



# **Antropologia**

Annuario diretto da Ugo Fabietti

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# Antropologia

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# Antonio De Lauri

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

That this is the umpteenth analytical effort dedicated to war should alone suffice to underscore from the very beginning of this yearbook that we live in ‘interesting times,’ as the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2011) would argue. Žižek maintains that in China, in cases of extreme hatred, one uses the curse, ‘May you live in interesting times.’ And historically, ‘interesting times’ have always been characterized by power struggles, extreme social inequalities, war and the like. Žižek rightly points out the historical persistence of (and somehow the advent of new) ‘interesting times,’ though it would appear that the curse is not of Chinese origin.

The ways of war have changed over the centuries. Developments in weaponry have made it possible to attain increased destructive impact and kill more people. Combat strategies have multiplied. The science of war has evolved both in terms of technological complexity and human ability. Similarly, the discursive dimension of war has been complexified by new forms of communication and information. Today the correlation between individual wars is more evident, as are the correlations between global and local dimensions of conflict. The privatization of war is another element that, over the decades, has challenged and redefined the common understanding of war as an issue of state sovereignty (Hall, Biersteker 2002; Levy, Thompson 2010; Münklerr 2002). The phenomenon of ‘privatized military industry’ (Singer 2003) is evident in most battlefields worldwide – consider for example the role played by military companies such as Blackwater in Iraq. Furthermore, the perfection of the killing machinery of modern warfare, the destruction of bodies, and the infeasibility of proper burial create all sorts of ghosts that must be reconciled with the living – for example through family commemorative rites. Heonik Kwon (2006) observed in his study of commemoration in Vietnam, that the bereavement of the families of civilians killed

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1. I am grateful to Edyta Roszko and Deniz Gökalp for their comments on earlier drafts of this introduction. My thanks also to Clare O’Sullivan for the linguistic revision of the volume.

in military operations has not been acknowledged in national remembrance ceremonies, but has produced different patterns in the domestic cult of ancestors. Thus, not only has war evolved, but in changing, it has given rise to novel patterns in many spheres of life. Yet despite these new scenarios, if we politically analyze the global order, elements of continuity between contemporary wars and those of the past delineate the contours of an on-going race for weapons and the persistence of the armed-governance model. The political (and theoretical) reaffirmation of the 'just war' approach (Falk 2004; Lutz, Millar 2012), as well as the interconnections between humanitarianism and militarism (Chandler 2001; Fixdal, Smith 1998) and the affirmation of security regimes (Eckert 2008) are all salient features of contemporaneity.

Although the key underlying question of why people make war (Bramson, Goethals 1964; Ferguson 2001; Haas 1990; Malinowski 1941; Simons 1999; Otterbein 2009) seems destined to remain open for a long time to come, ethnographies of war continue to produce crucial data and timely reflections that enhance our understanding of the multifaceted nature of warfare. War is generally described as political and armed conflict among groups, factions, nations (or among nations and groups, as in the so-called 'war on terror') that involves both fighting forces (compelled or voluntary) and civilian populations; the latter, as well as being directly hit by warfare, are subjected to regimes of terror, violence, embargos, isolation and other forms of suffering. As with any definition, this description of war provides an arbitrary delimitation of reality. For instance, in many war or war-related contexts the distinction between soldier and civilian is purely abstract (cfr. for example Rosen, *ivi*). There are also phenomena connected with situations of war that are not necessarily experienced on a battlefield (e.g. human bombings, acts of espionage, interrogation and torture, etc.). Indeed, wars are conducted at multiple levels, and not only through the opposing sides in battle, but also through other channels – hence the crucial role played by literature, academia and the media (Andersen 2006; Barker 2012; Chomsky et al. 1997; Dwyer 2011; Hoskins, O'Loughlin 2010; Oddo 2011). Cyber wars are another example of the multilevel dimension of warfare (Clarke 2009; Lin 2012; Sharma 2010; Sorenson, Matsuoka 2001).

While wars are to some extent governed by economic, political (in the broader sense) and geo-political interests, there are other aspects of war that interest anthropology more closely, such as mechanisms of stigmatisation of the 'other,' attempts to legitimise conflict using government propaganda, the social effects of conflict, the militarisation of humanitarian interventions, the use of collective memory in order to justify recourse to military force, the mechanisms of post-conflict reconciliation, everyday perceptions and descriptions of war, the justification of violence, the intertwining of religious/cultural and political/social dynamics, the meanings of living and dying, to name but a few. Contemporary ethnography is often faced by logics of dominion and tyranny as well as by the suffering and social implications produced by war. Far from considering war as a fact in itself, an isolated event, anthropologists have traditionally tried to analyse it in relation to historical, political and economic contexts as well as

to the cultural and social systems that confer it with both macro- and micro-sociological relevance. As has been argued, war may be seen as a 'social project among many competing social projects' (Richards 2005, p. 3). Thus, wars are not only revealing of dramatically negative developments in social life, but also of conscious attempts to shape the world in specific ways.

This volume gathers the work of anthropologists committed (within different perspectives) to the study of war – and war-related phenomena – in terms of its discursive construction, implications, and cultural and social prerequisites. The common thread running through the papers largely concerns the ethnographic sensitivity and cultural-critical approach shared by the authors, which help to identify and compare the structural, symbolic and material elements at the base of justifications of war, narratives of violence and the call to arms – and even the call to a different way of being a citizen and person, child or adult, dead or alive. Taken as a whole, this collection of essays forms a transcultural investigation that guides the reader through an immersion in the tortuous sea (with its abysses, perpetual movement and tidal waves) of sacrifice, martyrdom, mythological imagination, non-cruelty/intimacy, categories of practice and categories of analysis, childhood and warfare, long-term effects of war and its social implications, cultural representations of war and the conflicting narratives it produces.

No less important, as an effect of inevitable anthropological interest in the re-making of the world, this volume supports a counter-rhetoric of war that critiques the dominant rhetoric produced at both the mass media and specialised levels, which depicts war as a necessary evil. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that the papers included here make their contribution, in some measure (and in some cases indirectly), to this counter-rhetoric of war without drawing on a humanitarian dehistoricised philanthropical narrative whereby the description of war is closely linked to the ambivalent sense of guilt typical of the modern condition of being Western (or Westernized) – constructed in contrast to the victimized condition of being 'underdeveloped.' Indeed, humanitarian discourse on war fully assimilates the idea of 'horrorism' (Cavarero 2008) but does not help us to see beyond 'the mandatory modern tropes of terror' (Rosen, *ivi*).

Naturally there are situations that are not fully accounted for within the framework outlined in this volume. What about, for example, the right to collective self-defence? Is a population that is oppressed by fierce tyranny, legitimised in taking up arms? Though such questions appear to fall within the domain of law, they mainly call for serious reflection on what we may view as a universal anthropological feature: the struggle to survive and the desire to do so in the best possible way.

## On War (and Radical Contradictions)

At the very moment in which war is transferred from the battlefield into theory and enters the arena of news media debate, positive-sounding discourses tend to be generated, producing functional representations that serve to legitimise war while underestimating and oftentimes outright ignoring what Carolyn Nor-

dstrom (2008) calls 'radical contradictions.' Even when the 'horrific' argument dominates, its ahistorical and non-situational character eventually comes to support the humanitarian-interventionist approach – proving functional to 'just war' ideology or, at least, to massive humanitarian-developmental programs.

To explain the concept of 'radical contradictions,' Nordstrom tells of a human rights activist doing fieldwork in Angola, a man who was strongly committed and active at the front line of many contemporary conflicts, ready to denounce injustice and abuse. He was the head of a major international organization with the mission of stemming the violence of war and assisting its victims: one of the big players. According to Nordstrom, this man was one of the most remarkable and effective proponents of human rights she had ever met. And he was fearless. He went out to the worst areas of fighting and, alone and unarmed, walked right into bunkers, even right into fox holes. Nobody but this man ventured out to the front. He saved thousands of lives by doing so, and risked his own life every day. Yet, he also black-marketed diamonds and had sex with little boys, hungry and desperate war orphans. This man, for Nordstrom, embodies the type of radical contradiction that is inevitable in the world we live in. An anthropology of war, from this perspective, is first and foremost configured as an anthropology of radical contradictions, which inevitably also investigates the contradictions entailed in the ways we represent war and violence – as well as fighters, terrorists, mercenaries, martyrs, and soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

'Enduring contradictions' (Green, *ivi*) take a variety of forms in the world today, and their consequences are unpredictable (Asad 2007). On the one hand, each individual has to deal with his/her own mortality while on the other, genetic science promises an infinite lifespan. To a certain extent, the sacredness of human life is considered to be above all things,<sup>3</sup> while at the same time people are allowed to kill and die and to do all within their power in order to defend a collective lifestyle. On the one hand, the life of every individual has equal value; on the other, the massacre of 'civilized humans' is perceived (at least in the West) as more touching than that of the 'uncivilized' (Asad 2007).

Of course a soldier, prisoner, scholar, journalist or passive spectator will each absorb the shock of war in different ways – apart from the fact that there are soldiers who become passive spectators, prisoners who are also scholars, or victims who become perpetrators, and so on. Yet, to some extent, large-scale violence also has an impact on those who have never experienced it – whether this results in insensitivity to the suffering of other people, pacifism, political activism or even nihilism. What is at stake here is that war, wherever it is fought (given the multi-level interconnections implied by contemporaneity), affects the deepest dimensions of the ordinary and everyday (Das 2007; 2012) at a global level, with manifold consequences for discourses, experiences and beliefs linked to perceptions of life and death. Furthermore, as Sophie Roche and Linda Green show in

2. See for example the articles of Fabietti, Roche and Rosen in this volume. Cfr. also Das (*ivi*) for a reflection on inclusion/exclusion from the scene of war.

3. Cfr. also Carrithers, Collins, Lukes 1985 and Joas 2013 for a discussion of the category of 'person' and its sacred dimension.

their contributions, the impact of war on ordinary life certainly does not cease with termination of the armed conflict. On the contrary, war has a temporal extension that reaches far beyond the time spent fighting. Hence the capacity to recognise radical contradictions and to interpret structural mutations in the ordinary constitutes the very purpose of anthropological discourse as a contemporary form of cultural and political critique that goes beyond the contingencies of the conflict frontline.

In 1997 Nordstrom commented:

When I first began writing about war, I found it surprising that it spoke so clearly to contemporary issues of core cultural processes and personal identity. I found it equally surprising that wars in what many consider more remote parts of the world's power grid illuminated key dynamics of contemporary warfare in the world as a whole (p. 4).

It is worth clarifying here, however, that there is quite an interesting variety of positions within academia concerning what war is or how it should be studied. The intuitive idea that war is the by-product of power struggles and the pursuit of profit is nowadays not at all in fashion among scholars: 'If not exactly false in any simple way, such a vision is nevertheless narrow and misleading' (Smith 2005, p. 3). However, while the investigation of war as part of a broader attempt to explore human complexity is a never-ending road that continuously pushes the analysis in unpredictable directions, a certain form of interpretativism can culminate in essentialist approaches that exaggerate some aspects to the detriment of others. 'By the end,' says Smith at the beginning of his book, 'we will understand that war is not just about culture, but it is all about culture' (Idem, p. 4). The present volume shows that war is not understandable in 'all about something' terms. If, however, we really want to reduce it to a slogan, its causes and implications suggest that war is about us – though such a 'human focus' has repercussions for the non-human: animals, the earth.

## Enemies

Whatever the real reasons that generate a war, identifying the enemy is a crucial element of every 'call for conflict.' But the changing character of 'the enemy' does not stand in one univocal and universal category. Wars have taken various forms across time and space to the point that, in certain circumstances, the enemy could not be understood in terms of the identification/construction of a 'distant other.' In the United States, for example, while the 'American Indian Wars (1775-1924) comprising a series of broken treaties, warfare and forced assimilation of Native peoples on the North American continent, circumscribed a ruthless, albeit changing set of policies and practices designed to extinguish Native peoples, a one-two punch of genocide and ethnocide' (Green, *ivi*), 'the American Revolution was as much a civil war as it was a war of national independence from England.' Furthermore, 'like many modern conflicts, the war was also an internal domestic conflict, which set neighbour against neighbour, brother

against brother, and father against son' (Rosen, *ivi*). Veena Das also emphasizes this point when she reports Piatigorsky's reflection on 'Arjuna, the warrior hero, having surveyed the enemies in the battlefield [who] wants to put down his weapons since he can see all his kin – fathers, uncles, elders, cousins – on the opposite side and says that he would rather live the life of a beggar than kill his kinsmen' (Das, *ivi*).

Even proximity to the enemy, however, does not necessarily mean that hate can be avoided. The social production of hate can be the result of complex historical processes as well as of common levels of communication – such as rumour – that create the 'conditions for the circulation of hate' in situations of crisis and social tension (Das 1998). Voices that feed hatred simultaneously destroy the possibility of compassion, in the sense of *sumpatheia* ('concordant vibration,' 'feeling in unison'). At another level, as Das suggests (*ivi*), the social production of hate unsettles the scene of intimacy, in which non-cruelty is generated. In fact, in order to be able to kill – systematically – it is not enough to (dis)regard the enemy, to despise him/her; it is also necessary to see in the foe an obstacle to the realization of a social project, which in turn implies criteria of inclusion/exclusion. As explained by Green in her paper, war consistently requires transformation of a man's identity from the status of an individual to a member of a fighting group. Here war is not simply a battlefield on which to conduct military actions. It also entails the interlaced dynamics of violence, fear, sacrifice,<sup>4</sup> opportunism, reaffirmation or subversion of the social hierarchy, transfiguration of the 'other,' redefinition of the individual and collective selves. The symbolic construction of the enemy thus becomes a fundamental element for those individuals, groups, factions or governments who incite war, attempting to transform it into an identity-making battle and defence of an existing lifestyle, with the ultimate aim of earning presumed freedom, attaining presumed justice or establishing a new order. Indeed, when war is reduced to an abstract ideal, or even to a way of achieving a transcendental goal, it becomes easier to obscure the connections among the interests of groups, geo-strategic plans, historical antagonisms, access to resources, development politics, privatisation, expansion of the global market, and economic networks linked to licit and illicit trafficking. The very concept of 'ethnic conflict' itself, for example, which has found ample opportunity to come to the fore in contemporary wars, when not inscribed in broader geopolitical scenarios, contributes in part to rendering such correlations less evident – elucidative examples are provided by the Rwandan genocide<sup>5</sup> and the Afghan wars, often seen as internal humanitarian crises with no consideration of the transnational historical processes at the core of internal political unrest. In Afghanistan, this unrest is typically and wrongfully attributed to the country's inability to spontaneously and autonomously embrace democracy. Not surprisingly, while there is widespread awareness in the Western

4. The category of sacrifice is complex and polyvalent and connected to war and violence at different levels. For a discussion see both Fabietti and Lecomte-Tilouine in this volume. See also Das 1983.

5. On the Rwandan case see Mamdani 2001; for a comparative reflection on genocides see Hinton 2002.

media and humanitarian discourses of the dramatic consequences of the Soviet invasion initiated in 1979, the historically negative impact of the Anglo-Afghan wars or the role played by the US in supporting the emergence of fundamentalism during the past twenty-five years, for example, are generally excluded from the representation of internal instability, despite their evident connection with the political tensions of today (De Lauri 2013). As Nazif Shahrani has claimed, 'Afghanistan's current, complicated situation can only be understood by focusing on its failed attempts at nation-state building within the broader geopolitical circumstance of foreign manipulation and proxy wars that have given rise to particular forms of ethnic factionalism' (2002, p. 716).

In such a scenario, ethnicity becomes the concrete manifestation of alterity as the symbolic processing of otherness and difference. In war, that of the 'other' is an uncomfortable and unexciting role, in which physical body becomes a projection of the social body, the most natural, intimate, and thus most significative site at which to identify the somatic signs of an enemy to fight. Regional conflicts are emblematic with regard to the cultural distancing mechanism produced by war. As a counterpoint to this, it is precisely in the violence towards the problematic-other that one looks for the reassuring cultural stabilisation made impossible by the relentlessly constant cultural mutations. It is thus clear that 'violence cannot be mitigated by a rational mode of argumentation but rather by accepting the power of intimacy through which we are called to inhabit the world with the other' (Das, *ivi*).

The experience of violence is never really cathartic, satisfying or conclusive. If the only objective of war is the mere physical elimination of the enemy, then it is not possible to explain why the torture and destruction of bodies both dead and alive is practiced with such ferocity on so many battlefields. From the researcher's point of view, among the principal difficulties linked to the confrontation with the brutal violence produced by war is the need to produce logical explanations and sound arguments in scenarios that sometimes appear to be senseless. How is it possible to investigate nonsense? How may we explain the fury involved in mutilating bodies, visceral hatred, or murderous desire? A sentiment of elusiveness permeates the 'scene of violence,' and it seems, in some ways, to be akin to placing oneself before the indefinite which, in a tragically paradoxical way, produces clearly visible and verifiable effects: the agony of bodies in pain, abandonment, death. There is a sort of uncertain upper hand that expands to every level of daily routine and that apparently finds its epilogue only in the dialectics of good or bad luck. In her work on violence, Hannah Arendt (1969) argued clearly and impactfully that there are no other circumstances in which luck plays as important a role as on the battlefield.

Achille Mbembe (2003) has noted that war is, after all, as much a means of attaining sovereignty as a way in which to exercise the right to kill.<sup>6</sup> However, it is formally considered unacceptable for a human group to systematically unleash its power on other groups through homicide and violence, including tor-

6. On the sacrificial nature of 'the right to kill' see Lecomte-Tilouine in this volume.

turing and raping people and dissecting their bodies. Although in abstract terms such violence appears unimaginable, it becomes possible to visualize when the murdered or tortured are aligned with dehumanizing representations portraying them as usurpers, cowards, filthy, paltry, unfaithful, vile, disobedient. Thus violence becomes a dramatic attempt to transform, redefine and establish social boundaries; to affirm one's own existence and deny that of the other. The context of war is therefore a transformative space because the experience of violence is transformative (Taussig 2004). At another level, this transformative power transcends the time-span of the actual conflict determining a long-term impact on the definition of communities and actors (Roche, *ivi*).

Foucault (1975) has explained that the ultimate purpose of violence is not to inflict pain but to create categories of people (cfr. also Lecomte-Tilouine, *ivi*), and to forge and keep boundaries around them. In this sense, the other's body is simultaneously the mirror and the tool of the attempt to establish (cultural, social, political) fences between individuals and groups. By extension, it follows that the violence generated by war is not mere empirical fact, but also a complex form of social communication (Fabietti, *ivi*). Insofar as this social communication is channelled within a specific imaginary and a transnational rhetoric governed by the dominant logic of war as a traditional form of political action, it becomes an integral part of the process of legitimising violence on a large scale.

## Rhetorics

From my early childhood onwards, I learned about war through the memories of my grandparents and the signs (scars, amputations) on the bodies of their brothers and sisters. I have seen the wounds of war while travelling in Afghanistan. I have acquired an understanding of the long-term effects of the violence of war through meeting refugees, veterans and military in different parts of the planet. Diachronic comparison is useful in tackling the controversial issue of the rhetoric of war. In this paragraph, I therefore use two examples from two different geographical and historical contexts to reflect on the anti-war potentials of 'indiscipline' and to point out the dialectical tension between alternative rhetorics of war.

Carlo told me his story shortly before his death. He was born in the province of Lecco (Northern Italy) on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1918, the year in which the Great War was turning into a fragile and temporary epilogue. He passed away in 2009, with his daughter and niece at his bedside. Carlo was an introverted man who was extremely respectful of rules. Without a doubt, nobody could have defined him as being talkative. His sparing use of speech vanished only when speaking about his beloved job as a shoemaker, or when his memories carried him back to the years of the Second World War, when he was a soldier, or a 'small soldier,' as a Roman officer used to call him due to his short height.

It is widely accepted that war is an extremely tragic event. However, historical records, literature and cinematography have contributed to giving shape to a sort of ethics of war identifying something humanly noble about it, something

that directly connects tragedy with grandeur as though to say: in war, human beings touch the lowest level of their existence, but at the same time it enables them to aspire to something 'more important'; they can make something more than a mere man or a mere woman of themselves; they can become heroes who escape the banality of daily routine and boldly write their names in history. Glory, honour, defence of homeland, sacrifice and martyrdom are all elements that make the tragedy of war more acceptable to some degree, elements that make up the plot of a fertile rhetoric of war and exploit the tragedies and suffering in the name of 'something greater,' a superior interest that justifies the payment of innumerable lives.

Yet, Carlo's memories emphasized the suffering, famine, cold, thirst, the loss of dear friends, the affirmation of the hierarchy and loss of self (in war not everyone pays with his/her own life, only some: others govern or guide the more vulnerable to their immolation to the conquest of this 'something' that demands such extreme sacrifice). In her essay, Veena Das reminds us that loss of one's self is an 'essential corollary of warfare.' No matter what the result of war is, given the moral overturning and the public and intimate violence that war generates, 'the self and all forms of relatedness will become frayed, if not lost.'

At the time of the Italian expedition to Russia, Carlo, who could read and who had somewhere read the story of Napoleon, knew what the Italian soldiers were going to face; he knew that the expedition would not be a bed of roses. He was serving in Rome at the time. He loved the city but was homesick and missed his fields and country lanes. When the time came to leave for the cold Russian lands, his restlessness became unbearable: 'it was not the right thing to do.' His life had already once been miraculously saved while wearing that uniform, the meaning of which he did not fully understand. He began to eat less and less. In a few weeks, his body became so weak that his captain took him to the medical lieutenant colonel. 'This man is undernourished; he cannot leave,' said the doctor. The captain, who had his own requirements to reckon with, did not want to accept this and tried to convince the doctor that the soldier had to go. 'I repeat, this man is ill,' decreed the doctor. So Carlo was exempted from the expedition and assigned other duties. 'I would have died,' he often repeated. The expedition had meant the death of his comrades who, whether or not aware of the freezing ordeal to come, had been obliged to go.

Carlo's story is certainly not to be rated among those echoing the hegemonic rhetoric that constantly invades talks, movies, songs, novels, poetry, and history books about war, in which the main focus is on killed heroes, not reluctant and 'indisciplined soldiers.' This dominant rhetoric alternates victimizing perspectives with glorifying narratives, sometimes in a schizophrenic fashion. From a comparative perspective, it is interesting to look at Carlo's hesitation in relation to other forms of what might be considered indiscipline and disobedience from an official-military viewpoint. As we have been reminded by Renato Solmi (2007), from 1965 onwards, movements opposing the war in Vietnam had repercussions also within the US military forces. The case of the Fort Hood Three was one of the first episodes of dissent against the Vietnam war in the US

army. Dennis Mora, James Johnson and David Samas were stationed at Fort Hood in Texas, when in 1966 they received the order to leave for Vietnam. The three soldiers prepared a joint statement in which they refused to obey the order, arguing that the Vietnam war was unjust, immoral and illegal. They claimed they did not want to take part in a war of extermination and they rejected such a criminal waste of American lives and resources (Solmi 2007, p. 624). The soldiers were arrested and each was condemned to three years of imprisonment by different tribunals. It has been observed that during the Vietnam war 'the military itself was the locus of widespread antiwar activity. Opposition to the war intensified as service personnel began to see themselves as occupying the front ranks of a multi-faceted struggle against American imperialism abroad and injustice at home.' Some, like the Fort Hood Three, 'analyzed the disobedience in explicitly political terms. Others sought Conscientious Objector status, even while they served in the military' (Tischler 2002, p. 395). Since then, many US soldiers have been arrested and condemned because they expressed dissent (Mattern 1990) – the post-war activism of Iraq veterans is one of the most recent examples. Although these cases of 'feeble voices' opposing the Leviathan from the inside have generally been read as forms of mere disobedience, their implications go much further.

Beyond the difference in the historical, political and social contexts of Carlo's and the Fort Hood Three's stories, both subvert the idea of the soldier as an emblem of the 'disciplined body' (Foucault 1975; cfr. also Basaglia 2005 and Goffman 1961 for a broader understanding of the category), a sort of religious figure who 'has a mission and a calling' (Lutz, Millar 2012, p. 487), somehow similar to the 'already dead' described by Fabietti in his contribution to this volume. The indisciplined soldier, it is worth pointing out, is different to the contractor (the modern version of the mercenary and one of the most visible effects of the privatization of warfare – whose death mostly remains unknown), different to the soldier who is unaware (whom we have discovered thanks to Hannah Arendt's banality of evil), and different to the deviant soldier (he/she who loses control, commits a crime or is guilty of excesses in the exercise of violence). The latter three figures are all functional to the hierarchical order. Although it may seem illogical, even the action of the deviant soldier is somehow predictable. Examples are provided by US soldiers who tortured prisoners in Abu Ghraib and by the US soldier (even though there are still doubts as to whether or not he acted alone) that in March 2012 killed children, women and men in Southern Afghanistan for no apparent reason. A ferocity that at first appears incredible, yet may be explained within the dehumanizing framework provided by war. In order to reaffirm the authority of the government and the legitimacy of war, the soldier is condemned, perhaps even executed, but his action remains functional to the macro-logics of the conflict, such as creating a climate of terror, exacerbating hatred, and justifying further interventions (or justifying withdrawal, depending on the specific political moment – e.g. election time). The indisciplined soldier, on the contrary, challenges authority, reacts to a fate that seems already sealed, and searches for his/her own humanity just as war is trying to annihilate it.

Yet the agency of those who take part in war needs to be understood in another sense too. As Mbembe puts it,

Dominant and dominated participate in the same *épistème*. It is against the backdrop of these commonly shared 'canon' and 'genres' that one must conceive of and interpret practices of 'disorder' and indiscipline, desertion, disguise, duplication (*dédoublement*, *doublebouche*) and 'improvisation' (1992b, p. 133).

Carlo's story, for instance, might be seen as a story of indiscipline, disguise and improvisation while the Fort Hood Three case might be regarded as a story of indiscipline and 'exposure.' Because of its co-participative epistemic nature, however, war cannot be simply described as the by-product of political decisions from above, but is also determined by participation and initiatives from below.<sup>7</sup> This, of course, complicates the picture, as does the connection between individual actions and global forces (Nordstrom 2007). Also, the very concept of 'discipline' itself is complex and not to be understood in a univocal sense – just as the concept of 'indiscipline' cannot be viewed as an 'invariably positive' tool. On the theme of political discipline, Antonio Gramsci has for example observed that

To discipline oneself is to make oneself independent and free. Water is pure and free when it flows between the banks of a river or stream, not when it is sprinkled chaotically on the soil or when in rarefied form it escapes into the atmosphere. Those in politics who do not adhere to a discipline are like substances in a gaseous state or contaminated by foreign elements: therefore useless and harmful (1967, p. 50; my translation).

It must nevertheless be noted that the history of political discipline on the one hand, and the history of protest movements around the world on the other, suggest that it may be deceptive to consider political action valid and effective only when imbued with political discipline. Furthermore, if scholars have devoted analytical effort (and some, political commitment) to understanding the causes of extreme violence and investigating the close relationship between historical processes and agency, so as to grasp the long-term wounds of those who 'did their job' in battle, it should at least be recognized that the stories of 'indisciplined soldiers' mostly remain untold in mainstream narratives. And throughout human history, untold stories have always had something to reveal that runs contrary to consolidated myths<sup>8</sup> and official memory – Howard Zinn (2001) has provided some useful examples.

To be sure, from West to East, dominant narratives of/on war are anything but the product of a coarse ideology. They rather embody a complex fusion of morality and doctrine, reason and pragmatism. In the humanities and social sciences there are many instances of those (including eminent personalities of the

7. See for example Mamdani 2001 and Rosen, *ivi*.

8. Michael Taussig has noted that 'cultures of terror are based on and nourished by silence and myth' (2004, p. 469). On silence as a mechanism for perpetuating violence see also Green in this volume.

past, from Machiavelli to Sun Tzu, from Evans-Pritchard to Wittgenstein) who have combined critical thinking – sometimes a revolutionary way of thinking, in the sense of those who revolutionise themselves, adopting a radically different way of expending their lives (Wittgenstein 1987) – with a personal pragmatic-interventionist tendency, or those who have objectified war as a social fact with few emotional implications, or those who have thought to prove themselves through the experience of war, or again those who have associated scientific/professional expertise with military intelligence.<sup>9</sup>

Conflicting narratives on war are engaged in a continuous relationship with the ‘War, Inc.’ universe. While on the one hand the hegemonic position of governments and large corporations fuels a dominant rhetoric that tries to offer a more acceptable image of war, presenting it as an inevitable step towards solving extreme situations, on the other hand ‘indiscipline’ as a critical category may be seen as a useful instrument for the production of a counter-rhetoric of war. And this implies reflecting on the political and cultural use of categories such as evil, good, justice, honour, homeland, and sacrifice, categories that become ‘legitimizing concepts’ allowing those who detain power to preserve it (Wallerstein 2006).

A counter-rhetoric of war is, clearly, rhetoric in the sense of *rhetorikè téchne*, or the ‘art of saying.’ It is positioning. In this perspective, a counter-rhetoric of war avoids the traditional dichotomies of dominant war discourses. In fact, beyond the ritual forms used to refer to contexts of war and peace, the papers in this volume show that these two poles of the human condition seem to take (indeed to have taken) different forms in the global scenario, pointing up a tragic continuity between one (war) and the other (peace).

The positioning I am discussing here is not necessarily to be understood within the political framework of pacifism<sup>10</sup> – and of course it rejects the combination of pacifism, just war tradition and divine justice (Charles 2005). The first goal of a counter-rhetoric of war might be to destabilise the certainty of positions that aim to define what war is (intrinsic to human nature, inevitable in the logic of confrontation, a primitive way of solving a crisis, a necessity in order to protect human rights and free women from fundamentalist regimes, and so on) ‘with an increasing determination bordering on the evangelical,’ as Clifford Geertz (1984, p. 268) would have argued. The anthropology of war, however, is not limited to this counter-discourse. It is also ‘creative narration’ which continually places at the core of its *raison d’être* the relationship between the ethics of knowledge, political commitment and a moral dialectic. The last-mentioned factor mainly concerns the way in which a moral anthropology of war (Lutz, Millar 2012) – following the orientation of a critical moral anthropology (Fassin 2012) – investigates the different moralities of war and relates to what has been termed ‘moral dissonance’ (French 2011).

9. Some of these elements are traceable to and/or discussed in Cramer 2006; Edwards 2010; El-Tom 2012; Gray 2006; Gusterson 2007; Kelly et al. 2010; Price 2008; Utas 2009.

10. For a definition, see for example the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Indeed, contemporary wars have far-reaching implications and increasingly call for committed engagement from scholars. The state of being contemporary amplifies and redefines the very idea of involvement and commitment that, in the anthropological field, seems to oscillate between the embracing of a variety of non-hierarchized cultural alternatives (Barth 1994) and the politico-cultural criticism that tends to challenge and oppose structures of violence, practices of supremacy and forms of submission. It is of absolute importance to try to explain why and how a large part of the world's population live in dire need and is considered expendable in the name of god, democracy, justice, freedom, security – or, behind these, profit, control, egoism. Yet, the space between merely economic-political explanations of war and sociobiological assumptions<sup>11</sup> still needs to be properly filled. This in-between space is, to a certain extent, the space in which the anthropologists who have contributed to this collection give shape to their arguments.

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11. See for example Chanon 1966, 1996; Crook 1994; Diamond 1997; Dunbar 1985; Shaw, Wong 1989; Sosisa, Kressb, Bosterb 2007; Thayer 2004.

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## **Veena Das**

### War and the Mythological Imagination

There is an interesting ambiguity that marks any discussion on war in much of modern political theory. While it is acknowledged that war entails enormous human suffering, considerable latitude is conceded for moral judgements about the right to wage war, on the grounds that the suffering imposed upon self and others due to war, is an unfortunate necessity for the future good of a national community. The legality (as distinct from the legitimacy) of modern wars is directly tied to the notion of contractual violence, such that state entities are granted the right to declare war and to conduct it within the constraints (in theory if not in practice) of agreed covenants that place restrictions on what is justifiable violence in war and against whom it may be directed. In theory the state wages war on behalf of the political community, but as Michel Serres (1995) pointed out in his philosophical reflections on this theme in his book, *The Natural Contract*, not everyone has the right or the means to become a legal subject and hence to be seen as part of this contract. More specifically, Serres's meditation on the devastating impact of war on the environment raised the question of how human beings should regard the rights of nature within such a contractual theory of war. In reply to the objection that nature did not have hands to sign such a contract, he pointed out that the same criticism had earlier been (pointlessly) levied against the social contract, given that there was no particular date or place at which we could say that the social contract had been signed. In this article I argue that Serres's concerns are profoundly reflected in the register of mythology in the Mahabharata, the great Sanskrit epic that depicts the war of Kurukshetra in North India waged over eighteen days between two related princely lineages, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. With more than 20,000 lines of verse, the epic has many compositional layers and is thought to have grown through accretions from stories dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE to a text that reached its present form during the Gupta Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The epic has been a source of literary compositions, popular theatre, ritual performances, film, and even teledramas, and hence has the texture of a living text

rather than of one to be confined to scholarly archives (Fitzgerald 2004). My interest in this paper is to show how those who are excluded from the political community – women and animals, as well as the earth itself – come to have a place in the mythological imagining of warfare.

