in Simple Human Societies: Homicide among the Gebusi of New Guinea.” *Current Anthropology* 28(4): 457-482.

²⁸ Greenawalt, Kent. 1983. “Punishment.” In *Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice*, vol. 4, edited by Sanford H. Kadish, p.1336-1346. New York: Free Press.

of armies to deter external aggression. As has already been made clear, the Semai would not agree and their society reflects those ways of thinking.

One of the most striking ways the Semai and many of the other peaceful societies disagree with the dominant thinking around the world is with respect to the role of governments in their lives. Government, after all, is essential to the prevention and control of conflict that leads to violence, as we see it. The eminent scholar Kenneth Boulding wrote in his important book *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory*, that “conflict control is government and though government has broader functions than this, conflict control is perhaps its most important single task.”

The Semai, like the other peaceful societies, try to deal with issues themselves and avoid the involvement of state governments or other political entities. They avoid calling the police if at all possible. Individuals who are involved with a dispute will try to resolve it themselves, or they may turn to the local group if necessary. They rarely want to get threatening outsiders involved in their issues. They will laugh off problems, walk away from conflicts, and try to settle their difficulties themselves. If those approaches don't work, they may call for more formal, but local, conflict resolution strategies, such as the *bcaraa*'s already discussed. The critical point, however, is that the group is seen as a forum to promote the peace, as a way to dissipate tensions, as a means of getting beyond the dispute and resuming normal life. The group is most emphatically NOT a polity that can enforce decisions.

The only enforcement action that is taken by many of the peaceful societies is that of ostracism. The person who refuses to make amends for aberrant behavior, who simply will not abide by the norms of the community, whose constant troublemaking never seems to end, can be ostracized by the community.

The point to conclude with is the view, in Western circles at least, of the inevitability, and perhaps the desirability, of conflict. David Augsburg wrote in 1992²⁹ that it was completely impossible to eliminate conflict—and probably not wise to do so since it fosters so much creativity and change. Individuals who accept that viewpoint proclaim the virtues of peace, harmony, and love but accept and rationalize away such antisocial values as competition, aggression, conflict, and violence. We accept them as inevitable—in large part because our society approaches them as inevitable. Re-

²⁹ Augsburg, David W. 1992. *Conflict Mediation across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox.

solving conflicts is thus only a process, something that is perhaps better than resorting to the ultimate controls such as the police, prisons, and armies.

The Semai, and the other societies profiled in this book, see conflict resolution and the processes of building peacefulness differently. More important. Worth everything to live for and worth promoting with your kids. Souillac and Fry, in an overview of lessons that can be gained about conflict resolution from indigenous people, argue for more dialog between them and modern societies.³⁰ Their argument could certainly be applied to the Semai so that perhaps moderns could gain wisdom about indigenous practices regarding better approaches to conflict resolution.

And like the experiences of Dentan's five-year old daughter Elizabeth, the approaches of the Semai may differ from those used by other nonviolent societies, but the values are similar. Maintaining a peaceful society has been critical to the Semai for a long time and it still is for many of them.

³⁰ Souillac, Geneviève and Douglas P. Fry. 2014. "Indigenous Lessons for Conflict Resolution," in *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, 3rd edition, Peter T. Coleman, Morton Deutsch, and Eric C. Marcus, editors. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014, p.604-622.

4. The Piaroa Reject Competition and Violence

The Foolishness of the Gods

The Piaroa love to tell good stories. In the evenings they enjoy gathering around the leader of the community, a shaman, in order to listen to him tell tales based on the old myths about their ever popular, and always absurd, gods. The storytelling provides the people with their happiest moments as they laugh at the slapstick comedies that he narrates and acts out. Joanna Overing, a British anthropologist who has written many works about the Piaroa, said that she always felt closest to her hosts during their evening get-togethers when they were telling funny stories, sharing scatological and bawdy tales, and enjoying teasing and good humored bantering.¹

Their mythic tales are dramatic episodes filled with parody and humor, of gods acting like buffoons, their bizarre actions often filled with irony. One god, competing with his brother to see who could toss the moon higher in the sky, accidentally bangs his head on it, leaving his facial imprint as a mark of his foolishness. The other brother is even more ridiculous—he gets himself burned to death on the sun. In another story, a god sees a penis hovering over him and grabs it, giving form to man.

Overing delights in retelling some of the stories in her scholarly writings. For instance, Wahari, the creator god, and his sister Cheheru decide to hold a feast at their home and invite everyone. Soon, a lot of people arrive, many of them well perfumed and decorated. Wahari, however, is concerned about protecting the virtue of his sister so he orders her to be careful—she must not

¹ Overing, Joanna. 2000. "The Efficacy of Laughter: The Ludic Side of Magic within Amazonian Sociality." In *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*, edited by Joanna Overing and Alan Passes, p.64-81; Overing, Joanna. 2006. "The Backlash to Decolonizing Intellectuality." *Anthropology and Humanism* 31(1): 11-40.

drink to excess or compromise herself. She obeys him and resists the amorous advances of numerous male guests but for his part Wahari drinks too much and enjoys some romantic pleasures with their female visitors. After the party, Cheheru learns of the hypocrisy of her brother and expresses her anger at him, reflecting bitterly on all the nice men she had turned away that evening.

Wahari, in turn, gets furious at his sister, mocking her for not bedding down with the good-looking men. But then he gets so angry with his sister that he throws her powers of sorcery off onto the Mountain of Sorcery—and he tosses her there also. Where she falls, she creates howler monkey, becoming on her part the Mother of Monkey. She has created the Monkey Urine Madness disease, an illness the Piaroa call *k'iraeu*. It causes sexual promiscuity. It came from the perfume that she gave to the monkeys, a perfume that was derived from the urine of the same animals. The crazy monkeys are, in effect, making a love potion out of their own urine. One can imagine a Piaroa shaman, or storyteller, retelling, embellishing, and acting out a story like that, where the morals are clear but the basic premise is to enjoy the re-telling of the drama as well as to learn from it.

Cheheru and Wahari then go their separate, nomadic ways. She visits various foreign communities, creating perfume for them, having love affairs, creating more monkeys. Wahari tells everyone that if they use Cheheru's perfumes, they will go crazy, suffer from Monkey Urine Madness, and make love to their brothers, sisters, friends, and even strangers. The guilty individual in the myth is of course Wahari, whose arrogance has caused the rancor and ultimately the illness that they all suffer from. Cheheru's wandering and promiscuity is the result of Wahari's bad behavior.

The stories are made up of bawdy words and absurd actions in order to effectively capture the essence of life for the Piaroa—consumption, reproduction, and social relationships. Overing makes it clear that her retelling of the stories is sanitized from the roughness of the Piaroa originals that she heard and witnessed. But the stories are more than just entertainment. The myths embody the dangerous as well as the beneficial aspects of fertility and of life on the land. The myths told by the shamans focus the listeners on emotions—good and bad, right and wrong, but never neutral or “scientific” concepts. The storytellers emphasize, through their telling of the myths, that humans are capable of both outrageous and destructive actions. The stories convey these truths on a visceral level.

In a society that is firmly egalitarian, the myths and their skillful, humorous retellings hold up social violations for ridicule. The stories place such negative feelings as anger, contempt, and arrogance within the context of

the ridiculous, the grotesque, and the obscene. The laughter of the audience is a sign that the words of the story have had their intended magic effect—to improve the health of society. The bawdy words the storytellers use; suggest to the listeners that it is possible for their emotions to have gone astray and for the intellect to have become disconnected. The audience laughter shows that the subtle messages about the need to control oneself are being received—intellectually and viscerally.

Storytelling is an essential ingredient in a society where the people depend on one another. The Piaroa, an American Indian society that thrives in the rainforests of southcentral Venezuela, used to subsist on shifting cultivation, fishing, hunting, gathering and trading craft products, but in recent decades their economy has grown more complex. They now live in more stable settlements where they accept modernizing trends, grow crops in permanent gardens, raise livestock, earn money through wage labor or even, in some cases, from professional jobs. But traditionally, adults would expect to work closely with others with whom they could easily banter. Their work and their play complement each other, though the Piaroa adults are always careful about the context of their humor, constantly making sure that their stories and jests do not cause offence. Their laughter is carefully controlled so as to not violate their codes of behavior—it must not be excessive.

When groups of Piaroa laugh and tease a young man who just farted, for instance, they believe that the merriment helps preserve everyone's good health—much as Germans might say *gesundheit* to people who sneeze. But the intentions of the Piaroa go deeper than having simple fun. They believe that the fart may release powerful contaminants, which the man may have gotten from his father-in-law, so the laughter helps give them real protection from danger.²

While the Piaroa laugh about bodily noises and functions, they also see the humor and folly of so much that surrounds them. Their myths, the basis of their beliefs, represent the creation and order of the world, but their stories about the creator gods are confused with a lot of foolishness that they like to laugh at. In the process of laughing, they defuse the dangers that the order, productivity, and wealth of the earth pose for people. For they see the inter-connections of the creation stories with their everyday experiences—the myths help explain their vision of reality. The Piaroa are a highly political people but they strongly value personal and informal rela-

² Overing, Joanna. 2006. "The Backlash to Decolonizing Intellectuality." *Anthropology and Humanism* 31(1): 11-40.

tionships based on trust and conviviality. Along with other Amazonian societies, they have a distaste for hierarchy or coercion and they much prefer tranquility, comfort, mutuality, and good humor. But they are quite aware of the difficulties that get in the way of achieving such harmony in society.

The problems are apparent in their myths, which reveal the Piaroa views of the universe. An essential element in their worldview is the bawdy, the folly, the rowdy. The humor of the gods is slapstick, in part because it reflects another one of their creator gods, Kuemoi, Wahari's father-in-law. He was a totally whacked-out fool. A madman and a diabolical monster, Kuemoi created gardening, curare, hunting, and other useful arts and skills, but he also laughed raucously as he stomped through creation times. He hatched outrageous plots, stamped his feet, ran endlessly in circles, and shrieked when his plots were foiled. He was a highly comic, rather than a tragic, figure.

He represents for the Piaroa the potential danger posed by all human beings, who may behave in wicked, odious ways. Kuemoi was driven by a deep-set cruelty, and his complete madness was devoid of reason. His horrid ways, representing humanity's potential for evil, were based on knowledge and an abundance of power. He obviously had too much of both. The other gods and beings of mythic times were also, like Kuemoi, highly paranoid. They ended up consuming each other, a descent into cannibalistic chaos. Thus, the events of the creation period established the existing world and everything that people need—but they also created the potential problems the people must contend with. The Piaroa realize from the stories that ordinary events can lead to violence, mayhem, and murder. The forces for evil need to be carefully controlled.

The Piaroa shaman stands—or in some communities, used to stand—between the evils of the despicable gods and the health and harmony of their daily lives. The shaman is an imitator of the gods, a trickster and jokester, a master of the art of folly. But through his efforts he is able to make it possible for the rest of the Piaroa community to escape from the evils that the gods have vested on humanity, those poisons that are implicit in the very creation they provided.

As a result, the Piaroa community is peaceful, easygoing, and quite safe. Overing describes an idyllic day in a Piaroa community, with the children playing freely, the men and women planning out the work of the day, and, later, the women socializing while they relax, chat, and peel cassava roots. Meanwhile, the men work nearby to make darts, weave baskets, and as

they can, join the women with their joking. The men and women entertain each other by telling amusing experiences from their days.³

All this tranquility and peaceful community spirit is based not only on the protective chanting of the Piaroa shamans but also on the social values held by the people. They take a personal responsibility for their own actions and they accept the need to master their individual powers. A young man who gets a woman pregnant must continue to live with her, to protect her and the growing fetus that he is responsible for. If he fails in that duty and the woman or their child dies, he would bear the responsibility. The young people must be the masters of their sex organs, especially since the demonic creator gods were so obviously unable to master theirs.

To the Piaroa, it is essential to master their creative energies, whether their own human offspring, their bodily secretions, or their farts. They believe that the blood and excretions of the animals they kill, like the waste and gasses from humans, may be possessed by fertile powers and dangers. So they protect themselves and help master harmful forces by joking about farting, by being careful of animal blood or feces, and by chanting to ward off the evils of the creator gods.

The Piaroa system of ethics and moral philosophy is based on a view of human nature being composed of knowledge, which is poisonous, combined with wild desire; both are overcome through personal will. Humans must learn personal restraint in order to achieve happiness and tranquility. They believe that humanity is neither innately aggressive nor good or evil; rather, we learn aggression when we allow our knowledge to poison our will and hence our passions, a potential danger of our culture and society.⁴

The Piaroa thus believe that the good life is one where moderation of the senses and the mind are achieved equally, and virtue is equated with tranquility. Children learn the virtues of leading a tranquil life from their shamans at the age of six or seven from lessons on being responsible for their own actions, restraint, respect for others, avoiding quarrels, and control of other human defects such as jealousy, arrogance, malice, dishonesty, vanity, and cruelty: they particularly stress control over malice and arrogance, which disrupt peacefulness most strongly. The children are taught

³ Overing, Joanna. 2006. "The Backlash to Decolonizing Intellectuality." *Anthropology and Humanism* 31(1): p.20.

⁴ Overing, Joanna. 1985. "There Is No End of Evil: The Guilty Innocents and Their Fallible God." In *The Anthropology of Evil*, edited by David Parkin, 244-278. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

that emotions and desires must be mastered, and that process allows responsibility to develop along with a free will to respect others, the desired result of consciousness.

The Piaroa equate moral goodness with cleanliness, beauty, restraint, and the moderate light of the moon; they associate evil with dirt, madness, excesses, ugliness, and the fierceness of full sunlight. They perceive nature as neutral, tame and stable, while human culture is wild and poisonous, the poison being derived from their experience in which many plants, even food plants, are poisonous unless they're treated properly, and in which poisons are often used in fishing. To make sense of all this, they depict Kuemoi's evil habits through slapstick comedy to illustrate the Piaroa view that associates evil with excess and loss of mastery over one's knowledge. Kuemoi lurks rather than hides, he laughs raucously, his evil deeds rebound on him, his plots are ridiculous: in order to trap young men for his meals, he seeks to entice them with his daughter, in whose womb he has planted piranhas.

Humans are not innately evil, they believe; rather, they are fallible and capable of acting foolishly and with evil consequences—the Piaroa make a distinction. The lack of proper sociability is like an illness, a condition associated with diarrhea that is cured by the individual gaining proper control over the senses and thoughts. There is no other recourse for people who pose problems, no punishment, no courts, and no councils. The only answer for society is proper control by each individual.

For someone raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is fascinating to conceive of creator gods who are so colorful—and of their actions having so much meaning. Yes, there are many colorful passages in the Old Testament—the Samson story comes to mind. But the Piaroa gods have them all beat for impressive narratives. Wahari, the Tapir, creator of sky, land, and Piaroa constantly battled in mythic times with his father-in-law Kuemoi, the Anaconda, master of the waters, darkness, and death, creator of crocodile, caiman, vulture, jaguar, and poisonous snakes. Wahari fished for his food, ate from the other's domain, and Kuemoi, the hunter, likewise ate from the domain of his son-in-law, bringing death to the inhabitants. Their natures are opposites, yet their strife was caused by the fact that Wahari did not reciprocate the relationship with his father-in-law—he gave the older god nothing in return for his wife. The myths point out the instability and peril in unequal relationships, particularly within families.⁵

⁵ Overing Kaplan, Joanna. 1984. "Dualisms as an Expression of Difference and Danger: Marriage Exchange and Reciprocity among the Piaroa of Venezuela." In *Mar-*

The Piaroa Opposition to Violence

It needs to be made quite clear that Piaroa communities, at least until recent decades, have been almost totally free of physical violence, in large part due to their avoidance of competition, a complex topic that will be explained below. But a lot of additional factors are at work. The people rarely express anger in physical ways. They never kill other humans through physical violence, though people do die as a result of sorcery, usually caused by unknown sorcerer/murderers in other communities. They highly value personal moderation, tranquility, equality, and individual autonomy; they get very distressed by any open signs of aggression. The shaman, the teacher of their ethical values, sets the example for humility and proper manners. The Piaroa link violence with domination, and domination, along with tyranny and coercion, is associated with the ownership and control of resources. These resources, and the cultural ability to transform them into human food, are owned by the gods—no individual humans may own them since that would allow coercion and violence to develop.⁶

But sometimes the actions of the shamans can become highly violent—in a shamanistic fashion, that is. Alexander Mansutti Rodríguez describes some dramatic episodes of shamanistic violence in an article about lowland South America.⁷ One episode he describes gives a flavor of the issue. The story concerns a very powerful Piaroa shaman, called a *tujaturuwa* (lord of the people), who was preoccupied with defending himself from the attacks of potentially jealous rivals. One day another shaman moved into his neighborhood. Both men were conscious of the need to be very careful, to prevent confrontations. The two shamans arranged for a granddaughter of the *tujaturuwa* to marry a son of the other. She quickly became pregnant.

The situation became complex when the older sister of the married girl suddenly was found hung, an apparent suicide. The one shaman was presumed to have attacked his rival, the *tujaturuwa*, by killing his older granddaughter.

riage Practices in Lowland South America, edited by Kenneth M. Kensinger, p. 127-155, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

⁶ Overing, Joanna. 1986. "Images of Cannibalism, Death and Domination in a 'Non-Violent' Society." In *The Anthropology of Violence*, edited by David Riches, 86-101. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁷ Mansutti Rodríguez, Alexander. 2008. "Envy and Revenge: The Case of the Piaroa." In *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America*, Edited by Stephen Beckerman and Paul Valentine, p. 216-232. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Then, the married girl was also found hung, and again the powers of sorcery were presumed to be the cause. The affected family carried out appropriate revenge rituals after each death. A few months later the *tujaturuwa* himself suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed, and shortly after that he died. The people attributed all of these events to shamanistic attacks from the newcomer, who was perceived to be envious of the powers of his rival.

Shamanism is, or was until recently, omnipresent in the Piaroa world. Shamanistic activities are not, in themselves, necessarily negative or positive. Rather, the effects they produce determine their character. The results of shamanistic attacks in Piaroa society are not predictable. If a shaman is powerful, attacks by others will probably not harm him or his family. In fact, the peacefulness of the Piaroa is marred primarily by instances of shamanistic aggression. They are rarely physically aggressive and they idealize the absence of violence in families. The Piaroa recognize, of course, that revenge plants the seeds of more revenge, a major problem in any society. But in general, they try to prevent shamanistic attacks and cycles of revenge from occurring. In sum, Piaroa society strictly prohibits physical violence and idealizes the control of passions. But all shamans, they believe, suffer from setbacks, the results of envy by other shamans, so they are constantly motivated to seek revenge. Their shamanistic attacks, as long as they are in defense from the aggression of others, can therefore be legitimate. Their society represents a delicate balance between these conflicting needs; the people base their abhorrence for physical violence on their acceptance of symbolic aggression.

Turning to the actual instances of violence they have experienced, a history of Piaroa inter-tribal relations shows that their ethnic boundaries and inter-group relationships during their pre-colonial, postcolonial, and modern historical periods were generally, though not always, peaceful. The pre-colonial Piaroa appear to have had a lot of contact with surrounding groups: evidence found in burial sites, pre-historic ornaments, surviving rock art, and other archaeological bits and pieces suggest that they had extensive inter-group contacts.⁸

Their oral histories also imply that they had a lot of contacts with outsiders, but they appear, to judge by the stories, to have been complex interactions, alternately peaceful and symbiotic, then competitive and hostile. At times they traded, at other times they raided. They did have close,

⁸ Zent, Stanford. 2009. "The Political Ecology of Ethnic Frontiers and Relations among the Piaroa of the Middle Orinoco." In *Mobility and Migration in Indigenous Amazonia: Contemporary Ethnoecological Perspectives*, Edited by Miguel N. Alexiades, p. 167-194. New York: Berghahn Books.

peaceful, trading relations with several large, neighboring groups, such as the Maipure and the Atures. Those tribes lived in the floodplains next to the Orinoco River, while the Piaroa lived in the headwaters of the tributaries. Their pre-contact relations with other neighboring groups appear to have been not so friendly. The Piaroa may have had some physical conflicts with the Mako, the Yabarana, and the Mapoyo; without doubt they traded shamanistic witchcraft attacks back and forth. There are some records of physical hostilities with those groups before the European conquest.

When the Europeans arrived, the newcomers soon destroyed the more riverine societies, peoples who lived in villages that were easily accessible to slave raiding and warfare along the main waterways. The Piaroa were mostly spared from those genocidal attacks because they lived in headwaters areas, far from the Orinoco and its major tributaries, in places that were protected by thick jungles and small rivers with large rapids. The Piaroa also feared raids by traditional enemies from outside the Middle Orinoco region: predatory Indian groups such as the Caribs and the Arawak peoples.

In the modern period, starting about 1960, drastic changes occurred in Piaroa society. Missionaries from the New Tribes Mission penetrated their communities, and the Catholic Silesians established boarding schools in some of their villages. In the 1970s, the Piaroa migrated down the streams to be nearer health clinics, social welfare offices, and economic opportunities. By 1982, when the first census of Venezuelan Indians was conducted, most of the Piaroa communities were located along navigable rivers, and village populations were mostly over 50 people—much larger than the traditional hamlets of 25 to 30. By 1992, the peaceful migrations decreased, as the settlement patterns became more stable.

These recent migrations caused crowding and stresses in the more urbanized communities. In addition, other peoples have settled among them. These conditions have fostered tensions and conflicts over access to land and resources. But as a result of their downstream migrations, the Piaroa have become successful traders of forest products and cash crops. At the same time, they have become consumers—electrical appliances, fabricated clothing, tools, cooking utensils, and the like.

Many other changes have permeated Piaroa villages in recent decades. The authority of the shamans, traditional leaders of the communities, has been taken over by younger and more Westernized leaders. Piaroa business people, civil servants, and political operatives are able to negotiate the intersections of local concerns with national and international forces better

than their predecessors could have done. Inter-tribal organizations have sprung up to coordinate the resolution of common problems.

More recently still, news reports from Venezuela have focused on the violence that the Piaroa began to experience from invasions by illegal miners and others in their territory and their attempts to stop the invaders. *The Economist* reported in early November 2013 that the FARC guerillas from Colombia (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) had been taking refuge in neighboring Venezuela, especially in Piaroa territory and surrounding lands.⁹ The movement of the FARC guerillas into Venezuela began as a tactical retreat from the Colombian military, but it grew into a large scale criminal conspiracy, with the civilian and military authorities of Venezuela involved. The local people, particularly the Piaroa, were severely affected. The reports alleged that the Venezuelan government denied providing refuge for the FARC guerillas, and the government of Colombia, intent on trying to improve its international relations, did not pursue the matter.

A couple weeks later, the Inter Press Service also published a report on the situation.¹⁰ The reporter talked with several indigenous leaders who repeated the concerns expressed by their people earlier about the invaders. According to the IPS report, representatives of FARC had met with Piaroa communities in May of 2013. At that meeting, the Piaroa asked them to leave their territory. José Carmona, a Piaroa shaman and leader in the community of Caño de Uña, told the reporter, “The guerrillas have come here to tell us they are revolutionaries fighting against the empire. But we are peaceful people, we don’t want weapons—we want to live peacefully in the territories that belong to us.”

Piaroa Peace Gardens

Gardens focused on peace ought to be inspiring. There is something intriguing about the juxtaposition between managing natural processes and managing our own wild human natures: the essence of being a gardener and of being a peaceful person. The Piaroa are not the only people who can

⁹ “Unwelcome Guests,” *The Economist*, November 6, 2013:

<https://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2013/11/trouble-amazonas>

¹⁰ Humberto Márquez, “Demarcation of Native Territories Essential for Venezuela’s Amazon Region,” *Inter Press Service*, November 19, 2013:

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/11/demarcation-of-native-territories-essential-for-venezuelas-amazon-region/>

show how they try to build peacefulness through effective garden management techniques. The International Peace Garden, located directly on the boundary between Canada and the United States in Manitoba and North Dakota, commemorates the many years of international peace between the two countries. It includes lots of flower beds, benches, and even a tower designed to assist visitors in contemplating the meaning of peace. It attracts tourists with their cameras as well as people pondering peacefulness.

There are others. The Penn State University Park campus has a modest Peace Garden consisting of a rectangular, quarter acre patch of ground hidden among some big buildings with trees, benches, and large granite blocks, all roughly 2 feet by 3 feet in size and rigidly arranged in rows. It attracts students to do their studying. Perhaps the designers of the garden felt that the students would be inspired by the dull, non-native, plantings; or they may have felt that peacefulness is intrinsically uninspiring.

The Peace Garden in Harrisburg, however, is much more interesting. It consists of a 40 to 50-foot-wide strip of grass studded with trees, flowers, and monuments artfully arranged for two long blocks between Front Street and the Susquehanna River, from Emerald Street on the north as far south as Maclay Street. The charming ambience of some of the small monuments and the miniature gardens around them are surprising. It attracts local people to tend the gardens, to contemplate, and best of all to socialize with an out-of-town visitor about the garden, its importance to the state capital of Pennsylvania, and peace.¹¹ These gardens reflect the interests in fostering peacefulness in their communities much as the gardens maintained by the Piaroa reflect theirs.

For the Piaroa, the manioc garden is an essential symbol of their peaceful society as well as the place where the women do a lot of important work. The Piaroa women gain fulfillment, pleasure, and respect from raising manioc in their gardens, anthropologist Serena Heckler argues, and their work is essential to their society.¹² Other scholars have argued that manioc planting, cultivation, and processing is a way for lowland South American societies to control their women—the hunting successes of the men confer prestige on them that the women cannot attain. Heckler strongly disagrees, at least for the Piaroa.

¹¹ Based on personal visits to the International Peace Garden on June 28, 1992, to the Peace Garden in Harrisburg on July 25, 2007, and to the one at Penn State on September 14, 2016.

¹² Heckler, Serena L. 2004. "Tedium and Creativity: The Valorization of Manioc Cultivation and Piaroa Women," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* vol. 10:241-259.

Based on her fieldwork, she finds that many traditional Piaroa women take a great deal of pride in their gardens—they enjoy showing them off to the anthropologist. The hard work and skill of the expert gardener, and her knowledge of wild as well as cultivated plants, is recognized and appreciated by the rest of the community. Gardens that provide abundant, safe, and reliable foods are as much a source of pride for the women as hunting success is for the men. In fact, the women often cultivate their gardens much more than is necessary since their neatness conveys an aesthetic sense of well-being and shows off the owners' accomplishments.

Heckler notes that some of the experienced women gardeners grow many cultivars of manioc—more than 20 in some cases—in their gardens as a way of combating pathogens. These varieties of manioc are used for different purposes, depending on the characteristics of the plants, such as for making starches, flour, bread, or beer. The women obtain these cultivars from their broad reciprocal networks and sometimes with the assistance of men who bring back cuttings when they travel. But the different varieties grown in a woman's garden are not really just the result of impersonal economic transactions. Rather, they represent acts of giving and receiving; the cultivation of each plant may remind the woman of the individual donor and their close personal relationship. With all of the relationships expressed by the manioc varieties, the woman's garden is a manifestation of her life story, a personal, historical landscape. Could any peace garden in the U.S., even the most successful, make such a profound claim?

An important aspect of the Piaroa gardening are the rituals related to their manioc beer. For while the men host the rituals and participate in the ritual activities, everyone is aware that it was the women who grew the manioc and prepared the beer that is central to the social aspects of the ritual experience. Some observers, noting that the men have the formal role of communicating with the spirits, have concluded that Piaroa women are subject to the men. In fact, the people don't actually pay too much attention to the men during the rituals. The real action occurs among the women while they are discussing among themselves the details of their lives, including, of course, the news about their gardens. The peaceful socializing of the women is actually one of the primary goals of the rituals. The rituals of the men, in essence, are most effective when people are paying little attention to them.

But like most of the peaceful societies, changes are occurring among the Piaroa. Some younger women are learning enough Spanish to take wage labor jobs in nearby towns, so their gardening work has to fit into their lives as best it can. For them, manioc gardening has become a necessary chore, a

way to educate their children, rather than a source of pride. Other young women are taking agriculture classes and may seek to integrate formal schooling with traditional practices. However, some women continue to follow the examples of their mothers.

In another journal article, Heckler writes that the home gardens of the Piaroa, in contrast to their manioc gardens, serve many purposes in addition to food production. They provide building materials, supplies for hunting magic, medicinal plants, and the settings for social activities. Those gardens display the creativity of their owners and they serve as sources of pride and self-esteem. The Piaroa use them for the first stages of their agricultural experiments and, perhaps most significantly, they use them as places to live.¹³ Comparisons with peace gardens in the U.S. will have to be paused for a few moments in order to fill in some details about the Piaroa home gardens.

The composition of the Piaroa home gardens supports and complements the lives and activities of their owners. The gardens are the most important locations for their socializing, where all family members and their visitors gather. Children may play in the gardens, women talk, men discuss business; visitors may congregate there and be served beverages and foods. Men and women both cultivate their plants in the home-gardens, though the former are more likely to focus on cash crops and the latter on herbals. The gardening spaces of the men and women will overlap freely. While the Piaroa have to shift the manioc fields every few years, they keep the home-gardens next to their houses where they can intensively manage them, even if they live in the same homes for decades. The home-gardens form the basis of much Piaroa socializing, and they need to be understood as essential elements of their communities.

Piaroa gardening is also closely tied in with their proximity to the surrounding forests. They are fortunate in that they have not lost their lands and their encounters with modern, mainstream society have not been too traumatic. Furthermore, they are very close to their forest environment, which is essential to their social memory. Human health depends, in their view, on a close relationship between the spirits of the ancestors and the forests in which they live. For them, the forests have been an integral part of both their food supply network and their nonviolence.¹⁴ Their gardeners have found that their tradi-

¹³ Heckler, S. L. 2004. "Cultivating Sociality: Aesthetic Factors in the Composition and Function of Piaroa Homegardens." *Journal of Ethnobiology* 24(2): 203-232.

¹⁴ Freire, Germán N. 2007. "Indigenous Shifting Cultivation and the New Amazonia: A Piaroa Example of Economic Articulation." *Human Ecology* 35 (6): 681-696.

tional style of gardening on shifting plots supports their growing population, supplies them with good nutrition, and provides them with more income than modern, high-input agriculture can do. In essence, the Piaroa find their traditional swidden (shifting) agricultural practices to be quite effective.

However, traditionally, as Piaroa settlements became older, garden plots became worn out and they had to be abandoned. The people would clear a different patch of forest land and start gardening in a new location. There they would build new huts near that more recently cleared land. One settlement might have a number of huts at greater and lesser distances near different garden patches. Eventually, one of those distant locations would be chosen as the new site for the village to move to. But in the meanwhile, the distant huts would also serve a defensive purpose—so people who would otherwise refuse to fight could quickly move away to a new location if the main village were to be threatened by outsiders.

In Piaroa villages of the Cantaniapo river valley, a tributary of the Orinoco near the Amazonas state capital of Puerto Ayacucho, modern farming techniques have failed and traditional practices are highly successful. Since their villages now are mostly stationary, the Piaroa in the Cantaniapo valley tend to have concentric rings of gardens and re-growing forest plots, some of which may require a fair amount of walking to get to. The men still do most of the slashing and burning plus all of the planting of crops, while the women do most of the processing; but gender roles are not as distinct as they once were. The complexity and sophistication of their management is impressive. They plant many different varieties of cassava in their gardens and they continue to farm them for three to five years, until weeding becomes too onerous and they need to be abandoned. The fallow, reverting-to-forest, land is not really abandoned, however—it provides more varieties of food than the cultivated fields. The reverting forest lands are important locations for fishing, hunting and gathering.

Since the Piaroa communities in the Cantaniapo Valley are quite near Puerto Ayacucho, they have been patronizing the markets in the city for many decades. While the cassava from their gardens is their staple food product and is sold in the market as flour or bread, it generates little cash income since it is such a common product in the region. But they have discovered that they have a ready source of cash in the market from the sale of valuable forest products, which they still are able to find. Because many of these forest plant products can only be harvested for brief periods of time, the Piaroa can sell them for premium prices. They recognize the sup-

ply and demand situations so they sell the forest products they have gathered to their best economic advantage.

The Piaroa village of Paria Grande put on a play on Saturday evening, October 3, 2015, which demonstrated the continuing value of traditional gardening to the people. It tied the gardening together with their legends about the way the gods created humanity.¹⁵ The actors in the production were members of the village, located in the municipality of Atures in Amazonas State, to the south of Puerto Ayacucho. The play, “Creación de los Conucos Huöttöja” (in English, “Creating Piaroa Home Gardens”), expressed the indigenous knowledge of the Piaroa people through scenes that displayed the essence of their culture and society. It was co-produced by the Centro Nacional de Teatro (CNT, the National Theatre Center) and the Teatrales de Construcción Comunitaria (Theatrical Community Building Program).

The production was a way of communicating, by means of the theatrical performance, the importance of the cultural and artistic history of the Piaroa people. It was seen as a way of strengthening the traditional knowledge of the community, while at the same time reaching out to the broader population of Venezuela. The play, which was collectively developed by the village, was guided by America Ramirez, a facilitator for CNT, and by Daniel Otero, an elder in the Piaroa village. The play evidently focused on the sister/brother gods Cheheru and Wahari, plus another god we have not met as yet named Buoka, in a divine collaboration on creating human beings and fertility. The special emphasis was on the role of the home oogardens in promoting strength and autonomy to the people, as well as the use of cassava as a major food in their diet.

In sum, Joanna Overing writes, the Piaroa village is “exceedingly comfortable, easygoing, and immensely safe” as children play freely, men socialize, and women chat while they peel their cassava roots in their peace gardens.¹⁶ The peaceful value, for this visitor at least, to the Harrisburg Peace Garden provided precisely the same impression. It was not so much a place for raw tourism (International Peace Garden), or a place for academic work (Penn State), valid as those activities certainly are, but as a place to socialize with someone who

¹⁵ “Theatre Production about Piaroa Gardens,” Peaceful Societies website News and Reviews, October 8, 2015:

<https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2015/10/08/theatre-production-about-piaroa-gardens/>

¹⁶ Overing, Joanna. 2006. “The Backlash to Decolonizing Intellectuality.” *Anthropology and Humanism* 31(1): 20.

was caring for the mini-garden surrounding the monument erected by her church that created an atmosphere where peaceful interactions, if even between complete strangers for a brief 15 minutes, can take place. Gardens, like peaceful societies, if nourished right can be beautiful creations.

Intersections: Does Competition Promote Violence?

Sceptics who doubt even the possibility of peacefulness existing in human societies unless it is carefully controlled by police forces and all-powerful government agencies are quick to seize on any demonstrations of violence in so-called peaceful societies to prove their arguments. They maintain that humanity is essentially aggressive after all, so all human societies must therefore reflect that predilection for constant violence unless it is controlled by a governing agency. Only the sanctions of the powerful modern state will bring about peace in our times. The news sometimes appears to prove their point

So, naysayers alert, news stories from the media in Venezuela reported one weekend in 2016 that violence had occurred in the Piaroa community of San Juan de Manapiare, a town in Amazonas State: the well-known peaceful people had burned a local post of the National Guard. The different news reports provided somewhat conflicting details, but the basic ingredients of the story were consistent.

El Universal, a major news service for the nation, provided probably the best coverage by reporting on some communications by Liborio Guarulla, the governor of the state of Amazonas. The governor said that Sunday evening in June that a group of Piaroa had protested against the police. The demonstration led to the burning of some buildings on the police command post in the town. The protest had followed the arrest of three Piaroa, two of whom were children.¹⁷

But as the details of the story came out, the reasons for the protest became clearer. The protest was the result of a perception by the people that the two minors, at first reported to be 12 and 14 years old, had been tortured while they were in police custody. The three people had been arrested that afternoon and later in the day, when their families were permitted

¹⁷ "Piaroas protestaron contra GN por detención de tres compañeros en Amazonas," *El Universal*, June 13, 2016: http://www.eluniversal.com/noticias/sucesos/piaroas-protestaron-contra-por-detencion-tres-companeros-amazonas_314689

to visit the juveniles, they saw many bruises on their bodies. They were also told that the prisoners would be transferred to the city of Puerto Ayacucho.

Another news story the next day from a different source provided more information about the incident.¹⁸ The new details were that the three Piaroa were accused of stealing a motorcycle. A special commissioner for the state government, Jonathan Bolívar, said that Jose Rodriguez, a 30-year old Piaroa, and the two teenagers, ages 14 and 15 in fact, had been apprehended by the police Sunday afternoon. They were accused of stealing both the motorcycle and spare parts for it from the son of the mayor of Manapiare, Alberto Cayupare.

Sr. Bolívar went on to say that because the accused are Piaroa, they are not fluent in Spanish. They had answered yes when questioned about the thefts because they hadn't understood the questions. He added that during the protests, the National Guard officers had fired about 80 rounds in the air—and then released the boys. He also said that the arrests were arbitrary, and they were part of a pattern of aggression by the police against the indigenous people.

He added that the police action violated the human rights of the Piaroa. The special commission had quickly gone from Puerto Ayacucho to San Juan de Manapiare to investigate the situation and to calm the indigenous community. The commissioners spoke with the people, who demanded answers as to what had happened and why. The Piaroa agreed to provide reparations and to repair some of the damage. The commission agreed that it would provide medicines for two people who had been wounded in the fracas.

The commission observed that there were several severe background issues that were roiling the community—the absence of food and electricity, telephone connections that go down for long periods of time, a lack of fuel, no malaria medicine, and no drinking water. The only food available was the manioc (cassava flour) that the people grow in their own gardens. The governor called for the lieutenant in charge of the command post to be dismissed. He said that the National Guard resolutely refuses to participate in a joint meeting to address the issues raised by the Piaroa.

So while Piaroa society is changing and is not perfect, naysayers about their peacefulness need to note that the people that Sunday evening in San Juan de Maniapare only demonstrated and burned down a building, in pro-

¹⁸ "Piaroa React to Violence with Violence," Peaceful Societies website News and Reviews, June 23, 2016: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2016/06/23/piaroa-react-violence-violence/>

tests against a demonstration of police brutality. The shots were fired by the police themselves, not the local indigenous people.

But the nasty incident does reflect the ways a society that has been characterized as peaceful by anthropologists can and is changing. They are now ready to protest rotten treatment by government agencies and police brutality. But the story does more. It suggests the value of an investigation into the nature of their nonviolence, and particularly the character of their opposition to competition, which they closely link with violence. Can modern states tolerate small-scale societies that are trying to maintain highly peaceful traditions? If those societies are highly opposed to competition, which they perceive as inimical to their nonviolence, should they be tolerated at all? And just as important, are the reports of the anthropologists to be trusted?

Answers to these questions have to begin with the basic research. The Piaroa view competition as fostering cannibalism. Competition over resources and over the ability to transform the earth's resources into human goods is the major force producing human violence, they believe. In fact, the Piaroa political processes reject competition and the associated ownership and control of those resources. Nonetheless, they still suffer from the violence associated with their mythic past. The shaman, through his chanting every night, used to be able to blow the words of the chant into water and honey which, consumed the next morning by adults and children, would keep them safe for another day.¹⁹ This may not be as true today with the authority of the traditional shamans much diminished and the government trying to maintain the peace instead.

A better sense of the Piaroa aversion for competition and the violence it sometimes produces can be gained from a careful review of their beliefs about the nature of production itself—the capitalist process, if you will. And what may seem odd to non-Piaroa readers, their beliefs about production, competition, and violence are tied in with their aesthetic conceptions. It is too simple to just say that they oppose competition because it can provoke violence. It's much more complex than that.

To start, the Piaroa view production, which is usually associated with competition, as either social or asocial, beautiful or ugly. Controlled behavior is beautiful and conducive to the formation of community, while excess is ugly and opposed to community. Beauty is thus a moral conception, and

¹⁹ Overing, Joanna. 1986. "Images of Cannibalism, Death and Domination in a 'Non-Violent' Society." In *The Anthropology of Violence*, edited by David Riches, 86-101. Oxford: Blackwell.

understanding Piaroa aesthetics is an important way to appreciate their social life and their opposition to competition and violence. But first, we need an overview of the way the Piaroa organize and conceive of society.²⁰

The Piaroa place a very high value on personal autonomy, informal social life, and tranquil interpersonal relationships. They constantly proclaim the rights of individuals to choose how to do things—or how not to do things as the case may be—and they would not comment negatively on decisions by others regarding their choices of work, foods, sexual habits, residence, or almost anything else. Decisions as to where a married couple should live will be made by the couple based on their perceptions of what is right and best for them. The work of the day is loosely organized according to individual choices and moods—no one feels compelled to do things. A couple will cooperate on clearing a garden after several years of marriage, when prompted to do so by having children. A person who becomes a nuisance will be referred by a relative to the shaman, who has curative powers. Affluence is thus felt in a community that is flexible in terms of preferences by individuals for daily work, who are comfortable and who have good morale.

The Piaroa thus define affluence not as something gained through individual or group competition but as comfort in their work and high morale, something that is achieved through amiable daily cooperation. Furthermore, coercion is alien to them—no one has the right to give an order to another. Produce from the forest, at least for those who still go out and gather produce, is shared equally, though garden produce is the property of the gardener. No council of elders makes decisions over disputes or economic matters. They have no notion of a right by the community to make collective decisions about individuals, or that one person should submit to a group decision. Morality is not imposed by the community from above. But their individualism is balanced by the belief that being social is the greatest virtue—a sociability based on personal autonomy. It is clear why the competitive capitalist ethic is not a good fit for them.

And here is where the aesthetics of the Piaroa come in, for it is their aesthetic knowledge, in part, that enables them to create their sense of community and thus reject competition. Their aesthetic conceptions give them the skills needed for producing food and goods as well as for producing harmonious relationships. Piaroa men and women ornament themselves (or at least they did in 1989) to represent, on the surface of their bodies,

²⁰ Overing, Joanna. 1989. "The Aesthetics of Production: the Sense of Community among the Cubeo and Piaroa." *Dialectical Anthropology* 14: 159-175.

these skills. Markings on women represent their abilities to produce children; on men, they depict their wisdom about fishing, hunting, and protecting. The designs on men's faces represent their specific knowledge of their chants—their paths, or beads, of knowledge. The individual's skills are stored in internal beads—derived from the gods—which are represented by the beads he or she wears. Beauty is produced, the Piaroa believe, by fertility and abundance, by moderation, by social and moral goodness, cleanness, and restraint. Ugliness is associated with excess, madness, dirt and antisocial behavior—plus competition and violence.

This leads us back to their relationships to competition and production. The forces of production for the Piaroa can be dangerous: they have to be mastered or the results can lead to ugliness and madness. For we must remember that their creator god, Wahari, was mad, evil and physically ugly. He gained his abilities to produce from the earth's resources—to hunt, garden, and cook—from the hallucinogenic poisons given to him by the supreme god. His powers were poisonous and they affected all of the other gods in mythic times, which was the time when the technologies for using natural resources originated. Thus, the forces of production are infused with such evils as competition, violence, arrogance, greed, and lust, all of which poison peaceful relationships among and within communities. The creator gods murdered and cannibalized in order to control those resources.

To recap, the ability of the individual to avoid competition and trouble, and to maintain harmony with others, became the essence of Piaroa aesthetics, which focus on beauty, cleanliness, and restraint. The negative qualities that they abhor—arrogance, a quarrelsome personality, greed, madness—are all produced by an inability to keep productive forces under control. Excessive, competitive uses of natural resources plus illegitimate political and social power are all a result of those antisocial, evil forces. The Piaroa recognize the dilemma they face: since they clearly need to use natural resources, they need to rely on their predatory abilities to garden, hunt, and transform foodstuffs into edible foods. Their productive capabilities also contain the seeds of violence and ugliness; the healing song is also, potentially, the breath of the jaguar. The beads of life contain poisonous predatory forces. The cleansing powers of the moon allow the Piaroa to overcome their dangers and clean the forces of production of poisons and wildness.

Piaroa aesthetics involves their egalitarian social structure and its focus on the personal autonomy that maintains it. Emotional stability is valued above material prosperity. In sum, they believe in a violently creative period in mythic times in which the gods achieved material and technological pros-

perity along with violence and competition, and yet their social life today focuses on resisting a return to that creative period. The creativity of their present society is individuals living peacefully together, an antidote to those past excesses of wanton wildness.²¹

It must be noted that the Piaroa do not always live up to their ideals, for competition does exist, in at least a subtle fashion, among their leaders, the shamans. For the leaders of the large, communal Piaroa houses and the still larger territories are, or used to be, quite competitive in seeking and maintaining their political power. Power is attained by the leaders and potential leaders making favorable marriage alliances of their own and of various kin with the relatives of other potentially powerful individuals. The territorial leader has the most knowledge of the magic and sorcery which will protect his people, and he holds on to his territory through skillfully maintaining his political alliances. While younger potential leaders might not obviously challenge him, they will negotiate for a strong position so they will be better situated to succeed him when he dies.²² Making alliances through marrying the right people is of course a worldwide phenomenon. In the United States, Jared Kushner, the oldest son of the prominent New York real estate developer Charles Kushner, married Ivanka Trump, the daughter of an even more prominent New York developer, Donald Trump.

In contrast, people in the United States and in many other major societies fervently believe in competition. It is seen as a driving force in all human societies; many believe it is a basic aspect of human nature. We live in a highly competitive world, its proponents argue. Besides, we are told, it is essential for the progress of business, the innovation fostered by technology, and of course achievements in sports, the arts, and most other human endeavors. Scholars define not just competitive versus cooperative social situations, but also individualistic ones, where people neither cooperate nor compete; instead they do things by themselves. Needless to say, there is an extensive literature on the subject of whether competitive or cooperative environments better foster achievement, which this author has summarized elsewhere.²³

²¹ Overing, Joanna. 1989. "The Aesthetics of Production: the Sense of Community among the Cubeo and Piaroa." *Dialectical Anthropology* 14: 159-175.

²² Overing Kaplan, Joanna. 1975. *The Piaroa, a People of the Orinoco Basin: A Study in Kinship and Marriage*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

²³ Bonta, Bruce D. 1997. "Cooperation and Competition in Peaceful Societies." *Psychological Bulletin* 121(2):299-320.

The big question is: does research prove that competition causes violence? The answer is still not clear—certainly not from the peaceful societies' literature. Most of the peaceful peoples reject competition, raise their children to play cooperative or individualistic games, and avoid competitive activities at all times. But that doesn't PROVE that the one causes the other. There is, however, a significant body of research literature that shows how competition promotes aggression. Not necessarily violence, but certainly aggressive behaviors. For instance, people who played a game competitively in one study were much more aggressive in their approaches to the game than other test subjects who were told to play it cooperatively.²⁴

While some research suggests that cooperation and competition are mutually exclusive processes—competitive forces if you will—it should be pointed out in fact that they often operate in the American context in tandem. Politicians certainly have to compete in most cases for elected offices, yet once they are in a legislature, say, the essence of the political process is one of compromise and cooperation. In order to pass a piece of legislation, a lawmaker must normally make compromises with opponents in order to win their support. Cooperation with the legislators across the aisle is a fundamental premise of democracy if the people who elect them are to be served. At least that's the ideal.

²⁴ Bay-Hinitz, A. K., Peterson, R. R., & Quilitch, H. R. 1994. "Cooperative Games: A Way to Modify Aggressive and Cooperative Behaviors in Young Children. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 27: 435-446.

5. Gender Equality among the Batek

Finding Peace in a Cave

When a group of about 15 Malay men visited the Batek village of Kampung Ki Ying in Peninsular Malaysia, the women quickly fled into the forest. Though it was only days before the 2013 national election, the women were afraid. Groups of visitors sometimes were only intent on attacking and raping. This time, the visitors were representatives of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition—they were seeking votes. They handed out bags of food and announced that the following day, a high-ranking politician from their party would visit the village.

