THE POLITICS OF PEACE (AND WAR) IN PRELITERATE SOCIETIES

Part 1: The Adaptive Rationale behind Corroboree and Calumet

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Introduction

Peaceable preindustrial (preliterate, primitive, etc.) societies constitute a nuisance to most theories of warfare and they are, with few exceptions, either denied or ‘explained away’. Contending theories have also tended to severely underestimate the costs of war to the individuals as well as to the communities involved. Materialist theory, as formulated by Ferguson, is one such exception: “[I]n contrast to the Hobbesian view, we should find nonwar, the absence of active fighting, in the absence of challenges to material well-being” (Ferguson, 1984). Where the costs of initiating violence outweigh the benefits, war is expected to be absent (Durham, 1976; Ferguson, 1984, 1990, 1994). There is no theoretical reason to deny the possibility of peaceful societies. Indeed, “there may be alternative peaceable and militaristic trajectories of evolution” (Ferguson, 1994).

The capability to make peace (peaceability) and the readiness to make war (warlikeness) are, it will be argued, not Platonic essences but the outcomes of a rational (Realpolitical) cost/benefit calculus (though the benefits of war or peace to the warrior-participants may not always be prima facie obvious) and an adaptive response (in the Darwinian sense) to particular sociopolitical ecologies.

Most peoples seem to prefer peace when they can afford it, i.e., when they can solve the internal problem of the ‘young male fierce warrior syndrome’ (especially prevalent when the warrior role is rewarded with social status and/or sexual privileges), and the external problem of being left ‘in peace’ by other peoples. One reason why it is the young males (especially young bachelors) who are eager to initiate and conduct war, Keeley (1996) explains, is that they have the least to lose and the most to gain from successful combat: spoils and loot (“booty and beauty”); honor, status and renown; sexual access to both ingroup and outgroup women, etc.

The ecological roots of peace may be as complex as, or even more so than, the roots of violence and war. There may be as many reasons for peaceability as there are for belligerence: Intercommunity nonviolence may be a response to overwhelming odds; it may be the taming effect of defeat; it may be enforced by colonial or imperial powers; it may be the result of isolation and/or xenophobia; it may be due to a negative cost/benefit balance of war, making peace more opportune under the given circumstances; it may be due to a voluntary decision to abstain from or abandon violence, or to a nonviolent ethic or pacifistic ideology; or some combination of all these factors. As Dentan (1992) reminds us: “[P]eaceability is not disability, not a cultural essence unrelated to a people’s actual circumstances”. Thus, warlike people are quite capable of peacefulness, while peaceable peoples are perfectly capable of intergroup violence under altered circumstances.

If war is so universal and ubiquitous as has been claimed by advocates of the Universal Human Belligerence theorem (see Van der Dennen, 1990), the mere fact of peace constitutes a problem, and we would have to develop a theory of peace as an abnormal, anomalous condition. Gregor (1990) has actually proposed such a perspective: “Political systems are so volatile and war is so
contagious that its existence should occasion little surprise. It is peace that needs special explanation”.

In this contribution I shall argue that the claim of universal human belligerence is grossly exaggerated; and that those students who have been developing theories of war, proceeding from the premise that peace is the ‘normal’ situation, have not been starry-eyed utopians; and that peace — the continuation of potentially conflictuous interactions between discernible groups of human beings with other means (to paraphrase the famous Clausewitzian dictum) — in primitive peoples is just as much a deliberate and rational political strategy, based on cost/benefit considerations and ethical judgments, as is war.

The Security Dilemma

General Robert E. Lee is reported to have said that “it is a good thing that war is so horrible or else we would grow too fond of it”. The statement by Davie (1929) that “Men like war” is as apodictic as it is general (referring to all men), and obstinately reiterated to the present day. Lately, Van Creveld (1991) stated (with a similar universal pretense): “However unpalatable the fact, the real reason why we have wars is that men like fighting, and women like those men who are prepared to fight on their behalf”.

Jane Goodall (1986) observed a great eagerness in young prime male chimpanzees for the behaviors involved in ‘lethal male raiding’ parties, but she also pointed out quite emphatically that there are distinct individual differences in this eagerness.

Fox (1991; Cf. Klineberg, 1964) seems to advance what may be called a Bad Seed or Rotten Apple theory of war: One rotten apple soon spoils the whole basket. Similarly, one or a few percent of hyperaggressive or belligerent males distributed more or less at random throughout the megapopulation would be sufficient to create a rampant war complex among all the demes involved (e.g., Papua New Guinea, Amazonia.)

There is a much more ‘tragic’ variant of this theory in which no one has to harbor ill will. The expectation or suspicion thereof is sufficient for an internecine war complex to develop. Virulent war complexes do not have to be explained by some evil streak in human nature, but can be understood — at least in part — as the result of a war trap (Tefft, 1988, 1990), from which nobody can disengage on penalty of annihilation.

Richerson (1995) advances what he calls the ‘evolutionary tragedy’ hypothesis (not unlike the ‘tragedy of the commons’): Warfare is liable to evolve even if it makes everybody worse off. It results from the perversion of the situation (the perfidious logic of the war ‘game’) rather than that of the actors involved. The only practical way to avoid victimization by aggressors is to deter attack by being conspicuously prepared to fight, and display a credible ability and will to inflict unacceptable damage on would-be attackers.

Primitive societies, like modern nation-states in an anarchic state system, are trapped in a security dilemma (e.g., Elias, 1978). Simple game-theoretical analysis reveals why such a situation results, most of the time, in an equilibrial stalemate of mutual deterrence (assuming short-term rational choices of actors) even if none of the actors harbors evil intentions or sinister motives (or is equipped with aggressive/violent/belligerent drives, urges or instincts).

The security dilemma in which (primitive) peoples find themselves has the formal structure of a Prisoner’s Dilemma (PD) in which individual short-term rational behavior leads to a collectively irrational outcome: All parties involved defect and lose (in terms of casualties, destruction of property, costs of war preparations, opportunity costs, etc.).
In a relatively stable socio-ecological environment (in which each society knows its and others’ place, numerical strength, retaliatory capacity, etc.) to be on the alert and be prepared to defend itself may be a beneficial strategy resulting in a kind of peace through insulation with only sporadic and incidental flares of overt violence.

In this case, which has the formal structure of an *iterated* PD, diplomacy and peace become viable options. In such an iterated PD situation, when both parties know each other more or less intimately, and expect future (reciprocal or mutually beneficial) interactions, mutual suspicion and xenophobic fear can give rise to mutual caution and diplomatic maneuvering, but probably only if there also is a higher (e.g., tribal) authority to stop the private-enterprise (revenge) raiding of the young male warriors, or relax the obligations of the blood feud (and the concomitant male ideal of the macho warrior, and material rewards and social privileges attached to the warrior role). “The Mohave Indians of the Colorado River valley are by reputation a warlike tribe” Stewart (1947) relates, “although my informants insisted that the people as a whole were pacifically inclined. It was asserted that, while war was disliked by a majority of the Mohave, battle was the dominant concern of the kwanamis (‘brave men’), who were responsible for the recurrent hostilities and over whom there was no effective control” Stewart, 1947).