While the connection between sovereignty and the monopoly over violence is the dominant theme of any story of sovereignty, we may treat the epic war of Mahabharata as educating us in a different kind of story in which one mode through which men seek their way out of cycles of violence is to join their own destiny to that of creatures lower than the human being. The scene of sovereign violence thus turns out to be one of vulnerability, in which to be in the grip of violence is also to be in danger of losing the self. I argue that the voice of the woman appears as the voice of interrogation, so that one might read the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics as an argument with the gods (Das 1998). At the overt level of the story, the war is about justice, vengeance and the display of heroic virtues, but within the story itself we find an alternative perspective – that of the earth which is tired of the violence and destruction waged by warrior lineages and thus leads the war to an end in which these lineages will be destroyed. On the significance of this war, the great Indologist and mythographer, Alexander Piatigorsky (2005) writes of the scene in which Arjuna, the warrior hero, having surveyed the enemies in the battlefield wants to put down his weapons because he can see all his kin – fathers, uncles, elders, cousins – on the opposite side and says that he would rather live the life of a beggar than kill his kinsmen. Among other arguments put to him by Krishna, the god, for his obligation to fight, is the importance of this war which is like no other. According to Piatigorsky:

He (Krishna) also said that the battle on the field of Kurus was not a simple battle, one of many, but the greatest battle that marked the end of the previous (*dvāpara*) and the beginning of the next (*kali*) period of time (*yuga*) – the period of history proper, so to speak, and that all other battles and wars to come would be no more than superfluous and senseless imitations of the one which is witnessed (and by implication designed) by Him, the Highest Witness, Self of all Selves (*paramātman*), Person of all Persons (*puruṣottama*), the Highest God (2005, p. 4).

As we shall see the alternative perspectives on the war are then nothing less than an acknowledgement that gods are not to be trusted to take humans out of the violence of warfare, although from Krishna's own perspective there is an unstoppable inexorable logic that makes this war inevitable for it introduces man into the time of history (Piatigorsky 2005).

Before I come to the scenes that I intend to analyze, a brief comment on the complementary relationship between the two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, on the topic of warfare may be in order here. Sheldon Pollock (2007, p. 34) describes the complementarities of the two traditions in the following terms:

The works are, in a fundamental way, complementary. [...] Both poems relate a struggle over succession to the throne, leading to the degradation of the princess and the

political power she represents and (before or after that) the exile of the protagonists, war, return, and recovery of the throne. But here, too, the complementarities are telling. Most important is the agon itself; the 'Rámayana' is a tale of 'othering,' the enemy is non-human, even demonic, and the war takes place in an unfamiliar, faraway world; the 'Mahabhárata' is a tale of 'brothering,' the enemy are kinsmen – indeed, as the protagonists say, almost their own selves – and the war takes place at home.

I begin with two fundamental observations on the story of the war depicted in the Mahabharata. First, I contend that a strong theme of the epic is to show that even the tragedy of great events such as epic warfare is contained in the everyday. Second, the epic dramatizes 'the moral' as the point at which we are placed in the grip of uncertainty – in the text this uncertainty hangs over the everyday as the female voice emerges in the interrogation of various male characters, and even of Krishna, the god, who is present at every scene of violence and is held responsible for not stopping the war when it was in his power to do so.

### War, the Scene of Violence and the Loss of Self

I propose to develop my argument around the theme of the loss of self as an essential corollary of warfare. My argument does not rely on the plot, characters or narration in the Mahabharata, for the text itself uses multiple frames, embedding stories within stories, making it impossible to give a linear account of either the story or the identity of the characters portrayed (see Hildebeitel 2001). My strategy of description, then, is to bring certain scenes in the text into sharp focus and treat them as scenes of instruction in which different voices are in tension with each other, dramatizing the different perspectives on the events that are before us.

On the story I can do no better than give Doniger's (2009, p. 263) ironic summary:

The five sons of King Pandu, called the Pandavas, were fathered by gods [...] all five of them married Draupadi. When Yudhishtira lost the kingdom to his cousins in a game of dice, the Pandavas and Draupadi went into exile for twelve years, at the end of which, with the help of their cousin the incarnate god Krishna, who befriended the Pandavas and whose counsel to Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra is the Bhagvad Gita, they regained their kingdom through a cataclysmic battle in which almost everyone on both sides was killed.

Of course the bare bones of the story tell us nothing (as Doniger's ironic condensation shows) about the texture of the text or its place in moral argumentation and the making of Indian sensibilities. I will therefore turn to two kinds of scenes<sup>1</sup> – the first I call the scene of the loss of self as the individual comes within the force field of violence and the second, I call scene of instruction, in which

1. This is a very small selection of scenes – a fuller description would take a monograph – but see, especially, Hildebeitel (2001).

the virtue of non-cruelty is offered as a way out of violence, enunciated through animal stories that stand for the voice of nature as it becomes part of moral reflection. It is of the utmost importance that the value of non-cruelty is advocated precisely at a juncture in which violence or some form of violent death has taken place in the course of war. It is as if non-cruelty, defined simply as a desire not to injure others, is seen as a realistic starting point for imagining how humans may make their way out of the cycles of violence unleashed by the desires of the heroic warrior clans. Otherwise stated, one might define *anrishansya* or non-cruelty as a mode of being that recreates the theme of non-violence but in a minor key that humanizes the impersonal force of both violence and blind adherence to a morality of rules conceptualized as *dharma*.

### The Dice Game

Let us begin by placing ourselves in the public assembly of the Kaurava King where a dice game is in progress. Having lost everything else, Yudhishtira has wagered Draupadi, the wife he shares with his brothers, and has lost the wager. An usher is sent to bring her to the public assembly. But she presents him with a cascade of questions of which the most important is 'Go to the game. Having gone, ask Yudhishtira in the *sabha* (assembly), which did you lose first, yourself or me?' As Hildebeitel interprets this question, the term *atmanam* could be translated as yourself but also as 'the self'. Behind the legal question then as to whether one who has already lost himself can wager another or whether the wife is the property of the husband, lurks the philosophical question, were you in possession of your self when you entered the contract? In the *sabha* the question will snowball reducing the most learned to utter silence.

Meanwhile, Draupadi, having been dragged to the assembly now stands in a completely dishevelled condition in public before all the assembled kings, who include her elders. 'In a single garment, a waistcloth below, weeping, having her period, having come to the *sabha*, she came before her father-in-law.'<sup>2</sup> Here she is insulted, called a whore for having five husbands by none other than Karna, who unknown to himself is the eldest of the Pandava brothers; invited to sit on the bare thigh of Dushasana, a younger brother of Duryodhana; and yet, the elders assembled do nothing. She now cries out to Krishna, the divine lord who is also her cousin. Her words rebound with her lament not only against her husbands but also against all the men assembled there. 'I have five husbands rivalling the prowess of the celestials, but they are powerless to prevent my humiliation. This assembly is filled with men of great fame, invincible warriors and Brahmans learned in the scriptures, but none has shown the power to prevent this injustice.'

When Draupadi again asks if Yudhishtira had lost himself before wagering her, she gets no response. Vidura, the youngest uncle of both the Kauravas and

2. It is impossible to describe the pathos of the term – *ekavastra* – the single cloth worn by a menstruating woman who expects to be completely veiled from the outside world. The reference to her father-in-law compels us to recognize that the person presiding over the assembly was none other than the old king Dhritarashtra who stood in a relation of surrogate father to her five husbands.

the Pandavas and an incarnation of Dharma cursed to be born from a Shudra woman, is the only one who urges for an answer to be given.<sup>3</sup> No one, however, dares to answer and Dushasana begins to drag Draupadi to the inner chambers. Challenged by the questions of Draupadi, Bhishma, the eldest patriarch, can only say that the course of *dharma* is subtle and that only Yudhishtira, the most learned in the ways of *dharma*, would be able to answer her question. As readers we are astonished that the same Yudhishtira who is able to answer the subtlest of questions on righteousness is now reduced to silence. The crisis is temporarily resolved by the intervention of the blind king Dhritrashtra, but not before terrible oaths of revenge have been uttered and the destruction of the entire Kuru race has been predicted in keeping with the inexorable logic of insult and vengeance.

We learn at least two important lessons from this episode. First, Dharma, the deity incarnate of righteousness and the dispenser of justice meted out according to one's past actions and on which the stability of the earth rests, becomes mute in the face of a question posed by a woman. Draupadi's unanswered question hovers in the background of the text and though she is saved from the ignominy of standing naked in the full court of men, a cycle of violence has been let loose. According to popular lore in many parts of India, on the night she was dragged before the assembly, no Brahmin household offered the evening worship that brings the turbulence of the day to a peaceful rest. Later, an inconsolably wailing Draupadi tells Krishna: 'I have no husbands, no sons, no relations. I have no brothers, no father. And I do not have even you, Madhusudana.' It would seem that a public debating forum on the righteousness or otherwise of moral conduct fails in the presence of violence that is simultaneously public and intimate. Even though the war will be won, the self and all forms of relatedness will become frayed, if not lost.

In the course of this story we also learn that within the mythical logic, Draupadi (whose other names Panchali and Yagyaseni point to her dark origin as we shall see in a moment) is but the instrument of the will of gods, born to ensure the complete destruction of the Kurus and the Panchals, the two powerful Kshatriya lineages whose incessant warfare has made the earth tired. Her name, Panchali, signifies her birth in the lineage of the Panchals and refers to another story within this rich tapestry of stories. The essential elements of that story are as follows. Drona, a Brahmin and Drupada, a Kshatriya and the future Panchala king, are childhood friends. However, a terrible enmity develops between them and Drupada is humiliated in battle by Drona. Burning with the fire of vengeance, Drupada performs a fire-sacrifice with the help of two priests in order to ritually produce a son for himself who will kill Drona and avenge his defeat. A mighty son is born from the sacrificial fire but without any intention on the part

3. *Dharma* is a polyvalent term meaning both righteousness and law. As a proper name Dharma is envisaged as an incarnate deity who is responsible for keeping a strict account of the good and bad actions of each person. The common name for this deity is Yama, also known as the god of death. Shudra refers to the lowest stratum in the fourfold hierarchy of priests, warriors, householders, and servants.

of the sacrificers and initially unnoticed by anyone, a beautiful girl is also born from the sacrificial altar.

What is the meaning of this birth, a residue of the sacrifice – a clear acknowledgement that the human king may have had one kind of purpose (wreaking vengeance on his enemy) in performing the fire sacrifice, but that the gods used that very moment for setting into motion a different kind of violence? The text tells us that as soon as she was born, a disembodied, heavenly voice announced that Krishna (another name for Draupadi referring to her dark associations as mentioned earlier) will, in time, accomplish the work of gods, leading the Kshatriyas to their destruction. Indeed, the prediction comes true in the course of the great battle, but it is clear that though the gods intervene and the human purpose of the rite is exceeded by another purpose, none of this provides a way out of the cycles of violence. How might one then return to the human scale again? It is here that the stories existing on the borders of the text, as echoes of and commentaries on the war and cycles of violence – the side shadows as it were – come to life. But let us wait a little longer before we turn to these stories.

### The Hesitation of Arjuna

The second scene I consider is the famous battle scene in which Arjuna is standing on the battlefield and refusing to go into a battle that will result in the death of his kin. Krishna advises him that violence is not only necessary but that in the broader scheme of things, it is not violence. I cannot go into the literature on the philosophy of action to which notions of violence and war in the Bhagvad Gita have contributed, but I note that the text brings fully to light how non-violence, which Krishna propagates as the highest dharma, is enmeshed with violence. There is also a difference between how Arjuna is consoled as he faces future actions and is about to wage violence and how Yudhishtira is consoled as he faces the old king Dhritarashtra and his wife Gandhari, who have lost all their sons after the battle. In the latter event even though the scene is that of reconciliation, dark residues of anger remain, for even as Yudhishtira touches Gandhari's feet, his nails go black from the anger that is transmitted from Gandhari's body to his. Further, it is not Krishna, the god, who can speak of non-cruelty to either Arjuna or Yudhishtira since he stands accused of encouraging the war. Even contemporary Indian literature retains this sense of the injustice that was committed not only by the Kauravas but also by Krishna. If Draupadi's voice showed *dharma* to have been silenced in the scene of sexual violence that we witnessed earlier, it is Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas who has lived her married life in voluntary blindness, whose grief leads to her cursing of Krishna. In Alok Bhalla's lovely translation of the Hindi play, *Andha Yug* (Bharati 2010), we can hear her rage against Krishna:

What have you done Krishna! What have you done!  
 If you wanted [...] You could have stopped the war [...]  
 You may be a god [...] You may be omnipotent

Whoever you are [...]
   
I curse you and I curse all your kinsmen.

Krishna accepts the curse, which then leads to the complete extinction of his lineage while he himself is killed like a wild animal in his old age. What is haunting, though, is Bharati's depiction of what Krishna has taken upon himself in this terrible war. He says:

In this terrible war of eighteen days,  
I am the only one who died a million times.  
Every time a soldier was struck down.  
Every time a soldier fell on the ground.  
It was I who was struck down,  
It was I who was wounded,  
It was I who fell to the ground.  
[...]

It seems that in order to get out of the cycle of violence of war, it is not the divine voice but the human voice or one on a scale even lower than the human that will have to be recovered.

### Non-cruelty or the Humanization of Dharma

In explaining the concept of non-cruelty Mukund Lath (2009) asks us to look for its meaning in the actions of various characters in the Mahabharata since the word does not seem to carry much importance outside of the epic. In Lath's words,

Literally the word *anrhamasya* means the state, the attitude, of not being *nrhamasya*. The word *nrhamasya* is common enough in Sanskrit literature; it literally means one who injures man, from which other meanings follow such as mischievous, noxious, cruel, base, vile, malicious. *Anrshimsya* would then mean an attitude where such qualities are absent. But the word has more than a negative connotation; it signifies good-will, a fellow feeling, a deep sense of the other. A word that occurs often with *anrshamsya*, therefore, is *anukrosha*, to cry with another, to feel another's pain. All these meanings are brought out in the stories' (p. 84).

I do not have the space to visit all the stories that would be relevant here. Let me briefly allude to the moment when in reply to a question posed by a divine being (Yaksha, who turns out to be the Dharma himself), Yudhishtira answers that non-cruelty is the highest *dharma*. This is the same Yudhishtira whose actions in the dice game, as we saw, had led to the unleashing of a cycle of violence. However, more importantly his actions showed that any learned public discourse on right and wrong becomes impossible for one whose self is lost. So, is the modality of non-cruelty as a way of being in the world what Yudhishtira arrives at,

learning this virtue only after his silence in the assembly? Would it be possible to say that non-cruelty lowers his sights from Dharma with a capital D to *dharma* in a lower key, as a possible means of recovering his lost self?

## Humanizing Dharma

The different stories through which a human scale or at any rate a scale lower than that of the gods may be found to speak about non-cruelty do not parse out the concept into different parts – rather they allow us to circle around the concept so that a swarm of ideas are generated around it. The first such idea is that of breaking the rigid law-like regularity of the relation between *karma* or action and its fruits, or consequences, in order to humanize the force of *dharma*. The second is the exploration of the meaning of togetherness and the third, I suggest, is the obligation of a writer towards his (by extension her) character – thus not simply how *you* are in the world but also how you imagine *others* might live in the world. A common thread uniting these ideas is that non-cruelty is generated from within the scene of intimacy and is hence perhaps to be distinguished from compassion as an impersonal virtue to be extended to all beings.

The story about the humanization of the relentless force of *karma* goes as follows. It is told in the text through the device of explaining how Vidura, the youngest uncle of the Kauravas and Pandavas, who was none other than Dharma, the god of righteousness and whom we met earlier at the assembly of the Kaurava kings when he urged everyone there to respond to Draupadi's question, had come to be born of a lower-caste Shudra woman. A great Brahmin ascetic, Mandavya, was performing strict austerities in his hermitage when a bunch of thieves hid their loot there. Pursued by the royal guards they were caught and the loot was found in the hermitage. Mandavya could not answer any questions since he was bound by a vow of silence during his austerities and was then mistakenly condemned by the king to be strung on a stake. Mandavya was released by the king when he (the king) overheard two birds discussing what bad *karmas* the innocent Mandavya might have committed in his past life for which he was now being punished. However, the stake could not be fully released from his body. After his death Mandavya questioned the god Dharma as to why he was punished. He learnt about a childhood prank he had played on some flying insects in his last life. Enraged that he was punished for a childhood prank, the ascetic cursed Dharma to be born of a Shudra woman. He also established that henceforth the laws of *karma* would not apply to childhood deeds. Hildebeitel (2001) summarizes the import of this story, saying that the impersonal Dharma, God of righteousness and of death, is 'humanized' here by having to undergo birth in human form. More importantly, the frailties of humans are acknowledged so that we are not held responsible for actions we may have committed as children. For Hildebeitel, Dharma learns 'compassion.' This may be true but for me the relentless force of an impersonal logic of action and consequences is softened by the modality of non-cruelty that acknowledges and prepares the ground for positing that violence cannot be mitigated by a rational mode of ar-

gumentation but rather by accepting the power of intimacy through which we are called to inhabit the world with the other. This is what emerges in the animal stories that follow.

The scene of the first story is the evening when Bhishma, the eldest of the lineage is lying on the battle field, mortally wounded, and the two warring sides have come there to listen to his parting words. Yudhishtira asks Bhishma to explain the meaning of non-cruelty. Bhishma tells this through the story of the parrot and the tree. A fowler from the famed city of Kashi went hunting antelopes but mistakenly lodged a poisonous arrow in a tree. The tree withered and died and all the birds left it to find nests in other trees but one parrot remained. It too began to wither with the tree. Indra, the lord of heaven was amazed at the capacity of the parrot to take happiness and suffering as one and the same. He asked, how can a bird experience *anrishansya* (non-cruelty) – is that not impossible for animals? He goes disguised as a Brahmin and tries to persuade the parrot to leave for a tree with leafy foliage and fruits. The parrot says that he was born in the tree, growing up in and receiving protection from it and so out of non-cruelty and sympathy, he will not leave it. Indra then restores both tree and parrot to health.

Contrasting the qualities of non-violence and non-cruelty, Hildebeitel (2001, p. 213) interprets this story as saying ‘While *ahimsa* tightens the great chain of beings, *anrishamsya* softens it with a cry for a *human* creature-feeling across the great divides.’ Dalmiya, interpreting the same story sees it as parable of the relational. ‘Just as experience of relationality is not rule bound, the relationality itself is also not contractual. The parrot was *born* in that particular tree and *found* itself in a context that it did not actively choose’ (Dalmiya 2001, p. 297). In both Hildebeitel and Dalmiya, the force of a concept such as non-cruelty comes from the fact that a particular disposition is generated through the experience of togetherness – if the parrot had gone to a different tree no one would have termed it as ‘betrayal.’

The second scene, regarded as the iconic moment showing the virtue of non-cruelty, is that of the final journey of the Pandavas with Draupadi. Since only those who are free of any sin can ascend into heaven in bodily form, everyone except Yudhishtira gets eliminated along the way. Yudhishtira continues along the path with a stray dog who had attached himself to the group. Indra, the lord of heaven, comes in his chariot to take Yudhishtira to heaven but on condition that he abandons the dog. Yudhishtira is not swayed by any argument in favour of abandoning the dog and is accused of becoming snared by *moha* (attachment) to a dog when he was able to renounce everything else – love of kingdom, love of wife, love of brothers. In the end, the dog is revealed to be none other than Dharma, his father, who is subjecting him to a final test. Yudhishtira passes this test since he has developed the qualities of non-cruelty and sympathy.

How is one to understand the two features of these animal stories that are displayed here? First, the quality of non-cruelty is displayed across species and at moments when it is not given through language or through appeals to distant moral concepts such as ‘obligation’ or ‘rule-following’ but through a sense of to-

getherness that has developed by the sheer contingency of having been brought together – the fated circumstances of togetherness. Second, it is from within a scene of intimacy that dispositions toward non-cruelty develop.

We must recall the two women, Draupadi and Gandhari who became the causes for the destruction of the *kshatriyas* and of Krishna's dynasty, respectively, thus ending the cruelty of the warrior clans. From the ashes of the heroic project of the warrior castes, emerges the possibility that there is another kind of intimacy between men and women, humans and animals that can offer a non-cruel way of inhabiting the earth. The Mahabharata names it non-cruelty. We could view the epic itself as an argument with gods rather than a resolution of the question as to who is the legal subject in the contract to wage war. The Mahabharata enacts this argument through a proliferation of figures, both minor and major. It reminds us that the stirring message about the necessity for war, given by Krishna in the battlefield must one day come full circle when war ends with the grieving prince, Yudhishtira, who seeks not incentives to wage war, but consolation – for when all has been destroyed what is left for the prince to take pleasure in?

I conclude this meditation on the critique of war in the mythic register with some of Freud's observations about war that resonate with the sense that victories in war are blighted by a sense of the criminality inherent in the taking of life. For the Mahabharata this life includes the life of the non-humans that the earth sustains.

When the furious struggle of the present war has been decided, each one of the victorious fighters will return home joyfully to his wife and children, unchecked and undisturbed by the thoughts of the enemies he has killed whether at close quarters or at long range. It is worthy of note that the primitive races, which still survive in the world [...] act differently in this respect, or did until they came under the influence of our civilization. Savages [...] are far from being remorseless murderers; when they return victorious from the warpath they may not set foot in their villages or touch their wives till they have atoned for the murders they committed in war by penances, which are often long and tedious (Freud 1915 [1993]).

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## Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

### Does Sacrifice Avert Violence?

#### Reflections from Nepal and the People's War<sup>1</sup>

This article attempts to address the link between sacrifice and violence by exploring the settings in which they are to be found in the ritual order governing socio-political organization. It is based on extensive ethnographic work in Nepal, a country that was regarded as a safe haven until it was swept up in a revolutionary movement that combined Maoist ideology with a sacrificial impetus. If warlike movements generate an ideology of legitimization that borrows religious imagery, those supported by a revolutionary ideal tend to spiritualize violence to the point of developing a genuine mysticism. This was the case of the People's War in Nepal, which was presented as an apocalypse, led by warriors rejoicing in their own suffering and glorifying martyrdom as the supreme means of achieving the ideal goal of a classless society. *Bali dan*, sacrifice, was the main expression of this revolutionary movement, referring both to individual commitment and to the movement as a whole. Formulated as it was in sacrificial terms and by its own actors from the outset, the sacrificial dimension provided real momentum to the People's war, as opposed to retrospective attempts to lend meaning to violence, such as using the term 'holocaust' for the 'final solution.' In the case studied here, revolutionary violence was born sacred and, to an even greater extent, as a new expression of the most highly authorized form of violence that is sacrifice. This kind of identification is relatively common, probably owing to the fact that both war and sacrifice share common features as formalized contexts for the destruction of (human or animal) lives on behalf of a cause (or a higher power), for the benefit of the entire community and beyond, for the entire planet (in the case of revolutionary movements, which are meant to spread) or even the universe (in the sacrifice that governs the relationship with the cosmos). However, the frequency of the analogy between sacrifice and

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1. I wish to thank warmly Bernadette Sellers (CNRS), who revised my English text.

war poses a specific problem, given that the former is generally conceived as a regulator of violence, whereas the latter generates it on a massive scale. A first response to this problem is to consider, with Hobbes, that war itself is one way of regulating the extreme and anarchic violence of the 'war of every one against every one.' Alternatively, one may consider that the analogy of war and sacrifice does not reflect any common feature between them, but represents a mere figure of style. A third alternative is to reckon that war represents a deregulation of sacrifice by transposing it beyond the religious realm. One last way of addressing this problem, which has been little explored to date yet needs to be developed without fully invalidating the other positions, consists of taking the analogy literally, in contradistinction to the second position, and examining whether sacrifice may not be intrinsically linked to wider forms of violence outside its restricted nucleus. Ruling out the possibility that a war of everyone against everyone might even exist, we would argue that collective forms of violence such as armed movements are not to be conceived as deregulation, but as a possible form taken by sacrifice, in contradistinction to the third position evoked above.

By arguing that sacrifice conditions, or even leads to, other forms of violence outside its specific ritual domain, I do not mean that all forms of collective violence may be reduced to a single, universal, sacrificial model beyond the basic principle of offering up life for a cause. Instead, I suggest that the forms of sacrifice related to collective violent movements display an irreducible diversity, due to their own, sometimes contradictory, logic; hence the necessity to resist the temptation to generalize and the need to examine in depth the reciprocal links between sacrifice and collective violence within specific contexts. In fact, the case of the Nepalese People's War suggests that the co-existence of various models of sacrifice within the same socio-cultural context, as is the case in Nepal and more generally in the Hindu world, is at the heart of the construction of violence. The combinatorial nature of their interplay borrows from a seemingly universal schema, and even more so from inherited patterns, but results in a construction that is unique in that it corresponds to a new, specific context.

When understood in this way, collective violence represents an invasion of the socio-political realm via a transposition of the usually controlled and limited area of the sacrificial. By virtue of this 'invasion,' the violent movement achieves the effectiveness of religious forms, asserting a relationship with a transcendent realm. Within such a framework, one participates in a movement whose disturbing nature – since some beings lose their lives in it – is surmountable when its purpose is to confirm or transform the world order. In the context of sacrifice, the form is ceremonial and fixed, while in the revolutionary context at the other extreme, it takes on the appearance of unorganized spontaneity. However, the latter borrows directly from the former, notably its vocabulary, and thus appears conditioned by predefined sacrificial patterns. In the Hindu world, this relationship does not go ignored, since war (*yuddha*) in general is equated with sacrifice. As in sacrifice, the violence that unfolds during the war is conceived in this context as being of a particular type, although at the same time it may not be recognized as such; this type of violence is seen as necessary and even valued.

In both war and sacrifice, it also has the faculty to take life without giving rise to a 'sin,' *paṇ*, and to rid death of its polluting nature.<sup>2</sup>

Following the path of violence as a guiding line for exploring both war and sacrifice does not therefore directly stem from an emic point of view, given that both the violence of sacrifice and of war is denied in the Hindu world (including Nepal). Yet, the similar though separate treatment of violence in these two contexts is remarkable enough to constitute a path to be explored. In the same manner, to posit violence as the essence of sacrifice goes against the grain of most theories about sacrifice, which see the latter as a way of expunging it. However, a movement like the People's War, whose entire ideology was formulated in sacrificial terms<sup>3</sup> and caused more than 15,000 deaths, with thousands missing and many more injured, clearly calls for a review of the relationship between violence and sacrifice.

### Sacrifice and Violence

In Nepal, blood sacrifice is a very common practice. Part of an ancient Hindu heritage, sacrifice here has not met the criticism that has marked the modern period in India, where it is banned in most states. In the context of Nepal, on the contrary, religious ceremonies today include the real carnage of various animals, from chickens to buffaloes. The vast majority of the population consider blood sacrifice to be the most effective way to obtain a boon, to satisfy the gods, or to contain or divert these divinities' anger. Priests and executors are supposed to gain personal merit and prestige, sponsors (or sacrificers)<sup>4</sup>, the realization of their wish, while even the victim is said to greatly benefit from being sacrificed, whether by reaching a heavenly abode, immortality or by obtaining a nobler rebirth. Remarkably, scholars who have studied sacrifice have not radically distanced themselves from this perspective, offering interpretations that scarcely take into account the violence at the heart of sacrifice and the role it might play, but that emphasize the benefits for the group, through the notions of exchange, gift, communion and mediation. (The emic perspective, however, focuses on the effect the sacrifice has on the gods, while the analytical perspective ignores these invisible recipients to consider only the 'indirect,' alleged effect on the group). Similarly, in the humanities, the founding character of sacrifice, strongly present in Hindu myths, takes the form of mythico-historical, sacrificial patterns that are conceived as being at the origin of social life. The most famous is Freud's theory of the murder of the father by the primitive horde as the origin of the rules of social and religious life; then there is Hocart's killing of the king, framed in terms rather similar to Freud's, except that the existence of a royal institution denotes the pre-existence of organized social life and that the

2. On violence in the Hindu context see Bodewitz 1999, and on its conception in Nepal and in the Maoist revolutionary movement, see Lecomte-Tilouine 2010.

3. On the subject, see Lecomte-Tilouine 2009, Chapter 8.

4. A sacrificer is the person who patronizes a sacrifice, and a sacrificer, the person who performs the sacrifice.

killing of the king is ritualized. More recently, René Girard drew another sacrificial fresco, claiming that, right from the beginning of time, the killing of the scapegoat has permanently regulated social life, which is constantly threatened by generalized, mimetic violence.<sup>5</sup>

The murder of the father or king is a powerful image that may be used as a model of founding, transgressive violence; Freud applied this model to the Russian revolution and the assassination of the Tsar, seeing these events as the realization of the myth of the primitive horde in which the brothers join forces to kill their father. Yet the model is limited in the analytical range it offers to help understand violence and in particular the event to which Freud refers. The Girardian model, on the contrary, does not proceed by images but seeks to understand the mechanisms of the momentum at play in collective violence. By its abstraction, it promotes an analytical approach to the facts and may be applied to a large number of observable situations. Yet, it is based on two assumptions that weaken it: firstly, its 'universality,' independent of any social organization, which in practice amounts to the generalization of a fundamentally egalitarian model of society. Secondly, the idea that the sacrificial ritual restrains the violence inherent to the human condition, a theory in keeping with most approaches to sacrifice and even, one might say, with those that acknowledge violence's central position. Thus, following in the steps of René Girard, when Lucien Scubla (1999) proposed getting rid of the long tradition of denying sacrificial violence, contrasting it with a conception of sacrifice as a violent act, the theory he then developed seems to correspond to the idea that he was actually fighting against: On the basis that sacrifice contains violence that threatens to spread in the absence of control mechanisms, the author attributes such great value to this principle that he suggests that the more a sacrifice is 'bloody' (or violent), the more effective it is, and that the sacrifice of plants, which do not fulfil this function, would expose us to the spread of violence. Without ruling out this possibility, it would seem that the type of transformation of violence operated by sacrifice cannot be reduced to the single function of 'containing' it. To quote just one example, Maurice Bloch (1992) has shown most convincingly that many rituals include a double cycle of violence, or 'rebounding violence,' which creates a process that is independent of reality and designed to modify it.<sup>6</sup>

Yet there is another property of sacrifice that is not closely related to the modalities of its internal logic but lies instead in its force as a 'representation,' in the two meanings of the term outlined by Louis Marin (1981, pp. 9-10): that is to say, both as a forceful presentation of something and as a presentation of something other than itself. This 'something else' is clearly polysemic in the case of sacrifice, and therefore may be related to the model of the gift, of the debt, or of

5. Another similar scenario, suggesting that religion developed from hunting, is to be found in Burkert 1972.

6. Maurice Bloch's theory is that ritual (and in particular sacrifice) includes a first form of violence aimed at weakening vital energy, then a second form applied to an external thing or being, which restores energy. This process has the aim of denying the natural process of weakening of the body through old age and death, by introducing other cycles.

communication with the invisible powers. But one of the most obvious aspects of sacrifice is perhaps not the 'something else' but what it forcefully presents, in that it acts as the ultimate model of legitimate violence, i.e. the capacity and even the duty of some members of society to publicly deprive a human or animal being of their life, for the common good. It plays this role above all in a context in which sacrifice is not unanimously accepted, as I believe is in fact always the case to varying degrees, and in this instance, the legitimacy of sacrificial violence is denaturalized and tends to be perceived as an expression of power.<sup>7</sup>

Even when it is not as clearly linked to collective violence as it is in the Hindu context of Nepal, one of the consequences of sacrifice being the model of legitimate violence is that it also acts as a framework within which violence may be legitimated and spread; hence the frequency of the analogy or equation of war with sacrifice.