The next morning, a large number of motor vehicles adorned with the blue flags of the Barisan party arrived and the visitors set up chairs in the village hall so the highly-ranked politician could give his speech. The Barisan supporters, wearing shirts sporting the Barisan logo, set up the flags of the party around the village and especially in the village hall—to establish a suitable environment for the visiting luminary.

The dignitaries sat at the front of the hall—a Muslim imam from a nearby Malay village, the politician, the village headman, and a village elder. After introductory remarks by a local politician, the Batek headman rose to speak. A charismatic figure in his own right, instead of uttering the usual face-saving platitudes that people are supposed to make on occasions such as that, the headman expressed disappointment about the lack of development in the village.

The politician was visibly irritated at what had been said, despite the fact that the headman had spoken politely. He tried to deliver his prepared speech anyway by telling his listeners how their lives had been improved by the government, and he asked for the votes of the Batek villagers. The headman replied that 5,000 rubber trees, promised to the village five years

before, had never come. No one in the village would vote for Barisan until the rubber trees had been delivered.

The stubbornness and unforgiving attitude of the headman enraged the politician. He hollered at his followers that they were all leaving—immediately. Everyone quickly fled from the hall, the visitors to their motor vehicles, the Batek back into their homes. They ignored the lunch boxes that had been brought by the visitors—the residents suspected that they might have been filled with poisoned food anyway. The two visiting anthropologists recording this incident, Ivan Tacey and Diana Riboli, went with their Batek hosts.¹ They were stopped briefly by a couple Malay police officers, but then were allowed to accompany the headman back to his home. He asked his visitors to immediately leave the village and return to Kaula Lumpur—he feared for their safety. While they were on the road back to the capital, he called to tell them that after they had left, he had fled his home and sought refuge in the forest. Shortly after he had fled, three policemen had visited the village looking for him.

Fearing reprisals from the Malays, most of the other villagers had also left. They divided into three separate groups and sought temporary refuge at camps in the forest that were located next to cave entrances. The Batek kept calling the authors until days after the election, until after the Barisan party had been returned to power, when they felt safe enough to return to their village. The anthropologists then also felt it was safe to return to Kampung Ki Ying.

Tacey and Riboli use the story to illustrate their points about the development of the Batek approaches to maintaining peacefulness in their communities. They argue that the Batek, like the other Orang Asli societies in Malaysia such as the Semai and the Chewong, are subject to what they call “structural violence,” consisting of discrimination, marginalization, poverty, poor health conditions, abuses, and lack of basic human and legal rights. These current conditions have combined, in the minds of the Batek, with their folk memories of extreme persecution and slavery at the hands of the Malays over the ages, abuses which continued into the 20th century when whole communities were destroyed. This fear of Malay terrorism promotes their very strong fear of outsiders—especially of the Muslim Malays. Their justifiable fears still foster one of their strategies for self-protection and anti-violence—hiding out in the forest, especially near the entrances to caves.

¹ Tacey, Ivan and Diana Riboli. 2014. “Violence, Fear and Anti-violence: The Batek of Peninsular Malaysia.” *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 6(4): 203-215.

Caves had provided sanctuaries from large-scale violence 50 years before, during the British war against the Communist Insurgency, and they might do so again. Further, the Batek view caves as being filled with mostly hostile non-human beings. But when faced with extreme emergency situations, such as this incident when they feared the reprisals of the politician, they apparently were able to reverse their conceptions of the beings dwelling in the caves from possible persecutors into potential protectors. Whatever the ethics of living peacefully might be, the authors argue that the Batek villagers were simply being pragmatic. The Malays are far more numerous than they are—so openly resisting, them would be suicidal. Despite at times fantasizing about violence, “their fundamental ethical principles, which represent important components of their cultural identity, are indeed ‘anti-violent’ in nature,” the two anthropologists write (p.210). Tacey and Riboli make it clear that the Batek are still subject to “countless acts of violence and terror (p. 204),” and that the dramatic episode they had witnessed was just a mild version of what the people sometimes have to contend with.

Kirk Endicott has been visiting the roughly 700 to 800 Batek who live in the Upper Lebir River watershed of Malaysia since the early 1970s. He describes the nature of their peacefulness plus the conditions that foster it by pointing out that their society and culture is very different from the much more numerous Semai. Unlike the latter, most of whom rely primarily on agriculture, the Batek subsist primarily on harvesting wild fruits, hunting game animals, gathering yams, and collecting forest products, such as fragrant woods and rattan, to sell to traders. They move about frequently, living in temporary camps for a week or two, each family inhabiting a separate lean to. Despite the temporary nature of the camps, people are expected to share the foods they have hunted or gathered. They also provide assistance to one another whenever needed.² While recent news stories about the Batek focus on their lives in settled villages, it is clear that many of them still rely heavily on gathering products from the forests.

The Batek believe they have no control over others, since they prize their individual autonomy. In the words of Professor Endicott, “The Batek

² Endicott, Kirk. “Peaceful Foragers: The Significance of the Batek and Moriori for the Question of Innate Human Violence,” a paper presented at the American Anthropological Association conference in Montreal, November 16, 2011, and discussed in the article “Center for Global Nonkilling [Panel Presentations, part 1],” in the Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, December 1, 2011: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2011/12/01/center-for-global-nonkilling-2/>

considered all violence, aggression, and coercion of any kind toward other members of the Batek and toward outsiders as absolutely unacceptable.”³ Just like the Semai, the Batek believe that violence, and the threat of violence, is a characteristic of children and improperly socialized people. A Batek man indicated that they were prohibited from engaging in war and violence by their ancestors. They even proscribe hitting other people—it seriously violates their moral values.

The Batek believe that violent acts are prohibited by the thunder god, who sends thunderstorms down on villages if the prohibitions are violated. An underground deity would be similarly offended by violence and send a flood to dissolve an errant camp. Offenders would also be punished by disease, sent by the creator god to afflict people who act violently. These prohibitions represent supernatural sanctions in which three different Batek gods cooperate to prevent violence. Furthermore, people who do act violently will not have their shadow souls taken to the afterworld when they die, they believe.

The basic ethical principle in Batek social life is cooperative autonomy, which emphasizes personal freedom as well as a responsibility to help others. Their daily activities, social norms and religious values all reinforce this principle. Of course, people sometimes have to confront clashes between values—for instance, personal autonomy might conflict with a duty to help other people, depending on the specific situations. The Batek do have prohibitions—against incest, against some foods, and against mocking *bs*—but the rules are enforced by the superhumans, which give force to their values. The Batek consider all forms of aggression, physical coercion, and violence to be completely unacceptable. Hurting someone is strongly proscribed by the superhumans Tohan, Gobar and Ya. The superhumans would not take the shadow souls of violent individuals on to the afterworld when they died, they believe. Their souls would wander forever in the forest as malevolent ghosts.⁴

And among themselves, adults are able to settle their disputes peacefully. They often air their conflicts loudly to the rest of the camp, in situations

³ Endicott, Kirk. “Peaceful Foragers: The Significance of the Batek and Moriori for the Question of Innate Human Violence,” a paper presented at the American Anthropological Association conference in Montreal, November 16, 2011, and discussed in the article “Center for Global Nonkilling [Panel Presentations, part 1],” in the Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, December 1, 2011: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2011/12/01/center-for-global-nonkilling-2/>

⁴ Endicott, Kirk M. and Karen L. Endicott. 2008. *The Headman Was a Woman: The Gender Egalitarian Batek of Malaysia*. Long Grove, ILL: Waveland, p.50.

where everyone else could participate. If the dispute is not successfully settled, one or more of the people involved will simply move away to join another group. An individual who is frequently aggressive will be abandoned by the rest of the band, who might even flee from an aggressor if that appears to be the only way to resolve a problem.

The Batek have developed elaborate controls on internal violence in order to maintain their close relations with one another. They depend on each other for survival. They realize that fighting could destroy their society. The absence of several factors in their communities may help militate against violence. Since they do not compete for scarce resources, they do not have that motive for fighting. They also have no groupings that could lead to feuding behavior. Also, they have no leaders, whose ambitions could potentially foster conflicts. Furthermore, they have no beliefs in sorcery or witchcraft that could lead to violent, retributive punishments. In essence, the Batek approach to controlling violence does work most of the time.

The Batek approach to one of their diseases, called *ke'oy*, also may contribute at times to their peacefulness. The disease, consisting of a fever, depression, shortness of breath, and weakness, is, or used to be, caused by frustration, mistreatment by others, or fright. People get—or used to get—*ke'oy* if they feel someone is angry at them without justification. While there are some spells that may help, the cure for the disease is for the person who is angry to control his feelings so the victim can recover. The person who has caused the problem can treat the victim by making a cut in his own leg and, using five or six fresh leaves, wipe the blood in a prescribed fashion over the chest and back of the victim. He then tells the victim's heart to be cool, blows on his chest for the cooling effect, then grasps and throws away the disease. If this treatment doesn't work, other people will do the same things until the disease is successfully treated. This belief in *ke'oy* used to ensure (and may well still for some) that the Batek treat each other well, since the person who caused the disease in another would lose his social support and be ostracized unless the victim is cured.⁵

Kirk Endicott and his wife Karen Endicott, who has also published several works on the Batek, write that the central, organizing spirit of their highly peaceful society is, or was at least in the mid-1970s, a moral commitment to sharing any and all foods with everyone else who happens to be in camp. This “moral unity,” as they so evocatively put it, requires that they

⁵ Endicott, Kirk. 1979. *Batek Negrito Religion: The World-View and Rituals of a Hunting and Gathering People of Peninsular Malaysia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

constantly share their foods; their children are constantly scampering about carrying meals from one shelter to another, even though the recipients may already have plenty of the same foods.⁶

While the fundamental social entity for the Batek is the conjugal family, the long-term economic unit for the ones who avoid living full-time in the villages is the nomadic hunting and gathering camp. Many of them live near and within the world-famous Taman Negara National Park, a large tract of unbroken tropical forest in northeastern Peninsular Malaysia. The Batek today number about 1,500 people, one third of whom at any one time live in temporary shelters in the park.

The Batek teach their children to act nonviolently, though the youngsters sometimes do fight with one another. Adults believe they will grow out of this behavior, which they feel is normal. Parents will separate fighting children, then laugh to try and minimize the importance of the issues they were fighting about. By the time children are four years old, they have learned that, in their society, people just do not fight. Adults normally do not use physical discipline on their children.⁷

The child-raising strategies used by the Batek are noteworthy since they appear to be an important part of the strategy for building a nonviolent society. One is the fact that fathers play an essential role in raising children from infancy. They hold, cuddle, and fondle their babies as much as the mothers do and with as much obvious enjoyment. Both parents clean and bathe their infants. While resting in their temporary camps, fathers often make things for the children to play with, and amuse them while holding them in their laps. Other members of the camps shower affection on the babies as well. The Batek often have told anthropologists that they desire male and female children equally.⁸

⁶ Endicott, Karen L. and Kirk M. Endicott. 2014. "Batek Childrearing and Morality." In *Ancestral Landscapes in Human Evolution: Culture, Childrearing and Social Wellbeing*, edited by Darcia Narvaez et al., p.108-125. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Endicott, Kirk. "Peaceful Foragers: The Significance of the Batek and Moriori for the Question of Innate Human Violence," a paper presented at the American Anthropological Association conference in Montreal, November 16, 2011, and discussed in the article "Center for Global Nonkilling [Panel Presentations, part 1]," in the Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, December 1, 2011: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2011/12/01/center-for-global-nonkilling-2/>

⁸ Endicott, Karen L. and Kirk M. Endicott. 2014. "Batek Childrearing and Morality." In *Ancestral Landscapes in Human Evolution: Culture, Childrearing and Social Wellbeing*, edited by Darcia Narvaez et al., p.108-125. New York: Oxford University Press.

As children grow beyond the toddler stage, from about 2 to 6 years of age, they continue to play, but they are not attended to as closely by their parents. The youngsters chop at trees with knives, build fires, dig for tubers, climb trees, gather sticks, and pretend to cook—in essence, they imitate in their play what they see adults doing. Boys and girls often accompany their mothers when they go into the forest to collect tubers. Children play completely non-competitive games. Their play groups tend to be flexible and spontaneous, and no one is excluded. If a child cannot keep up with the other children, however, he or she will drop out and find another game to enjoy. Play activities in the groups are initiated by one child or another, according to the whims of the children involved, and the games tend to have no rules. A typical sequence of play might start with swimming in a stream, shift to jumping off a log, then move to playing tiger chasing Batek, with the kids changing roles as they wish. Their games have no winners or losers. This noncompetitive nature of the games is derived from the lack of competition among Batek adults. As the children grow older, their play activities focus more intensively on the work they will be doing as adults—hunting, fishing, gathering, digging, and so on.

The Batek socialize their children to be nonaggressive. Children have few if any experiences with violence in their communities—only with occasional outsiders. Batek children of one year of age, who strike at other children, are separated quickly from the others, though generally without comment by adults. In general, parents think that children will grow out of any aggressive, possessive behavior patterns, and lecturing about it might simply call attention to the unwanted actions. Sometimes, though, adults do laugh at children's aggressions, thus trying to trivialize situations that the youngsters might have felt were serious.

By the time the children are adopting roles appropriate in their society for women or men, they have also absorbed the positive values that the people feel for both genders. The Batek are, as the Endicotts expressed it in 2014,⁹ gender egalitarian in that they place no greater value on the activities of men or women, and neither group controls the other. This is an important concept that requires a more detailed investigation later in this chapter.

Forest Paths

The Batek identify themselves as a forest people; the forest is their true home. Their shelters are scattered about wherever they decide to camp, with

⁹ Endicott, Kirk M. and Karen L. Endicott. 2008. *The Headman Was a Woman: The Gender Egalitarian Batek of Malaysia*. Long Grove, ILL: Waveland, p.50.

no symbolic defenses from the surrounding forest environment. While the thatch is still fresh and green, it is almost impossible to see a camp from even a few feet away. They prefer the forest because it is cooler and, they feel, healthier than living in the heat of the clearings. Kirk Endicott wrote that they also prefer the forest because it gives them a refuge from other people.¹⁰

Another anthropologist, Lye Tuck-Po, has studied the Batek relationships with their forest environment quite thoroughly and written evocatively about them. In her 2004 book *Changing Pathways: Forest Degradation and the Batek of Pahang, Malaysia*, Dr. Lye describes a lengthy discourse one evening by a Batek shaman whom she called “Tebu.” His comments, which he clearly hoped the anthropologist would spread to a wider audience, were poetic, eloquent, and profoundly important for understanding the Batek—and, more broadly, the human—dependence on the natural environment. Lye used his comments as the springboard for her discussion of the Batek relationship with their forest.¹¹

Tebu describes the Malay practice of converting the natural forest into a monoculture of oil palm plantations: “they kill the world.” He adds, “we miss the times of peace. We remember, we miss. We show how.” The healthy environment of the past, he seems to be saying, fostered a state of peace. Furthermore, the Batek, with their continuing ability to live nonviolently in their forests, can show the vastly larger surrounding societies how to live peacefully. The Batek people still tend to retreat into the forest when they feel threatened by potential enemies, such as outside villagers and government agents. The forest is still a refuge that allows them to return to their freedom; it provides a venue for them to withdraw from others as a way of resolving conflicts.

The Batek and the Malay concepts of forest differ. For instance, Batek words for “lean-to” and “house” have very different meanings. Lean-tos are upriver, homes in the forest where Batek live. Houses are downriver where Malay slave raiders used to live. Houses are to be feared as symbols of the slave raiding over 100 years ago and the buildings convey negative associations and, frequently, misplaced trust. The Malay people clear the land in and around their villages so everything can be neat and ordered, with the forest kept as a boundary in the background. The Batek camps are in the forest, with only patches of

¹⁰ Endicott, Kirk. 1979. *Batek Negrito Religion: The World-View and Rituals of a Hunting and Gathering People of Peninsular Malaysia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹¹ Lye, Tuck-Po. 2004. *Changing Pathways: Forest Degradation and the Batek of Pahang, Malaysia*. New York: Lexington Books.

vegetation cleared to make room for their lean-tos. With the lean-tos open on three sides, a Batek person steps out of the dwelling directly into the forest. There is no attempt to remain apart from the natural environment.

The Batek certainly have closer relations with the forest than they do with outsiders. Until about 100 years ago, Malay slave raiders came up the rivers and decimated their communities. Their fear of outsiders persisted through the 1960s. They would flee settlements along the rivers at the sound of an approaching motorboat. These attitudes persist: they socialize their children to conflate fears of strangers with their fear of tigers. While barriers and suspicions are gradually diminishing in communities where Batek and Malays live close to one another, the Batek realize that they are always the subordinate people. Periodically tensions will flare up, particularly when the Muslim Malays become intolerant of the animist beliefs of their neighbors, who continue to resist converting to Islam.

The Batek prevent overcrowding and competition for forest resources by spreading out along the different tributaries of the rivers. They discuss their plans for future group movements with relatives among different foraging groups, so everyone is aware of the intentions of others and people can minimize competition for forest resources.

Peace, to the Batek, also means the absence of noise in the woods. They are attuned to forest sounds, which may carry signals of danger, so they habitually prefer a quiet environment. If they are congregating in a large group, many people will erect lean-tos off by themselves in the forest, a distance away from others so the dense surrounding vegetation will muffle sounds. Those living in the group campsites will individually leave in the daytime just to find solitude and quiet. Some adults even have a hard time talking with visitors, such as an anthropologist, if their own children are making a lot of noise nearby.

The author, who grew up in Malaysia, lives not too far from the forests of the Batek and she supplements her formal periods of fieldwork with frequent return visits to see her friends. Thus, her writing is based on very recent information. Many Batek continue living nomadically in forest camps, hunting and gathering in traditional fashions, and cherishing their peaceful relationships with the forest and each other. While they are very clearly aware of the material culture in the Malay villages that surrounds their forests, they prefer their hunting and gathering lifestyle.

"They kill the world the way they live," a Batek shaman said, speaking about the modern, industrializing, high-tech society of the Malays that surrounds their forest homeland. The Batek view themselves as upriver people of

the forest, in contrast to the downriver agrarian Malays. Part of Batek mythology focuses on the horrible ends that befall innocent forest people who stray downriver toward the land of the violent Malays, a place where the forest has been destroyed, where the indigenous trees no longer are allowed to grow.

Their cosmos and worldviews are tied up in their protective forest cover. The spirits of the Batek may dwell in the forest canopy or on sacred stone pillars that are reminiscent of the emergent treetops. In their origin myth, half of the original people became trees so that the remaining people would have enough to eat. Trees and people thus share a common identity and history. Continuing careful harvesting of trees, they believe, recycles the plant nutrients through the people and back to the forest.

But the loss of trees and the forest, through wasteful logging practices and the conversion to agriculture, cuts people off from their origins. It destroys the earth deity below and shows superhumans that people are out to destroy the world. Destroying the forest kills the homes of the superhumans as well as of people, and it shows them that the humans have rejected them. As a result, the Batek place a lot of importance on their forest stewardship. The forest world will survive and thrive, they feel, as long as the superhumans remain satisfied with the things that people are doing. That is, people like the Batek need to continue to live in and utilize safely the forest, carefully “observing the moral codes and playing their part in receiving knowledge and looking after the forest.” Thus for the Batek, the forest is a social environment. Human stewardship is absolutely necessary, and the forest could not exist without the involvement of caring humans.¹²

The Batek relate to their forests while walking through them. When they are walking in the forest, the Batek are confident, even proud, of their abilities, but as they move along, they are also fearful, at times, of dangers—an apparent paradox. Malaysian forests, even the lowland patches of woods that the Batek live in, can be dense and forbidding—especially to a visiting anthropologist who is unfamiliar with them. Batek pathways differ from the roadways created by loggers, the paths used by Malays that connect their communities, or the hiking trails used by tourists. The Batek paths are just ways to get through the forests. They are narrow and not maintained at all. Indistinctly marked, they are ways for people to slip along and not much more.¹³

¹² Lye, Tuck-Po. 2005. “The Meanings of Trees: Forest and Identity for the Batek of Pahang, Malaysia.” *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 6(3): 249-261; quote on p.257.

¹³ Lye Tuck-Po. 2008. “Before a Step Too Far: Walking with Batek Hunter-Gatherers in the Forests of Pahang, Malaysia.” In *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and*

The visiting anthropologist learned how to walk through the forest so as to avoid getting tangled in vines, impaled on thorns, or slipping in the mud. She adjusted herself to moving with people who are used to traveling through a forest together. She accepted their laughter when she slipped, stumbled, tripped and acted like an ungainly, non-Batek person—someone who was less graceful moving through the forested countryside than they were. She learned to slide down a steep, slippery slope on her rear, in contrast to even the Batek children, who could easily skip down a hill.

She also accepted the way the Batek put her near the head of any line of travel, so they could better keep an eye on her. That was the way they trained their children, who also have to learn proper Batek ways through doing and being watched by their elders. She realized that they consign the slow and the weak to the front, so that the whole group will not travel faster than the least capable among them, such as small children and a visitor.

Lye admitted that during her visits among the Batek, she has occasional qualms about creeping through the forest. But she usually puts aside her fears of poisonous snakes and things that bite and crawl when she is with her Batek friends. Interestingly, though, they too have their fears. They are afraid of tigers and strangers, which they sometimes use as bogeys to scare children into good behavior.

She relates an interesting story about an encounter with a feared person and the surrounding forest. One evening someone entered a camp that she was in and said that Telabas, a well-known madman, had just been seen immediately across the river. The group quietly began to panic, and quickly decided to leave. They formed a consensus on where to go. In less than an hour, the entire band, over 60 people, had gathered their belongings, broken camp, and left for the new location. It was many hours of walking away. No one argued, no one disagreed with the consensus that they had to leave—immediately. As they walked quietly along the Batek pathways through the long night, everyone was clearly quite tense.

Some of the people knew Telabas, and others had actually seen his mad acts. All feared him. All agreed that leaving immediately, fleeing from any potential confrontation with him, would be the best thing to do. Also, they all knew the precise route to take to get to the agreed-upon location, where they could safely spend the remainder of the night. There was nothing random about their movement that evening—they knew exactly where

they were going. In that instance, they were afraid of a potentially dangerous confrontation rather than of the forest itself.

In fact, a pathway, a route, is a central symbol of Batek culture. One follows a path, in their language, even when leaving an established trail, just by pursuing an activity. People may decide to go somewhere, but they make various changes in plans as they are leaving. Then they change their minds along the way and get to the desired place, or not, as the circumstances develop. They have a chaotic-seeming approach to organizing their daily paths. Individuals move about in camp, discussing and fussing over whether or not they will accompany others who are going somewhere. Plans are made spontaneously, and changed constantly. They improvise as things develop. That spirit of improvisation continues in the discussions people have along the trail after they do finally get going. Some people dart off to pursue interests or to chase game, while others drag along, barely keeping up.

Walking, in the Batek language, implies both going somewhere and returning. The concept suggests equivalence to them. They link their concepts of coming and going with a verb that means both arriving and leaving. Even their word for moving camp, normally a one-way movement, includes the concept of remembering and longing to return to the same spot. The point is that the Batek value the ability to return to a campsite. It is a place to come back to. To them, moving forward in time is equivalent to connecting back to the past—to old paths, with old camps. Their future and their history are linked together.

For the Batek, walking along forest pathways is thus a balance between confidence and fear, between going forward and retreating backward. Dr. Lye feels that walking, for them at least, symbolizes having a way, a path forward; it provides a sense of life itself. Losing your way is like facing death. Becoming lost is the horror of not finding your way home. In addition, avoiding tigers and madmen along forest pathways creates places in the landscape that people have to avoid, locations that they can continue to talk about in their endless stories.

For a week in 1996, the anthropologist relates, she and her hosts camped on a high ridge along the spine of the Malay Peninsula. She had accompanied them to the top of the Bumekel Ridge while they collected rattan. Most of the Batek had never camped there before, and it was not the most comfortable place to live, even briefly. There was no water nearby—if the anthropologist wanted to bathe, she had to scramble down a very long

slope to the nearest trickle. Mostly, people used water from springs they encountered during their wanderings in what was left of the forest.¹⁴

Many of the trees had been logged off some time before, so the redeeming feature of the campsite for Lye was that she could awaken at dawn and watch the sun coming up over the distant ridges, an unusual experience for forest dwellers, where sunrise comes slowly and softly, filtering ever more strongly into the woods until full daylight. She admits to even getting up one day before everyone else, just to walk out into the clearing and see the daylight views emerging. In the evenings after the work of the day was done, while the women sat around casually watching their children playing nearby, they would talk, reminisce, and remark about particular places they could see in the landscape. Although the anthropologist could only see forested (and deforested) ridges into the distance, the Batek would see stories and images of past adventures and events.

Lye writes evocatively of the scene. “Where I could see nothing but an expanse of forest and a distant line of low hills, they could reach back to images of past travels, past campsites, past adventures, favourite rivers, former landscapes.” It was obviously a good time and place for the young anthropologist to learn more about the Batek worldview.

As one might expect, rampaging logging in recent years is harming the Batek people and their way of life. According to news reports in January 2014, the two major rivers in the northern part of the Taman Negara National Park, the Koh River and the River Lebir, are increasingly threatened by pollution caused by logging. The River Lebir turns cloudy like milky tea whenever it rains. This is a new phenomenon dating only from the logging of recent years in that place, and local people became worried that the lumbering would harm the park’s plants and animals.¹⁵

A 30-minute boat ride led to a Batek village located only half a kilometer from a pile of logs. The Batek in this community, as a result of the logging, have lost their access to clear, unpolluted water. They were quite concerned also about the graves of their ancestors, which are threatened by the logging. The journalists covering the story detected tension in the faces of the villagers.

¹⁴ “Blog Posts about the Batek,” Peaceful Societies website News and Reviews, September 18, 2008: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2008/09/18/blog-posts-about-the-batek/>

¹⁵ “Batek Suffering from Logging,” Peaceful Societies website News and Reviews, January 23, 2014: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2014/01/23/batek-suffering-from-logging/>

Evidently, the Batek in the village now have to use water that has drained off nearby oil palm plantations for their cooking and bathing. They worry about toxic chemical fertilizers in the polluted water. They have to walk long distances to get even that, polluted as it is. The village headman, Hamdan Keladi, 40, described the results of the situation. After two or three days of bathing in the polluted water, he said that his body tingles. He added, however, that as yet they had not had health problems or vomiting from using the water for cooking or drinking.

Hamdan said that the surrounding forest had already been surveyed for logging. He indicated that farmers who had settled in the areas that were recently cleared of forests had not had much positive contact with the Batek. They did not ask permission for using their land. He told the visitors that the logging could destroy their community, since they had not been given any written titles to the land they live on. Other residents told the journalists that the logging activities in the area had harmed agricultural crops. One person, named Board Majid, said that the logging had harmed the rubber plantations and other crops, such as cassava and vegetables, though he did not explain how the logging had impacted those crops.

One man, Jamil Hendi, 21, discussed his feelings of grief one day at seeing a bulldozer parked on top the grave of his son. Four other nearby graves had also been desecrated by the machine, parked there by unfeeling outsiders. He went on to say that the strangers did not consider the reactions of the Batek in such matters—they only thought of their own needs and interests. He felt that the Malays not only ruined the lives of the Batek with the logging, they crushed their spirits as well.

One of the major take-away values from a study of the Batek is their persistent, continuing love for the forests. A news story in late 2017, for example, quoted several Batek men and women who preferred living nomadically in the forests, gathering and hunting, foraging for rattan to sell for needed supplies, and holding onto their old way of life despite the difficulties that lifestyle requires.¹⁶ They love the forest in large part because it represents a good, peaceful life to them.

¹⁶ “Orang Asli Kuala Koh amal hidup tradisional.” *Utusan Online* October 23, 2017: <http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/wilayah/kelantan/orang-asli-kuala-koh-amal-hidup-tradisional-1.541198>, and discussed in “The Batek Love Forests.” Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, November 2, 2017: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2017/11/02/batek-love-forests/>

Contrasts with Nietzsche

A blog post published by *Psychology Today* in October 2016 captures quite effectively the way the Batek lifestyle might inspire other people. Matthew Rossano, a professor of psychology at Southeastern Louisiana University, compares the beliefs of the nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche with the approaches to life of the Batek. Rossano makes it clear that many people would profit from gaining a better understanding of the Batek.¹⁷

Rossano deftly describes the beliefs of Nietzsche. The philosopher rejected all religious faiths and beliefs in God, who is, he famously declared, quite dead. More to the point, Nietzsche taught that humans could reach a state of perfection by becoming an *Übermensch*, usually referred to in English as a “superman.” (Rossano provides a less gendered alternative translation of the German word: an “exceptional one.”) The superman is a person who strives for mastery in any subject he or she undertakes. Perfection is an all-consuming goal. The individual is forever seeking to do more and to do better by taking greater risks and by testing the limits of the self. That testing should be all-consuming, not just for one’s intellectual or physical abilities. Personal growth, therefore, must be ceaseless and as a result the superman finds meaning and truth from the quest for perfection.

The superman only yields to his or her own constructed principles, Rossano explains. He provides, as an example, the movie characters portrayed by the famous American actor Clint Eastwood. One might interject that many business leaders and politicians also appear to have adopted an *Übermensch* as their ideal. Rossano summarizes the philosophy of Nietzsche as “hyper-individualistic,” but it is also “fit for a modern era.” His philosophy is based on individual achievements and the supposed need for personal power.

The interest for the study of peaceful societies, and the point of Rossano’s essay, is his comparison of Nietzsche’s philosophy with the way of life of the Batek. He introduces the Batek to his *Psychology Today* readers by writing that they still engage in their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle, the men using their blowpipes to harvest monkeys from the forest canopy, the women gathering foods such as fruits, tubers, and mushrooms

¹⁷ Rossano, Matthew J. 2016. “Nietzsche vs. the Batek: Two Different Views of the Human Ideal.” *Psychology Today* blog post, October 16, 2016: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/seeking-perfection/201610/nietzsche-vs-the-batek>

from the forest understory. The Batek also collect rattan and trade it with nearby villagers. Rossano describes briefly the fact that the Batek are of interest to anthropologists because of the peacefulness and nonviolence of their society. He wonders how they do it.

He finds an answer by looking at their basic image of the perfect human being—which contrasts so sharply with that of Nietzsche, who appeals in many ways to people in modern societies. For the Batek, the perfect person is both completely cooperative and also autonomous and self-reliant. The Batek do not expect others to do things for them—you cook your own dinner or repair your own blowpipe. Those tasks of daily life are not difficult, however—they are enjoyable, in fact. But the major point is that for the Batek, cooperation, sharing, and equality are essential values. The competence of the individual is always seen within the context of the society, its bonds and its needs, Rossano writes. The hyper-individualism espoused by Nietzsche is not possible for the Batek.

If Nietzsche's ideas were to be adopted by the Batek, any value of exceptionalism would have to function within the context of human interdependence. Overcoming the limits of the self and constructing meanings for oneself would have to conform to the needs of the broader human society. "Needing others in order to grow, achieve, and realize our full potential is not an extrinsic, socially-imposed dogma. It is simply a human fact," Rossano concludes. In essence, learning about the Batek provides a way of freeing people from dogmas such as those of Nietzsche.

Gender Equality among the Batek

The Batek have a highly egalitarian society in which both men and women share the food that they both procure. While the men normally hunt and the women usually gather the vegetables, both foods are valued equally and both sexes are part of the sharing network of foods in their camps. In essence, men sometimes gather vegetables and women sometimes (though rarely) hunt—they have no rigid rules separating their gender roles. Both sexes gather the rattan which they trade for outside goods, and men and women both participate in government-sponsored agricultural activities. Marriages are based on equality, compatibility, and affection; couples make joint decisions about movements and food-getting. They live companionable lives, working together and enjoying their leisure time with one another. If the warmth of the relationship erodes, either can divorce the other and count on the sup-

port of the band to assist with child-support and food-sharing.¹⁸

Kirk M. Endicott and Karen L. Endicott define gender equal societies as ones where neither sex controls the other or has greater prestige. By this definition, the Batek enjoy one of the few gender equal societies on earth—at least they did in 1975 when the Endicotts did most of their fieldwork there. When they arrived at the Batek settlement, the anthropologists discovered that the people did not follow the patterns of other hunting and gathering societies, with men doing the hunting and women doing the gathering. Batek society was different. The men and women sometimes worked together on hunting or gathering tasks, at other times each sex separately hunted or gathered, and frequently they assisted each other with child care.¹⁹

The “headman” of the band was a woman named Tanyogn, a born leader of her community. A middle-aged, energetic individual, at times she had to strenuously advocate for her people by confronting outsiders. For instance, one day outside traders tried to blame the Batek because some cut rattan had floated away on a flood. She shouted at them that they were the fools who had piled the harvest on the bank of the river. The Batek, she said, would have had the common sense to pile products like that safely in the forest. Another time, some Malays took corn from a Batek garden. The head lady confronted them and demanded that they pay the victims two jugs of rice or she would report them to the government. They paid.

Tanyogn was constantly involved in the affairs of the community and she led by example, pitching in to work with others on many projects. She got the two anthropologists involved by having them weigh produce for the community, in order to help keep outside traders honest. She was a hands-on leader, a strong personality, and an expert on many subjects. The Batek were under no obligation to follow her recommendations but they normally did.

The Endicotts did notice that the Batek recognize physiological differences between the sexes in addition to the obvious reproductive functions. Men have a stronger breath than women, they believe, which explains why they can use blowpipes more effectively to hit monkeys higher in the trees than women can. They also think that men have greater strength for climbing tall trees, though young women also climb reasonably well.

Karen Endicott points out in another article that some anthropologists

¹⁸ Endicott, Karen Lampell. 1984. “The Batek De’ of Malaysia.” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 8(Summer): 6-8.

¹⁹ Endicott, Kirk M. and Karen L. Endicott. 2008. *The Headman Was a Woman: The Gender Egalitarian Batek of Malaysia*. Long Grove: Waveland.

believe all societies are, to a greater or lesser extent, dominated by men with women fulfilling a subordinate role.²⁰ This isn't completely true. One writer she cites argues that sexual asymmetry predominates in hunter/gatherer societies because men are the hunters and the meat they provide is the most favored food. Endicott refutes these arguments based on her research work with the Batek and the literature about other societies. Among the Batek, the nuclear family is formed by a willing agreement between a man and woman to live together. After they are married, the couple make all decisions jointly, though one or the other may be the more vocal. Either can simply walk away from the marriage at any time. The Batek do not always favor meat as the preferred food—during the season when fruit is plentiful, they will eat it instead of everything else, including meat. Endicott concludes that the domination of men over women in many societies is based on established authority structures; that male domination is not universal, hunting is not necessarily a pre-eminent role, and meat is not necessarily the most highly prized food.

But after a number of years of exposure to the outside world, how have gender relationships changed in Batek society in the 21st century? Although gender equality has long been a hallmark of the Batek people, the status of women in that society may be starting to fray, according to a report published in 2015. Patrick Mills, the author of the scholarly report, observes that recent developments such as the employment of Batek men may be threatening their traditions.²¹

He provides careful background in his report. He writes that the Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MyCAT), organized in 2003 as an association of several Malaysian conservation organizations, recognizes that the Batek possess a special knowledge of the forest and of wildlife patterns in them, particularly the habits of the threatened tigers. The group began employing the Batek in tourism activities. MyCAT started what it called "Weekend CAT walks" ("CAT" stands for Citizens Action for Tigers) in the region between the Taman Negara National Park and the central forest reserve. Volunteer tourists hike through forested areas along with experts, documenting such signs of tiger activity as nests and pug marks—as well as

²⁰ Endicott, Karen Lampell. 1981. "The Conditions of Egalitarian Male-Female Relationships in Foraging Societies." *Canberra Anthropology* 4(2): 1-10

²¹ Mills, Patrick. 2015. "Preserving the Culture of Malaysia's Batek People through Ecotourism & Conservation." <https://ecoclub.com/education/articles/979-150907-batek>

poaching activities, which the teams carefully dismantle when they see them. MyCAT includes the Batek as guides for these expeditions.

A Malaysian social organization, Ecoteer, became the organizer of these weekend projects. It employs the Batek as guides in the Weekend CAT Walks. Mr. Mills, who is the Volunteer Coordinator of the project for Ecoteer, focuses his report specifically on the Batek community of Batu Jalang, located on the western border of the national park. Mills makes many observations about the Batek based on his experiences and his research, but his comments about their knowledge and connections to the forest and the possible deterioration of their gender relationships may be of most interest to those concerned with their peacefulness.

The author points out that the Batek near the national park have become more and more dependent on farming and wage labor, which help separates them from their connections to the forest and threatens their traditional social structure. Furthermore, most of the jobs have been reserved for men, prompting them to become the primary wage earners in their families, much like the surrounding majority Malay society. As a result, the Batek women have become dependent on men and have taken on more subservient roles in their families.

In a parallel development, Daniel Quilter, the founder of Ecoteer, recognized that the forest knowledge of the Batek made them ideal for conservation work which would help protect the tigers, such as tracking, establishing camera traps, and collecting data. "They have the basic skills to do everything themselves," Quilter explained. If the Batek had "a bit more focus on things like how to use the GPS and data recording, then we could really start building a good map of animal movements." Mills wrote that further training for the Batek would allow them to gather data such as seasonal changes of tiger populations that would then suggest better conservation strategies.

Employment in these kinds of forest-based activities would not only be helpful for the conservation goals of the organizations, it would also allow an alternative to wage labor and farming. But the critical issue became the fact that the guiding jobs were only being taken by men, even though Batek women have an equal knowledge of the forest. In order to address this issue, MyCAT and Ecoteer introduced activities that involve Batek women with the volunteer tourists, including leading camping trips and foraging. As a result, the volunteer tourists are gaining a richer knowledge of Batek society, while the Batek are more equally earning income and sharing their knowledge of both their hunting and their gathering. As of the 2015 date of the report, the effort

was still rather small, with only a handful of male guides for the CAT walks and a group of 6 to 8 women who were leading foraging trips and camping.

Mr. Quilter held a meeting in August 2015 with members of the Batek village in an effort to explore concerns about the program. The Batek welcomed the new forms of employment but some of their elders were concerned about the numbers of outsiders who might come into their village. Too many visitors might lead the Batek to reveal too much of their traditional knowledge. For his part, Mr. Quilter described his concerns about the lack of sharing among the Batek families of the different opportunities that were being offered to them. The meeting concluded that no more than 10 outsiders per day should be permitted to visit the community, and that the Batek should introduce a rotation system among themselves to better share the benefits of the employment.

Intersections—Gender Equality More Broadly

The big question still needs to be answered: is there a clear link between the unusual, if not rare, gender equality among the Batek and their highly peaceful lifestyle? Does the gender equality in this society, or in the other peaceful societies for that matter, have a direct connection with their peacefulness? Does the one promote the other? It would be great if there were clear answers, but unfortunately the answers are bit muddy. A brief review of some studies should provide at least a bit of clarity to the situation.

Few readers will need to be reminded that the United States has a violence-prone society, especially in domestic life. Over 100,000 rapes were reported to the police in 1990, over half of which were by men with whom the women had romantic involvements. Another somewhat dated statistic showed that one out of four wives is battered by her husband or male partner. Or another: three to four million women are battered annually by their male partners, and violence among dating couple is increasing in the U.S.²² Many other studies provide similar, equally depressing, results.

Some of the social science literature on violence between intimate heterosexual partners focuses on the issue of gender equality, and concludes that the basic reason for violence against women is the patriarchal structure

²² Russo, Nancy Felipe, Mary P. Koss, and Lisa Goodman. 1995. "Male Violence against Women: A Global Health and Development Issue." In Violence and the Prevention of Violence. Edited by Leonore Loeb Adler and Florence L. Denmark, pp.121-127. Westport: Praeger.

of society. Researchers taking that position emphasize that basic inequalities in male/female relationships play an important role in causing gender violence.²³ In much of the literature the relationship is direct and linear—the less gender equality, the more violence will be used to maintain the dominant person's power. In fact, one study shows that male dominance is related to spouse abuse even when the wife strongly believes in the patriarchal family relationship.²⁴ Other social science research, however, points to opposite conclusions: that as gender equality increases, the rate of rape increases, for several possible reasons, such as the notion that men may feel a need to teach women a lesson as equality increases.²⁵

To summarize the equality controversy: feminist scholars contend that intimate violence is based primarily on power and gender issues, a contention that is disputed by other violence researchers who maintain that patriarchal family relationships represent only one issue among many other causes of violence in the family. The feminist research is based on data relating to victims of severe male violence, while the broader sociological studies use national surveys that seek to find relationships comparing violence with age, socioeconomic status, cohabiting status, unemployment, and so on. Each side disputes the approaches of the other. The feminist scholars claim that the national scope surveys ignore the context of family violence; those surveys, they contend, are biased in under representing violence by males. Broadly-focused family violence sociologists, on

²³ Barron, Larry and Murray A. Straus. 1987. "Four Theories of Rape: A Macrosociological Analysis." *Social Problems* 34:467-488; Berkowitz, Leonard. 1993. *Aggression: Its Causes, Consequences, and Control*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Erchak, Gerald M., and Richard Rosenfeld. 1994. "Societal Isolation, Violent Norms, and Gender Relations: A Reexamination of Levinson's Model of Wife Beating." *Cross-Cultural Research* 28:111-133; Levinson, David. 1989. *Family Violence in Cross-cultural Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

²⁴ Straus, Murray A. 1991. "Physical Violence in American Families: Incidence Rates, Causes, and Trends." In *Abused and Battered: Social and Legal Responses to Family Violence*. Edited by Dean D. Knudsen and JoAnn L. Miller, pp.17-34. New York: deGruyter

²⁵ Barron, Larry and Murray A. Straus. 1984. "Sexual Stratification, Pornography, and Rape in the United States." In *Pornography and Sexual Aggression*. Edited by Neil M. Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein, pp.185-209. San Diego: Academic; Austin, Roy L. and Young S. Kim. 2000. "A Cross-national Examination of the Relationship between Gender Equality and Official Rape Rates." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 44: 204-221.

the other hand, argue that the feminists rely on single variables for their analyses of patriarchy and ignore other important social factors.²⁶

While spouse abuse appears, to some observers, to be a nearly universal phenomenon in human societies, for other scholars intimate partner violence is a particular problem in societies where warfare, civil unrest, and violence are endemic problems. In those latter societies, it is argued, the overall levels of violence that permeate the societies undermine efforts to control domestic violence.²⁷ Even if some societies are particularly violent, it can still be argued that scholars may focus too much attention on violence and not enough on the nonviolence that permeates most human relationships.²⁸ Rather than trying to cope with family violence by studying violence, why not cope with it, at least to some extent, in a more positive fashion by investigating nonviolent families—the basic purpose of this chapter on the Batek and of the entire book on peaceful societies?

The very firmly held, and of course widely differing, values in these societies that condemn violence and foster nonviolence appear to extend to male/female, husband/wife relationships. To put that more positively, many of these societies place nonviolent, nurturing, positive spousal relationships at the centers of their worldviews and social structures. Societies dedicated to very high standards of peacefulness appear to enjoy, as an integral aspect of their nonviolence, marriages that are warm, supportive, harmonious, and generally free of violence. Many of the societies base their marriages on closeness, compatibility, and affection, much as the Batek normally do.²⁹ In a number of the peaceful societies, especially the hunting and gathering peoples, marriages tend to break up frequently while men and women are young, but

²⁶ Anderson, Kristin L. 1997. "Gender, Status, and Domestic Violence: An Integration of Feminist and Family Violence Approaches." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59:655-669.

²⁷ Erchak, Gerald M., and Richard Rosenfeld. 1994. "Societal Isolation, Violent Norms, and Gender Relations: A Reexamination of Levinson's Model of Wife Beating." *Cross-Cultural Research* 28:111-133; McWilliams, Monica. 1998. "Violence against Women in Societies under Stress." In *Rethinking Violence against Women*. Edited by R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash, pp.111-140. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

²⁸ Fry, Douglas P. 2001. "Is Violence Getting Too Much Attention? Cross-cultural Findings on the Ways People Deal with Conflict." In *Cross-cultural Approaches to Research on Aggression and Reconciliation*. Edited by J. Martin Ramirez and Deborah S. Richardson, pp. 123-148. Huntington: Nova Science

²⁹ Endicott, Karen Lampell. 1984. "The Batek De' of Malaysia." *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 8 (Summer):6-8

then they find compatible mates and form life-long bonds, where husbands and wives become each other's best friends; such couples will cooperate in collecting products for sale, trading in the market, caring for children, and enjoying their leisure time with one another. Family harmony and close, companionable, nurturing relationships between husbands and wives is the central moral and social symbol for a number of these societies.

However, while gender equality may be an important issue to many scholars investigating family violence, it does not appear to be the major determining factor in the level of marital nonviolence/violence among the peaceful societies. Gender equality is quite important in a number of these societies, but in others the sexes are not terribly equal and that factor is not too important an issue. Discussions of social constraints such as gender control, authority, and male domination are present in some of the peaceful societies' literature, but those conditions vary so widely from one society to the next that no conclusions can be drawn. However, the literature does suggest that gender relationships in most of these peaceful societies *are* generally based on positive moral and ethical values, and on related individual psychological structures.

If gender equality does not necessarily relate to the extent of nonviolence in the peaceful societies, what other factors do characterize their male/female relationships? The terms used by the anthropologists and sociologists who describe male/female relations in these societies vary, of course, but the basic message from much of the literature is very similar: in most of the peaceful societies, men have positive, affirmative views of women, and the women themselves have correspondingly very positive self-images. These two conditions appear to be much more closely related to nonviolence, at least in these societies, than whether women have equal roles or statuses with men.

Positive ethical values such as respect, approval, esteem, admiration, prestige, and nurturing, and the corresponding psychological attributes of self-respect, self-esteem, and self-confidence are certainly not unique to the peaceful societies, but they turn up frequently in much of the literature about them—but certainly not all. Take the Ifaluk, the subject of Chapter 2 and a highly peaceful society. It is not really clear how much women are respected in Ifaluk society nor how much self-respect they may have. Most of the day, Ifaluk men and women are engaged in their separate activities, but in the privacy of their homes they do show affection to one another. But the women have secondary roles and statuses compared to men and they appear to do more work. Furthermore, women are highly deferential toward men. Women bend at the waist as a sign of deference when they walk past men, and when a woman must pass her brother indoors she

crawls past him on her hands and knees to avoid having her head above his. This is not a gender-equal society, peaceful as it is. In spite of this, though, Ifaluk women have significant status and control. Since descent and inheritance are matrilineal, women control the children, the households, and the garden produce while men control the distribution of fish and the rights to certain coconut trees. Men are thus dependent on mothers, sisters and wives for shelter and most of their food.³⁰ But respect and self-respect? The literature on the Ifaluk is not completely clear.

Several fundamental questions beg to be answered from the literature: what prompts a society to value people, not for their ability to dominate, conquer, or vanquish but for their intrinsic worth as human beings? Why, in some societies, is the concept of respect more appropriately accorded to men who compete for that honor, while in others it is given to men and women without reserve? Unfortunately the literature on gender relations in peaceful societies does not provide clear answers: it only gives hints about the variety of factors that foster respect relationships. But the conclusion still holds: in many of these peaceful societies, where people value immeasurable qualities like selflessness, nurturance, harmony, and an emphasis on the other person, respect and self-respect, esteem and self-esteem appear to be important social and psychological conditions in establishing patterns of nonviolence. This conclusion does not necessarily challenge the arguments of feminists against patriarchal gender violence—at least not in societies such as the Batek that promote gender equality.