As Goldschmidt (1994) points out, the problem of internal dissatisfaction with existing peace treaties among preindustrial societies is a recurrent one. The problem is caused partly by (a) distrust and fear; and (b) inability to restrain the (entrepreneurial raiding of the) warriors. “Even when the population is war weary” Goldschmidt (1994) concludes, “even when there is a genuine need for peace, the peace is fragile precisely because there remain those who feel that their masculinity, by which we mean their social identity, is lost if they do not press their cause”, that is, the hatchet will not be ceremonially buried, when there is no acceptable face-saving device (peace with honor) for the ‘fierce’ warriors. Nevertheless, even in a situation of chronic insecurity, the acceptance of mitigating rules of combat, of a common law of war and peace, is in accordance with enlightened self-interest (Mühlmann, 1940). Rules for war mitigation and a common law of war and peace can, Mühlmann holds, gradually develop (only?) in a situation of hereditary enmity. Paradoxically, the Plains Indians’ war complex with its emphasis on individual feats of bravery and bravado (as exemplified by counting *coup*; touching the enemy, whether alive or dead, was considered to be the ultimate act of bravery) actually limited violence, so that warfare, though incessant, boiled down to a series of small-scale raids of a few ‘braves’ striking *coup* and stealing horses, which were far more important objectives than killing the enemy.

**The Inventory of Allegedly Peaceful Societies**

‘Simple’ human societies, according to Knauff (1991, 1994) place great emphasis on generalized reciprocity and far less on balanced competition or negative reciprocity. Concomitantly, collective military action or warfare tends to be rudimentary or absent. This contrasts in aggregate terms with more complex, sedentary, horti- and agricultural societies, among which subsistence and demographic intensification are associated with increasing property ownership and status inequality, and increasingly competitive politicoeconomic and military rivalry (e.g., Fried, 1967).

Accordingly, we should be able to find a number of such ‘simple’ societies without war, or with only rudimentary war, in the literature. Swanton (1943) surveyed the anthropological literature and found that there were about as many societies that were peaceable as warlike. Leavitt (1977)
found war absent or rare in 73% of hunting and gathering societies (n=22), 41% of simple horticultural (n=22), and 17% of advanced horticultural societies (n=29). Holsti (1913), Hobhouse, Wheeler & Ginsberg (1915), van der Bij (1929), Numelin (1950), Textor (1967), Bonta (1993), and Van der Dennen (1995), among others, present inventories of a great number of peaceful peoples.

On the other hand, Otterbein (1970), in a sample of 50 societies, found only four or five to have engaged “infrequently or never” in any type of offensive or defensive war. Ross (1983) found twelve societies engaged in warfare “rarely or never” out of a sample of ninety societies. Also Jorgensen (1980) identified seven peaceful societies in his study of northwestern North America. Among these peaceful societies are the Monache, Panamint, Battle Mountain and Hukundika Shoshone, Gosiute, Kaibab Paiute, Wenatchi, Columbia Salish, Copper Eskimo, Cayapa, Lapps, Gonds, Tikopía, Semang, Dorobo, and Mbuti. Most of these peaceful societies, as Keeley (1996) notes, were recently defeated refugees living in isolation, or were forcefully pacified, or both (cf. also Ember & Ember, 1992).

Nevertheless, the evidence of a substantial number of peoples without warfare, or with mainly defensive and/or low-level warfare (i.e., seldom exceeding the level of petty feuding or desultory skirmishes) does not support the view of universal human belligerence. It does not support the equally erroneous view of universal peaceability either. Rather, it supports Muhlmann’s (1940) and Dentan’s (1992) view that peace as well as war are the results of illuminated and opportunistic self-interest in the political arena.

Van der Bij (1929) concluded that primitive peoples were peaceful because they were primitive. Steinmetz (1929), on the other hand, concluded that primitive peoples were primitive because they were peaceful. Steinmetz thereby reiterated the statement by Gumplovicz (1892) that peaceful peoples were evolutionarily stultified and remained on the level of monkeys. Gumplovicz, by the way, admitted that ethnology offers numerous examples of such peaceful peoples, without giving any explanation of why and how such monkey-like peaceful peoples have been able to survive in so warlike a world as he envisaged.

**Peace as the Normal Condition**

“The question has been raised whether the traditional view of early society as one of constant warfare is really justified by the facts. There is, in fact, no doubt that to speak of a state of war as normal is in general a gross exaggeration” Hobhouse, Wheeler & Ginsberg (1915) concluded in their extensive survey of some 650 primitive peoples. Similarly, Quincy Wright (1942) stated: “No general golden age of peace existed at any stage of human history nor did any general iron age of war. Neither the Rousseauian nor the Hobbesian concept of natural man is adequate”. In even the most warlike societies, the vast preponderance of time is spent in the pursuit of ordinary, peaceful activities (Gregor & Sponsel, 1994). The unsentimental military analyst Turney-High (1949) proved, in several parts of his work on primitive war, to be a perceptive and keen psychologist. He observed that “Cold-blooded slaughter has really never been approved by the bulk of mankind. All have understood the amenities of peace to a greater or less degree... Peace, then, seems to be the normal situation in the minds of even warlike peoples”.

Similarly, Keeley (1996) notes, warfare, whether primitive or civilized, involves losses, suffering and terror, even for the victors. “Consequently, it was nowhere viewed as an unalloyed good”. At some level, even the most militant warriors recognized the evils of war and the desirability of
peace (e.g., Jalé: Koch, 1979; Kapauku: Pospisil, 1963; Jivaro: Karsten, 1967; Apache: Opler, 1983). Even the fierce Jivaro head-hunters regarded their incessant warfare as a curse. Additional evidence of the universal preference for peace, Keeley contends, is the ease with which some of the most warlike of tribal peoples accepted colonial pacification or pacified themselves (e.g., the Waorani or Auca; vide infra).

In discussing the Inevitability Belief (i.e., the belief that war is ‘natural’ and, therefore, inevitable), Ferguson (1989) notes:

[T]he claim for universality [of primitive war] can only be advanced by relying on several dubious procedures: letting one cultural subdivision with war represent a broader cultural grouping which includes some groups without war; letting war at any point in time count, and disregarding what may be much more typical periods of peace; and when these fail, falling back on the untestable assertion that a peaceful people might have had war before the Westerners arrived. Even if we focus on societies where warfare is an undisputed occurrence, periods of active warfare involving a given group usually are relatively brief. The vast majority of humans, living or dead, have spent most of their lives at peace. So one can agree with Hobbes that politically autonomous groups have the potential for war, but this tells us nothing about why real war occurs. Contrary to the Hobbesian image, peace is the normal human condition.