Before going any further, we need to justify the association we are making here between violence and sacrifice, given that the latter does not necessarily involve killing (at least real killing) of a living being and is defined in its broadest sense as a gift or abnegation. The etymology of sacrifice indeed means 'to make sacred,' but in the Hindu context (in Nepal as in most regions of India), it is generally termed *bali dan*, meaning the gift of *bali*, a term of uncertain etymology but which is usually understood as the adjectival form of 'power,' *bal*, by the Nepalese, introducing the meaning of 'powerful gift.' *Bali dan* is described as a circulation of power, with the person offering *bali dan*, and receiving *bali*, power, from the god in exchange. The best rendition of this process would therefore be 'gift for power.' It is true that even in the Nepalese context substitutes for animals are sometimes offered, but only real animal offerings include a sanctification of the 'thing' offered and a sign of its acceptance by the deity (marked by the thrill of the animal after its purification), whereas inanimate objects are automatically accepted by the deities. Thus, only blood sacrifices truly establish bilateral communication between people and the invisible forces, and strictly speaking match Hubert and Mauss's (1994, p. 302 [1899]) definition of sacrifice, as a 'process that involves establishing communication between the sacred world and the secular world through a victim.' Since blood sacrifice alone leads to bilateral communication, we will only refer to rituals involving the killing of living beings when speaking of sacrifice and we will not take into account the type of transaction that takes place during the sacrifice, given the great diversity of forms that come into play here. As a matter of fact, numerous debates on sacrifice address this aspect, including the nature of the sacrificial gift (debt, trade, contract, or irrational expenditure) and the type of relationship that develops between 'the sacred and the profane,' or between men and invisible powers (reconciliation, distancing) within sacrifice.

The notion of violence, which in our view characterizes sacrifice despite the denial of this by the Hindu orthodoxy (and the science of religions), is difficult to address, given that its definition and limits vary in time, space and even from

7. On the naturalization of violence, see Bourdieu 1998.

one individual to another. Thus, though conditioned by the law, morals and ideology, the definition of violence is not hegemonic, and this is particularly true in the caste society, in which each group nurtures its own values parallel to orthodoxy. We can only therefore retain a broad, basic definition, such as: any phenomenon that at least one individual in a given group considers violent.<sup>8</sup>

Such a definition is made possible, even necessary, by the ethnographic approach, which bypasses the determinism of the dominant view as expressed in the texts and, to an even greater extent, the masking role it plays towards the whole process involved in collective violence. The text, so Girard says, necessarily adopts a single point of view: either that of the crowd, as in the case of myth, where the victim is always presented as guilty and no longer appears as a scapegoat; or that of the victim, as in tragedy, in which one is unable to understand the behaviour of the persecutors. Girard's remarks on the concealment of violence are useful when addressing the denial of the sacrificial and warlike violence expressed in the Hindu textual tradition. Nevertheless, anthropologists may overcome this limitation through ethnographic observations, which simultaneously disclose various types of behaviour and points of view during the sacrificial ceremony. As in the text, two main stances may be observed, but rather than opposing the 'crowd' and 'the victim' they oppose on the one hand the sacrificers, the sacrificers and the majority of the population, who rejoice, and on the other the victim, with whom some categories of the population identify themselves or commiserate. Yet this second position is marginal and linked to marginalized groups, in such a way that concealment of violence is also prevalent in the current ritual context. Here it consists of the ability of the elite to organize public exposure of the orthodoxy at the expense of marginal views, but without obscuring them completely.

Since the public organization of sacrifice falls to its ideologues and sponsors (Brahmins and Kshatriyas), it establishes and confirms the difference between men, which is staged during the ritual. Because of the strong parallel between the social and the ritual orders, the ultimate model of legitimate violence, the right to kill without killing, as detained by its custodian elite (the groups respectively controlling spiritual and temporal power) is akin to social domination. It thus takes an antagonistic turn in such a socially transparent context as caste organization and, what is more important as I will try to show, this is neither accidental, contextual nor derivative but constitutive of this socio-religious organization, given that it was already present in the oldest Hindu myths. As previously mentioned, Nepalese society is fundamentally organized according to the principles of Hinduism – although its recent history has seen significant protests against this religion – and shares the values of its normative and mythological texts. Examination of this broad ideological body helps to highlight the sacrificial nature of Hindu society at large (and of its Nepalese sub-species), as well as two of its features that are essential to our present study: first, rivalry be-

8. Violence is *himsa* in Nepali, and its definition roughly corresponds to its English equivalent. In the Nepali Brihat Sabdakosh (p. 1417) it reads: 1) to take the life of a living being or to kill; 2) to afflict others by some means.

tween men is not based on identity as in Girard's model; second, blood sacrifice does not put an end to violence, but on the contrary initiates it and contributes to its spread outside its own sphere to generalized, societal forms. One may certainly argue that burgeoning Hindu mythology cannot be so readily reduced to generalities. I would therefore appeal to two fundamental myths of origin, dealing respectively with the origin of the caste organization, and with the origin of kingship, to support the centrality of my proposals. On the other hand, to prevent any decontextualization, I will consider this mythology as it has been 'appropriated' by the group under study, at this specific moment in history, and then bring it to the ethnographic observation of the sacrificial ritual, just as I was able to observe it in Nepal. The result is a combined analysis of sacrifice, calling upon mythical texts describing this ritual as well as upon the accounts of the actors in the sacrifice, their ritual practices and feedback.

### Founding Patterns: Sacrifice in Hindu Myths of Origin

Studies on sacrifice in the Hindu world have mainly focused on ancient India, although there are also works on contemporary practices of exceptional value. The starting point of this line of enquiry may be traced back to the publication in 1898 of *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brâhmanas*, by Sylvain Lévi, on which Hubert and Mauss drew heavily to write their famous essay on sacrifice, published the following year. Lévi aimed to establish a unified doctrine of sacrifice based on the enigmatic and scattered formulas contained in the Brahmanas. He notes that this doctrine leaves no room for morality; instead, it is a mechanical operation regulating the relations between men and the gods, and a 'magical operation' by which the sacrificer rises to the deity, with the dangers that this movement entails. Lévi outlines the myth of the god-sacrifice, Purusha, whose sacrifice gave birth to the universe, to show that in the Vedic context, sacrifice 'is the only reality,' and that everything else takes on its appearance, 'son semblant d'existence'. The study of Hindu sacrifice was subsequently marked by contributions from Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud whose work was jointly published in *Le sacrifice en Inde ancienne* in 1976. This book emphasized the Vedic roots of Hindu sacrifice, arguing that they have been preserved, as well as the unity of Hinduism. For Madeleine Biardeau, the essence of sacrifice is the abandonment, *tyag*, by the sacrificer of something that is a substitute for his person. Then, with the rise of Bhakti (devotion), sacrifice became the renunciation of the person for the deity. Charles Malamoud's contribution in turn focuses on the *daksina*, ritual salary, or 'price to be paid for the layman's body of the sacrificer, abandoned in the sacrifice, to return to its owner.' Malamoud notes that this process fits into the overall scheme of debt in Brahmanism, which governs not only sacrifice, but also the organization of the world, with sacrifice providing a model for the relationship between users and service providers.

Other authors, such as Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger (1989), have contributed interesting observations about the substitution at the heart of Hindu sacrifice, showing that between man, the prototype of the victim, and his surrogates

there are differences in degree that are highlighted in the texts. As they noted, sacrificial qualities may take different directions in the substitution chain: at times it is man, the prototype, who is considered the most suitable victim, yet sometimes at the other extreme, the goat is seen as the chimera of all living beings that may be sacrificed. For Smith and Doniger, sacrifice itself is a substitute for its ideal form, human sacrifice, conceived here as self-sacrifice both by the authors of the study and by those of the texts they study. This convergence of views is remarkable and has led to the failure to question the strangeness of considering animals, not other humans, as the closest substitutes for oneself.

It seems reasonable to assume that the choice of an animal victim as a substitute for the self reflects the distance from others that is cultivated in the Hindu context. This distance is made manifest in the division of society into classes and castes but, as I would like to show here, it is taken further in the differentiation between individuals, a fact that is particularly apparent with regard to twins, i.e. the human entities closest to one another in identity. Given that I am inevitably asked in Nepal and India about my family members, I have noticed that many of the people to whom I reply that I am a mother of twin boys, exclaim: 'Ah, you have Ram and Laksman!' These names that Hindus often give to twins, also designate them generically. In a second step, whereas Westerners would inquire whether they are identical or not, I am often asked whether the first or the second-born is the taller. Through this question, the difference between the twins is asserted: one is necessarily taller than the other, and the only unknown factor is how this difference relates to birth rank — the idea being that the second-born is generally the taller.

It so happens that the pair of mythical heroes who give their names to all sets of twins, Ram and Lakshman, are not themselves twins but half-brothers born of different mothers. The case is complicated by the fact that Ram and Lakshman have other siblings and that these include one pair of twins. Surprisingly, Lakshman is one of them. However, his relationship with his twin brother is never mentioned in the Ramayana epic and has not given birth to any model figure. Instead, Lakshman, the twin, is depicted as so deeply attached to Ram, his distant half-brother — and ideal Hindu king — that he follows him into exile for 12 years in the forest, and assists him in his most perilous adventures.

Twins are therefore far from creating this inseparability or mimetic rivalry, which is essential in many myths (elsewhere) as well as in Girard's theory. Instead, real twins are named or generically designated by the names of inseparable but distant brothers, whose inseparability breaks the twin birth link of one of them. This strange situation is clearly a model, given that it is also found in an attenuated form in the other great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, in the affection that Yuddhisthira has for one of his twin half-brothers.

This pattern underlines the fact that difference originally prevails, while identity (or at least inseparability) requires construction. Interestingly, this teaching from the two great epic poems comes to complete the creation myth, which stresses the sacredness of the differentiated nature of Hindu society, born as such from the primordial sacrifice. In Hindu mythology, there is no question

of a wild and undifferentiated state of humanity at the dawn of time, but only the primacy of sacrifice from which there emerges a complex society, hierarchically structured according to the verticality of the body of the primordial being that has been sacrificed. In the Brahmanas and the oral versions of the myth in Nepal, this first sacrifice is a self-sacrifice. Social classes emerge one by one, starting from Purusha's head and going down to his feet, and they are granted attributes that correspond symbolically to the different parts of the body of the primordial being of whom they are born. The class born from the feet, at the bottom rank, has no other function than to relieve the other three of their impurity. In this myth we can see, without taking its interpretation too far, the introduction of a social system that is sacrificial in nature, not only because it is born of the first sacrifice, but also because it is maintained by 'victims,' the impure groups, who, like scapegoats, are 'socially sacrificed' by taking on themselves the impurity of the others and being rejected as outcasts. Far from the Girardian vision of a victim randomly chosen at a time of social crisis, the scapegoats here are permanent regulators, and born as such, they have no way of changing their condition. The social system is also sacrificial in the sense that its scapegoats are not individuals but a group opposed to other groups, forming a dichotomy that constitutes the nucleus of the caste organisation.

It is this myth that Sylvain Lévi addresses in the first chapter of his study, similarly to most of the subsequent reflections on the Hindu sacrifice. But, one might say, they deal only with the first part of this myth depicting Purusha's sacrifice. The sacrificial nature of the society that his sacrifice produces has not attracted the same attention, although Charles Malamoud pointed out that the service contract between pure and impure castes reproduces what is at work in sacrifice. The prevailing idea is that Purusha's self-sacrifice is such a fundamental model that in the course of time, sacrificing animal surrogates for the sacrificer disappeared and was replaced by renouncement, as a closer reproduction of the primordial self-sacrifice. It is true that the Brahmins, who used to act as priests for sacrifices in ancient times, were then strictly forbidden from killing (or from being killed) and engaged, in India as in Nepal, in ascetic practices, with renouncement as their ideal. But animal sacrifice did not die out. While it is no longer practised or publicly practised in many regions of India, other Hindu areas including Nepal have taken the practice to the extreme. Nepal is described in the media as the country with the largest number of blood sacrifices in the world, with its Gadhi Mai festival quoted as a cult involving the killing of 300,000 buffaloes. Concomitantly to the return of Brahmanic sacrifice to its initial self-sacrificial form, a vast array of sacrifices emanating from another class, the warriors or Kshatriyas, developed in this context. This is hardly an anomaly, considering that Brahmins have never had exclusivity over sacrifice in the Hindu realm, as its prescribed performers, not its patrons. Sacrifice has in fact been a mutual concern between Brahmins and the class of kings and warriors, as evidenced – among numerous other examples<sup>9</sup> – by the story of King Vena, which retells the origin of king-

9. On this structural conflict, see Dumont 1966 and Stern 1973.

ship. The grandson of the king of the dead, Vena, is portrayed as a terrible king, chasing men as if they were gazelles. He angers the Brahmins, not by his acts of violence, but by preventing them from offering sacrifices to anyone but himself, arguing that as sovereign, he alone represents all the gods. The Brahmins then put him to death in a collective and highly sacrificial manner, by whipping him with the sharp blades of grass they use to purify the sacrificial area, the ritual elements and their own bodies. The Brahmins sacrifice the evil king, this polarizing figure who does not recognize any authority other than himself, but the world without a king sinks into chaos and hordes of poor people attack the rich. To put an end to this new disorder, the Brahmins extract from the thigh of the royal corpse a small, black, hideous being, depicted as a tribal king carrying the sins of King Vena. They immediately banish him to the forest as a scapegoat. Then the Brahmins extract from the right hand of the royal corpse, now stripped of its negative aspects, King Prithu shining like the sun, who gives his name to the earth – his wife – and becomes the first earthly king.<sup>10</sup>

The ritual murder of Vena by the Brahmins presents a very different model of sacrifice, in which the victim is not a substitute for the sacrificer, but a model-obstacle for their group. Sacrifice here ends the conflict between the universal king (Vena) and the sacrificial elite, but interestingly causes a new form of violence, taking the form of a sort of class struggle. The two facets of royalty are then literally embodied in a small black being bearing its negative aspects, a scapegoat driven away from the civilized world of the Brahmins, and a brilliant king meant to maintain the social order and stay in his proper place. This ideal king does not oppose the theorists of the rite, makes us understand the myth and ensures proper order or 'social peace' by returning the 'poor' or 'thieves' to their original condition, while the tribals are ritually chased away, outside of living space, where they are free to reign.<sup>11</sup>

Violent union against a model-obstacle is one of the scenarios analyzed by René Girard, particularly in his study of the *Book of Job* (1985). Girard highlights how, if we disregard the prologues, the lamentations of Job and his dialogue with his three friends, show him not as a victim of God, but of the society in which he lives. Job recalls that he was once a respected and influential man until his servants, relatives and friends turned away from him. He then became an object of hatred for all those, including himself, who adopted this perspective.

The polarization of violence forms a more convincing pattern than the hypothesis of pure mimetic violence developed by Girard (1972), which includes many debatable points, such as the origin of the first violent act in the absence of a model, or the idea that mimicry does not take into account inherent differences in humans, such as the physical force that distinguishes them, even if we hypothesize that desire erases social differentiation (leading, for Hindus,

10. This version was collected in western Nepal in 2000. For an analysis of the different textual versions of this myth, see *The split child*, pp. 321-68 in Doniger O'Flaherty (1988).

11. This myth recalls the mythical origin of the Shah and other royal dynasties in Nepal, in which the establishment of kingship was preceded by the degradation of a royal personage and his association with a tribal group. See Lecomte-Tilouine 2009, Chapter 6.

to the law of the fish, *matsyanyaya*). Taking into account particular social positions, such as that of Job, has the advantage of reintroducing some social reality, albeit at a very general level. It also explains very simply the convergence effect of the violence it can generate. Yet this position itself owes nothing to mimetism, which is therefore not sufficient to explain collective violence. This does not mean that mimetism is not involved in the construction of violence in various ways. Thus, Michael Taussig (1987) sees in the torture inflicted on Indians by the settlers, a 'colonial mirror' or 'a reflection' of the savagery they feared, condemned and invented; this is a theme dear to post-modernism which has recognized it in many areas, but into which the history of Nepal, which has never been colonized, does not fit.

In the case of the Nepalese People's War, mimetism clearly marked the revolutionary camp, made up of like-minded fighters and activists. But it was a dynamic set up by an organization and its leaders, not a spontaneous and collective movement of imitation. There was also strong mimetism between the character at the head of the violent group, the leader Prachanda, and the 'model-obstacle' who was the king, which grew in proportion to the detestation of the king. This was 'positional,' not 'essential' mimetism, between two individuals who were very different but placed in similar positions within rival organizations. Thus, both cases of mimicry identified in the Nepalese revolutionary movement have a source that shifts from the strongest antagonist to the 'model-obstacle,' despite the differences in caste and ideology (the revolutionary leader being Brahman, and the king, Kshatriya). In the same manner that the sacrificial killing of the model-obstacle in the myth of Vena does not come from the crowd but from the sacrificial elite, the hatred of the king in Nepal increased with the growing sovereignty of his mimetic enemy, showing the construction behind collective violence.

What is more important still is that the two major myths of origin examined here, which deal respectively with the creation of caste society and the creation of kingship, show strong parallelism by depicting a transformation of sacrificial violence into social violence. In the first case, sacrifice leads to the creation of a sacrificial social order relying on the existence of institutional scapegoats, and in the second case, to a form of class struggle (ended by ritual creation which amounts to getting rid of the tribals and to establishing a new guarantor of social subordination).

More broadly speaking, the parallelism emphasizes the causal relationship between blood sacrifice and socio-political organization. The organizing role of sacrifice, clearly outlined by Detienne and Vernant (1979) with regard to the Greek city, is therefore also essential in the Hindu context, and particularly in contemporary Nepal. This is the case not only at a mythological level but also in actual ritual practices.

### **The 'Sacrificial Contract' at Work**

In Nepal, adult males of every group (the Brahmins excepted) are set apart by their right to kill. They represent just as many butchers, with no caste being spe-

cialized in this function like in India (or among the Newars). As for women and children (and Brahmins), they are strictly forbidden to kill, even small animals. Killing is thus strongly associated with masculinity and takes on an initiatory character. From childhood, boys aspire to be granted this responsibility and it is not uncommon to see them emphatically claim the right to kill their first chicken. This permission is granted to them by their parents once they are considered old enough not to hurt the animal, which is considered a sin, *pap*. Whoever can kill can sacrifice, in this context in which there is a very blurred distinction between killing and sacrificing, with any killing being more or less of equivalent value to a sacrifice. Indeed, it is customary to offer part of an animal to the gods even when it is beheaded for eating outside of a ritual context, or when it is killed during hunting. The sacrificial nature of killing equally exists when the victim is human: openly in the case of war, given that in the past dead bodies used to be commonly brought as offerings to temples or the enemy's blood used to fill sacred ponds. With the recent reactivation of warlike activities during the People's War, new forms of deifying the fallen emerged, such as ceremonies to honour martyrs during which their immortality is chanted. Even in the case of murder or suicide, the possibility that it might be a hidden sacrifice to accumulate power is often suspected, but not openly stated.

Whatever the context or type of victim, decapitation is the authorized form of ritual killing and any other method requires a moral or technical explanation. Similarly, in all cases, unfinished beings (children or small animals), female beings (women and female animals), as well as those associated with priesthood (Brahmins and cows) must not be killed under any circumstances, including sacrifice. These categories were also exempted from the death penalty when it was still in force. Opposite these women, children and Brahmins, who are only allowed to kill themselves and whose suicide brings forth powerful malevolent spirits, stands the horde of men of any extraction who represent just as many butchers, sacrificers and warriors, like a different aspect of the same reality, synonymous with control and masculinity. Yet the Brahmins occupy a very specific position in this setup, because if on the one hand they may be ranked within the same category as women and children regarding the power of death, they are also set apart from them by their ascetic practices which are considered to be a form of self-sacrifice. They also form the only category of people who are entitled to commit religious suicide, which does not pollute but is a way of 'quitting the world.' Furthermore, in the case of collective ceremonies, they are the ones who make the blood sacrifice possible by sanctifying the victim before it is killed – by Kshatriyas, as a rule. This feature finds its logical continuation in the fact that killing, due to its sovereign dimension, also makes kings. Sacrificial decapitation was a sort of initiation for young princes and today the sacrificial sword all covered in blood is still paraded at the end of state celebrations, as a symbol of the sovereign's alter ego. Although the sacrificial exercise is shared by all men alike, it thus falls more specifically to the Kshatriyas and among them, to their most eminent representative, the king. Furthermore, a certain hierarchy is displayed in the types of weapon used: sickles among villagers in a domestic

context, long curved knives during collective rituals and a sabre or sword in a royal context.

Given the close correspondence between masculinity, killing and the sacrificial function, animal sacrifice does not appeal to the gift of oneself, but follows a logic of warlike execution of others. In collective ceremonies, the distance maintained between the executor and the animal victim is marked by the nature of the victim, whose flesh the sacrificer cannot consume lest he become an outcast. Similarly, the sacrificial gift is not thought to be made or even accepted by the animal victim itself, which would be another disguised form of self-sacrifice. It is imperative that the animal make a sign in order for the executor to behead it: it must 'tremble,' i.e. snort after being sanctified by a libation of sacred water which is poured on its neck. But this sign marks the consent of the recipient of the gift, or the god, not that of the victim itself, suggesting that its 'trembling' characterizes possession (a sign of the presence of a divinity in the animal). This interpretation is based on two occasions on which I attended a sacrifice that could not be performed owing to the lack of a sign from the sacrificial victim, and people concluded that the animal was marred by imperfection and therefore had not been accepted by the divinity. In fact, where the deity is present, that is to say, embodied in a person who is possessed, he manifests his acceptance of the gift by touching the victim's forehead with a bell, but if he dislikes the animal, he immediately kills it by striking it with the bell.

Thus, sacrifice is a man's affair (a male affair to be more precise), with other categories excluded from both the function of executioner and the function of victim; however, the fact that it concerns fellow beings does not mean that sacrifice does not have a natural orientation, given the radical asymmetry of its interaction.

In Nepal, and especially in the western hill region that is my area of investigation, the main sacrificial ceremony is the festival of Dasain. It is also the only sacrifice that might be described as 'total' in that it is aimed, as the primordial sacrifice, at maintaining the cosmos, the socio-moral order (*dharma*), kingship, political power at all intermediate levels between the ruler and the householder, as well as all hierarchical relations within the sphere of kinship. Dasain sacrifices are performed every year in autumn. The ritual lasts for nine consecutive days during which the entire population gathers around a royal centre and performs specific tasks to celebrate the royal, warlike power in the figures of the Goddess and of deified weapons (called sword-gods, *khadka devata*). Each caste, on this annual occasion and on this occasion alone, plays a specific role, which amounts to a warlike function: Damai tailors become the drums, pipers and singers, Sarki shoemakers, the scabbard makers; Kami blacksmiths, the armourers; tribals and Kshatriyas, the soldiers; Brahmins, the priests performing the sacrifice and astrologers who set auspicious times. Outside this context, each caste carries out a different function, such as the smiths who usually forge household tools or the tailors who do sewing. Furthermore, some groups have not retained any caste speciality outside the context of the warlike Dasain sacrifice. This is the case of the warrior class, which forms by far the largest group in Nepal, especially if we

consider that the tribals are assimilated to them. Sacrifice is thus the only activity that brings together the whole of society for a joint project, sacrificial war, in which everyone participates in their own way and in their rightful place: it thus acts as the organizer of caste society.<sup>12</sup>

The rituals culminate in blood sacrifices, the reconfirmation of all social and political positions and subsequently war starts. This final part is now portrayed by dances with swords or by races around the sacrificial post. Yet people say that in the past, this was the beginning of a period of real war against a neighbouring kingdom, a highly institutionalized and ritualized war that regulated society. As a matter of fact, the collective celebration of Dasain is correlated with the existence of ancient kingdoms, and in the regions of eastern Nepal, where there were only tribal chiefdoms, the rituals do not represent such social cohesion. In western Nepal, there existed two main sets of kingdoms, the Chaubisi (Twenty-Four [kingdoms]) and the Baisi (Twenty-Two). Interestingly, while the rituals show internal social cohesion in the Chaubisi region, they display conflict in the neighbouring region of the Baisi. And this major difference manifests itself during the climax of the festival, which is represented by the buffalo sacrifice. This animal is associated with Mahisasura, a mythical buffalo-demon killed by the Goddess, and more generally with the negative forces that threaten society. Buffaloes are offered by anyone wishing to participate in the ritual, but at least one of them is acquired by the entire community with each member contributing equally to buying it, or it may be purchased with the local temple funds and then designated as 'governmental' or 'royal,' *sarkari* (given that temple properties are royal donations). This collectively offered buffalo is consecrated and put to death by the elite, or the two pure classes conceived as Twice-born by virtue of their initiation, the Brahmins and Kshatriyas. However, the buffalo is an unclean animal whose meat is not eaten by these upper classes or even by middle-ranking groups. The buffaloes that have been sacrificed are therefore offered as food to members of the so-called 'impure' castes. This official transaction is thus unbalanced, with some involved in sanctifying and killing the animal while others merely have the role of eating the impure remains of the offering. The sacrifice thus stages the way Hinduism is globally organized and highlights its fundamentally sacrificial order.

However, although the sacrificial ceremony does indeed unite society, ethnographic observations show that women physically distance themselves from and disapprove of the violent killing, while the lower castes often identify themselves with the victim. As I was able to observe, they take great care to ensure that decapitation takes place in due form and they may be heard to yell at the executioner if he fails to accomplish his task with one blow. In addition to these major divisions, Brahmins in some places have been heard preaching an end to animal sacrifice in accordance with their own group's ban on killing any living creature at all. Thus, sacrificial killing also highlights the internal division of

12. See Lecomte-Tilouine 2009, Chapter 7, where, in contradistinction to Hocart who viewed war as a secondary function of the king, I argue for its centrality.

the society present into distinct categories: men and women, pure and impure castes, Hindus and tribal, Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

Parallel to this most common modality of buffalo sacrifice, there exist local specificities that are particularly revealing. Whereas buffaloes are usually killed in the noblest manner, with one stroke of a sword, in some former royal capitals of the Chaubisi, such as Gorkha, their decapitation must be painful and be executed in three strokes.<sup>13</sup> And in several of the Baisi former royal capitals or places of power, such as Dullu, Lulu (Kalikot) or Markhu (Achham), the killing of the buffalo is a collective massacre, which causes internal conflict between the class of warriors, who are supposed to kill the victim, and the impure castes, who try to usurp the warriors' prerogative.

In the former imperial capital of Dullu, the staging of the sacrifice of the buffalo-demon, which is portrayed in the texts as the victory of good over evil, of order over chaos, and as the renewal of royal power, offers a particularly striking interpretation. Locals say that the beheading of the buffalo is accompanied 'by the laughter of pure castes while impure castes cry,' which clearly shows their contrasting identification. This is consistent with the fact that, in many parts of Nepal and India, members of impure castes and tribal groups claim to be devotees of Ravana, the demon killed by Rama, the ideal Hindu king. Interestingly, the decapitation of buffaloes in autumn in honor of the goddess is said to have been established by Rama in order to defeat Ravana. Therefore, in a way the sacrifice stages the conflict between pure castes and their gods, on the one hand, and impure castes and their 'demons' on the other hand, suggesting that the socio-moral order (or *dharma*) is the expression of the domination of the former over the latter.

More poignantly, tribals share this perspective of the buffalo sacrifice, which they interpret even more explicitly as an expression of their domination, since they regard it as the commemoration of the 'Aryans' victory' over their own ancestors. They consider their own participation in this ritual as resulting from the particularly perverse behaviour of high-caste Hindus, who allegedly forced them to celebrate their own defeat. Indeed, the celebration of this ritual has long been mandatory for all Nepalese, while tribal organizations have been advocating its boycott ever since the advent of multiparty politics in 1990.

The perverse dimension of the sacrificial ritual, as denounced by tribal groups, affects above all the impure castes, even though, to my knowledge, the latter do not explicitly formulate this as an issue. Indeed, buffaloes, like these castes, are unclean animals whose milk and dung may not be used in rituals (as opposed to those of the cow); their meat may not be eaten by castes (or tribal groups) considered to be above the water barrier dividing pure and impure castes. Like impure castes, male buffaloes are essentially victims. Born to be beheaded during Dasain, they have no other function – except that of reproduction which is reserved for only one of them over a short period of time. Those who offer buffaloes in sacrifice make the very people they represent eat its flesh, and thus contribute to maintaining the link between these impure victims (animal

13. On the rituals in Gorkha, see Unbescheid 1996.

and human), and the reciprocity between ritual and 'social' order. This socio-religious organization is clearly political, since both impurity and excess of purity (i.e. Brahmanhood or asceticism) excludes one from political power. This was so much the case that in many stories, members of higher castes are presented as purposely offering impure food to some of their rivals to turn them into untouchables and get rid of them (politically). Similarly, a dismissed or defeated king was turned into an ascetic.

The sacrifice of the animal that embodies disorder is a gathering of the whole of society, but is nonetheless perceived in a highly contrasting manner by the different groups. Here, there is no true communion within the group, no substitution of the sacrificer by the victim, nor confusion between the victim and the deity, but a strange form of social cohesion made up of a display of differentiation and of the staging of power that keeps one section of society busy getting another section to play a role that confirms its position of victim. It is no coincidence therefore that the buffalo sacrifice is considered to be the Kshatriyas' ritual, even though it has been elevated to the status of national festival in Nepal.

Unlike textual approaches that necessarily adopt a partial view of the sacrifice, ethnographic observations can take into account a variety of perspectives on the same phenomenon. And the combined analysis of sacrifice, mixing mythical accounts of sacrifice, practices, attitudes and comments, shows that while the sacrifice acts as a social organizer in the given context, it is also indicative of that context's internal tensions and fault lines. These fault lines represent just as many focal points at which sacrifice is likely to be broken down into different practices or even, as in the People's War led by the Maoists, at which it may act to develop a system that counters the sacrificial socio-political order of the monarchy and of caste society. Interestingly, though it was clearly aggressive and directed against a pre-existent organization (which however, was itself perceived as violent), the revolutionary movement developed as a self-sacrificial form by denying the death it inflicted and by considering that the very act of engaging in the movement represented self-sacrifice. Given the movement's underlying Brahmanic sacrificial model (the sacrifice of the self), the fact that its leaders and ideologues were Brahmins is fully consistent. On the other hand, the enthusiasm that it provoked in a large section of the population is more intriguing. This suggests that in spite of its previously restricted dimension (in the modern context of Nepal), the Brahmanical *tyag*, renouncement, or 'self-sacrifice of the selfish,' had the potential to encompass sacrifice, *bali dan*, as a whole. Revealingly, this notion of *bali dan*, which was previously understood as and used to designate animal sacrifice or the sacrifice of the other, came to mean self-sacrifice with the People's war. Thus the Brahmanical renouncement or model of sacrifice developed rapidly in all sectors of society only when it fitted into a warlike framework that kept intact two main features of the very sacrificial organization that the movement was fighting against: its faculty to divide humans into categories, making a part of them the victims of the other part to form an antagonistic dynamics, and its denial of its own violence. The counter-nature of this new movement is borne out by the fact that, while deploying their

own 'total sacrifice,' revolutionaries strictly forbade animal sacrifice and even threatened to sacrifice the disobedient.

### Conclusive Remarks

In this exploration of sacrifice in the Hindu context of Nepal, I have come across strong parallelism in the mythical accounts that describe the capacity of sacrifice to give birth to generalized, social forms of violence. This capacity is not only restricted to discourse, especially mythical, but may also be observed during Hindu sacrifice as it unfolds during the national festival of Dasain where, in a seemingly exact reproduction of the myths about the origins of society and of kingship, sacrifice organizes hierarchical caste society and initiates war. Here sacrifice is antagonistic in nature, although this dimension is displayed to varying degrees in different local contexts, in the same manner that caste organization is antagonistic, although this aspect has been fully ignored by most of its specialists.<sup>14</sup> All this coherence is certainly not due to an accumulation of coincidences or a careful selection of the facts, but may be put down to the representation of power that is at play in sacrifice.