Finally, in those societies that allow violence, “Cultural Spillover Theory” holds that the more strongly a society endorses forceful, physical means to achieve its goals, such as the control of crime or the maintenance of social order, the more likely force will be used, even if not approved, in other social spheres such as family life and gender relations. Thus rape and other intimate partner violence may be a “cultural spillover” from broader cultural values that accept violence as regrettable but necessary at times.³¹

³⁰ Burrows, Edwin G. and Melford E. Spiro. 1957. *An Atoll Culture: Ethnography of Ifaluk in the Central Carolines*. New Haven: Human Relations Area Files; Lutz, Catherine. 1988. *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll & their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³¹ Baron, Larry, Murray A. Straus, and David Jaffee. 1988. “Legitimate Violence, Violent Attitudes, and Rape: A Test of the Cultural Spillover Theory.” In *Human Sexual Aggression: Current Perspectives*. Edited by Robert A. Prentky and Vernon L. Quinsey. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 528:79-110.

The literature on gender relations in the peaceful societies suggests that an opposite cultural spillover may also apply: that the more societies endorse highly nonviolent values, where goals are achieved nonviolently and with a lot of respect engrained in human relations, the more they will have respectful, peaceful family relations. Cultural spillover can work positively as well as negatively, depending on what questions are asked, on what definitions are proposed, and on what societies are examined. Thus, for the Batek at least, their gender equality is an important quality in supporting their peaceful lives. That fact may not prove anything scientifically, and followers of Nietzsche may not be pleased, but it certainly is important for the human inhabitants in and around Taman Negara National Park.

6. Schooling to Preserve Buid Values

Prologue: the *Tultulan*

When Humaynan, a Buid schoolgirl, returned to her village in the mountains of southern Mindoro Island in the Philippines, she began to have sex with her young lover, Ginhiw. The young couple tried to keep their relationship secret until the girl had finished her secondary schooling in Calapan, the capital city of Oriental Mindoro province on the island. The parents of the couple were aware of the situation and went along with keeping it secret but an aunt of the girl's, who disliked the family of the boy, discovered their relationship and began spreading ugly gossip about the pair.¹

The Buid, whose economy is based primarily on shifting agriculture, normally have nothing against pre-marital relationships. But in this case, since the young people were having sex continuously and since both had been baptized as Catholics—and they had been educated in town—the norms of the Filipino lowlanders seemed to apply. One tryst would have been overlooked but the continuing relationship needed to be sanctified by a marriage ceremony. Or so some people in the village claimed.

The community decided to convene a *tultulan*, a conflict-resolution meeting used by the Buid (also spelled Buhid) to settle contentious issues such as this one. Should the couple be required to get married or not? When the *tultulan* was convened, it fostered all sorts of gripes among different members of the families involved. As things began to settle, it was clear that Humaynan's father, Ukad, and members of his family had major objections to Ginhiw and his family. Their anger could be settled with a gift, called a *hinuyo*, an “anger-easing gift,” if the *tultulan* would decide on one. Ukad suggested that a

¹ This story is related in Lopez-Gonzaga, Violeta. 2002. *Peasants in the Hills: A Study of the Dynamics of Social Change among the Buhid Swidden Cultivators in the Philippines*. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

gift of 100.00 Philippine pesos would help heal the anger he felt in his belly. However, his brother, Away, demanded twice as much.

The *tultulan* was adjourned to give the parties to the dispute time to think things over. It turned out that Humaynan's uncle had had a long-standing land dispute with the boy's family, and while some of the issues had been settled successfully over the years, others had not. Away decided to use the issue of the proposed marriage to bring up his smoldering grievances before the whole village. After a couple days, the *tultulan* was reconvened. One immediate result was that Alaga, the stepfather of Ginhiw, said he would sell a calf of his—the animal had boils anyway—and give part of the money from the sale to Ukad. Ginhiw's mother, Daeng, decided to pay for Away's *hinuyo* out of her own savings. Ginhiw's father, Yahiwan, was short of cash but he agreed to give a sack of rice, valued at P115.00.

Once Ukad had collected his *hinuyo*, he was satisfied and contributed a sack of his own rice for the upcoming community feast, and Away contributed one of his pigs. The rest of the family members contributed to the feast by helping with the water, the cooking, and the serving duties at the festivities that marked the successful airing of grievances and the resulting conclusion of the *tultulan*.

The point of the *tultulans*, and of the compensation agreements they frequently arrange, is to channel disputes into negotiations and compromises. A major source of conflicts in the Buid villages is the frequent breakdown of marriages. Since all adults have stocks of personal valuables, they can easily make payments to facilitate the dissolution of their marriages. These payments are often made, not at the beginning of a marriage—the Buid usually marry without ceremonies—but upon its peaceful termination. The average Buid goes through five marriages, so that children are raised with numerous step-siblings and step-parents, and as adults they raise their step-children. The partners in a marriage share in the ownership of the house and the livestock but they continue to own their own *swiddens*—the plots of land that these shifting cultivators use for a while. They also maintain control of their own valuables. They share food and work together, though the husbands tend to perform more of the heavy tasks and the wives more of the lighter, repetitive chores.²

² Gibson, Thomas. 1985. "The Sharing of Substance versus the Sharing of Activity among the Buid." *Man* n.s. 20 (September): 391-411; Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press; Gibson, Thomas. 1988. "Meat Sharing as a Political

When a couple does become divided, however, the Buid believe that the spirits of the earth may become angered by their quarreling and terminate their protection of humans, which would endanger life and fertility. Benevolence of the spirits may be restored after a quarrel through a ritual sacrifice of one of the couple's pigs, whose meat is shared with the entire community, with a portion reserved for the spirits. Their moral universe is symbolized by the human society, which is symbolized by the couple, which is symbolized by the sacrificed pig. However, the Buid do not expect their marriages to necessarily endure.

If the rituals don't work, the villagers will call a *tultulan* to foster the venting of grievances in hopes that it will end the quarreling. If that doesn't work and the couple needs to separate, the one who has been abandoned is entitled to compensation, which will be set at a reasonable level by the community meeting. A spouse who is aggressive, jealous or possessive is condemned by the group, but infidelity is not. Thus the *tultulan* and the compensation procedures they authorize seek to diffuse potential conflicts into compromise.

Convening a *tultulan* is not the only approach the Buid take to help keep the peace in their villages. Another strategy they use is for the men and women to periodically wrestle together on moonlit nights, in a semi-ritualistic gang fight in which the men reach up the women's skirts and the women fight back by ganging up on a man, grappling with him, and grabbing for his genitals.

And lest an emphasis on *tultulans* and ending marriages effectively be misconstrued, it is important to emphasize that the Buid seek to base their highly peaceful social and moral order on the symbolism of companionship, particularly on closely cooperative marriages. The Buid view social relationships in two ways: either they are based on kinship, which implies negative values of dependency, an involuntary nature, and permanence, or they are based on companionship, which carries the positive values of personal autonomy, an ease of termination, and a voluntary nature. The successful marriages that they strive for thus symbolize the peaceful society they want to have.

Turning Your Backs on Your Friends

One of the most fascinating aspects of Buid society, and a major contributing factor to their peacefulness, is their practice of not facing one an-

Ritual: Forms of Transaction Versus Modes of Subsistence." In *Hunters and Gatherers 2: Property, Power and Ideology*, edited by Tim Ingold, David Riches, and James Woodburn, 165-179. Oxford: Berg.

other when talking. They avoid as much as possible what are called dyadic relationships. When two men converse, for instance, they do not face one another or address comments or questions directly to the other person; instead, they will sit facing the same direction, or back-to-back, making comments that the other person may or may not respond to, depending on whether he agrees. Rather than contradicting the speaker, the listener may make his own comment on a different subject, to which the first speaker may respond or change the subject again in turn. When they are preparing to engage in cooperative agricultural tasks such as slashing, burning, planting, or harvesting, the community will get together, everyone squatting and facing in the same direction, perhaps concentrating on a distant mountain. Each person will address the group and indicate his need for assistance; if conflicts are perceived, the parties will talk them out. In no case, though, do two individuals address each other: instead, all individual comments are made to the group as a whole. Since the speaker is always an individual and the listener a group, clashes of wills are avoided; avoiding social interaction between symmetrical units such as individuals thus helps minimize competition and confrontations.³

Similarly, the Buid dislike economic transactions that put one person in debt to another, even temporarily. Anthropologist Thomas Gibson found that when he was doing fieldwork in the Buid villages, he was unable to pay people directly for work they might do to assist him. The best he could do was to offer support to the community as a whole, and assistance to him would be provided anonymously. He would find fresh fruits and vegetables on his doorstep in the morning but could never figure out who left them. If he needed assistance carrying supplies across the river, for instance, individuals would not come out to help, but everyone might turn out as a group to participate. Avoiding the existence of individual barter situations prevented the embarrassing situation of people having to calculate the exact values to reciprocate.

The Buid feel that calculating equivalent values and the practice of reciprocity are completely incompatible with their egalitarian ethos. Those relationships place people in situations of competition in which one or the other must lose, which they can't tolerate. However, their values apply only within their own villages. Their indebtedness to the lowland Christians is, to them, without any moral obligations. They do, however, have a long history

³ Gibson, Thomas. 1988. "Meat Sharing as a Political Ritual: Forms of Transaction Versus Modes of Subsistence." In *Hunters and Gatherers 2: Property, Power and Ideology*, edited by Tim Ingold, David Riches, and James Woodburn, 165-179. Oxford: Berg.

of trade with the outside world to obtain articles that are essential to their economy—iron blades, cloth, or salt—in return for their pottery, baskets, and resin used for torches. But Gibson found that when he wanted to obtain some Buid objects for the British Museum, direct purchase or barter was out of the question. So he displayed a large collection of glass beads for the whole community to take what they wanted, and individuals returned objects that they thought had equivalent values. No individuals could be singled out for attention; no negotiations could be held, no debts incurred.⁴

For the Buid, physical violence is the result of boasting, quarreling, expressions of emotions, egotistical self-assertion, and aggression, all of which they deplore. To them, *maisug* (aggressive) behavior is characteristic of their Christian lowland neighbors, which they condemn continuously. The same word, however, is used elsewhere in the Philippines, such as among the Tausug Muslims, to refer to positive male virtues such as courage and virility. The Buid do not have a positive word for courage when confronting danger, though they do have words for flight from a dangerous situation. Whenever a Buid does act aggressively, the actions are condemned and the aggressor is assumed to lack proper control or have a weak mind.⁵

With all of this emphasis on avoiding aggressive actions with one another, how do they deal with aggression and injustice from their neighboring, lowland, Christian Filipinos? While the Buid have traditionally relied on rituals for help in maintaining harmony within their families and communities, a development in December 2010 illustrates how they also rely on ritualistic approaches when they are threatened by outsiders who are determined to take away their lands.⁶

By way of background, some Buid decided to begin protesting the ways their ancestral lands were being deeded to non-Buid farmers. In 2004, the Department of Agrarian Reform in Oriental Mindoro province started distributing land titles for about 600 hectares of Buid ancestral lands to non-Buid lowlanders. The titles were given to over 200 non-Buid farmers as part of the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. However, due to

⁴ Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.

⁵ Gibson, Thomas. 1990. "Raiding, Trading and Tribal Autonomy in Insular Southeast Asia." In *The Anthropology of War*, edited by Jonathan Haas, 125-145. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ "Buid Lose their Lands." Peaceful Societies website, December 16, 2010: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2010/12/16/buid-lose-their-lands/>

an insurgency in the region at the time, the government did not continue the program until late in 2010 when it resumed distributing the titles.

A reporter contacted Yaum Sumbad, leader of a group called Sadik Habanan Buhid, who told her, "Our sacred lands were measured and are being taken away. We fear sickness, calamities, death. We ask for the protection of our land." The reporter visited the town of Bongabong and witnessed a Buid ritual called a Luhudan. Five mediums chanted prayers above a pig, which had been tied to a piece of wood. They were appealing to the ancestors for help in driving away the evil spirits, which they felt were trying to take their land away from them.

Thomas Gibson similarly witnessed pig feasts held in Buid villages when he was doing fieldwork in their communities. They were held in order to resolve internal disputes, particularly marital problems. The ritual of sacrificing pigs and distributing the meat to others evidently follows traditional rules designed to restore and reaffirm harmony within the household and the community. Though the animals that are sacrificed all belong to individual households, the meat is always shared equally in the community. The circumstances that prompt the ceremonies vary, but the rituals are only held because of a mystical danger to the community. The larger the apparent threat, the greater the community of participants. Gibson describes a ritual that he called a "swinging-pig ritual," which sounds quite similar to the one observed by the reporter in 2010. The Buid believe it serves to expel invading spirits "through the violent release of animal vitality."⁷

As the reader has perhaps already guessed, the Buid have strikingly different beliefs from their neighboring Christians, beliefs that have a relationship to their peacefulness. The spirit world serves as a model to explain the social world in which the Buid live: the hostility between the Buid and their Christian lowland neighbors is represented mystically by hostilities between spirit familiars and predatory spirits. The mystical linkages between the Buid

⁷ Gibson, Thomas. 1989. "Symbolic Representations of Tranquility and Aggression among the Buid." In *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Signe Howell and Roy Willis, 60-78. London: Routledge; Gibson, Thomas. 1989. "Collective Ritual as a Model for Corporate Economic Activity among the Buid of Mindoro." In *Changing Lives, Changing Rites: Ritual and Social Dynamics in Philippine and Indonesian Uplands*, edited by Susan D. Russell and Clark E. Cunningham, 63-80. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan; Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.

and the earth spirits represent the sharing, supportive relationships manifest among the Buid in their own communities. The Buid maintain their peaceful, tranquil communities within a context of predatory aggression by lowlanders and spirits. As part of their mystical system they have to commit aggression against animals and sacrifice them. The Buid see themselves as part of a continuum, in which pigs eat passive plants, then people eat pigs in rituals which attempt to control the dangers from predatory spirits, and finally the spirits eat people. While violence is prohibited within the human world, it is an important part of the non-human world.⁸

Buid rituals, called *fanurukan*, reaffirm the companionship of humans and the earth spirits. A pig is sacrificed as a fertility ritual to the spirits of the earth since those spirits provide the foundation of a safe house. The sharing of the meat strengthens social units and the collective society against external threats. These rituals provide the mystical vitality for their idealized image of a tranquil cooperative household free of domination, possessiveness, jealousy and quarrelling. To be more specific, their social and moral order is based on the symbolism of companionship, particularly the closely cooperative marriages.⁹

Another essential element of Buid religion is their *séances*, which are conducted by many mediums, none of whom are possessed by spirits and none of whom have any special access to the world of the spirits. The mediums have equal access and they form a consensus with other mediums in their knowledge about the spirits. The egalitarian Buid ethos limits exhibition or competition among the mediums, particularly since the emotions and the soul are the sources of aggression, they believe. Their *séances* reinforce mental and social control over aggressive behavior or spirits and souls. Just as their social structure limits dependency of one individual on another in favor of dependency on the group, similarly their ritual life emphasizes that individuals are mystically dependent on the group.¹⁰ While their spirits do not appear to direct the Buid to flee in the face of aggressive enemies,

⁸ Gibson, Thomas. 1989. "Symbolic Representations of Tranquility and Aggression among the Buid." In *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Signe Howell and Roy Willis, 60-78. London: Routledge.

⁹ Gibson, Thomas. 1985. "The Sharing of Substance versus the Sharing of Activity among the Buid." *Man* n.s. 20(September): 391-411; Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.

¹⁰ Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.

their religious beliefs form a coherent whole that emphasizes and reinforces their nonviolent, nonresistant ways. The nonresistance, expressed as passive behavior and flight from hostility, is a similar behavior pattern to the Christian Anabaptist societies. It is just that the basic religious imperative for that behavior differs significantly.

Poetry that Promotes Peace

The Buid rely on more than just performing rituals over swinging pigs for help when some seriously threatening situations develop, such as when Philippine soldiers storm into their villages and attempt to harass and intimidate the people. The Buid may begin to recite their love poems, called *ambahan*, to assert their unity and sense of determination.

However, the primary purpose of the poetry is to express thoughts about love. Young Buid men never try to conquer women through force and violence—they recite their love poems instead to try to win their favor. An important factor that supports their long-standing tradition of reciting love poems is the fact that they, and their neighboring society to the south, the Hanunoo, still use an ancient written script call *baybayin* to help preserve the poetry. These two societies speak mutually unintelligible languages but to some extent both groups understand the same words of the formal, stylized poetry.

While the other indigenous groups farther to the north on Mindoro—referred to collectively as “Mangyans”—do not preserve the ancient writing systems, they also recite *ambahans*, much as the Buid and the Hanunoo do, for such purposes as expressing ideas, describing feelings, forming harmonious relationships—and making love. As the Dutch anthropologist Antoon Postma explained, parents may use the poems to educate their children; visitors may use them to gently ask for food; and relatives may recite *ambahans* to say goodbye after a visit.¹¹

Of course, the Buid do not say everything poetically. A man coming home from working in his fields would not use an *ambahan* to express his hunger to his wife. He would use clear, plain language to express his needs. But he would use an *ambahan* on special occasions when he needs to say unpleasant, delicate, or embarrassing things. A boy might use plain language to express his love for a girl—that he will love her forever—but it would sound much better if he could say so with an *ambahan*. Some examples of

¹¹ Postma, Antoon. 1972. *Treasure of a Minority; the Ambahan: a Poetic Expression of the Mangyans of Southern Mindoro, Philippines*. Manila: Arnoldus Press.

the poems are reprinted on the website of the Mangyan Heritage Center, located in Calapan City.¹²

All of this made the news in April 2011. On April 15 and 16, about 500 people from all seven Mangyan societies gathered to celebrate Mangyan Day, hosted by Pastor Marcelo Carculan in his village, Abra de Ilog, at the northern tip of Mindoro. While representatives spoke seven different languages and came from seven different cultures, they were united in their opposition to the loss of their lands—and united in their determination to defend their rights.¹³

The representatives gathered together, chewed betel nuts, and shared their ritualistic *ambahans* as symbols of their unity. Although reciting stories poetically remains an important aspect of life in the Mangyan villages,¹⁴ the uses of the poems are changing. To some extent, the traditional content of the *ambahan* is giving way to newer ideas and concerns—problems with soldiers, mining, logging, the loss of lands, the destruction of forests. But the older uses also remain important.

One person at the Mangyan Day celebration explained his *ambahan* song: “We, Mangyans avoid problems but now, it cannot be avoided. The only solution is unity.” A Buid representative sang—the poets chant their thoughts—about the importance of fighting a dam, while a representative from another group indicated, in his *ambahan*, how the people plan to defend their lands.

The representatives did more than recite poetry. They prepared and signed a Mangyan Declaration, a statement opposing proposed mining operations. The declaration named government officials whom the people feel are guilty of discriminating against them. It called for an end to aggressive development projects, and it requested the repeal of laws that permit the desecration and expropriation of their lands. According to Pastor Carculan, “mining and other projects divide us, like the fingers in our hands. It is only when we clench our fist that we would be able to win against threats to our existence.”

But government officials were aware of the threat posed by popular gatherings. Five days before the planned Mangyan Day, soldiers visited Marcelo

¹² <http://www.mangyan.org/content/ambahan>

¹³ Olea, Ronalyn V. “Special Report: A Difficult Life for the Mangyans.” Bulatlat.com website, a report in four parts, April 25, 2011: <http://bulatlat.com/main/2011/04/25/special-report-a-difficult-life-for-mangyans-1-st-of-4-parts/>

¹⁴ Tanglad. Blog post “Ambahan,” July 2, 2009: <https://tanglad.wordpress.com/2009/07/01/ambahan/>

Carculan to ask about his organization, Hagibbat, and the upcoming activities. On April 15th, they carried through. A truckload of soldiers from the 80th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army arrived at 7:00 AM, brandishing their high powered rifles in front of the growing crowd. Some attendees were intimidated, as the soldiers had doubtless intended, and simply melted away to avoid any confrontations. But many stayed, discussed their issues, and wrote their declaration expressing their newly found unity. And to be fair, attitudes in the Philippine Army may have changed since 2011. A news report from August 2018 described a road that the army recently built into a remote Buid village to provide better access for them to the outside world. The army officers quoted expressed positive attitudes towards the Mangyan people.¹⁵

But Buid men still have the desire to win the hearts of women. What better way than to court them with an ancient form of poetry, the very use of which suggests that the man's interests are entirely peaceful? A report in a major Philippines newspaper in October 2016 described the preservation and contemporary uses of the *ambahans*.¹⁶ They are still preserved in their ancient *baybayin* script on bamboo tubes, which are left outdoors to be used and read by others. The people hold *ambahan* sessions that often last all night or over a weekend. During these poetry readings, the Buid or Hanunoo will gather and socialize, laughing, whispering, chanting and composing poems almost endlessly.

The people build on each other's feelings and thoughts as expressed in their poetry, without thinking much about who owns the verses. They all share the understandings of what they are saying as well as their intuitions about the meanings of the lines. Quint Delgado Fansler, a youthful idealist, described the Mangyan people to the journalist: "Culture changes. Heritage does not. The significance of Mangyan life is that it represents a living pre-Hispanic culture."

The journalist, Rita Ledesma, expressed her admiration for the Mangyan cultures evocatively: "Mangyans have been dancing with the winds of happiness and ease for hundreds of years." She devoted several paragraphs in her article to the eminent scholar of *ambahan* studies, Antoon Postma, and

¹⁵ Pa-a, Saul. August 30, 2018. "Oriental Mindoro Road Projects Benefit Residents, Mangyan Tribes." Republic of the Philippines, Philippine News Agency: <http://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1046349>

¹⁶ Ledesma, Rita. "Peace-loving—and Proud to be Mangyan." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 9, 2016: <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/240062/peace-loving-and-proud-to-be-mangyan/>

his daughter Anya Postma, who is carrying on his scholarship related to the ancient form of poetic expression. Antoon, a missionary priest for the Society of the Divine Word, was assigned in 1958 to work on Mindoro, where he fell in love with the Mangyan people and their culture, particularly the *ambahans*. After 30 years he left the priesthood and married a Hanunoo woman. Anya was their first child.

Postma's book *Treasure of a Minority* (1972) describes the *ambahan* in detail and, perhaps best of all, provides numerous examples of the poems, with English translations. While he described and translated the *ambahan* of the Hanunoo specifically, he made it clear that most of what he wrote would apply equally well to the Buid.¹⁷

In his introductory comments, Postma defined the *ambahan* as a form of poetic expression that has seven syllable lines and rhyming end syllables. It is usually presented in a chanting style, though without musical accompaniment or any defined pitch. The purpose of the poem is to express allegorically the situation that the poet feels himself or herself to be in at the moment. The seven syllable rule is often accomplished by contractions or expansions of words to make the line have the proper number of syllables. Rhyming of the end syllables is essential, Postma wrote.

Postma noted that an *ambahan* may appear to be a nature poem about birds, trees, insects or flowers, but there are many different levels of meanings. One example he gave is that a poem about avoiding getting stung while taking honey from bees may have allegorical meanings such as the importance of watching out when you climb a mountain—or being careful when you go to the parents of a woman you love to ask for her hand in marriage.

He said that the traditional Hanunoo and Buid recitations of *ambahans* are of poems that have been handed down through the generations, not of recently created poems. At least, that is what the persons doing the chanting will say. Postma made it clear that the people were, in fact, creating new *ambahans*, but they were not admitting it. Also, different groups of people have their own groups of poetry—children, for instance, have *ambahans* written specifically for the interests of kids.

Postma wrote, “The *ambahan* is primarily a poem of social character; it finds its true existence in society (p. 14).” It served practical purposes, such as the education of children, the courting of young lovers, the need of visitors for food, or the expressions of farewell by departing relatives. It helped

¹⁷ Postma, Antoon. 1972. *Treasure of a Minority; the Ambahan: a Poetic Expression of the Mangyans of Southern Mindoro, Philippines*. Manila: Arnoldus Press.

strengthen their peacefulness. His daughter Anya made it clear in a more recent paper that those values still apply. The *ambahan*, she wrote, “portrays the Mangyans’ values of family, relationships, trust in nature, [and] respect for others...”¹⁸

The *baybayin* script, used by the Buid and their neighbors the Hanunoo to write their *ambahans*, is also used by another indigenous society in the Philippines, the Tagbanwa on Palawan Island. All three societies preserve different variations of the written script, which derives from ancient writings from South India called Brahmi. The *baybayin* consists of 17 cursive characters.

However, the script is being preserved only by a few people in remote villages and it is in danger of going extinct. Fely Montajes, a 40-year old Buid lady in the village of Batuli, knows and uses the Buid version of the *baybayin* script. She is obviously proud of her heritage: “I inherited this from my parents. This is one of the few things that is still our own,” she says as she carves the characters on a piece of bamboo, sounding them out as she proceeds to inscribe her love poem. She adds that she learned some of the script from her father and the rest from her friends.¹⁹

Buid who live in communities close to cities are the ones in greatest danger of losing their connections with their ancient culture. But even some of the elders in the more remote communities no longer know the *baybayin*. Bercelinda Babylya, a district official, described how the script is still being maintained to some extent in the mountain communities. But for many of the Buid, she said, the most important thing to focus on is obtaining food and the other basics of survival.

Emily Catapang, executive director of the Mangyan Heritage Centre, points out that some of the elders who know the script only use it for signing their names, but in parts of Mindoro there are signs on hospitals and markets written with it. The Centre is reaching out in various ways to promote the cause among the Buid and Hanunoo, such as through writing contests and reading traditional *ambahan* poetry. Also, people visit colleges, schools, and institutions around the country with outreach messages about it. And, in Batuli, Ms. Mantajes has tried in her own way to reach out to others, encouraging the Buid to cherish their script.

¹⁸ “Poetry of the Buid.” Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, October 20, 2016: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2016/10/20/poetry-of-the-buid/>

¹⁹ Lowe, Aya. “Fighting to Keep Alive the Philippines’ Ancient Script.” The National, August 27, 2014: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/fighting-to-keep-alive-the-philippines-ancient-script-1.465473#full>

Ms. Catapang expresses a hopeful take on the survival of the *baybayin*. In fact, an important commitment for her center is preserving the script, a key element in helping the Buid and the Hanunoo maintain and value their cultures. The Centre has people teaching the Hanunoo version of the script in 10 different schools. An 82-year old resident of Batuili named Say-an Reyes, who deplores the fact that the number of people bothering to learn the script is dropping—less than a third of the elders in that village still know it—goes on to say, “It’s important for people to learn the script [but] no one teaches [it to] the kids anymore.”

The Buid, much like the people in many of the peaceful societies, recognize that incorporating traditional values and beliefs into the schooling of their kids is a critical element in preserving their culture. Some Buid have taken the issue to heart and are taking action to pass along to their children their culture of peacefulness. A recent assessment by an anthropologist indicates that the peacefulness mostly persists.

Recent Update about the Buid

It is hard to keep up with an obscure group of about 4,000 people living in remote mountains that are rarely visited by newspaper reporters, much less careful anthropologists, so a report on a May 2009 revisit by Thomas Gibson with the Buid, his first in many years, is to be treasured. Gibson makes it clear in a 2011 publication that the Buid still retain/ the “radically pacifistic and egalitarian” society that he studied from 1979 through 1981.²⁰

Gibson argues that the pacifism and egalitarianism of the Buid results from their reactions, as persecuted highlanders, to the violence of their lowland neighbors. He briefly reviews the history. For hundreds of years, the Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish colonizers in the Philippines engaged in numerous battles with the Muslim sultanates to the southwest in what is now Indonesia, and the Buid were on the edge of that fighting. As a result of that history, the Buid tend to reject asymmetrical social relationships and even the expectation that people within families will sustain close social ties. All relationships are based on versions of equality: adults with adults, adults with children, and humans with animals.

²⁰ Gibson, Thomas. 2011. “Egalitarian Islands in a Predatory Sea.” In *Anarchic Solidarity: Autonomy, Equality, and Fellowship in Southeast Asia*, Edited by Thomas Gibson and Kenneth Sillander, p.270-293. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 60.

Gibson's essay provides a good review of Buid beliefs. For instance, he writes, the Buid do not believe that individuals should own land. The earth is freely owned by all, although perhaps the spirits have the first claim. Furthermore, people only possess the items they create for themselves, such as the crops they have planted in their gardens. Also, husbands and wives each own the produce from crops they plant, pooling the harvests for their families but retaining individual ownership in the event of divorce. The people manage their gardens individually rather than as groups.

The Buid cooperate for some agricultural tasks at certain times of the year, such as planting crops and harvesting them. The sponsors of such cooperative tasks host other people from their widespread communities at special mid-day meals for all the helpers. The socialization afforded by the meal is the reward for the helpers. The Buid build their houses at some considerable distance from one another, near their swidden (shifting) garden plots, and usually hidden from outsiders in groves of trees. They tend to be spaced evenly, a kilometer or two apart across the landscape. They deliberately space themselves out, evidently as a way of avoiding one another and the conflicts that might arise.

When the Buid kill animals, especially pigs or chickens, they share the meat equally, obsessively, and very carefully. These meat sharing events occur more or less weekly in the community where Gibson lived and they provide a primary form of social connectedness. No one is excluded or included due to age, sex, length of residence in the community, or genealogical connections to others. Moreover, no one feels any obligation to reciprocate those social events. People are entitled to a share of the meat at the festivities only because they live in the community, not because of built up obligations from earlier events. Any social distinctions that exist in the community are thus symbolically dissolved in the sharing of communal meals.

Gibson learned when he revisited the Buid in 2009 that they had gained a sense of integration as a tribe in the 24 years since he had last been there. The Buid have formed nongovernmental organizations in both the Oriental Mindoro and Occidental Mindoro provinces to represent their rights. The government in 1998 issued a Certificate of Ancestral Land Claim granting them qualified exclusive rights over 98,000 hectares of land. The process of granting genuine land titles, called Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles, was ongoing.

The Buid in the community where Gibson had done his field work, Ugun Liguma, seemed to exhibit a social style that was quite similar to what he had observed earlier. He feels that the residents retain their religious beliefs and their same harmonious ways of settling marital and land disputes.

And of considerable importance, they still treat the old and the young, men and women, parents and children equally. They still place a high value on tranquility and harmony, and they devalue aggression and competition. In other words, the Buid appear to remain a highly peaceful society.

But at least some of them have not been averse to making use of the latest technologies. A Google search in 2018 for Pamana Ka, the name of their high school in Danlog described in the next section, turned up several references to Facebook where the school system is featured. Which makes one wonder how much the Buid with smartphones and access to the internet use the social media. For there are some surprising similarities between Facebook and the Buid style of peacefully communicating.

For a moment, we need to reflect back on the way the Buid normally socialize—by making comments to a group of people, usually sitting back to back or all facing a distant mountain peak. Everyone addresses the group as a whole, rarely if ever speaking directly to another person. It is as if the Buid were anticipating Facebook many decades ago. While a Facebook member can, of course, send comments to specific individuals, most Facebook members direct many of their comments to their entire group of “friends,” hundreds or perhaps even thousands of people. Much of the news shared on Facebook is less than earthshaking: “I took my dog for a walk this morning,” or some such. Though some people will care, many will read it, grunt, and go on to the next post in their news feeds. Or put up their own news about the performance of their kid in the school play last night. Or how cute the cat is. The things that matter to people.

The Buid in their traditional villages similarly make comments to groups of people without worrying about who will or will not respond. Much of the personal news and opinion is banal, in Facebook or in the Buid village, but that’s the charm, or at least the potential charm, of both. A Buid man might make a comment about his kids one morning to a group of his friends, who would similarly grunt, respond or not as they felt so inclined, and perhaps make a comment of their own.

The similarity is startling. Instead of directing comments at specific individuals and setting up potential conflicts, the Buid as well as many Facebook members, just make their comments to an undifferentiated group. People will respond when and if they feel like it. Anthropologist Gibson does not indicate if the Buid have different gradations of grunts people might make that would provide a pre-internet equivalent of “like.” But he does make it clear that the reticence of the Buid toward others—their attempts to never put anyone else on the spot—are an important element in their culture of peacefulness.

The big question therefore is whether the similarity with the social media, of sending comments to an undifferentiated group of friends without them having any obligation to respond, could become a foundational element in building a more peaceful world. Obviously many other elements will need to be developed before cultures of peace will take off more widely, but communicating with an indirect, nonthreatening, undemanding manner, as the Buid are so expert in doing and as Facebook seems to reinforce, may well represent one of the beginning elements of a coming culture of peacefulness. It won't replace direct communication right off, but it may help us to feel our way forward. In a non-confrontational fashion.

Building Schools for the Buid

The people of many peaceful societies focus on raising their children to adopt their approaches to nonviolence, much as more "normal" (violent) societies emphasize the importance of teaching aggressiveness, the value of male dominance, and the supposed inevitability of conflict and warfare. Some of the small-scale, peaceful groups have problems, however, melding their traditional socialization strategies, which teach their youth to uphold what they see as proper moral and social values, with the obvious advantages that come from a good, formal, Western education. With the former they will be able to maintain and perpetuate their societies. Do the adults want their young people to become better equipped to deal with the dominating national and international cultures, technologies, and business practices in their countries. Both may be essential, and all of these small-scale societies have to deal with the issue of how to blend the differing values. How should young people adapt the best of the outside, yet preserve the best of the inside?

The most appropriate way to begin a discussion of the issues raised by these questions is to approach them as the Buid might: by sitting together, focusing on a distant mountain peak, and considering the history of Buid involvement with formal education. Then, if readers are still interested, we can broaden the discussion to consider how the peaceful societies in general tend to handle issues related to education and the preservation of unique cultural and social values. People who lose interest can just turn the pages to the next chapter.

Our history begins with a primary school in a Buid community in 1979, which was maintained by a teacher couple in which the man taught all the children combined in grades one and two, and his wife taught grades three and four. Although the couple had lived in the area for a decade, they made

no attempt to incorporate local needs into the curriculum, and the teaching was substandard. Despite that, the Buid appreciated the fact that the children were learning at least some rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Those skills were valuable, they felt, in their dealings with traders from outside groups. When the school was threatened with being closed, the Buid mayor of the barrio recruited children from other groups to also attend and was able to persuade the town government to subsidize the salary of the teaching couple.²¹

Laki Iwan, a beloved Buid elder, had different answers—at least he tried to answer the questions more effectively. He was about 90 when he slipped on a patch of mud in his village early in 2006, hit his head when he fell, and died. His body was discovered several hours after the accident. The man was suffused with a spirit of far-sighted generosity: he had donated the land for several schools for his community during his life, a legacy that the other villagers acknowledged fondly.²²

He was a resident of the hamlet of Sitio Danlog, in Barangay Monteclaro of the town of San Jose, on Mindoro Island, and he was always known for his generous spirit. One of his 80-some grandchildren and great grandchildren recalled that “he would always give us bananas for food ...” He evidently planted foods just so he could give them away to others. Another grandchild recalled his penchant for always keeping his word. His family says that he frequently exhorted them to study hard for the future of the Buid people.

But founding schools was his special passion. When he realized that a high school he had founded, referred to as Pamana Ka, was growing successfully, he decided it was important to have a document prepared to ensure that his gift of land for the school would not be rescinded by any of his heirs after he died. The administrator of the school, a nun, was impressed, since the idea had not occurred to her. The high school had graduated 10 students from the different Mangyan societies, including the Buid, not long before the accident, of whom seven planned to go on to college. Three of those college-bound students planned to apply to the new indigenous peoples’ college, Pamulaan, founded by the University of Southeastern Philippines on its campus in Davao City.

²¹ Lopez-Gonzaga, Violeta. 2002 [first printing 1983]. *Peasants in the Hills: A Study of the Dynamics of Social Change among the Buhid Swidden Cultivators in the Philippines*. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

²² “Buid Elder Remembered.” Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, June 22, 2006: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2006/06/22/buid-elder-remembered/>

Laki Iwan's first gift was a patch of land for the village of Danlog itself. Then he gave land for a school, then, with the agreement of his children (his wife had died), he gave more land for schools. He enjoyed carrying produce from his fields, such as bananas and vegetables, into the schools.

According to an update to the Laki Iwan story two years after his death, one of the schools he helped to found was thriving.²³ It enrolled 48 students from kindergarten to grade three. The teachers used the Buid language in the classrooms to teach their subjects, and the instructors used the traditional alphabet of that society, the surat Buhid, as their mode of teaching. The goals of the traditional school, in the words of the update, were "to promote the protection and preservation of Mangyan culture, and likewise, [to provide] free education to Mangyan children." The school sought to teach history, math, English, and other Western subjects, but in the context of their own Buid culture and beliefs.

The traditional Buid people did not easily accept the need for schooling the children. They realized that their youngsters might learn about the works of Shakespeare but remain unfamiliar with their own traditional *ambahan* poetry, which is preserved in their ancient, written language. Children could attend school and come to see their culture as inferior to that of the West, and Western education as superior to their own ways. Despite the fact that many people have converted to Christianity, the Buid still hold onto many of their traditions.

During the celebration in the school of World Literacy Day on September 8, 2008, the Buid recalled how some of their young people had gotten Western educations and then become too good for their traditional communities. Village elders admitted they would be happy when their young people finished college. According to Luisito Malanao, one of the school teachers, while the elders "were happy for some of ours who have finished college courses, they were also disappointed over the influence of modern civilization [on] some of these educated Mangyans that made them abandon the native culture."

The young people with their diplomas would hesitate to return to their native villages in the mountains due to the mud and the dirty family members. Some hated the thought of sleeping in common rooms in their small houses with the rest of their families. But Mr. Malanao, admitting the disap-

²³ "A Buid School Makes Significant Progress." Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, September 18, 2008: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2008/09/18/a-buid-school-makes-significant-progress/>

pointment within the Buid communities about the ways some of their children had turned out, concluded nonetheless that “we cannot afford to stay ignorant and exploited all our lives.”

Another Mangyan school teacher, Alma Agular, echoed his sentiments. “We have to embrace basic education without going to schools where we are discriminated [against due to] being Mangyans by lowlanders who dominate these learning institutions,” she said. Several years ago, the people decided to formalize their style of traditional schooling within the purview of the Philippine educational system. With the support of some non-governmental organizations and local Department of Education officials, in 2005 the community launched a program called Pamana Ka (Paaralang Mangyan Na-Angkop sa Kulturang Aalagaan).

The program officially recognized a kindergarten and an elementary school curriculum for the Buid and other Mangyan students. It emphasized traditional values and approaches. The Buid school had originally been built in a traditional style, with cogon and bamboo—good ventilation and a natural learning environment. The newer approach, however, has been to build permanent classroom buildings, with the support of Plan Philippines, Inc., a member of Plan International, the worldwide NGO which is devoted to community development with a primary focus on improving the lives of children.

Plan Philippines has supported other Mangyan schools in the area, in addition to the Pamana Ka Buid school. It not only gives money for constructing new school buildings, it also has provided supplies for the Mangyan-oriented curricula, such as books and materials for the teachers and children. An official at Plan Philippines told a reporter that his group is helping over 2,000 Mangyan school children on Mindoro. He expressed a great deal of pleasure in the fact that they assist the Pamana Ka school in the Buid village.

Five years later, a major Philippine news source described the Buid schools again by focusing on the hopes of Allan Agaw, a 16-year-old student who wants to give back to his village after he completes his education. He clearly cherishes the sharing tradition of his society. “I want to take up engineering so I can help my community,” he said (in English translation).²⁴ The spirit of giving and sharing, an outstanding characteristic of the Buid, was an essential part of the story of Laki Iwan, who donated the land for the school where young Agaw was studying.

²⁴ Norries A. Padilla, Stephen. “Education to Restore the Mangyan’s Identity.” Inquirer.net, August 12, 2013: <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/464223/education-to-restore-the-mangyans-identity>

The school in Danlog, which had 10 students in 2006 and 48 in 2008 had grown to 60 by 2013. The reporter in 2013 tells stories that are similar to the ones of five and seven years before, though it differs in some details. One difference: the 2013 report says that the school, Pamana Ka, an acronym, was established by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), while the two earlier accounts indicated that it was founded by the Mangyan people themselves. Presumably, both were involved in getting it started. As of 2013, the director of the school, Aristeo Bautista, is from the FMM.

The reporter finds that everyone in the school emphasizes the importance of Buid traditional culture. Bapa Ane Arevalo, an elder who teaches the ancient Buid script, says, “there are Mangyan[s] who, after studying in the lowlands, come back to the community but don’t speak our language anymore. It’s as if they’re ashamed of being a Mangyan.” Before Pamana Ka was built, young Buid who wanted an education had to study in schools in the lowlands that are part of the majority Filipino culture. Clara Panagsagan, a science teacher, recalls being told, in such a school, that as a Mangyan she knew nothing.

Alma Aguilan, a mathematics teacher, notes that at a lowland school she was laughed at and humiliated because of her inability to correctly pronounce the word “present” the first time attendance was called. As time went on, even when she knew answers, she still hesitated about participating in classes for fear of having similar experiences. The need for Pamana Ka, a school by and for the indigenous kids, is evident.

Students remain on the Pamana Ka campus most of the year in dormitories, one for the boys, one for the girls, since their homes are so far from the school. The Mangyan students at Pamana Ka raise vegetables and fruits in the fields around the school, and they take care of poultry and fish in a pond on the campus, all of which provide foods that they eat. The staff also live in the community because their home villages are scattered all over the mountains of Mindoro. Margie Munoy Siquico, who formerly taught at Pamana Ka, points out that the education of the students doesn’t stop for vacation breaks. She says that all the subjects taught in the school—reading, science, math, Filipino—are infused with Mangyan traditions and cultures because all the teachers themselves are from Mangyan communities.

The Buid elders in Danlog also play an important role in imparting their skills, practices, knowledge, and spiritual values to the students and teachers, especially through the stories they tell. Aristeo Bautista, the school director, indicates that the school is committed to restoring “the faith ... of the children in indigenous knowledge systems and practices...”

To further that goal, the school curriculum includes the subject “lupaing ninuno,” or “ancestral domain.” Taught at the end of the afternoon every day, the class focuses on teaching Mangyan cultural values, rituals, and agricultural practices. Juanito Lumawig, Jr., who teaches science in the school, values the ancestral domain course. He tells the reporter (in an English translation), “our dream, along with accepting the type of education that we advance, is for everyone to regard our ancestral domain as our sacred spring of knowledge and life.”

Intersections—Teaching Nonviolence in Peaceful Societies

Socializing their children to live harmoniously, as all of the societies discussed in this book do, requires very different strategies from the approaches taken by peace educators in major societies such as the United States who want to foster cultures of peace. The reason is that in the U.S. and much of the world, children are socialized in their homes and taught in their schools the dominant values of their societies: competition is good and necessary; conflict is creative and productive; aggression is an inevitable aspect of human life. Children must be raised to cope with the realities of the world. At least, those are the values perpetuated in much of the world—though not all.

In the small scattering of peaceful societies around the world, children are socialized to accept different values. They are raised to avoid competition and competitive games. They are taught to leave the scenes of disputes, which should be avoided at all costs. They learn that conflicts may, at times, lead to anger, which could produce violence. And they see incidents of violence, for various reasons, as the most destructive catastrophes possible. For many peaceful societies, confrontations are stupid and bravery is explicitly devalued. Better to flee from your enemies into the forest or away across the desert than to fight and perhaps die or be enslaved.

How do societies that are already peaceful, yet living on the fringes of modernity, socialize and educate their children to develop and retain peacefulness? How do they prepare their young people so they will want to retain their relationships with their traditional peaceful values, yet will be qualified for possible jobs in modern occupations if they so choose? In what ways are the peaceful societies different, if any, from others in the approaches they take to educating their kids to cherish and practice nonviolent values? What can socialization in the peaceful societies, and instruction in their schools, suggest to professionals involved in peace education in industrialized settings—and vice versa? More specifically, what does socializa-

tion for nonviolence in the peaceful societies actually consist of? What do adults do to teach peacefulness to their children? And most critically, what lessons do the socialization patterns for nonviolence in the peaceful societies present for modern peace educators?

While formal education in schools is now available, to a greater or lesser extent, in many of the communities described in this book, none of those people needed schooling to teach harmony and nonviolence to their children. Peacefulness is a condition that is emphasized in those societies. Although they use different strategies for socializing their children, their worldviews focus, in large part, on living harmoniously with others within the family, with the rest of the village or settlement, and as much as possible with the wider reaches of humanity. The socializing processes work for each society—the people are trying hard to retain their values, including of course their peacefulness, in the face of modernizing forces. Those modernizing forces include formal schooling, which many, though not all, of the peaceful communities welcome. A critical issue is how to integrate the modern, consumer, materialistic culture—which implicitly includes elements of domination, competition, and, arguably, structural violence—with an ethic of nonviolence.

In essence, the peaceful societies see nonviolence as a critical element of their cultural traditions to pass along to children, not just as an add-on to their education system. Peacefulness is an essential part of the entire society. While of course people in those societies make unpleasant comments, get riled up, and have serious issues with one another, they settle their conflicts with tact and grace.²⁵ Like religious beliefs in many other societies that are imparted to children at a very young age, peace values, often part of their religious and mythological beliefs, are socialized into children in the peaceful societies starting when they are very young. In the Buid society, children who are particularly quarrelsome and anti-social or who have tantrums may be cured by exorcising the evil spirits that have caused the problems. This serves to distance the children from their anti-social behaviors, and it involves no loss of face. The exorcisms encourage children to assume self-control. Kids do not have to adhere to what might seem to be the unintelligible commands or moral values imposed by adults.²⁶ This is not an argument that these societies are mostly peaceful because their religious or

²⁵ Bonta, Bruce D. 1996. "Conflict Resolution among Peaceful Societies: The Culture of Peacefulness." *Journal of Peace Research* 33 (November): 403-420.

²⁶ Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.

mythic beliefs teach them to be so. In fact, for some of them, such as the Semai, peacefulness is important simply because it works. It is an extremely effective way to live, and they raise their children to accept that belief.²⁷

It would probably be a more accurate summary to state that nonviolence is an essential aspect of the respective cultures in all of the peaceful societies, and as such it is shared/taught to their children starting at a very young age. Socialization for peacefulness begins with infants, though the societies approach their babies differently. Norberg-Hodge observed that Ladakhi babies are cared for constantly, mostly by the mothers but also by others in the family.²⁸ In a similar fashion, Paliyan infants in southern India are indulged for their every need until about age two when they are weaned, their mothers go back to work, and the children experience the frustrations of having their demands ignored for the first time. Their temper tantrums will be mostly ignored by adults, a traumatic period for the children that lasts until age four or five. The emotional independence that results, however, prompts the children to adhere to social rules, to play quietly without fighting, to be reticent, self-confident, and socially skilled.²⁹

Some of these societies traditionally have been very loose about the ways they instruct their children in their peaceful norms, or they just assume that the children will learn by example. Others are so concerned that they actually lecture their children, classroom style, in the values of the society. At about the age of six or seven, the Piaroa *ruwang*, the religious and political leader—the shaman—in each community, begins gathering children together for lessons in social morality and the virtues of a tranquil life. He teaches them to be responsible for their own actions, to avoid quarrels, and to respect others. He teaches them the negative Piaroa attitudes toward social attitudes such as vanity, jealousy, arrogance, dishonesty, cruelty, malice and ferocity and the importance of mastering their emotions³⁰ In sum,

²⁷ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1994. "Surrendered Men: Peaceable Enclaves in the Post-Enlightenment West." In *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence*, edited by Leslie E. Sponsel and Thomas Gregor, p. 69-108. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

²⁸ Norberg-Hodge, Helena. 1991. *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

²⁹ Gardner, Peter M. 1972. "The Paliyans." In *Hunters and Gatherers Today: A Socio-economic Study of Eleven Such Cultures in the Twentieth Century*, edited by M. G. Bicchieri, 404-447. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

³⁰ Overing, Joanna. 1985. "There Is No End of Evil: The Guilty Innocents and Their Fallible God." In *The Anthropology of Evil*, edited by David Parkin, 244-278. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; Overing, Joanna. 1989. "Styles of Manhood: An Amazonian Contrast

formal teaching of peaceful values is often the province of the families, but formal lecturing education is not unique to just schools as we may know them. Of course, that lecturing is only part of the socializing that seeks to perpetuate the peacefulness of the society.