**Purification Rituals: Ambivalence toward the Enemy**

We have been led to think that disregard for enemy life and his feelings are characteristic of warfare, Turney-High (1949) states, but this is not necessarily so, as evidenced by ambivalent feelings toward the enemy and guilt-expiating ritual, both of which seem to be universal and betraying ‘bad conscience’.

War and killing push men into some kind of marginality which is at least uncomfortable, for there seems to be a basic fear of blood contamination, an essential dread of human murder. If man did not consider human killing something out of the ordinary, why has there been such common fear of the enemy dead, the idea of contamination of even a prestigious warrior of the we-group? We have seen that the channeling of frustration into hatred toward the enemy is good for the internal harmony of the we-group, but the enemy is human, too. Humanity is capable of ambivalent attitudes toward its enemies (Turney-High, 1949).

In a chapter of his *The Golden Bough*, aptly entitled “Taboo and the Perils of the Soul”, Frazer (1890) was the first to acknowledge the existence, and summarize the available evidence of disculpation ritual, taboos and purification ceremonies (or lustration), indicative of some sense of guilt, in the post-war behavior of primitive peoples. The purpose of the seclusion and the expiatory rites which the warriors who have taken the life of a foe have to perform is, he points out, “no other than to shake off, frighten, or appease the angry spirit of the slain man” (cf. Kennedy, 1971; Goldschmidt, 1988; Keeley, 1996).

In his *Totem und Tabu*, Freud (1913) was so impressed by these examples of disculpation ritual among primitive peoples that he discussed the subject at length, connecting the expiatory ceremonies following the killing of an enemy with the general ambivalence of taboo.
Much of the post-war ritual activity in primitive societies seems clearly to indicate the expiation of guilt. Various kinds of ritual penance after killing were widespread in primitive (and ancient) societies. Fasting, sexual abstinence, and separation were common, as were ritual responsibilities such as sacrifices for vows given. Often the returning warrior was considered spiritually polluted or contaminated and had to undergo additional purification (cleansing) rituals. The Pima, for example, regarded the killing of an enemy to be such a dangerous act that a Pima warrior withdrew from battle the moment he killed his opponent to begin his rites of purification, or lustration (Kroeber & Fontana, 1987). “There has existed” Turney-High (1949) concludes his perceptive review, “a dread of taking enemy life, a feeling that if the life of a member of the we-group was precious, so was that of a member of the other-group. Fear of death-contamination has demanded expiation or purification among many folk”.

**Prudent Feuders**

There are a number of instances of tribal communities that do not support individual members in their personal vendettas against outsiders for fear that such revenge actions may escalate intercommunity violence which would prove detrimental to the collective interests of the whole community. There are three ways for kin units such as patriclans to avoid unnecessary feuds: (1) They may send the culprit into exile; (2) they may renounce the clan’s responsibility to avenge him, giving other clans a free license to hunt him down, or the community may even turn a murderer over to the victim’s kin; or (3) his own clan may put him to death (A. Moore, 1978; S. Moore, 1972; Boehm, 1985, 1986). Boehm (1986) comments: “A clan system of collectivized self-defense and liability ‘works’ only if clan members are reasonably prudent in committing homicides or in otherwise stimulating members of other clans to kill them. Too much heroic aggressiveness can embroil a clan in so many feuds that it faces serious decimation or cannot earn its subsistence. Warriors living in feuding societies [such as the Pathans (Pashtun) and Montenegrins] are aware of these costs, and mostly they behave accordingly – that is, prudently. They try to be as aggressive as honor demands, but also try not to initiate feuds recklessly or pointlessly”.

**Peacefulness Does Not Equal Pusillanimity or ‘Gentleness’**

When Gregor (1990) tried to find comparative data to complement his study of the relatively peaceful Xingu communities, he was frustrated by the minimal number of peaceful peoples he could find. He writes: Other researchers, who have combed the literature more systematically than myself, have reached the same conclusion. Thus Richard Sipes notes in his study of war and combative sports: ‘Relatively peaceful societies are not easy to find. I had to investigate 130 societies to find eleven, of which five were rejected because of insufficient information’ (1973: 68). Similarly, Otterbein (1970) found only four peaceful cultures among the fifty in his study of the evolution of war. Turning to advanced, state-level societies the searcher for peace becomes even more disheartened... The societies that come closest to fitting the model of the truly peaceful culture are small
in scale and primarily hunters and foragers. This conclusion is in keeping with research on war by Wright... and others who have positively associated war with community size and cultural development. Peaceful peoples also tend to be geographically isolated. Otterbein (1970), for example, finds that societies lacking in military organizations, such as the Copper Eskimo, the Dorobo and the Tikopians, live on islands, mountain tops, arctic wastelands and plateaus surrounded by malaria infested jungles. In some cases this isolation is a strategic adaptation to dealing with more aggressive societies that surround them. In most instances, however, peaceful societies appear to achieve their status by evading rather than solving the problems of intertribal relations (Gregor, 1990).

Isolation, splendid or not, seems prima facie to be the most prominent condition for peacefulness. So much so, in fact, that Mühlmann (1936, 1940) virtually identified peaceful peoples with Rückzugsvölker (litt. evading/retreating peoples). Why could Gregor find so few peaceful peoples? One of the reasons might be simply because his criteria were wrong. In order to classify a people as ‘peaceable’, some scholars demand not only absolute proof of the absence of intercommunity warring and feuding, but also the absence of every trace of intragroup violence, manifestations of aggression, and even conflict. They quite unrealistically require these societies to be ‘gentle’ and pusillanimous in all walks of life. As Turney-High (1949) already observed: “Such warless people have by no means been friendly and pacific. They have not been ignorant of how to shed human blood, nor have they abhorred it. Neither have they been without social institutions which formalized man-killing... Field ethnology no more demonstrates that a warless people are per se a kindly one than it shows that a monogamous tribe is sexually chaste” (Turney-High, 1949).

Bellicosity Does Not Equal Aggression

Whatever function aggression or violence may serve in the life of the individual or the small group, Malinowski (1941) already observed, it does not serve the same function between political units. Wars between bands, tribes, states or similar political entities are not just magnified quarrels between individuals. Warfare is not just simply aggregated individual aggression.

The profound misunderstanding about aggression and warlikeness, and the fundamental confusion concerning ‘nonaggressive’ and ‘peaceful’ is perhaps best exemplified by Heelas (1989; Cf. also Dentan, 1992), who devotes his whole contribution discussing definitions of aggression in his Search for Peaceful Peoples.