I would therefore readily describe sacrifice as a system of tension representing the legitimate violence inherent to any social organization, and whose transcendent necessity is displayed in the public killing of a being. This definition of sacrifice goes far beyond the Nepalese and Hindu setting which has served here as a guide, because many sacrifices are accompanied by extreme social tension and a division of the group, part of which identifies with the victim, such as (to take very well-known examples) the sacrifice of Christ, or that of Iphigenia and the series of murders it triggered. Sacrifice therefore exposes internal social violence, or the violence of the group inflicted on itself, that is, to be more precise, of the dominant group over the others; an exposure that acts as a test in that it crudely and cruelly displays the normally hidden or naturalized asymmetry of the relations that constitute the group.<sup>15</sup> The violence of such exposure does not serve as a catharsis, but as the ultimate test of group belonging, explaining why it can also apply to contexts of war. In Nepal, once the legitimate violence of one over the other had been ritually exposed, accepted and deified, the reunified group led an equally violent and sacrificial campaign, but directed at an outside entity, the neighbouring kingdom. The stability this double movement ensures, the first containing in germ the language and structure of the second, recalls Malamoud's remarks about sacrifice in ancient India: that man does not have the duty to 'perform,' but 'to deploy' (1985). The People's War took its vocabulary from the warlike royal sacrifice, but combined it with the Brahmanic model of self-sacrifice. And it is ultimately this last model which, in the context

14. On the antagonistic nature of caste organization, see Béteille 1992.

15. In a certain manner, this is also true of sacrifice within the domestic sphere, in which male elders put to death goats cherished by the women and children of the household. They sometimes react so violently against the idea that the householder is obliged to sell his goat and buy another one for the sacrifice.

of Nepal was assimilated and taken to the extreme, providing the global logic of the revolutionary movement, which was presented as a vast endeavour of purification led by self-sacrificial warriors to eradicate a feudal system in which the sacrifice of others was the engine and the mark of possessing power. In the same manner that the sacrificial nucleus of the buffalo sacrifice had this ability to grow into ritual war, the People's War developed from a sacrificial model hitherto restricted to individual asceticism and the ideal of a non-hierarchical society made up of ascetics. Although utopian as such, the model indeed existed not only in theory but also as an absolute value towards which exceptional individuals tended: it endowed its righteous absoluteness on the movement in order to oppose and designate as violent the sacrificial organization of caste society and the monarchy that ensured its regulation and perpetuation. The movement harshly criticized the sacrifice of the other administered by the king at state rituals, magnified in his war against the revolutionaries. The second, generalized form of violence was indeed assimilated to the first, ritual and restricted form of sacrifice by the rebels, who advocated the supreme legitimacy of self-sacrifice to defeat this system, without considering that it could be an indirect form of sacrificing others, by enticing them onto such a self-sacrificial path.

The complex construction that produced the Maoists would merit a separate study. Nevertheless, it is certain that although the two models of sacrificial violence finally recovered their circumscribed forms and were re-transposed to certain ritual occasions, particular places and symbolic forms, they preserved their ability to expand and to act as a metaphor for the entire social and political fields as putative sacrificial areas. In both cases, sacrifice does indeed constitute the foundation of violent organization, and the main feature of the context under study is that it has developed and promoted in parallel two sacrificial logics, which are almost opposites but may be associated in different ways in a powerful combinatorial alchemy.

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# Ugo E. M. Fabietti

## Is the 'Martyrdom' of Human Bombers a 'Sacrifice'?

### Definitions

There is a tendency to view as 'sacrificial' any act that, even at a distance, evokes the twofold dimension of a renunciation and/or gift for the purpose of receiving a benefit in return.<sup>1</sup> However, the sacrificial dimension is tinged with a particularly dramatic character when evoked within ritual references to war or religion. In both of these contexts, sacrifice is a means of 'thinking' about the dimension of transcendence (the Kingdom of Heaven, God, one's country, community, ideals, etc), that is to say, something that transcends and surpasses the individual as a mortal subject, transposing him or her into an eternal dimension; importantly, transcendence can, and in many cases must, be accomplished by means of an act of violence.

Particularly since 9/11, authors from different disciplines have compared notes on the topic of 'suicidal terrorism' in order to debate the following question: can suicide attacks carried out by Muslim men and women against military and civilian targets be considered acts of war and/or 'religiously motivated' sacrifices?

From a purely 'technical' point of view, a suicide act of this type has been defined as

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1. The difficulty of attributing a unitary meaning to the phenomena usually defined as sacrifices has been discussed by various authors (Detienne 1979; de Heusch 1986; Scubla 1992), and indeed it has been suggested that the term sacrifice should be abolished from the lexicon of anthropology and history of religions. This suggestion is a consequence of the disappointment felt by those in search of conceptual categories to include a large number of phenomena, which has prompted them to adopt a sort of epistemological nihilism: a resigned idea that the task of anthropology is to produce analyses of very circumscribed cases, 'uncompromised' by any attempt whatsoever to generalise. I believe however that, in this case as in others, the task of anthropological analysis is neither to resign ourselves to the 'particular,' nor to find at all costs general formulae to 'explain' the totality of phenomena that we tend to group linguistically under particular categories such as that of 'sacrifice.' Instead the task of anthropology is, I feel, to unravel the 'local' logic of every phenomenon, with a readiness to welcome the differences and discrepancies between the various 'local' manifestations, not as failures of the theory, but as opportunities to enrich our view of the phenomena we deem 'relevant' to our analysis.

a politically motivated violent attack perpetrated by a self-aware individual (or individuals) who actively and purposely causes his own death through blowing himself up along with his chosen target. The perpetrator's ensured death is a precondition for the success of his mission (Schweitzer 2000, p. 1).

The perpetrators' 'ensured death' as 'a precondition for the success' of their actions is closely linked to the fact that they pursue the goal of being recognised as 'martyrs' (*shahid*). The statements issued by past and aspiring human bombers, along with the comments of their supporters and of those who wholly or partly approve of their mission, always converge towards the notion of martyrdom (*istishahad*).

There is a definite semantic confluence between the ancient Christian model of martyrdom, according to which the man or woman who undergoes or voluntarily seeks it is a 'witness' (in Greek, *martyr* means 'the witness'), and the Muslim martyr (*shahid*), likewise considered to be the author of a 'witnessing' (*shahadat*). The case of the suicide attacker further involves the idea of 'martyrdom as sacrifice' (*istishahad*).<sup>2</sup> In line with such a view, the ancient history scholar, G.W. Bowersock, has written:

Perhaps the most astonishing and influential extension of the concept of martyrdom as witnessing came in Arabic after the Muslim conquest of Palestine in the seventh century. Just as the Syriac speakers had done, the Arabs translated the Greek word as 'witness' into Arabic - *shahid* (1995, p. 19).

Just who, within Islam, may be considered a martyr (*shahid*), and for what reason, is a complex issue, full of doctrinary exceptions and subtleties. However, the notion of martyrdom (*istishahad*) is for the most part associated with the concept, likewise extensively debated, of *jihad*. Often hastily translated (into the European languages) with the expression 'holy war,' in reality its true meaning varies according to circumstances: from that of the 'struggle' of an individual to improve his or her moral condition, to the notion of a war proper, aimed at defending or asserting the faith (Mervin 2000). The issue here is not how to find univocal definitions for *jihad*, given that Islam, apart from a number of shared fundamental principles, does not display the same level of doctrinary unity as the Christian, or Catholic Christian churches in particular. Islam is made up of numerous different views validated by different discursive traditions, which are recognisable as 'Islamic' only when (and until) they are both self- and externally recognised as such (Asad 1986). Rather, the question of interest to us here is to ascertain whether we can identify in the *jihad* of an aspiring *shahid* a sacrificial element that does not emerge as such 'from the outside and afterwards' (as the

2. There are a number of Arabic terms to indicate ritual practice, which are all indistinctly translated by the term 'sacrifice.' The sacrifice par excellence, the one which Abraham did not carry out and which Muslims 'ritualize' every year on the occasion of the 'Id al Kabir, is called *'adhya* (which recalls the idea of 'giving') or more rarely *qurban*, a term used mainly however by Christian Arabs and in reference to the sacrifice of Christ (evoking the idea of 'closeness').

act of someone who 'sacrifices themselves for something'), but is a veritable self-sacrifice connected to a discourse, which may also be implicit, on *transcendence*. Transcendence and violence are almost universally closely connected; so much so that, as Maurice Bloch has stated, 'violence itself [appears as] a result of the attempt to create the transcendental in religion and politics' (1992, p. 7).

### Symbolic Change and Martyrdom as Giving

Generally speaking, the martyr (*shahid*) is understood to be a 'witness' (*shahid*). The reasons that may have prompted him or her to 'witness' are historically contingent; they depend on the existence of circumstances linking witnessing with the other term often associated with martyrdom (*istishahad*), namely the *jihad* (as understood by those who die fighting 'while seeking martyrdom').<sup>3</sup>

Most authors agree that acts of human bombing may be interpreted as an extreme means of establishing a symbolic exchange between the Islamic community, the enemy, and the bombers themselves (Asad 2007; Mbembe 2003; Strenski 2010). When however an attempt is made to relate human bombings to Islam, the points of view become varied and often sharply divided. Some maintain that these acts have nothing to do with the religious dimension as such (Asad 2007; Pape 2005), whilst others are of the opposite opinion. However, even among the latter group there are a number of important distinctions. These perspectives range from the belief that such behaviour is underpinned by 'typically Islamic' violence, to the view that nothing may be ascribed to the Muslim religion *as such*, but that a connection can nonetheless be established between these acts and the religious dimension. Strenski (2010), who adheres to the latter perspective, sees such acts as being accompanied by language and rituals that can only be defined as religious. Strenski's position is largely acceptable in my view, but we must take into account cases of human bombers who act without any explicit reference to the religious dimension. In fact, for this very reason, my own position is different again to those just outlined. Does a lack of reference to the religious dimension signify that there is no appeal to the sphere of transcendency? In my opinion, not. On the contrary, I am persuaded that acts of human bombing may be interpreted as having an underlying truly 'sacrificial configuration' that combines violence with transcendency, be it religious or profane.

It is believed that aspiring martyrs act before a community (*umma*) from which they expect to obtain recognition as representatives of a 'superior' authority. For that purpose they implement a ritual dynamic and a logic of giving, which Strenski has described as follows. The rituality concerns the preparations for undertaking the suicidal action: ranging from declarations of intent, written or filmed, to prayers and readings of the Koran, also filmed, to farewells

3. With all due consideration to proportions of scale, it is interesting to note the findings of Jean Flori in his study on the conception of the crusade in medieval Christianity. Flori has showed that, aside from the political and economic motives behind these large-scale 'military movements,' the spirit of the Christian knights who set out 'to seek martyrdom in the Holy Land' was by no means a secondary feature of that critical point in history (Flori 2009).

and proclamations about the aspiring martyr's motivation for the act they are about to carry out. In contrast, the logic of giving implemented in acts of human bombing captures, and morally obliges the public to recognise, the legitimacy and positive value of the martyrs' gesture. The announcements and declarations of intent released by human bombers always state that what is about to be done is for the benefit of someone else. It is a renunciation of life to ensure that the lives of others will be better. The logic of giving, is – as we know – based on the threefold obligation to give, receive and repay; it is therefore designed to arouse, in the givers' own communities, the feeling of a twofold obligation: 'to accept the gift of their deaths and, most importantly, to be *obliged* to repay this gift of their heroic deaths in some appropriate way' (Strenski 2010, p. 181). In this way, the aspiring martyrs impose on their public the obligation to 'render': reinforcing the idea of the goodness of the act committed, insofar as closely connected to the lofty ideal that prompted this 'renunciation' (sacrifice) of life. Within this logic, the human bombers lay down their lives in the attempt to produce a 'heightened sense' of collectivity within their community. Strenski defines this dynamic as an 'addition by subtraction' (p. 176) that engages the community in the fight for 'the cause.'

The logic of giving<sup>4</sup> assumes different meanings in different contexts and depending on its objective. Generally speaking however the purpose of these acts is to render *indisputable*, in the eyes of their own community, the authority of those who die for a cause – whether that of Islam, Palestine, the Shi'ite or Sunnite communities, etc.

### Contexts: The Human Bombers' Public

The context in which the figure of the witness came to coincide with that of the martyr, understood as a person who sacrifices their life for their faith was, as we have seen, Christianity and the late antique period in particular. It was in a judiciary, hence public, sort of context that the term *martys* (witness) found its true and original application: a context that only inasmuch as it was public could represent a witnessing of faith in the full sense of the term. Likewise, the social, political and ideological importance of the *jihad* today is defined 'not by its various local causes, nor by the individual biographies of its fighters, but as a series of global effects that have assumed a universality of their own beyond such particularities' (Devji 2005, p. 87). These global effects, which reach beyond single specific cases, Devji observes, are the product of the media environment through which the *jihad* is perceived. Devji himself, in support of this thesis, quotes the story, which appeared on a website sympathetic to al-Qaeda, of the motivations that drove one young man to join the *jihad*, and consequently to seek death as a *shahid*.

4. Strenski infers the presence of a logic of giving from the common root of certain terms in the Arabic language that connect the ideas of sacrifice (understood as the destruction of a life and as a renunciation) and giving, as in the word '*adhya* ('sacrifice').

One day he came across an audio cassette called *In the Hearts of Green Birds*. After hearing this cassette, he realized that this was the path that he had been searching for, for so long. This was shortly followed by some videos showing the Mujahideen from Bosnia. To him, it was as if he had found a long lost friend, from whom he could not depart. *In the Hearts of Green Birds* deeply moved him as it narrated the true stories of men who personified the message that they carried, men who were prepared to give up their most precious possession (life) in order to give victory to this Message (Devji 2005, p. 87-88).

What is interesting about this story is that for the aspiring martyr his encounter with the *jihad* through the media appears to be entirely abstract on the one hand and entirely individual on the other, that is to say, independent of any clearly identifiable and localizable intervention by any Islamic authority. The *istishahad* (act of martyrdom) itself has in fact become a space of 'visual discourse' in which a political communicative intention may certainly be situated, but also, and above all, represents to the human bombers themselves their destiny, mission, enemy and gesture, which, in the case of human bombings, is presented precisely as a 'witnessing' (*shahadat*).

This 'media environment' influences the protagonists themselves as well as their Muslim and the Western publics, who receive a 'uniform' message presenting the *jihad* as a 'global' fact, disengaged from any particular context and in which acts of human bombers project their hope of being perceived as martyrs by both Muslims and non-Muslims: a media representation of martyrdom and the *jihad* that multiplies, among those intending to take it up, the effects of the logic of giving mentioned by Strenski.

The contexts from which the original Christian and the current Muslim martyrs emerge are, in some ways and despite appearances, rather similar. For example, a public context and the presence of a visual communication space make both the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian martyr and the Muslim martyr of today into witnesses, given that they are *witnessed* (seen/heard) by others: by those who directly witness the process; and by the broader (today prevalently media) public of the suicide attack. Both contribute to the effectiveness of the act of martyrdom, because the protagonists are publicly *seen* and *recognised*.

## The Sacrificial Dynamic

The act carried out by the *shahid* is, by definition, that of a person who sacrifices themselves in order to witness to their faith or 'cause.' This extreme gesture finds its *raison d'être* within a particular positional and motivational configuration, underpinned by specific conceptions of 'sacrality' and transcendence, as well as by a particular view of the relation between body and mind. Although the notion of the 'sacred' is commonly linked with the idea of religion, the relationship is only partial, and stems from the association between the two terms established by Durkheim in his famous study of 1912.<sup>5</sup> In reality, Durkheim him-

5. 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden' (Durkheim 1915 [1912], p. 47).

self never inferred that the definition of the sacred as something 'separate,' 'forbidden' or 'inviolable' might refer to religion only. The notion of sacredness, as pointed out by Leiris (1939), may be usefully adopted to denote all those aspects of human life worthy of 'special attention.'

In a study devoted to *necropolitics*<sup>6</sup> in the colonial and post-colonial critical period, Achille Mbembe has written that in Palestine today 'two apparently irreconcilable logics are confronting each other: the logic of martyrdom and the logic of survival' (2003, p. 35), both containing concomitant ideas of death, terror and freedom. The context of the suicide attack described by Mbembe seems indirectly, and in a certain sense, to reintroduce the general logic of a sacrificial dynamic as outlined in many works of anthropology; while also evoking multiple interconnections between sacrifice and hunting, as a number of recent and less recent ethnological studies have highlighted (Valeri 1994).

In line with this view, the aspiring *shahid*, before carrying out the act that will (it is hoped) take them to their death, is subjected to a process of sacralisation, strongly reminiscent of that undergone by both the victim and the perpetrator in the theory of sacrifice proposed by Hubert and Mauss (1968 [1899]). In this theory, the process of consecration of these two subjects is viewed as a movement from the profane to the sacred (transcendent) and back again. Specifically, the basic structure of sacrifice postulated by Hubert and Mauss involves the progressive ascent of both victim and officiant from the profane state to a state of sacrality, culminating in the destruction of the victim himself, and the progressive return of both victim and officiant to the profane state: the officiant regains his normal role in society but 'with something extra' that has been acquired through his contact with the sacred; the victim on his part is transformed into the basic material that remains after his life has been 'donated.' Thus, upon their 'return,' both subjects have been transformed in relation to their initial status.

The aspiring martyr is usually 'consecrated,' or 'consecrates himself,' with prayers and declarations of intent regarding the motives that have prompted him to affirm the truth of his faith and of the cause, often after having received a blessing from an imam. It is only at this point that he chooses his target. He departs to 'procure victims for himself,' his 'prey.' The victims of the attack are a target-prey chosen in places where (similarly to animals at a pond) people gather by necessity or habit: a bus stop, a café, a supermarket. The attacker-hunter camouflages himself, concealing weapons on his body, ready to become a weapon himself. The attacker sets out on his or her mission as a 'sacralised' individual. Given that, together with the victims of his deed, the aspiring martyr will himself become a victim, he is at this point in a state of 'suspension.' This makes him, in a certain sense, 'already dead.' In fact the expression used by supporters to refer to the aspiring attacker is *al shahid al hayy*, 'the living martyr.'

As in a rite of passage (from ordinary human being to *shahid*), the suicide attacker places him or herself, through consecration, in a transitory state that

6. By necropolitics Mbembe means – reversing (in a specular sense) the expression 'biopolitics' coined by Michel Foucault – 'the power and capacity to dictate who can live and who can die' as the ultimate expression of sovereignty in the contemporary world (2003, p. 11).

precedes his or her ultimate transformation into the desired condition (that of martyr). It is no coincidence that in the interval between the consecration and the suicide action, the *shahid al hayy* subjects himself to the same purifying constraints laid down for other ritual occasions in the Muslim tradition. The idea that the aspiring committer of suicide is 'already dead' is also in keeping with the – widespread – tendency to speak of the person preparing to undergo a 'transition' (for example in rites of initiation), as a 'dead' person. There are two reasons for this: first, because the person's status is indefinite (they have lost one status but have not yet attained another), and second, because it is often only in this state of being 'apparently dead' that the individual comes into contact with the world of the invisible, normally defined as 'sacred': ancestors, divinities or anything else upon whom the life of individuals and the community depend, and that we refer to, following Bloch (1992), as transcendence.

Naturally the journey undertaken by the suicide attacker departs considerably from the pattern outlined by Hubert and Mauss in their celebrated study of 1899. In particular, in the case of human bombings, perpetrator and sacrificial victim are one and the same person. This variable – by no means unimportant for a public accustomed to imagining self-sacrifice only for the purposes of human redemption, following the model of the sacrifice of Christ (Asad 2007, p. 91) – does not in reality contradict the sacrificial dynamic. An anthropological view of physical self-obliteration, conceived as part of and essential condition for the aspiring martyr's success, entails reflection on sacrificial violence, conceptions of the body, and the relations between the latter on the one hand, and the transcendent and spiritual dimension on the other. The destructive violence unleashed by the act of self-elimination might be intended to signify, as Mbembe observes, that the aim of such a gesture is to 'close the door on the possibility of life for everyone' (Mbembe 2003, p. 37). This realisation seems at first sight to be in contrast with the 'desire for freedom' which the suicide attackers (for example the Palestinians) wish to express. While their gesture is certainly extreme, it is part of a more complex process and translates into action a particular conception of the relationships between violence, transcendence and life.

In his comparative study of the role played by violence in creating the dimension of transcendence, Bloch (1992) suggested that violence, far from being archetypal, may be the more general product of the various forms taken on by political relations. Bloch's idea is that by undergoing violence in the 'outgoing' phase (when for example an individual is subjected to rites that distance him/her from a certain status), the protagonist is dominated by the transcendent forces (ancestors, divinities) that, as often asserted, 'watch over' the rite. This violence 'kills' the person subjected to a rite (for example to an initiation rite) to the extent that the initiate is described as a 'dead person.' It is however in this intermediate state of suspension that the individual acquires the strength that will enable him/her to 'return,' 'politically' stronger than before. He or she appears to be endowed with a status superior to that previously held and now permanently abandoned. This strength comes from the transcendent world, specifically from contact with the powers transmitted to the individual when

'dead,' that is to say when (symbolically) part of the invisible world. Bloch maintains, on the basis of largely compelling ethnographic evidence, that in many rites of this type, the initiates, by returning stronger than before to the world of the 'living,' manifest their greater strength through violent acts that may range from animal sacrifices (followed by feasts) to hostilities against enemies. It is in this sense that the transcendent would appear to be the product of political relations, both within and outside the group.

### Immanence of the Body and Transcendancy of the Spirit

If the considerations just put forward suggest a political interpretation of the meaning of sacrificial violence as it is usually understood (i.e. as giving greater strength to the person committing it and to the community as a whole), the act of self-destruction pursued by the aspiring martyr may be seen as aimed at fortifying that person and their community in relation to the suffering endured at the hands of an enemy. Aspiring martyrs, through the 'consecration' that precedes their final act, 'acquire' a strength that can only come from the transcendent dimension: God or the particular community for whom they are sacrificing themselves. It is thanks to this 'added' strength that the aspiring *shahid* are able to fling themselves against their objective. It is a spiritual force that transcends the immanence of the body. The aspiring martyr's body is not in fact something to be protected. On the contrary, it has neither power nor value, as a body:

The power and value of the body result from a process of abstraction based on the desire for eternity. In that sense, the martyr, having established a moment of supremacy in which the subject overcomes his own mortality, can be seen as laboring under the sign of the future (Mbembe 2003: 37).

Now, what is this process of abstraction, this supremacy, this prevailing over one's mortal condition, if not the force of a transcendancy acquired by the aspiring martyr through the process of consecration? The fact that the martyr 'operates with a view to the future' also indicates, in addition to a messianic conception of time, the 'direction' of the motivation for martyrdom: the martyr erases himself for the future of his supporters, his faith and his community. The body of the *shahid*, which in the case of human bombings is dissolved, is therefore only a means of attaining transcendancy. How? By sacrificing the body itself. This instrumental function of the body which, by destroying itself, approaches the transcendent, may be better understood in the light of the following passage from Georges Bataille, who, on the subject of the body and the spirit, has written:

it is man's misfortune to have the body [...] and thus to be like a thing, but it is the glory of the human body to be the substratum of a spirit. And the spirit is so closely linked to the body as a thing that the body never ceases to be haunted, is never a thing except virtually, so much so that if death reduces it to the condition of a thing, the spirit is more present than ever: the body that has betrayed it reveals it more clearly

than when it served it. In a sense the corpse is the most complete affirmation of the spirit. What death's definitive impotence and absence reveals is the very essence of the spirit, just as the scream of the one that is killed is the supreme affirmation of life (2006 [1973], p. 40).

In this perspective, the destruction of the body is not so much what 'frees' the spirit, as what makes it more present than ever; thus in the conception of the *shahid* (as in that of the Christian martyr) the more the corpse is dissolved, the more the presence of the spirit is enhanced.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, destroying oneself while stuffed with explosives is not only an effective means of surprising the enemy by turning one's body into a weapon to increase the devastating force of the explosion; it is also the aesthetic expression of a vision of sacrifice whereby what is corporeal disappears to make way for transcendency, seen as the ultimate reason for survival.

Recourse to suicidal violence is, as well as a politico-military act, a complex form of social communication, which as we have seen, places the martyrs in a position of authority over their community (Strenski 2010). Although shaped by media pressure, this form of communication in itself contains a particular conception of the individual, the community, the body, and transcendency, as well as of time and, naturally, of violence itself.

## Destruction and Construction

Form and meaning are attributed to violence as a form of communication within the typical languages and practices of a given historico-social context. Violence may thus be transformed into a process of 'construction through destruction, where the suffering of an individual can become a blessing to an entire society' (Aijmer 2000, p. 8). This implies the emergence of a particular conception of the relation that binds together life, death and rebirth, typical of all religious and secular conceptions that see the sacrifice of the individual as a means of asserting the 'eternity' of the group (the community of believers, the nation, etc.). The Muslim martyr's sacrifice (*istishahad*) in fact only makes sense in view of an after-life, which is not necessarily solely that of the martyr in paradise, but may also be the future physical and earthly life of his community.

A sacrifice can also be, as has been pointed out, an act

7. The dissolution of the body as a means of attaining transcendency and reaffirming the values expressed by that transcendency is a theme also to be found in Christian patristics. Ignatius Bishop of Antioch, who was condemned 'to the wild beasts' under Trajan (2nd century CE) writes thus in one of his epistles, in which he begs his fellow-believers not to do anything to halt his progress towards martyrdom: 'How glorious to be a setting sun, away from the world, on to God [...] I fear that your love will cause me damage for I shall not have such another occasion to enter into the possession of God. I am the wheat of God and I must be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may become the pure bread of Christ' (Quaesten 2000, I, p. 64, my italics. I am grateful to Marco Antonio Ribeiro for having drawn my attention to this passage).

that restores social agency to the [sacrifier]. The victim [of sorcery attack]<sup>8</sup> becomes a world maker who simultaneously engages in acts of self-recreation and is endowed with the capacity to consitute and reshape relationships in the world as these affect the victim's life chances (Kapferer 1997, p. 185).

Performing a sacrificial act seems to universally take on the meaning of becoming a 'builder of worlds.' This notion of a victim of violence who, to avenge the violence suffered, makes a sacrifice that can 'restore order,' seems to also fit the act carried out by the *shahid*. Perceiving themselves and their communities as victims of violence, they perform a sacrifice through which the forces capable of restoring order to the world may be released. However, their sacrifice is of themselves, in an extreme act whose purpose is to bring out those spiritual and transcendent forces on which the only possible order ultimately depends. It is solely within this peculiar configuration, made up of sacrality, transcendence and particular conceptions of the relation between body and spirit, as well as of political violence and messianic expectations, that we can attempt to grasp the specificity of this act whose nature is, I feel, fully sacrificial.

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8. Kapferer refers here to the sacrificial practices performed by the victims of witchcraft among the Buddhists of Sri Lanka.

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# Sophie Roche

## Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice since the Tajik Civil War

### Introduction

They said, 'we won't say anything to Kyrgyz people, you can come back,' and my husband believed. Akai Ibrohim, the one who just died, people said that Afghans had made him a slave, that they took his wife and daughter, and we believed. Today they say we came back because of our money. [...] We came so that our children should not suffer, let's go to our homeland we thought, but nobody asked in this war whether you have weapons or not, whether you are guilty or not. During this war, those who had no sins came back, those who were guilty didn't go, they knew they were guilty and left; those without sin came and were taken instead of the guilty. [...] We came to Shahrituz and they made us climb a truck, bigger than our house. They brought us to this school PTU and picked out the men. [...] If you were Tajik, that's it, you died. (Interview, Shahrituz, January 2007).

Modern Tajik schoolbooks devote a mere two pages in Class 9 and ten pages in Class 11 to the civil war (1992 and 1997).<sup>1</sup> Compare this to World War II (also known as the Great Patriotic War), to which ten pages are dedicated in Class 9, twenty-seven pages in Class 10 and nine pages in Class 11. In Class 11, pupils learn that the civil war was the result of the sudden emergence of several political parties, all of which scrambled for power and took up arms against the ruling government. The categories utilised contain an unmistakable message: a single party system and a strong leader guarantees peace, while political opposition can easily turn into a threat to social harmony. In this narrative, Tajikness is an ethnic category that goes back to the Samanides (9<sup>th</sup> century) and may be traced through the great leaders of history. Here, the civil

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1. Tim Epkenhans (2012) has mentioned that the production of these texts has accompanied the creation of Tajik historiography since independence in 1991.

war is merely a disturbing moment that was overcome by reuniting Tajiks (the annual National Unity Day is celebrated on 27 June). In this official rhetoric we can hear the ethnic subtext being transmitted to prevent any further splitting of categories.

The political categories used to describe oppositional activities have been transformed since Tajikistan gained independence in 1991. While in the early 1990s opposition to the communists was articulated through Islamic and democratic parties, during the war these opposition groups changed, leading the Islamic party to oppose the democrats who had previously been communists. Today political activism is most often referred to as a 'terrorist' threat to cultural and political harmony, whether the actors have a religious agenda or not. While categories of analysis change with the political context, there have been few attempts to investigate how these categories relate to local practices and actors, and to what degree categories of practice are linked to politically-shaped discourses. In this paper, I will investigate how categories of analysis and categories of practice are related to each other. I am interested in the transformative power of the conflict and the impact it had on defining communities and actors both during and after the war. My interest is not in how the war really erupted (cause analysis) but how the conflict has shaped these categories.<sup>2</sup>

## Using Categories in Conflict Settings

Categories of analysis aim to situate events within a meaningful framework, to identify patterns, structures and logic, and to make complex processes understandable and comparable. Here, categories of analysis do not necessarily match categories of practice. Despite being an essential tool for meaningful engagement with conflict, categories of analysis also lead to viewing conflict in terms of the features that appear to be characteristic of a specific conflict situation but which may actually misrepresent it.

By category of analysis, I first mean the ordering of civil war events by researchers and journalists according to specific features that were seen as the causes of the conflict, and more generally, according to Western political approaches (for instance, the consequences of communism or Islamic terrorism). Second, I mean the ruling lineage that imposes its category of analysis and order of history based on a cultural-historical argument in order to establish political legitimacy and national unity. Category of practice refers to the categories that

2. This paper was first presented at the colloquium 'Le fait guerrier' at the EHESS in Paris organized by Gilles Bataillon and Stéphane A. Rouzeau on 16 May 2012 and it benefited from two further sources. First, the workshop at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek "Remembering the Civil War in Tajikistan" in September 2012 organised by Tim Epkenhans and Maxim Ryabkov at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the Academy of Dialogue in Dushanbe. This workshop brought together former actors to recall the years 1991 and 1992. The second source was the feedback of my colleague Antia Mato Bouzas from Zentrum Moderner Orient, as well as the ZMO itself. Financially the work presented here was supported by the BMBF and the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology.

ordinary people<sup>3</sup> use to explain and structure the past and the present, and relates to contemporary social practices.<sup>4</sup>

The context of civil war poses several challenges to ethnographers and limits participant observation. Most studies are conducted in the wake of military interventions or in more accessible settings such as refugee camps. While we expect people to tell us a great deal about the civil war immediately after the events, this may not be the primary concern of those who have more urgent practical questions to resolve (reinventing peaceful continuities within their communities, securing food, everyday life, etc.). It follows that many Tajiks have become adept at omitting the civil war period when recounting their biographies. Yet, the civil war remains a point of reference in narratives, in memory and in numerous practices. Events are recalled by situating them before, during or after the war (*pesh az jang*, *dar vaqti jang*, *ba'di jang*). The war experience has shaped the re-organisation of their lives; in other words, it has been integrated into categories of practice. Conflicts often divide history into sections. In fact, war memories have shaped the way people relate to each other and how local conflicts are solved and interpreted without these memories constantly being recalled. While the younger generation has little memory of the war in their country, it has nevertheless been socialised in Tajik society and has taken over certain categories of practice; one of the most important of these being ethnic and/or religious versus secular identifications and classifications.

The study of practice allows us to link the war period to the present by reconnecting it with people's contemporary lives. It also helps to see how interpretations of the conflict become transformed along with practices. I first visited Tajikistan in 2002, and therefore have no personal experience of the civil war. Through the narratives of ordinary people, however, and through colleagues and their scientific work, I gradually learned to visualise and understand how the war affected ordinary people's lives. Unlike political analysis, ordinary people frequently explain the civil war using categories from their personal war experience. Let me give one example: although for ordinary people, notably parents, one of the most urgent issues during the civil war was the youth, in political explanations this is almost irrelevant. Parents reflect on the war from their own position: their concern for their children and their efforts to restrain them from joining militant groups. In their eyes, the civil war was an opportunity for young boys to play out their masculinity. Political categories make little sense to the mother who went to the mountains to pick up her son who had joined a combatant group 'because it was cool to have a weapon.' Obviously, she used her own categories to explain the civil war: young people engaged in armed struggle

3. By ordinary people in this context, I mean all those who do not claim political, religious or military leadership. This category is admittedly imprecise but necessary to differentiate between the various actors during the civil war, particularly between those who were able to mobilise others and those who followed, feared, rejected or questioned mobilisation.