Respect for others is a salient characteristic of the peaceful societies, an essential value of peacefulness, and the literature about several of them conveys the ways they teach respect to their children. Among the Buid, children are never ordered to do things and are never punished, a reflection of the anti-authoritarian tenor of their society, where the wishes of others are always respected.³¹ A similar respect for the wishes of children is exemplified by the Paliyan, who allow small children of five to hold sharp tools without restraint by adults. By the age of seven, their children are able to handle the basic technology of the group.³² The active teaching that the Piaroa shaman does with the children in his village also includes the implicit assumption that the child is free to adopt the virtues of their society as much as he or she desires.³³ Semai children similarly are expected to make their own choices, which adults will respect, even if they seem to be poor ones. It is important, adults feel, for children to develop autonomy and self-reliance.³⁴

Modern schools have been established in many communities of the peaceful societies, and in many, though not all of them, formal schooling is improving—in some cases dramatically. The most critical condition is whether the schools are either completely controlled by the local communities, or at least are highly influenced by local public opinion. It will be useful to focus on the societies in which local communities are strongly involved in their schools, for these are the ones where the schools are integrating traditional values with

in Tranquillity and Violence.” In *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Signe Howell and Roy Willis, 79-99. London: Routledge.

³¹ Gibson, Thomas. 1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.

³² Gardner, Peter M. 1972. “The Paliyans.” In *Hunters and Gatherers Today: A Socio-economic Study of Eleven Such Cultures in the Twentieth Century*, edited by M. G. Bicchieri, 404-447. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

³³ Overing, Joanna. 1989. “Styles of Manhood: An Amazonian Contrast in Tranquillity and Violence.” In *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Signe Howell and Roy Willis, 79-99. London: Routledge.

³⁴ Dentan, Robert Knox and Juli Edo. 2008. “Schooling vs. Education, Hidden vs. Overt Curricula: Ways of Thinking about Schools, Economic Development, and Putting the Children of the Poor to Work—a West Malaysian Example.” *Moussons: Recherche en sciences humaines sur l’Asie du Sud-Est*. 12: 3-34.

the teaching of modern subjects. These societies strongly feel that preserving their traditional values is essential, and adults want to see their traditions included along with the modern subjects in the schools.

For one thing, the Buid, and the other Mangyan societies, are especially eager to learn how to cope with the outside, dominating, Filipino society, and they see education as a key to their self-preservation. They perceive that being able to read and to understand numbers will help defend them from outside exploiters.³⁵ Similarly, local enthusiasm and involvement has also become critical in recent decades in schools in Piaroa communities³⁶ and in some of the Ladakhi schools.³⁷

At the other, more discouraging, end of the scale, the Paliyan have little if any involvement with the schools that some of their children attend. A school was opened in the early 1960s in one of their communities but the Paliyan were so unsettled by the presence in their community of aggressive outsiders—the Tamils of southern India—that most of them returned to living in the forests in the region. By 1978, only a few Paliyan children still attended the school, and they appeared to be more oriented toward the forest than the ones an anthropologist had seen in the same village in the early 1960s.³⁸ On the other hand, a Paliyan man was quoted in 2010 as being enthusiastic about the opportunities that schooling could give to his sons. He said he wanted them to have a better future. He works like a slave, he said—he wants his children to live like humans.³⁹ An even more recent article, however, indicates that Paliyan kids themselves are not too eager to go to the local government-run school, since the people there are generally unfriendly toward them.⁴⁰

³⁵ Salamat, Marya. 2013. All the Mangyans Want Is for Their Children to Learn. *Bulatlat.com*, June 7. <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/06/07/all-the-mangyans-want-is-for-their-children-to-learn/>

³⁶ Amodio, Emanuele, Gilberto Pérez and Claudia Poblete. 2006. *Las Pautas de Crianza del Pueblo Piaroa de Venezuela*. Caracas: UNICEF. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/venezuela/spanish/pautas_piaroa.pdf

³⁷ Rizvi, Janet. 1996. *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia*, 2nd edition. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

³⁸ Gardner, Peter M. 2000. *Bicultural Versatility as a Frontier Adaptation among Paliyan Foragers of South India*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen.

³⁹ Bosio, Dario. 2010. "The Paliyar Tribe: The Wind Is Changing." *Madurai Messenger*. <http://www.maduraimessenger.org/printed-version/2010/september/tribals/>

⁴⁰ Karthikeyan, D. 2013. "Tribe Takes Social Media Route." *The Hindu*, June 30. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/tribe-takes-social-media-route/article4865545.ece>

While many of the Semai children appear to be eager to go to school so they can have the chance to have more prosperity in their lives, the schools in or near their communities, run by outside authorities, do not include much if any local involvement by the Semai people.⁴¹ Both the Semai, on a large scale, and the Chewong on a much smaller scale, suffer in their schools from poor instruction, bullying by the majority children, and, frequently, a lack of quality teachers and relevant materials. Teaching the Orang Asli children has mostly been a failure. Instruction is in Malay, a language the children, when they are young, do not yet understand. The curriculum, as recently as the 1990s, reflected the needs of urban Malay children, not the isolated rural lives of the Orang Asli. Until the mid-1990s, teaching in the Orang Asli schools, organized by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, the JHEOA, was frequently carried out by Malay teachers who did not want to be there, who were resentful of having to live in isolated conditions, and who were often unqualified for their assignments. They sometimes expressed their frustrations and resentments in their schools. After 1995, when instruction in the Orang Asli schools was reassigned to the Ministry of Education, the quality of schooling may have improved somewhat, though the curriculum remained the same and the children continued to drop out of school very frequently.⁴²

The extremes—the Buid enthusiasm for educating children within their own social and cultural context, versus the Chewong antipathy for alien approaches to schooling—suggest that there are many possible answers to one of the basic questions: Is it possible to socialize children to adhere to traditional peaceful values yet also educate them to fit in with the contemporary world? The peaceful societies provide contrasting answers on this subject, but the lessons should be useful to advocates of peace education around the world.

Where formal schooling has been developed within the control of the peaceful societies, in what ways are the local traditional values incorporated within those schools? In other words, how do traditional values fit in with modernity? In the Buid society, the integration of modern subjects that are

⁴¹ Dentan, Robert Knox and Juli Edo. 2008. "Schooling vs. Education, Hidden vs. Overt Curricula: Ways of Thinking about Schools, Economic Development, and Putting the Children of the Poor to Work—a West Malaysian Example." *Moussons: Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est*. 12: 3-34.

⁴² Lillegraven, Anja Lingjerde. 2006. *Paths of Change in Fields of Power: A Study of the Chewong—an Indigenous Minority Group in Peninsular Malaysia*. MA Thesis, University of Oslo. <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/16572>

taught within the context of their traditional culture is seen as essential. Young people who studied in schools in the lowlands often suffered ridicule and discrimination, and those who completed an education sometimes did not want to return to their native villages. So overcoming those problems and providing alternatives to traditional approaches within the context of valuing their traditional society became essential to Buid elders, who continue to strongly support the schools in their mountain communities.⁴³ The literature is not as detailed about the Ifaluk, but it appears from one article as if the children themselves reinforce island values of peacefulness in the school on their atoll by emphasizing the importance of their traditional approaches to social control via their concept of justifiable anger—*song* in the Ifaluk language.⁴⁴

Piaroa schools also have emphasized promoting their traditional culture while, at the same time, introducing modern subjects. Many Piaroa communities have pre-schools, but the pre-school teachers, typically Piaroa adults from the same community, will show the value for their culture by teaching children how to weave baskets or how to make traditional toys. They will sing traditional songs, but they will include a beginning exposure to numbers and to the letters of the alphabet. Boys in general accept teachings by the shamans, which are endorsed by the parents, about the importance of respecting elders, of not committing robbery, of not being aggressive with women, and so on. Girls are taught to respect others, to not yell, and to help their mothers. In communities with more extensive contacts with Creoles, the rituals are performed less often, replaced by other approaches, such as lessons given by the schools. In one community, Paria Grande, the pre-school and grades 1 through 3 in the primary school, about 153 children are exposed to programs that include time for traditional Piaroa cultural topics—language, dress, necklaces, makeup, etc. Children are guided in the production of traditional crafts, such as knitting, weaving baskets, and making manioc strainers.⁴⁵

⁴³ Padilla, Stephen Norries A. 2013. "Education to Restore the Mangyan's Identity. Inquirer.net. August 12. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/464223/education-to-restore-the-mangyans-identity>

⁴⁴ Lutz, Catherine. 1990. "Morality, Domination and Understandings of 'Justifiable Anger' among the Ifaluk." In *Everyday Understanding: Social and Scientific Implications*. Edited by Gün R. Semin and Kenneth J. Gergen, p. 204 -26. London: Sage.

⁴⁵ Amodio, Emanuele, Gilberto Pérez and Claudia Poblete. 2006. *Las Pautas de Crianza del Pueblo Piaroa de Venezuela*. Caracas: UNICEF. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/venezuela/spanish/pautas_piaroa.pdf

As Nelson, Van Slyck and Cardella wrote in 1999 (p.91), “If creating peace implies developing peaceful people, education is the cornerstone for peacebuilding. While peace education involves learning about peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, its ultimate objective goes beyond transmission of knowledge to development of peaceful people.”⁴⁶ These authors effectively captured the challenge—to see how peace education really fosters peaceful societies. Important pieces of the puzzle are to identify ways that the ideas and approaches of the peace education discipline are already comparable to the experiences of the peaceful societies, and, secondly, the ways that scholars and practitioners in that discipline could learn from those societies. One can hope that peace educators will gain some insights from the groups that are already peaceful.

⁴⁶ Nelson, Linden L., Michael R. Van Slyck, and Lucille A. Cardella. 1999. “Peace and Conflict Curricula for Adolescents.” In *Peacebuilding for Adolescents: Strategies for Educators and Community Leaders*, Edited by Linda Rennie Forcey and Ian Murray Harris, p. 91-117. New York: Peter Lang.

7. Peaceful Lives and Religious Beliefs in Ladakh

A Conflict Resolved

A gang of Buddhist monks in 1999 attacked a boy selling magazines at a bus stand on the streets of Leh, the administrative capital of part of Ladakh, destroying many copies of an issue he was selling that contained a critical article about some of them. The magazine, *Ladags Melong* (Mirror of Ladakh), was published by an NGO called the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL), a group founded by an intellectual Ladakhi pioneer named Sonam Wangchuk and run by students and other youthful, educated Ladakhis. The article the monks were upset about, written by a young man named Rigzin, recounted how a group of monks had recently thrown him off a bus.

Fernanda Pirie, in the first chapter of her outstanding book *Peace and Conflict in Ladakh: The Construction of a Fragile Web of Order*, describes the way the conflict was resolved.¹ Tashi Morup, the editor of the magazine, told her that he had suggested to the magazine seller that he should not file a complaint with the police. Instead, Sonam Wangchuk wrote a letter to the monks requesting an apology. They didn't respond so he told them he would either take the issue to the Dalai Lama or to court.

A conflict resolution meeting was proposed for the SECMOL members and the Ladakhi Gompa Association (LGA), an umbrella organization of the area Buddhist monasteries. At the meeting, the monks admitted they had been sent by the LGA to beat up the magazine seller because the article by Rigzin had insulted their religion. They had attacked in order to protect the monasteries, rituals, texts and doctrines. Wangchuk replied by asking one of the monks to hold a picture of the Dalai Lama on his forehead and repeat

¹ Pirie, Fernanda. 2007. *Peace and Conflict in Ladakh: The Construction of a Fragile Web of Order*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

the statement. He later told Pirie that he knew the monk could not lie in the presence of the Dalai Lama. His tactic worked. The monks decided to try and find a compromise.

Wangchuk fostered a settlement. The monks agreed to pay SECMOL a fine since they had destroyed property of the group. The author of the offending piece, Rigzin, also reluctantly agreed to pay a small fine to the monks. His argument about the need to respect his freedom of speech had to be balanced off against the traditional Ladakhi need to resolve conflicts before they get out of hand. Throughout the entire negotiation process that settled the issue, all sides agreed on the importance of peacefully settling the dispute. When Pirie asked Wangchuk why he had agreed to the mediation with the LGA, he replied that he and his associates at SECMOL don't enjoy fighting. Like other Ladakhis, they prefer to settle their conflicts—everyone knows one another and they don't want disputes to linger on. They accepted paying a fine that they felt was quite unjust for the sake of harmony in the whole community. Compromise and the restoration of the sense of community was more important than the value of freedom of speech, at least for the moment.

The focus of Pirie's book is on the Ladakhi need to maintain order in their communities through the control of anger and conflict situations that could lead to violence. The author bases most of her discussion of Ladakhi social characteristics on her primary study site, the small village of Photoksar, a community where the people subsist on small farms and herding. It is located in the mountains south of Leh, in the northern tip of India.

She reviews a number of important social factors in the village. A variety of cross-cutting ties such as mutual-assistance groups, kinship connections, and neighborhood relationships help hold the village together. Differences in wealth among the households are constantly downplayed by the villagers. Since Ladakhis realize that disparities in wealth can produce resentments, they avoid discussing or even acknowledging such topics. Leadership positions are rotated so no one, even highly competent people, can gain status above others.

Photoksar women are especially critical of quarreling by men. They severely berate their husbands if voices are raised at a party. People who quarrel are described as *tsokpo*, which means "dirty" or "bad," a word that conveys a strong sense of moral disapproval. The Ladakhis do not believe in justifiable anger or revenge. No matter what the provocation, a harsh response is absolutely unacceptable. They similarly censure anger, selfishness, and laziness.

While Fernanda Pirie, an anthropologist at the University of Oxford, rejects the view that peacefulness, at least in the Leh District of Ladakh, is due to their Buddhist religious beliefs, Uwe Gielen, a psychology professor at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, NY, argues the opposite, that their Buddhist beliefs provide the key to understanding their nonviolence.² In his research, he examines Ladakhi beliefs, culture, social structure, and psychological patterns to see how that society might fit in with the generalizations set forth by Erich Fromm in his 1973 book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, particularly Fromm's category of "life-affirmative" societies. The second objective of Gielen's paper is a comparison of Ladakhi and American societies. He finds that the forms of aggressive individualism of the US "stand in stark contrast" to the cooperative, synergistic social forms of Ladakh.

Despite rhetoric that expresses his opinions and conclusions quite forcefully, the author builds his arguments with meticulous care. He begins by describing his research in Ladakh in 1980-81, when he sampled, in and around Leh, 72 Buddhist Ladakhis—boys, girls, men, women, and monks. His detailed questionnaire solicited reactions to fictional stories with Ladakhi settings, wherein adults and children had to deal with challenging problems. The responses allowed him to determine how Ladakhis made moral decisions, reasoned out social dilemmas, and dealt with complex issues such as guilt, punishment, interpersonal relationships, anger, friendship, the value of life, and so on.

Based on that research and his other work in Ladakh, Gielen has come to believe that the Ladakhi worldview can best be summarized by the image of the Wheel of Life. Ordinary Ladakhis, he says, are taken by the Wheel of Life images displayed near the doors of the monasteries, which symbolize their Tibetan Buddhist view of existence. The images confirm the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism—that hate, greed, and egotistical attachments can be overcome by striving for the liberation of self and other from the wheel of birth, death, and reincarnation.

Gielen effectively summarizes how enlightenment liberates Tibetan Buddhists in Ladakh from the tyranny of self-focus. They believe that life is transitory and attachment to material goods chains the individual to the Wheel of Life. The Tibetan Buddhism practiced in Ladakh thus undermines natural tendencies toward acquisitiveness, selfishness, and self-assertion.

² Gielen, Uwe P. 2004. "Peace and Violence: A Comparison of Buddhist Ladakh and the United States." In *International Perspectives on Violence*, edited by Leonore Loeb Adler and Florence L. Denmark, p.161-184. Westport: Praeger.

The goals of the individual seem to merge with the goals of others as people feel they are interconnected by a web of life that reduces interpersonal conflicts. Selfishness, he says, “is not abolished; rather, it is fused with altruism” (p.173). He argues that Ladakhi society is held firmly together both by religious beliefs and firm reciprocal relationships.

As a result of their beliefs and social patterns, Gielen argues, their society is remarkably peaceful. People are generally very good-humored and cheerful, despite the harsh living conditions of their natural environment, and aggressive behavior “is extremely rare and confined to the occasional, usually harmless, fights between young men under the influence of the local beer” (p.174). Because their religious beliefs de-emphasize the self, Gielen’s research subjects had a hard time even understanding the concept of self-esteem. They tended to equate it with selfishness and pride—undesirable traits. Gielen enriches his article with details about the society that result from their beliefs: the noncompetitive, peaceful way they raise their children, the relatively high status of women, and the near absence of competition.

Gielen also suggests that there is an interesting contrast between the attitudes toward peace and violence held by Ladakhis and those of Americans. “The peaceful ethos of the Ladakhis has much to teach modern Americans, whose comparatively violent way of life is morally suspect,” he writes. “The comparison between the Ladakhi and the American ethos suggests that the American ethos is inherently flawed,” he adds (p.181). Those forceful statements, concluding a paper that describes the basis of Ladakhi peacefulness and the roots of American aggressiveness—at least from his perspective—will be considered in the concluding section of this chapter.

Beliefs and Practices Fostering Peacefulness

The nature and basis of Ladakhi peacefulness need to be examined in more detail. The villagers in Photoksar idealize a peaceful community, one free of anger and conflict. Conflict, they feel, is a manifestation of a society that is degenerate—yet they recognize that their own village is far from ideal. When Pirie suggests that the village does not seem to have much conflict, one of her informants quickly disagrees, saying that they have too many arguments because they drink a lot of chang!³

³ This section is based on three different works: Pirie, Fernanda. 2006. “Secular Morality, Village Law, and Buddhism in Tibetan Societies.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12: 173-190; Pirie, Fernanda. 2006. “Legal Autonomy as Political En-

While the practices and beliefs of Buddhism are quite important to Ladakhis, Pirie argues that they do not form the basis of their peacefulness. She points out that the Buddhist villagers she studied in Ladakh do not have a cosmological view of their moral universe. Instead, they avoid violence through practical means. The villagers censure public displays of anger, disharmony, or discontent. Occasionally they might exchange sharp words, but those occasions are a source of shame and the families of individuals who have argued will continue to maintain warm personal relations. Pirie did witness some tensions but mostly people listen to someone spout off, then shrug their shoulders and say nothing. People laugh at adversity, or sometimes sigh in resignation when things are not going well, but they preserve their dignity at all cost.

The Ladakhi basically see conflict as a clear threat to their community rather than as a possible disturbance of the cosmos. The Buddhist pantheon and the local spirits are not offended by conflicts—the social order is disturbed. While the Buddhist deities are part of the local cosmology, they are distant figures compared to the local deities, who are more immediately present to the people. The village deity, the *yul lha*, is physically present in the village shrine. He protects the village, but he also threatens married women, new mothers, and babies. He is propitiated daily. Household gods also need to be treated with respect, and great care is taken with the ghosts and spirits outside the village that might cause accidents and sickness. The villagers do not really see a divide between the ritual practices involving their local spirits and those regarding the more remote Buddhist pantheon. If the local Buddhist monks will not provide the ritual protection that ensures the success of such practical needs as developing fortunes and providing for the fertility of the community, the villagers will turn to the *onpos*, the astrologers, for assistance.

When people have an argument but settle it or walk away from it, it is merely a matter for village gossip. But when a dispute is not resolved, the village becomes seriously concerned. The issue is not the nature or causes of the argument—it is the fact that harsh language has been used. The villagers are, of course, interested in the issues being disputed, but the community must immediately restore harmony. People will quickly call on relatives of the involved parties to help, and if they can't resolve the matter

agement: The Ladakhi Village in the Wider World." *Law & Society Review* 40(1):77-103; and Pirie, Fernanda. 2007. *Peace and Conflict in Ladakh: The Construction of a Fragile Web of Order*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

they will go to the goba, the village headman, or his assistant, the membar. These officials are not really interested in the background of the quarrel—they are simply concerned that disharmony in the village has arisen and it must be settled. If the goba and membar are not able to resolve the conflict, the matter is referred to the village yulpa, the meeting of the adult men and the highest authority in the community.

The yulpa may take ballots on occasion but normally it will decide by consensus matters such as taxes, rotations of the water resource, and the institution of new rules. While some men are more respected for what they say at the yulpa than others, no one openly acknowledges that such differences exist. The officials and the meeting may impose fines, sometimes fairly steep ones, on parties who have fought. But the essential ingredient in resolving a conflict in the village is the apology. The person who argues but then apologizes will be quickly forgiven. However, someone who refuses to apologize is subject to ostracism.

The goba, the onpo, and the amchi, the Tibetan medicine practitioner, are given respect in the village but they have no special control over local politics. Neither do the local monks, who do not take part in discussions in the yulpa. No one appeals to the local monastery for decisions or for the monks to legitimize the decisions made in the village. The lha, the village god, is apparently indifferent toward conflict situations. He may be part of village life as far as fertility and fortunes are concerned, and villagers frequently provide offerings to appease his considerable power. But he doesn't get involved in issues that might affect the harmony of social life.

Pirie gives an example of a dispute that she witnessed in which the livestock of one family was harming the crops of another. The quarrel escalated, but was ultimately resolved under pressure from the yulpa. The woman that the village felt was guilty had refused to apologize for her actions, but she buckled under when faced with the crippling threat by the yulpa of a social boycott. She went through a ceremony in which she offered the headman a white scarf and beer from a brass jar, important symbols of respect in their society.

Pirie extends her analysis of the peacefulness in the remote Ladakhi village by examining the actual, practical ways the people implement their very firm belief: that the basic order of life is harmony, unity, and peacefulness. The village maintains its peacefulness, in part, because of the way the people administer their affairs. The adult men who attend the yulpa can vote on issues but in fact they rarely do. Instead, they normally make consensus decisions. After a meeting, people will discuss the settlement of an issue in terms of “we”—

we made this or that decision. In their minds, everyone has made the decision. While there are differences of opinion, people do not form factions or opposing camps over issues before they are decided.

The people of Photoksar distinguish between differences, which are normal, and substantial disputes, which are not. Differences and disputes to them are two separate phenomena. Their words for “dispute” can be translated as “shouting,” “quarreling,” “fighting,” “arguing,” and “hurling abuse.” While differences are normally settled between individuals, disputes threaten the whole community. Of course, some interpersonal problems float on the border between the two concepts. The author was aware of two men who had bad relations—they had not spoken to one another since the previous year—but their difficulties had not yet escalated into the level of a real dispute.

Differences begin to threaten the community when an argument, even between a husband and wife, degenerates into a dispute. Resolving the problem is essential. Mediation efforts will frequently follow a hierarchical pattern. The family may get the neighbors involved, but if that doesn’t work they may approach an outside mediator. The mediator may attempt various approaches to resolving the problem, but if the results of the mediation fail, the matter may be referred to the headman of the village, the goba. If he can’t resolve the dispute, it may be brought to the yulpa for a decision.

One approach might be to take the matter to the police, but that strategy is rarely used since the police can make a problem worse rather than better. The villagers told the author that they avoid the police because they often demand money or beat people. Even very serious issues, such as the rare crimes of violence, are handled within the village if at all possible, to avoid police involvement. Thus, when the people deal with disputes, they think of them as taking place “inside” or “within” the village. This thinking extends to the capital, the small city of Leh, where people believe that disputes should be settled within the bounds of the neighborhood. Complex problems in Leh, such as disputes involving water rights, are handled by government officials in the same spirit—within the immediate community. Maintaining the local order is a paramount concept in Ladakh.

The purpose of judicial proceedings in the village, however, is not to determine guilt or innocence, right or wrong. The primary goal is to maintain the peaceful social order. The yulpa and the headman have the authority and power they do—to mediate, to dictate settlements, or to impose fines—simply because everyone accepts the need for them to maintain stability. In other words, the villagers accept the need for controls because they cherish their freedom from disputes, which could possibly lead to violence.

The moral values of the people focus, unequivocally, on an abhorrence for abusive behavior, insulting language, arguing, and fighting. Behavior that merely violates local customs is commented on, perhaps with embarrassment or amusement, but anger, quarreling, or fighting is completely immoral, intolerable, and unacceptable.

In sum, the Ladakhis believe that the natural state of human society is a peaceful order made up of individuals who live within webs of harmonious interrelationships—people cooperating and sharing readily with one another. As Pirie points out, however, a social web is as fragile as one made by a spider. Harsh words between two people could easily lead to a fight that might tear and seriously damage the fabric of their society. Maintaining harmony between individuals is essential to the lives of the Ladakhis, so quickly resolving disputes is a fundamental part of their village society.

The peaceful social order is thus a human social construction, at least in the eyes of the Ladakhi villagers. The peacefulness of the social order is vital to the villagers, even if it is unconnected to their gods and spirits. The villagers are deeply opposed to conflict, quarreling, arguing, and fighting. They disapprove of laziness, selfishness, bad conduct, expressions of anger, and uncooperative behavior. People would express their moral values about the importance of harmony in the village, but their comments did not refer to basic Buddhist values. The monks, in fact, usually did not express their moral values to the village people. When the higher level monks visited Photoksar, they spoke about karmic matters, issues that might affect the future of people's souls.

Those same attitudes also prevail in the more modern, urban environment in Leh. When a dispute threatens to upset one of the neighborhoods, the residents will approach the goba of the city, who has the same concern for resolving conflict as the rural people do. Urban Ladakhis strongly disapprove of fighting, quarreling, and violations of the social order. Those actions are shameful. They retain their sense that the community—or neighborhood—serves as a social space where external threats and internal divisions are kept at bay. A fundamental ideal of the Ladakhis is to have a harmonious, united, and peaceful community. They believe that order is an individual responsibility, not a divine condition or an idea based on laws. It is established by individuals acting voluntarily, and it is not imposed from above.

Ladakhi Society

Although there are many inequalities in rural Ladakh, the Ladakhi villagers have a variety of social institutions that try to minimize the stresses that

differing social statuses can produce. One is called the *dral-go*, the way the villagers line themselves up according to rank on social occasions. In most villages there are few, if any, members of the traditional aristocracy or the traditional outcaste groups, and the remaining people, the drongpa majority, line up in the *dral-go* according to age and gender.⁴

In a typical social line-up (preparing for a dance, gathering at a home for socializing, whatever), the *onpo*, the astrologer, normally is at the head of the line. He is followed by the *amchi*, the Tibetan medicine practitioner, then the *goba*, the headman of the village. They are followed by a line for men and one for women with people arranged strictly according to age. The relative wealth of the villagers is ignored. Thus the *dral-go* suggests that while order is imposed on all social occasions, universal ideas of age and gender are much more important than any kinds of inequalities. The richer and poorer households are not acknowledged in the village line-up, so the richer households do not gain status on social occasions. Furthermore, poorer households have the same obligations as richer ones. There is, of course, special respect for certain individuals who are more influential and have more effective things to say at meetings.

Another critical point is that the resolution of disputes, as reviewed above, and the exercise of power is seen as a local matter in Ladakh. People do not view central law courts as being important sources of justice. Conflict resolution and justice are local village matters. Villagers also tend to disregard outside influence and suggestions as interference. They are happy to take money offered by government agencies and NGOs, but they resist the development work of the NGOs. They firmly, if passively, avoid making changes suggested by development workers.

Ladakhi families interact with the objective of maintaining community solidarity. Everyone participates in village ceremonies, both festive and sad, and people will help other families when extra assistance is needed. This kind of unity among families is particularly notable during death feasts and at harvest time. Families assist one another regularly to make their lives easier in the face of the difficult environment in which they live.⁵

Because of the harsh environment of Ladakh, helpfulness and coopera-

⁴ Pirie, Fernanda. 2005. "The Impermanence of Power: Village Politics in Ladakh, Nepal and Tibet." In *Ladakhi Histories: Local and Regional Perspectives*, edited by John Bray, p.379-394. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

⁵ Mann, R. S. 1972. "Intra and Inter Family Relations among the Ladakhis of Ladakh." *Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India* 21 (Jan.-June): 88-106.

tion among families is essential for survival. When individuals violate social norms, the ultimate form of social control is ostracism, which is very infrequently used. Infractions which provoke ostracism might include a threat or challenge against a religious leader or actions which threatened the life of the community. If the person does not cease the offending behavior, the lamas may stop serving the religious needs of the person, which is highly demoralizing to the Ladakhis; no one may visit the offender; no one will help the offender or his family in any endeavor; no one offers or accepts food from the offender; and there are no possibilities of marriage alliances with other families. This harsh punishment can only be relieved when the offender seeks the pardon from the village civil and religious leaders.⁶

Ladakhis have larger social groupings than the family. Members of the *Gyut*, a grouping of people who are descended from the same ancestor, help one another with mutual assistance whenever needed. Members borrow one another's bullocks for ploughing, assist with labor in agricultural tasks, and provide help with money or labor when needed. The Ladakhis also have a system referred to as *phasphuns*, whereby several unrelated families maintain alliances of friendship, cooperation, and helpfulness with one another. If both parents in a family would die, the other adult members of the *phasphun* would get together and decide who would raise the remaining children. If a family decided to separate, the members of the *phasphun* would be called together to make a fair division of the property. The families in the *phasphun* worship a common god. Related families usually do not belong to the same *phasphun*, and neighboring families may or may not belong. While most of the member families of a *phasphun* will live in the same village, they do not all necessarily live together. The normal size of the *phasphun* ranges from six to ten families, though they may number only a few or as many as fifteen.⁷

Gender differences do exist within rural households. Men go to village meetings and women do not; older members of the households have more responsibilities than younger ones. The oldest man in each household has his own special responsibilities. But the day to day differences are not terribly significant in the life of the household, and while some tasks are gendered, everyone is likely to help out when necessary. Household work is

⁶ Mann, R. S. 1986. *The Ladakhi: A Study in Ethnography and Change*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.

⁷ Mann, R. S. 1972. "Intra and Inter Family Relations among the Ladakhis of Ladakh." *Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India* 21 (Jan.-June): 88-106; Mann, R. S. 1986. *The Ladakhi: A Study in Ethnography and Change*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.

fairly evenly divided between men and women, and women are free to speak out on any subject. Traditionally there has been little expression of superiority or authority, but conditions for women in Ladakh have been changing: see the next section for more details.⁸

The Status of Women

One of the more fascinating aspects of Ladakhi society is the status of their women. The practice of polyandry, which is now illegal and is not practiced any longer, used to give a lot of power to the woman in such unions, in which she would typically marry several brothers. While the elder brother had more rights, and the wife spent the most time with him, the younger brothers were also treated well by the wife, who spent time with each. There was normally no jealousy among them. The wife may have had an authoritarian relationship with the younger brothers. The reasons for polyandry in their culture included limiting population growth due to the meagerness of natural resources, maintaining unity within families, and allowing one or more men to stay with the families while others in the family went up to the high mountain pastures with the flocks each summer. Other reasons included conserving resources under sparse agricultural conditions by sharing a common kitchen, avoiding the fragmentation of fields through divisive inheritance practices, achieving order by having the elder brother in each family act as head of the whole family, and guaranteeing the freedom of Ladakhi women.⁹

As a result of the tradition of polyandry, there was no seclusion of Ladakhi women, who interacted equally in social situations with men. While the women who did not get married sometimes became nuns, and some women married Moslems living in Ladakh, the institution of polyandry in general helped maintain the equality of women. In the families, particularly the polyandrous ones, the women managed the economy of the homes, which gave them authority and respect. Furthermore, the Buddhism practiced in Ladakh did not in any way demean the status of women, although certain religious roles were reserved for men only.

In some ways women did not have full equality with men: they did not,

⁸ Pirie, Fernanda. 2005. "The Impermanence of Power: Village Politics in Ladakh, Nepal and Tibet." In *Ladakhi Histories: Local and Regional Perspectives*, edited by John Bray, p.379-394. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

⁹ Mann, R. S. 1986. *The Ladakhi: A Study in Ethnography and Change*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.

traditionally, travel as men did; and while recognizing that the women frequently worked harder than the men did, the women were regarded by the men as inferior. Women had equal rights to divorce as men did, and when they divorced they were compensated fairly. But widows were discriminated in some religious functions where married people and widowers were not. Except for ploughing, which the men do exclusively, the women shared the field work with the men, helping out with harvesting and threshing, cooperating in construction jobs, and carrying heavy loads. Women did the cooking and cleaning without the assistance of the men but they traditionally had little role in village governance and little possibility of getting an education.¹⁰

It is necessary to turn to more recent news stories to verify the present realities relating to the status of women in contemporary Ladakh. An Indian news story in October 2012 includes a paean of praise for the equality that does exist, as the reporter saw it, between Ladakhi women and men, a situation that is unique in a country where female abortion and infanticide are still widely practiced.¹¹ The reporter was clearly impressed upon arriving in Leh, the largest community in Ladakh. “When you first step into this high altitude region, you will be greeted by the wide and candid smiles of the Ladakhi women.” The article develops this theme—of women who contrast with the rest of the subcontinent. Women don’t peep shyly out from shuttered windows, they don’t wear veils. They work out in the fields, full of self-respect and confidence, secure in their positions in their communities.

The reporter focuses on a relatively new movement in Ladakh, the so-called Self Help Groups (SHGs), also called Ama-Tsogspas or Mother’s Alliances. These SHGs actively promote the interests of women in the more remote Ladakhi villages and help protect the traditional culture, especially the strength and positions of the women. Women in the villages, especially housewives, complete their daily chores and then join the village SHGs, where they spin wool, dye it in the traditional ways, and knit woolen garments for sale. They still help with heavy tasks in the fields. They earn income from the sale of products such as apricot jam and seabuckthorn juice. In their SHGs, the women make decorative items and winter clothing for sale in Leh.

¹⁰ Mann, R. S. 1986. *The Ladakhi: A Study in Ethnography and Change*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.

¹¹ “Faint but Firm Footsteps by Women of Ladakh.” *News Track India*, October 25, 2012: <http://www.newstrackindia.com/newsdetails/2012/10/25/241-Faint-but-firm-footsteps-by-women-of-Ladakh-.html>

The reporter interviewed the president of the SHG in the village of Chashut, called the Shashi Self Help Group, started by six women in the community. It has grown to 15 active members (as of 2012) who work to improve the village as well as their own lives. Amina Khatoon, the president of the group, tells the reporter, “After working for five years in this village, we have achieved a lot of improvement not only in our work but in the life-style of the villagers.” She describes the efforts of the organization to spread awareness of appropriate health and sanitation practices.

In 1991, the women’s Self Help Groups formed an alliance, called the Women’s Alliance of Ladakh. These groups foster input from elderly women, who participate in income-generating projects such as spinning and weaving, thereby sharing their traditional knowledge with the younger people. The SHGs were having some difficulties, at least in 2012, because of the remoteness of the villages, which made it difficult for the people to gain access to raw materials. The women are constantly in search of alternative sources of supplies for their craft work. But despite the hassles of keeping up with altered economic conditions, the SHGs continue to help the women. They foster the continuing strength and confidence of the women, yet also help them negotiate the social and economic changes that are occurring in the region.

A news story published in March 2017 about the Ama Tsogspa movement, based on a different visitor’s experiences in Ladakh, presents a similarly upbeat report about the increasing importance of the work that Ladakhi women are doing to protect and improve life in their communities. This more recent reporter focused on the ways the groups of local women have been tackling such community problems as the ever-increasing trash in some towns—and helping to solve them.¹²

The 2017 report on the SHGs opens with the observation that Leh is getting covered with more and more trash and garbage due to the increasing numbers of tourists and the increased availability of pre-packaged foods. However, the visitor to Ladakh will notice an immediate difference not very far away in the much smaller community of Phyang, where there is no evidence of trash anywhere. A local contractor, Tsering Phuntsog, says with some pride, “Although packaged foods have increased dramatically over the last 8-10 years, our village looks even cleaner than before!” He and others in Phyang credited the local SHG for the cleanliness. Tsering Dolam, a 47-

¹² “The ‘Swachh’ in Ladakh.” *Business Standard*, March 14, 2017: http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/the-swachh-in-ladakh-117031400587_1.html

year old housewife in Phyang, explains that the women collect the trash twice a year and burn it.

The numbers of the women's groups have been growing steadily. The Kargil District of Ladakh has several Ama Tsogspa groups while the Leh District has 22 villages with them. About 5,000 Ladakhi women are members of them now. The missions of the SHGs include promoting women's empowerment, improving the management of farms, helping tourism to be more responsible, and anything else that catches their attention. In the late 1990s, for example, they focused on the use and abuse of polyethylene bags; as a result, their use was banned in Ladakh in 1998. Ladakhi women in the Mothers' Alliances foster skills such as spinning, dyeing, weaving, and knitting; they also promote the use of traditional medicines. Their members engage in farming, dairy, and food-production work. They take stands against such traditional social ills as alcoholism.

But they increasingly realize that they need additional training to bolster their effectiveness in handling village issues. Tashi Dolker, a 43-year old woman and an active member of her local Ama Tsogspa, says that the women need more awareness in order to be more effective. She advocates better information from government agencies. She suggests that the members need to have a broader understanding of issues throughout the Himalayan region, perhaps through exposure trips. The news report quotes Sonam Ladol, the President of the group in Phyang, who expresses an optimistic outlook. Their members, she said, "have a lot of energy and interest but we need facilities to draw the best out of them. For this, we need support." Then she concludes, "Actually our real potential is yet to be realized."

Later in 2017, two different news stories covered in detail the discrimination and violence that Ladakhi women have to confront. One report from late August that year describes a five-day self-defense training program that seems to be necessary to protect young Ladakhi women from aggressive men—and their enthusiastic responses.¹³ Attacks by Ladakhi males are evidently now a very real possibility. According to the article, nuns of the Drukpa Order of Buddhism, called Drukpa Kung Fu Nuns, mastered the martial art and decided to train Ladakhi girls and young women in ways to defend themselves. While the women and girls practice kung fu during the

¹³ Eaton, Kristi. "In the Himalayas, Kung Fu Nuns Teach Young Women How to Defend Themselves." *NBC News*, August 30, 2017: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/himalayas-kung-fu-nuns-teach-young-women-how-defend-themselves-n796936>

week, the more experienced nuns walk through the rows of students, correcting their various kicks and movements.

The first of a planned series of training sessions, the workshop was held at the Hemis Monastery in Ladakh in early August 2017. It was organized by a nonprofit organization called Live to Love International, which was founded by the Gyalwang Drukpa, the head of the Drukpa Order of Tibetan Buddhism. In 2009 he had introduced kung fu training to the order's nuns as a means of promoting their self-defense, confidence, and health. The program each day includes kung fu training such as handling attacks from behind, dealing with sexual assaults, and planning escape routes. The sessions include discussions and group sharing, when the women and girls are encouraged to talk about their own experiences. Competitive games and dancing are organized in the evenings.

One of the nuns, Palmo, tells the reporter that she developed a lot of self-confidence from her own kung fu training. She says she joined the order when her father explained to her that the Gyalwang Drukpa focuses a lot of his attention on women's empowerment. She became a nun so that she could help other Ladakhi girls. The organizers had widely posted advertising signs around Ladakh and the workshop in 2017 attracted about 100 females from ages 13 to 28, including some Muslim girls and young women.

A 23-year old participant, Tsering Yang Chen, says that she had recently been in a shop and the shopkeeper had touched her inappropriately. Though she said nothing at the time, she felt dirty afterwards. Then, when she heard about the workshop, she decided to take it. "When someone touches me, I want to punch him," she tells the reporter, adding that men also whistle at girls in the markets. Another participant, 16-year old Stanzin Norzin, says that the best part of the workshop for her was learning to punch correctly. She says that since young women and girls often have to travel alone at night, they worry about their safety. She adds that she will certainly be more confident and feel stronger as a result of the workshop. Participants slept in tents, woke early, and spent most of their days practicing their new skills.

Two months later, an Indian daily newspaper published a piece in which the journalist emphasized that the situation for women in Ladakh is worse even than she had imagined. Ladakhi women are widely discriminated against, she found: they are often not given a share of their father's or their husband's properties. Furthermore, they are frequently left with nothing if

their husbands, even after many years of marriage, decide to divorce them, leaving them with no resources with which to raise their children.¹⁴

The author opens her article by reporting on her interview with Thinlas Chorol, the well-known woman founder of a trekking guides company in Ladakh, who expressed strong reservations about the place of women in Ladakhi society. Ms. Chorol, was dismissive of analyses about the tradition of gender equality fostered by the Ladakhi. “Is it justified to say that women in Ladakh are enjoying liberty and equality only because we are not burnt for dowry or killed in the [womb],” she complained to the journalist.

The writer piles on the facts to build her case. The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, the governing body in the region, has 30 seats, of which only two are held by women. Rinchen Lamo, one of the women councilors, points out that the LAHDC has succeeded in addressing numerous important issues but the concerns of women are not among them. Even basic gender amenities such as separate public toilets for women, or separate cells for women in prisons, are not available in Ladakh. In her position on the Council, she is trying to advance the cause of women but is still waiting for results from male authorities.

Deachen Angmo, a 35-year old councilor in a local village council, complains that women work as hard, or harder, than men do. They take care of their families 24 hours of the day, do all the housework, take charge of community activities, serve on village governing councils as she does, and participate in the discussions—but they are frequently not allowed to make the decisions. Her words reflect her bitterness: “The work load is always on women whether it is in the family or in the village,” she says vehemently. Another woman, Tsering Dolma, 62, from the village of Choglamsar, says basically the same things. The women organize the meetings of all the adults in the village and do all the work of the village council, but then they are not part of the decision-making. She wonders why.

The journalist interviews both the president and the vice-president of the Women’s Alliance of Ladakh, located in Leh. Murup Dolma, the president, says that Ladakhi women have tried to compete in elections but so far they have been unsuccessful. The reason is that the voters are reluctant to elect women to decision-making and policy-making positions. She feels a complete lack of support about that issue in the community. Yangchan

¹⁴ Khan, Anzara Anjum. “Women’s Empowerment: A Long Way to Go in Ladakh.” *The Asian Age*, November 6, 2017: <http://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/061117/womens-empowerment-a-long-way-to-go-in-ladakh.html>

Dolma, the vice-president of the organization, is even more outspoken about conditions for women in Leh. “Things are changing in this small town—not for the better, but for the worse,” she says. She goes on to say that the organization focuses on skill-building for village women in workshops that try to foster useful productive interactions and that seek to develop entrepreneurship skills.

Buddhist/Muslim Strife

Ladakh is by far the largest and most diverse of the peaceful societies included in this book. As such, many of the ideals it sees for itself are failing. But the failures are instructive. Some of the smaller societies such as the Ifaluk covered in chapter 2 are able to maintain their traditional peaceful ways due to their isolation. But with tourism climbing to more than two hundred thousand visitors per year,¹⁵ isolation is no longer an option for Ladakh. With a great diversity of peoples and traditions among the Ladakhis, it is amazing that they are able to maintain at least some semblance of their peaceful traditions, not only in the remote villages but also in the more cosmopolitan capital of Leh. The failures in Ladakh, such as not maintaining safety for women and not preserving harmonious relations between Buddhists and Muslims need to be acknowledged. But the successes, in attempting to maintain and strengthen their tradition of avoiding conflicts and disputes, also need to be studied and cherished. The warts need to be recognized among the beauty spots in societies such as the Ladakhi if peaceful societies are to spread.

In that vein, one of the major issues that divides them—a problem that many people feel has grown worse in recent decades—is the division between the Ladakhi Buddhists and the Ladakhi Muslims. The major issue is the higher birthrate among the Muslims than among the Buddhists. A related concern is interfaith marriages. In 2009, Sara H. Smith from the University of North Carolina described how the deterioration of inter-community relations in Ladakh over the previous two decades had played out in personal and family decisions, such as whom to marry and how many children to have.¹⁶

¹⁵ Palkit, Nawang. “30% Annual Growth Rate in Tourist Arrival in Ladakh.” *Reach Ladakh.com*, April 21, 2017: <http://www.reachladakh.com/30-annual-growth-rate-in-tourist-arrival-in-ladakh/3722.html>

¹⁶ Smith, Sara H. 2009. “The Domestication of Geopolitics: Buddhist-Muslim Conflict and the Policing of Marriage and the Body in Ladakh, India.” *Geopolitics* 14: 197-218.

The scholar explained that Ladakhi Buddhists no longer entertained their Muslim relatives, friends, and neighbors the way they used to, and that Muslim hospitality toward the Buddhists had waned as well. Before 1989, Buddhists would visit their Muslim neighbors during major festivals, such as Eid, and would enjoy themselves. Likewise, during Buddhist holidays, Muslims would visit and be entertained warmly. As one Muslim man told the author about the celebration of the Buddhist New Year, “the Muslims would go to the Buddhist families, and they would feed them food, and they would sing and dance together all through the night (p.205).”

In 1989, the worsening geopolitical situation in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, of which Ladakh is a part, prompted the Ladakh Buddhist Association, based in Leh, to start defining the position of the district in terms of religious identities. The LBA initiated a boycott of Muslims, ignoring the fact that Muslims in Ladakh differed from one another and from Muslims in Kashmir. Buddhists were forbidden from having any contacts with Muslims, social or economic, subject to threats of violence or fines.

While the intent of the boycott may have been, as the LBA claimed, to redress the grievances of the Buddhists against the Muslim government of the state, the effect was to quickly undercut the historic peacefulness of the intercommunity relations in Ladakh. But not everyone paid attention to the dictates of the LBA. People continued to visit their relatives and friends on the other side of the divide, though often at night when they wouldn't be spotted. Muslims and Buddhists in the Leh area are so closely intermarried that most families have members from the other side. The boycott was unenforceable—it just caused trouble. A Muslim lawyer told Smith, “Muslims and Buddhists have blood relations. We cannot be separated on the basis of faith (p.206).”

Smith, who did fieldwork in Leh in 2004, 2007, and 2008, explained the perception that Muslims were out-breeding Buddhists. In time, Buddhist leaders feared, they would greatly outnumber us, and all would be lost. Everyone felt that Muslim women in Ladakh tended to not worry about how many children they have—more are better. Buddhist women worried about having more children than they could afford, so they tended to limit the sizes of their families. One of the major social problems, as seen by both sides, is intercommunity marriages. Buddhist-Muslim marriages, which used to be quite common, are widely frowned upon now. Smith referred to this as “the surveillance of bodies (p.205),” which played out in attempts to prevent Buddhists from marrying Muslims.

Political pressures on Buddhist women to have more babies also has invaded their bodies, according to the scholar. In 2006, the LBA sent a letter

to doctors at the Leh hospital asking them to stop performing abortions and tubal ligations on women. One Buddhist woman explained how doctors had to deliver her third child, a son, with a caesarean operation during a difficult birth. The doctors convinced her afterwards that since she now had three children, she should have a tubal ligation, to prevent any further pregnancies. She agreed to the procedure because the birth of the son had been so traumatic, but she later came to regret it. She decided that she had done something wrong, committed a sin. Preventing the birth of another child might prevent the rebirth of someone who had died, perhaps an elderly relative. "In Buddhism, it's a sin. It's the worst sin," she told Smith (p.212). A Ladakhi woman suggested to Smith that attempts to prevent intermarriages between people of different communities and faiths are normal all over the world. They foster peace.

In early February 2006, clashes between the two groups erupted over what, in another context, would have been a very minor incident. Accounts in the Indian press varied in some of the details, but on Sunday night, February 5, someone tore pages out of a Quran in a mosque in the Ladakhi village of Khangral Badkharboo and threw them in the streets.¹⁷ Discovering the vandalism on Monday, Ladakhi Muslims accused the Buddhists of desecrating their holy book, so they began to protest in Leh. Buddhists in Leh mounted counter demonstrations.

The government soon imposed a curfew in the town to quell the growing violence, but it was relaxed temporarily on Thursday, February 9, to allow a Muslim procession celebrating the festival of Muharram. However, during the procession, Buddhist rioters threw stones at the official vehicle of the Station House Officer in Leh, Padma Dorje, injuring him and his three guards. Four houses and three vehicles in Leh were set on fire in the rioting. The government moved the army into town and arrested more than thirty-one people before order was restored.