It may be important to note that ‘peace’ as used by Heelas and Dentan, and by many other Anglo-American authors, refers to the absence of physical violence generally (including intra- and intergroup violence), while in most other languages ‘peace’ (except in such metaphors as ‘peace of mind’, etc.) refers preferentially or exclusively to the absence of ‘war’ (as collective, organized, armed and violent intergroup or interstate conflict).

Montagu (1978) makes the same distinction between intragroup or intergroup ‘aggression’ and implies that they may vary independently: “When reference is made to aggressive societies we have to be quite clear whether the reference is to intragroup or intergroup aggression. There are societies in which intergroup aggression is high but in which intragroup aggression is low, as among a number of New Guinea peoples. There are some societies in which aggression is high both within the group and between groups, as among the Yanomamö. There are societies in
which both inter- and intragroup aggression is low, as among the Toda of Southern India, and there are some societies in which both inter- and intragroup aggression are nonexistent, as among the Tasaday of Mindanao, in the Philippines” (Montagu, 1978) (The Tasaday have in the meantime been exposed as victims or perpetrators of a hoax).

The only reasonable criterion for peacefulness is the presence or absence of offensive war or warlike behaviors (which implies that it is an intergroup phenomenon), and not the presence or absence of any and all forms of intragroup violence, or aggression, or conflict. The confusion rests on the, mostly implicit, assumption that war in some unspecified way is the result of the collective outpouring of accumulated ‘raw aggression’. In a previous publication (van der Dennen, 1986) I have tried to outline the fallacies involved in this kind of reasoning, especially the cumulative fallacy (the confounding of levels-of-analysis).

According to Kennedy (1971) and numerous other authors (see van der Dennen, 1986), aggression is obviously correlated with, and an integral aspect of war, but the relationships between war and aggression are reciprocal, complex, and mediated by intervening variables. There is no simple cause and effect relationship, and as White (1949) and others have long contended, there is probably more evidence to support the proposition that war produces aggression than the reverse. Ember & Ember (1992, 1994) found empirical evidence that among primitive peoples socialization for aggression is more likely to be a consequence than a cause of war. Grudges of ‘unemployed’ warriors after coercive pacification have sometimes been (mis)construed as evidence of some kind of innate bellicosity.

Robarchek & Robarchek (1992), discussing the Waorani in Amazonia (who are probably unique in deliberately and consciously abandoning feuding and warfare), draw attention to the often limited options available in a hostile environment: “In such a situation, where warfare is endemic [and rampant], a people’s options are rather limited: they can either flee, fight back, or be overwhelmed. Given the sociocultural environment of the region (and with no safe refuge available), engaging in at least defensive warfare becomes a functional necessity for group survival. Warfare, under these conditions, is contagious; once one group adopts it as a tactic for advancing its ends, others must either take it up or be destroyed”.

The result is a more or less stable balance of terror with constant raiding among the various social groups (Robarchek & Robarchek, 1992). In such a situation, fear, as Whiffen (1915) long ago, and Mühlmann (1940) and Meyer (1977) more recently, pointed out, seems to be the predominant war motive.

There is, furthermore, a strong androcentric bias in the accounts relating aggression and warfare in primitive societies; “with a sleight-of-hand extension of man into Man... Woman is either ignored or presented as innately less aggressive than man. The arguments for a biological difference in the sexes in this regard are far from conclusive, but in cases where such a difference is put forward, the general conclusions of humanity’s aggressive nature are not revised” Howell & Willis, 1989).

These authors also draw attention to the fact that aggression/violence/warlikeness, though considered ‘natural’ (particularly or exclusively in males) is also condemned as ‘bad’, while its perceived opposite, peacefulness, carries with it the negatively valued connotations of being passive and inert, qualities which are associated with females. One might go so far as to state that for many males in primitive communities, as well as in our Western culture, ‘peaceful’ equals ‘weak’ equals ‘unmasculine/feminine’ equals ‘impotent’ equals ‘emasculated/castrated’.

**Primitive War as a Post-Contact Phenomenon**
The effects of contact with ‘civilized’ states and colonialism in the warfare patterns of primitive peoples have, until recently, not sufficiently been acknowledged. Virtually all over the globe such contact has exacerbated warfare within and among nonstate societies to a degree we are only beginning to sense (e.g. Blick, 1988; Ferguson, 1992a,b; Ferguson & Whitehead, 1992; Sponsel, 1994).

“Accepted wisdom even now holds that ‘primitive’ cultures are typically at war and that the primary military effect of contact with the West is the suppression of ongoing combat. In fact, the initial effect of European colonialism has generally been quite the opposite. Contact has invariably transformed war patterns, very frequently intensified war and not uncommonly generated war among groups who previously had lived in peace. Many, perhaps most, recorded wars involving tribal peoples can be directly attributed to the circumstances of Western contact” (Ferguson, 1992b). A consequence of this is, as he explains elsewhere (Ferguson, 1990), a systematic exaggeration of images of warlike behavior in supposedly ‘first contact’ accounts.

The Characteristics of Peaceful Peoples

Fabbro (1978) analyzed five peaceable primitive societies, including the Semai, the Siriono, the Mbuti, the !Kung, and the Copper Eskimo. To these ‘traditional’ groups, Fabbro added two literate peaceful communities for reasons of comparison, the Hutterites and the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha. Contemporary peace groups, such as Hutterites and Amish, living in permanent communities based on a common religion, are also called ‘cenobites’. A peaceful society, according to him, is one that is not involved in internal (i.e., intracultural) collective violence; one that exhibits relatively little interpersonal violence; one that provides no special role for warriors; and one that has values and sanctions precluding violence as a means for resolving conflict. Peaceability should not be confused with pacifism, which is only one genre of peaceability (Dentan, 1992).

McCauley (1990) presented the results of a study of the Semai and two other peaceful societies, the Buid of the Philippines, and the South American Xingu River conglomeration of tribes. Various combinations of the peaceable communities mentioned above were also present in the analyses of Gregor (1990) and Dentan (1992, 1994). From the combined analyses of this rather small sample a number of patterns emerge:

- All peaceful societies are essentially small, local, face-to-face, communities with very low degree of social stratification, and open and egalitarian decision-making.
- The ‘traditional’ societies do not maintain an exclusive monopoly over an area of land. Other groups may come and go, and in times of shortage an incumbent band may share the food and water resources with another less fortunate group. But conflicts within these groups are also partly responsible for personnel changes, fission being used as a dissociative conflict resolution form.
- The traditional societies produce little or no economic surplus. Material inequality between individuals on a long-term basis is, therefore, impossible. As a corollary, leadership remains on the level of personal authority rather than coercive power because there is no surplus to appropriate.
- The differences in child-rearing practices between the traditional and the cenobite societies are open to a number of possible explanations. Cenobites generally are more authoritarian
with children than are peaceable ‘refugees’ like Semai, and they approve the spanking and whipping of children as corporal punishment of last resort (Dentan, 1992, 1994). The socialization of nonaggression (e.g., Montagu, 1978; Irwin, 1990) may be a relatively minor factor in the creation of peaceability (e.g., Riches, 1987; Dentan, 1992; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1993), though some cross-cultural studies find a positive correlation between child abuse and neglect or harsh socialization practices and bellicosity (e.g., Levinson & Malone, 1980; Ross, 1992).