4. I refer here to categories of practice and of analysis suggested by Bourdieu (1972) and by Brubaker and Cooper (2000). Categories of practice are everyday experiences, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors, while categories of analysis are experience-distant categories used by scientists, journalists (and to a certain degree, politicians) (Brubaker, Cooper 2000, p.4).

to gain access to status and resources, given that gender constructions and age had made recruitment easy.

Consequently, the reintegration of sons into the family and the village after the war without openly questioning their activities was made possible via categories of practice rooted in a culture that conceptualises young men as maturing. Indeed, a young boy is only partly responsible for his activities – many of his actions are predetermined by ‘nature’ and a long maturing process. Most mothers do not contextualise their sons as political actors, but rather as family members who have a ‘natural’ interest in fights and are thus easy prey to the interests of others (who in turn are mature enough to consciously exploit the nature of youth).<sup>5</sup>

The problem of how to relate categories of analysis and categories of practice is not new and has been discussed in geographic scale analysis (Moore 2008) and sociology (Brubaker, Cooper 2000; Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins 2009). Criticism of the topic targets the use of categories of analysis as given facts and concrete things such as ‘nation or ethnicity,’ which are terms typically used in folk concepts and essential terms of reference. Accepting that social categories are constructed is not sufficient. Moore reminds us that we should not only be more careful in distinguishing the different scales of analysis, but we must also reify the practices of actors and organisations as focal points of research (not as political fiction). Defining them as politically motivated, Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins indicate that the categories ‘extremism’ and ‘moderation’ may, for instance, mean something very different to activists engaged in the struggle for justice than to the power-holding group.

The key aim of this contribution is to identify the categories of analysis developed and the resources they have become for politicians, and to contrast and link them to the categories of practice that shaped people’s lives during and after the conflict. I am not interested in rejecting categories of analysis per se, or replacing them with categories of practice. Instead, I shall place them in relation to one another in a constructive way in order to trace the dynamics of conflict representations and practices beyond the period of violence. Hence, the strategies and narratives of ordinary people must tell us something about the way conflict transforms society. Contemporary society, which was shaped by the conflict, tells us what categories of practice emerged in association with the conflict and how they relate to the categories of analysis employed.

### Tajikistan in the Making

The new Republic of Tajikistan was cut out of the Soviet Socialist Republic Uzbekistan as an Autonomous Region by Stalin in 1924. Tajikistan was then recognised as an independent Republic in 1929 either because Stalin wanted Persian speakers to have a Socialist country as an example to other Persian speakers (Iran

5. A valuable source for different views and interpretations of mothers regarding their combatant sons is the Oral History Project Tajikistan, OSCE Bishkek, interviews collected in 2006; the project manager is Tim Epkenhans.

and Afghanistan), or because he recognised Tajiks as ‘the oldest inhabitants of the region,’ as some like to argue. The predominantly rural mountainous areas were not very suitable for a republic (both Persian speaking urban centres Samarkand and Bukhara were made part of the SSR Uzbekistan), and thus the city of Khujand was added to the republic when Tajikistan became an independent republic in 1929 (Bergne 2007). The country has no more than seven percent arable land suitable for agriculture, which was prevalently devoted to the monoculture of cotton. Within the economic redistribution system of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan contributed raw materials and received massive financial support.



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, Map Collection, 2012

The creation of nations in Central Asia was based on the theory of Marx, Engels and especially Lenin, namely that one nation should be based on one culture and one language.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, a ‘Tajik culture’ had to be found within the new country’s territory. The area between Panjakent and Khujand came to be identified as of ‘original Tajik culture’ because it had produced many poets and various cultural practices.<sup>7</sup> Numerous books were produced by ethnographers, historians and archaeologists and research gained great popularity. However, the cultural project was never internalised by all the people, and the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand as cultural centres of the Bukharan Emirate were never forgotten.

Theories of ethnicity claim that Tajiks, once deprived of their urban and cultural centres Samarkand and Bukhara, did not develop a cultural elite under the Soviet Union, and thus experienced an identity crisis along with the civil

6. ‘Nationalist’ following Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin is a necessary step along the path of human development towards Socialism (*pyatichlenka* – five steps: primitive society (tribal confederations), slavery, feudalism, capitalism (nationalities) and socialism. For a good example of how the *pyatichlenka* theory was applied in historiography, see Tchoroev 2002.

7. For instance Loik Sherali, Abuabduhlohi Rudaki, Mirzo Tursunzoda, Hofizi Sherozi just to name a few. Later Hisor was added as a cultural centre especially for ritual traditions such as weddings (Roche, Hohmann 2011).

war (Roy 2000, p.78). Similarly, Rubin (1998, p. 135) claimed that 'More than other Central Asian states, Tajikistan lacked a cohesive intelligentsia with a common conception of a Tajik nation. Hence there were few leaders or symbols to provide a focal point for ethnic nationalism, even among the 62 percent of the population who were classified as ethnic Tajiks.' Instead, Rubin suggests that ethnic identities in Tajik territory were developed through the pre-Soviet *bekliks* (local authorities under the Emir of Bukhara) which established culturally-transmitted local identities that could be politicised, leading to local 'ethnic' conflict (Rubin p.144). These territorial identities were maintained throughout history, acting as an obstacle to a more homogenous idea of national identity.

Along with other Central Asian states, Tajikistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union in September 1991. Independence however went along with an economic crisis and struggles for power. From 22 March 1992, people started to gather in Dushanbe on '*Shahidon*' (Martyrs) Square. Several parties (Lali Badaghshan, Rastokhez, Islamic Revival Party, Democratic Party, etc.)<sup>8</sup> called for political change and transparent economic reforms (especially concerning the privatisation of industry and agriculture). In 1990, the government had banned the export of agricultural products from private plots, which for many was the main source of revenue. Furthermore, some local leaders of agricultural farms (mainly *kolkhoz*) had gained considerable power among local people. However, arbitrary privatisation processes raised the anger of many, who subsequently joined the political protests.

Rahmon Nabiev, a Tajik party chief from the early 1980s, became the first elected president of independent Tajikistan in December 1991. However, instead of cooperating with the emerging opposition parties and taking their claims seriously, he turned increasingly against any opposition. In early 1992 the regime took active measures against the opposition groups. One event in particular was to set the stage for future regional conflict. Safarali Kenjayev, the Speaker of Parliament, accused the Minister of Interior, Mamadayaz Navjavanov, of corruption and did so by discrediting him as a 'Pamiri' (a person from the Gorno Badakhshan district, an inhabitant of the Pamirs). Although this was not the only event in which regional origin was used as an identity marker, the episode played a key role in defining political categories (Whitlock 2002, pp. 154-55). Local actors from the civil war see Safarali Kenjayev as one of the key players who elevated regionalism to a major resource in the conflict.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that regional identities had not been strong before; however, they had not previously been a source of political confrontation and violent conflict.

8. The opposition (United Tajik Opposition) was characterized by the inclusion of multiple groups, including the Pomiri, the Democratic Party (Hizbi Demokrati Tojikiston), the Islamic Revival Party (Hizbi Nahzati Islomi), Rastokhes, and the La'li Badakhshan Party (Karim 1997, p. 410).

9. Pisari S. Kenjaev '*Padaram farzandi zamoni khud bud [...]*' (the son of S. Kenjaev: 'My father was a child of his time [...]', interview with the son of Kenjaev, published in Ozodi, <http://www.ozodi.org>. Parviz Mullojonov argues that regionalism was already a political tool during the election processes in November 1991, when Nabiev won in a flawed election and voting patterns clearly reflected regional loyalties. For a more multi-layered approach, see Dudoignon 1994.

Demonstrations in the capital from late 1991 onwards became the scene of political tension. The opposition organised demonstrations (*miting*) and demanded economic reforms and a regime change. Their supporters came from rural areas of Kurgan Tepe, the Qarategin valley, and also urban areas (intellectuals). Pro-state demonstrations were organised by those in power in early 1992, who for this purpose brought young boys from southern rural areas, mainly Kulob. The slogans<sup>10</sup> on these squares may have been not so relevant for the population, but they were relevant for external observers (and for taking sides and setting categories of analysis). On one side (the opposition), calls for democracy went along with demands for economic reform and religious liberalisation, while, on the other side, demonstrators in favour of a communist state had gathered.

When religious slogans appeared at the '*shahidon*' square where the opposition met, urban-dwellers (many of whom were Slavs) were alarmed and the opposition was soon labeled as being made up of radical Islamists.<sup>11</sup> This view was reinforced by the television station whose reporting was influenced by the party controlling it.<sup>12</sup> Thus, at times anti-opposition propaganda (warnings about 'radical Islam') shaped the perceptions of many people, while at times portrayals of the violent activities of pro-government militias' reversed this view. Thus, to local people the political tension in Dushanbe appeared in the first instance to be ideological: on the one hand, democratic-Islamic parties were confronting a communist regime; on the other hand, radical Islamists were portrayed as a threat to the state. Eventually the parties organised a coalition government of National Reconciliation in May 1992 (30 percent participation was granted to the opposition) that ended in November the same year after fresh outbreaks of violence had begun to affect numerous areas.

The question of how political tensions turned into violent confrontation is explained differently by various actors, but this shall not be the major question here. What may have been important factors in this context, among others, were the lack of an army obedient to the acting president, the assumption of each side that the other side was already armed, easy access to weapons thanks to corrupt Russian soldiers (and Afghanistan), local (criminal) leaders that had their personal youth groups and agenda, the economic crisis, and opaque processes of economic transformation. In May 1992, open confrontation erupted, leading to the first mass movements of refugees. Combatant leaders began to recruit from

10. Participants in the demonstration claim that on the state side they believed in re-establishing the Soviet Union and that if necessary, 'we will go to Moscow for this.' When the Popular Front first raised its flags – the first flag that the Popular Front brought to the square and put in front of the Majlis Oli and parliament had the verses '*nest bod ba Islom*' (down with Islam) written on the right-hand side, and '*nest bod ba Turajonzoda*' (down with Turajonzoda) on the left-hand side. With these slogans they entered the square arguing that their claims were based on the Constitution (Interview with M. Haitv, member of the IRPT, Dushanbe, July 2011).

11. This all happened in an urban context: about 38 percent of the population of Dushanbe were Tajik, the rest being Slavic and of other Central Asian, European and Asian nationalities (Rubin, p. 140).

12. The role of television in the Tajik civil war has not yet been fully examined. At various stages it was used to disgrace the opposition (or to propagate against the communists once the TV station had been taken over by the opposition), and hence was blamed for fuelling hatred. Thus, many claim to have taken sides only after having seen killings and the massacre of 'their people.'

among their villages and kin groups, and more broadly in their regions. The activation of 'regionalism' as a political tool emerged in this political context. Soon all political categories became rewritten within this category. The main explanation for the war remains 'regionalism,' or '*mahallgaroi*' in Tajik. Here we face the first confusion between the political confrontation and mobilisation strategies. While the opposition saw a political agenda at the core of the conflict, the ruling party used the *mahallgaroi* argument to both downplay the importance of politics in violent confrontation and label political activism as 'criminal' and to disrupt the activities of local leaders.<sup>13</sup> The civil war thus dissolved political processes into a generalised power struggle that set the categories of analysis for the Tajik civil war.<sup>14</sup> The question is thus not which category is 'right' or 'wrong', but what resource do these categories constitute once they have entered journalistic reports and travelled the globe, and what interests stand behind such categories. States claim to hold the power to define categories and establish orders of things, and they do so in order to favour national interests (Herren, Rüesch, Sibille 2012), yet how they make their choices demands careful investigation. In the Tajik case, the order of the civil war in history is controversial and interesting. In the following sections I will investigate two categories (*mahallgaroi* and violence specialists), analysing their genealogy, context and relation to practices. Here I am interested in how the conflict transformed group identities, as well as the role of cultural practices in this process. In other words, I will move between different levels of categories and analyse their relationship in terms of interdependence or independence.

### The *Mahallgaroi* Argument

The administrative division of the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) into *oblast* (district), *jamoat* (several villages) and *kishlok* (village) created an administrative hierarchy that also defined access to resources and power. The system of *kolkhoz*<sup>15</sup> (collective farms) and later of *sovkhoz* (state collective farms) organised not only labour but whole communities.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the *kolkhoz* used the labour of men, women and children during work-intensive periods (e.g., harvest), provided shops and paid music groups, and organised the flow of goods (buying and selling of products). In this way, local communities were reinforced through the admin-

13. In order to disqualify the Islamic-communist opposition, the new president Emomali Rahmon first went to Mecca in March 1997. Later he extensively supported 'old Tajik culture,' which he believed to be an 'Arian culture' and hosted a conference about "Imomi Azam" (Abū Hanifa) in 2009. (Epkenhans 2012).

14. It is worth mentioning here that during the meeting in Bishkek in 2012 with actors and specialists from the civil war (see Footnote 2), religion did not come up as a theme or subject of debate. All discussions concerned the truth and justification of concrete actions in light of political tensions and individual responsibility.

15. Abbreviation of '*kollektivnos khozjaistvo*' (collective farm).

16. It was Roy (1998) who first mentioned that *kolkhoz* organisations were built according to regional and local patterns. Roy stressed that the role of the *kolkhoz* in the building of community identity was diachronic to clan affiliation. According to Roy, the civil war may even be understood as 'the War of the *kolkhoz*' (2000, p. 94).

istrative division, the economic system, and the reproduction of local traditions as cultural markers.<sup>17</sup> The collective farms were also the basis for reconstituting religious communities under the Soviet regime. Rather than destroying traditional ways of life – as had been the intention behind collectivisation – the collective farms provided the necessary space and links between local, rural and urban elites for maintaining, remaking and adapting religious dynamics, as Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noak's (2013) comprehensive book shows.

According to the literature, local solidarity groups were established in Tajikistan among people who were forcibly relocated in the 1940s and 1950s, and indeed up until the 1970s (Roy 2000; Ferrando 2011). Complete villages were transferred from mountainous areas to the plains to cultivate cotton. The village communities were maintained and became working units (brigades) within the agricultural structure (*kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz*). Any political career in rural areas necessarily moved from the village context via the agricultural or other village industrial enterprise to the regional and national levels. Vice versa, a youth who studied in Dushanbe was expected to return to his village school to teach and engage in a career within his own community. While no village was made up of only one lineage or group, most of these communities had a limited number of kinship groups and shared the same traditional practices (Roy 1998, 1999, 2000).<sup>18</sup> Using the Turkmenistan *sovkhoz* as an example, Dudoignon and Qalandar (2013) have suggested that power struggles within the collective farm were led by religiously established authorities (lineages), self-proclaimed *mullahs* and alternative Islamic solidarity networks and private entrepreneurs. On the eve of the civil war, these local communities were said to be at the core of local patronage networks and capable of recruiting for violent engagements (Kilavuz 2009). Thus, administrative units set the structure for mobilisation during the war. John Heathershaw (2009) has added to the discussion that this regionalism is not as territorially bound as it seems at first glance, claiming that 'Soviet legacies provide a unique historical basis for Central Asia's new regionalism – network elites across the region who share similar experiences, spaces, and discourses' (p. 133). While this literature emphasises the plurality of possible identifications and the competition of lineage, religious and economic groups, it also proves that the collective farm was the central institution in which these dynamics developed. The material drawn on in this literature suggests a far more complex picture of the *mahallgaroi* argument than the version that became the major explanation for the civil war among ordinary people.<sup>19</sup> To understand the move from complex dynamics to clear-cut oppositions, I turn to a concrete example in

17. This is based on in-depth research in Qarategin. After independence, many workers retreated from the *sovkhoz*, and thus lost membership when the land was privatised among the *sovkhoz* members only. In many cases, families kept a foot in the *sovkhoz* only through a daughter who was entitled to land when it was privatised.

18. Traditions vary from region to region and even from village to village, and are markers of communities more than of ethnic groups. The study by Olivier Ferrando (2011) is a good example of how lineage and ethnic dynamics developed among relocated populations.

19. Websites such as Ozodi, for instance, frequently serve as a platform for political discussions that still today often point to regional interest groups as the cause of any political or economic failure.

which the civil war facilitated a simplification of distinctions and helped create oppositions and hostilities.

Specifically I will use a concrete example of a group that was resettled in 1953 from mountainous areas of the Jirgatol district<sup>20</sup> to the cotton-growing plains in the south of Tajikistan. The example is as specific as it is representative. It is specific in its scope for possible identifications – these differ considerably between the areas to which people were relocated (for instance Shahrituz) and the areas that were emptied (for example Jirgatol) – but is general in terms of the strategies employed to create group solidarity and divisions. The Qandowi (from the village Qandow in the Jirgatol district) came to live with other relocated groups from Tavildara, and with ‘Mestnis’ (locals), Arabs, Qungurot, Lakai and Uzbeks, in the area of Shahrituz. On old Soviet maps, Shahrituz is depicted as being situated in a wild forest. It must have been only in the 1940s that the forest was cleared to create open spaces for cotton plantations, and many people were relocated from mountainous areas. Today Shahrituz is a conglomerate of many different social and ethnic groups, including some varieties of ‘Arabs,’ various Uzbek tribes and Afghans – to name just a few.

The Qandowi were called ‘Kyrgyz’ by their neighbours because they had moved from an area mainly populated by Kyrgyz. Thus, they held on to the etic term ‘Kyrgyz’ despite using Tajik as their primary language and participated in community life as part of which each group celebrated its local traditions as a specific identity marker. This allowed for regular participation in each other’s life-cycle rituals, and for the establishment of friendship groups among the cultural groups. Close cohabitation of different people that use different languages, economic niches, or cultural expressions is characteristic of the whole of Central Asia and has led to variously mixed versions and modes of cohabitation (Finke, Sancak 2012).

The Tajiks’ kinship system is a case in point, as it differs depending on the people they are living with. A Tajik can marry anyone except his own siblings and his father’s brother’s children. This provides them with a maximally open kinship system that allows for integration and adaptation. Religious lineages tend to be more selective in the choice of marriage partners in order to maintain their status. Other lineages intermarried to the degree that their original group identity eventually dissolved. In Jirgatol for instance, some lineages were unable to define themselves as Tajik or Kyrgyz, but called themselves ‘*chalish*’ (mixed) and chose which identity to emphasise according to the political context. Kinship remained central for reproducing territorial solidarity. The Qandowi intermarried – preferably with other Tajik from the mountains – but also with Kyrgyz and more rarely with Uzbeks and Mestni, both local groups.<sup>21</sup>

20. This district was earlier referred to as ‘Kirgizia,’ as it was settled mainly by Kyrgyz people. Under Soviet administration, the idea that the area was mainly settled by Kyrgyz remained, yet it was integrated into Tajikistan.

21. This is based on statistical analysis of detailed demographic data collected by the author between 2006 and 2007.

Hence, we find different levels of identification that move from kinship, village and ethnic belonging, to regional identifications.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the 1990s there was no guarantee that any of these identities had grown stronger than others. It might be revealing to share that when I first visited a village in Jirgatal and asked the people ‘Who they were?’ I received the answer ‘*boston*.’ This is a Kyrgyz tribal term, but was applied by Tajik and Kyrgyz alike. Upon further investigation, I realised that this had been the name of the regional *buzkashi* team (horse polo).<sup>23</sup> Hence, the first identity I was told was the one they shared from a sports team. Only later did various other identifications emerge, with the ethnic distinction of Kyrgyz versus Tajik being the most recent one, still heavily debated. Even today identities continue to be played out in sport teams. Football for instance, has become the main scene in which to display political opposition through regional identities. Attending football matches in 2011, amongst others between Istiqlol (the team of the president’s son) and ‘Khaïr’ from Vahdat, I witnessed how football was used as a way of publicly displaying regional identities.<sup>24</sup> The public would provide support by screaming ‘Vahdat, Vahdat’ rather than the team’s name (Khaïr), and shouting to the players their religious status rather than their names (*Hoji bidav – Haji run*). Just from watching this game one could identify the regional origin and the political power behind the team.

Another cultural practice that reproduces local group identities as well as inter-group links is friendship. More than ten different terms for friendship exist in today’s Tajik language, and many are used for friendship that cross-cuts groups, whether ethnic or regional or of any other kind (Roche 2010). One of the most prominent polyadic friendship groups are the ‘*hamsinf*’ (class mates). *Hamsinf* (in Russian: *odno classnik*) are strong groups that exist throughout life and for many became the most real alternative to kinship and village-group belonging. Although I never came across any of these groups that formed the basis of a combatant group, I did observe that these *hamsinf* groups recovered after the war even before people started to attend each other’s life cycle rituals again.<sup>25</sup> In addition, we have dual friendships between two men (*rafiqi qiyomat, jura*) which

22. For a critical study of how identification affects conflict settings, see Schlee (2008).

23. Karmysheva (1976) made a similar observation regarding Tajiks and Uzbeks in other parts of Tajikistan in the 1950s.

24. Other football teams are called SSKA Pomir, Regar-TADA3, etc. While it is usual for teams to be named after cities all over the world, in Tajikistan the official teams have strong political imprints. In Gharm football was long seen as un-Islamic and discouraged. Thus, I was amazed to hear that the local *hukumat* had ‘ordered’ the creation of a football team in 2011. The young men who had initiated numerous youth activities, including wrestling (*gushtin*), a national sport, and had been asked to organize the team were half-hearted and told me ‘they do not really pay, so why should we make a team?’ While boys do play football in their spare time, a network of player institutions does not exist. Similarly, it was only in 2010 that I heard Tajiks in Russia say that they were planning a football team so that they could compete against Russian teams. So far they have lost all of their games because they lack good players.

25. While many of those who had groups before the war revived their group, the younger generation in Shahrituz has not yet done so. The son of a Qandowi, for instance, had been refusing to go to school – for almost a year at the time of being interviewed. When I asked him why, he told me that he was beaten up by youths from other local groups and since he had no backing he preferred not to attend school.

have been initiated by their mother, grandparents or any other person. These are often explicitly initiated between boys from different families, whether on ethnic or other grounds, and they bind men together independently of any possible conflicts between their families or communities because they are divine friendships. To summarise, community identities during the Soviet period were reinforced not only by the socialist administration and organisation of labour, but also through sports, friendships, and life cycle rituals. At the same time, cultural institutions such as friendship and religious education interconnected the communities.

What was the role of these different levels of identifications when the war reached the Qandowi in Shahrituz in November 1992? The Tajik-Kyrgyz Qandowi community provides a good example for testing emic and ethnic concepts of community and the impact of conflict on the different identifications. When the pro-government combatant groups arrived around Shahrituz in November 1992, the Qandowi left, less because they felt guilty – ‘we were without (political) sins,’ a woman believed – but because they were migrants. A Mestni had climbed aboard their truck so as to flee with them, and they tried to convince him to stay. It was neither clear nor obvious where lines of opposition should be drawn and who was a friend and who a foe.

Violent contexts demand an ad hoc definition of friend and foe, and this is how, once the war had reached Shahrituz, communities took sides in the conflict. In this period two terms came into use to define opposition: *vowchik* (from Wahhabi, meaning an Islamic partisan) and *jurchik* (from the Russian name Jurchak, which is representative of communist dominance). These terms do not refer to regional identities but to political categories. In parallel we have another opposition that draws from regional dialects: *tushka* and *kartoshka* (both meaning potato in two different dialects). While these were not representative of any particular community, they provided an immediate means of classifying a person.

The Qandowi, together with the Tajik from Tavildara,<sup>26</sup> fled southwards and soon reached the Amu Darya that separated them from Afghanistan. Attacked by the pro-government militia on one side and by Russian border guards on the other, the refugees bribed the Russian border guards (‘with a milk can full of gold jewellery collected among the refugees’) to allow them to cross over without being shot at. Once the Tajik-Kyrgyz left, the Mestni plundered their houses, whereas pro-state militias killed those who had remained (usually elderly people) and bulldozed their houses. Sometime later, an Uzbek regional commander of Shahrituz called back the ‘Kyrgyz’ because he considered them ethno-linguistic brothers of the Uzbek, who supported the government. Several families from the Qandowi decided that they were Kyrgyz enough to return. When they came back, the men were identified as enemies from Qarategin and were all killed, while the women were dumped somewhere around Dushanbe.

26. One man from the Tavildara migrant community recalled how he had exchanged his car for weapons received from Afghanistan. It was easy and cheap to buy weapons from Afghanistan, where they had been left from the Afghan-Soviet war (1979-1989).

This is how they learned their ethnic lesson. Today they know that they are Tajiks. And whenever a conflict erupts in the region, security forces take the side of the Tajiks, thus their Tajikness has become a way to increase the security of their community members.

According to the *mahallgaroi* argument, the Qandowi were killed because of their regional origin. In other words, being Qandowi was an ethnic marker similar to that of the Pamiri who live in Badaghshan. This is how the categories of analysis were established out of the complex interrelationship of various groups (kinship, regional, religious, economic, political) in order to explain war mobilisation. Yet the example of Qandowi, who confused emic and etic identifications shows that neither regional identities nor language and other ethnic markers (e.g., Turkic origin) were clear references for all, and that it was only in the course of the violent confrontation that the lines were clearly laid out in favour of a Tajik identity.

Today *mahallgaroi* is commonly accepted as the main cause for conflict. Sometimes *mahallgaroi* is merged with ethnicity or ethnic-sub groups (Jean, Mullojonov 2008). These groups are perceived as enjoying a common identity strong enough to have been mobilised. While many of the markers for ethnic groups apply to these groups (they are ascribed a common identity, they are family encompassing, stretch over generations, and are not territorially bounded), one central marker is missing: self-identification.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen in the example, some groups lack an emic concept and accept etic ascriptions. Kılavuz (2009) has presented many more similar examples in which regional ascriptions did not produce self-identification. Kılavuz has used the concept of patronage in order to overcome this identification confusion. While he does not specify the nature of these patronage networks, his article emphasises the importance of individual actors in shaping conflict settings. Hence, a look at the actors may be more revealing than assumptions of categories.

If we assume that the conflict affected community identifications, then this must have some impact on the communities today. In light of this hypothesis I will now describe confrontations that occurred during my field work. Hereby I pay attention to the way actors were contextualised. In all the examples the stories were interpreted to me against the background of civil war events and community belonging, not as individual criminal activity. Hence, we can see that criminal acts in Shahrituz today are not judged as individual acts that should be restrained by the legal forces, but as representations of community relations. In this sense, not only did the civil war have a deep impact on how identities were shaped and fixed, but these identities have been constantly reinforced, becoming categories of practice. These individual acts and the way they are interpreted stand in contrast to the official rhetoric that rejects *mahallgaroi* as a cause of conflict for the sake of nation building. As such, the civil war is seen as an episode within a continuity of peaceful cohabitation.

27. I follow Elwert's (1989) definition of ethnic group whereby this is a we-group marked by: 1) an emic identity; 2) ascription; 3) being family encompassing; and 4) being inter-generational.

Today, fifteen years after the massacres<sup>28</sup> in Shahrituz, it is deadly dangerous for an Uzbek man to enter certain Tajik neighbourhoods in Shahrituz. If he is a young man he will be beaten up with no legal consequences for the aggressors. While friendship groups and visits of life cycle rituals have been reactivated, they are also misused by individual people to take revenge. I witnessed how, during a life cycle ritual at the home of a Qandowi, a youth from another local group pulled the host's elderly father into the room and threw him down in front of the guests. This is among the worst insults to honour and hence a direct provocation. This, say the people, is not an exception but has become a way to harass one other. When Tajik young men are invited to a Mestni's life cycle ritual, they first eat and then start to quarrel, a woman explains. They fight until the police come, knowing that they will side with the Tajiks and hence there is no legal justice. During the Soviet period Uzbeks held key positions, but today the leader of the cotton industry is the brother of the president's wife, the head of *hukumat* of Shahrituz is a *hamkurs* (a study friend) of the president, and the chief of the KGB was an old guard from Kulob.<sup>29</sup>

These examples suffice to show that the civil war not only led to a redistribution of power and the establishment of a quasi-kingdom, but that categories of analysis that were developed during the war to explain political processes and mobilisation became a tool for immediately identifying friends and foes (*tushka* versus *kartoshka*), and as such created categories of practice that continue to be applied and that reinforce community belonging through regular conflicts initiated by young individuals who are seen as representatives of their community, not as individual criminal actors.

### Violence Specialists

Following Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins' (2009) suggestion to focus on actors to identify categories of practice, in this section I will examine violence specialists both during and after the war. Violence specialists (*Gewaltspezialisten*) enjoy the reputation of being dangerous even before the violence erupts because they have proven their professional ability to destroy, Jutta Bakonyi (2011, p. 65) explains. They not only come out of the state military apparatus and the criminal world, but may also enjoy cultural capital and titles that mark them as experts in the use of violence. In conflicts, this cultural capital becomes overvalued and is linked to political and military titles. Hence, violence specialists are also locally embedded actors, as they are both political and economic players.

While Elwert et al. (1999) (who only use the term 'warlord') suggest that violence specialists plan their action carefully and include economic considerations, these actors are also opportunistic and quick to adapt their strategies in line with the changing political and economic context. Violence specialists depend on the motivation of their combatants (whether economically or ideologi-

28. I have been told of at least two mass graves in the region. The Qandowi however have not to date found the place where their husbands, sons and male in-laws were buried.

29. All of this information was gathered during my field research between 2006 and 2007.

cally driven) and their loyalty. The Tajik civil war provides a good example to help us understand that violence did not simply appear, nor was it 'culturally' programmed, but that violence specialists were brought to the scene because the role of the armies was unclear. Unlike the category of analysis, not all of these violence specialists used *mahallgaroi* as a mode of mobilisation.<sup>30</sup>

With independence, several Soviet armies and divisions remained on Tajik territory: the 201<sup>st</sup> rifle division,<sup>31</sup> the 40<sup>th</sup> division that had fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the 15<sup>th</sup> division,<sup>32</sup> and the border guards.<sup>33</sup> In spite of the presence of all these military divisions, with independence the state lost power over the military. This became clear when newly-elected president Nabiev wanted to end the demonstration by force but the Minister of Interior, Navjavanov, refused to give the order to attack the demonstrators. In this context, it was evident that the government lacked an army to see its interests through and stop the demonstrations.<sup>34</sup> To solve the problem, Nabiev organised his own presidential guard in May 1992. He brought former criminals (some right out of prison) to Dushanbe under the lead of Sangak Safarov, himself a leader of the underground.

Young people were brought from the south, the Kulob region, and assembled and armed in Ozodi Square. Many of these youths had never held a weapon and the many lethal accidents that occurred when they received arms, fuelled the conflict even more. Sangak Safarov was entrusted to build the presidential guard with these boys. While political analyses explain that the choice of Sangak Safarov was based on regional considerations – Kulob having been a politically 'neglected' area throughout the Soviet period – others claim that it was his links with politicians and his authority among the youth that made him suitable for the job. This is also how he survived capture by the opposition at the beginning of the political confrontation. Sangak Safarov is described as a man in his sixties, strong as a bear and a person who knew how to speak to high-ranking officials (Atkin 2002, p. 102). In other words, his cultural capital of being a respected authority among youth became linked to his criminal career now overvalued as a military qualification. Safarov entered the history books as a hero because of his physical strength, *nomus* (honour code) and political recognition, all masculine values to which youth strongly adhere. Nowhere in the literature or accounts do

30. On the contrary, leaders of violence such as Yokub Salimov and a Pamiri leader had been close friends but led two opposing camps during the conflict.

31. The 201<sup>st</sup> army division was under the command of Ashurov, from the Garm region. He refused to actively engage while waiting for commands from Moscow that never came.

32. The 15<sup>th</sup> division is said to have actively engaged in the war after it had broken out in the area of Kurgan Tepe.

33. According to Whitlock, each side would hire tanks from the border guards for a couple of hours at a good price and bomb the other. However, opposition combatants claim not to have benefited from the tanks in the same way, but to have remained dependent on them for ammunition. The opposition also bought weapons of all kinds from Afghanistan where they were readily available and cheap (a Kalashnikov for two carpets). The Afghan-Soviet war had flooded Afghanistan with weapons.

34. The border guards were under CIS command and thus just as much beyond Nabiev's reach as the 201<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division which had to obey Moscow.

we learn of his political agenda or ideological views,<sup>35</sup> which leaves us to assume that his primary interests were simply to use his power to influence politics: it is no coincidence that his candidate, Emomali Rahmon, became head of government during the conflict.