¹⁷ Mir Ehsan, "After Clashes, Army Flag March in Leh," *The Indian Express*, February 19, 2006: <http://archive.indianexpress.com/oldStory/87621/>; "Curfew Clamped on Tense Leh," *DNAIndia.com*, February 9, 2006: <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-curfew-clamped-on-tense-leh-1012227>; "Communal Turmoil in Leh," *The Tribune India*, February 9, 2006: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060210/main3.htm>; "Kargil Under Curfew, DSPs House Torched," *The Tribune India*, February 10, 2006: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060211/main5.htm>; "Quran Desecration: Curfew Relaxed in Leh," *Rediff*, February 12, 2006: <http://ia.rediff.com/news/2006/feb/12leh.htm?q=np&file=.htm>.

On Friday, February 10, rioting also broke out in Kargil, the administrative center of the primarily Muslim district of Kargil after worship services in the mosque. Five police officers and five others were injured as protesters hurled stones at buildings, torched cars and houses, sacked a government building, and burned the official residence of the Deputy Superintendent of Police. The rioting became quite violent: thousands of Muslim rioters stoned the police, who responded with teargas charges. The government imposed a curfew on Kargil as well as on Leh, where incidents of stone throwing continued. Another area of Ladakh, Nubra, also reported growing tensions.

News over the weekend indicated that the indefinite, total curfew in Leh and Kargil was working. People were running out of milk, bread, and other food items as all shops were closed, but since no one was allowed on the streets, the violence had ceased. On February 12, with no incidents reported, the curfew was relaxed for two hours, from 11 to 1 pm in the town of Leh, though the curfew remained fully in force in Kargil town.

By Monday, the press was reporting that the curfew in Leh had been further relaxed to allow people on the streets for eight hours, and the Kargil curfew also had been relaxed a bit. The Muslim and Buddhist communities in Leh held peace marches in which the marchers offered sweets to each other. Leaders of the Muslim and Buddhist associations participated in the marches and promised to visit Muslim villages the next day.

Both communities took initiatives to break the ice and foster peace. A major factor was a written appeal from the Dalai Lama. He wrote, in part, "both communities should understand that their religious sentiments could be misused by anti-religious elements." Both sides took heart from his appeal, and the leader of the Ladakh Muslim Association replied, "we will take this as an order and not merely an appeal because we see His Highness Dalai Lama as not only a religious leader but as a messenger of peace."

A Muslim leader on Monday gave assurances that there would be no more attacks on Buddhists, and the spiritual leader of the Buddhists indicated that the centuries-old harmony between the two communities must be maintained. By Tuesday, February 14th, 2006, the Muslims and Buddhists in Leh were walking openly hand-in-hand, shaking hands, and embracing one another. But tensions simmered below the surface, as both sides continue to wonder how it all got started.

But as stated already, the major issue, for the Buddhist leaders at least, was the fact that their population growth was lagging behind that of the Ladakhi Muslims. The president of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA), Dr. Sonam Dawa, sent a letter in November 2007 to the State government

of Jammu and Kashmir asking it to desist from population planning programs in the region. “The Ladakhi race has limited population in the country and there is apprehension of its extinction,” he asserted. He addressed his letter to the state minister of health and medical education, Mangat Ram Sharma. Earlier that year he had written to the national government about the same issue.¹⁸

He focused on family planning camps held in Ladakh, which he stated had aroused opposition in the past among the Buddhists. He asked the state government to not sponsor them again. Dr. Dawa argued in his letter that the Buddhists have been adhering to family planning standards, which has resulted in a drop in their numbers compared to the Muslims. “Our population has been declining, while Muslims do not adopt the directives [of family planning],” he wrote. In addition, he indicated that he has asked Buddhist monks to preach against family planning, lest the Muslims gain a steadily growing advantage.

Asraf Ali, president of Anjuman-e-Islamia, a Muslim group in Leh, denied the LBA assertions that Muslims are purposely trying to outstrip the Buddhist population. “Many Muslims are adopting family planning norms. It is an individual decision and we cannot force anyone,” he said. He added that the reason the Buddhist population is not growing as quickly as the Muslim is that the Buddhists are better educated, more prosperous, and thus more inclined to desire smaller families.

A journalist named Sahana Ghosh wrote a report in 2012 that came to different conclusions—intercommunity relations are slowly getting better, not worse, she maintained.¹⁹ One result of the peaceful values held by Ladakhis, she argued, has been the frequency of interfaith marriages, which are widely accepted among both Buddhists and Muslims. The story indicated that, despite the interfaith troubles of the late 1980s and early 1990s, tensions have subsided and the local beliefs in harmony prevail.

The author wrote that the sense of religious identity in Ladakh is quite strong, but it is not a divisive issue. She pointed out that most of the residents of the Kargil District are Shia Muslims, with Sunnis mixed in, while

¹⁸ Ishfaq-ul-Hassan, “Buddhists in Ladakh Renounce Family Planning,” DNAIndia.com, November 4, 2007: <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-buddhists-in-ladakh-renounce-family-planning-1131735>

¹⁹ “Is Buddhist/Muslim Harmony Growing in Ladakh?” Peaceful Societies, *News and Reviews*, June 28, 2012: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2012/06/28/is-buddhistmuslim-harmony-growing-in-ladakh/>.

most of the people of the Leh District are Buddhists, with some Muslims included. Everyone shares common cultural mores—dress codes and food preferences, for instance. The common features of both communities help people overlook their differences.

Sonam Gatso explained to Ghosh the ways religious harmony works out in practice in their Leh neighborhood. He pointed out that the road to the monastery goes right past the mosque. The monks are careful not to sound their chimes when the calls to prayer are issued from the mosque five times per day.

Ghosh's investigation of interfaith marriages, and the way traditional harmonies in the region are reviving, presented a more hopeful picture of the restoration of good community relations than Smith's article of 2009. It is not clear whether intercommunity tensions in fact are getting slowly worse, as Smith's research suggested, or whether relations are slowly improving because of the traditional Ladakhi beliefs in harmony, as Ghosh's investigation concluded. The student of Ladakhi peacefulness may be cautiously optimistic.

Sara Smith published another journal article on the subject in 2014. She argued that, despite the priorities of the Buddhist leadership to pressure their women to increase the numbers of their children, the women made their own choices and did not seem to reject contraception. Younger women wanted their children to have a chance to get an education, at least through the equivalent of high school and ideally a university somewhere in India. Parents with large families, they realized, would have much greater difficulties in gaining those advantages for their children.²⁰

However, among the 198 women that she interviewed during her fieldwork in Ladakh, only two cited their religious beliefs as reasons for avoiding the use of contraceptives. She found that they thought and rethought their answers to her questions about contraceptives, or they answered her questions with questions of their own. They did not necessarily contradict the religious or political arguments of their leaders, but they considered the question of how many children to have in terms of their own views of medical, ethical, and economic issues.

That is, their views were contradictory: the women had very real economic concerns about the potential problems from having large families, but they also accepted the arguments of the leadership to avoid the use of contraceptives. The author found that during her interviews with the women, they often articulated quite similar views to one another. Most of the

²⁰ Smith, Sara. 2014. "Intimate Territories and the Experimental Subject in Ladakh, India." *Ethnos* 79(1): 41-62.

women, both Buddhists and Muslims, felt that the ideal family should have only a couple children—two or three at most. Smith concluded that the women were making their own choices as to how many children to have based more on economic factors than on religious adherence.

The author observed that the calculations of ethical values among Ladakhi women appeared to be changing. One woman said that even spacing her children is sinful—despite the fact that she has had a tubal ligation. Another woman used an IUD to limit the size of her family. What else could she do, she wondered, since they lacked income to support a large family? Smith wrapped up her article by asking rhetorically, what is best for Ladakh? It was clearly a question for the Ladakhis to answer.

The LBA, however, was not about to let the relationship improve. Tensions in Ladakh over the fact that Muslims are producing more babies than Buddhists bubbled to the surface once again in January 2015. The Ladakh Buddhist Association sent a letter to the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, plus other officials protesting what it called a “love jihad” by Muslims.²¹

The letter restated the LBA position—their absolute opposition to inter-faith marriages: “Buddhist girls have been lured by [the] Sunni Muslim community in Zaskar forcing them to embrace Islam. Young girls are being lured by Muslim boys to marry and [then they] finally convert them to Islam,” the LBA wrote. Zaskar is a subdivision of the Kargil District. The LBA letter claimed that Muslim activities had converted some Buddhists to Islam, “which ignited resentment and anger among the Buddhist community all over Ladakh.”

The letter described specific incidents late in 2014 and early in 2015 in which Buddhist females were lured away from their families by Muslims. The LBA appealed to Prime Minister Modi to intervene. As yet, it said, no arrests had been made. The letter warned that serious intercommunity tensions would be the result if the situation is not stopped, and government officials would be at fault. For their part, Ladakhi Muslims denied that they were perpetrating any forceful conversions. Representatives of their community protested that the Buddhists were the ones who were enforcing a social boycott against them.

Ghulam Rasool, a retired Muslim official, said that Muslims form only a minority in the Zaskar region, and that they have no reason to try and convert anyone. He admitted that some Muslim and Buddhist young people do marry one another, but he asked the obvious question: “so what role

²¹ “A Love Jihad in Ladakh,” *Peaceful Societies, News and Reviews*, January 29, 2015: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2015/01/29/a-love-jihad-in-ladakh/>

does the whole community play in it?" He concluded that the social boycott is basically at fault, and if individuals convert from one faith to another, isn't that their own, private business?

The situation in Zanskar remained tense throughout 2015, especially in the town of Padum. A news report from that December explained that the Buddhist community in Zanskar was inflamed three years earlier by the news that two dozen people were about to convert to Islam. The Zanskar Buddhist Association (ZBA) alleged that the conversions were being forced on 24 Buddhists, which the ZBA hotly denounced. The Muslims supposedly accepted the converts eagerly—even going so far, so the story went, of welcoming them with a sort of victory parade. Zanskar has nearly 14,000 inhabitants, 95 percent of whom are Buddhists and 5 percent Sunni Muslims, according to the reporter.²²

As a result of some inter-community violence in Padum in October 2012, the ZBA imposed a forceful social boycott on the Muslim minority, making their lives quite difficult. The boycott was still in effect in December 2015. The ZBA prohibited all economic and social relations between the two communities. The Muslims found that the vast majority of stores, owned by Buddhists, would not sell anything to them. Likewise, Buddhists were not permitted to patronize Muslim shops. If a Buddhist was caught in a Muslim store, he had to pay a large fine.

Muslims in Padum complained that they were not getting help from local officials and politicians. Tsering Angdus, Executive Councilor, spoke sympathetically for the Buddhist position in the continuing dispute. "Back in 2012 when Buddhists embraced Islam then the Muslims from Padum took out [a] procession in the town holding the converts on [their] shoulders like they had won a World Cup." He went on to say that he is doing his best to end the boycott and to restore normal relations. But, he argued, it would take time for the social wounds to heal. He felt it would be best if some of the non-governmental organizations would get involved and try to help end the boycott.

Nazar Mohammad, a 54-year old Muslim farmer, complained bitterly about the situation. He said that the boycott had made their lives very difficult. They cannot build anything because the Buddhists control the areas along the Tsarap River next to town, a tributary of the Zanskar River,

²² Raqib Hameed Naik, "Three Years and Counting: In Zanskar, Social Boycott of Muslims Shows No Sign of Ending," *TwoCircles.net*, December 9, 2015: <http://twocircles.net/2015dec09/1449639049.html#.Vml2bb-0IsY>.

where builders need to take sand and stones for construction purposes. The barter system among neighboring farmers was the basis of local life, “but the social boycott has brought doom to it,” he said.

Intersections—The Role of Religion in Fostering Peacefulness

On August 9, 2016, His Holiness the Dalai Lama traveled to the Thiksey Monastery in Ladakh 12 miles east of Leh to give an address at the opening of a Buddhist religious festival. In his comments, which appeared on his website,²³ he reasoned that since all religions teach love and compassion as well as tolerance and forgiveness, there should be no reason for them to foster conflicts. “Since in practice we have so much in common, we should treat each other with respect,” he said referring to the growing conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims in the hitherto peaceful region.

He went on to address the strife by saying, “Here in Ladakh, I am happy to see that Buddhists and Muslims have good relations and live together in peace and that Shia and Sunni Muslims also live together in harmony. This is something very precious about Ladakh that you must preserve. It’s a treasure that others in India and the world at large may admire. You show by example that a multi-religious community can live together [in] peace and harmony.”

His words captured well the peaceful ideals of the Ladakhi people, which many of them, along with the Dalai Lama, still treasure. It is not clear whether His Holiness has any practical suggestions for resolving the growing population imbalance between the two faiths—or indeed whether he approves of politicizing the two faiths as some of the Ladakhi people have done. He is too smart a leader to get embroiled in the minutiae of the conflict. Best to focus on the ideals and hope that the people will continue to cherish them—and sort out their problems from within the perspective of their shared heritage.

The Buddhist/Muslim strife in Ladakh prompts an obvious question: how much do the other peaceful societies depend on their religious beliefs for promoting their nonviolence and, for that matter, how important is the Christian faith for promoting peacefulness in America? An article by Uwe Gielen mentioned earlier in this chapter provides the beginnings of some answers. It

²³ “Fourth Great Summer Religious Council at Thiksey Monastery,” His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, August 10, 2016: <https://www.dalailama.com/news/2016/fourth-great-summer-religious-council-at-thiksey-monastery>.

includes a detailed, five-page table that gives a point by point comparison of the worldviews, personality characteristics, and ethos of traditional Ladakh and contemporary America.²⁴ In the one, peacefulness is the ideal and it still largely prevails. In the other, violence is accepted as normal reality.

Morality for the Ladakhis is a system of revealed prescriptions, while for Americans it consists of personal choices for competing values. Feelings of guilt are rarely found in Ladakh while they are strongly felt in America. Ladakhis focus very little on the self, in contrast to Americans who emphasize their extreme individualism. Gielen summarizes in his table the Ladakhi and American perspectives on 17 different issues: life goals, emotionality, self-esteem, sense of conscience, personal drives, happiness, faith, and so on. It is a good place to begin a look at the religious values of the peaceful societies that inspire their nonviolence, and the corresponding place of religion in fostering peacefulness—or its opposite—in America.

Gielen's description of American beliefs, social patterns, and psychological structures are based on his reading of various sources, such as the 1985 book *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, by R. N. Bellah et al. He distinguishes various strains of individualism in America and shows how they influence other major facets of American beliefs such as competition, success, and self-control. He argues that these beliefs in America lead to ambivalence about “mental poisons” such as pride, jealousy, envy, lust, greed, hate, and aggression, all of which foster weak family systems, problems with drugs, child abuse, and high rates of violence.

“Violence has always been close to the center of the American way of life,” he concludes, “but in recent decades it has grown malignant because it feeds on the forces set free by the weakening of family life.” Some Americans may not agree completely with his assessment of the US, but the stark contrast he describes between the peacefulness of traditional Ladakh, and by extension many of the other peaceful societies, and the self-centered violence of contemporary America should startle and provoke all American readers into examining their own beliefs and values.

How strongly do our worldviews emphasize peacefulness? Do our self-conceptions really foster interpersonal harmony? How do we reconcile our beliefs in cooperation with our urges to compete? Thoughtful readers should be inspired to go beyond Gielen's examination of Ladakhi values, and the con-

²⁴ Gielen, Uwe P. 2004. “Peace and Violence: A Comparison of Buddhist Ladakh and the United States.” In *International Perspectives on Violence*, edited by Leonore Loeb Adler and Florence L. Denmark, p.161-184. Westport: Praeger.

trasting ones in America that he so effectively describes, to reflect on their personal beliefs and their connections with peacefulness. And to consider the roles that religions play in societies that are famed for their peacefulness.

Skeptics will argue at once that violence is fundamental to human nature, an essential aspect of our animal nature. Many scholars in biology, the social and behavioral sciences, plus religious and popular writers could be cited. For instance, popular writer Jacques Ellul tells us that "the better we understand that violence is necessary, indispensable, inevitable, the better shall we be able to reject and oppose it."²⁵ Another scholar, P. Régamey, indicates that self-defense is "a natural right" that does not need to be legitimated by the New Testament. He goes on to say that "the Beatitudes are a shining light. But they are not taken seriously even by serious people. Where will they lead to if one followed them?"²⁶

Régamey's question is profound, one that Christian thinkers have been attempting to deal with for centuries. Christian history is filled with examples of leaders and scholars who have found the Beatitudes, the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, and in fact the peace emphasis of Jesus to be a message that has to be marginalized. St. Augustine justified war on pragmatic terms: it is justifiable when it establishes a peace that suits the victors. Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin and many others expanded and modified the rationalization of state violence that came to be known as the "just war theory." All of them tried to adapt and reconcile Christ's difficult injunctions about being peaceful to the supposed realities of violence in the world around them.

Bernard of Clairvaux and others went even further by preaching the necessity of the Second Crusade in particularly enthusiastic terms. The English Puritan divine William Gouge didn't defend his advocacy of war on New Testament grounds; instead he found the Israelite wars of the Old Testament to be more congenial prototypes for his thinking. He not only justified defensive wars, he argued that offensive wars to weaken enemies were commanded by God. He did not attempt to reconcile his views with the Sermon on the Mount. The Crusaders and the Puritans could all be characterized as believing that violence was a central tenet of Christianity, a way for the faithful to fol-

²⁵ Ellul, Jacques. 1969. *Violence from a Christian Perspective*. New York, Seabury Press, p.130.

²⁶ Régamey, P. 1966. *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience*. New York, Herder and Herder, p.122.

low Christ. Their beliefs were supported by violent biblical imagery. Killing, it seemed, became an essential way of behaving like Christ.²⁷

The peaceful societies are not uniform—they vary from one another in that each believes human societies need to be internally peaceful and they should have nonviolent relations with outsiders. Furthermore, there is no dichotomy between peaceful societies and all others. Rather, human societies appear to fall on a continuum of the violence they tolerate. Some peoples are highly violent—acts of murder and aggression occur constantly. Most human societies fall somewhere in between, with greater or lesser amounts of violence occurring in daily life and in occasional wars. A few societies, however, have almost no violence, or in a small number of cases, seem to have no recorded violence. The peacefulness is not a permanent feature of these societies. Some of them have become less peaceful over time while others have become more and more peaceful as time goes on. Generalizations of this type are often subject to error—but, on the other hand, there IS a very significant literature about societies that, on the whole, do appear to be significantly without aggression or violence. Readers raised in the United States or much of the rest of the world may find this hard to believe. They need to look at the literature to become convinced.

Consider the belief in nonresistance, important in the Christian tradition and in the traditions of some of the peaceful societies. As Jesus said, “But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...” (Matthew 5:39). And, a striking parallel from the Paliyan society, people who also assert an explicit code of nonviolence. One man expressed it thus in his first interview with the anthropologist Peter Gardner: “If struck on one side of the face, you turn the other side toward the attacker.”²⁸ Gardner was probably struck by the fact that his informant was using the same analogy for proper behavior that Jesus used near the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount. This is clearly an example of parallel thinking, even if the one man hides from overt persecution by hostile outsiders in the remote, densely forested mountains of southern India while the other willingly went to the cross 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem.

²⁷ An effective summary of the thinking of the Christian advocates of violence, the just war theorists, and the absolute peace activists, is provided by Lisa Sowle Cahill (1994), *Love Your Enemies; Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory*. Minneapolis, Fortress.

²⁸ Gardner, Peter M. 1972. “The Paliyans.” In *Hunters and Gatherers Today, A Socio-economic Study of Eleven Such Cultures in the Twentieth Century*, edited by M. G. Bicchieri. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, p.425.

Since the point of studying the peaceful societies is to attempt to learn how some societies successfully integrate pacifist thinking into the totality of their social and cultural experiences, we must be aware that beyond the confines of the Anabaptist groups such as the Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites, and the Historic Peace Churches, Western Christian societies appear to have little difficulty ignoring the nonresistance command.²⁹ In essence, for most Christians Matthew 5:39 is only a remote ideal. And it may be slowly getting more remote in the large, aggressive Christian countries. Richard Maxwell Brown's book *No Duty to Retreat*³⁰ describes the English legal tradition, which was subsequently accepted in the American colonies, that someone who was threatened had a duty to retreat until escape was impossible, when homicide in self-defense became permissible. Under the influence of frontier conditions, throughout the 19th century, Americans gradually set aside that doctrine—they no longer had a duty to retreat. While not the same as nonresistance, the earlier doctrine had the same effect: with two people engaged in a fight, each had the duty to flee the violence to avoid a homicide. Similar in spirit to nonresistance, no duty to retreat was, at one time, part of the Anglo-American common law.

The nonresistance of the peaceful societies has many fundamental similarities, as well as some significant differences, from the Christian Anabaptist groups. Many of those societies exist on the fringes of much more powerful and aggressive peoples, as the Anabaptists do; but their nonresistance frequently takes the form of immediate flight from danger. Like deer when they sense danger, they disappear at the first hint of aggressive outsiders. When the Lepchas, a nonviolent society discussed in chapter 1, have had to deal with aggression from outsiders they have historically retreated and hidden in the forest.³¹ Among the Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia (see chapter 9), one man was accused—he claimed falsely—of stealing by a

²⁹ A good overview of nonresistance can be found in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* article on "Nonresistance," volume 3, p.897-907. A longer, classic statement of nonresistance from the Anabaptist perspective is by the same author as the encyclopedia article, Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace & Nonresistance*, 3rd edition (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press, 1981, orig. 1944). A selection of works about many of the peaceful societies, Bruce Bonta, *Peaceful Peoples, An Annotated Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ, Scarecrow, 1993) includes numerous entries about nonresistance.

³⁰ Brown, Richard Maxwell. 1991. *No Duty to Retreat*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press.

³¹ Gorer, Geoffrey. 1967. *Himalayan Village: An Account of the Lepchas of Sikkim*, 2d edition. New York: Basic Books.

neighboring Chinese farmer, who threatened to beat him. The Chewong family immediately packed what they could, left under cover of darkness, and did not come back. A Malay soldier threatened another Chewong man so he fled with his family to a remote mountain; after 10 years they were still afraid to return.³²

The passive, nonresistant nature of these societies and others, such as the Semai and Batek of Peninsular Malaysia (chapters 3 and 5, respectively), can be directly tied not only to their beliefs but also to their history of suffering from violent, powerful people in their past, and to some extent today as well. The peaceful aboriginal peoples of Malaysia were subject to the violence of slave raiding by the dominant Malay people; the Paliyans (chapter 10) and other peaceful societies who subsist in the mountains at the southern end of India's Western Ghats likewise have suffered from their aggressive Tamil neighbors. The Buid (chapter 6) of the mountainous interior of Mindoro Island likewise have been dominated and enslaved in their recent past. All of these peoples learned that flight into the forest meant the possibility of survival, while fighting was generally hopeless. Religious beliefs form only part of the explanation for their peacefulness. But they can be an important part.

For most of the peaceful societies, their religious beliefs or mythologies clearly link to, and are supportive of, their peacefulness. For some of them the mythology is highly negative—the gods are petty and exhibit the worst possible behaviors, which the human ethical and social system needs to compensate for. The Ifaluk (chapter 2) god Wolphat, for instance, carries on in their mythology in a manner that is completely at odds with their ethos of peacefulness and their abhorrence for aggression. The stories the Ifaluk people tell of Wolphat display the hero as hostile, petulant, vengeful, lusty, aggressive, and self-centered. In some of the stories, when one member of a group is kind to a stranger (Wolphat), everyone else is hostile, the god responds by punishing or killing the group except for the one kind person. The chiefs, who are viewed by the Ifaluk as the major enforcers and instructors in their ethics, take great delight in relating these stories. They explain that these are the stories of gods, not men. And while the gods instituted the Ifaluk ethic of peace, Wolphat was born of a human mother, which excuses much of his behavior.³³

³² Howell, Signe. 1984. *Society and Cosmos: Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

³³ Spiro, Melford E. 1951. "Some Ifaluk Myths and Folk Tales." *Journal of American Folklore* 64: 289-302.

Similarly, the Piaroa (chapter 4) creator gods—evil, mad, and physically ugly—murdered and cannibalized in order to control resources in mythic time. Wahari, the Tapir, creator of sky, land, and Piaroa constantly battled in mythic time with his father-in-law Kuemoi, the Anaconda, creator of crocodile, caiman, vulture, jaguar, and poisonous snakes. Kuemoi is an especially colorful character: he plants piranhas in his daughter's womb so he can snare young men who visit her and have them for his meals. The religious beliefs held by the Ifaluk and the Piaroa appear to be fundamental to their nonviolence even if they are negative values.

The society in which Jesus lived and died was small in scale, like most of the peaceful societies of today. Can a fervent conviction to peace really work in a vast-scale society such as modern America? Christian societies, with a few exceptions, do not fervently, uncompromisingly, fanatically, quietly, and determinedly accept the peace witness that Jesus so effectively articulated. Christians that want to build peacefulness may have to learn to reject the temporizing apologetics of the just war theorists, and accept the fundamental idea that Jesus' message is quite similar to those of the peaceful societies. It trumps all the rest. Many millions of Christians, of course, devote their lives to good works that strive to bring about, to realize, the peace message of their faith. But the examples provided by the peaceful societies demonstrate that the apologetics for violence, the “realistic” viewpoints of thinkers such as Augustine and the other exponents of “just war,” only undercut the inspiration that Jesus' basic message, and the examples of the peaceful societies, provide for the ideals of “just peace” and “just peacefulness.”

8. Inspired by Forests: the Kadar

The Setting: Kadar Society in the 1940s

One evening in the 1940s, a very loud and vociferous fight disturbed Parambikulam, a Kadar village in Kerala where an anthropologist was doing fieldwork. The noise overwhelmed the usual evening chatter. A woman named Velakkal was sitting outside one of the houses in the village loudly abusing her husband to everyone within earshot. Her husband, Tambi, had bought what she argued were very nice presents for his two grown daughters from a previous marriage. He had given the oldest daughter, Kartiyayani, a European blouse and his second daughter, Nallatungal, a piece of jewelry. His crime? He had only gotten a red chain for his youngest daughter, Matha, who was Velakkal's child. The woman was offended; she felt that his present for their kid was worthless. For over an hour she loudly berated him, accusing him of having an affair with the widow of his younger cousin Vellitaval and of visiting a widow in another village. He listened patiently, at times quietly denying her accusations.

Finally, he suggested politely that it was time for everyone to go to sleep, which they all did. In the morning Velakkal was gone, leaving word that she was going to divorce Tambi, ostensibly due to his alleged infidelities. But the real issue that was bugging her was that circumstances had forced both of Tambi's two grown daughters, Kartiyayani and Nallatungal, to settle in the home of their father and step-mother. The two young women had both been divorced but their husbands had soon rejoined their wives—in their father and step-mother's house. A week after she stormed away, Velakkal returned and moved in again with him—and her step daughters and their husbands. Public opinion in the community was divided in support for the husband versus the wife in this issue, but since she had rejoined her husband and his extended family, the angry evening was soon forgotten. The Kadar went on about their peaceful lives, normally solving

contentious issues just as Velakkal had done—by walking away from them.¹

The Kadar still live in small villages like Parambikulam much as they did in the 1940s, located along the western slopes of the Western Ghats mountain range of Kerala, in Southwestern India. Their communities, containing about 2000 people in 2001, are now scattered in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, an internationally-acclaimed tourist destination, in the Vazhachal Forest Division to the south of it, and in the vicinity of the Athirapilly Waterfalls on the Chalakkudy River. All of them are between 50 and 75 km northeast of the major Kerala port city of Kochi.

In the 1940s, when Velakkal was busily berating Tambi, the Kadar villages were mostly impermanent settlements, with residents moving in and out as circumstances seemed to dictate. People could come and go within family relationships as well as within the village as much as they wished depending on their personal relationships and economic opportunities. Women were as free to move out of marriages as men were. The villages had no indigenous chiefs or headmen except for the ones installed by the authorities in the surrounding states, though Tambi was accepted by most of the people in Parambikulam as their informal leader. However, he and the other so-called leaders had no authority among the Kadar to punish or coerce anyone.

The Kadar almost never had physical fights about issues. A wife might berate her husband for not having enough western material comforts, or someone might accuse another of taking money to purchase drugs, but they did not fight as a result of their disagreements. There was no memory among them of murder or of violent acts of revenge, and local forestry or police officials confirmed the total absence of crime. However, during the first half of the 20th century, as the Kadar gained increasing contacts with the lowland civilizations that surrounded them, they learned the art of cheating. But they still retained their traditional values to some extent: whatever they might have gained through cheating was quickly bartered away for other products, which were then shared with other Kadar.

In the 1940s, the Kadar had a society that, in theory at least, accorded equality to the sexes. But that ideal was being rapidly eroded due to the influence of the larger Indian society that surrounded them in the plains. When a Kadar man of the time held a job and was able to afford a sari for his wife, she had to wear it in order to avoid the stigma of being seen naked above the waist. The social stigma against bare-chested women produced an attitude of servility among them toward outsiders—they had to hurriedly

¹ Ehrenfels, Umar Rolf. 1952. *Kadar of Cochin*. Madras: University of Madras.

cover their breasts whenever someone outside their village came past. Also, wearing the clothing often prevented a woman from foraging by herself in the forest, so she tended to become dependent on her husband and his job, thereby losing her own independence. Furthermore, job opportunities in the 1940s, either offered by government agents or by contractors that came into the Kadar area, were exclusively given to men.

The Fight against the Big Dam

The outside society intruded into the lives of the Kadar in various ways, forcing them to make changes in their social patterns—and to some extent their approaches to peacefulness. Two major stories need to be examined in order to gain an idea of how two very different concerns have affected their lives. The second, and arguably the more significant one, has been their growing involvement in helping manage the life of the surrounding forest. Saving that for later in this chapter, we need to first look at their opposition to a huge hydro-power dam proposed by the government of Kerala that, if it is ever built, would destroy one of their villages and have a serious impact on another. In many ways, their opposition to the dam, which threatened their forests, homes, and livelihoods, may have helped propel them into taking a stronger interest in better management of the forests. The story of current life among the Kadar thus starts with the dam builders.

The projected dam involving the two Kadar villages, initiated by the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) in the 1980s, was proposed to be constructed about 400 m. above the Vazhachal Falls on Kerala's Chalakkudy River. The engineers who designed what was called the Athirapilly Dam estimated it would generate 163 megawatts of electric power. But the KSEB made few attempts to integrate its plans for power generation with the culture of the nearby indigenous communities. Of the two Kadar villages closest to the planned hydropower project, Vazhachal is located less than 400 m. downstream while the other, Pokalapara, is about 4 km. upstream. The Kadar in those two communities felt that government officials attached no importance to them, so their input about the dam was irrelevant.²

During the period from 2006 through 2010, the project was hotly contested by major Indian environmental groups because it threatened an important riverine habitat with its unique plants and animals—and, increasing-

² Nair, Tamara. 2014. "Decentralization and the Cultural Politics of Natural Resource Management in Kerala, India." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35(3): 397-411.

ly, by the Kadar and their supporters. Despite extended strong opposition by environmentalists and supporters of the tribal society, the government of Kerala decided in 2007 that the project would move forward. On Saturday August 25th that year, the Kerala Minister for Electricity, Mr. A.K. Balan, held a news conference to announce that construction would begin soon on the Athirapilly Dam on the Chalakkudy River, despite the protests. The project had also been approved by the national government, he said.³

The minister acknowledged that issues had been raised, but he argued for the government perspective. The project would maintain at least some water flow over two waterfalls in the river downstream, below the dam. Out of the 163 megawatt potential of the dam, three megawatts would be devoted to maintaining a small, natural flow. He also acknowledged the concerns of the Kadar people—that they might have to be moved out of their villages and could lose their traditional way of life. He said, however, in the words of one news report, that the “project will not affect any tribal family.”

Mr. Balan added that the government had proposed a package for Kadar families “that might be affected by the project,” which would include a new house on an acre of land per family, plus a common area for a public health facility and a school. In other words, the government is really not going to destroy the village, but if they do, they will provide housing for the affected Kadars. As minister not only of electricity but also of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the official may have had his own feelings for the welfare of the Kadar. He announced that the proposed reservoir would have facilities for speed boating, trekking, bush walking, and other activities that should attract more tourists to the southwest coastal mountains of India. The government thus intended to provide jobs for the people affected by the development.

Despite the government’s assurances, opposition to the project was growing. Opponents pointed out that the project would destroy very sensitive riverine forest lands, disrupt corridor links between important natural areas, and possibly harm a number of animals such as tigers, elephants, leopards, hornbills, liontailed macaques, and Nilgiri langurs. Furthermore, the environmental impact assessment, commissioned by the electricity ministry, appeared to the environmental community to have been a hurried job. They claimed it was an inadequate study that missed many major issues, such as the potential submergence of hundreds of rare plants. The en-

³ “Controversial Dam Approved in Kerala.” Peaceful Societies, September 20, 2007: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2007/09/20/controversial-dam-approved-in-kerala/>

vironmental assessors visited in the wrong season for observing the huge numbers of birds that nest in the affected forest.

By March of 2008, the construction had still not started. The High Court of Kerala, which reviewed various court suits about the proposed project, ordered the KSEB to start work by the 31st of the month. The court order was in response to a suit brought against the state government by a construction contractor challenging a move by the state to re-tender the construction award. The media in India had been buzzing with stories about the opposition to the dam, though the opponents appeared to be getting nowhere. But neither did the government move ahead with it.⁴

Although prospects for the dam opponents looked bleak in March, they appeared to be considerably improved four months later. Opponents had ratcheted up their activities and the government seemed paralyzed with inaction. The irreplaceable riverine forest community and the closest Kadar village were both still in place. Opponents pointed out the inefficiencies and waste of the planned project, but much of their emphasis was on the threats to the hornbills, elephants, and fish species that would be affected. They also questioned the wisdom of trying to relocate the Kadar village out of the way of the hydropower project.⁵

In mid-April of 2008, a meeting had been held in the town of Chakkudy to commemorate two months of a Satyagraha action initiated by local people protesting the dam. The lead speaker at that occasion, Medha Patkar, a prominent Indian environmental leader, was outspoken in her criticism of the dam proposal. "When the government thought about building another [dam], they should have discussed the matter first with the Kadar tribe," she said. "The project should be implemented only if the grama sabha [a village meeting] of the Kadar tribe approves of it. Environmental impact assessment and public hearing held for the Athirapilly project were an eyewash," she argued.⁶

⁴ "Kerala Set to Begin Dam Construction." Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, March 6, 2008: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2008/03/06/kerala-set-to-begin-dam-construction/>

⁵ "Kerala Dam Proposal Still Disputed." Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, July 24, 2008: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2008/07/24/kerala-dam-proposal-still-disputed/>

⁶ "Do Some Soul Searching, Medha Tells VS." The Hindu, April 26, 2008: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/Do-some-soul-searching-Medha-tells-VS/article15212983.ece>

In mid-May, the Chalakkudy River Protection Forum and the Athirappilly Action Council, the two organizations taking the lead in opposing the dam proposal, announced a larger convention in Chalakkudy for June 3 and 4, the 100th day of the Satyagraha action that had started on February 25. The purposes of the convention, called “Jalaaravam” (call of water), were to coordinate the work of a variety of grass roots groups, to demand that the Kerala state government prepare a “white paper” justifying the project, and to demand a “river basin dialogue” at all levels.

The comments of the keynote speaker, famed author and social commentator Arundhati Roy, were widely noted. She said that the people should develop a militant, though nonviolent, strategy for preventing the government from building the dam. “If the foundation for the dam has been laid, throw it away,” she said. She argued that the project is environmentally unsustainable, economically foolish, and politically unwise. Government agencies usually try to outwait opponents of projects such as these, so her response was that people involved with the struggle should continue until the government ultimately gives up. “Maintain your energy level,” she urged.

The Satyagraha actions continued through the following year⁷. In January of 2010, a dramatic announcement from the national government changed the tone of the discussion. The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests in New Delhi issued a statement proposing to halt the dam project. The MOEF directed the Kerala State Electricity Board, which had been pushing for the project, to show cause why the environmental clearance the agency had issued in July 2007 should not be revoked. According to the MOEF statement, “It has come to the Ministry’s notice that the primitive Kadar ... colony is located in areas surrounding the proposed dam site... and that valuable biodiversity would be endangered.”⁸ In February 2010, Jairam Ramesh, the Union Minister of Forests and Environment for India, made it official: he told reporters in the small Kerala city of Palakkad that permission to build the dam was

⁷ “First Anniversary of Satyagraha in Kerala.” Peaceful Societies, March 5, 2009: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2009/03/05/first-anniversary-of-satyagraha-in-kerala/>

⁸ “Athirappilly Project: Show-Cause Notice Issued to Electricity Board.” *The Hindu*, January 7, 2010: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/Athirappilly-project-show-cause-notice-issued-to-electricity-board/article15956967.ece>

now out of the question.⁹ Although the pro-dam forces continued to agitate into the summer of 2010, the issue appeared to be resolved in favor of the Kadar, the river, and the forest.¹⁰ At least for the moment.

During the height of the controversy in 2010 and 2011, a scholar named Tamara Nair spent five months doing fieldwork in the two Kadar villages most closely affected by the proposed dam project. She conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews among the Kadar and others in the immediate area affected by the proposed dam. In the course of her investigation, the Kadar told her repeatedly that because they had not been consulted during the planning process for the dam, they felt as if they had been relegated to the fringes of society. They compared their recent treatment with their feelings of being ostracized, which they have felt since before the independence of India.¹¹

Nair found out during her interviews that the Kadar live up to their name “people of the forest” in the languages of that part of South India, Malayalam and Tamil. She learned that the senses of the Kadar are acute when they are in the wilds and that they are experts at collecting honey and other non-timber forest resources, which they bring out to sell to the people of the plains. They have also been employed by several biologists and the managers of important conservation projects over the past decade. They have expert levels of indigenous knowledge, Nair argued, that could be important assets in planning development projects.

She found that most of the Kadar men and women were resigned to the dam situation: no changes were likely in their status. When they had to deal with authority figures or government officials, they had little if any confidence that anything positive would come of it. They felt that they were the last people to be considered by officials, and they seemed resigned to their position of living on the fringes of modern society. A few of the author’s Kadar informants, however, expressed indignation at the treatment they had been given, and they desired more and better attention. But those Kadar were the ones who had gotten some education and belonged to social groups. They saw the dismissive attitudes of officials for their views as evi-

⁹ “Kadar Village to Be Spared.” Peaceful Societies website, February 25, 2010: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2010/02/25/kadar-village-to-be-spared/>

¹⁰ “Debate Continues in Kerala over Athirappilly Dam.” Peaceful Societies website, July 15, 2010: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2010/07/15/debate-continues-in-kerala-over-athirappilly-dam/>

¹¹ Nair, Tamara. 2014. “Decentralization and the Cultural Politics of Natural Resource Management in Kerala, India.” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35(3): 397-41.

dence of a basic attitude that they were primitive, or backward, and thus really unable to discuss development concerns intelligently.

Nair found that while no one was actively trying to prevent the Kadar from participating in the planning process, no one was actively fostering their participation either. Development proposals moved down from state agencies like the KSEB to local governments to local communities—but the Kadar were left out. However, legal recourses did exist for them. A woman in the Vazhachal colony launched a Public Interest Litigation in the Kerala High Court because her colony appeared to be removed from a map that demarcated the area of impact from the proposed dam.

A news report published in August 2015 indicated that the fight with the KSEB was far from over. The dam builders were at it again but the Kadar were taking a more activist role.¹² At least some of them were. What happened was that despite the fact that environmental minister Jairam Ramesh had effectively shut down the proposal in 2010, a new group called the High Level Working Group, chaired by K. Kasturirangan, came to a different conclusion. It decided that the project could move forward anyway, so the Kerala electricity board took this as approval to move ahead on the dam project. The national Ministry of Environment allowed the state to reapply, and it was then referred to the River Valley Committee for clearance—for the fourth time, in fact. At its meeting in July 2015, that committee withdrew the show-cause decision of Mr. Ramesh from 2010. The committee ignored the fact that the Kadar in the affected villages had obtained approval of their Community Forest Rights under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act of 2006; it accepted the information provided by the state—that the project will not harm any Kadar people; and it ignored the contradictory information provided by the Kadar themselves. It approved the project.

In response, a tribal council of the Kadar communities held a meeting on August 23. Ms. V. K. Geetha, the headwoman of the Vazhachal village, had written an open letter in July stating that the Athirapilly project “will destroy 28.5 hectares of riparian (riverside) forests that sustain our way of life.” The purpose of the meeting was to draft a resolution opposing the dam. The Kadar, led by Ms. Geetha, had clearly gotten their backs up and were becoming determined to do everything they could to protect their forest, livelihoods, culture, and society.

¹² “A Kerala Tribe Invokes its Newly Acquired Forest Rights to Fight Off a Dam.” *Scroll.In*, August 22, 2015: <http://scroll.in/article/750235/a-kerala-tribe-invokes-its-newly-acquired-forest-rights-to-fight-off-a-dam>

In a letter she wrote on March 14, 2016, Ms. Geetha, discussed some protests that she had recently helped organize.¹³ She made it clear that the reason she and hundreds of other supporters of the Kerala forests had gotten together on March 13, 2016, was to preserve life along the river and in the riverine forest ecosystem. As part of their celebration of the forest that day, the participants had tied what she called “bamboo friendship bands” around 150 trees. Kadar young people and children had been preparing for the event for weeks by painting the bands and writing messages on them. With this form of peaceful protest, the Kadar and their supporters “are declaring to the world the inalienable right we have over the forests, the trees, rivers and animals that we share our home with.” They also wanted to proclaim, through their protest, that they are indignant at not having been consulted by the government when it formulated plans for the dam—and the destruction of the forest.

The protesters also took what Ms. Geetha called a “moving pledge” to preserve the forest from destruction. The Kadar want to go on living in the forest which gives them life next to the Chalakkudy River, she wrote. She invited supporters to come to their area of Kerala, not just as casual tourists but as fellow human beings “concerned about pure water, air, soil and [the] right to life.”

The state of Kerala had apparently not counted on the strenuous opposition of the Kadar, but by the summer of 2016 they continued to state that they were going to build the dam. The small, peaceful tribe of about 2,000 people was gearing up for a battle with the state in opposition to the dam. Ms. Geetha announced that the tribal council, called the Oorukoottam, would be meeting shortly to decide on its course of action. She said that the Indian Supreme Court had ruled in favor of tribes having the right to decide whether or not to allow projects on their tribal lands. “We won’t let the government play with our lives anymore,” the woman said to a journalist.¹⁴

Her words, backed up in the past by her actions, show the determination and abilities of this formidable leader. “No State or the Central government can implement any project here without our consent. The permis-

¹³ “Dear Sisters, They Are Killing Our Trees,” by Geetha and Friends. *Countercurrents.org*, March 14, 2016: <http://www.countercurrents.org/geetha140316.htm>

¹⁴ “Kadar Get Set to Fight Athirappilly Project,” by K.S. Sudhi, *The Hindu*, May 31, 2016: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Kochi/kadars-get-set-to-fight-athirappilly-project/article8670360.ece>; “Kadar Tribespeople Seek Legal Recourse,” by K.S. Sudhi, *The Hindu*, June 1, 2016: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Kochi/Kadar-tribespeople-seek-legal-recourse/article14377657.ece>

sion of the tribal people is mandatory even for plucking a leaf from here. We will go to any extent to protect our rights,” she said.

Ms. Geetha and the village council of Vazhachal, called the grama sabha, separately approached the High Court, through petitions presented by their counsel, P. B. Krishan, to block the environmental clearance granted for the project. According to the attorney, the petitions “have been admitted by the High Court.” The contention of the petitioners was that the proposed project would forcibly displace the Kadar from their constitutional rights to their lives and their livelihoods in the forests surrounding the Athirapilly Waterfalls, where the dam is planned. They further contended that they had been forced to move down out of the mountains by earlier hydroelectric dams higher up the Chalakkudy River, but no forests or mountainous areas remain farther downstream for them to move to. But for its part, the government of Kerala has made it clear that they do not plan to give up on the Athirapilly project, despite opposition from experts, conservationists and the local Kadar people. The state Electricity Minister, M. M. Mani, told the state Legislative Assembly in early 2017 that the government was proceeding to acquire the land necessary for the project.¹⁵

The interesting aspect of the dam story has been the way the Kadar have changed, in part due to a charismatic leader, from a downtrodden marginal group of villages into a society willing to do whatever they can to stem the tide of discrimination that they have historically faced. The state government remains the same: determined to do what some governments do best, which is to support developers at the expense of poor and marginalized communities. The Kadar, however, are changing, becoming ever so slightly more assertive, at least when they are led that way; they are determined to protect for themselves the forests that Indian law appears to grant to them. An interesting aspect of this story, however, has been the corollary development—their growing involvement with formal, scientific administration of Kerala’s forests and wildlife.

Forest Workers

The Kadar have become workers and assistants in a range of forest research and management activities, in part due to their involvement in the opposition to the big dam and also due to the circumstances of living in vil-

¹⁵ “Athirappilly Project Still Live.” *The Hindu*, March 1, 2017: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/athirappilly-project-still-live/article17385656.ece>

lages that are close to magnificent scenic treasures—huge rivers, stunning waterfalls, and imposing old tracts of trees that harbor tigers and other exotic animals. In essence, they have changed from a tribal society who lived in a forest while utilizing their sophisticated indigenous knowledge of it into a group who now live in the forest fringes but still retain that knowledge. In recent years they have been evolving into forest experts who are learning scientific research processes and modern forest management skills. In many ways, this story is as significant for them as their opposition to the destruction of the forests.

In late August 2010, six months after Jairam Ramesh had officially closed the door on the big dam (for five years anyway), a report came out from an agency called the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) that described the work it is doing with the Kadar and the ways that grant funds are helping change their relationship to the forest.¹⁶ According to the report, the Kadar used to hunt both of the large hornbill species that still live in the mountainous forests of Kerala, the great hornbills and the Malabar pied hornbills. The Kadar used to hunt them for food until it was declared illegal and they mostly stopped.

The CEPF is a worldwide funding agency that focuses on protecting major biodiversity hotspots in tropical and subtropical countries. The Western Ghats range is one of the hotspots they have designated. Under a project funded by the agency, the Kadar are being trained as guards to protect the huge birds. The hornbills are in an avian family characterized by large bills, some of which have big casques on top of their upper mandibles; they live in tropical and subtropical Africa and Asia. Many of the species are endangered, some critically, due to the loss of habitat as well as hunting pressures.

Dr. K.H. Amitha Bachan, a botanist who had specialized in riparian flora research, took an interest in the hornbills because of their role in dispersing forest seeds. The Vazhachal Forest of Kerala, where he works, is home to many Kadar people as well as hornbills. The CEPF considers it to be a priority area within the Western Ghats hotspot region because it is the last remaining intact riparian forest in Kerala, and it is the last spot where the Malabar pied hornbills nest in the state.

Of the 1,400 remaining Kadar people, according to the CEPF, about 850 live in the Vazhachal Forest Division. Many are now engaged, for at least a

¹⁶ “Kadar News Increasingly Upbeat.” Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, September 23, 2010: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2010/09/23/kadar-news-increasingly-upbeat/>

few months of the year, in wage labor for forest protection activities, such as the CEPF project. Dr. Amitha Bachan used the grant money to begin a systematic hornbill nest monitoring survey. The first thing he did was to conduct an awareness program in the Kadar communities throughout the region. Many people asked about the possibility of obtaining jobs as forest guards. He ultimately hired 31 Kadar and gave them field training so they could begin monitoring the hornbill nest trees. In 2010, the Kerala Ministry of Environment and Forests recognized the importance of the hornbill project and started funding the monitoring guards too. The ministry and the Kadar guards now take a lot of pride in the program. A local farm cooperative has adopted an image of one of the hornbills as its logo.