- Many of the peaceful societies develop what Gregor (1990) calls an ‘antiviolent’ value system; cultural norms and ideologies which discourage both intra- and intergroup violence (an important component of which seems to be Gelassenheit at least among cenobites). Nonviolence is supported by stigmatizing quarreling, boasting, stinginess, anger, and violence, and by according prestige for generosity, gentleness, and conflict avoidance. This value system is supported by supernatural beliefs (McCauley, 1990).

- Peaceability and nonviolence among primitive peoples and cenobites seems to stem from (a psychology of) defeat: “Defeat tamed them... those that survived did so by learning virtues of political accommodation or withdrawal from temporal affairs” (Barkun, 1986; see Dentan, 1992, 1994). Or, as Bigelow (1969) put it “their ‘peacefulness’ was imposed on them by force”. ‘Islets of peaceability’ can arise as an adaptive response to defeat by neighboring peoples when there are relatively unpopulated areas (called ‘refuges’ or ‘enclaves’) to flee to.

- Peaceable ‘refugees’ tend to be insulationist and xenophobic. Lacking the oppositional frontier processes that create peaceable ‘refugees’, cenobites need specific mechanisms to maintain the boundaries between their people and the ‘others’ by means of physical isolation. Peaceable peoples like Semai contrast themselves with the peoples they fear, creating a counterculture. The antiviolent value system is embodied in a contrast between the peacefulness of the ingroup and the violence of outsiders. Outsiders are bloody, violent, dangerous, ugly, evil, animal-like and, in a real sense, less than human. Children are warned against outsiders and, especially, about behaving like outsiders. Apparently, “hating violence requires violent people to hate” McCauley, 1990).

- The gender-equality characteristic of many egalitarian band-level societies is not a necessary correlate of peacefulness among enclaved peoples, although the two phenomena can co-occur.

- None of the peaceful societies would seem to operate on the premise that its members would automatically refrain from violence (even though aggressive models are absent). Even the most peaceful of these societies employ various forms of social conditioning and indoctrination to constrain and deflect the tendencies to resort to violence, as well as community inducements to discourage violence, and instructions in the virtues and arts of nonviolent conflict resolution. Tribal cosmology, rituals, legends, religious and ethical concepts and precepts reinforce the nonviolent norms of the society. And social ostracism is typically inflicted on individuals who violate these norms (S. Brown, 1994).

The 52 Peaceful Societies investigated by Melko (1973) are not really societies (in the ethnological sense) but particular historical periods of particular civilizations (such as the Han and T’ang dynasties in China) without major internal physical conflicts. Yet, some of his findings may be summarized for reasons of comparison.

- No one form of government, no one economic system, no one structure of society, no one system of education seems to be essential to peace.
• Moderate powers seem to have had the advantage over great powers in maintaining peace. They are strong enough to resist attack, but not strong enough to become overextended. Small powers that have been successful in maintaining peace have refrained from interfering in the affairs of their neighbors. Great powers seem to succeed in attaining peace only if they conquer all other great powers within range.

• Peace is the normal internal condition for a society. Conflict involving physical fighting is exceptional. When it occurs, most people involved in it are not fighting most of the time. Most people in most places in most periods of history have not been killed or injured in war.

Part 2: Peace-making and Peace-keeping Strategies

A Typology of Peace

Tefft (1988, 1990), among many other, pointed to the fact that tribes involved in so-called ‘restrictive’ (or rather ‘restricted’) wars often have institutionalized checks limiting the level of intertribal violence (e.g., Polopa: D.Brown; Bete: Balandier, 1986; Meru: Fadiman, 1980). Many societies from all over the world seem to make a clear distinction between ‘real’ wars and more game-like, ritualized wars (also called ‘agonistic’ wars) (e.g., Rappaport, 1968). In the next section, I shall present a typology of peace and more fully discuss some of the strategies and mechanisms of peace-making and peace-keeping in primitive societies. According to Service (1975), it is the evolution of the various causes of peace (instead of the ‘causes of war’) that can be studied in the human record, and “a large and essential part of the evolution of political organization is simply an extension and intensification of peace-making means”.

Table 1: A Typology of Peace:

**DISSOCIATIVE (SEPARATIVE) PEACE**

Peace by isolation; accomplished by
(1) geographical distance; insurmountable barriers; large no-man’s lands;
(2) absence of technical means of telecommunication;
(3) conscious insulation, ‘splendid isolation’, and non-intervention policies

Peace by extermination or annihilation

Peace by flight and migration

Peace by defeat or stalemate peace

Peace by incorporation or subjugation (*debellatio*)
(1) conquest and annexation of the territory of the vanquished and/or
(2) subjugation of the population resulting in (a) slavery; (b) vassalage; (c) tribute; (d) satellite group; (e) colonization; or (f) assimilation

Peace by war-weariness

Peace by deterrence

**ASSOCIATIVE (SOCIATIVE) PEACE**
Peace through union by means of
(1) fusion; (2) alliance; (3) federation and confederacy

Peace by convention
(1) Armistices, truces, and cease-fires;
(2) peace treaties, covenants and ceremonies
   Means to enforce peace treaties: (a) intervention by invisible powers
      (magic, religion); (b) hostages; (c) cautions and guarantees; (d) military
      occupation or reprisals

Institutions for safeguarding peace:
(1) Sanctuaries, asylums and refuges
(2) Neutrality
(3) Treuga Dei

Institutions and conventions tending to counteract or mitigate war:
(1) Connubium; exogamy and intermarriage
(2) Arbitration and mediation by religious authorities or third parties
(3) Permanent international jurisdictions
(4) Commercium; trade
(5) Diplomacy; messengers, heralds, envoys, couriers
(6) Intercommunity rites and feasts; corroboree, etc.
(7) Hospitality
(8) War substitutes (e.g., potlatch)
(9) Personal union (blood-brotherhood and friendship)
(10) Formal declaration of war
(11) Fixing time and place of battle in advance
(12) Post-battle compensation, indemnification and reparation

Ius in bello:
(1) Inviolability of certain persons (women, children, arbitrators)
(2) Inviolability of certain places: refuges; neutral areas; tabooed times
(3) Use of special, sublethal weapons (e.g., arrows without points or shafts: California),
   or special tactics (e.g., the custom of counting coup in Plains warfare)
(4) Expiatory combat; judicial duels; sham battles
(5) Chivalry and courtesy in battle

(after Holsti, 1913; Mühlmann, 1940; Turney-High, 1949; Numelin, 1950; Gilissen, 1961;
Galtung, 1965, 1968; Oliver, 1989; Gregor, 1990; a.o.)