Interesting in this discussion of violence specialists is the urban context. Several local leaders had divided out the town between them into zones of influence. Known as '*krisha*' the leaders of these areas were active amongst the local community (organising young men), the trading community (those selling at the *bazaars*) and the politicians. Hence, they were far more than simple underworld bosses.<sup>36</sup> Yakub Salimov was one of the more influential authorities that became the 'third force' (alongside the opposition and the pro-government demonstrations) to claim power. Despite Salimov's friendship with a Pamiri leader, he was co-opted by the pro-government forces, and even made it to Minister of Internal Affairs.<sup>37</sup> Considerable respect was also accorded to sports club authorities and other youth leaders who had already emerged during the Soviet period.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately the 'Afgantsy' (those who had participated in the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s) came to occupy a central role in the structure of what became known as 'the Popular Front,' the pro-state militia. Makhmud Khudoberdiev, an Uzbek by nationality, had gained experience during the Soviet-Afghan war. He was an important actor in the south of Tajikistan, including Shahrituz. In many of the former Soviet countries, the so-called Afgantsy became specialists of violence. While in Kazakhstan and Russia these Afgantsy became highly demanded as bodyguards (known to be strong and fearless), in other republics they formed groups that went into the underworld and maintained relations with political elites. These groups also provided security services in shadow businesses in which politicians were often involved. Hait has mentioned that the Popular Front not only made use of commanders and violence specialists of the Afghan-Soviet war, but the structure of the Afghan-Soviet war was the very basis for the Popular Front. 'For instance, Colonel Lunev, the head of KGB soldiers, Colonel Quachkov<sup>39</sup> expert in explosions – Lunev lives in London now – they organised the Popular Front' (Interview with Hait, Dushanbe, 2011). In other words, the pro-government militias organised themselves around various violence special-

35. According to Whitlock (2002), he hated the communists who had killed his father.

36. A more complete study on the different authorities in the civil war is currently being prepared by Tim Epkenhans.

37. Salimov was later sent as ambassador to Turkey by Rahmon to remove him from the power game. Sangak Safarov, Yakub Salimov and Khudoberdiev were only the best-known among the many other commanders. Yussuf and Madamin were two brothers in Dushanbe who controlled a district, and Kilavuz provides many more concrete examples of commanders and their engagement.

38. Bushkov and Mikuls'ki (1996, p. 51-54) argue that in all Central Asian cities young people had spaces where they would group and negotiate status. The *bazaars* were often the centre of neighbourhoods where youth exerted power over the traders, for instance the Bazaar Shoh Mansur, which was supported by the *qozi kalon Turajonzoda*.

39. Colonel Quachkov was the leader of the 15<sup>th</sup> brigade and responsible for the design and implementation of the entire military operation in Kughan Tepe.

ists who drew on their military or violent experiences, and who became overvalued through their participation in the Popular Front.<sup>40</sup>

What about the opposition? How can we understand the commanders in the opposition, and on what resources did they draw? Obviously we find numerous opportunists among the commanders of the United Tajik Opposition, as well as in pro-government militias. One of these examples was Sodirov Rizvon Mardon, who entered the civil war arena as a religiously motivated fighter, but together with his brother soon became known as a ruthless commander with few ideological aspirations.

The *mujohid* who believed in some ethical principles were good – they also prayed, and they did not harass anybody. Those people [the Rizvon group, for example] just got hold of weapons and their way was open before them. They were hooligans and took whatever they wanted. He [Rizvon] was a law unto himself (Interview with Murad, Gharm District, October 2006).

Rizvon entered the scene after the conflict had started; he was known for heading up a group of thugs with little ideological commitment, and his group was extremely mobile (for some time, he even joined Ahmed Shah Masud in Afghanistan). In the end, his claims were not taken seriously during the peace negotiation process, and apart from his brothers, no one remained with him (Tutubalin 2006).

To understand other forms of leadership within the opposition, we have to turn to one of the leading actors, Said Abdullo Nuri; he was born in 1947, and therefore was 45 years old by the time the Soviet Union ended. Nuri had been the founder of the underground youth organisation, *Sozmoni Javononi Ozod* [Organization of Free Youth], later to become the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (*Hizbi Nahzati islomi*) (IRPT) in October 1991 (Hallbach 1996; Olimova 2000, 2004).<sup>41</sup> Nuri had been repeatedly arrested for religious activism but did not stop his involvement. Earlier, his father had resisted the Bolsheviks and continued with religious engagements despite the communist ban. This family's religious lineage enjoyed deep respect within and beyond their *kolkhoz* community, which had been forcefully relocated in the 1950s.

While Nuri was far from being the best educated among the religious leaders in Tajikistan, he had accumulated religious knowledge with important authorities such as Hindustoni, and grew up in a religious family, both aspects that car-

40. Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev was the head of Kulob province. He also organised a military unit under the Popular Front and moved from the post of prime minister to Mayor of Dushanbe. In this position he took control of large sectors of cotton and aluminium exports (Atkin, p. 103).

41. Halbach (1996, p. 17) claims that youth-groups emerged in the southern territories to where people from Gharm had earlier been relocated. They became organized and in 1983 started to bring out the newspaper *hidojat* (guidance). 'The objective of this young group was to study and disseminate the reformist teachings of Hasan Al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt) and the ideas of Abdul Ala Mawdudi (the ideologist of a Pakistani branch of political Islam),' writes Olimova (2000, p. 65). The first all-Union Islamic Revival Party was founded in Astarakhan in 1990, later splitting into national sections.

ried important cultural capital.<sup>42</sup> Further, he was a strong man who incorporated values of masculine honour (*nomus*). Almost all of the young people who learned from him or fought in the opposition described him as an exceptional leader and used terms of respect for this. These terms derive from a teacher-student relation (*ustod-shogird*). Still today Said Abdullo Nuri is referred to as '*ustod Nuri*' or even just as '*ustod*' by his party followers and many other people. *Ustod-shogrid* is a relation of respect, variations of which are to be found in all dual relations in which knowledge and skills are passed on to the younger generations. As well as being a bond of respect more generally, it also refers to craftsmen and their apprentices (Kikuta 2009; Dagyeli 2011) and to religious authorities and their disciples (Khalid 1998).

Against the background of this important institution, we can see that Said Abdullo Nuri benefited from cultural capital that helped him to attract young combatants. He was not the only one to make use of his cultural capital (*nomus*, religious education and well-known lineage). Indeed, others similarly enjoyed solid *shogird* support when the conflict erupted. Although this capital was not meant to produce violence, these individuals were able to integrate violence in order to defend their political and economic interests.<sup>43</sup> Several combatant leaders drew their cultural capital from the religious context. Consequently, we find terms such as *jihad* and *shahid* to have been reactivated and used by violence specialists to upgrade violence by means of religious terminology. Among the demonstrators at '*Shahidon*' Square, terms such as *jihad* and *shahid* became part of the militarisation of the opposition. Several informants recalled their fascination on discovering that Islam included concepts that gave a new meaning to death and made it possible to re-evaluate political events through religious terminology.<sup>44</sup> We need to clearly distinguish between religious scholars who discussed Islam as political opposition long before the civil war and the majority of people who were poorly informed about Islam beyond life-cycle rituals and selected practices such as Ramadan fasting and prayer. Thus, specialists were needed to translate the political events into religious terminology.

A first attempt to filter cultural capital into military value came with the nomination of general and other military titles during demonstrations – a reaction to the elevation of Safarov to the stage of the presidential guard. Although this remained an isolated case until the opposition organised itself more professionally with a staff quarter and hierarchy from which militant

42. The opposition was split between the two rivals Eshon Turajonzoda, who came from a religious lineage and in 1991 held an official position as *qozi kalon* and Said Abdullo Nuri who was more politically motivated (Mullojonov 2001).

43. Already during the demonstrations of 1992, when the first young men had been killed, the religious leaders introduced terms such *jihad* (religiously motivated war) and *shahid* (martyr) to the demonstrators and thus translated violent confrontation into religious terminology (Hetmanek 1993). While we do find the terminology among certain groups as far back as the 1970s (Babadjanov, Muminov, Kügelgen 2007; Rahnamo 2009) and in reports on the Afghan-Soviet war in the 1980s, my research indicates that for ordinary people these terms only acquired a concrete meaning in 1992.

44. For further descriptions see Mikul'skij 1996.

groups obtained recognition and weapons,<sup>45</sup> it was a symbolic act registered by the violent actors as an elevation of opposition actors to military grades. After the opposition had retreated to Afghanistan, religious propaganda became more important and eventually books appeared and were distributed among combatants that taught militant terms of Islam and notions of brotherhood (*barodari*) as a crosscutting value.<sup>46</sup>

With *ustod-shogird* and *barodar*, we have a more qualitative view of the relations that were possible between a commander and his followers in the opposition and a social relation that lasted long after the conflict, mainly because it was not solely linked to violence. This does not exclude the possibility that many combatants may have joined the conflict out of personal ambition.<sup>47</sup> Yet many of the combatant groups of the opposition continued to exist long after the conflict on the basis of moral values, shared combatant experience and economic dependencies. Although few combatants became integrated into the state structure, they maintained their network through various types of link, including religious networks (lineage and educational) and distribution of resources. However, since 2008 many of these groups, in Qarategin as well as in the south, have been isolated and eliminated in various operations.<sup>48</sup>

The story of Ali Bedaki (Alowiddin Davlatov from the village Bedak) is a case in point: Ali Bedaki was a young man when his elder brother, a doctor, was tortured and killed by pro-government militias. He became a commander to revenge his brother and later turned into a religious authority, a defender of *shariat* and the owner of a garden<sup>49</sup> and large herd, the most precious resources in the Gharm area. In this way he was able to maintain a network of *shogird* and became an influential person in the region. Until 2010, youth from all over the area came to study under him and he sponsored mosques and *madrasas*. He and a set of other commanders divided the Qarategin area into influence zones, and hence their rule continued far beyond the peace process until it was ended in a military conflict in 2010. Until about the mid-2000s they more or less maintained a religious regime outside of state law, but their influence has since decreased, not least due to the many young people working in Russia whose interest in material success is often greater than the wish for a religious regime.

Whereas the examples of violence specialists outlined suggest that they were able to mobilise cultural capital and transform their violent or physical strength

45. According to informants, they would go to Tavildara, swear alliance and upon recognition, receive weapons.

46. Muhamadsaburi Bukhari (editor and interpreter) *Tushai Mujohid*, (Mujohid's Handbook, 1996, Centre of Islamic Culture 'Bukhoroi'); Alavon, Abdulloh Noseh, 1997, *Barodarii Islomi*. Translation Centre Islam Heritage.

47. It is not possible to pinpoint all motivations for joining a conflict, as these may be multiple and changing and may certainly be different retrospectively. Yet certain aspects seem to be more persistent and valuable in the narratives of people, and these are the ones considered here.

48. Suhrob Langariev in 2008, Mirzo Ziyoev in 2009, Ali Bedaki in 2010, just to name a few. The black list of president Rakhmon, Ferghana News Agency, published in Ferghananews, <http://enews.Fergananews.com>.

49. Fruit gardens are the wealth of the area, as other agriculture yields poor harvests and land is scarce. Another lucrative investment is animal husbandry if the owner has access to pastures.

into military titles, once the war started we not only had various opportunists emerging out of a range of contexts, but also a more simple military approach to recruitment, namely that in times of war all men of fighting age must defend their country.<sup>50</sup> When I asked in villages who participated in the war, I usually received the answer 'boys born in 1975 and after.' Upon further investigation, I was told that this was the age group that was supposed to be recruited for military service in the 1990s. Thus, officially boys and men from the age of 17 upwards were recruited wherever a combatant group passed; in practice much younger boys were recruited, with some mothers claiming that children as young as 14 were taken. While these recruitment practices follow military rules and cannot be considered specifically Tajik, the relation between the commander and his followers deserves a more nuanced description. In the literature all commanders have been called warlords (Nourzanov 2005), patrons or elites, which is more a choice of category of analysis than a category of practice. While these terms suggest that the actors benefited from a personal network, they do not qualify the relationships. Instead, if we look at culturally-specific hierarchical relations, we obtain a more qualitative view of possible categories that endured well beyond the conflict.

## Conclusion

Categories of analysis develop a genealogy of violent escalation and define the terminology through which the conflict and the actors are contextualised (e.g., ethnicity, warlord, regionalism). Categories of practice are less absolute since they are rooted in cultural practices, long-term political experience and immediate situations; it can even be argued that they are more effective than categories of analysis when it comes to conflict escalation and de-escalation. This is because categories of practice are applied for survival, and shape everyday realities, while categories of analysis do not claim relevance to ordinary people's lives. Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2009) have claimed that analytical categories limit our ability to explore what is really important to social actors. They therefore argue that if they focus on social actors and how these actors use categories to construct their own terms of reference, they will be able to reconceptualise analytical categories from categories of practice.

In this article I have suggested reviewing two categories of analysis – *mahall-garoi* and violent specialists – that were used to 'explain' the Tajik civil war. Using both descriptions of the conflict and accounts and observations collected in the field, I have illustrated that categories of analysis were developed within the urban political context, but missed out on the dynamics that transformed multiple and fluid groups into rigid group identifications. At the same time, cultural concepts of youth, neighbourhood and friendship made it possible for young

50. This information refers to opposition groups, who recruited and integrated people from all regions regardless of their regional origin. I am not sure whether pro-government militia acted in the same way, as they appear in oral accounts to have been more like executives who 'cleaned' the area of unwanted people such as migrants from the mountains.

combatants to be reintegrated into their own community. Hence, categories of practice today reflect the tension between, on the one hand, the group identities that resulted from the civil war and that are reinforced by political practices (security forces) as well as by direct aggression by individual young men (representatives of their community), and on the other hand, harmony discourses and cultural practices that allow the war to be seen as a disruptive moment rather than the end of inter-community relations.

The ruling party has carefully chosen the frame of representation of the conflict and the categories to do so in order to avoid political contestation of their legitimacy as 'the power that brought peace, security and stability to Tajikistan.' Thus, categories of representation of the civil war differ considerably from the categories of practice that have developed their own dynamic. National unity is believed to come from ethnicity, common culture and history. This culminates in the person of the president elevated to the status of His Holiness, the respected President Emomali Rahmon. The majority of the population look up to the president as a king (*podshoh*) in whose hands lie the past and the future of the country, its development or destruction.<sup>51</sup>

This Soviet approach to nationhood suggests that one people share one culture, language and history. While Soviet researchers identified the northern areas roughly between Panjakent and Khujand as the original Tajik culture, since a lineage from the Kulob district has taken over, the culture map has been re-centred. Kulob has been increasingly found to be among the oldest cities and main cultural centres, as if this were to better legitimate the current ruler. Culture in Tajikistan is a highly political issue; it is a category that the state claims to define and celebrate. Hence, harmony discourse uses cultural constructions to establish unity and ignores local specificities. This is done in countless rules that regulate clothing, ritual practices and representations, and establish the celebration of cultural and historical events (e.g., the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kulob).

While culture is thus an important political tool for rebuilding Tajikistan after the civil war (some Tajiks claim that this new ideology replaces communism), it ignores local power struggles and the individualisation of young people, especially with regard to their religious identity. The discrepancies between categories of representation (which are here official categories of analysis) and categories of practice increase as well as diminish. Many pupils have absorbed official cultural representations and integrate them as their identity, while at the same time critical voices demand fair access to resources and power independently of political loyalty.

51. Development in Tajikistan remains the monopoly of the president, he gives roads, hospitals, schools, increases pensions, assists the poor etc. (people use the words 'gift of the president' to indicate infrastructural improvement). For instance, if the president-king (*podshoh*) is to visit a place the roads are asphalted overnight, flowers planted and new buildings opened. Many ordinary people feel emotionally attached to the *podshoh* and think that oppositional activities are activities against the state of Tajikistan. Against the background of this relation between the *podshoh* and ordinary people (*khalk*), one can understand that political change will hardly come from elections. A king cannot be replaced by democratic elections, he can only be overthrown by a group that holds military power.

A closer look at the violence specialists has shown that *mahallgaroi* was not necessarily their organising principle. Instead, they activated their personal cultural capital, which became overvalued as a military title that mobilised youth to enter the conflict. While categories of analysis see both political motivation and the activation of violence as necessarily congruent – leaders are said to have clear ideological agendas whether they are Islamic, ethnic, regional or communist, or some other category – the study of practices shows that these two phenomena are not necessarily a direct result of each other. Quite to the contrary, various local authorities have used the power vacuum as a means of pursuing their own agenda. In fact, many groups were already armed despite political efforts to create a government of National Reconciliation in 1992, so that, as one informant said, ‘they were ready for a war.’ A leader may well use his personal cultural capital independently of political categories in order to engage in a conflict and take position politically only in the course of the conflict. Categories are established to separate groups that are transformed in the course of conflict, with long-term cultural implications. Not only were violence specialists able to establish themselves as political actors and respected leaders – the president being the most successful of these – but they also managed to transform cultural capital into a political tool.

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## David M. Rosen

### Child Soldiers: Tropes of Innocence and Terror

The story of child soldiers in the Western imagination is a story of symbolic reversals. Where the image of the child soldier once denoted public virtue and the nobility of sacrifice, it now stands for virtually everything that is wrong with war. Children were frequently present in the military through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Aries 1962, p. 193). But by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Western nations had begun to reduce or eliminate the presence of children in their armed forces. The change was slow and erratic, however, so that even during World War I the heroic and patriotic child soldier, typically a boy sailor or soldier, remained a central image in the ideology of war and conflict (Conley 2009). The representational disjuncture between past and present is razor-sharp. In contemporary perspectives child soldiers exist as the most transgressive form of fighter: children who have been transformed into combatants in violation of the essential characteristics of childhood: innocence, vulnerability and dependency. The central interpretative (and moral) challenge presented by child soldiers in the modern world is the management and reconciliation of the putative claims of childhood innocence with the empirical record of war. In the former, children are assumed to be in need of care and nurturance. In the latter, children not only kill others in combat but also aggressively participate – sometimes gleefully and wholeheartedly – in horrifying atrocities and crimes of war.

Much of modern warfare, especially in those regions of the world where child soldiers are widely recruited, has involved the widespread use of terror. Following Walzer (2001), I understand acts of terror as involving the planned and programmed murder of innocent people. Such persons are killed not because they are involved in combat or other military activities or even because they are the police or other persons who carry out oppressive acts. Rather they are killed precisely because they are innocent bystanders who share some collective identity targeted by agents of terror. There is little doubt that historically nearly all wars have involved acts of terror. But the use of terror as a deliberate military strategy and a strategic and tactical weapon of choice is widespread among the

many rebel and insurgents groups that also rely upon the recruitment of child soldiers. While not all child soldiers participate in acts of terror there is little doubt that many do. Bridging the conceptual and emotional gap between the highly idealized child of contemporary Western imagination and the reality of children's behaviour on the battlefield, both as ordinary combatants and as agents of terror, has required the steady interjection of a variety of explanatory tropes whose interrelated logics attempt to explain away the contradictions between the ideal and the real.

The modern image of the child soldier is partly influenced by broad social and cultural shifts in the relative power of the family and the state over the lives of children. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, children were understood as functioning within the institution of the family or the state, and little attention was paid to their concerns as individuals. Both legally and morally, family authority over children was extremely powerful and was understood as central to the proper moral and social organization of society. In Protestant and Puritan thinking, the authority of the family over its members was all-encompassing. The English Protestant clergyman William Gouge, in his widely followed 1622 treatise on the family titled *Of Domesticall Duties*, wrote that the family was 'a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned' (Gouge 2006 [1622], p. 11). Likewise, for New England Puritans the family was a 'little commonwealth' in which power and authority were largely wielded by the family patriarch (Demos 1999). Indeed in England and colonial America the family remained, at least in the eyes of the law, a powerful self-governing institution, a microcosm of government, where disobedience by children (and women) was regarded as a form of treason (Coontz 1992, p. 10; Stone 1977, pp. 653-54).

Although the legal and moral principle of the subordination of children was crystal clear, in actual practice there was a great deal of diversity in the organization of family life and the practical agency and autonomy of children. Moreover, although children were under the authority or control of adults, this was not intimately coupled with the idea of child protection, so that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood often seem blurred. The result was that legally subordinate children had a great deal of *de facto* autonomy. Few, if any, 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century children could be regarded as possessing the kind of psychological autonomy prized in modern life, but their range of independent action was quite large, probably far greater than that of contemporary children.

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century new ideas, indeed a new modern mythology about childhood, was taking root. This involved a widely shared and deeply held conviction that the family was a sacred unit, and that children, purer and more innocent than adults, were to be treated as treasured objects who deserved exceptional care (Dolgin 1997, p. 1114). As this perspective gained acceptance in many areas of social life, courts, legislators and society as a whole became more concerned and involved with the interests of children and began to articulate their own ideas about children's interests and needs. Absolute family legal authority over children slowly eroded and came to be perceived strongest only when family authority was consistent with the larger society's notions of what

was in the best interests of the child. These changes often merely substituted the authority of the state for the authority of the family. Indeed, the very concept of 'the best interest of the child' presumes that children do not have fundamental liberty rights to choose for themselves how to conduct their lives (Archard 2010).

In Britain, North America and other places in the West, the cultural and social distinctions between childhood and adulthood hardened, and childhood gradually came to be regarded as a separate and distinct stage of life characterized by innocence, vulnerability and the need for protection. Great deference was paid by adults and adult institutions to the psychological autonomy of the child. But while family authority *per se* waned, the practical autonomy of the child also lessened considerably. Childhood autonomy may have been celebrated both philosophically and conceptually, but the psychologically autonomous child was placed within a gilded cage. Of course, none of this happened overnight. Real changes took place more rapidly among the middle class than among the working class and poor. But these new sensibilities spread quickly into law, especially family law, which in both North America and Britain was increasingly fashioned around middle class sensibilities. In particular, courts and other legal institutions increasingly articulated and enforced a 'progressive' view of the moral order which included the idea that the family was the foundation stone of society and that a key role of law and government was to strengthen and enhance family relationships (Friedman 1993; 2005). As both law and society converged around the idea of childhood innocence, and the presumptive embeddedness of childhood in family life strengthened, connections between childhood and the military weakened. As children increasingly came to be seen as innocent, vulnerable, and in need of protection, military service and childhood came to be seen as fundamentally incompatible.

### Icons of the Past: The Boy Soldier in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Discourse

One of the best examples of iconic boy soldiers was Andrew Jackson, the Seventh President of the United States. When Jackson ran for president in 1824, his campaign was bolstered by the first published campaign biography in the young history of the United States. This book, John Eaton's *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, caught the attention of the nation. At its heart was the story of young Jackson, a thirteen-year-old boy soldier in the army of American Revolution (Lepore 2008). Born in South Carolina, Jackson was thirteen years of age when the war for American independence raged across the American South. Jackson's older brother Hugh had already died during a battle near Charleston. The American Revolution was as much a civil war as it was a war of national independence from England. The war was not simply one of contending armies but was fought among a local population with fiercely divided factions and loyalties. Thus, like many modern conflicts, the war was also an internal domestic conflict, which set neighbour against neighbour, brother against brother, and father against son (Parton 1860, pp. 70-75).

The violence of the revolution was accompanied by an emerging rhetoric of atrocity and revenge that defined the way in which the two sides – Patriots (Rebels) and Tories (Loyalists) – viewed one another. Although it is sometimes difficult to sort out myth from reality, personal revenge was a powerful motive for the rebels (Rubin 2010). Jackson and his brothers were determined to avenge the dead and the wounded. The main objective of both parties was to kill the fighting men, and thereby avenge the slaying of partisans (Parton 1860, pp. 70-75). ‘Men hunted each other,’ said Amos Kendall, ‘like beasts of prey’ (1843, p. 44). Along with many others, and without enlisting in any organized corps, Jackson and his brother formed small parties that went out on single enterprises of retaliation, using their own horses and weapons. In this murderous cauldron the laws and customs of war were routinely disregarded. There were few distinctions between soldiers and civilians, and even where different groups wore distinguishing signs or badges, they often used each other’s badges as a mode of disguise. Later in life, Jackson spoke about the madness of war during that time, particularly citing the case of one Patriot who, having found a friend murdered and mutilated, devoted himself to killing Tories. According to Jackson, he lay in wait for them and had killed twenty by war’s end (Parton 1860, pp. 75-76).

The emblematic story in Eaton’s book focuses on the time that Jackson and his brother Robert joined a cavalry unit, which was routed by a group of armed Loyalists. Jackson and his brother fled and tried to hide in a nearby house, but were soon discovered and captured. Not long after his capture, the officer in charge ordered Jackson to clean his boots. Jackson refused, demanding to be treated as a prisoner of war. As Jackson’s biographer described the scene,

The officer glared at him like a wild beast, and aimed a desperate blow at the boy’s head with his sword. Andrew broke the force of the blow with his hand, and thus received two wounds –one deep gash on his head and another on his hand, the marks of which he carried to his grave (Parton 1860, p. 89).

The officer also ordered Robert Jackson to clean his boots, and when Robert also refused he struck and badly wounded him.

This episode was a prelude to a family tragedy. Jackson’s father had died before the war. His older brother had already died in the war. Jackson and his brother Robert were nearly starved to death as prisoners of war and Robert ultimately died of the wounds inflicted by the officer. Jackson’s mother also died, from a fever she caught while bringing food and medicine to Patriot prisoners in the British prison ships in Charleston harbour. Thus by age fifteen, his brothers and parents were all dead and Jackson was an orphan of war (Parton 1860, p. 94). But Jackson also emerged a hero. He was nationally known as ‘The Brave Boy of the Waxhaws,’ the region of the Carolinas where he grew up. By the time of his election as President he was lauded as a hero of two wars, most notably, as the triumphant general who led American forces to victory in New Orleans in the War of 1812. But Jackson the boy soldier was also deeply embedded in the American imagination: the young patriot, the child who had been told by his mother

that the 'first duty' of her children was 'to expend their lives [...] in defending and supporting the natural rights of man' (Meachem 2009, p. 11).

Jackson was not an anomaly. Legendary child soldiers appeared throughout popular culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In art, the image of the child under arms was prominent in Eugene Delacroix's 19<sup>th</sup> Century painting *Liberty Leading the People*, which depicts a scene at the barricades during the July Revolution of 1830. At the centre of the painting is 'Liberty' in the form of a woman leading the charge over the barricades while clasping the flag of the French revolution in one hand and a musket in the other. To Liberty's immediate left is an equally powerful portrait of a child, a young boy brandishing a musket in each hand. The child under arms was often thought to serve symbolically as a personification of class struggle. Armed children represented the lofty goals of popular insurrection which drew people from all walks of life into the battle against monarchy and entrenched privilege (Yvorel 2002).

The classic representation of the child at war in 19<sup>th</sup> Century literature is the character of the street urchin Gavroche in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. A key moment in Hugo's novel, written some thirty-two years after the events, is the Paris student uprising of June of 1832, where many students died in a short but violent anti-monarchist revolt. As with Delacroix, the main action is on the barricades and focuses on a child, the orphan boy Gavroche, a street urchin who joins with the student rebels, pistol in hand. During the battle he crosses over the barricades into the line of fire in order to gather unspent cartridges from among the dead. He is killed while singing.

In Hugo's novel, Gavroche's heroic actions are marvels. Margaret Mead once opined that adults viewed children as 'pygmies among giants' (Mead, Wolfenstein 1955, p. 7). But Hugo turns Mead's vision on its head, describing the diminutive Gavroche as a giant concealed in a pygmy body and comparing him to Antaeus, the great mythical Libyan giant defeated by Hercules. As Hugo put it,

The rebels watched with breathless anxiety. The barricade trembled, and he sang. He was neither child nor man but puckish sprite, a dwarf, it seemed, invulnerable in battle. The bullets pursued him but he was more agile than they. The urchin played his game of hide and seek with death, and [...] tweaked its nose (Hugo 1976 [1862], p. 1028).

Gavroche does not survive, but when he is finally brought down by a bullet, Hugo tells us that 'his gallant soul had fled' (1976 [1862], p. 1028). For Hugo and for others, the child fighter very much represented 'the people' in their struggle for democracy; in this sense, the child served as a collective representation of all that was good, striking to break out of an encrusted social order.

Hugo's story of the death of Gavroche must be placed in the context of his understanding of the violence of war. *Les Misérables* combines both narrative and social commentary and is marked by Hugo's observations on revolution, which he understood as inevitably flowing from the conditions of inequality in society. Hugo carefully distinguished his judgments about the morality of collective violence from the particular make-up of the participants. The latter he recog-

nized could be a rather motley stew of combatants. Hugo was well aware that violence could also take a negative turn, but citing Lafayette, Hugo argued that true insurrection, as a form of expression of collective and universal sovereignty guided by truth, was a sacred duty (1976 [1862], p. 887).

For Hugo, Gavroche's participation in the insurrection is part of the rights and duties of all citizens – men, women, and children – to resist oppression. Given the oppressive nature of childhood for children of his class background, Gavroche's interests are best served by participating in insurrection. In no sense could it be said of Gavroche that war 'robbed him of his childhood,' to use a modern humanitarian cliché. If anything, it was peace that had robbed Gavroche of his childhood. Insurrection, in contrast, was the harbinger of a new moral order designed to eliminate the immorality of the social order that framed the ordinary life of a street child in 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris. Hugo does not imagine that children would be barred from joining in class struggle.

The American Civil War was also filled with celebrated child martyrs and heroes. These include Luther Ladd, age 17 years, reputed to be the first Union soldier killed in the Civil War, Clarence Mackenzie, age 12 years, who died at Annapolis, and Joseph Darrow, age 15 years, who died of wounds suffered at the Battle of Bull Run. All had enormous public funerals and were proclaimed to have gallantly given their lives in the cause of abolition and freedom. Both during and after the Civil War, literature for young boys extolled both the dangers and excitement of war. Oliver Optic's 1864 novel, *The Soldier Boy; or, Tom Somers in the Army*, turned war into an adventure for boys. In Optic's novel, Tom's grandfather tells him that he, too, was only sixteen when he fought in the war of 1812, spurring sixteen-year-old Tom to enlist. Harry Castlemon's Civil War novel, *Frank on a Gun Boat* (2006 [1892]), celebrated the dangerous but lofty adventure of war. Like much of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature for boys, these war novels tied the proper development of boys to the encountering and overcoming of important trials and tribulations.

But there were also clear dissenting opinions during the period that Hugo and others were extolling the virtues of boy soldiers. Many writers recognized and abhorred the dramatic and horrifying displays of violence and terror in wartime. For example, in his memoirs Viscount de Chateaubriand, describes terrible scenes of murder and mayhem during the French Revolution that hardly support Hugo's view of the morality of revolutionary violence. Indeed Chateaubriand described crowds of people bearing severed heads on spikes:

A troop of ragamuffins appeared at one end of the street. [...] As they came nearer, we made out two dishevelled and disfigured heads [...] each at the end of a pike. [...] The murderers stopped in front of me and stretched their pikes up towards me, singing, dancing and jumping up in order to bring the pale effigies closer to my face. One eye in one of these heads had started out of its socket and was hanging down on the dead man's face; the pike was projecting through the open mouth, the teeth of which were biting on the iron (Baldick 1961, p. 105).

Similarly Chateaubriand's memoirs of the July Revolution of 1830, the same one that figures so prominently in Delacroix's painting, are unequivocal in their near-racialised disparagement of children and his horror at how they threw themselves into the bloody work of war.

The children, bold because they were unaware of danger, played a melancholy role during the Three Days: sheltering behind their youth, they fired at point-blank range on the officers who would have considered themselves dishonourable in firing back. Modern weapons place death at the disposal of the weakest of hands. Ugly and sickly monkeys, libertines before possessing the power to be so, cruel and perverse, those little heroes of the Three Days gave themselves over to assassination with all the abandon of innocence. Let us beware, through imprudent praise, of generating the emulation of evil. The children of Sparta went out hunting Helots (Chateaubriand, p. 1326).

Chateaubriand was a foe of revolutionary violence. He casts the violence that Hugo celebrated as being deeply immoral by referring to the children of Sparta, thereby linking it to an alleged yearly ritual in Sparta, in which young warriors – perhaps as a rite of passage – were given free rein and legal immunity to slaughter defenceless agricultural serfs in what may have been a form of guerilla warfare (Ross 2011). But Chateaubriand was in the clear minority. His scorn for children under arms did not prevail in either French or Western thought, in which the democratic gains brought about through revolution trumped virtually all other considerations. Thus, despite the cruel bloodletting of the past and the prominent role played by young people in revolutionary violence, revolutionary activity was understood as meaningful and positive. Chateaubriand's critique of the revolutionary violence of children contains some elements of the links between innocence and terror that dominate the modern view of child soldiers, but there is an important difference. His interpretation of childhood violence appears similar to the kind of child violence described in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, whereby innocent children become violent because of the absence of the constraints of 'civilized' society. For both Chateaubriand and Golding, childhood innocence easily segues into terror. Their views of childhood embody a more general view of human nature in which violence, even among children, lurks under every semblance of civility. In modern humanitarian discourse, by contrast, children are essentially innocent and their conversion to violence always implies the culpability of adults. It is adult abuse and terror that subvert the innocence of the child and transform the child into an agent of terror.