According to the CEPF, the guards were quite enthusiastic about their work, even though they were employed for only three months of the year. Despite that, many continued to gather data for the remaining nine months because of their personal commitments. They enjoy their jobs because they allow them to work in the forest observing wildlife. By extension, the jobs support their traditional skills and customs. They apprehended a few hornbill poachers, but even those hunters have changed their ways and are now also protecting the birds. The numbers of nests are slowly increasing and the birds appear to be increasing their nesting range, facts which suggest that the program has been successful so far.

After 15 more months of successful research work with the hornbills, the program was expanded in 2011, a credit to the Kadar employees who did much of the field work. The hornbill monitoring program was extended outside the Vazhachal region to include the Edamalayar, Nelliampathy, and Parambikulam areas as well. Four different species of hornbills were known to nest in the Vazhachal Forest: the Great Hornbill, the Malabar Pied Hornbill, the India Grey Hornbill, and the Malabar Grey Hornbill, according to one news story. The forest is an important habitat for the large birds, which are important for overall ecosystem health due to their habits of widely dispersing fruits and seeds.¹⁷

The Kadar who were employed to survey the forests near their homes were trained to note evidence that suggests the presence of different hornbill species, such as fecal matter and the remains of food around potential nest trees. Suspect sites were observed at least once a week, and monitored until

¹⁷ "Kerala Tribesmen Will Fan Out to Watch Nesting Sites," by K.S. Sudhi. *The Hindu*, November 28, 2011: <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/kerala-tribesmen-will-fan-out-to-watch-nesting-sites/article2666119.ece>

eggs were presumed to have hatched. According to Dr. Amitha Bachan, the forest knowledge of the Kadar was an important ingredient in the success of the program. They found 57 hornbill nest trees in one year. While they moved around through the forests on their surveys, they were trained to watch for other key wildlife species, such as tigers and lion-tailed macaques.

The nest monitors wrote down descriptions of the nest trees, details about the entries of female birds, whether or not the females appeared to be in the nest cavities, measurements of the trees, heights of the nest holes, and details about the nearby vegetation and terrain. They also recorded the hatching of chicks and possible threat factors at the nests. Amitha Balan has written that hornbills are particularly threatened by any loss of forest habitat and by factors such as deforestation, conversion of the land to plantation agriculture, clearing for shifting cultivation, or logging.

Emboldened by their successes in working with the hornbill research, the Kadar formally requested greater involvement in the overall management of forest resources in Kerala. The Indian Forest Service appeared, as of late March 2012, to be favorably inclined to support their initiative. Eight Kadar communities in the Athirapilly gram panchayat filed in March 2012 an application to the secretary of the Indian Forest Service. They asked to be designated as the managers and protectors of the forests in their region. They also requested the legal right to collect forest products, something they have done for millennia.¹⁸

Officials in the forest department supported the Kadar due to their active involvement in existing projects, such as the research on the hornbills. Their assistance in the hornbill research had also gotten them involved in forest plantation work, fire protection, and eco-tourism—all with the support of the forest service. M. Manikyaraj, a Kadar, said that the law—the national Forest Rights Act—should allow them the right to manage four forest ranges in the Vazhachal Forest Division: Chapra, Vazhachal, Kollathirumedu and Sholayar. About 1500 Kadar attended a meeting in Thrissur, a major city in Kerala, where they passed a resolution demanding their rights to manage the forest resources.

An unnamed forest official expressed his support for the Kadar objective. “The main aim of the [Forest Rights] Act is to ensure stability of [the]

¹⁸ “The Kadar and their Forests.” Peaceful Societies website, News and Reviews, March 29, 2012: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2012/03/29/the-kadar-and-their-forests/>

habitat of primitive tribes,” he said. “We will soon set up an ecological monitoring protocol to prevent excessive exploitation of forest resources.”

Then, the Kadar forest workers started gaining recognition for more than just hornbill research. Kadar workers in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve were singled out in September 2012 as one of the key reasons for that nature sanctuary’s recognition as one of India’s best protected natural areas. The reserve was accorded top honors along with other internationally-known natural treasures such as the Corbett National Park and the Periyar Tiger Reserve.¹⁹ One has to wonder if any descendants of the contentious Velakkal and her meek husband Tambi were aware of the irony of the forest surrounding their grandparents’ village gaining such international recognition as a prominent preserve.

The reasons given for the recognition of Parambikulam were the comprehensive management approaches taken by the park, which has 15 to 18 tigers—and the ways the Kadar and the other indigenous peoples living in it are incorporated into its management. The reserve was to be recognized at a meeting of the United Nation’s 11th Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Hyderabad beginning on October 8, 2012. Parambikulam was recognized because it successfully reduced human-animal conflicts and increased its biological diversity.

An Indian Supreme Court decision prohibited tourism activities in the core areas of the nation’s tiger reserves, but Parambikulam nonetheless has been able to employ the local tribal people for forest protection work, according to Wildlife Warden K. Vijayanandan. He told a reporter that the reserve helped develop the tribal peoples through a form of community-based eco-tourism. Over 250 tribal peoples have benefited from the program, both as park workers and as helpers and guides to the tourists. Many of those tribal people appear to have been Kadar, though the Malamalar, the Muthuvan, and the Malayan peoples also live in or near the reserve.

One result of the effective human/animal management strategy has been the decline of poaching. N. Babu, a tribal person not identified by a reporter with a particular society, said that the reserve had not witnessed a single incident of tiger poaching since 2004. Furthermore, there had not been a

¹⁹ “Parambikulam Tiger Reserve Is India’s Most Protected.” *The Times of India*, September 28, 2012:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/Parambikulam-Tiger-Reserve-is-Indias-most-protected/articleshow/16583821.cms>

forest fire in the reserve since 2007, he asserted. “We were able to do tourism in a very eco-friendly way,” he said.

As an added benefit, the tiger reserve has had increasing revenues, which doubtless the managers and officials appreciate. Revenues generated by Parambikulam increased from Rs. 1.25 crore (US\$236,000) in 2009-10 to Rs.1.86 crore (US\$352,000) the next year, and Rs.2.45 crore (US\$463,000) in 2011-2012. The park disbursed Rs.85 lakh (US\$161,000) in salaries to the local tribal peoples, and Rs.90 lakh (US\$170,000) to upkeep and maintenance. “Tribal people have become part of the Social Tiger Protection Force and are effectively combating forest and wildlife-related offences. Here there is no man-animal conflict,” said Warden Vijayanandan.

A year later, in November 2013, the Kadar again gained recognition for their forest management work but from a very different source. Britain’s Prince Charles, vacationing with his wife in India’s Kerala state, drove into the mountains to visit the famous waterfalls on the Chalakkudy River and the nearby Vazhachal Forest. He showed a lot of interest in the research being carried on in that forest, where he met some Kadar employees who were helping monitor wildlife conditions.²⁰

The prince, who serves as the president of the WWF-UK, was hosted by officials of the WWF-India. Forest officials took him to visit the elephant corridor, about 5 km further into the Vazhachal Forest beyond a building called the Inspection Bungalow. He spent 40 minutes in the area, but he did not get to see any elephants. He had arrived in the midst of a tropical downpour—no thunder or lightening, just monsoon rain. Nonetheless, he was intensely curious about the flora and fauna that he did see.

On the way back out of the mountains, the party stopped again at the Inspection Bungalow, where the prince met five members of the Kadar community, workers who had been trained for two years as ecological monitors. The Kadar evidently believe that rain on any auspicious day, such as a wedding or the beginning of a new project, brings good luck. So they decided that the downpour on the day that the Prince of Wales visited implied that he would have a long-lasting connection with the wildlife and the forests of Kerala.

Perhaps, but Prince Charles did ask them about their work, the forest products they collected, and the foods that they ate. According to Abdul Nazerkunju, Divisional Forest Officer, he discussed the geographical spe-

²⁰ “A Tropical Downpour Is a Good Omen.” Peaceful Societies website News and Reviews, November 21, 2013: <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/2013/11/21/a-tropical-downpour-is-a-good-omen/>

cialties of the area with the Kadar employees. They showed him some products that they are harvesting sustainably from the forest. He met more scientists and officials before leaving late in the afternoon, driving once again past the famous waterfalls on the way back down to Kochi.

Although the publicity for their forestry work may have been beneficial—and perhaps flattering—to the Kadar, a group of scholars decided to go one step farther. They decided to investigate whether the indigenous people of Kerala, especially the Kadar, are effectively managing their gathering and trading of the non-timber forest products (NTFPs) from the mountains of the state. The results of their investigation were published online in 2014 and then in a journal article in 2015.²¹

A major issue for the Kadar is their business of gathering forest products for what is called in India the Ayurvedic industry. Ayurvedics are herbal preparations, the uses of which are founded on Hindu traditional beliefs. They might be compared to patent medicines in other contexts. About 80 percent of the Ayurvedic industry in India is based on products gathered in Kerala, especially by indigenous tribal peoples such as the Kadar. Examples of NTFPs gathered in that state include zedoary, or white turmeric (*Curcuma zedoaria*) and green (or true) cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*). In addition to these plants, which have immediate sale value, the Kadar and the other tribal groups gather honey, which is also considered an NTFP. The central issue facing the Kadar is the rapidly-growing demand for these products, especially for those that support the Ayurvedic industry

The expanding demand has ramifications for the resource base, the Kadar people, and the markets for these forest products. The growing demand is affecting the informal economic sector, where many of the plants are bought and sold. The investigators explained that, “With the recent implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) [of] 2006, which ensures clearer property rights and autonomy to tribal communities in terms of access and use of NTFPs, the current market arrangements are expected to be detrimental in terms of both long-term livelihood and conservation outcomes...” In essence, better ways to control the markets needed to be found.

The authors explored the issues by surveying, in 2012, 101 Kadar households located in nine different settlements in the Thrissur district of Kerala

²¹ Krishnakumar, Jyotsna, John F. Yanagida, V. Anitha, Rajeev Balakrishnan and Theodore J. K. Radovich. 2015. “Non-timber Forest Products Certification and Management: a Socioeconomic Study among the Kadars in Kerala, India.” *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 17(4): 837-858.

state. They defined three goals for their research: (1) to analyze the dependence of the selected Kadar households on the gathering of NTFPs; (2) to study the local NTFP markets and their implications for the conservation of the forests; and (3) to assess the economic values of NTFPs to the Kadar under the current methods of marketing, as compared to other possible scenarios such as a certification model. The results of that first research goal were especially useful for understanding the continuing economy of the Kadar people.

The results? About 89 percent of the 101 households surveyed were involved in collecting non-timber forest products. Furthermore, 54 percent of all their forest-generated income was derived from the gathering and the sale of NTFPs, while only 46 percent came from forest management and conservation jobs. In essence, important as the forest and wildlife guards and other related positions had become, the income from those jobs as of 2012 still provided less than half of their sustenance. The simple gathering and sale of plant products, the traditional economy of the Kadar, was still of fundamental importance to them.

The authors also discovered that there is a negative relationship between education and NTFP income: “as education increases, income from NTFP significantly decreases,” they reported. In other words, as a few people in the Kadar settlements reached higher levels of schooling, they showed less willingness to support themselves by gathering and selling plants and plant parts. Furthermore, collecting forest products had become primarily a male activity. Also, Kadar communities situated close to forests tended to be the ones that were more dependent on the NTFPs. Also, surprisingly, people who placed a greater cultural value on the significance of the forests tended to be the ones who were less dependent on just their NTFP income.

A news story posted on the website of WWF-India in January 2015 described how that NGO had been working since 2007 with the Kadar and with the Vazhachal Forest Division (VFD) in India’s Kerala state to help the tribal people protect their forests and their rights to NTFPs. The Vazhachal Forest Division helps protect both the Parambikulam and the Annamalai Tiger Reserves. Roughly 850 Kadar live in colonies within the VFD, into which they were resettled some 50 years ago. WWF-India argued that, since the Kadar still depend on forest resources for many of their needs, conservation work has become essential for their own livelihoods as well as

for the health of the ecosystem. The news story summarized nearly ten years of cooperation between WWF and the Kadar.²²

The fact is, the Kadar have never been agriculturalists: they depend on gathering the NTFPs. They have been aware of the danger of overusing the resources of the forests, and they have become eager to learn how to better preserve them for their future generations. Furthermore, the Kadar appear, to WWF, to be interested in learning to use technologies that would help them better preserve the forest environment.

In the beginning of their relationship, WWF-India conducted data collection activities with the Kadar to investigate their dependency on forest resources. The NGO also wanted to determine the socio-economic status of the nine Kadar communities in the VFD. WWF held meetings in the tribal settlements to share information about the best, most sustainable, ways to use forest resources, as well as strategies for preserving the ecological integrity of the region. Then, WWF initiated a process of community mobilization that encouraged the Kadar to map the forest resources. As a follow up, administrators overlaid the maps to identify collection and depletion areas. That process promoted inter-community dialogs, so the tribal peoples themselves could decide on ways to correctly harvest resources that would give them maximum long-term sustainability.

The WWF held what the news story referred to as “capacity-building workshops,” programs which sought, over the course of a year, to train 30 Kadar from the nine different colonies to do ecological monitoring. WWF also worked with the VFD in the use of modern technologies such as GPS equipment so forest officials and the Kadar could work together on appropriate conservation programs.

The WWF news story revealed that the claims filed in 2012 by all nine Kadar settlements for their Community Forest Rights, as provided for by the Forest Rights Act of 2006, were subsequently approved by a district level committee. The titles for these forest rights were finally signed in January 2014 and distributed the next month, on February 26, to the Kadar communities by the Kerala Tribal Minister. These new Community Forest Rights Kadar groups were, with the help of WWF-India, setting up coordinating mechanisms to ensure that the forest resources will continue to be monitored and used sustainably in the future.

²² “Strengthening Community Forest Resource Use Rights in Vazhachal.” WWF-India, January 13, 2015: https://www.wwfindia.org/news_facts/?12761/Strengthening-Community-Forest-Resource-Use-Rights-in-Vazhachal

Intersections: the Kadar and Pennsylvania

On July 21, 2018, the Center for Private Forests of Penn State University hosted its biennial Forest Stewards Summer Meeting, a day-long event held on university property near State College. A wide range of group tours and educational programs were offered for the Pennsylvania forest stewards, their families and guests, all free of charge. The focus of the day was on exposing private forest landowners to the latest research on woodland matters. Participants attended an educational tour focusing on the ecology of invasive plants, or another on forest succession, or a third on the latest invasive insect pest that threatens our forests, the spotted lanternfly. A group of people attended a program on the history of forest technology held in the agricultural history museum. The sessions—were captivating. Each person registering for the day-long activities was encouraged to attend events of their own choosing and of course all enjoyed socializing with hundreds of other forest landowners who are equally passionate about protecting and cherishing our woods. After all, what is our state named for if not for our founder, William Penn, and his forests?

The PA Forest Stewardship Program (PAFSP) in the state has been a personal commitment for over 20 years, tying together a passionate interest in our own forestlands and a growing appreciation for the values the Kadar place on their woods. And oddly enough, the ties are not just a matter of personal interests. In fact, there are some very real parallels between the developments of the two pro-forest movements on the opposite sides of the earth. While they are not neighbors, the intersections between these two very different forest habitats should be considered since the human dimensions are comparable. It appears as if both the Kadar of southwestern India and the Forest Stewards of Pennsylvania have become more sophisticated and more focused on forest ecology over the years. While both use the products from the forests, both mostly base their uses on sustainable values. Both treasure the forests, and both groups are into learning more. Both groups have benefitted from having charismatic leaders—more about them in a moment. One difference between the two groups is that the Pennsylvanians clearly own their own forest lands, while ownership of the forests in India's Western Ghats by the Kadar is still not as clearcut as they would like—and as incontrovertible as it should be, to judge by the provisions of relevant Indian law. Nonetheless, the two groups might benefit from knowing more about one another.

Much like the story of the Kadar and their growing commitment to learning all they can about the forests of Kerala so they can become better stewards, the PAFSP has also changed since it started in the early 1990s. The work and the emphases of the PAFSP has been evolving as it has become less nuts-and-bolts management oriented. For example, during a summer program many years ago, about 90 forest stewardship members toured a private property here in our state. The events of the tour exemplified the “best ways to use it” mentality that prevailed at the time.

The focus of the day was on the reforestation of a tract of strip-mined land in Western Pennsylvania and the landowner’s efforts to develop a new forest on it. All of the formal stops on the tour were in the strip mine areas and the patches of forest that had been “treated” in recent decades. The tours paused at a timber stand improvement cut and a clear-cut that had been done some years earlier. The tour leaders stopped several times to discuss the landowner’s efforts to re-establish trees on the spoil areas where all the sub-surface rocks and shale had been graded into hills and valleys.

Standing next to a small ridge-top cabin in the middle of a clear-cut and strip mine area, there was a striking view across a swale toward the opposite hillside, which was covered with row upon row of grow tubes in perfect military formation. Workers had erected 700 of the four-foot tall, four-inch diameter translucent plastic pipes across the mine spoil several years before to protect tree seedlings from being nipped by animals. These tubes, the same as most grow tubes, had curls of plastic at their tops to strengthen them, like bugles set to blare forth the rapidly growing little trees within. Although some of the trees had failed to grow in the tubes, on the whole the protected saplings had grown far better than the unprotected ones. Most of the tour group felt they were seeing an interesting experiment in re-vegetation.

At least one participant was appalled. The tubes looked like a choir of death angels lined up to proclaim that war on the earth is good. That rebellious forest steward commented quietly to a forester standing nearby that the whitish tubes looked strikingly like the Arlington National Cemetery. The forester chuckled—a bit nervously, perhaps. Those plastic tubes looked like monuments to humanity’s vain attempts to make amends, to right the incomparable evils committed on a place like this. They trumpeted the horror, the mining, which has been perpetrated here on these hills. Why can’t we take lessons from people like the Kadar?

Restoration of damaged habitat is noble and often thankless work, but the restoration ecology movement does provide salve for the consciences of the developers, more perhaps than it fosters spirits of protecting, learning, and

appreciating. The tolerant forester was still standing nearby, so it was impossible to refrain from asking another question: why, with all the difficulties of getting these various species of hardwoods and softwoods to grow here, didn't the landowner just let the black locusts move in, which they were obviously doing anyway. Black locust is one of the natural first-succession tree colonizers of open land in our part of Pennsylvania. The forester muttered something about the lack of economic value in locust trees and doubtless wondered why these forest stewards kept asking silly questions.

For instance, don't the land managers and professional foresters at least sometimes know what they are doing? They can remove the top layers of the earth, take out the coal, and restore the earth into an acceptable version of its former self by planting trees that will prove economically important in the future. There won't be much soil, admittedly, but who needs it anyway? Just the rest of the web of life, or what used to be a web of life at least, in this place. That's all, and why should anyone care? Besides, the rock and shale is contoured to look, from a distance, just like the original hills—as long as you don't get too close or look too carefully.

Memories of that one day, however, have long since been overwhelmed by the many other very useful Pennsylvania forest stewardship sessions and publications, such as the one in July 2018, which demonstrate that appreciation and education have become primary emphases and the issues of use, while still present, are no longer so dominant. Prof. James Finley, the inspiring leader of the Forest Stewardship Program, not only led the effort to get forest landowners more involved by organizing many programs, field trips, and organizations, at least until he retired in June of 2017, he also wrote constantly for the forest stewards about the issues everyone faces.

Always interesting and often inspiring, Dr. Finley's many writings were welcomed in our email in-boxes. Even though he is retired now, he still writes his pieces, just not as often. For instance, he wrote in March 2016²³ about the fact that there are other owners of neighboring forest properties, so we need to take a landscape perspective before we do anything to our own woods. He opened his thousand-word essay with the down-to-earth observation, "In many ways, we are all neighbors and the decisions we make move across the landscape like ripples from a stone tossed into a

²³ Finley, James. March 18, 2016. "Wooded Landscapes Have Very Few Fences." Penn State Center for Private Forests <https://ecosystems.psu.edu/research/centers/private-forests/news/2016/wooded-landscapes-have-very-few-fences>

pond.” He goes on to describe how good and bad decisions have affected all of the forests in our state.

The parallels with the Kadar are striking, instructive and inspiring. Also in March 2016, Ms. V. K. Geetha, the headwoman of the Vazhachal Kadar colony, wrote an eloquent appeal for saving their forest from the proposed hydropower dam on the Chalakkudy River.²⁴ But instead of focusing on the potential destruction of two Kadar communities, her letter was a paean of praise for the forest in which they live. Ms. Geetha referred back to earlier fights against the dam but she quickly focused on the threat to the trees in the area to be submerged. The government of the state of Kerala had asked the Forest Department to begin marking and assessing the trees for cutting.

She wrote that the Kadar in all nine settlements in the Vazhachal Athirapilly Forest Division understand that the trees are part of a larger rainforest ecosystem. She explained the Kadar understanding for the value of the trees in a forest: “We value them for the coolness we feel as we walk for hours in search of food, fuel and fodder. We know and sense trees through their continuous life process by which water is rejuvenated in the ground and flows out as streams and rivers.” She was clearly raised in a forest, much as some Pennsylvanians have been.

Ms. Geetha wrote that many creatures in addition to humans also depend on healthy forests, such as Malabar giant squirrels, liontailed monkeys, and other mammals. She appreciates every drop of water in the forest, which flows down the Chalakkudy River to nourish communities below. In the forest, the Kadar lady wrote, she senses “the strength and generosity of trees in the honey filled flowers and the honey combs that bees make that earn us our livelihood.” The Kadar, in her view, appreciate the fish, the forest floor humus derived from leaves, and the other lifeforms in the woods. Ms. Geetha expresses Kadar appreciation for the food and fuel they take from the land. Such a contrast to the grow-tubes approach of some foresters in Pennsylvania, but very much in line with the PAFSP today.

But her expressions of appreciation were subtle. She understood that dying and dead trees are also necessary for some of the life forms in the forest, such as the hornbills, which use them for their nests. She realized that the root systems of trees hold the thin forest soils from eroding away. She appreciated being able to dig up roots and tubers from the forest floor.

²⁴ “Dear Sisters, They Are Killing Our Trees,” by Geetha and Friends. *Countercurrents.org*, March 14, 2016: <http://www.countercurrents.org/geetha140316.htm>

Kind of like morel hunters here in Pennsylvania, skulking about in our forests as they search for spring treasures.

While the Kadar may appreciate their forests as much as, or maybe even more than, Pennsylvania forest stewards do, their experiences in them are perhaps even more significant aspects of their lives. During her interviews with the Kadar in 2010 and 2011, Tamara Nair found that they felt beaten down and mostly ignored. The government had not bothered to discuss with them the huge dam that would harm two of their villages: nobody appeared to care about them.²⁵ But by 2017, their protests about the resurrected dam plans fostered a resurgence of pride in their forests. The recognition they had gotten for their forestry work had given them a new sense of self confidence.

In 2017, some Kadar were working to restore one of their worship sites in Kerala's Vazhachal Forest when forestry department officials going past asked them to stop. They politely refused, citing their rights under India's Forest Rights Act (FRA). They were aware that maintaining their temple was permitted as one of their Community Forest Rights under the FRA. The unusual aspect of the exchange was that the tribal group was not only aware of their rights but they were willing to be assertive about them. Such assertiveness would have been unthinkable even 7 years before, and even by 2017 it was still not an accepted way of interacting with outsiders for many of India's tribal people.²⁶ Pennsylvania forest stewards may at times encounter unpleasant bureaucrats, apathetic neighboring landowners, and rapacious loggers but we don't have a tradition of being ashamed of our love for nature nor are we necessarily reticent with others.

Ms. Anantha Latha from the River Research Centre in Kerala provided some interesting background about the Kadar and their forests. She told a reporter that the Kadar have been forced out of their homes and hamlets repeatedly over the past century as the Chalakkudy River has already been dammed six different times.²⁷ She told him, "When these dams came, [the

²⁵ Nair, Tamara. 2014. "Decentralization and the Cultural Politics of Natural Resource Management in Kerala, India." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35(3): 397-411.

²⁶ "Protecting Forests with Law: What Tamil Nadu Can Learn from Kerala's Kadar Tribe," by Sibi Arasu. *The News Minute*, June 26, 2017: <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/protecting-forests-law-what-tamil-nadu-can-learn-kerala-s-kadar-tribe-64230>

²⁷ "Protecting Forests with Law: What Tamil Nadu Can Learn from Kerala's Kadar Tribe," by Sibi Arasu. *The News Minute*, June 26, 2017: <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/protecting-forests-law-what-tamil-nadu-can-learn-kerala-s-kadar-tribe-64230>

Kadar] were forcefully displaced, because they mostly live along the forest valleys, they don't live up on the ridge. There was no rehabilitation, no displacement norms, nothing." As a result, the Kadar are now spread out, most of them in nine hamlets in the Vazhachal Forest Division in the state.

The reporter also interviewed Ms. Geetha. He credited her complete mastery of the facts about the dam proposal and her understanding of the provisions of the FRA as the keys that successfully empowered the Kadar community. She made it clear to him that the Kadar will not permit any future developments in the forest. "These forests are ours and we're going to protect them to the best of our abilities," she asserted.

She added that as a result of the active stance by her group, government officials have changed their attitudes toward them. They used to denigrate the Kadar as not being worth their attention when they entered their offices: "they looked down at us, we were not treated as equals." But now, she said, when they visit a government office, "the officers ask us to come and sit." They know that the Kadar have rights that they must respect. She said that the relationships between the Kadar and the broader, non-Kadar community has also improved. Other leaders come to Ms. Geetha for support with their issues and she contacts them at times. She is clearly proud of the mutual support system that has developed.

Several Kadar in addition to Ms. Geetha told the reporter that they were happy with developments. Ms. A. Manju from Wachumaram, one of the hamlets, discussed the past when they were required to move. But like the others, she still defined herself as a forest denizen. "We've always belonged to these forests and hardly any of our people have ever left [them]." The Forest Resources Act reinforces her beliefs.

With the authorization provided by the FRA, the Kadar are also trying to establish community enterprises of their own. They plan to weave baskets and mats with reeds and they hope to establish a jackfruit enterprise. They are.... considering growing NTFPs in abandoned plantations that fall within their control. But as of 2017, many issues and concerns remained. The reporter interviewed N. Rajesh, the District Forest Officer for Vazhachal, who said that officials need to work with the tribal people in order to manage and effectively protect the forest and its resources. He expressed concern about the infrastructure in the forest that should be developed with the input of the Kadar but he sounded as cautiously optimistic as they were.

The same is true in Pennsylvania. Optimism, a keynote in the Pennsylvania forest stewardship community, is instantly noticeable in the 2017 *Annual Report*

of the Center for Private Forests at Penn State and in their website.²⁸ Both provide excellent overviews of the FS Program, as well as the many other programs that promote sound forest management in the state. The Center exists to promote forest stewardship, coordination, outreach and research to forest landowners, the forest-products industry, government agencies, and the public at large. Coordinating the Forest Stewardship Program, which has been growing since 1991, is one of the major components of the Center's work.

As is frequently the case with annual reports, this one provides numbers to show the successes of its many programs. The Forest Stewards, owners of forest lands, are given, free of charge, a couple of lengthy weekends, about 40 hours of classroom and field training in forest ecology, silviculture, wildlife management, and environmental resource management. The volunteers agree to give back at least as many hours of their time in promoting the principles of sound forest management in their own communities around the state. Since the program began in 1991, 684 forest landowners have received the training (including this writer and his wife) and about two thirds of them (539) remain active in promoting the goals of the program. Many have formed regional forest landowners groups within the state which hold their own outreach programs. The report provides many figures, such as the total number of hours given by the volunteers during the year to forest management and education activities (13,763), the numbers of people reached through stewardship outreach (29,504), the number of young people reached through educational outreach presentations, and on and on.

Interesting as the numbers may be to people who love their forests and who are committed to their sensible management, the annual report comes alive with some quotes by members of the class trained in September 2017. Craig Lehman, a member of the class of 2017, is quoted in the Annual Report as writing, "The Pennsylvania Forest Stewards training, combined with my reading of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, was nothing short of inspirational. It gave me an even greater appreciation on the importance of working together to help restore balance to our wild and natural areas."

Old hands at protecting forests such as Ms. Geetha and Dr. Finley would certainly agree.

²⁸ Center for Private Forests. *2017 Annual Report*. Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, 2018. Their website is at <https://ecosystems.psu.edu/research/centers/private-forests>

9. Changing Conditions Affect Peacefulness: the Chewong

Frog-Woman's Tale

Bongso, who lived alone in the forest, was busily clearing a new swidden, a temporary garden patch, when he became desperately thirsty and headed for the river with his bamboo to get a drink. But when he stuck it into the water, he accidentally caught a frog woman and pulled her out. As she came out of the water, she emerged as a human woman, though she was stark naked—and quite shy about it. She quickly asked Bongso for his sarong so she could cover her nakedness and he tossed it to her. According to the Chewong myth, they both went home, she to the stones in the river, he to his own residence. But the next day he went back to the river and they became husband and wife.¹

They moved to the swidden that Bongso had created and planted some hill rice, which was soon ready to harvest. One day, while he was away hunting, she threshed the rice by rubbing it against her thighs. When he returned home that evening and asked her about the rice, she produced it for him. It was very good. Bongso decided to take a dish of it to his mother, who lived a short distance away. Mother questioned him about his skill at threshing rice but he lied to her, saying that he had prepared it himself. After she ate the rice, she decided to visit her son. However, as soon as she got to his house, she realized that he was with someone else so she didn't bother them that night.

The next morning, when she visited again, she asked if he were now married. He again lied, denying he was married, but Mother insisted she had heard them together the night before. So he finally admitted that he had taken a wife. The wife came out of their house to meet her mother-in-law, who asked her new daughter-in-law where they had met. Bongso lied

¹ "The Frog Woman," In Howell, Signe. 1982. *Chewong Myths and Legends*. Kuala Lumpur: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Monograph 11, p.339-40.

again, saying that she was a jungle person too. The three of them ate together, chewed some betel nut, and smoked before Mother went home.

In time, the frog woman and Bongso had two children, a son and a daughter. Mother convinced her husband that they should move in with Bongso and his wife in order to be much closer to their grandchildren. But one day, while Bongso was off in the forest hunting, Mother took the two children to the river so they could bathe. Even though the river was dirty and flooded, the kids enjoyed frolicking in the water. Mother became impatient with them and scolded them, calling them frog-children. This name calling so upset the kids that they were sullen with their grandmother when they walked home.

Then their mother had to go to the river herself to fetch some water for the household and the kids went along, still acting in a sullen manner. Their mother asked them what was wrong. The children told her what had happened and what their grandmother had called them. She was appalled and refused to return to the house. She and the children turned into frogs and went to live in her former house among the river rocks. That evening, when Bongso returned from hunting and found his family missing, he asked his mother what had happened. He was upset to learn what she had called his children. He bawled out his mother, telling her that his wife was, in fact, a frog-woman. He ran to the river, turned himself into a frog, and joined his wife and kids among the river rocks.

The saddest part of the legend occurred the next morning when Bongso's father went to the river to bathe. He heard his grandchildren calling to him, for they were quite fond of their grandfather—he never bawled them out. The kids were asking him to join them among the rocks in the river but he couldn't do as Bongso had done and turn himself into a frog. He couldn't even see them, for he didn't have the special eyes that Bongso had. The story ends with the Chewong listeners wondering why the legendary family would allow such a brief spark of anger to separate them.

In one of her many publications, anthropologist Signe Howell explained the myth and provided some background about the Chewong, a small Orang Asli hunting, gathering and gardening society of Peninsular Malaysia.² Howell suggested that Bongso clearly had shamanistic characteristics of his own, considering his ability to move from a human cloak to that of a frog. But the myth, like so many others told by the Chewong, points out the fact

² Howell, Signe. 2013. "Metamorphosis and Identity: Chewong Animistic Ontology." In *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, edited by Graham Harvey, p.101-112. Durham: Acumen.

that the divisions between the human world and the non-human are not at all absolute, and that the boundaries are not necessarily firm. Those worlds exist in parallel and, at times, they are nestled one within the other.

The frog woman may have threshed rice for her family, but she did so as a frog might have done, by rubbing the grains against her thighs. The story implies that life in the frog house in the river is carried on more or less as it is in the human house with the parents-in-law. That universality of the basics of living suggests that the moral values supporting all sentient life are very wide reaching indeed.

The importance of all of this is that the Chewong believe the forest they live in is composed not only of humans but of a wide range of sentient beings, all of which live by rules that prescribe correct behavior. Their myths, songs, and stories describe their forest world, the ways they understand it, and how those understandings develop the rules that guide the peaceful behavior of the “people”—both human and non-human—that live in it. The Chewong believe that all conscious beings—human and non-human alike—are “people” who have to interrelate in a universal moral sphere. Consequently, most living beings must be mutually interdependent.

Hence, all sentient beings not only live within a single moral cosmos, they follow universal principles that mandate proper behaviors in the context of their social order. An effective understanding of the rules of conduct is essential for surviving in the forest world. Humans and the other “people” interact according to social rules based on their correct understanding of the cosmos. Furthermore, the socialization that occurs among humans and the forest beings implies that there are wide-ranging social and moral realities. In essence, the animism of the Chewong suggests that forest beings, which of course include humans, are required to have reciprocal moral relationships.

In addition, since the Chewong and the other forest beings possess consciousness, which they call *ruwai*, they are not only characterized as persons, they are also all thought to be equal. And this too is important: the Chewong myths, stories and songs about the universe, which describe the behaviors required to get along, must be understood as very real to the Chewong rather than as just being symbolic. But while a correct knowledge of the rules of behavior is essential for surviving in the forest world, the relevance of that knowledge is limited only to their own specific, Chewong situation.

For the Chewong of course realize that the common moral universe does not disguise the obvious—that different species of “people”—humans, frogs, whatever— have different characteristics, what the humans think of as their “cloaks.” Those cloaks are special bodies that may be taken off and put on as

necessary by shamans. When individuals are cloaked in the person of another species but neglect to behave as their natures indicate they should, metamorphosis occurs. In other words, the Chewong may think of all the animate beings in the forest in a unifying fashion, but at the same time they realize that each species is different, and each has a different point of view from the other. The composite world may have common behavioral standards, but at the same time the people that live here have many different natures. In sum, the moral, behavioral rule is what matters to the Chewong. The universality of that value underscores the validity of their belief.

Rules for Proper Behavior

The next question is: how do they enforce their rules? Shortly before Signe Howell arrived at a Chewong camp in 1977, a violent thunderstorm occurred one evening, bringing lightning, thunder and rain. Several families were spending the night sleeping out in a temporary shelter when a huge tree fell over directly onto them. Three people were killed outright, two others were badly injured, and others had minor injuries. Howell arrived shortly after the tragedy had occurred and of course expressed her sympathies. But the Chewong dismissed her thought that it was bad luck for them—they had no conceptions of good or bad fortune. Instead, they felt that the tree had fallen on them that night because of moral errors that some of the people had made earlier that same evening. Several had laughed at some millipedes that had happened into their lean-to. Laughing at living things is strongly prohibited in their society, a sanction that they call *talaiden*. They had broken rules in their belief system so the camp had been severely punished for their infraction.³

The explanation was that Tanko, the thunder spirit who lives in the sky above, and Original Snake, who lives in the sea below the earth, decided to inflict their punishment—the heavy rain storm—on the rule-breakers. The Chewong were convinced that their own actions had brought about the tragedy. The fact that some of the people who had been injured were not, themselves, involved in teasing the millipedes was really not relevant. *Talaiden* rules have wide applicability: laughing at animals may endanger a whole community.

For the Chewong live in an environment in which most sentient beings, including humans and spirits, exist in the same moral universe, all following

³ Howell, Signe. 2012. Knowledge, Morality, and Causality in a 'Luckless' Society: The Case of the Chewong in the Malaysian Rain Forest. *Social Analysis* 56(1), Spring: 133-147.

the same cosmic rules that maintain proper order and social behavior. Correct knowledge of those rules of proper conduct is imperative so that all can live harmoniously together in the forest. All men and women are thought to have full knowledge of the basic rules. The Chewong do not make value judgments on individual achievements or lack thereof. Actions or personal qualities that are highly desirable, or those that are undesirable, are not judged. In fact, the abilities or achievements of individuals are ignored. While individual attributes may be recognized, people do not make much of them. Success or lack of success are dismissed as irrelevant. If Howell commented on someone being a good hunter, the person she was talking to would correct her by saying that all hunters are good.

Another important rule that guides Chewong behavior is the *punén* rule. *Punén* requires anyone bringing food into a settlement or camp to share it with everyone present. If someone else learns that there is food in the camp that has not been properly shared, he or she might experience an extreme, and dangerous, feeling of unfulfilled desire. The danger is that the envious person could fall seriously ill due to that desire—and that illness would be the fault of the stingy individual. A *séance* would then be conducted by an experienced shaman which might help retrieve the soul (*ru-wai*) of the ill person, the one who has been so distressed by the lack of sharing. But if the shaman is unsuccessful and the sick person dies, the stingy person will be responsible for the death. Thus, the Chewong place extraordinary sanctions on anyone who contradicts the fundamental social need to share forest foods.

The Chewong have many other intricate rules governing their behavior in addition to *talaiden* and *punén*. There are many other dos and don'ts, taboos that proscribe all sorts of activities, rules that must be followed: the way knots must be tied in a carrying basket; the manner in which beams are fastened together in the rafters of a house; the way people are forbidden from whistling in the forest; the fact that the afterbirth of a newborn baby must be wrapped in a certain leaf and placed in the top of a particular tree.

Their rules may seem to be heavy, but they have no institutionalized ways of maintaining the social order—no police force to keep the peace, no concrete way to restrain bad behaviors. Their rules accomplish that for them, and yet they provide maximum freedom for them within the context of their life, which is still based, at least in part, on hunting, fishing, and gathering in the forest. Their rules, their practices, constitute their cosmological knowledge, and help them maintain their highly peaceful society.

Not surprisingly, there is no sense of social status or hierarchy in Chewong society. Peaceful co-existence is not only highly-prized, it is lived. Humans, however, may not institute punishments for antisocial acts—the spirits, the ones that are offended by acts that break the rules, punish offenders.⁴ The Chewong language lacks words for aggression, war, crimes, quarrels, fights, or punishment. When confronted with aggressiveness or threats, they immediately flee. One man was accused—he claimed falsely—of stealing by a neighboring Chinese farmer, who threatened to beat him. The Chewong family immediately packed what they could, left under cover of darkness, and did not come back. Another man, who was threatened by a Malay soldier, fled with his family to a remote mountain, and after 10 years he was still afraid to return. The Chewong apparently never quarrel, show anger, or display emotion. They do gossip, but more to pass information along than to condemn others.⁵

Furthermore, the Chewong completely lack a sense of rivalry or competitiveness. While the tasks they perform together are few, and some people are naturally better able to do their jobs than others, no one singles out one individual's greater ability. Hunters do not compete in the amount of meat they can bring in, and as with all other activities, no one comments on the abilities of selected individuals. Children do not include any competitiveness in their games. When they spin tops, they leave out the competition that characterizes the Malay top spinning game. They do not have races. But while the Chewong do not compete, they also don't help one another, since they prefer to not be involved with each other's work.

The Chewong Family

The Chewong recognize that men are physically more adept at tasks requiring greater strength, and of course women at child bearing and nursing. But they ascribe no special status to any of the distinct male or female roles. Hunting carries no more prestige or value than cooking, planting, gathering, or child-care. The married couple cooperate closely in their economic activities: While the wife may have primary responsibility for the fields, the husband frequently helps. If she is incapacitated, he will do all of

⁴ Howell, Signe. 2012. Knowledge, Morality, and Causality in a 'Luckless' Society: The Case of the Chewong in the Malaysian Rain Forest. *Social Analysis* 56(1), Spring: p.139.

⁵ Howell, Signe. 1984. *Society and Cosmos: Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

her chores. Likewise, women may help with hunting and they normally fish with their husbands.⁶

Behavior of the parents during pregnancy is critical for the development of the fetus: a father who failed to follow a food taboo was blamed for the fact that his child was born with club feet. The fetus, however, is able to see what is happening around the mother, so she must be careful, for instance, not to eat something she has gathered and break the *punen* rule which requires everyone to share food from the forest. The unborn child might see her do it and decide to delay its birth to avoid a stingy mother.⁷

Children are not referred to by gender-specific pronouns, and the names of people can be used for either males or females. When the children grow older, they are recognized to be men or women, though both sexes work together with very flexible roles attached to their tasks. The fact that only the women can bear children and nurse them prompts the men to take on more of the hunting and heavy work, as mentioned already, but no value judgments are assigned to either sex or their respective behaviors.

Small children have to be protected from a variety of dangers that threaten them from the superhuman beings while they are young: there are foods they can't eat, their hair and nail clippings must be protected, they must not bathe in the river, and they must not roam about at dawn or dusk. When they reach about age seven, the children begin a gradual shift from the constant care and protection by their parents to an adolescent life with their peers of the same sex. Adolescence is a time of active learning, though no one teaches them anything. The society just assumes that the young men and women will learn the skills of adults by the time they are grown. Individual achievements are ignored by everyone and personal proficiency is not remarked upon. The important thing for the Chewong is the continuation of their society, not individual gratification.

Children are not encouraged to develop faster than they wish to, they are not taught skills; adults have no idea at what age a child should be able to perform any particular motor skill, and they never discuss the progress of a child. The characteristics of a child are those with which it is born. The Chewong feel that timidity and fearfulness are inherent characteristics of

⁶ Howell, Signe. 1984. *Society and Cosmos: Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Howell, Signe. 1988. "From Child to Human: Chewong Concepts of Self." In *Acquiring Culture: Cross Cultural Studies in Child Development*, edited by Gustav Jahoda and I. M. Lewis, 147-168. London: Croom Helm.

people: they constantly reinforce their fear of the Malay people, tigers, snakes, soldiers, and strangers with one another and with their children. Their lack of leaders is due to the rules of their culture—all foods are shared, emotions are suppressed, aggressive behavior is squelched, and everyone is viewed as equal.

Beyond the family, the Chewong have no political organization, no leaders, and no system of authority. Group ideas of proper behavior are known by all, and someone who transgresses the rules—such as one old man who married too young a girl—has to move away to avoid the disapproval of the group. The group has no formal sanctions, punishments, or headmen to pass judgement. They do have to have someone with whom the outsiders, the Malay people and the government, can deal, though the position of spokesperson is not sought after. Older people, by virtue of their greater experience, are respected, but they have no particular authority.⁸

Intersections: Preserving Peacefulness in Changing Times

One of the fundamental questions anyone investigating the peaceful societies' phenomenon needs to ask is, how well are they able to maintain their peacefulness in the face of global economic, technological, cultural and social changes? For changes are an endemic condition in our lives as humans. As individuals, we obviously change constantly—sometimes not all for the better as we age, despite the comforting propaganda from AARP. But if life as an individual is filled with change, it is even more so a characteristic of human societies. Even the Sentinelese, the inhabitants of North Sentinel Island in the Andaman Islands of India, famed for being one of the world's pre-eminent warlike societies—they still shoot their arrows at any trespassers, such as an American missionary in November 2018—presumably still have changes to cope with. Of course they won't let any outsiders near to find out for sure.⁹

Adapting to changes caused by internal and external forces is an important concern for scholarship about large modern states. Take, for instance, a memorable journal article by Erik Gartzke from 2009 that analyzes the ways the United States has, or at least the ways it should be, managing its international relationships in the face of growing global changes in com-

⁸ Howell, Signe. 1984. *Society and Cosmos: Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

⁹⁹ "Sentinelese." *The Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentinelese>

petition and the increasing loss of American predominance in world markets and international affairs.¹⁰

One of Gartzke's major arguments is that, no matter how the world power dynamics will evolve, with the U.S. gradually losing its global hegemony, the most important consideration for the issue of war and peace is the way the new systems evolve, not the actual results of the changes. The ways societies adapt to changes are critical—greater amounts of confusion related to power transitions are more likely to lead to major power wars, the scholar argues. For “change breeds uncertainty,” he writes (p.374). He goes on to point out that a consensus among nations about the relative balances of power helps to maintain the peace, while transitions in power structures have been associated with major wars throughout history. In other words, change may be inevitable, but it can be dicey. It should be accepted, but handled carefully if we want to foster peaceful world conditions.

The question this raises, once again, is how well have the peaceful societies been handling the changes that may seem to be overwhelming for many of them? Some of the best answers are suggested by the Chewong, who still avoid anger, violence and competition, and who continue to cherish the nonviolent interactions of their egalitarian society despite the many challenges that confront them. They continue to maintain their mostly peaceful society, adapting to changes as best they can. The story of their adaptations to modernity has many complexities, some of which can be mentioned here, but the challenges faced by the Chewong do help put the changes that the U.S. faces—how to more effectively develop our peacefulness in a changing world—into better perspective.¹¹

¹⁰ Gartzke, Erik. 2009. “Power Shuffle: Will the Coming Transition Be Peaceful?” *Current History* 108(721), November: 374-380.

¹¹ Since her first period of fieldwork with the Chewong beginning in 1977, Signe Howell has returned many times to their community. Four different articles by her provide the information used in this section: Howell, Signe. 2015. “Continuity through Change: Three Decades of Engaging with Chewong: Some Issues Raised by Multitemporal Fieldwork.” In *Malaysia's Original People: Past, Present and Future of the Orang Asli*, edited by Kirk Endicott, p.57-78. Singapore: NUS Press; Howell, Signe. 2012. “Cumulative Understandings: Experiences from the Study of Two Southeast Asian Societies.” In *Returns to the Field: Multitemporal Research and Contemporary Anthropology*, Ed. Signe Howell and Aud Talle, p. 153-179. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Howell, Signe. 2011. “The Uneasy Move from Hunting, Gathering and Shifting Cultivation to Settled Agriculture: The Case of the Chewong (Malaysia).” In *Why Cultivate? Anthropological and Archaeological Approaches to Forag-*

Starting in the 1980s, the Malaysian government promoted the construction of new roads and logging in some of the nearby forests and began pressuring the Chewong to settle into permanent villages. They were urged to grow crops. Government agents provided them with housing and fruit trees. Out of fear of the power of the agents, many Chewong attempted to do as they were told. But some of them soon abandoned the fruit trees and houses and returned to the forests in which they felt more comfortable.

Nonetheless, by 2010 about 100 residents were more or less permanently settled into a new community called the Gateway Village, though it was called “Kampung Sungai Enggang” in a news story from October 2018.¹² They grew foods in the same fields, year after year, though more for sale to outsiders than for their own use. The people have been slowly entering the money economy, and some are energetically accumulating cash and goods, consuming in some cases more than their peers. While many Chewong go into the forest frequently for foods and other produce, others have completely abandoned the forest-based economy in pursuit of consumption.

They also have been harvesting forest products that they sell to traders who have consumer goods for sale. Such economic incentives have quickly produced changes in their social structures. They have access to some money now so they can participate in the consumer economy, but they are ambivalent about completely assimilating into it and the values it represents. Many acquiesce, though some changes can be detected. They are yielding to the pressures of the larger society, and they are fascinated with consumer goods. Yet they still resist.

In some ways, the Chewong retain their older values. They thought of themselves, in 1977, as gatherers and hunters and to some extent middle aged and older adults still do. Most still accept their animistic religious beliefs, in which they interact on a daily basis with non-human, conscious beings in the forest whose rules must be followed carefully. Any failures to follow those rules could result in mishaps or illnesses. In effect, their social

ing-Farming Transitions in Southeast Asia, Edited by Graeme Barker and Monica Janowski, p.95-104. Cambridge, UK: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge; Howell, Signe. 2011. “Sources of Sociality in a Cosmological Frame: Chewong, Peninsular Malaysia.” In *Anarchic Solidarity: Autonomy, Equality, and Fellowship in Southeast Asia*, Edited by Thomas Gibson and Kenneth Sillander, p.40-61. New Haven, CT: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph 60.