Many authors discern negative and positive peace. Negative or dissociative peace in a pure form
is based on minimal relationships: “Good fences make good neighbors” (see Galtung, 1968).
War presupposes contact between political entities. When these entities live apart and separated
without any mutual contact, problems of war or peace are nonexistent. Other classic forms of
negative peace are peace by deterrence (Gregor, 1990); peace by annihilation or ‘peace of the graveyard’; peace by incorporation or subjugation; peace by defeat or stalemate-peace; and peace by war-weariness or exhaustion (Oliver, 1989).

Positive (associative) peace is supposed to depend on the exchange of goods, services and peoples. One of the effects of exchange is to create loyalties which are divided by both territory and bonds of interest, such as kinship and economics. These competing allegiances attract a natural constituency in favor of maintaining peaceful relations. Moreover, exchange may lead to the creation of a common culture. Parallel institutions in different societies may generate a consensus of values and stimulate interdependence (e.g., Galtung, 1968; Gregor, 1990). Most of the strategies, institutions, customs and conventions of positive peace are well-known in our contemporary repertoire of peacekeeping efforts.

**Diplomacy:** Many primitive peoples have employed women both as messengers and envoys. females are not uncommonly sacrosanct, i.e., enjoy personal inviolability in war, and are consequently available for intercommunity diplomatic missions, trade, and peacemaking (Holsti, 1913; Numelin, 1950). Young men were generally not regarded as reliable diplomats. They were suspected of trying to stir up warfare in the hope of being able to acquire personal prestige by performing deeds of valor.

**Connubium:** “Exogamous tribes generally – though there are exceptions – live in peace with each other” Numelin (1950) claims, though this seems not to be substantiated unequivocally by the cross-cultural evidence (see Epilogue). Exogamy, or marriage outside the group, is claimed to be an aid in binding groups together. Exogamy, according to Tylor (1889), was an extraordinary factor of peace, for it developed a bond of solidarity between the groups by making them dependent on each other for wives and children. For primitive men the choice was, as Tylor emphasized, “between marrying out and being killed out” (Tylor, 1889; see also Melotti, 1990). Also Fox (1967) noted this pacifying effect: “You would not try to exterminate a band whose wives were your daughters and whose daughters were your potential wives; you would become, in one sense at least, one people; you would be dependent on each other for your continuity and survival”. Thus, far from being only an economic ‘exchange of women’ in the Lévi-Straussian sense, exogamy is basically an exchange of genes (Melotti, 1990).

Kinship and marital bonds may also lead to divided loyalties and conflicts of allegiance, which, in turn, may lead to neutrality and war mitigation; an idea already expressed by Mühlmann (1940). Among the Alaskan Inuit (Eskimo), for example, relatives were neutral when their communities were in conflict (Nelson, 1899). But, building upon the idea of divided loyalties, conflicts may, in effect, be resolved by expanding them (Scheffler, 1965; Oliver, 1989; Goldschmidt, 1994).

The same effect can be obtained not only by bonds of marriage but also by bonds of friendship. If a man, in one tribe in the New Hebrides, had a friend in one of the groups to be attacked, “it was his prerogative to refuse to fight along side with his own tribe... if a man chose not to join in the expedition, he had a perfect right to do so, and no question as to his bravery was involved” (Humphreys, 1926).

Because Kapauku men often married women of confederacies that traditionally were regarded as enemies, ‘in-law’ relatives, blood relatives, and friends met on the battlefield as enemies. To avoid hurting or killing one’s relative or friend, one fought on the other end of the battlefield (Pospisil, 1994).

Persons, especially women, related by kinship or marriage to both belligerent parties were
sometimes allowed to pass with impunity from one camp to another. Such persons were, especially in Oceania, employed to carry proposals of peace (Holsti, 1913; Rowe, 1930: Numelin, 1950).

Not only more or less permanent exchange of women in exogamy, also short-term exchange of women is sometimes part of the peacemaking ritual. Among the Kiwai Papuans, the peacemaking feast that each enemy tribe gives its opponent includes giving their hosts access to their women “to put out the fire” (Landtmann, 1927). Among the Maring, women are exchanged between enemies as part of the peace negotiations, ideally one woman from one tribe for each man slain in the other (Rappaport, 1967; Goldschmidt, 1994).

Among the Australians the exchange of women is part of the peacemaking ceremony, as well as a means of direct dispute settlement: “When an attacking party is about to attack the home party, the latter if it does not want to fight, sends a number of its women over to the former. If these are willing to settle the matter in dispute without fighting, they have sexual intercourse with the women; if not, they send them back untouched... the Aborigines have no desire to exterminate each other’s groups, for, if they did, how could wives be found?” (Elkin, 1938).

A related phenomenon is common worship or religion, which may sometimes mitigate war (Holsti, 1913; Numelin, 1950). Among the North Australians it was believed that while a totemic emblem is in camp all fighting should cease, and any infraction of the tribal law was considered a direct insult to the clan (Warner, 1930). Common worship has also led to the custom of forbidding war during religious festivals, a custom analogous to the Western treuga Dei (peace of God).

Commercium; Trade as promoter of intertribal relations: Barter exists virtually all over the primitive world. Silent trade probably originated from distrust, fear or enmity, prohibiting any direct contact with strangers. Territorial boundaries gradually came to be recognized as neutral areas where one might occasionally meet for mutual benefit, if not on friendly terms, at least without hostility. “As distrust declines, the former silent trade becomes less silent and the tribal representatives (mostly women) begin, though at first shy, to meet at regular intervals: The primitive market. The market day necessarily has the character of a restday, holiday, affording opportunities for social intercourse, sport and amusement, during which hostilities are suspended. The market place can also become a kind of asylum, violation of which is sacrilege” (Numelin, 1950).

Intercommunity rituals, feasts, and festivals: Mühlmann (1940) regards the male initiation ceremonies as the evolutionary matrix of the amphictyony because several sovereign clans unite for the occasion. In Australia hostile tribes met in peace during the performance of certain initiation rites; all hostilities were suspended for the time being. The intertribal character and significance of these ceremonies appears from the fact that persons travelling to or from such feasts could pass unmolested through the territory of hostile tribes. There are instances of peaceful relations between primitive tribes being maintained by means of festivals specially arranged for the invocation of peace. All fighting is placed under a ban or taboo for the time of the festival, and this ban may sometimes have great and lasting consequences (e.g., corroborees, Mindarie feast of the Dieri, etc.) (Numelin, 1950). On the other hand, instances are not lacking in which the former enemy was invited to a feast in the other’s camp only to be treacherously attacked there (e.g., Yanomamö: Chagnon, 1968).