There is however, at least one domain in which the image of the heroic child soldier has actually continued to thrive. This is in Western fantasy literature such as the *Harry Potter* and *Hunger Game* series where it remains safely removed from contemporary events (Rosen, Rosen 2012). In both instances teenage warriors play a key role. In *Harry Potter* it is the children of Dumbledore's Army who fight against, sometimes to the death, Voldemort and his army of Death Eaters who seek to take over the magical world. The *Hunger Games* series is a dystopian trilogy about a fantasy world in which ruling adults have institutionalized the

systemic murder of children by other children at gladiator-type games organized by the state. The plot focuses on sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen who defies gender stereotypes and emerges as an intelligent, moral, skilful warrior who is both self-reliant and nurturing. Katniss forges an alliance with a teenage boy, Peeta Mellark, and they emerge as symbols of resistance to the authoritarian rule of the state. As the story progresses, Katniss develops not only as a symbol of resistance, but as a participant in an armed rebel movement that brings about the violent overthrow of the state and its leaders. The *New York Times* hailed Katniss Everdeen as one of the most radical female characters to appear in American movies. She is a female warrior, who fights for herself, her family, and her community (Scott, Dargis 2012).

Both the *Harry Potter* books and the *Hunger Games* trilogy have become international phenomena, as literature and in film. *Harry Potter* is the bestselling book series in history, with more than four hundred and fifty million books in print. Over thirty-six million copies of the *Hunger Games* trilogy are currently in print. Both series illustrate the dramatic return of the child hero in wartime, although the realism of earlier child hero novels is deflected to some degree by the fantasy settings. Indeed, given the general public concern about child soldiers, fantasy may be the only setting in which the appearance of heroic child warriors is culturally acceptable. Collins has made it clear, however, that she does not want the fantasy settings of the *Hunger Games* to derail her message by opening the door to an allegorical interpretation of her work. Rejecting the suggestion that the entirety of the *Hunger Games* can be interpreted as an allegory of the struggles of adolescence, she has insisted that the *Hunger Games* is, first and foremost, about war (Dominus 2011).

### The Modern Iconography of Child Soldiers

Perhaps the most iconic modern account of child soldiering has been provided by Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone whose autobiography, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Child Soldier*, was a best-selling book in the United States in 2007 and distributed nationally through the Starbucks Coffee chain. Beah was born on November 23, 1980 in a fishing village in Bonthe District in Southern Sierra Leone. Beah's memoir of his recruitment and service as a child soldier sold over 700,000 copies and the book was read across America on many college campuses.

According to his memoir, in 1993 Beah's village was attacked by rebel soldiers of the Revolutionary United Front, a force known for its murderous cruelty in the treatment of the civilian population, including frequent amputations of civilians' hands and arms. The moment his village was attacked was the beginning of Beah's odyssey of flight, recruitment and rehabilitation, punctuated by a series of horrible events that shape the narrative of his life.

After the attack on the village, Beah and some companions flee, but soon realize that they will not be able to feed themselves without money, so they sneak back into the village to retrieve funds. After they escape again from the village,

they wander through the countryside, now a burnt landscape of terror, looking for a zone of safety and hoping to perhaps reconnect with Beah's parents. The boys are briefly captured by rebels, witness the torture and mock execution of an old man by rebel fighters and are forcibly recruited into the rebels' ranks. Beah learns that those not selected for recruitment will be marched to a river and shot, but the whole episode is interrupted by gunfire and he again flees. He wanders through a countryside of burned villages piled high with dead and mutilated bodies and full of fearful and hostile survivors who sometimes threaten and rob him. He sees rebel soldiers who have just burned down villages, carrying the severed head of one of their victims.

Finally, after a long journey, Beah is captured by Sierra Leone government soldiers and believes he has found safety, but instead is forcibly recruited as a child soldier. The war into which Beah has been recruited is a brutal civil war, and the gratuitous violence is apparent on both sides of the conflict. Though the RUF was marked by its extreme brutality toward civilians, the Sierra Leone Army was also a predatory force and was ruthless in the way it treated enemy combatants. The army killed virtually all enemy soldiers, and gave no quarter to those who had been wounded or were captured. As Beah's commanding officer, the 'Lieutenant,' explained, all rebels must be killed, for, he says, 'We are not like the rebels, those riffraffs who kill people for no reason. We kill them for the good and betterment of the country' (Beah 2007, p. 123). Beah is given an AK-47 assault rifle, trained to use the bayonet, and told that he must kill all rebels and leave none alive. He is introduced to the use of drugs including marijuana, brown-brown (a mixture of cocaine and gunpowder), and white capsules (probably amphetamines) and attacks a village where he shoots and kills 'everything that moves' and watches as swamp crabs feast on the eyes of the dead (2007, p. 119). But this is only the beginning of Beah's journey into violence and horrific war crimes. His troops raid both enemy camps and civilian villages to capture recruits. They force other civilians to carry loot. He and his fellow SLA soldiers immediately kill all the wounded, and round up prisoners for hideous and gruesome executions. In one instance, Beah wins a killing exhibition and contest which involves slitting the throats of captured rebels to see who dies first. In another, prisoners are forced to dig their own graves and Beah joins in tying them up, bayoneting them in the legs and burying the screaming captives alive as he and his companions laugh and joke.

The violence of Beah's life as a soldier carries over into his demobilization experience. The Sierra Leone Army agrees to comply with UN demands, and suddenly and without explanation Beah is rapidly demobilized as a child soldier and is turned over to UNICEF. Although he should have surrendered his weapons, he hides a hand grenade and a knife in his clothing. Later, in a camp for former child soldiers, he and his SLA comrades enter into a pitched battle with former child soldiers of the RUF, and six child soldiers are killed before order is restored. As Beah makes plain in his memoirs, he wholeheartedly participated in these and many other atrocities. To Beah's credit, he casts a gimlet eye on the parade of humanitarian and human rights workers who keep telling him that no matter

what he did it was 'not his fault.' He is quite aware of the war crimes he has wilfully committed and of his personal culpability for murder.

But Beah was also quite lucky. He is charming and charismatic, and people like him. He gained the personal attention of Esther, a nurse at a mini-hospital associated with the UNICEF rehabilitation centre, who continued to emphasize that nothing he did was his fault. Beah states that, 'even though I had heard that phrase from every staff member – and frankly I had always hated it – I began that day to believe it' (2007, p. 164). From then on there was a rapid change in the course of Beah's life. Visitors from UNICEF, the European Commission came to the centre, and in a talent show for the visiting dignitaries Beah gave a reading from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and performed a short hip-hop play about the redemption of a child soldier that he had written with Esther's encouragement (2007, p. 169). Soon afterward, he was selected as a spokesman for the centre and began talking to gatherings in Freetown about how to end child soldiering and rehabilitate former child soldiers. Not long after that, he was interviewed and selected by the UN to go to New York to participate in the First International Children's Parliament and to speak before the UN Economic and Social Council. He returned to Sierra Leone and then ultimately fled the country. While in New York, he met Laura Simms, who eventually became his adopted mother when he made his way back to the United States in 1998.

After coming to the United States, Beah completed high school at the United Nations International School and went on the Oberlin College, where he wrote the original drafts of his memoirs and graduated in 2004. He has become a major internationally known spokesman and advocate for the plight of child soldiers and children in conflict zones. He was appointed UNICEF's first advocate on children affected by war. He serves on Human Rights Watch's Children's Rights Division Advisory Committee. He has testified before the US Congress and regularly speaks on college campuses across the United States and in many other key policy venues, such as the Aspen Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the United States Marine Corps' Warfighting Laboratory. He has also founded the Ishmael Beah Foundation, which provides direct assistance to war-affected children in Sierra Leone to help them further their education and reintegrate them into Sierra Leone society.

In this age of fact-checking, Beah's memoirs have been subject to intense scrutiny. The Sydney Australia newspaper *The Australian* raised a number of questions about the accuracy of his story and whether or not some of the events portrayed happened at all (Sherman 2008). UNICEF, for example, could not verify the deadly incident in its camp that resulted in the death of six teenagers that is described in Beah's memoirs. Likewise, *The Australian* could not find anyone who remembered this incident or who filed a report about it. Nevertheless, UNICEF maintained that 'Long Way Gone' is 'a credible account of the tragedy of recruitment of children into armed groups, told by one who undoubtedly experienced this abuse firsthand' (Clancy 2008). Nonetheless, the negative reporting on the book has done some damage. Chris Blattman, who has carried out extensive research on child soldiers in Uganda, doubts the accuracy of Beah's book. He states, 'We

are told what we want and expect to hear when we ask for desperate and tragic tales. The truth is of secondary importance' (Blattman 2008). Neil Boothbay, who has had extensive experience with child soldiers, has also cast some doubt on the veracity of the book. Boothbay's criticism stems from the fact that Beah's account includes almost every possible trauma that could ever occur to a child soldier, and suggests that it would be unlikely for all of these to have happened to a single person. Like Blattman, he suggests that Beah was egged on by UNICEF, psychologists, and journalists to produce a sensationalist account of trauma and rehabilitation. Despite this, both Beah and his publisher have insisted on the truthfulness or at least the 'truthiness' of the accounts (Rayman 2008). Nowadays Beah maintains an ironic distance from attempts to portray him as traumatized. He recently regaled an audience of appreciative anthropologists with tales about how his glassy-eyed teenage boredom during endless meetings with NGO officials was invariably described by these officials as the effect of 'trauma' (Beah 2011). Despite all these difficulties, like Andrew Jackson, Beah has emerged from war as a star. But instead of serving as a symbol of militant patriotism, his recruitment and use as a child soldier serves as a symbolic proxy of the horrors of war. Equally importantly, his story embodies the mandatory modern tropes of terror and innocence that accompany the tales of today's child soldiers.

### Child Soldiers in Popular Culture

Much of the contemporary popular fictional literature on child soldiering, frequently written as dystopian parables, serves to echo and exaggerate Beah's view. In Chris Abani's novella *Song for Night* (2007), twelve-year-old My Luck is recruited into a mine defusion unit. After the training, the trainers cut My Luck's vocal chords and those of all the other boys being trained as sappers, to render them voiceless, so that if a mine blows up they will not scare the others with their death screams. There is no evidence that any such practice ever existed.

Another of these dystopian tales, *Beasts of No Nation* (Iweala 2005), which is crafted as a comic book nightmare allegory, tells of the forced recruitment of Agu, a child soldier. It follows Agu through his initiation into the most brutal forms of violence, including his participation in the gruesome murders of both captured soldiers and civilians, which are portrayed in graphic detail, his drug infused killing frenzies, and his routine rape and sodomization by the commander of his unit. The book is set in a kind of dream time, although in this instance the dream is a nightmare. From the very beginning it makes use of the conventions of comic books. In this instance, the Commandant is the nefarious nameless leader of the nameless force that murders Agu's father and kidnaps him from his village. The Commandant has all the attributes of a comic supervillain. Like the Joker in the Batman comics, he has no ideology. He is not interested in power, money, or land. He kills for the sake of killing, as well as for his own lust and amusement. Like other super-villains, he has his servile minions such as Luftenant and Rambo, as well as his army of soldiers who laugh when he laughs and seek to imitate his every walk and gesture. All this is dramatically ef-

fective, but it also has the effect of stripping the story of any social and cultural context. The story unfolds both nowhere and everywhere. There is no history and no meaning to anything that is going on. Strongly paralleling the humanitarian understanding of war, the novel portrays brutalized and manipulated child soldiers who simply kill people for nothing, for no reason at all.

Although child soldiers exist in nations around the world, the vast majority of fiction and cinematography focuses on Africa. Prime examples are films such as *Blood Diamond* (Zwick 2006) and *Johnny Mad Dog* (Sauvaire 2008). *Blood Diamond* was set in Sierra Leone but it almost makes no difference where the story is set: African contexts are fungible. The film *Johnny Mad Dog* is based on the original novel by Emmanuel Dongala. Although no specific country is named in the novel, the setting is apparently Congolese. In contrast, the film is set in Liberia. In some instances, stories about child soldiers that did not originally take place in Africa are intentionally Africanized for dramatic effect. This is the case with the recent award-winning film *War Witch* (Nguyen 2012) set in a nameless African country. Here again a rebel attack on a defenceless village takes place for no comprehensible reason and the rebels commit senseless war crimes. The main character in the story is Komona, who is first forced to kill her parents and then abducted into the rebel army as a child soldier, becoming the virtual property of the rebel leader, Great Tiger. Komona is believed to have the magical power to foresee coming attacks by the enemy, and she is designated a 'war witch' for the Great Tiger. But the film was inspired by events said to have actually taken place not in Africa but in Burma. The Canadian film director Kim Nguyen relocated and filmed *War Witch* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but set it in an unnamed but familiarly generic African country.

Placing the action of novels and films outside of any temporal, historical or societal context gives the horror they describe an elusive transcendence. The action, which stands outside of history, stands for 'Every War' or at least every African war and in this respect, at least, there is little difference between these novels' understanding of Africa and that found in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad took Africans out of history and context and suspended them between the human and the animal. In his influential critique of Conrad, Chinua Achebe decried Conrad's stripping Africans of their humanity and his description of Africa as a 'metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity' (Achebe 2001). Conrad also had a larger purpose – to offer a critique of colonialism – yet 'You cannot diminish a people's humanity and defend them at one and the same time' (Phillips 2003). As in *Heart of Darkness*, the parade of abused and violent children in much of the popular cinema and literature clearly has a larger purpose. It meshes easily with central themes of humanitarian efforts to 'protect' children under arms. But it strips children of their humanity and agency in order to immunize them from their culpability in murder.

Much of the iconography of child soldiers is an iconography of extremes and moral panics (Denov 2010; Schissel 1997). Nevertheless, there are both personal accounts and novels that tell far more complicated tales. Emmanuel Jal's memoir *War Child: A Child Soldier's Story* relates how he and his family fled from the ram-

pages of Arab soldiers in the Sudan, many of whom seem similar to the murderous racist Sudanese militias of Darfur that Woli Soyinka likened to an African version of the Ku Klux Klan (Soyinka 2012, p. 87). Jal finds himself taken into the Sudan People's Liberation Army. There he had many harsh and often times brutal and shocking experiences during his recruitment, training, and deployment. There is little doubt that members of the SPLA also committed war crimes, but it is also clear that Jal's commanders in the SPLA were not gratuitous abusers and murderers of civilians or of their own troops. In fact, Jal himself witnessed the execution of fellow soldiers for the rape of women (Jal 2009, pp. 183-184). But he is also very troubled by the fact that in an attack on Juba, now the capital and largest city of the Republic of South Sudan, he mercilessly killed soldiers who were trying to surrender and whom he knew he should have taken prisoner (2009, pp. 157-159). But these facts are hardly unique to warfare or child soldiers. The killing of surrendering soldiers in the heat of battle has not been uncommon even in the well-disciplined armies of the West (Keegan 1976, pp. 46-54). And as Jal himself makes clear, he never killed anyone in cold blood (2009, p. 255). Despite his youth and the fears, passions and terrors of war, Jal's experiences as a child soldier are much more akin to those of an ordinary soldier, whether child or adult.

Like Jal's memoir, there are also examples in popular culture which provide a more nuanced view of child soldiers. Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* (2007) depicts the fourteen-year-old Nigerian child soldier Ali Banana as he is fighting the Japanese with Orde Wingate's British army in Burma. It is a picaresque novel filled with terror and with humour, and Banana ends up having to kill his mortally wounded comrade to save him from torture and mutilation by the Japanese. It is both a coming-of-age story and a tale of the madness of war but falls within virtually none of the tropes of terror, exploitation, abuse and criminality that characterize the leading novels about child soldiers. Likewise Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1994), an early novel written in the wake of the war in Biafra that is lyrical, funny and terrifying and clearly written before the set piece tropes of the child soldier novel coalesced. Finally the tone of some francophone novels such as Amadou Kourouma's *Allah is not Obligated* (2007) have also retained this picaresque quality. There is clearly a North-South dimension to much of the understanding of child soldiers (Macmillan, 2009). Catarina Martins (2011) argues that a clear shift of tone is more likely where African writers and filmmakers control the narrative. These stories often place war and the children who fight them in historical context and contain elements of children's responsibility, voice, agency, tragedy, adventure and a strong diversity of life stories (Martins 2011, pp. 440-43). But some African writers are also able to voice some of the unforgiving anger toward children who wantonly kill in ways that leave little room for Western notions of innocence. In Sierra Leone writer, Aminatta Forna's novel *The Memory of Love*, Kai, a physician, attempts to pick up the body of a rebel commander killed by desperate and oppressed Freetown residents at the close of a brutal occupation:

[She] was a young girl, lying upon the road, angled in death. Fourteen, sixteen at most. Someone had tried to remove her clothing. She lay in the street in a scarlet bra and

panties, doubtless at one time looted from an upmarket boutique. The people who lived there refused Kai and his team leave to touch the body. She'd been the commanding officer in charge of the attack. They would deny her the dignity of burial. The teenage commander, in stolen, silken underwear (Forna 2010, p. 367).

But these views have done little to disrupt or modify the popular narrative of the child soldier, the most recent episode of which has been the film *KONY 2012*, the very slick viral video 'wanted poster' produced by the organization Invisible Children (Russell 2012). The film targets Joseph Kony, Commander-in-Chief of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an insurgent group that has been fighting the government of Uganda and the Ugandan army for more than 25 years. The Kony-led insurgency coincided with the coming to power of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who has been President of Uganda since 1986. In 2005 the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for Kony, charging that he had personally issued orders to target and kill civilian populations, including those living in internally displaced persons camps in northern Uganda. Kony has been charged with numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, sexual enslavement, intentional attacks against civilian populations, and most notoriously, the forced enlistment into the LRA of children under the age of fifteen.

The Kony video had more than 93 million views on YouTube and appears to have catalyzed the African Union into launching a new regional military operation against Kony using 5000 troops drawn from four African countries: the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and Uganda. Even prior to the release of the video, US President Barak Obama had ordered a small force of about 100 special operations troops in support of the search for Kony's rag-tag but lethal band of rebels, now estimated to number between 200 and 400 people.

There is little doubt that Kony is a war criminal, and that he should be captured and tried for his alleged crimes. Nonetheless, the film clearly exaggerates Kony's significance today. (He has not even been in Uganda for seven years). There has been a lot of criticism of this film. The filmmakers appear self-absorbed, over-estimating their own importance. Moreover they know little about Uganda and the film's analysis lacks complexity and nuance; it is ethnocentric and patronizing. One of the biggest problems with *KONY 2012* is that it turns the whole issue of child soldiers into a discussion about criminals, when it should be a discussion about politics and social change. It feeds into the general belief that the recruitment of child soldiers is a uniquely modern form of deviance, the result of a few 'bad apples' abusing, exploiting, and terrorizing children and stampeding them into murder.

But these criticisms of the *KONY2012* video are equally applicable to many of the screeds about child soldiers put out by a host of venerated humanitarian and human rights organizations, where nuance and complexity are rarely the order of the day. The UNICEF report 'Adult Wars, Child Soldiers' metaphorically links the problem of child soldiers to the worst forms of child sexual abuse, such as sex trafficking or child pornography. It offers a model of criminality in which

unscrupulous adults exploit immature, innocent and impressionable children (UNICEF 2002). Child soldiers are frequently described as 'used,' 'manipulated' or 'cheap and disposable' (Youth Advocate Program International 2004). The last-mentioned term likens them to cheap modern goods and products – disposable cameras, razors, plastic cups, wristbands – that are easily consumed and discarded. The term 'disposable' is also frequently used to describe 'human goods' such as labour migrants, child miners, and modern criminal forms of slave labour.

In tandem with this is the stress upon the forced recruitment and abusive exploitation of children who are used as child soldiers. The compulsory recruitment of child soldiers is frequently described as being linked to specific acts of terror and horror, such as forcing new recruits to kill family, friends or co-villagers in macabre ritual acts designed to ensure the permanent alienation and separation of the child soldier from family, home, and community life. In addition, once they are recruited into armed forces, child soldiers are said to suffer from the worst forms of child abuse, including forced labour, sexual slavery, the forced use of drugs and outright murder. The result, it is sometime argued, is the creation of whole generations of psychologically scarred children who contribute to long-term social instability (Kaplan 1994).

At times, child soldiers have been described as 'harvested' by various armed factions, a kind of post-apocalyptic metaphor that represents them as expendable feed or fodder. Children are frequently described as 'cannon fodder.' Historically, of course, critics of war have often used the term 'cannon fodder' to describe raw untrained recruits, both young and old, who were deemed expendable and cynically thrown into the face of enemy fire with little regard for the loss of life. But contemporary critics of the recruitment of child soldiers have adopted this term as especially applicable to all children who are recruited into armed conflict, deeming them 'the cannon fodder of choice' (Masland 2002). Parents are sometime accused of being immoral accomplices in their children's recruitment. When a child soldier, from a group of soldiers who said they were aged between fifteen and seventeen and who had volunteered for the Mai-Mai Patriotic Resistance in the Congo, told that he was encouraged by his parents to fight. Joseph N. Giza, of the Congolese NGO Heal Africa, said this was not unusual. 'Can you imagine?' he said, 'sending your children to a war you are busy running away from? The children were used as cannon fodder' (Faul 2009). Child soldiers, even those who have been demobilized are said to be so traumatized that they constitute 'time bombs' or 'ticking time bombs' that need to be defused (Plan International USA 2008).

Child soldiers are routinely said to be 'programmed' in both advocacy literature and media accounts, in reference to their being trained to function like robots or being inducted into a cult. They are described as being 'programmed to kill,' 'programmed to lie about their age,' 'programmed to feel little revulsion for their actions and to think of war and only war' (Honwana 1998, p. 21). They are said to be 'programmed to develop a mindset that resists any acknowledgment of injury and sickness, be it physical or psychological.' Filmmaker Shar-

meen Obaid Chinoy described Taliban child soldiers as looking like ‘they’re in a trance; they rock back and forth; it’s as if they’re reciting things that they have been programmed to recite’ (Lakhani 2010). The idea of the child soldier as programmed has become so engrained in public consciousness that the Australian ethicist Robert Sparrow likens child soldiers to actual ‘autonomous robots’ which he foresees as the weapons systems of the future – the next generation of smart weapons (Sparrow 2007).

It is almost a cliché to say that war is terrible. The chaos of war can upend and destroy the young and the old, the innocent and the guilty. As it does for adults, war poses significant and often lethal risks for children who serve as combatants, as well as for children who serve in support roles. Like adults, children can emerge from war physically injured or maimed, or psychologically traumatized; in addition, the fact of living in a warzone and directly experiencing war can result in severely limited life prospects. Beyond the fact of being involved in combat, some contemporary conflicts have additionally involved brutal exploitation of children by various armed groups that have used them as suicide terrorists, sex slaves, or forced labourers. On the darker side, children have also, often gleefully, committed terrible war crimes.

Ethnographers of war zones have had considerable success in documenting the highly complicated role of children under arms (e.g. Coulter 2008; Denov 2012; Honwana 2006; Hoffman 2012; Jourdan 2011; Rosen 2005, 2012; Utas 2005; Vigh 2006). But the general understanding of the role of children in warfare has been seriously distorted by legal, humanitarian, and popular notions that insist that the issue be primarily framed as a matter of childhood innocence distorted and subverted by adult culpability. Even legal scholars who show keen awareness of these complications are often unable to abandon the model (e.g. Drumble 2012). Such an approach will occasionally yield convictions in international tribunals and for the worst abusers of children such convictions are appropriate and just. But there is probably not a single ethnographer of war zones who would agree that issue of child soldiers can be reduced to adults abusing and terrifying innocent children into committing violent acts. Childhood innocence and adult culpability are the Janus-faced tropes of the child soldier problem. Given the horrible realities of war, as we increasingly mythologize the innocence of child combatants, we are forced to more emphatically mythologize the blameworthiness of adults. As we come to see children as more innocent, we must, if we are to explain the horrors of war, consider adults to be more guilty.

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## Linda Green

### Betwixt and Between: Yup'ik Combat Soldiers and the Burden of Wars

Violence [...] refers to not only acts of individual physical aggression but also to social and linguistic systems of exclusion and collective coercion, degradation or destruction of property, persons and the environment. Violence is any harm or destruction of life, whether intended by individuals or enacted by a system of language, policies and practices (Pahl 2010, p. 15).

#### Enduring Contradictions

Eric Hobsbawm, the noted British historian, in his masterful account of modernity<sup>1</sup> writ large, suggests that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most violent in human history,<sup>2</sup> highlighting crucial connections between capitalist expansion and bellicosity. Over the course of the twentieth century, and in particular over the past 60 years, the United States has indisputably become the global master of war. A military budget and a weapons arsenal that dwarfs those of all other countries, alongside its repeated incursions into other sovereign nations, are alone sufficient to earn the title. Moreover, warfare in its many guises – coups, counterinsurgencies, direct invasions, the training and financing of brutal dictatorships and more recently torture, kidnappings and drone attacks – seems to be acceptable to large swaths of the American population, as is evident from their acquiescence, or perhaps indifference, to the costs of ‘protecting US interests.’ With little public discussion of what those interests are and who they may represent, a hegemonic discourse of US military might as a force for the ‘greater good’

1. See especially his latter four books; *The Age of Capital* (1962), *The Age of Revolution* (1962), *The Age of Empires* (1987), *The Age of Extremes* (1994).

2. Steven Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011), notwithstanding. Pinker argues that ‘violence has been in decline for long stretches of time’ and ‘we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species’ existence.’ See also Jared Diamond (2005). For a competing critique see Edward Herman and David Peterson’s ‘Steven Pinker on the Alleged Decline of Violence,’ [dissentvoice.org/2012/steven-pinker](http://dissentvoice.org/2012/steven-pinker), December 5 2012.

pervades mainstream society. This rationale, of course, serves to paper over the real beneficiaries of US power, capitalist profiteers. The enormous costs of wars in monetary, social and human terms go mostly unacknowledged.

Within its borders however, American bellicosity in the name of the greater good has its roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The American Indian Wars (1775-1924) comprising a series of broken treaties, warfare and forced assimilation of Native peoples on the North American continent, circumscribed a ruthless, albeit changing set of policies and practices designed to extinguish Native peoples, a one-two punch of genocide and ethnocide (Brown 1970; Jennings 1975). Justified by an ideology of Manifest Destiny, militarization, missionaries, merchant capital and medicine became some of the primary emissaries of domination. This American variant of social Darwinism has been crucial to the dispossession and dislocation of indigenous peoples from their land, their livelihoods and their kin, key elements of their collective survival over the centuries. Although the long term goal of full extinguishment has only been partially successful, the self-inflicted violence and the blunt force trauma of poverty and racism – legacies of these earlier wars – continue to mark indigenous peoples' lives into the twenty-first century (Williams 2012). Native Americans and Alaska Natives as a whole remain some of the poorest and most marginalized peoples in the United States. Impunity for these crimes – crimes against human dignity – is a crucial facet for the continuance of this multi-faceted violence directed against 'Others,' whether at home or abroad.

Given this, it seems at first glance incongruous that Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up a disproportionate share of US military troops per capita. Together they have the highest rate of military service of any group of Americans (Robinson and Lucas 2008; Holms 1996). Ironically these native soldiers, along with their non-indigenous counterparts, are the public face of US aggression outside America's borders. As they take their place on the frontlines of US wars, the soldiers are quite literally the embodiment of empire, defending a way of life that has relentlessly tried to destroy theirs. After the Vietnam War, volunteer conscription replaced obligatory military service. Since then the vast majority of the America's foot soldiers have been from poor, minority and indigenous peoples' communities, the very victims of America's class war.

In what follows I draw on some of my preliminary findings from my ongoing research project with Yup'ik combat soldiers from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of south-western Alaska. Grasping the human and social consequences of war on the lives of Yup'ik men who serve in combat in the US military requires an examination of the social, economic, political and cultural texture of their lives. Many of them must shoulder the burdens of two wars: a racialized class war – mostly unacknowledged by the dominant society – but whose misery is keenly felt by Yup'iks, while at the same time they bear the hardships of combatants at the frontlines of America's 'global war on terror.'

In this essay I situate the experiences of deployment to war by Yup'ik men within a historical context of structural, symbolic and everyday violence (see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2003) that brings to the fore some of the social

processes and forces that have turned rural Yup'ik communities into what Joao Biehl (2005) has called in another context, 'zones of social abandonment.' Crucial to these processes is the extent to which social vulnerabilities and injustices both historically and in the present are at once painfully knowable, as the grim statistics on Native well-being testify, and simultaneously rendered invisible, refracted through a lens of race, ethnicity and class. A process that squarely situates on individuals and their 'culture' the blame for what are in fact socially produced problems (Bauman 2004). The duality of the distress of most Yup'iks remains largely outside our purview, a canvas writ small.

Over the past several years I have interviewed dozens of active duty soldiers and veterans who have served in Vietnam, Desert Storm and over the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the summer of 2011 I spoke with a number of Alaska National Guard soldiers, many of whom had been deployed to Kuwait in 2007. At the time of our meeting the unit was preparing for a ten-month tour in Afghanistan in 2012 as paratroopers. In this essay I explore two dilemmas that emerged from that facet of my work with these Yup'ik men who live in rural communities scattered across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. First, many of the Yup'ik men I have interviewed joined the US military in the hope of creating a future for themselves and their families, one mostly denied to them as indigenous people whose communities have been ravaged under the weight of long-term, systemic policies and practices that have produced unremitting poverty and intensifying violence. The rub of course is that as soldiers they are fighting for a way of life from which they are systematically excluded both before and after their combat experiences. Moreover, the social and cultural costs of building that future most often include having to leave behind their deep and abiding connections with the land and with each other. Second, and somewhat contradictorily, I examine how almost all the Yup'ik National Guard troop's experiences in the military, in particular, reinvigorate a shared cultural identity through social spaces that are not simply invoked but that are actually experienced as collective social bonds. The irony, however, is that these ties are configured within a matrix of state violence; a violence that leaves in its wake its victims alongside its perpetrators.

Field note: Summer 2009

I met Wayne, 25 years old, who was a member of the Marine unit that entered Bagdad in March 2003, soon after the US-led invasion. After receiving an honourable discharge from the Marines in 2006 Wayne returned to his natal community of 800 people. Restless, by 2007 he was off again. Wayne went off to the Middle East war theatre but this time as a member of the Alaska National Guard that deployed to Kuwait.

Wayne joined the Marines right out of high school. He said ever since he can remember he wanted to be a Marine like his father who served in Vietnam. At 18 he passed the entrance test and soon thereafter entered boot camp. Although he said there was the full measure of racism and discrimination in boot camp, noting that, 'I had my fists up a lot' he tried to not let that deter him from his dream. Wayne said he was excited to go into combat so that he could put to use his skills learned so well on the tundra. As a hunter of sea and land mammals from a young age, Wayne was already an accom-

plished marksmen and knew well how to work and travel in groups, skills necessary for survival on the tundra of the Far North and on the battlefield. Wayne spoke with obvious pride and dignity of those remembered successes.

When I did get a chance to interview Wayne's father he described to me some of his own difficulties that he had faced upon returning home. And he reiterated he did so mostly in silence. Now he worries about his son as he faces a similar set of circumstances. Wayne by his own admission isolated himself and drank heavily after his discharge from the Marines.

Wayne holds one of the few steady jobs in his community. For the past nine months he has been a member of the Village Safety Police force. Because there are no state police in rural communities local village men are trained as community police. Alaska State Troopers come out to rural communities only when a violent felony crime has been committed. Although by all reports Wayne is a capable worker it is also taking its toll. To do his job well Wayne must uphold the law even if it necessitates taking action against kin or community members, many in the throes of their own distress. All the while, Wayne is left to cope with his own nightmares and flashbacks from his deployment to Iraq, which he says are often aggravated when he must intervene in violent assaults. Wayne does so mostly alone and in silence.

When Wayne joined the Marines he had ambitions to go to college afterward. He thought he could use the benefits from the military to do so, but now he says he is too 'screwed up' to use them.

Community members pointed Wayne out to me as someone who has readjusted and reintegrated with some difficulties, but now seems to be doing well. And he is clearly devoted to his wife and daughter. Yet over the weeks I spent talking with Wayne he began to tell more of his distress, his anger, and his isolation from those around him. Perhaps most startling to me, however, was the day he asked if I would like to see some of his videos of Iraq. As I sat watching in some horror the explosions, bombings and battles, Wayne told me that these are the memories that he is left with from Iraq. And he felt he could never really escape them. When I asked if he had ever sought any help for his difficulties, he shrugged saying there was not much that could be done to help him.