¹² “Big-hearted Gesture.” *The Sun Daily*, October 26, 2018: <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/big-hearted-gesture-HUARCH586711>

world still encompasses their spiritual surroundings—the forest spirits are animated beings to them.

The Gateway Village where some of them now live was created for them by the government just outside the Krau Wildlife Reserve, where they have lived for centuries. It is located in the Titiwangsa mountain range of Pahang State, in the central section of the Malay Peninsula. At first, the government provided only wooden houses for the Chewong, but now they live in brick homes with piped in water and electricity.

Another development that has had an impact on the Chewong has been the establishment of the National Elephant Conservation Centre, Kuala Gandah, right next to the Gateway Village. Wild and orphaned elephants have been brought there since the late 1980s and it has become a major Malaysian tourist destination, attracting, in 2009, about 150,000 visitors. A few Chewong men have been hired to work at the facility.

The people cultivate primarily in order to sell, not to eat. But several Chewong families remain in the forest, only rarely appearing in the village when a family member arrives to sell a forest product. While they clearly have a desire for consumer goods, many have not made a hard and fast choice about staying in the forest permanently or living in the village all the time. They have a fluid pattern in their accommodations to modernization.

They will work hard to raise money to purchase rice, or to afford the costs of a wedding. But unless they have specific items they want to buy, they rarely save for long-term goals, much less for unforeseen circumstances. Their attitudes are a hold-over from their hunting and gathering heritage. When they need something, they will get up, go out, and work for it. As a result, the process of developing agricultural crops that require long-term planning and harvesting is still not attractive to them.

One of the aspects of life that has not changed for the Chewong is their timid, often fearful relationships with outsiders, particularly the Malays and the Chinese. Their reactions are based on centuries of slave raiding and, since the 1900s, of being exploited by outsiders. When they are cheated or mistreated by outside merchants and government authorities, the Chewong react as they always have— by withdrawing from confrontations.

To some extent, however, the cash economy is prompting changes for the Chewong. For one thing, they are spending an increasing amount of time on activities that generate cash. When they need more rice, or they need to make a payment on a motorbike, they may search in the forest for products that they can gather and sell. They are starting to cultivate rubber plantations—investing in their own future consumption.

Another change is the way they handle *punen*, the Chewong abhorrence for eating alone, for not sharing available food. To not share foods has always been a highly condemned, supremely anti-social act. All foods killed or gathered, according to *punen* rules, are carefully shared. Sharing is—or used to be—a foundational value for people living in a foraging economy. To not share properly might lead to condemnation by everyone, as well as attacks by the spirits. But the careful rules that prescribed how, when, and what to share have been eroding due to the availability of money and the tendency of people to purchase foods with their own earnings. People still invoke the *punen* rules, but more selectively now. Food that is purchased is often not included within the rules, but the situation is ambiguous. People who live in the forest will still share foods that they buy, but those who live in the permanent village will not. Purchased consumer goods, such as motorbikes, clothing, and electronic devices, are clearly owned individually. This contemporary process, of not sharing widely, still makes the Chewong uncomfortable.

Hunters continue to kill game in the forest, and they will still share meat with close family members in the gateway village. If a large animal such as a pig were brought into the village, the meat would be butchered, cut into small portions, and shared completely. They are fanatical about sharing their tobacco with others in a group gathering. When they get together, without outsiders present, they roll cigarettes and pass them around, signifying with their sharing that they all belong to a unique group of people—us, Chewong. The process of sharing signifies belonging.

But they often will not publicly display the carcasses as they used to, and they may try to withhold information from others about their hunting successes. However, when game killed in the rainforest is consumed in forest settlements, it will still be shared according to traditional rules. But even while people are living in those forest settlements, the men are also spending time collecting minor forest products for sale. The goods subsequently bought at the store will be retained for family use and not shared.

These changes are fracturing their earlier commitments to equality. Men are earning more money than women, so they are becoming the decision-makers for their families. They also spend excess money on the goods that they want for themselves—televisions, clothing, motorbikes, and such. Instead of a sense of equality, with men and women both bringing in foods from their work with their blowpipes and digging sticks, men are sometimes now the sole breadwinners, able, from their earnings, to buy all the food and goods the family needs. As one might expect, there are now some reports of violence, young men against their wives.

The outsiders, the store owners and traders, of course notice the men who are the more successful wage earners and give them increased attention, thus creating additional inequalities in Chewong society. However, counterbalancing this trend, the Chewong are not engaged in the long term acquisition of wealth, which helps them preserve their deeply-engrained ideology of equality.

In the Gateway Village, while the men are working, at least at times, for money, the women are mostly confined to childcare and cooking. Nothing prevents them from cultivating crops but they don't seem to be doing that. Instead, they are becoming more passive in their settled lives. They are increasingly sitting about drinking beverages and eating cookies. Female obesity is a recent phenomenon.

Inequalities in wealth are appearing to exacerbate social tensions. However, someone who has earned a lot of money does not gain a higher social status. The individual earns, instead, more social uncertainty and ambivalence. Young people, furthermore, as they gain some education, are losing the traditional knowledge of their parents. They are not retelling their myths as much as they used to. Due to frequent interactions with outsiders, the Chewong are beginning to lose their timidity.

The Chewong may feel pressured by the Malaysian authorities to live in the settled village, but they are not helpless victims of modernization. They are fascinated by consumer goods, happy to have easily purchased foods, and to some extent willing to allow their society to change. But the changes do not always go just one way. When *Signe Howell* visited in 1991, she noticed that many Chewong had moved into the Gateway Village and were using purchased TVs and motorbikes. They seemed increasingly addicted to the consumer lifestyle. On her next visit in 1994, she quickly realized that many had returned to the forest and the Gateway Village was mostly abandoned.

The reason, the people told her, was that they disliked being so close to all the outsiders. They also told her how they missed the forest foods and the wild game. The women appeared as if they were enjoying their active lives in the forest more than they had the passive lifestyle of the village. But they were weighing the advantages of both. Some seemed to prefer the forest, others the village, and still others moved for short periods between the two. The continuing existence of the forest is only possible because their village is next to the game preserve, which protects it from being logged. The Chewong thus continue to have the choice between the forest life, with its peaceful sharing and equality, and the gateway village, where sharing is more restrained but consumer goods are more easily available.

Howell also noticed a number of Chewong adults and children converting to Islam in 2002, but during her visit a few years later she could not spot any traces of it. The missionaries had left the village so the people went back to their old ways. Christian evangelists have been more successful since they keep coming back to the village every month to conduct a church service and to provide food and clothing to those who have converted. However, Howell observed that the converts did not have a very deep understanding of Christianity.

While she has witnessed many changes among the Chewong due to the influences of the larger society, Howell doubts that the gloomy scenarios proposed by some social scientists for the end of hunter-gatherer societies will necessarily apply to the Chewong. They will not inevitably be subjected to increased poverty, disempowerment, and acculturation due to modernization. The Chewong demonstrate that they have complex motivations in the choices they make and it is difficult to predict how they will react to new situations that develop. They make their own decisions as best they can.

In essence, not all of the developments among the Chewong are downbeat. The changes are not all dire. According to Howell, the Chewong still have no need for, or belief in, leaders. They still have a strong egalitarian ethos, a communitarian spirit, and no desire for a political structure. To a considerable extent, while they strive to cope with change, their society is still based on the forest and on their peaceful traditions.

Contrasts between the American society and that of the Chewong can thus go beyond the obvious one of size, complexity, and relationships to violence. Americans might take some lessons from the Chewong. The people in this small Orang Asli society are willing to change and, perhaps more significantly, are able to critique their long-held values. Are Americans? Perhaps, but whether they will make compromises between modernity and peace as well as the Chewong appear to have done is not so clear.

The Chewong are divided between fans of modernization and believers in their traditional ways. They seem able to peacefully assimilate new ways of doing things, but then react and reject the ones that seem too disruptive to their traditions, which many of them still cherish—at least those traditions that preserve nonviolence. Comparably, many Americans treasure our violent history and our current ways of reacting to violence by promoting more guns, as if violence helps prevent violence. Of course many Americans question such values, but those in the U.S. who raise such doubts about the wisdom of perpetual violence appear to have less impact on our society than the questioners among the Chewong have who want to try the new

consumer goods, or return to the forest economy, or whatever. The issue, once again, is not just that of tolerating violence throughout society, it's a question of tolerating or even welcoming changes that might add to, or diminish, such violence. The Chewong seem to be addressing these questions related to changes in their society better than Americans are.

Another interesting comparison between the Chewong and the Americans is the fact that the various accounts frequently refer to the practice of equality among the Chewong and their corresponding lack of leaders. It appears as if the informal leadership among the people may be a significant factor for strengthening their attempts to preserve their traditional ways. There are also some intriguing parallels between the Chewong approaches and the theoretical analysis of achieving social change through nonviolent means by the eminent American peace scholar Gene Sharp, who died at the age of 90 in 2018.

In his 1973 path-breaking examination of the politics of nonviolent action, Gene Sharp identifies three different ways that major social and political changes can be brought about nonviolently despite the opposition of established forces of repression, such as government agencies. The first mechanism of change is conversion—the people mounting the nonviolent action attempt to win their struggle for reform through appeals to “love,” through fellowship with the repressor, through demonstrations of good will toward the oppressors, and so on. The second mechanism is accommodation, where the government or other oppressing organization grants the demands of the actionists without really accepting the spirit of what they are demanding. The third is nonviolent coercion, when the opponents of the action are neither converted nor are they even willing to accommodate their demands, but the nonviolent protesters are still able to achieve their ends using only nonviolent coercion.

Sharp concludes that political and social changes won through those processes of nonviolent actions can last much longer than improvements achieved by violent means or, indeed, much longer even than those won without any struggles. Sharp also argues that the leadership of nonviolent actions in a society such as that of the U.S. works best when it takes place in a shared form, such as through leadership committees. This is particularly true when no one leader obviously stands out above the rest, or no one is clearly prepared to assume a leadership position. A leadership committee, in the western experience, wouldn't work well if it included members who were unable to listen well, he points out, or who were arrogant, unstable,

unreasonably opinionated, and basically unable to work with others.¹³ It sounds as if the Chewong approaches would resonate with the members of nonviolent movements in the rest of the world. And similarly, the Chewong would find Sharp to be a kindred soul if his three volumes were to be made available to them. Peace activists treasure the scholarship of Sharp,¹⁴ but they might supplement it with the experiences of the Chewong.

¹³ Sharp, Gene. 1973. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part One: Power and Struggle; Part Two: The Methods of Nonviolent Action; Part Three: The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston: Porter Sargent.

¹⁴ One of the numerous obituaries of Gene Sharp that praised his contributions: Johansen, Jørgen. "Gene Sharp Has Died and the World Has Lost a Global Educator." *The Transnational*, January 30, 2018: <https://transnational.live/2018/01/30/gene-sharp-has-died-and-the-world-has-lost-a-global-educator/>

10. The Paliyans Redefine Nonviolence

The Foundations of Paliyan Peacefulness

A Paliyan mother struck her ten-year old boy one morning three times on his backside. He had taken some food that belonged to his aunt. Another unrelated woman walked in, took the child by the hand, and led him to her house to spend the rest of the day with her and her own children. While the woman's slaps did not leave any marks on the kid, her guests, including anthropologist Peter Gardner, all watched. No one commented on what they had just witnessed, but moments after her flash of anger, the woman burst into tears over what had happened and expressed her remorse on having violently hit another human being. Gardner reflected that the Paliyans believe the rights of everyone, including small children, must be respected. It is an important element in their peacefulness.¹

Nearly 5,000 Paliyans live in the forested hills and nearby villages of Tamil Nadu state in southern India. They are famous in the literature of anthropology as a forest-based hunting and gathering society with a firm commitment to nonviolence. But over the last half-century since Gardner first started doing fieldwork among them, they have been changing. While a few of the changes might be expected—some of them now use the social media—the essentials of their society, their peaceful approaches to human encounters, seem to be strengthening.

The Paliyan passion for maintaining a peaceful society illustrates the possibilities that such commitments can bring to people; they provide a rich

¹ The story is told in Gardner, Peter M. 1972. "The Paliyans." In *Hunters and Gatherers Today: A Socioeconomic Study of Eleven Such Cultures in the Twentieth Century*, edited by M. G. Bicchieri, 404-447. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston and retold with more details in Gardner, Peter M. *Journeys to the Edge: In the Footsteps of an Anthropologist*. 2006. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

display of the many ways that nonviolence can play out. And the changes accepted by them illustrate the powerful hold that their basic beliefs have on their ways of adapting to outside, shifting conditions. They overcome stressful situations in ways that appear to strengthen their society, despite the changing world around them. They offer a model for other, arguably less peaceful, societies to consider emulating.

But first, the basics. The essential conditions of the traditional Paliyan society and approaches to nonviolence are easy to construct from a look at Gardner's publications.² Paliyans who thrive at the forested edges of the South India plains may either live in villages among their Tamil neighbors or they may live in the depths of the forest. Those living among the Tamils may be employed in contract labor, though some continue to gather products in the forest. The Tamils are the majority people of Tamil Nadu. Paliyans living in proximity to their Tamil neighbors will adopt some of their practices, such as Hindu wedding festivals, while the ones living in the depths of the forests will continue with their own customs. The forest Paliyans are nomadic, sleeping in rock shelters or simple huts among the trees and they may move daily or a few times per year. In general, the Paliyans retreat from the edge of the Tamil world and move into the forests whenever they feel threatened by violence.³

When the Paliyans traditionally moved back into the forest to avoid a conflict, they felt that the threatening situation would eventually pass and they could move back out to the border zone. Their return was tentative and gradual in nature, based on their sense of the potential threats in the border situation. Some of the Paliyan villages in the plains have been stable for centuries, while it appears as if many of the forest Paliyans may live relatively briefly in that environment—one to two decades at the most.

The area where the Paliyans and the Tamils meet can best be referred to as a "frontier zone." The Paliyans either live in the forest, in the plains, or in the frontier itself. All of the Paliyans can be described as bi-cultural—that is, they are able to live in both their own culture and that of the Tamils. They have two different sets of expectations and understandings which allow them

² Readers who are intrigued by the Paliyans should consult Gardner's book—*Bicultural Versatility as a Frontier Adaptation among Paliyan Foragers of South India*. 2000, Lewiston: Mellen—or his numerous articles for a more thorough portrayal of their foods, employment, social organization, medical knowledge, religious beliefs, and so on.

³ Gardner, Peter M. 1985. "Bicultural Oscillation as a Long-Term Adaptation to Cultural Frontiers: Cases and Questions." *Human Ecology* 13(December): 411-432.

to live in either environment. They view their own cultural environment as moral, proper and correct—as real culture. In contrast, they view the Tamil way of life as profitable and rewarding. They don't see themselves as living in two cultures since that might become threatening; they live in one culture, but they feel they are smart to adapt to the other way of life.

There are several factors in the Paliyan culture that affect their decision-making process as to where to live. They are a very atomistic, anarchistic society, with each individual making his or her own decisions. They do not value consensus; they place no value on authority or on specialists who might possess specialized knowledge; they do not value promises of contracts; and they are highly egalitarian between the sexes and between persons of differing ages in terms of major decisions such as moving to another location. Young people may move to be near elders, but the reverse is as often the case; families may move as often to be near the wife's family as the husband's.

The Paliyans maintain a humble, self-effacing manner in their contacts with outsiders in their frontier settlements. Because of their mannerisms, they are sometimes ridiculed and censured by the neighboring Tamil peoples, who may think that they are offering guidance to the Paliyans. The latter, however, sometimes view Tamil behavior toward them as humiliating attacks.

How do—or to return to the past tense, how did—those values play out in practice? Gardner noted that when a contractor killed three Paliyans in one community, the remaining villagers immediately left for the forest. Five years later, as they were slowly moving back toward the frontier zone, they were quite willing to be interviewed on other subjects by the anthropologist but they would still not discuss the violent incident. They were very quick to leave if they perceived a threatening situation was developing. One group suddenly abandoned their village when Gardner, dressed in what looked like khaki clothing, appeared. He may have reminded them of an incident of police brutality a few weeks before. One family, noticing the man dressed in threatening looking clothing, suddenly gathered its few belongings and left. The rest of the villagers, seeing this, followed suit as if a general alarm had been sounded.

Gardner emphasized in one of his articles⁴ that the Paliyans are highly individualistic, neither cooperating very much nor competing at all. Any behavior that hampers the autonomy of an individual, such as cooperation or competition, lowers one's status. Their egalitarian ideal thus prohibits both coop-

⁴ Gardner, Peter M. 1972. "The Paliyans." In *Hunters and Gatherers Today: A Socio-economic Study of Eleven Such Cultures in the Twentieth Century*, edited by M. G. Bicchieri, 404-447. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

eration and competition. They prohibit competition because they feel it is based on desires for superiority, control, and rivalry. It might promote violence. Gardner observed them play a game comparable to prisoner's base, though the game had no competition or cooperation in it. No one caught anyone else; people were hardly interested in the performance of others; and the game mostly resembled a ballet of prima donnas. They did not like to be set off above their peers and minimized any social or economic differences.

The Importance of Respect

One of the most important aspects of the Paliyan peaceful social structure is their commitment to respect, described most effectively in an article by Gardner in the year 2000.⁵ The anthropologist explored several themes in that piece, including a comparison of the actual incidents of conflict and violence within two different Paliyan communities.

The Paliyans of the one community have been settled agriculturalists for 150 years and have had a lot of time to be exposed to the more violent ways of their Tamil neighbors. The other community, Shenbagathoppu, is more recently settled and the people are oriented more toward a forest-based economy. Gardner examined attitudes toward violence and nonviolence in the two villages and he reviewed the actual acts of disrespect and conflict that he observed.

He pointed out that authority structures in the two communities do not exist. An appropriate model for an authority structure in any Paliyan community would be a segmented worm rather than a pyramid—no one would be above anyone else. In fact, anything that interfered with the autonomy of other Paliyans would be considered disrespectful. Behavior that indicated subordination might impinge on the autonomy of others just as much as behavior that showed superiority. Furthermore, they denied that they, as individuals, had any ability that others were lacking. They carried this idea to an extreme: they had trouble even admitting the possibility of individual differences or of individuals being able to achieve more than others. A belief in absolute equality is apparently a corollary to their sense of mutual respect.

They were not perfect, of course. The anthropologist noted incidents of disrespect in both the forest-based and the agricultural communities. Jealous spouses accused one another; angry mothers swatted at their children;

⁵ Gardner, Peter M. 2000. "Respect and Nonviolence among Recently Sedentary Paliyan Foragers." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6 (June): 215-236.

a young man stole some things and fled the community for a couple weeks. On a different occasion, someone hurt the tender feelings of another with a slight jest. But the essential point was that the people handled these conflicts with a minimum of violence.

While the long-settled agricultural community experienced somewhat more severe instances of aggressive behavior than the forest Paliyans, the incidents of violent acts by the agriculturalists were nonetheless quite mild. The few blows exchanged in the agricultural village were quite light. But even those few outbursts of violence were shocking to the Paliyans, despite the fact that no one was bruised or injured. Neither Paliyan community, in fact, experienced violence because of sexual jealousy. The agricultural Paliyans may not be as carefully controlled as the forest group, but by any reasonable standard they could not be considered violent. Slightly less peaceful, perhaps.

Gardner found that the forest Paliyans resorted to separation to restore the peace more frequently than the agriculturalists. And both groups seemed to be affected by any acts of violence displayed by Tamils in their midst. A violent Tamil teacher who repeatedly kicked and cursed a dog in the forest village was imitated by the Paliyan school children the rest of the day.

Multiple factors have helped protect the Paliyans from increasing levels of violence when they settle into permanent villages. Their firm belief in respect, their habit of self-restraint, their penchant for using diplomacy and wit to diffuse tense situations, their practice of retreating from conflict, and their belief in avoiding the divisiveness of prestige all apparently helped prevent conflicts from escalating.

The anthropologist concluded that there may be a possibility of change among the settled Paliyans, especially in the agricultural village, since their children sometimes witness their own very strong values of respectful harmony being violated. The Paliyan children might begin to adopt the examples of disrespectful behavior, of acting out violence as their Tamil neighbors do, instead of following the respectful principles of their own culture. But even though there is evidence in the agricultural village that traditional values are weakening, the beliefs and practices that help keep the Paliyan communities peaceful are still mostly operational, Gardner argued.

Avoiding and Resolving Conflicts

Gardner examined the ways the Paliyans actually maintained order and

resolved conflicts. In 1972, he maintained⁶ that they used five different social and personal mechanisms. If one didn't work, they turned to the next. The first mechanism was self-restraint: they repressed feelings of anger and expressions of hostile feelings. In order to do that, they avoided consuming alcohol, which they felt would make them aggressive. They also sought to dissipate anger by applying to their foreheads the blossoms of *sirupani pu*, or "laughing flower." The second mechanism was to redirect any feelings of aggression through dreams, fantasies, and violent films. A third mechanism they sometimes used when conflict situations arose was that a headman would intervene and attempt to conciliate through joking or soothing. If that failed, the fourth approach was for the parties to a dispute to separate. A grandparent or other relative might take a child if a parent became angry, and spouses separated when they quarreled. A whole community would depart if a dispute occurred with another. At each level, it was the injured person or group which felt the obligation to withdraw, to avoid the danger of retaliation. The fifth mechanism was supernatural—they feared the revenge that might be generated through sorcery. That fear prompted circumspect behavior.

However, in an article published in 2013,⁷ he described their techniques for avoiding and resolving conflicts somewhat differently. While maintaining respect for others is important, conflicts arise anyway. One important technique they use for resolving conflicts is self-restraint, especially the practice of separation. When individuals are feeling disrespected by others, they will usually pull back and quietly separate from any threatening trouble. They will head out into the forest or the hills for a short time—or perhaps for several years, as the situation may seem to warrant.

A second technique for resolving conflicts is silence—people will avoid discussing offensive activities, injuries, or threats. Furthermore, they will refrain from making overt criticisms, from offering suggestions, or from uttering any form of ridicule, all of which may be taken as domineering behaviors. A Paliyan person who is threatened will respond without making verbal replies or physical gestures. The sight of a Paliyan simply walking away from a group might be the only signal one would get that the individual is avoiding trouble.

⁶ Gardner, Peter M. 1972. "The Paliyans." In *Hunters and Gatherers Today: A Socio-economic Study of Eleven Such Cultures in the Twentieth Century*, edited by M. G. Bicchieri, 404-447. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

⁷ Gardner, Peter M. 2013. "South Indian Foragers' Conflict Management in Comparative Perspective." In *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*, Ed. Douglas P. Fry, 297-314. New York: Oxford University Press.

A third technique is for people to simply tolerate irregular behavior by others. Gardner described how an elderly Paliyan man had to cope with his young wife bringing home a still younger lover. Making it clear that the new situation was not his business, and showing an unusual tolerance and forbearance, the man simply said “the gods will get them (p.305).” The Paliyans also have conciliators who help resolve conflicts. Conciliators are informal volunteers, people who are skilled in helping others get past difficult situations. They typically lack any authority, though outsiders have often unjustifiably ascribed powers of leadership to them.

Another strategy, one that has rarely been used, has been to convene community meetings to deal with serious conflicts. Gardner suggested that this approach is new to the peaceful societies of southern India. It may be derived from the councils of elders held in many other Indian communities. He watched one in operation seeking to resolve a Paliyan dispute in 2001. The advantage of the public meeting was that the parties to the dispute were able to weigh their options and consider the value of public opinion about the conflict. The anthropologist decided that, while it is a new technique for the Paliyans, it certainly is in keeping with their more traditional approaches to resolving disputes.

Confronting Injustices Peacefully and Making Changes

In terms of the vast panorama of India, the Paliyans constitute a tiny fraction of the 100 million Adivasi (tribal) people living on the subcontinent. But during the latter part of July, 2016, several of India’s major papers published news stories about them—the bad treatment they endure, the trials they suffer from, and their search for justice. The stories pointed out the effectiveness of their beliefs in nonviolence yet the ways their traditions are changing due to pressures from the dominating Tamil people. Two of them reported on the allegations and the actions by officials in response to complaints by a group of Paliyan women. The thing that really got to the aggrieved Paliyans was that a forestry official had subjected some Paliyan women to a humiliating strip search, in public, while they were walking back from gathering in a forest.⁸

⁸ “Tribal women accuse forest officials of putting them through strip-search,” *The Hindu*, July 26, 2016: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/Tribal-women-accuse-forest-officials-of-putting-them-through-strip-search/article14509251.ece> ; “Tribal woman ‘harassed,’” *Times of India*, July 26, 2016:

According to one news story, Ms. S. Paputhai from the Paliyan colony of Kadamalaikundu, in the Theni District of Tamil Nadu, submitted a petition to the Superintendent of Police, V. Baskaran, on Monday July 25, 2016, complaining of the treatment that she and a group of members of the colony—five families in all—had received from some forestry officials. They had been collecting forest products in the mountains near the town of Cumbum on July 16 and were walking back toward their colony when they were stopped by four forestry officers. Led by a man identified as Ranger Sekar, the men seized the produce the Paliyan were carrying, including some honey, and frisked the people.

Ms. Paputhai reported, “They ordered my husband and other men to remove their shirts and dhotis in the name of checking.” But her account got worse: “Later, they forced us to remove our saris in public.” She indicated that they seized a mobile phone and Rs. 2,000 (US \$30) from the group. After all the harsh treatment, the Paliyans had to continue walking 40 km back to their homes.

The troubles between Forest Department officials and the tribal people continued. On July 17, a group of five Paliyans went to the Varushanadu forest office to protest the treatment of the women, so the officials arrested them and put them in prison in the city of Madurai. Forestry officials argued that the tribal people had been throwing stones at the Varushanadu forest office, which prompted the arrests.

The Paliyan women appealed to the Superintendent of Police plus the Collector, N. Venkatachalam, who is the highest official in the Theni District of Tamil Nadu. The Collector said that he had forwarded the complaint, requesting action against Ranger Sekar and the others, to the police in Uthamapalayam for investigation.

One of the newspapers wrote that the Paliyan woman who filed the petition on July 25 was named S. Mariammal. She alleged that forestry officials often molest and humiliate them, and they try to deny them their rights to gather produce in the forests. Over 15 Paliyan women crowded into the Office of the Superintendent of Police for Theni demanding that action be taken against the forestry officials for harassing the women. The Revenue Divisional Officer, a Ms. Jamuna, conducted an inquiry with the women two days later.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/Tribal-woman-harassed/articleshow/53390047.cms> ; “Four forest officials booked for harassing tribal women,” *The Hindu* July 29, 2016: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/Four-forest-officials-booked-for-harassing-tribal-women/article14514668.ece>

Ms. U. Vasuki, a prominent Indian politician from Chennai, the state capital, who is a leader in workers' issues at the national level, spoke to reporters about the Paliyan scandal. She said that a 13-year old girl had also been required to remove her dress, along with the women, on the pretext of frisking them. Ms. Vasuki demanded that the forestry officials be immediately arrested under the terms of the Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 and the Child Harassment Act. She said that the husbands of the women who were harassed had been arrested and remained in custody.

Finally, on Friday July 29, after the investigation was concluded, the police did decide to take action. The Deputy Superintendent of Police in Uthamapalayam, a man named Annamalai, registered criminal charges against Forest Ranger Sekar, a forester named Prince, and two other staff members.

This story allows the reader to compare the attitudes of officials in Tamil Nadu today toward the Paliyans and those reported by Peter Gardner in 1972.⁹ Gardner wrote that the Tamil people of the South India plains had an attitude of superiority toward their tribal neighbors, whom they viewed as less pure and less sophisticated than they were themselves. There had been many instances of harassment, ridicule, and even murders of the underprivileged Adivasi people. While the Tamils relied on the Paliyans as guides at their forest temples, and the Paliyans often valued the availability of products from the Tamils, those conditions did not mitigate the effects of humiliation and domination of the tribal people. The legal institutions of the plains failed to protect the Paliyans since they were affiliated at the time only peripherally with the villages where those abuses took place. The standard Paliyan manner of dealing with such abuses—withdrawal—put them under social and psychological stress.

The news reports allow comparisons to be made between the attitudes of the Paliyans a half-century ago and in July 2016. While the forest did offer them protection in the 1960s—a thorn woodland that discouraged the entry of almost everyone except themselves—their constant flight into that environment simply increased their vulnerability, decreasing the likelihood that they would seek legal redress to their problems in the villages. They thus had a polarized, we/they view of the world. When they did stay and try to adjust to the larger society, they masked their feelings with superficial behaviors that allowed them to fit in.

It is quite clear from the news reports that at least some of the Tamil authority structure is changing its ways toward the Paliyans by investigating

⁹ Gardner, Peter M. 1972.

and taking action when abuses are reported, particularly when they are reported in the nation's major news sources. And for their part, the Paliyans may continue to walk long distances to gather forest products for sale, but at least some of them are adopting the Tamil approach to handling discrimination and harassment by protesting, by filing complaints, and by contacting prominent advocates. The days when the Paliyans simply faded into the forest to avoid conflicts appear to be ending.

Other news stories published in July 2016¹⁰ described the lives of a band of Paliyans who used to live in the Sathuragiri Hills in the Western Ghats, where they lived in caves in the hills and collected tubers, fruits, and honey. They were intimately familiar with the surrounding wild lands. But they soon realized that conditions were changing so they settled in valley communities. Not all has worked well for them. Two groups of women received training in the cultivation of mushrooms and in fabricating dhoops, types of sticks used for incense in India. But the women lacked the financing necessary for building sheds that would allow them to grow the proposed mushrooms and for acquiring the machinery needed to make the herbal incense sticks.

Also, some men from the Paliyan community had applied to work at the local Sri Sundaramahalingam Temple but they had not been hired. One man complained that, despite having been trained for forestry work, their young men are not being hired. "We have at least eight youngsters who are eligible for the post of forest watchers, with class X. Though there is [a] vacancy in Virudhunagar district for the post, our youths are not considered," he said. He added, "Our men are trained to climb up and down the hard rocky terrain with much ease. But, we are not given jobs."

One news report described the educational programs that are being developed at a Paliyan settlement in the Tirunelveli and Theni districts of Tamil Nadu. They were initiated by the NGO PACR Sethuramamal Charity Trust, aided by several government agencies. One of the most significant activities of the Trust was the establishment of a hostel/school for Paliyan

¹⁰ "Tribals find it tough to make a living," *The Hindu*, July 23, 2016: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/Tribals-find-it-tough-to-make-a-living/article14504366.ece> ; "Jobs still elude Paliyar men," *The Hindu*, July 23, 2016: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/jobs-still-elude-Paliyar-men/article14504380.ece> ; "Tribal kids make a mark in education, thanks to joint efforts by govt, NGO," *The Times of India* July 26, 2016: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/Tribal-kids-make-a-mark-in-education-thanks-to-joint-efforts-by-govt-NGO/articleshow/53394260.cms>

young people. The facility opened with 69 students in 2004 and it has grown to an enrollment of 155. The coordinator of tribal welfare, a man named Murgesan, said that while progress was slow at first, the school is doing well today. "Now, they are on a par with any town or city student competing not just in studies, but in extracurricular activities like yoga, spoken English, drawing and sports," he said.

The official explained that the Paliyan parents at first resisted sending their children to the school. But the school persisted in advancing the importance and the future benefits to the Paliyans for their children getting an education, and the Paliyan community has slowly come around. The efforts to encourage schooling are paying off. Some 33 students have completed class 10 in the past 10 years. Mr. Murgesan named a couple students who are doing very well: one of several he named is pursuing a BE in computer science. He added that the school also offers "skill training on how to make herbal medicinal products, cattle feeding and mushroom cultivation."

The reporter quoted a 25-year old nurse from the Paliyan community, named S. Mahalakshmi. This individual got a BSc in nursing in 2015 and works in a hospital in Rajapalayam, Virudhunagar district. "We were separated from the society for too many generations and only now started concentrating in education, culture, family relationship, dress code and others," Mahalakshmi said.

Adaptations to Modernity

In addition to modifying the basic ways they handle conflicts and their approaches to nonviolence, the Paliyans have accepted a number of other changes in recent years. Some are having, or probably will soon have, a significant impact on their peacefulness. For instance, like people in many other traditional societies in developing countries, some of the educated people have been using the Internet to their advantage. For instance, a post on a Paliyan blog at the end of January 2012 proudly described the peaceful structures in their society, but it warned that their peacefulness, combined with their shyness, has increased their vulnerability to being exploited by corrupt outsiders.¹¹

The post argued that the Paliyans have a lot to teach "the so called 'Modern World' from their traditions." It pointed out that their hunting and gathering subsistence lifestyle is the reason that they take extraordinary

¹¹ "Collective Action for Forest Adivasi in Tamil Nadu," blog by Paliyar Adivasis Speak Out: <http://cafattn.blogspot.com/>

care to protect the forests and wildlife. They believe that everything has a right to life. Their values about nature extend to their own survival. They do not store surpluses, and furthermore, they do not even try to make a profit from them. The blogger wrote that the Paliyans “have a modest living with minimum needs, very simple and straight forward in their thought process, find no reason to acquire in abundance when there is enough for their need and they respect ecological democracy”

The blog, which had not posted anything from September 2010 until January 2012, appeared to be closely linked to a Paliyan website, the Collective Action for Forest Adivasi in Tamil Nadu (CAFAT). They both posted some of the same pictures and similar, if not identical, information in English. The authors, who remained anonymous, clearly wanted to reach out to a wide audience with their ideas and information.

The blog post described the physical features and habitat of the Paliyans. It reported that some of them still subsist in the interior forests, in huts made of sticks and grasses, rather than living in the plains in closer association with the Tamils. The ones in the plains cultivate some crops, but, the story suggested, they still did not store surpluses. Many have been forced, due to the construction of dams in their forested lands, to move into the plains and take jobs in order to survive.

A few months later, another news story reported that a different Paliyan blog had appeared.¹² The Paliyans are a “relatively non-violent peace loving innocent” tribe that once lived in the interior forests of western Tamil Nadu state, in southern India, according to the new blogger. Mr. A. Muthuvezhappan, the author of the blog, wrote that they used to be a nomadic hunting and gathering people who subsisted in the interior forests on the eastern side of the Western Ghats mountain range before they settled into stable villages near the plains people.

He wrote that the Paliyans did not wear any clothing until the early 1950s when they began to leave the forests and come in contact with the Tamil peoples of the plains. The men formerly wore their dottis before giving them to the women to use for dresses. They used to perform poojas, the Hindu worship services, quite openly, but the Hindus of the plains put a stop to that. However, the Paliyans defy them and continue to go into the forests with their families to offer their own style of poojas.

¹² “Paliyar Tribal Empowerment,” blog: <http://paliyartribal.blogspot.com/>; “Paliyans Cherish Traditions But Adapt to Modernity,” May 24, 2012.

They still worship forest deities, particularly the goddesses Vanadevadai and Ananthavalli. Muthuvezhappan indicated that they often go with their families into remote spots in the forests to offer prayers to Vanadevadai and to worship a god named Karuppan. They believe that these deities will help protect them. "Their life style is very simple and sacrosanct. They love to live with nature," Muthuvezhappan wrote.

The author decried the fact that the Paliyan lifestyle, traditional social system, and economy seemed to be doomed. They no longer did much hunting, but they still gathered minor forest products to sell. The traders, to whom they sold their forest produce, sometimes used unscrupulous business practices with them and they had little recourse. Some of the Paliyans owed money to the traders, who used the debts to dominate them and to pay them the absolute minimums.

The following year, at least one Paliyan man used the social media to the advantage of his people.¹³ Thangaraj, a 23-year old Paliyan man in Tamil Nadu, India, posted some complaints on Facebook in July 2013 about delays by government officials in dealing with problems in his community. His strategy for publicity worked.

As the only person in the Alagammalpuram Colony near the city of Madurai to have gotten some education, he was able to lead the protest. Thangaraj publicly asked, via the social medium, the District Collector, Mr. Anshul Mishra, why some basic amenities and housing had not yet been provided to the Paliyans as required by Indian law. Mr. Mishra saw the Facebook post and called a meeting at the Paliyan community so he could listen to their problems. One of their issues was their desire to have free access to the forests of the Western Ghats, their traditional mountainous home territory. The official quickly responded by telling appropriate Forest Department officials to allow the tribal people to visit the forests without further hassles.

According to G. Dhanraj, a tribal rights activist, the Paliyans also demanded tracts of land that they are supposed to be given under the provisions of the Forest Rights Act of 2006. Provisions of the law, which decree that the tribal people are entitled to concrete dwellings and good drinking water, are not being met. Furthermore, the Paliyans demanded identity cards which will help them avoid being harassed by officials.

¹³ "Tribe takes social media route," *The Hindu*, June 30, 2013: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/tribe-takes-social-media-route/article4865545.ece>

The Alagammalpuram Colony was established by the Tamil Nadu state government in 1980 to wean the Paliyans out of their nomadic foraging way of life and settle them into a permanent community. But 17 of the houses in the colony by 2013 were in dilapidated condition. Residents of the settlement collect nuts, fruits, roots, honey, and twigs from local forests and they gather grasses which they make into brooms to sell. They also work for meager wages at nearby farms and mango plantations, where they get paid mostly in rations of rice.

They work seasonally at best, and rely on rice handouts the rest of the year. Three children, siblings, all of whom were dressed in soiled, threadbare uniforms, were observed playing around a small temple. They tell a reporter that they do not have any other clothing to wear. Also, they admit they don't go to school regularly since the people in the government school are unfriendly toward them.

Nearly two years later, in March 2015, news stories provided an update about the results of Mr. Thangaraj's use of Facebook to influence officials in Tamil Nadu.¹⁴ The reports indicate that Mr. Thangaraj, who completed his 10th year of formal education, was indeed responsible for prompting action, though not as quickly as he had hoped. Unfortunately, Mr. Mishra, who quickly assured the Paliyans that he would take action to build new houses for them, was transferred before he could do anything to improve the situation. Another collector, U. Sagayam, visited the colony and promised that new houses would be built, but he too was transferred.

Nearly two years after the original complaint, the state came through and built 10 new houses in the colony, buildings that, Thangaraj said, represent a significant improvement for the people. One elderly Paliyan resident in the colony, S. Vellaichamy, expressed his particular pleasure. He told of his fright one rainy night in 2012, when it was obvious that the ceiling of his house was starting to cave in. He alerted his family but he was injured on the head while he was saving his granddaughter from the structure as it collapsed. Thanaraj praised the district government for its action.

It is clear from these news reports that at least some of the educated Paliyans are taking action to help their people in their struggles with the dominating Tamil society. No one should be romanticized, of course, but if even a few Paliyans are willing to help preserve the best aspects of their society, then

¹⁴ "Power of social media puts roofs over heads of tribal families," *Times of India*, March 11, 2015: <https://www.nyoooz.com/news/madurai/67585/power-of-social-media-puts-roofs-over-heads-of-tribal-families/>

a hopeful perspective on the future strengthening of their peacefulness is certainly justified. Whether their economic activities remain on the fringes of the rural Tamil agricultural society remains to be seen, but the reports in numerous other news stories indicate that the Paliyans are loath to change too rapidly. They love the forests. They love the peacefulness that their traditions give them. They want to preserve the best of their civilization.

Intersections: Differing Perspectives on Peacefulness

The increasing willingness of the Paliyans to openly confront oppressors in South India is a significant development, but equally striking has been their readiness to challenge the very nature of their relationship to pacifism. Their experiences enrich our understandings of the place of nonviolence in the cultures of different countries and societies. The Paliyan, probably without intending to, provide a supplement to a fascinating 2012 analysis published in the journal *Peace & Change* by Sørensen and Vinthagen that explores the relationships between culture and peacefulness.¹⁵ Paliyan experiences also add new dimensions to the concepts of nonviolence propounded by Gandhi, so they are worth examining by contemporary peace activists for several reasons.

In their article, Sørensen and Vinthagen emphasize that activists in non-violent movements do their work entirely within their own cultural contexts—their worldviews are based on the cultural settings in which they live. Nonviolent activists do not try to replicate the cultural contexts of their lives, however—they actively seek to reconstruct the cultures of their societies. The authors point out that cultures are integral aspects of all human societies. They may be changing, contradictory, and in fact contested, but they can also foster stability and coherence. Culture can also prompt nonviolence. The authors add that in many societies, at least in ones where nonviolent resisters are at work, there are both dominant and alternative cultures: the people who want to preserve the status quo and those who seek changes as a result of their struggles. The Paliyans, in attempting to stand up for their own rights against the dominant Tamil society, are struggling to change the traditional inferior/superior status relationships that have existed in Tamil Nadu state of South India for centuries.

Indian people have come to understand such struggles in Gandhian terms as Satyagraha, a term that more or less means nonviolence. The Paliyan expe-

¹⁵ Sørensen, Maiken Jul and Stellan Vinthagen. 2012. "Nonviolent Resistance and Culture." *Peace & Change: a Journal of Peace Research* 37(3): 444-470.

rience, however, leads one to question Gandhi. In his book *Non-Violent Resistance*,¹⁶ Gandhi wrote that Satyagraha is not a weapon of the weak, it is a tool of strength. India's foremost exponent of peace acknowledged the existence of passive resistance, particularly in the Christian tradition of turning the other cheek, but he dismissed it as a characteristic of weakness. Passive resistance does not completely exclude violence, he argued, if the passive resisters should turn in that direction. It is not clear if he was aware of the Paliyans and the other tribal peoples in India who expressed their nonviolence by passive resistance, often called nonresistance, by fleeing from confrontations. If asked, the Paliyans would certainly not have agreed with Gandhi's assessment. The Paliyans expressed their reluctance to engage in fighting by retreating from it—sometimes precipitously. At least, they used to.

The anthropologist Peter Gardner amplified Paliyan attitudes toward peaceful nonresistance in a 2010 article¹⁷ in which he suggested that their nonresistance must be seen from their perspective, rather than from the viewpoints of outside societies. His argument was similar to that of Sørensen and Vinthagen. Since the Paliyans for the most part still confront aggression in terms of turning the other cheek, they do not see nonresistance in Gandhian terms as a weakness. Instead, they view their way of retreating from confrontation as a completely approved social style. They feel no stigma in avoiding conflicts, no humiliation in retreating from fights, no sense of cowardice. Gardner wrote that, for the Paliyans, retreating “is an unambiguous act of strength, strength in controlling oneself (p. 192).”

Thus, there are two perspectives on peacefulness operating in India, and arguably in much of the world—the active, challenging style of nonviolent resistance perfected by the Mahatma, such as marches, sit-ins, and so forth, and the flee-into-the-forests nonresistance advocated by some peaceful societies such as the Paliyan. The differences may be subtle but they are significant. However, several news stories in October 2012 implied that the continuing tradition of Satyagraha in India, exemplified this time by a land rights organization, and the nonresistance of the Paliyans may be starting to converge.¹⁸

¹⁶ Gandhi, Mahatma. 1961. *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*. New York, Dover.

¹⁷ Gardner, Peter M. 2010. “How Can a Society Eliminate Killing?” In *Nonkilling Societies*, Ed. Jóam Evans Pim, 185-194. Honolulu: Center for Global Nonkilling. <http://www.nonkilling.org/pdf/nksocieties.pdf>

¹⁸ “Jan satyagraha: Silent march by 30,000 landless people enters third day,” NDTV October 6, 2012: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/jan-satyagraha-silent-march-by-30-000-landless-people-enters-third-day-500992>; “Landless poor on long march to Delhi,” *The*

The Indian land rights group Ekta Parishad launched an epic protest that month by 50,000 landless Adivasi people. They started a march from the city of Gwalior intending to proceed nearly 200 miles (320 km) north by road to the national capital in New Delhi. The protesters were planning to hand a memorandum to the central government describing the difficulties they faced since they are still being deprived of their lands. They hoped to reach Delhi by October 29, marching by day and sleeping by night along the highway.

Ekta Parishad (Hindi for “unity forum”), a federation of about 11,000 community organizations, was founded in 1991 by the activist Rajagopal P.V. It focuses on land rights issues of the rural poor in India, particularly the tribal peoples. It follows nonviolent Gandhian strategies, particularly mass protest marches, in its attempts to negotiate with the national and state governments on behalf of the landless people.

Rajagopal led a similar march from Gwalior to Delhi in October 2007 with much the same demands. After several days of negotiations, the Prime Minister at the time, Manmohan Singh, and his government agreed completely with the marchers and established a National Land Commission. The commission subsequently issued its report, but the government had not acted on it. The march in October 2012 was designed to press those demands.

A Paliyan contingent took a train to Gwalior to join the march. They were singled out by a reporter who spoke with Dhanalakshmi, a 22-year-old Paliyan woman, who was listening at the back of the huge crowd along with others from her community. They were skeptical about a speech by Jairam Ramesh, the national Rural Development Minister. He was in Gwalior trying to head off the march with more promises.

“Discussion is always better than agitation,” he said to the vast throng. He listed the measures the government had already put in place to try and protect the rights of the landless. “Go home ... we will find the middle path,” he promised. He had earlier agreed to sign clearly delineated policies that would protect the rights of landless rural people, but the government had backed down and refused to sign. Ramesh said that land rights are issues controlled by the states, so the central government can’t make commitments.

Dhanalakshmi was not swayed by his reasoning, and she told the reporter why. She said that in her state, Tamil Nadu, if she tells the government agent that she wants her rights to land, he says that there is no land for him to deliver. She rejected that, saying that the state government has

plenty of land to donate to industries and to special economic zones. "He says, you get an order from above. So we are going to Delhi to get an order from above," the spirited young woman said.

The young woman had never ridden on a train until she boarded the one for Gwalior a few days before. She had crowded into an unreserved compartment with 200 other people to make the journey north. She was eager to tell the reporter her story. She explained how, in 2010, a group of Paliyans were evicted from their traditional lands despite the provisions of the Forest Rights Act of 2006, and they had to work as bonded laborers on a mango plantation to survive. They were unable to obtain deeds to their lands, despite the provisions of the law, so 28 families had occupied a plot of land and built small huts to live in at Serakkadu, in the foothills of the Bodi Agamalai.

The Forest Department threatened to demolish their houses, but Dhana-lakshmi and the others refused to be intimidated. A news story in *The Hindu* in November 2010¹⁹ about the 28 families and their hassles had prompted the Chief Minister of the state to get involved and make promises that the tribal people would get the land and houses they were demanding.

The reporter noticed that the speakers at the front of the crowd that day in October 2012, Mr. Rajagopal and the government ministers, were mere specks in the distance for the people from Tami Nadu. Also, since they were speaking in Hindi, the crowd at the back, fluent mostly in Tamil or their own tribal language, couldn't understand them anyway. But another Paliyan woman, Malliga, 35, said it really didn't matter. She recognized that she didn't have much in common with the people from the north of India. But she quoted a Tamil proverb for her purposes. "If one hand claps, it cannot be heard," she said. "But if many hands clap, if we all join together, they will have to hear us."

It sounded from those reports as if the precepts of Satyagraha are penetrating into Paliyan society, so they may yet find ways to peacefully win their rights. Could Gandhi be persuaded that there is value in both active nonviolence and passive nonresistance? Strength in both? The peaceful protest march ended the following week in Agra, when the government of India agreed to meet the demands of the marchers. Once again the media focused on the Paliyan participants.²⁰

¹⁹ "28 Paliyar tribal families intensify fight for land titles," *The Hindu*, November 18, 2010: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/28-Paliyar-tribal-families-intensify-fight-for-land-titles/article15691119.ece>

²⁰ "Centre likely to sign deal with landless marchers on Jan Satyagraha at Agra," *The Hindu*, October 10, 2012: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Centre-likely->

As the marchers slowly made their way toward the capital, the government began to cave in to most of their demands. The marchers had left Gwalior on Wednesday, October 3, 2012, planning to arrive in Delhi on October 29. On Wednesday, the 10th, the news broke that Mr. Ramesh, the Rural Development Minister, was going to meet the march in Agra the next day, a little less than halfway to the capital, with new proposals—and apparently a renewed willingness to negotiate.