Post-battle indemnification and compensation: In her study of Melanesian warfare, Camilla
Wedgwood (1930) found that peacemaking procedures usually “fall into two distinct parts; the making of compensation for injuries inflicted during the fighting; and the performance of some ceremonial, such as the exchange of gifts or food, which symbolically unites the erstwhile opponents”.

McCorkle (1978) states on the effects of compensation and indemnity payments (bloodmoney) in the Californian region: “It also appears that regional, intertribal adherence to the unwritten law that each injury must be exactly recompensed limited armed aggression, since restraint served to save wealth goods that would have to be expended at the settlement marking the end of hostilities”.

Another kind of compensation (non-monetary) is related by Whitehead (1990). He states that according to Gumilla (1745), among the South American Otomaco and Saliva, ceremonies of peace were concluded by individuals interchanging as many blows with a club (though not the war club) as amounted to complete satisfaction for both parties.

Keeley (1996) objects that the paying of blood money or other forms of war reparations are almost as much a cause of subsequent wars as of immediate peace. In general, reparations appear to be a very weak mechanism for maintaining peace, and they often prove to be an impediment to reconciliation or an inducement to further violence (e.g., Paula Brown, 1978).

**Third party mediation**: Whitehead (1990) presents the following example of third party mediation and peacemaking:

On March 22nd, 1624, a large Aricoure war party, from the Cassipour River in Brazil, stopped at a Yao village on the Oyapock, *en route* to attack Carib settlements at Cayenne. The Yao intervened, as they were ‘common friends of the two’. They secured a peace between the Caribs and the Aricoures. “On the occasion of this peace the Yaos entertained them together for eight days, peace having never been known between them before” (Sloane, 1707).

Among the North American Plateau tribes, hostilities were limited to petty feuds and occasional small-scale raids by self-interested volunteers. Headmen and chiefs of villages and bands, however, disapproved of such entrepreneurial raids and went to great length to maintain peace, sometimes risking their lives in negotiations with hostile outsiders (Driver, 1961). On mediation and negotiation see also Gulliver (1979) and Greenhouse (1985). The peace-making process among the Central Enga of New Guinea (as told in Meggitt, 1977; and summarized in Keeley, 1996) illustrates the excruciating delicacy necessary to establish an, always vulnerable, peace or truce between primitive societies.

**Formal declarations of war**: A further step toward the mitigation of war is the formal declaration of war (*indictio belli*) and the ultimatum (Mühlmann, 1940).

A declaration of war seems to have been the custom among many peoples. The Caribs, for example, declared war by hurling arrows or javelins into the enemy country, or sticking them into the ground at the boundary (von Martius, 1867). The Huron sent a black wampum belt to the enemy-to-be.

The effect of these war declarations is, as Numelin (1950) states, obviously to give the enemy a fair chance and can thus be considered to be some kind of chivalrous action. Turney-High (1949) offered the following interpretation: “Many tribes in varying states of culture considered war the unusual, so unusual that it required some formal act of declaration. It is impossible to say that...”
this idea correlates with either the very simple or the complicated cultures. It has been evident in
degrees of cultural development... This, to be sure, destroyed the surprise element, which may be
why modern nations have lost their manners”.

**Fixing time and place of battle in advance:** A still further step toward the mitigation of war is,
in addition to the formal declaration of war, the agreement on the war theater or battle field (and
by implication the neutrality of other localities) (Mühlmann, 1940). The most important
development of the ‘law of war’ is the transition from the treacherous attack to the pitched battle
on an agreed-upon battlefield. All other developments can be more or less logically derived from
this primordial achievement: Neutrality of certain places; non-belligerence and truces at certain
times; neutrality and inviolability of certain persons, especially non-combatants (women and
children); asylums and safe havens; use of sublethal weapons, etc.
Davie (1929) considers the sparing of women and children in war to be the beginning of a
common law of war and peace. Efforts to confine armed conflict to the fighting male population
has also been observed by Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1986) to be part of the institutionalization of rules of
warfare that help to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. Cultural evolution, he submits, here
phenocopies ritualizations that in the animal kingdom repeatedly led from damaging fights to
tournament-like contests.

Many primitive peoples spared and/or protected women and children of both sides (see Davie,
1929). Among the New Guinea Kapauku, the women, being tabooed from injury by the enemy,
moved around the battle lines collecting arrows for their husbands (Pospisil, 1994). This has also
been commonly reported of Californian societies (e.g., Kroeber, 1925).

Many primitive peoples had special theaters of war; arenas often located at the boundary
between the inhabited areas of the disputants. Sometimes neutral zones were arranged while the
rest of the country was looked upon as dangerous (Holsti, 1913; Mühlmann, 1940; Numelin,
1950).

**Expiatory combat and judicial duels:** Hobhouse, Wheeler & Ginsberg (1915) leave little
misunderstanding about expiatory combat as a conflict-limiting procedure. They state: “The
expiatory combats and the regulated fights of the Australians are also all of them palpably means
of ending a quarrel, or marking a point beyond which it is not to go. They do not seek to punish a
wrong but to arrest vengeance for wrong at a point which will save the breaking-out of a
devastating fight”.

The judicial ‘duel of champions’ has a similar objective of limiting ‘devastating fights’. Instances
of duels and single combats to settle intra- and intertribal disputes have been documented for a
great number of peoples (see Numelin, 1950).

Marian Smith (1951) described sham battles among the North American Plains Indians, in which
the braves could display their strength, boldness and agility in bloodless contests. A similar
custom of mock fighting was reported on San Cristoval (Fox, 1924). An important ingredient of
mock fighting seems to be the face-saving it offers to the fierce warriors.

Among the Australians of Arnhem Land, one of the types of battling was itself a peacemaking
 ceremony; the Makarata, in which members of an aggrieved clan were allowed to throw spears,
in a controlled and usually non-lethal way, at relatives of the individuals who had killed one of
them, until their anger had subsided. The ceremony did not end, however, until the injured
clanmen had drawn blood from the actual killers by jabbing spears through their thighs
(Warner, 1937).
**Chivalry and courtesy in battle:** “Gallantry paid the Maori poorly when they tried it with modern British troops. They played the game more fairly than fair in the European concept. They were amazed when the British shot the people whom they sent from the palisades for water, for was not water necessary? When British ammunition ran low they waited for them to bring up supplies, for why fight a man on uneven terms?” (Turney-High, 1949; referring to Del Mar, 1924). Chivalry in combat can probably develop only in ‘agonal’ types of warfare.