August 2011

When I last spoke with Wayne he had been moving every few months, coming and going between urban Anchorage and his rural community, trying as best he could to find a place for himself and his family to stay afloat. The village, he said, felt too confining, but Anchorage provided no relief. In fact he felt that the racism against Natives in the city rivalled the discrimination he experienced in the military. Although at the time Wayne was still officially in the Alaska National Guard he will not redeploy with the unit to Afghanistan in 2012. Initially, he wanted to go, especially for monetary reasons, but in the end he will not do so.

This field note raises several key issues that I begin to develop within the context of this essay; first, young men like Wayne enlist in the military with expectations of a viable future within the framework of Western society, as few other options are available to them. Opportunities for jobs, education and skills

training are severely curtailed by the constraints of their positionality and most especially within a context of neo-liberal economic policies whose overriding ethic is one of 'survival of the fittest.' The minimal state social protections that had been available to Yup'ik communities for decades have now been even further reduced. The impact of global warming is particularly evident in the Arctic, where increasingly the quantity and quality of marine and freshwater species have diminished: resources that are crucial to the Yup'ik subsistence way of life. Within this context wage considerations have become more urgent, as social reproduction has become all the more precarious.

Secondly, the invocation of following in a family tradition as a key reason for serving in the military is one I have heard from most every soldier I have interviewed. The dignity these young men feel is palpable, afforded they say by the accomplishment of their elders, particularly those men who served as scouts on the tundra in the Alaska Territorial Guard during World War II, quite literally defending their homeland, as the Japanese occupied several islands on the Aleutian Chain (see Marston 1969). And lastly this vignette brings to the fore the social and emotional disquiet, the restlessness and the desire to return to combat, that many soldiers like Wayne face after they leave the battlefield; left to cope alone, as best they can, with the very real but, mostly invisible wounds of war.

Thus, combat service and in many cases the resultant trauma that Yup'ik men experience when they return to their home communities must be understood within a context of massive cultural transformations and diminished social opportunities that have left Yup'ik peoples with few options to survive both as individuals and as a collective with dignity. And while these structures and processes do not determine people's behaviour they do condition the range of options available to them. By placing these Yup'ik soldiers' lives within the contours of history I try to explicate more fully how power and violence operate through dynamic tensions rooted in particular geographic, socio-economic and historical sets of relations. As such I shed light on the ways in which the violence of war abroad is inextricably linked to the violence of modernity at home, contributing significantly to the shape of the soldiers' everyday lives and livelihoods.

## Hegemony as History

Yup'ik peoples of south-western Alaska have experienced massive social transformations over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The violence and trauma in its myriad forms have reworked not only individual lives, but altered in the process much of the connective bonds of kin and community. This violence has mostly been normalized. The violence of which I speak is a violence that has left in its wake the almost total obliteration of a mode of life for indigenous peoples around the globe. A violence that leaves its victims standing, but weakened. And what has been lost is a point of view, a way of being inextricably tied to its material base and spiritual foundation. This violence is not, however, an unintended outcome of a social project, but rather intrinsic to those very processes. It is

violence so naturalized that most assume that the victims of this violence are actually its beneficiaries – rescued as it were from their isolated, primitive ways. And even those who may harbour doubts understand the outcome as inevitable, redeemed in their minds perhaps, by its imputed rendering of equality and freedom. This civilizing myth is deeply entrenched in the self-consciousness of Western society (Bauman 1991; Williams 2012).

The aggravated assault on indigenous peoples has often been carried out through processes of dispossession, dislocation, and partial<sup>3</sup> assimilation. A historical understanding of how these processes are produced is crucial. In a seminal article entitled ‘Pandora’s History,’ Gavin Smith (1997) explores the paradoxes that belie a rapprochement between anthropology and history in attempts by both disciplines ‘to give voice to the unspeakable.’ Smith urges us to think through those silences, to peer into ‘those subterranean passages where silence resides,’ to interrogate the ways in which they may ‘link up the events’ of official history. Thus, an examination of history also entails an interrogation of an erasure of history alongside the complicity of that erasure – of ordinary people’s suffering, not just in physical terms, but the emotional, cultural, social parameters of that suffering, suffering rooted in injustice.

The erasure of history, however, is not total, but rather partial – in both senses of the term – one that blocks any real understanding of the full extent of people’s suffering, while simultaneously setting the stage for an engagement with a particular kind of history, one that serves power. William Roseberry (1994) characterizes this as ‘hegemony as history,’ that is to say, the way those in power actually pose and then define the questions around which struggles are fought (Gramsci 1971). And it is here in these ruptures that violence against a people is often rendered invisible. Moreover without explicitly naming this violence, challenges to the status quo become mostly muted. Impunity in these instances can be thought of as something more than a lack of accountability in its legalistic sense, but rather as a social process that is enabled in part by a characteristic mixture of silence and memory among its victims and historical amnesia and widespread indifference, what the sociologist Jon Pahl has called ‘innocent domination’ on the part of the dominant society (Green 2008; Green 2011; Pahl 2010).

This history is not incidental to this story, but rather crucial for understanding the full extent of the violence that circumscribes the lives of Yup’ik peoples. As David Price (2013) has noted, historical memory can be utilized to make visible and to oppose both the legacies of the past and the current reality of state violence in its many guises.

### **The Weight of the Past, the Shape of the Present**

Yup’ik people were at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a semi-nomadic people who travelled in small kin groups over the vast tundra by dogsled, boat, or on foot.

3. There is ample historical evidence from around the globe to support the contention that the assimilation of indigenous peoples was intended to be only partial; that is they were to be consigned to the margins of society.

For centuries Yup'ik people have survived the harsh environment of the Far North with skill and grace. A people, who by necessity, moved seasonally and widely across the debouchments of the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta, some 30,000 square miles, to hunt, fish, gather foods and trade items necessary for survival (Haycock 2002). The tundra for the Yup'ik was not a vast empty space, but a crucial site for the production of social relations and cultural well-being, as the land not only provided them with their material sustenance, but embodied the very essence of their lives. Recent mapping and oral history projects with elders in the Delta (Chevak Traditional Council 2000) for example, have revealed the tundra to be alive with local history – of births, battles, burials, myths and ceremonial sites. I am not, of course, arguing for a romantic notion of the Yup'ik as Noble Savage. The Yup'ik people experienced famines, disease, warfare and violence – that is to say, all sorts of human and natural calamities, on a fairly regular basis – yet they lived their lives, as best they could, on their own terms.

My interests lie precisely in those aspects of the social transformation in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages that may not at first seem obvious; the extent to which social relations and social ties were reworked in Alaska Native communities, even as native people remained in place – on the tundra and with seemingly unchanged access to subsistence. Yet, the enormous changes in social conditions with the arrival of outsiders made the continuation of the old ways of making a living and living together increasingly impossible.

In the case of south-western Alaska, the assault was not on land per se, nor ostensibly labour, but on a constellation of social and material practices, crucial pieces of the organized matrix of their lives and livelihood, that slowly eroded their ability to survive with dignity. Elsewhere (Green, forthcoming) I index three such important and interrelated events: first, the introduction of merchant capital through the commodification of their subsistence species – wildlife and fish – that reworked Natives' relationships to their landscape and each other through social rearrangements of their productive activities; secondly, the arrival of missionaries and teachers – often one and the same – who spearheaded fundamental changes in their gendered, social and spatial relations as well facilitating the internalization of their imputed inferiority; and lastly, the reworking of Yup'ik lives and social identity in the context of rapacious epidemics of smallpox, influenza and tuberculosis that decimated the Yup'ik peoples of the twentieth century.

Until the late nineteenth century the peoples of south-western Alaska had only limited and sporadic interactions with outsiders,<sup>4</sup> mostly because the natural resources most sought after at the time – seals, walrus, gold and furs – could be procured elsewhere in relatively more accessible regions of Alaska. By century's end, fur traders began establishing trading posts along the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers and Moravian and Jesuit missionaries were travelling to and soon living in native settlements, establishing a permanent presence on Native lands and in Native lives.

4. The people of the Y-K Delta had long sustained ties through trade and warfare with other indigenous peoples in Alaska. There is little evidence that Russian colonists had much direct contact with peoples of the Y-K Delta, particularly with those villages on the shores of the Bering Sea.

Some of the changes introduced – trapping for cash or barter alongside of the introduction of the small engine, sugar, white flour, alcohol and tobacco – increased their dependence on a cash economy (Napoleon 1996). Yet, they were drawn into a cash economy, only partially and sporadically, which created both a dependence on outside resources that could never adequately fulfil their ability to meet their daily needs for social reproduction, while simultaneously precluding most alternatives. Moreover it altered the connections between them. Gerald Sider in his account of changing economic relations among people in the hinterlands of Labrador illustrates how ‘the tensions produced between autonomy of work processes and the imposed constraints to produce under merchant capital’ reworked positions of power and authority, as ‘traditional’ leaders coordinated the relations of their production and social reproduction in new and often deleterious ways (1986, p. 36).

It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of outsiders on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, that dramatic changes took place in the daily lives of Yup’ik people; the resettlement of seasonally nomadic people into settled villages changed the way they practiced subsistence and their relationships with each other. It reworked kin and gender relations as men were encouraged to move out of the men’s houses (*kasim* or *quigiq*) into nuclear family structures, changing the balance of power and authority between and among men and women and between the young and old. Environmentally, people moved out of their semi-subterranean dwellings into housing above ground that were structurally, socially and economically inadequate. The vast tundra, the site where meaningful social relations had been produced became a space of their confinement. Yup’iks began to live between two cultures – one slowly being hollowed out and the other, in which they took their place as marginalized people, as Western education, Western medicine and Christianity disrupted the meaning of their lives.

With the crash of the fur trade in the 1930s Yup’iks by necessity were thrown back onto their own resources to survive,<sup>5</sup> but in a context where everything had changed. Both before and after the collapse of the fur trade a succession of episodic epidemics – small pox, measles and influenza – occurred, which together left Native groups decimated, physically, socially and economically (Napoleon 1996). In many cases whole kin groups perished and in others the sole survivors were young adults. Subsequently, most Yup’iks were increasingly being lured in from the tundra – although often under duress – with the assistance offered by missionaries; schools for their children<sup>6</sup> and Western medical care that seemed all the more necessary as the power and legitimacy of the shamans had waned in the face of such disease and death. The long, slow death march from tuberculosis and other infectious diseases for massive numbers of people in the ensuing decades was simply another iteration of their dispossession and dislocation from

5. Men also began to go work in the fish canneries and crew on commercial fishing boats on Bristol Bay. Yet in many cases, the owners preferred migrant laborers to Alaska’s indigenous peoples (Haycock 2002).

6. Parents were often threatened that if they did not enroll their children at school the authorities would revoke their rights of custody.

each other and the landscape of their lives, as their social and economic fabric was shredded.

Today the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is home to some 25,000 Yup'ik people living in fifty-six small, geographically isolated villages. The largest village has an estimated population of 1,200 people and the smallest 100. The Yup'ik people make up the largest population of all indigenous groups in Alaska, yet the Delta remains the poorest region. For many in Yup'ik communities the social effects of poverty and trauma circumscribe their everyday lives. The deteriorating conditions of rural wellbeing have left many village members with a day to day existence best characterized by its instability. Yup'ik peoples in this region have the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment in Alaska – by some estimates over 75% of the active workforce is without waged employment as there are only a handful of regularly paying jobs in each village. More than half of the population live below the official poverty line. Most people rely on a mix of intermittent low-wage jobs and the state welfare system for cash to survive. And even these meagre sums are rhetorically denied them as Yup'iks are often derided in public discourse for their imputed laziness and 'cultural' backwardness.

Confined in their everyday lives to specific parcels of lands, further restricted by state-imposed hunting and fishing regulations, most people do continue to practice some degree of subsistence, but now from a sedentary existence. They go by boat, four-wheeler, or snow machine to hunt, fish or collect berries and grasses, food items crucial to their social ties and social identities. Yet, this too is becoming prohibitive as gas for their vehicles costs well over \$7 a gallon. Increasingly, even as their dietary mainstay remains their subsistence foods of fish, fowl and game, the local village store has become essential to survival. Yet, it is filled with mostly toxic substances – frozen fast food, soda and candy – that are literally killing them, albeit slowly, as hitherto unknown rates of cardiac disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer has soared over the past half-century. Most village people live in substandard, overcrowded housing, and even newly-constructed houses are inadequately designed for the sub-Arctic climate of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Moreover, there is simply not enough housing for all village residents and many households provide shelter to multiple kin. Many families lack even the most basic of resources; running water, access to clean drinking water and sanitation. Among those villages where a sanitation infrastructure does exist, many communities and households do not have the monetary resources to keep them operating adequately (Eichelberger 2011).

Yup'ik peoples too, have some of the highest rates of suicide, alcohol abuse, violent deaths, domestic violence and sexual assault in the state. Suicides among Alaska Natives alone rose over 500% between the mid 1960s and the mid 1990s. According to the State-wide Suicide Prevention Council, Native populations in western Alaska continue to bear the brunt of Alaska's suicides in per capita comparisons. While Alaska Natives make up less than one-fifth of the state's population, they account for more than a third of the state's suicides (Perkins 2006). Between 2004-2008, for example, the Wade Hampton census region, which en-

compasses part of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, had the highest suicide rate in the state (AK Bureau of Vital Statistics 2011).<sup>7</sup>

Yet, the chaos produced by economic and social policies and practices is mostly silenced by a rendering of history that is quite sanitized. Some in the dominant culture may lament the passing of a 'primitive' way of life, but cling to the notion that this is 'progress.' Such sentiments, however, not only fail to account for – and hold accountable those responsible for – the distress, disruption and destruction of Yup'ik lives, but actually contribute to the normalization of such violence. If one looks closely at the cluster of social and behavioural problems that plague many Yup'ik peoples today one finds that they mirror the very same types of symptoms that have come to define post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but this Yup'ik trauma is far from over; it is as ongoing as it is relentless. Today more than three generations of Yup'ik people are in the throes of distress as a result of the violence and trauma of an imposed capitalist modernity that has rendered them and their culture superfluous and disposable (Bauman 2004). This violence strikes precisely at the very essence of their being. It utilizes a destructive ideology of their imputed inferiority combined with an economic system that undermines their collective social ties, ties that remain crucial to their wellbeing as a people.

Although community spaces and kin relations are at one level fraught with contradictions, these social webs continue to be crucial for Yup'ik struggles for survival, giving vitality and a sense of dignity to individuals, kin and community members. At issue today are the intensifying violent social relations that undergird neoliberal capitalism, and that include the necessary breaking apart of the bonds of being human, our relations with each other. And for Yup'iks that includes a deeply-felt sense of relational ties to the natural world (Fienup-Riordan 1990). What is being undermined are the very places and spaces in which people are a little better able to withstand the blows and counterblows of capitalism and its attendant suffering.

### **Creating a Future in the Context of an Honoured Past and Intensifying Insecurity**

Over the past several years I have interviewed Yup'ik men who have participated in war, from Vietnam to Desert Storm to the 'Global War on Terror.' The majority of them said that one of their major reasons for enlisting in the US military, whether in active duty service or the Alaska National Guard, was to follow in the footsteps of their grandfathers who had served in the Territorial Guard. This tradition has continued over the subsequent generations as fathers, uncles, and older brothers too, have participated in the military, mostly in the Alaska National Guard, whose mission was until 2004 confined within Alaska's borders.

The Territorial Guard was formed under the auspices of the US military during World War II, prior to Alaska statehood and prior to Native Alaskans being given the right to vote, even though they were considered US citizens. These

7. See Wexler 2006 for an insightful discussion on Alaska Native youth suicide.

units were comprised of local men who acted as scouts along the western coastline of Alaska, after the Japanese occupation of the Aleutian chain. Their service was not formally and officially recognized by the State of Alaska until 2006.

By the 1950s the local National Guard had taken on a visible materiality as Guard buildings sprang up in most communities, where men would meet monthly to complete their formal service obligations. These spaces, too, provided a sanctioned site for men's communal gatherings, replacing in part the by then deprecated role of men's houses, and thus giving men a place where they could experience a modicum of public respect in community life under their new social arrangements (Chance 1990). The creation of a local National Guard and lay deacons of the Catholic Church were two imposed sites of legitimated authority and power for men, however limited. Today most of these village National Guard buildings stand idle, as non-deployed troops meet their training obligations away from the villages, in Bethel, Fairbanks or Anchorage.

Serving in the American military has long been a point of pride for many families, as the photographs of family members in dress uniform displayed prominently on walls in most homes attest. Moreover, military service linked to grandfathers, fathers and uncles viz. the Territorial Guard honours a way of life rooted in both material and affective relations when elders survived on the tundra in service to their kin and community foremost. Taken together, these webs provide young soldiers with links to their local history and with a modicum of respect in public discourse, as they are for a time also legitimized within the dominant culture by their 'service and sacrifice to the nation' (Pahl 2010).

At the same time most of the young soldiers who recently joined the Alaska National Guard unit headquartered in Bethel told me, too, that they had joined the military for economic incentives; often including the desire to help family members who may be struggling, a mother, a grandmother, an 'auntie,' a sister, a girlfriend. The younger soldiers, mostly in their early twenties, spoke with enthusiasm of the prospects of educational benefits that would be accruing to them after their service; college tuition or technical skills training, and housing loans. Older soldiers, mostly in their mid-late thirties, several of whom are close to completing twenty years in the National Guard, want to transfer educational benefits to their children as well as receive a retirement when they reached sixty years of age. Both young and old alike, however, said that the steady pay check, most particularly combat pay, provided much needed assistance for families often stretched beyond their limits.

Yet, what also became clear when talking with the younger soldiers in particular, was that their excitement about joining the military was also rooted in the sense of possibilities, of hope for a future considerably more than simply putting one foot in front of the other (Berger 2007). But to join the military they must leave their communities and families, much like the poor and marginalized people across the globe who are on the move. As John Berger poignantly notes, 'month by month they leave their homelands. They leave because there is nothing there, except their *everything*, which does not offer enough to feed their children. Once it did. This is the poverty of the new capitalism' (2007, p. 120).

Many spoke about their decision as a spur of the moment one; a recruiter was in town or they encountered the encouragement of a guidance counsellor at school, or simply discovered a desire to see other places. Several, too, mentioned that their parents objected to them joining because of their concern about the ongoing wars. Yet interest is high among the youth. A National Guard recruiter told me there are ten applicants for every two or three recruits accepted. For Yup'ik youth the military is increasingly seen as a survival strategy economically and socially. Thus, however contradictory it may seem, military service holds out the promise of reinvigorating the soldiers' ties to the honourable past of their ancestors and their elders, while simultaneously giving them hope for a future, but as individuals rather than as part of collective social bonds.

### War: Coming and Going

The numbers of soldiers drawn from these Alaska Native communities who have deployed to the Middle East war theatre over the course of the past decade are quite small. Yet the percentage of the population who has served in the active duty military and the Alaska National Guard in Iraq and Afghanistan is noteworthy. One local example is illustrative. In 2007 when the Alaska National Guard was deployed to Kuwait it was first time that Guard troops had been sent outside United States borders on a combat mission. The absence of 100 plus soldiers deployed from twenty-five communities across the Y-K Delta placed a strain on the economic and social fabric in the affected villages. In one community of eight hundred people, for example, seven young men were on active duty in the US military and six more were in the National Guard, all of them deployed, mostly to Iraq and Kuwait<sup>8</sup>. In material costs alone, family members struggled with the absence of so many adult males, men who are primarily responsible for day to day survival activities; such as subsistence hunting and fishing and procuring wood and water.

Moreover, upon returning home after a year's absence the soldiers felt 'out of place' in their own households. Family dynamics shifted by necessity, as their wives had assumed power and authority within the household. Several men mentioned that it took months before their children would listen to them as an authority figure or for the resentments and recriminations about their absence to stop reverberating in family struggles. A sense of mistrust of what those left behind had done or not done also caused a certain friction in the initial months of the soldiers' return.

One of the contradictions soldiers face while they are deployed is the liminal space they inhabit between a family they never fully leave behind and a battlefield without clear boundaries. With the new social media of Facebook, Skype, and the Internet, families are in constant contact even while the soldiers are away at war. The frequent communication between them allows, as one soldier put it 'to micro-manage the family from a distance.' And at the same time the soldiers fight in wars that no longer have clearly defined 'frontlines.' With sui-

8. This is over 1.25% of the local population, a percentage that mirrors the overall representation of indigenous peoples in the US military well beyond their demographic of 1% of the population.

cide bombers, IEDs, and where civilians and combatants co-mingle inadvertently, one feels 'safe,' if at all, only within the confines of the compound or encampment. The tensions that arise as a result of these antagonistic pulls leave these men in the throes of constant, albeit low-level stress, which further exacerbates its toll on their well-being and that of their families.

And in more than one case the distress in the family was palpable, like that of one soldier's 13-year old son. According to his mother, both father and son were experiencing nightmares alongside aggression alternating with depression. The youth was receiving some behavioural health assistance, which according to both parents was providing a modicum of relief. Recent research has shown that the family members, including children, of those who are experiencing PTSD can often exhibit what has been called Secondary Traumatic Stress, that is indirect exposure to traumatic events through close contact with someone experiencing primary PTSD.<sup>9</sup> The father did not think he himself could be helped, but he was anxious about his own health as he wanted to redeploy one more time.

As it came closer to the unit's second deployment, this time to Afghanistan, many wives, children and other family members, although supportive, were reportedly not very enthusiastic. Yet, the vast majority of the men I spoke with expressed not only interest in a redeployment but were quite expressive in their excitement about returning to combat, to a shared sense of a group mission. 'As crazy as it sounds, when I heard that the National Guard unit was deploying to Afghanistan, I wanted to go too' a Desert Storm veteran told me, even as he spoke of his difficulties in readjusting after his own combat experience.

What was striking to me as I spoke with these men was their anticipation of reconnecting with each other, as a group that 'counts on you and you on them,' offsetting in part, perhaps, the aloneness of modern individualism. The opportunity to experience deep, abiding connections with each other is increasingly rare for most ordinary people under conditions of capital relations. And while this sense of Western individualism is not as intensely felt in Alaska Native communities as in dominant American culture, many more now withstand the injustices of daily life in increasing isolation. Their experiences in the military invoke in part a shared past that reinvigorates and gives new meaning to their ties to each other. Many also reflected on the racism and discrimination directed at them from senior officers and non-Native soldiers which, in part they say, was mitigated by a mostly Yup'ik unit. The contradiction is that this sense of dignity and purpose as Yup'ik men is short-lived, as their lives are configured within a matrix of state violence.

Although men sign up for the military as individuals, what is required of them is a transformation of their identity from that of an individual to a member of a fighting team. To be effective combatants, soldiers must overcome the social prohibition of killing. During basic training one of the key objectives is to embed within the soldiers' psyche allegiance to and responsibility for each other, most

9. See for example Nelson and Wright (1996) on the effects on female partners of veterans with PTSD.

especially directed toward one's 'buddy' (Malantes 2011). But the chasm between this sense of camaraderie and belonging and the reality of the ongoing degradation and unspeakable suffering they witness, experience and perhaps cause often leaves soldiers with residual conflicts that may last a lifetime. Many return home alone and in isolation and into a context that one tribal leader characterized to me in 2011 as 'a war situation here at home,' referring to the intensifying social and economic turmoil that so many families and households were experiencing.

### Invisible wounds of war

'Dying from the inside out' –  
description from a mother reflecting on her son,  
an Iraq combat veteran who committed suicide.

Like Wayne, combat veterans and community members I have interviewed, spoke of the difficulties of returning from war. One goes off to war as part of a group yet returns as an individual. The sense of confusion, pain, grief and isolation from others that bears down relentlessly on the psyche and soul of a combat soldier has been well documented in literature, fiction and non-fiction alike.<sup>10</sup> The abuse of alcohol and drugs, legal and illicit, are some of the more ubiquitous ways in which soldiers have sought to numb the pain and confusion they feel. After a year or two, many are able to recover their equilibrium, often with the help of family members (Malantes 2011). But others remain lost over their lifetimes. A number of villagers noted that this had been the case for those who returned from Vietnam, and more recently for those returned from the Middle East war theatre.

Robert Jay Lifton's work on the Vietnam War analyzes one of the profound contradictions that many soldiers confront as they attempt to readjust to civilian life: the psychic numbing they experienced in the face of killing and death on the battlefield alongside lingering doubts about what they have seen or done (1992). Jonathan Shay (1994) argues that the betrayal of 'what's right' by military commanders – that is the very legitimacy of the war itself – underlies the etiology of the PTSD of returned soldiers. And because many soldiers are unable or unwilling to talk, their silence only reinforces their isolation, creating a vicious cycle.

Many US soldiers who return home from Iraq and Afghanistan, like their Vietnam veteran predecessors, have developed crippling psychological problems. Among the most common diagnoses given is PTSD, a cluster of debilitating symptoms including uncontrolled anger, nightmares, and depression. Moreover, many carry with them the dangerous reflexive habits of violence so necessary under combat conditions, but inappropriate and dangerous in their civilian lives and relationships (Coleman 2006; Grossman 1996; Malantes 2011). For example,

10. See for example Tim O'Brien (1973, 1990, 1994), Karl Malantes (2008 and 2011), Camilo Mejia (2007) and Kevin Powers (2012) for recent examples of war experiences and war injuries.

some recent studies have found a correlation between PTSD and interpersonal violence among Vietnam combat veterans, even some twenty five years later (Beckham et al. 1997; Sherman et al. 2006). Not all soldiers turn violent upon returning, but they all must take the brunt of trying to reconnect, to make sense of the moral compromises that combat demands, especially in wars in which there is no defined battlefield and everyone is a potential enemy.<sup>11</sup>

Stanford University scholars estimate that 40% of soldiers who fought in Iraq will suffer or have suffered from PTSD (Atkinson 2009). Numbers from Afghanistan are predicted to be similar. Researchers found that nearly half of those with PTSD will have suicidal thoughts. Nonetheless, seven out of ten soldiers who suffer from PTSD do not seek treatment.

Suicides of active duty soldiers are now numbered at an all time high, an average of eighteen per day, but the rates for veterans are much harder to determine. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, National Guard troops and reservists in general who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001-2005 made up more than half of the veterans who committed suicide after returning home (Defense Health Board 2007). In the Delta there have been two reported suicides of soldiers returned from the 'Global War on Terror.' Moreover, two of the primary factors that can inhibit veterans from obtaining needed behavioural and mental health services are access to care and willingness to seek care, mostly due to the stigma attached (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008; Schroder 2007).

To date, little ostensibly seems to have been done to address these problems in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta among the various health care agencies whose responsibility it is to make services readily available to assist soldiers in their reintegration (Bryson 2007; Green 2008; Green 2009).<sup>12</sup> And unlike the Vietnam War when veterans' distress was denied by the Department of Veterans Administration (VA), today the VA has recognized it, putting in place efficacious treatment regimes. But it also has a backlog of veterans who may wait up to a year to be deemed eligible for care. Year after year, VA officials promise that the problems of eligibility or disability will be addressed expeditiously. Yet, for a large number of veterans this promise is only partially realized (Kors 2008). In this context the lacklustre performance of the United States Veterans Affairs Administration, the United States Indian Health Service, State of Alaska, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Alaska Native Tribal Consortium, and Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation – key institutions responsible for Yup'ik soldiers' well being upon return from combat – to provide substantive assistance to facilitate reintegration is all the more egregious.

Although soldiers may apply for disability and receive some services locally that they are eligible for, most of the frontline care has been assigned to lo-

11. Jonathan Shay (1994) was one of the first to talk about moral injuries – wounds from having to do something, or failed to stop something that violates one's moral code, Shay argues that such acts torture the conscience, and are often expressed as shame, guilt and rage.

12. In an interview with me in 2007, Major General Craig E. Campbell, then Adjutant General of the Alaska National Guard, stated his firm commitment to providing whatever assistance was necessary to returning combat soldiers and their families to aid in their reintegration.

cal women who serve as behavioural health aides in rural communities: those with the least amount of professional training to deal with both emergency and chronic situations that these soldiers and their families face. The other option is to receive psychological help via telemedicine. Thus, one of the few possibilities for those who are in distress is go to the local health clinic to talk with a therapist via video and audio transmission. Both options however leave the soldier with little to hang onto and further burden the kin and communities where these soldiers live. As John Berger has noted despair is the emotion that often follows a sense of betrayal and in this sense US combat soldiers have been betrayed twice – once on the battlefield of America's illegitimate wars and again with an unrealized promise of benefits along with expedient and efficacious care.

Many soldiers, like Wayne, have decided that the path of least resistance is to struggle alone.

### **Conclusion: On Silence and Survival**

In the context of both their disposability and their desire to create a future for themselves, Yup'ik men become soldiers. The hollowing out of the cultural values and material practices that sustained Yup'ik people across generations has foreclosed most other local options for creating a future. Thus, military service becomes a possibility of resistance to their marginalization, as they are readily seduced by and simultaneously alienated from American culture.<sup>13</sup> To create a future Yup'ik men must do so as individuals within a context of ideal Western masculinity, defined by qualities of aggression, autonomy as individuals, and competitiveness. Yet, these very characteristics are antithetical to Yup'ik values of cooperation, generosity and relational space, where humans are part of, rather than dominate the natural world. These qualities are what for centuries have marked the ideal of male leadership and prowess on the tundra and among kin. Today all youth, and in this case in particular Yup'ik youth, must construct a future mostly circumscribed by racism, inequality and domination, and further reinforced by the relentless glorification of violence and aggression in popular culture. Whether the war on drugs, the war on terror or the war on poor, marginalized people, a social message is powerfully sent that violence as both means and ends is not only inevitable, but justified.

Yet, Yup'ik people have survived despite the systematic attempts to extinguish them. Subsistence food is still shared among them, caring for each other remains a powerful ethic and an allegiance to place and space on the tundra is held dear. People willingly give their time and resources to kin and community. They take pride in the revival of their dances, the stories and myths retold by elders that render history on their own terms and a language that remains vital even among the youngest of generations. Yup'ik struggles

13. See Gill (1997) for a discussion on citizenship and masculinity among indigenous youth in Bolivia. Also Bickford (2003) on the militarization of masculinity in the former German Democratic Republic.

however are centred within a social, economic and political context that continuously undermines their abilities to meet their collective obligations to each other. And while the everyday violence does not touch each individual and to some extent is idiosyncratic even in the cases of those that it does, yet chaos and marked vulnerability do circumscribe the social conditions in which the Yup'ik live. It is from this contradictory space – in which there exists a simultaneous hope of a future and an escape from a present that cannot sustain them – that young Yup'ik men enter into the military, many to combat in the service of 'American interests.'

Wilber Scott, a sociologist and Vietnam veteran, suggests (1993) that one of the most efficacious remedies in helping Vietnam vets return and readapt to civilian life was their involvement in political issues, most especially aggressive political participation in issues and concerns of their group. Perhaps some of the current returned soldiers from the Yukon-Kuskokwin Delta with their reinvigorated ties to one another may find similar spaces of possibility and of resistance, on their own terms within their own communities.

With fierce determination sustained by his dignity and his abiding hope for the young people of his community, a Yup'ik elder commented to me two summers ago, as he spoke about the current circumstances in his village, and the recent suicide of young Marine who was about to be redeployed to Iraq; 'we can still survive, we have already survived so much.'

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**Linda Green** is an associate professor of Anthropology and Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Arizona. Her research, though divergent in orientation, converges around a central theoretical problematic, namely how to think dialectically about complex issues of culture, community, violence and suffering. As such her work attempts to trace historical shifts in vulnerability, particularly among peoples across the Americas whose primary identity is indigenous. Dr. Green conducts field research in rural Guatemala, the US-Mexico border and rural Alaska. Her monograph *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* was published in 1999. *To Die in the Silence of History: Tuberculosis among Yup'ik Peoples of Southwestern Alaska* is in preparation. She has also authored: *The Fear of No Future: Guatemalan Migrants, Dispossession and Dislocation*, *Anthropologica* (2009); *A Wink and a Nod: Notes from the Arizona Borderlands*, *Dialectical Anthropology* (2008); *Notes on Mayan Youth and Rural Industrialization in Guatemala*, *Critique of Anthropology* (2003); *Structures of Power, Spaces of Violence: Everyday Life in Post-peace Accord in Rural Guatemala*, *Focaal* (2002).



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