Many of the tribal peoples subsisting on the fringes of rural Indian society were denied the rights to own the lands that they have lived on for millennia. The protest march, which was receiving increasing publicity in the Indian news media, with nationally prominent individuals joining the tribal peoples every day, apparently became too much for the government to resist. The agreement it signed promised that within the next six months it would draft a National Reform Policy, after consulting with other interest groups and the state governments. The government also agreed to establish fast-track land tribunals. In addition, it promised to start a national database that would record the properties that individuals own, with the intent of revealing the names of people who have purchased more lands than the laws allow. Perhaps most critically, the agreement provided for the distribution of one-tenth of one acre of land to every landless person, plus the additional land needed for housing.

For its part, Ekta Parishad gave up its demand for the establishment of land rights commissions in the various states since the national government would be constitutionally unable to promise such a thing. But the government did agree to establish a system of legal aid and to promise it will pressure the state governments to grant homestead rights for both tribal peoples and the Dalits, formerly called the Untouchables. Mr. Ramesh told the crowd in Agra, “Ekta Parishad should continue putting pressure not only on the Centre [the national government of India], but also on the State governments.”

While 60,000 people set out from Gwalior on the 3rd, and the march organizers had promised that the numbers would swell to 100,000 by the time the group reached Delhi, in fact only about 20,000 remained in Agra to witness Mr. Ramesh and P.V. Rajagopal, the founder of Ekta Parishad and organizer of the march, as they signed the agreement. Mr. Rajagopal expressed his pleasure with the agreement, saying that progress would be

[to-sign-deal-with-landless-marchers-on-Jan-Satyagraha-at-Agra/article12551402.ece;](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/The-landless-end-march-at-Agra/article12553768.ece)
“The landless end march at Agra,” *The Hindu*, October 12, 2012:
<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/The-landless-end-march-at-Agra/article12553768.ece>

slow and gradual. He mentioned other important social improvements that have taken time to bring about in India, and said that one-tenth of an acre of land was better than nothing. The tribal people should feel safe living in huts when they own the land they are erected on. He also said, "The next step is the fight for agricultural land. We want a guarantee of one hectare of farmland for every rural household." One hectare equals nearly two and one half acres, or 25 times the 0.1 acres promised in the agreement.

The marchers were not all thrilled with the outcome. Malliga, one of the Paliyan women who had expressed opinions about the importance of marching the previous week just as the march was starting, was still there and still willing to be quoted. She was dismissive of the promise of such tiny strips of land. "What will I do with one-tenth of an acre? What can I grow on it? If I throw my seeds on that land, can my children eat from it?"

Another Paliyan woman quoted the previous week, Dhanalakshmi, had also not left the march early. Now that the protest had ended, she said that she was planning to see the Taj Mahal in Agra before returning to her village in Tamil Nadu. "But if the government does not keep its promises, we will bring more people from our villages and we will come back." The landless Paliyans were clearly learning the power of nonviolent protests. Gandhi would be smiling.

One of the outstanding features of the Paliyan story is the way their nonviolence has changed and grown. Their historic commitment to avoiding confrontations with one another and with outsiders appears, from the various news stories, to have become deeper and richer. While they may still, at times, wish they could simply flee into the forest to avoid problems as their elders used to do, they—at least some of them—are now marching to dramatize the discrimination they experience. They are protesting in large groups, making points to the media, and a few are using the social media to good advantage.

The essential lesson for larger more developed societies is that they are willing and able to change. It is not so much that they are adopting outside ways of handling nonviolence. Martin Luther published his protests over 500 years ago, but so what. Western Europe changed and adapted through almost countless wars and continuous violence over the past half millennium too. The Paliyans are showing those of us who are interested in learning from them that there may be other, perhaps better, ways of finding peaceful solutions to problems. The United States, for instance, celebrates in numerous holidays each year its violent history, of solving problems through fighting wars.

The lesson that one small society in the western hills of Tamil Nadu suggests is that circumstances are changing. It's time for society to change—as the Paliyan are doing. They have dramatized the possibility of becoming more

peaceful by watching what the larger societies are doing and choosing new approaches that serve their own interests even better. They are becoming more aggressively peaceful by choice. Is it possible for Americans, Westerners, and the citizens of the developed countries around the world to start also making conscious choices to become more peaceful? To start scaling back the warlike, confrontational approaches to issues that have been so beloved by their ancestors and to begin substituting more peaceful approaches? Of course, myriads of peace activists, peace scholars, and peaceful individuals already practice these beliefs. They need to emulate the Paliyan society and convince the larger society to change. As the Paliyans are starting to do.

Sørensen and Vinthagen (2012) identify three potential strategies that the nonviolent resisters can use to relate to dominant groups.²¹ First, they can borrow cultural elements or symbols from the dominant culture and seek to remake them, thereby prodding the dominant culture into becoming more accepting. Second, they can remodel the existing culture through introducing new interpretations of major authorities, such as reinterpreting the Bible or the Koran. And third, they can seek to create an entirely new, nonviolent culture, one which reconstructs and replaces the old more violent one. Building on the thoughts of those two authors, the study of peaceful societies seeks to accomplish the same things but with new ideas and, hopefully, challenging new approaches based on viable alternatives that do exist out there.

²¹ Sørensen, Maiken Jul and Stellan Vinthagen. 2012. "Nonviolent Resistance and Culture." *Peace & Change: a Journal of Peace Research* 37(3): 444-470.

11. Comparisons of Peaceful and Violent Societies

Peaceful Societies Deniers

In 1994, shortly after my bibliography *Peaceful Peoples* was published, I had a fruitful conversation with my late brother-in-law about peaceful societies. Gary Myers, at the time working as an administrator in an elementary school in New Jersey, was visiting us at our home in Central Pennsylvania and we got to talking about my new book. Humanity is basically aggressive, Gary argued that day. All you have to do is watch children in the school lunch line as he did so often: the kids are constantly pushing and shoving one another to get ahead.

This may well be so, I replied, but Amish children don't push and shove in their lunch lines—if they even line up at lunch time. Gary didn't respond so I went on to argue that kids in many other peaceful societies don't push and shove one another either, and that the behavior he witnesses is the result of a culture in American families that encourages aggressiveness and self-focus. I was not sure if I convinced Gary but since we had a good, respectful relationship, we soon changed the subject and went on to talk about other topics that we could agree on.

The conversation prompted me to broaden my interest, not just in peaceful societies but in their opposite—societies that cherish violence, or at least that see no way to avoid it. Fortunately, some scholars, particularly anthropologists, have seen the value of making those kinds of comparisons in depth. Their publications point out, if they do not absolutely prove, that societies, just like individuals, make choices as to how to react to the stresses of disagreements, conflicts, and disputes between individuals in a family, among people in a community, between communities, and even among nations.

Some people, due to a variety of circumstances, chose to react violently to stressful situations while others react nonviolently. Many, of course, react more or less peacefully or violently depending on circumstances. How-

ever, the comparisons between the less peaceful societies and the more violent ones by scholars can provide interesting, hopefully even convincing, clues about the processes of building a more peaceful society. They can serve as an effective conclusion to this book. This is the kind of literature that proponents of the human-societies-are-intrinsically-violent school have to ignore. Or overlook. To pretend it doesn't exist.

One of the founders of the humanity-is-intrinsically-violent school was Konrad Lorenz, a prominent German scientist, though the roots of the belief go much farther back. In his book *On Aggression*, Lorenz argued that the major reason for intra-specific animal aggression is the biological need for the members of most species to disperse themselves as widely as possible across the habitat available.¹ That provides the maximum amount of food for them. He also maintained that animals defend their territories in direct proportion to how far they are from the centers of their territories. At the centers of the territories they are the most aggressive, but less so nearer the peripheries. In addition, the aggressive instinct is caused by the need for selection of the strongest animals for reproduction, so as not to weaken the species. For many animals, aggression is an essential element in promoting health and preservation of the species, he argued.

Then, he made a jump to the presumption that aggression is essential to humans as well. Aggression, he reasoned, is an instinct in man—his gendered term—that springs spontaneously from his very nature. He gave examples of men cooped up under stressful conditions—polar explorers and such—turning on their best friends for virtually no reason. The publication of scholarly works about peaceful societies was in its infancy at the time, so Lorenz did not have to argue about the existence of societies that were more, or less, aggressive than others. There is a lot of additional literature that supports and amplifies the model suggested by Lorenz for an intrinsically violent humanity—Michael Ghiglieri, *The Dark Side of Man*,² Lawrence Keeley, *War Before Civilization*,³ Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males*⁴

¹ Lorenz, Konrad. 1966. *On Aggression*. Translated by Marjorie Kerr Wilson. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

² Ghiglieri, Michael. 1999. *The Dark Side of Man: Tracing the Origins of Male Violence*. Reading, MA: Perseus Books.

³ Keeley, Lawrence. 1996. *War before Civilization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁴ Wrangham, Richard W. and Dale Peterson. 1996. *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

come quickly to mind as works that propose (with variations of course) a basically Hobbesian view of humanity—we are predisposed to violence.

The most recent, and one of the most prominent, scholars in the Lorenz school, Steven Pinker, carried on that tradition. His 2011 best-selling book *The Better Angels of Our Nature* presented many seemingly convincing arguments for his proposition that humanity has progressed from bestial violence in primitive times to restraints on violence over the course of history to signs and hopes for an end of violence due to the controls of modernism and the contemporary state society.⁵ Some of Pinker's arguments are quite interesting. For instance, he points out that dueling, which was still being honored into the 19th century, was in a category of violence based on a code of honor in the U.S. and Europe, in which everyone believed everyone else believed in the practice. It died out, Pinker argues, because people began to ridicule the practice. Makes one wonder about the power of ridicule and laughter being brought to bear on other facets of violence. Anyway, Pinker has a lot of fascinating things to say.

But in the course of his book, he needed to dispel the notion that some traditional societies could have been less violent than modern humanity. They had to be more violent in order for his model to work. Peaceful societies had to be wrong. He sought to demolish the facts put forth by anthropologists about the Semai, for instance, one of the societies he mentioned in this book. He referred to the book *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya* without mentioning the name of the author, Robert Knox Dentan, and without listing the book in his notes or bibliography.⁶ Curious readers might have gone to the library and looked at the work themselves. Can't encourage that.

To compound the selectivity, Pinker quoted an anthropologist named Bruce Knauft who had not personally studied the Semai but who attacked the peacefulness of that society anyway.⁷ Then, to make sure that curious readers don't go any farther in exploring the issue of just how peaceful or violent the Semai are, Pinker ignored the papers authored by Dentan and Robarchek—the two anthropologist who have studied the Semai most

⁵ Pinker, Steven. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Viking.

⁶ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1968. *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

⁷ Knauft, Bruce M. et al. 1987. "Reconsidering Violence in Simple Human Societies: Homicide among the Gebusi of New Guinea [and Comments and Reply]." *Current Anthropology* 28 (4): 457-500.

closely and who, despite their differences, firmly agree on how truly peaceful they are. Their arguments clearly demolished the points made by Knauff and the other deniers—and Pinker 25 years later.⁸

Peacefulness and Violence in Nearby Communities—the Zapotec

The evidence for the existence of peaceful societies published over the half century since *On Aggression* was published has become a growing thorn for the deniers. Fortunately, Leslie Sponsel has recently published a couple comprehensive reviews of the literature related to this debate, the facts of which present the convincing, if inconvenient, case for the importance of peaceful societies.⁹ One type of literature that relates to the argument and is especially convincing are comparisons by scholars of peaceful with violent societies. There are several instances of such comparisons out there, a quick review of which should help convince those who are still skeptical of the evidence presented so far. Some of it does not cite the societies reviewed in this book and some of it does. It doesn't matter. The important point is to see where the research takes our understanding of possible ways to build a more peaceful cotemporary world. We can rely on speculation by writers such as Lorenz and Pinker, or on the field work of trained anthropologists. The comparisons are worth a careful examination.

Douglas Fry, a widely regarded scholar and the Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, did extensive fieldwork among two very similar nearby Zapotec communities in Mexico's Oaxaca State, one of which he found to be quite violent, the other to be quite peaceful. In one of his perceptive articles about the two communities published in 1992,¹⁰ he contrasts the ways of the more peaceful community he called La Paz, with those of the more violent town, San Andres. In the latter town, jealousy, slapping, punching, and spouse abuse are

⁸ Dentan, Robert Knox. “[Response to Knauff and Otterbein].” *Current Anthropology* 29 (4): 625-629; Robarchek, Clayton A. and Robert Knox Dentan. 1987. “Blood Drunkenness and the Bloodthirsty Semai: Unmaking Another Anthropological Myth.” *American Anthropologist* New Series 89(2): 356-365.

⁹ Sponsel, Leslie E. 2017. “The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence.” *Diogenes* 61(3-4):30-45; Sponsel, Leslie E. 2018. “One Anthropologist's Answer to Glenn D. Paige's Question Challenging Peace Studies.” *Journal of Peace Education* 15(3): 267-287.

¹⁰ Fry, Douglas P. 1992. “‘Respect for the Rights of Others Is Peace:’ Learning Aggression Versus Nonaggression among the Zapotec.” *American Anthropologist* 94(September): 621-639.

normal and expected; aggressiveness is accepted as an aspect of human nature. In La Paz, people declare that they live in a peaceful town and condemn manifestations of violence. They try to be cooperative and respectful of one another. They contrast themselves with the folks of San Andres. The two communities are only a few kilometers apart and they share many Zapotec values. But their differences produce violence in one, peacefulness in the other. It is worth taking a careful look at the differences that he notes in that 1992 article.

In both the peaceful and the more violent Zapotec villages, the ideals of cooperation, respect and equality are held, and antisocial actions such as stealing, adultery, and physical violence are disapproved. However, the people of the more violent community believe that it is natural for some individuals to act violently, that killing a rival for reasons of jealousy is understandable, that sometimes aggressiveness is justified, that fighting when people are drunk is normal—people are just that way. Children who are raised in that village frequently hear adults admitting that violence is a part of life and that they do not have a consistently peaceful view of their village.

In contrast, the people of the more nonviolent village consistently express the view that their community is peaceful, that no one fights there, that they are cooperative, never jealous, and respectful of others—views which the children who grow up there hear constantly. Thus, the children in the two communities absorb the differing self-images and learn by example the way adults treat one another—to build up grudges and feuds and to escalate disputes into violence, or to approach human relationships peacefully, taking great care to avoid aggression.

A few pages later, Fry points out that there are significant differences in observable levels of adult aggression between the two Zapotec towns. In the violent one, teenage males normally engage in roughhousing, while the ones in the peaceful town do not; sometimes teenagers in the former have serious fights, but never in the peaceful community. Men in the violent village greet one another with slaps and punches, have mock fights, swear at one another, and steal and hide other men's hats. Men in the peaceful town do not engage in this kind of rough behavior and they refer to the inhabitants of the other condescendingly as unfriendly barbarians. Children in the violent town see adults engage in fist fights when they are drunk, which only occurs rarely in the more peaceful village.

The author observed instances of wife-beating in the one town but not in the other. The men of the violent village assume their wives will have sex with other men any time they can, so they try to control them through fear

and force. The women of the peaceful village do not have to deal with this problem very often since they are respected and treated as equals by the men. Husbands who do show jealousy are condemned by the community gossip, which the children hear. Parents in the violent village discipline their children with corporal punishment, since they view the children as naturally unruly and mischievous. Parents in the peaceful community use far less corporal punishment since they favor talking with the child who misbehaves in order to correct and educate them with love. They recognize the importance of their own good behavior as setting the right example for the behavior of their children. Fry observed many instances of parents beating their children in San Andres but none in La Paz.

Zapotec children differed in the nature of their aggressiveness toward one another depending on whether they were raised in the violent village or the more peaceful one. In the more violent community their aggression consisted of a physical attack on other children; in the peaceful village, they tended to engage in threatening behavior and to restrain themselves from aggression in many cases. The author's data indicates that the rate of aggressiveness in children appears to increase as they grow older in the violent village, and to decrease with age in the peaceful one.

In sum, Fry concludes, the people of the peaceful Zapotec village have strong ideals, beliefs, and values that condemn violence, while the inhabitants of the more violent village do not. This difference affects the attitudes that their children adopt and quite obviously the actual rates of observable violence. But Fry goes on most helpfully to at least tentatively identify factors which might have contributed to the differences in attitudes toward peacefulness and violence in the two communities. In the more violent village, the farmers own smaller areas of land than the ones in the more peaceful one, which may contribute to greater competition, tensions and hostilities. Furthermore, in La Paz, the women have been producing pottery for generations, thus making significant contributions to their household incomes. In this village the men respect and value the contributions of the women. There is nothing like this in San Andres, where the men have had the independent income from working in a nearby mine. These factors may have produced less wife-abuse in the peaceful town. A third factor may have been the fact that San Andres is situated near mines that have been owned by outsiders for a long time, and it is possible that the presence of these outsiders could have influenced the development of aggressiveness in the community.

Comparison: Semai and Waorani

Clayton Robarchek and his wife Carole, also of course deeply impressed by the peacefulness of the Semai during their visits with them in the 1970s and 1980s, decided to extend their fieldwork in another direction. In order to make the Semai peacefulness relevant to a wider audience, they decided to compare the highly peaceful society they had been studying with a highly violent one. They chose to do some fieldwork with the Waorani, a group living in the forests of eastern Ecuador that was famed for having some of the most violent people on the face of the globe.

While the Semai have experienced virtually no violence over the past 50 years (see chapter 3 above), the Waorani have been, until recently, constantly at war with outsiders and with each other. In their society until the 1960s, over 40 percent of their deaths were the result of raiding among different Waorani bands and 20 percent more were due to clashes with outsiders. They first came to the attention of the outside world in 1957 when they speared 5 missionaries, an action that drew worldwide attention. While they are much less violent now, spearings and raids still occur from time to time. And we think an annual murder rate of 40 out of 100,000 people in our major cities represents a high rate of violent crime! Yet in many ways, the Waorani and the Semai had a lot in common, except for their respective rates of violence. What made the Waorani so violent and the Semai so peaceful, the two scholars wondered? The premise of the Robarcheks' is a very sound one: that it may be highly instructive to study two societies that are similar in many ways but very different in their approaches to violence and peacefulness.

They published two journal articles comparing the two societies, the first in 1992 and the second six years later.¹¹ The 1992 piece, about twice the length of the 1998 work, emphasized the very significant differences in the worldviews of the two societies and how those differences foster violence or peacefulness, while the latter one focused to some extent on economic exchanges and norms of reciprocity.

¹¹ Robarchek, Clayton A. and Carole J. Robarchek. 1992. "Cultures of War and Peace: A Comparative Study of Waorani and Semai." In *Aggression and Peacefulness in Humans and Other Primates*, edited by James Silverberg and J. Patrick Gray, 189-213, New York: Oxford University Press. Their second article was Robarchek, Clayton A. and Carole J. Robarchek. 1998. "Reciprocities and Realities: World Views, Peacefulness, and Violence among Semai and Waorani" *Aggressive Behavior* 24:123-133.

The 1992 article was very broad in scope. It provided a thorough overview of the two societies—one of the most peaceful in existence and one of the most violent ever known. The authors carefully described the many remarkable similarities between the two. Their natural environments are similar, their modes of economic sustenance are similar, they even grow similar foods. Both the Semai and the Waorani fish, hunt, gather, and maintain swidden gardens in equatorial rain forest environments, and both have similar levels of technologies. The social organizations of both groups are similar—they live in kin-based residence groupings of normally less than 100 people. Children are socialized in both societies in an indulgent, non-punishing manner, and parents are affectionate and warm with their children. A number of their social structures are also quite similar, though of course some are different. Even in some relatively minor matters, such as avoiding the use of alcohol, the two societies are quite similar. The authors piled up the factual similarities between the two societies, and as the facts kept building their case grew ever stronger.

The Robarcheks presented a convincing argument that the major difference between the two is that they view the surrounding world differently. The Semai see themselves as helpless in the face of a surrounding environment that is dangerous and hostile; their only security and safety comes from their peaceful affiliation with their own bands. The Waorani, on the other hand, have a confident, pragmatic, independent view of the surrounding environment, within which individuals are normally quite self-reliant. They have little social need for group solidarity or cohesiveness and they have not developed structures that promote control of conflict. Because of their different ways of looking at things, the one society is highly peaceful while the other, until recently, had difficulty avoiding constant killing.

The Robarcheks explain that the societies that surround the Waorani, in the western Amazon basin near the base of the Andes, have had a very long tradition of warfare and hostilities. Among all of them, however, the Waorani reigned supreme for the intensity of their violence. In this situation, according to the authors, “where groups seldom had the absolute superiority in technological or other resources to defeat conclusively both the forest and their enemies—to kill their men, kidnap their women, capture their children, and occupy their territory—the result is predictable: a more or less stable balance of terror with constant raiding among the various social groups” (p. 197).

The authors point out in their 1998 piece that the Waorani have a much more restricted view of reciprocity than the Semai do. They exchange food only with the extended bilateral family. Beyond that, they have no belief in

sharing. In the larger, aggregated settlements established by the Ecuadorian government, when numerous peccaries are killed the meat is not shared generally with the rest of the settlement.

The Waorani view people as completely autonomous individuals who are independently capable of providing for themselves. Except for immediate family members, they do not expect assistance in their activities. Women give birth alone, and during a spearing raid everyone abandons others, even close family members, to flee. In the past, on occasion, when elderly persons became a burden, they might have been speared to death by members of their own families. But the Waorani are not at all frightened of their surrounding environment. The forest poses no physical or magical terrors for them.

In sum, since the Semai see the world as violent, their safety is only assured by the peaceful harmony of the group. As a result, interpersonal conflict and violence must be avoided if at all possible. The Waorani see the world as benign. People should be independent, capable, and self-sufficient, and should have few expectations and few obligations with others. To them, conflict and aggression are normal. The contrasting worldviews foster societies that are, on the one hand, constantly concerned about avoiding violence and promoting peaceful relationships, and on the other, tolerant of anger, hostility, and violence. The discerning reader should be reflecting by now as to where on this continuum his or her own society probably falls. Is it worth comparing the realities, posted in the daily news reports, with the possibilities? That is up to the reader to think about.

Anyone who has followed the news about global terrorism and frequent mass killings in recent years can only appreciate the prescient analysis of the Robarcheks in the two articles about an un-winnable balance of terror in the Amazon basin. The articles are filled with insights, such as an analysis of how and why the Waorani gave up their raiding and spearing lifestyle in the late 1950s. Several Waorani women had left their bands to live with other Quichua speaking, peoples. On the suggestion of several women missionaries, they were induced to return to their bands to see if they could gain permission for outsider women to live with them.

Seeing the missionary women as non-threatening, the bands agreed. Then, with all the talk from the Waorani women and the missionaries, the men began to realize that there were alternatives to their prevailing lifestyle—better ways to live than constant blood-feuds, raids, fear, hatred of outsiders, and spearing. While Christian beliefs may have helped foster the change, the major factor that prompted the Waorani to give up their violent ways was that they themselves really wanted to end their violence. They had apparently tried on

their own to foster peace at various times earlier, but they lacked the social and cultural structures to make the peace processes stick.

The outsiders, and the returned Waorani women, provided ample evidence that less violent conditions could and did prevail elsewhere. Confronted with the new information, as the Robarchek's explain, "once the bands became convinced that the feuding could stop, their commitment to ending the killing ... became a goal in its own right, one which superseded the desire for revenge" (1992, p.205).

A strong commitment to ending the killing quickly took hold—there were many other benefits to ending violence, as they all soon perceived—and the Waorani themselves made the effort to contact additional bands and convince them that they were ending the age-old cycle of violence. In a few months, the pattern of violence had largely (though not entirely) ceased.

The Role of Isolation on Peacefulness

Does extreme isolation foster either peacefulness or violence? This question arises frequently in the minds of many people who question the existence of peaceful societies. Surely those highly peaceful societies could only exist in extremely isolated situations, people assert, where they are not confronted by aggressive others. It sounds like reasonable thinking. And there is no doubt that some of the peaceful societies ARE highly isolated, such as the Ifaluk in the Federated States of Micronesia. But isolation is only one factor in their peacefulness and, more to the point, it appears to only protect societies from aggressors, not to foster their internal nonviolence. Or perhaps better, to be only a small part of the reason that a society treasures its culture of nonviolence—or puts up with its culture of violence, as the case may be. A couple of comparably isolated islands will shine light on this very valid question.

For the peacefulness—or the violence—of these two islands appears to have developed from the history of their respective settlements and the cultures that developed on each over time. The two islands, both first settled by the British, had superficially similar backgrounds, but one developed a culture of peacefulness that has persisted for several hundred years to the present day while the other has a culture of extreme violence toward women and girls. Fortunately, a lot has been written about each island so questions about why they are so different can be considered.

Tristan da Cunha: At Peace with Itself

One writer has argued that the basic values of a society are rooted in its fundamental cultural beliefs, such as, for people in the U.S., freedom and equality before the law.¹² These beliefs persist for long periods of time. The Tristanians, the people of Tristan da Cunha Island, also have fundamental cultural beliefs, and they date back to the founding of their settlement over 200 years ago.

The occupation of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic by the British military in 1816 marked the beginning of permanent settlement on the island. The government wanted a garrison on the island to prevent the French from possibly occupying it as a base for an attempt to free Napoleon from St. Helena, 1300 miles to the north. The next year, however, government officials changed their minds and ordered the garrison to be removed. Corporal William Glass asked to be allowed to remain on Tristan, with his wife, two children, and two other men, civilians who wanted to help him found a settlement. His superiors agreed.¹³

The three men evidently agreed to form a business partnership, so on November 7th, 1817, Lieutenant R. S. Aitchison, the commander of the occupying detachment that was about to depart, and another officer signed as witnesses a remarkable document, a constitution of sorts, that Glass and his two partners had prepared. It established in writing the understanding of the three men about their relationships. The first three articles described their intended communal sharing of supplies and the fruits of their labors, but it was the fourth article that was to have the most far-reaching effects on the subsequent development of the small community. "That in order to ensure the harmony of the Firm, No member shall assume any superiority whatever, but all to be considered as equal in every respect, each performing his proportion of labour, if not prevented by sickness," it said. (Munch 1971, p. 29). The document thus established equality and respect as the fundamental ethical values for the new settlement. The idea that everyone was completely equal came to mean that no one could assume any form of authority over anyone else. This absolute acceptance of equality appears, from the historical evidence, to have been the basis of the peacefulness that quickly developed on the island.

¹² Hargrove, Erwin C. 1998. *The President as Leader: Appealing to the Better Angels of our Nature*. Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas.

¹³ Munch, Peter A. 1971. *Crisis in Utopia: The Ordeal of Tristan da Cunha*. New York: Crowell.

As the population grew with more settlers, launching the island's long-boats from the beach—there was no harbor—required crews of strong men who would cooperate as if their lives depended on it, which of course they did. A helmsman had to express suggestions in a quiet, understated manner. Landing the boats in the pounding surf required men to cooperate with precision. They cooperated—they had to—but the leadership of the long boat by the helmsman was extremely subtle, quiet and understated. No matter what situation might be developing, he would never bark an order. Instead, he would only give quiet suggestions. “She might run a little higher, Johnny, if we pull in a little on that jib” (Munch 1971, p. 186). Handling the boats became symbolic of the values of cooperation, equality, and, most critically, the lack of formal leadership that permeate island culture. These qualities were noticed seven years later by Augustus Earle, an Englishman who was stranded inadvertently on the island for six months.¹⁴

An interesting incident in 1908 showed how the colony was developing. Visitors arriving from South Africa provoked a crisis on the island that gives us better insights into the issues of maintaining peacefulness there. Two of the newcomers, brothers, claimed that a house occupied by Andrea Repetto and his wife Frances really belonged to them. Their mother had abandoned it many years before, allowing the Repetto family to move in, but now the newcomers claimed it again. Since the small community had no formal leaders and no way to call a meeting to discuss the issues, tensions quickly mounted. The newcomers began threatening the Repettos physically. At the end of the week, the aggressors took matters a step farther. They climbed onto the roof of the Repetto house and pretended to start repairing a hole in the thatching.¹⁵

Mr. Repetto, an Italian sailor, had survived a shipwreck on the island in 1892 and had decided to stay and marry young Frances Green, the granddaughter of Peter Green, who had succeeded William Glass as the leader of the community, though Green had a more informal leadership style than Glass had had. Repetto then became an informal leader in his own right. His quiet manners and intelligence, plus, critically, his caring approach to people—his kindness, modesty, and good sense—prompted others on Tristan to increasingly like and respect him. However, when anyone tried to label him as the leader of Tristan, the inheritor of the mantle held by Peter Green and William Glass before him, Repetto quickly denied it (Munch 1971).

¹⁴ Earle, Augustus. 1966. *Narrative of a Residence in New Zealand/Journal of a Residence in Tristan da Cunha*, ed. by E. H. McCormick. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹⁵ Barrow, K. M. 1910. *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha*. London: Skeffington & Sons.

Andrea and Frances stayed calm, and Mr. Repetto told one of the men that if he had a paper from his mother giving him the house, they would quickly move out. Andrea then offered to give up their bedroom for him anyway if he'd like to move in with them. Repetto told him that he wanted to be friends, not enemies. After 16 years on the island, he had absorbed the Tristan way of resolving disputes. The newcomer thought it over and soon told Repetto that he was sorry for the way he had acted. He kissed Mrs. Repetto and her mother as part of his apology, and said that there would not be any more trouble.¹⁶ The island tradition of informally defusing conflicts had succeeded once again. Tristan, like any other peaceful society, may have its faults, but the Tristanians abhor violence and have developed effective strategies for resolving their conflicts (Munch 1971).

Sociologist Peter Munch did a field study on Tristan for four months in 1937-38 and he concluded that the major principle guiding the relationships of the islanders with one another is a strong sense of self-respect and mutual helpfulness. The islanders highly value their independence, economic self-sufficiency, and personal freedom. They repress self-assertion, evince a strong respect for others, and act in a kindly, considerate fashion. The highest level that hostility reaches on the island is that occasionally two people will stop talking to each other, but they can't maintain even that level of tension very long. Quarrels are rare and fights have never occurred in living memory. The person who lost his temper in a quarrel would have that scar on his reputation for life, while an individual who diffused a tense situation with a joke would gain general respect (id.). Much of that tradition evidently survives. A news article in January 2010 reported on an interview with Conrad Glass, the Tristan policeman. He said that the last time the community witnessed a bit of violence and the jail was used was in the 1970s when a fight broke out aboard a visiting fishing vessel.¹⁷ A recent book by Mr. Glass also implies the continuing overall peacefulness of the society.¹⁸

¹⁶ Barrow, K. M. 1910. *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha*. London: Skeffington & Sons.

¹⁷ Crossan, Rob. 2010. "The World's Loneliest Police Beat: After 22 years on Tristan da Cunha, Conrad Glass Has Still to Make an Arrest." *The Guardian*, January 12, 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/13/worlds-loneliest-police-beat>

¹⁸ Glass, Conrad J. 2011. *Rockhopper Copper: Life and Police Work on the World's Most Remote Inhabited Island, Tristan da Cunha*. Clifton-upon-Teme: Polperro Heritage Press.

Pitcairn: Violence against Women and Girls

Pitcairn Island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean doubtless has many decent, caring inhabitants, but the island does exemplify the darker side of human violence. In January 1790, nine British men settled there, but instead of arriving in peace and respect, with the full support of their military superiors as was the case 26 years later on Tristan, they settled in fear and violence, fugitives from the law. The nine included Fletcher Christian, John Adams, and seven of their fellow mutineers, men who had famously rebelled against the command of Lieutenant William Bligh on HMS *Bounty* the previous April. They brought with them 12 Polynesian women, one child, and six men, people they had kidnapped on Tahiti where they had stopped briefly. The women would provide sex; the men would make useful servants.¹⁹ Shortly after they began their settlement, the social climate in their community became clear. John Adams was reluctant to maintain his fences to keep his hogs in his yard, so Fletcher Christian warned him that he would shoot the next animal that he saw escaping from Adams' property. "Then I will shoot you," Adams replied.²⁰

The British sailors had divided up the women, one for each European, leaving three for the six Polynesian men. Soon, though, one of the British men lost his "wife" and he demanded that one of the Polynesian women be reassigned to him. His comrades ignored him. But some months later when Adams lost his "wife," he made the same demand and the rest of the mutineers agreed. Two women who had been allotted to the Polynesians were then reassigned to the sailors. Realizing how things stood, some Polynesians plotted to kill the Europeans, which prompted some murders, followed by more and more killings, until, in a few years, all the Polynesian men and five of the nine Britons, including Fletcher Christian, were dead.²¹

Despite the fact that the Polynesian men were all gone, the violence persisted. The women continued to be treated as sex slaves by their British masters, so they tried to build a boat to escape Pitcairn. It turned over as soon as they launched it, a failure provoked by the sailors who had helped them design and build it. Not long after, in November 1794, the four men learned that the ten women were plotting to murder them all. The security

¹⁹ Lummis, Trevor. 1997. *Pitcairn Island: Life and Death in Eden*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

²⁰ Nicolson, Robert B. 1965. *The Pitcairners*. Sydney, Australia: Angus and Robertson, p.39.

²¹ Lummis, Trevor. 1997. *Pitcairn Island: Life and Death in Eden*. Aldershot: Ashgate

of the men depended on the fact that at least a few of the women would try to protect their “husbands” if they possibly could. Each time there was a sense of trouble, the women would grab guns and flee into the hills, of course greatly outnumbering the men. But harmony soon returned and the plots of the women abated. Over the next several years, three more of the men died—only one of them due to natural causes—leaving just one man, John Adams, to survive into the 19th century.

As the only adult male and leader of the settlement, Adams then fostered a sense of peace and a complete change of heart—supposedly. He discovered the Bible and taught everyone to say their prayers before meals, to attend church services, and to celebrate Christian virtues. When a passing American ship finally discovered the Pitcairn hideout in 1808, Adams, the women, and the children displayed their Christian piety to the visitors, promoting a grand myth about a bunch of violent men who had found Christ, and He had wrought a complete change in their hearts.

The issues of peace, stability and leadership on Pitcairn became serious a couple decades later as Adams grew old. He wanted one of the young, island-born men to be designated as chief to replace him, but none of them felt qualified. Three different immigrants to Pitcairn tried, and failed, to take over island leadership. One of them supervised the production of a severe code of justice that provided flogging for offenders. The reign of another ended violently when a Pitcairn native forcefully disarmed him after an altercation. The incident showed once again that force and violence were the best approaches on the island to asserting social control.

Over the years, many travelers visited Pitcairn, usually for a few hours or for a period of a few days, and they sometimes described the peacefulness of the place, though others had different impressions. Harry Maude, a British official who visited the island in 1941, reported that the rape of girls under the age of 14 was “not regarded locally as a very serious offense.” He added that “this crime, together with various other sexual offenses, is far from uncommon among the islanders.”²²

The sexual violence continued, according to numerous reports, until the British police finally started a serious investigation in the late 1990s. They interviewed young and middle aged women who had left the island and found

²² Ball, Ian M. 1973. *Pitcairn: Children of Mutiny*. Boston: Little, Brown; Marks, Kathy. 2009. *Lost Paradise: From Mutiny on the Bounty to a Modern-day Legacy of Sexual Mayhem, the Dark Secrets of Pitcairn Island Revisited*. New York: Free Press, p.192; Silverman, David. 1967. *Pitcairn Island*. Cleveland and New York: World.

that every single one alleged she had been sexually assaulted or raped as a child. The women accused Steve Christian, the mayor and unquestioned leader of the community, and many other Pitcairn men of attacking them. Christian and his colleagues denied the accusations, got the support of most of the other adults, and denounced the accusers, plus the British government, for conspiring to destroy the community. The British government finally held trials on the island, conducted by three New Zealand District Court judges, in September 2004. A month later, one judge found Mr. Christian guilty of five of the six different charges brought against him by two different women of raping them while they were still children. The judges convicted five of the other six defendants of similar crimes.²³

The evidence is not certain, but it appears as if the patterns of sexual violence on Pitcairn date back to the mutineers. The Pitcairners themselves share this belief. One woman raised on Pitcairn, who was not involved in the trials, described how she had been frequently abused starting when she was six or seven. She believed that her mother and her grandmother before her had also been abused as children. She suspected that “the abuse has always gone on,” and she added, “I think that sort of behavior has carried on right since the *Bounty* days.” Others would agree.²⁴ The ultimate legacy of the mutiny on the *Bounty* is that the Pitcairners seem to deny that they should care for the safety of little girls or young women. The strong male leaders, starting at the time of Fletcher Christian and John Adams, appear to have been an important moving force in perpetuating this culture of violence.

A Pitcairn supporter might well question how we can know whether or not there is also an unreported pattern of similar violence on Tristan. We can't be certain, of course, but a glance at the available population statistics of the two islands shows that they both grew steadily to around 200 people by the 1930s. But as ship transportation connecting Pitcairn with the outside world became more regular, the population of that island began to drop while the numbers on Tristan continued to slowly rise. Young Pitcairn wom-

²³ Marks, Kathy. 2009. *Lost Paradise: From Mutiny on the Bounty to a Modern-day Legacy of Sexual Mayhem, the Dark Secrets of Pitcairn Island Revisited*. New York: Free Press; Oliver, Dawn. 2009. “Problem on Pitcairn,” In *Justice, Legality, and the Rule of Law: Lessons from the Pitcairn Prosecutions*, edited by Dawn Oliver, p. 1-21. New York: Oxford University Press.

²⁴ Marks, Kathy. 2009. *Lost Paradise: From Mutiny on the Bounty to a Modern-day Legacy of Sexual Mayhem, the Dark Secrets of Pitcairn Island Revisited*. New York: Free Press, p.258-260.

en who went to New Zealand or Australia for an education or for health reasons quickly found excuses to not return. A visitor in 1945 remarked on the fact that Pitcairn had 30 unmarried adult males and only four unmarried females. The trial of 2004 confirmed why. People frequently left Tristan too, but many returned—there was no comparable exodus of young women. As a result, the current population of Pitcairn has declined to less than 50, while that of Tristan remains around 270. Of course, many other factors could produce that disparity, but the exodus of young women of child bearing age does appear to be a major cause of Pitcairn's population decline.²⁵

Conclusions

The observations of the six reporters admitted to Pitcairn for the trial in 2004 would suggest that the island girls and women had to focus on their own survival. They listened to the women of the island justifying the abuses of girls. Everyone on the island has to get along together, the women said. "If you're opposed to something," one of the Pitcairn women said, "you tend to defer. We all have to get along together. We're a community. None of us can survive here on our own."²⁶ In essence, the women were saying that whatever the men want, they get, and caring for children is of secondary importance. The dominant pattern there is, well, dominance—the denial of caring.

In contrast, Tristan society reflected the Enlightenment ideals of William Glass. While Tristan was male dominated, women like Frances Repetto and her accomplishments were fully recognized. She served in virtually a co-leader role with her husband Andrea and, after he died, with her son Willie. Mrs. Repetto was "full of character and honesty" according to Allan Crawford.²⁷ Rose Rogers, living on the island from 1922 to 1925, described her as "rather a remarkable character, exceedingly good, clean, and strict with her family, and one of the most truthful and honest persons on the island." Mrs.

²⁵ Connell, John. 1988. "The End Ever Nigh: Contemporary Population Change on Pitcairn Island." *GeoJournal* 16(2): 193-200; Ferndon, Edwin N., Jr. 1956. "Pitcairn Island." *Geographical Review* 48(1): 69-85; Silverman, David. 1967. *Pitcairn Island*. Cleveland and New York: World; *The Statesman's Yearbook*. (Annual). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁶ Marks, Kathy. 2009. *Lost Paradise: From Mutiny on the Bounty to a Modern-day Legacy of Sexual Mayhem, the Dark Secrets of Pitcairn Island Revisited*. New York: Free Press, p.24.

²⁷ Crawford, Allan B. 1941. *I Went to Tristan*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, p.146

Repetto assumed a major role in helping care for Rogers' baby Edward, born to her and her husband a few months after they arrived on Tristan.²⁸

The most important social characteristics that developed on Tristan are kindness, consideration, respect for others, and the love of peace, values that contemporary scholars label as "caring." Munch recorded one Tristanian as saying, "the worst thing you can do on Tristan is to be unkind to someone."²⁹ The events of 1961—1963 tested their traditions. The government of the U.K. had evacuated the entire population of the island in 1961 to a village in England because the volcano was erupting. As time went on and reports came back that the eruption had ended, it became apparent to the exiles, still living in the U.K., that the government was stalling on returning them to their beloved island. To deal with the growing issue of their return, Willie Repetto realized he would have to take action as a real leader of his community. He must have realized he would be subject to backbiting for assuming a position of leadership, if even briefly, in violation of Tristan traditions. But he cared so deeply about the island's future that he was willing to ignore the islanders' gossip and unhappiness and proceed to do what had to be done. The record shows that he was truly a caring man, not a person who tried to argue with the Colonial Office about justice for the Tristanians. In sum, the cultures of violence among the Pitcairners and of peacefulness among the Tristanians almost certainly are closely linked, respectively, with the denial and acceptance of the caring values that their leaders exemplified.

In sum, the stories of Tristan compared to Pitcairn, La Paz compared to San Andres, and the Semai compared to the Waorani, provide probably enough detail on the issue for now. Another article that should be at least mentioned briefly is one by Joanna Overing, whose research on the Piaroa was quoted extensively in Chapter 4. She compared the Piaroa with a much more violent South American people, the Shavante, Amerindians of the Mato Grosso area of Brazil.³⁰ The Shavante glorify male ferocity, bellicosity, power, and aggressiveness, and they practice gender separation and discrimination. While they primarily subsist on the wild foods collected by the

²⁸ Rogers, Rose Annie. 1927. *The Lonely Island*. Milwaukee, WI: Morehouse Publishing, p.96.

²⁹ Munch, Peter A. and Charles E. Marske. 1981. "Atomism and Social Integration." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37(2): 158-171, the quote is on p.165.

³⁰ Overing, Joanna. 1989. "Styles of Manhood: An Amazonian Contrast in Tranquility and Violence," In *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Signe Howell and Roy Willis, p.79-99. London: Routledge.

women when they forage, the hunting done by the men forms the primary focus of Shavante society. The men talk endlessly about their hunting; it is the dramatic stage on which they display their prowess. An unsuccessful hunter is greeted coldly by the women when he returns to the group. On the other hand, the successful hunter throws down his kill for the women to dress and makes a show of going to lie down, seemingly indifferent about his success. He is clearly endowed with the appropriate male virtues. His endurance, his fleetness, his bellicosity are all the proper attributes, they believe, of the successful male hunter.

In contrast, while the Piaroa practice violent sorcery toward non-Piaroa communities, they believe that the good life consists of tranquility and harmony. Their territory is almost completely free of physical violence, expressions of anger, and displays of violent excess. They feel that arrogance and domination are odious behavior traits. They define maturity in an ideal sense equally for men and women. The Piaroa believe that the ideal meal is composed of meat and manioc bread, the product of a man's hunting and a woman's garden. Their ideal for both men and women is tranquility and control—a mastery of the emotions and of the harm that can come from their creative powers. The produce of the forest is shared by all the members of the multi-family house, but the products from gardens are owned individually by the people who grew them. Individuals are free to choose how much they wish to be part of any collective activity—there is no coercion in their society, which has no authority over people. While the concept of a collective will be foreign to them, the Piaroa highly value social skills and the ability to live together in a community. They view the function of the community to be the institution which achieves a society that prevents relationships of domination.

Another comparison between a peaceful society and a more violent one was developed in Chapter 1, the story of the 2013 conflict between the Lepchas and the Gorkhas. It demonstrates graphically the differences between the ways people act who value a serious tradition of peacefully resolving conflicts and those who champion violence as the best way to deal with issues. The history makes it clear that the Lepcha approach was just as effective as the violence-based one of the Gorkhas. Admitting of course that the Chief Minister of West Bengal may have been playing off the different actors for her own cynical political purposes, the point has to be emphasized that the Lepchas did get what they wanted and the Gorkhas did not—at least not in 2013.

The Lepchas may not be as absolutely peaceful as some of the other societies described in these pages but their ways of handling serious conflicts, especially one with a much more aggressive society such as the Gorkhas, demonstrate once again that societies are not all uniform, that they act in accordance with their beliefs, and that those who believe the world is a violent place so they must act violently form a real contrast with those that believe that it is essential for them to react nonviolently to events so they do, in fact, find ways to react peacefully. The Lepchas and their reactions to the Gorkhas do teach a most important lesson.

Likewise, it must be added, if the Lepchas are not as peaceful as other groups such as the Semai, the Gorkhas are not as violent as some major nation states, to judge by the events of 2013. Time after time that year, the Lepchas retreated from confrontations; numerous times the Gorkhas challenged the authorities in a confrontational, threatening manner. When the Lepchas held sit ins and hunger strikes, the Gorkhas threatened, and at least once attacked, a group of their opponents. The contrast between the two approaches cannot be wished away by the attacks on the facts by the peaceful-societies deniers.

Comparisons between relatively peaceful and relatively violent societies cannot, of course, be applied directly to the problems of today's world. But many of the broader themes that emerge in the discussion above should prompt readers to think about several important issues. The basic worldviews of societies—including such topics as how people view the nature of peacefulness and violence—can have a profound effect on how peaceful they really are. A violent society that is able to see for itself that less violent alternatives are possible and even desirable may be able to change its ways. If people only go so far as to consider alternatives to spearing their neighbors—or whatever—and seek better ways of getting along, we are making progress. Of course, glossing over the failings of the Ifaluk, the Semai, the Piaroa, or the Americans does no better than romanticizing their peacefulness or castigating their violence. But clear-eyed assessments of different, contrasting approaches to peace and war, peacefulness and violence, and open-minded considerations of alternatives is certainly better than ignoring the comparative literature about peaceful societies versus violent ones, much less ignoring the larger literature of peaceful societies as a whole.

Robert Knox Dentan, whose 1968 book on the Semai makes him one of the founders of the study of peaceful societies,³¹ has expressed a cautionary note about the study of these societies. His words are to be respected. He writes in 1994³² that peace groups in Western countries tend to form myths about peaceful peoples from the historical and ethnographic literature, which have tended to erect folklore (or perhaps fakelore) about primitive peacefulness. Real societies must not be transformed into false utopias, though the yearning for peace in the West is understandable.

However, Dentan adds, the Western peace groups do not confront issues of social justice: their views of peace come from comfortable, established positions. Furthermore, capitalism is relatively successful, which strengthens the nation state and the prosperity of its citizens against a potentially subversive mass peace movement. Dentan points out that the peaceful societies may be inspiring but they cannot provide a model for action in a modern nation-state.

The point of this book has been to look for inspiration rather than for specific courses of action. If someone is inspired to take action in any of the areas covered by the chapters in this volume, it is hoped that the literature and arguments developed about the different societies may prove to be relevant, useful, helpful and perhaps even inspiring. But Dentan's words give us the best possible conclusion: that the complexities of the modern state cannot be solved by looking to the peaceful Semai and the others for anything more than inspiration. But possibly, just possibly, the ways of approaching human relations by the peaceful societies will rub off on some people and have value here and there. We can hope.

³¹ Dentan, Robert Knox. 1968. *The Semai: A Nonviolent People of Malaya*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

³² Dentan, Robert Knox. 1994. "Surrendered Men: Peaceable Enclaves in the Post-enlightenment West," In *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence*, Edited by Leslie E. Sponsel and Thomas Gregor, p.69-108. Boulder: Lynne Rienner