**Peace treaties, covenants and declarations:** Fighting among primitive peoples is not only often preceded by ceremonial consultations but also regularly succeeded by a peace treaty, covenant or declaration. Frazer (1890) collected a number of cases of covenants by sacrifice of a slave or an animal. Peace had to be formally declared among the Polynesian Mangaian by announcement on the peace drums and a human sacrifice to the war god. These people recognized war and peace as separate states of affairs (or definite social statuses, or domains of reality) and observed the shift from one to the other by specific rites of passage (Buck, 1934). Dual chiefship (separate peace and war chiefs) may have served the same function (i.e., to demarcate the separate states of affairs) among many North American Indians (Numelin, 1950).

Elaborate and complex rituals of peacemaking have also been described for a number of highly warlike New Guinea societies, e.g., Tsembaga Maring (Rappaport, 1968), Jalé (Koch, 1974), Enga (Meggitt, 1977), and Mount Hagen tribes (Strathern, 1971; Vicedom & Tischner, 1962). Peace can also be ratified by means of exchange of gifts, and a variety of other peace ceremonies, such as burying the hatchet, breaking of spears, planting of trees, smoking the peace-pipe or calumet, etc.

**Blood-brotherhood and friendship:** The exchange of blood between persons who are establishing friendship is a relatively common ceremony. Drinking or mixing blood establishes peace relations. Blood-brotherhood is, in the primitive world, regarded as one of the chief factors in preventing feuds. Irwin (1990) describes pseudokinship (ritual cousins) among the Inuit he studied.

Friendship ties between Kapauku headmen of confederacies pacified formerly vicious enemies for the time of their lives (Pospisil, 1994). Between some Australian tribes close bonds of friendship were maintained, sometimes for several generations (Elkin, 1938).

Also adoption may work as an avenue for preserving peace. The Inca emperor adopted sons of conquered chiefs and thus cemented his empire into a formidable monolith. Similarly among the Kapauku adoption of young people of influential families was used to bring lasting friendly relations (Pospisil, 1994).

**War substitutes and institutions of peace:** Goldschmidt (1994) examines in some detail three instances of what he calls the ‘institutions of peace’; the White Deerskin Dance (as practised by the Hupa, Karok and Yurok of California); the potlatch (as practised by the Northwest Coast Kwakiutl and Tlingit); and the kula (as practised by the Melanesians). These institutions of peace (or war substitutes in the case of the potlatch) are, Goldschmidt says, socially constructed patterns of behavior in which antagonism and competitiveness are expressed in ways that are neither lethal nor violent. They do not eliminate war; they do, however, tend to reduce the level of military conflict.

Numelin (1950) ascribes a prominent part in the development of peaceful relations to the secret societies flourishing in the primitive world. “The secret societies seem to be so eminently
peaceful in character that it is a question whether one of their chief purposes is not to prevent hostilities between local groups and tribes”. For example, one of the most potent secret societies, the ‘Duk-Duk’ in the Bismarck Archipelago has been described by von Pfeil (1898) as “a power with sufficient influence to enjoin peace on contending parties”.

In general, Numelin’s claim seems grossly exaggerated, however. It is more likely that these secret societies performed internal militia and policing tasks, thus being able to control feuding to a certain extent.

Epilogue

Although all theories of negative and positive peace are intuitively reasonable, few if any of them survive the test of the cross-cultural data. Exogamy and trade may actually be positively correlated with war frequency Tefft, 1975; Gregor, 1990; Keeley, 1996). Just as interpersonal violence often occurs in close relationships, the most intense conflicts seem to occur between polities that are similar in structure and intensely engaged with one another (as Waltz [1979] also observed for the contemporary international system). Tefft (1975) notes:

Interchange of membership through intermarriage does not seem to reduce substantially the frequency of war or to further peaceful relations between political communities...
Economic ties create more mutuality of interest and less division than kinship ties at the tribal level. However, neither kinship nor economic ties create strong enough bonds of mutual interest to prevent external war.

This conclusion is, however, contestable. Tefft does not sufficiently distinguish types of warfare, nor does he take into account the various cultural, political, or socioeconomic levels among the societies studied, lumping them all together. It may well be that the mechanisms and processes in question are conducive to peace at some level of socioeconomic development, but not on others. Or only when a particular type of warfare prevails, and not when other types prevail. It is a not uncommon pattern to find that tribes trade, raid, and intermarry. Tindale (1974), the authoritative source on the Australian peoples, states: “Where intertribal marriages were common, the cross-tribal kinship links established thereby often prevented large-scale quarrels”.
Divale, Chamberis & Gangloff (1976) have proposed an alternative explanation of the Tefft (1975) and Tefft & Reinhardt (1974) findings that internal war (i.e., war between groups within the same culture) was correlated with the presence of peacemaking mechanisms, and external war (war between culturally different societies) with their absence. They suggest that internal war is of a regulatory nature while external war is a struggle for survival between two or more societies fighting for space in the same ecosystem. If internal war is regulatory, it follows that there should be many mechanisms to regulate it (i.e. peacemaking mechanisms) or to stop it for long periods (i.e. stable peace). If external war represents a struggle for survival between two societies trying to occupy the same niche, it follows that there can be no compromise or mechanism to regulate it.
Dentan (1992) sketches a political-ecological model for the origin, persistence and demise of peaceful societies. The model fleshes out the familiar suggestion that nonviolence is a way in which less powerful societies respond to violence by stronger ones (e.g., Bigelow, 1969; Sipes, 1973; Dentan, 1978, 1979; but cf. Knauft, 1987). Dentan argues especially (1) that ideology by itself does not determine peacefulness; (2) that nonviolence is not due to a psychic or cultural
inability to be violent; and (3) that static interpretations of dynamic adaptations and situations are unlikely to be helpful.

Some of the important observations and conclusions of the studies briefly discussed above are the following:

- Peaceability is not disability, not a cultural essence unrelated to a people’s actual circumstances. Warlike peoples are capable of peacefulness, while peaceable peoples are capable of waging war under appropriate circumstances. Furthermore, the hated enemy of yesterday can be the respected ally of to-day. Such reversals sometimes happen, as Keeley (1996) observes, with “bewildering rapidity”.

- Many peoples who value peace positively still have relatively high rates of intragroup violence, e.g., Gebusi of New Guinea (Knauft, 1987) and San (‘Bushmen’) of Africa (e.g., Thomas, 1994). Thus a cultural emphasis on (inter)dependence and nurturance does not by itself account for nonviolence. Social support networks themselves involve costs and conflicts. In other words, people are not nonviolent unless they feel nonviolence is good or at least that violence is bad; but peace-loving people on occasion may commit acts of violence, and those occasions may come often.

- The rise and survival of peaceful societies suggests that human peaceability is not an impossible, anti-Darwinian fantasy but instead, as Dentan (1992, 1994) emphasizes, an adaptive response to particular political ecologies.

- Any peace lacking powerful institutions and other means to maintain it amounts to little more than a prolonged truce (Keeley, 1996).

Note

This contribution is a highly condensed version of Ch. 7 of my book The Origin of War (1995). Many examples and extensive review of the literature can be found there.

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