Chapter 1
Learning from Extant Cultures of Peace

Douglas P. Fry, Bruce D. Bonta, and Karolina Baszarkiewicz

Introduction

Boulding (1978, p. 93) once quipped, “Anything that exists is possible.” The anthropological literature documents the existence of peaceful societies from around the globe. This chapter focuses on what extant peaceful societies can teach us about creating and maintaining “cultures of peace.” First, we will consider “peace systems.” Peace systems are comprised of neighboring societies that do not wage war on each other. A comparison of peace systems from Brazil’s Upper Xingu River basin, India’s Nilgiri and Wynaad Plauteaus, and the European Union (EU) suggests certain psychosocial features that help to prevent warfare and to promote cultures of peace within these peace systems. The cultures of peace elements with the most obvious relevance to peace systems include, for instance, social norms for peace education and socialization (including the promotion of values that explicitly shun intergroup violence), social cohesion and tolerance, inclusion of all groups in the system (human rights and equality values), a de-emphasis on security sought via military means, and in some cases, democratic participation, such as in the EU.

Second, we will consider some lessons for creating cultures of peace as derived from a study of internally peaceful societies. Several elements of the cultures of peace concept are germane to internally peaceful societies: societal norms favoring education and socialization for peace and the use of nonviolent dialogue and conflict resolution practices, valuing of women and nurturance, and the attainment of social cohesion via tolerance and understanding.

Peace Systems

It is often assumed that all societies engage in warfare (Fry 2004, 2006). However, this is simply not the case. Numerous non-warring societies exist (Fry 2006, 2007). Some neighboring societies have formed peace systems, meaning that they do not make war on each other (and sometimes not with outsiders either). For example, in addition to the examples to be presented in this chapter, the aboriginal inhabitants of the central Malaysia Peninsula, the Inuit of Greenland, and the
Montagnais, Naskapi, and East Main Cree bands of the Labrador Peninsula maintain peace systems.

**Brazil’s Upper Xingu River Basin Tribes**

In the 1880s, the first European to visit Brazil’s Upper Xingu River basin, the German explorer von den Steiner, found a cluster of tribes from four different language groups that comprised a peaceful social system (Gregor 1990). Correspondingly, Quain observed in the 1930s that these Brazilian peoples, although sometimes raided by outside tribes, did not wage war on each other (Murphy and Quain 1955). Gregor (1990, pp. 105–106), who has conducted fieldwork among these tribes over recent decades, summarizes:

> What is striking about the Xinguanos is that they are peaceful. During the one hundred years over which we have records there is no evidence of warfare among the Xingu groups. To be sure there have been instances of witchcraft killings across tribal lines, and rare defensive reactions to assaults from the war-like tribes outside the Xingu basin. But there is no tradition of violence among Xingu communities.

Gregor (1990) has lived among the Mehinaku and the Yawalapiti, visited most of the other Xingu tribes, and interviewed people from all of them. He concludes that the Xingu peace system rests on three pillars: intervillage trade, intermarriage, and ceremonial interconnections. The value system also plays an important role in preventing war.

Each tribe produces specialized items to trade with other groups (Gregor 1990; Murphy and Quain 1955; see also Fry 2006). The Wauja make pottery. The Kamayurá produce hardwood bows from *pau d’arco* trees that grow in their area. The Kalapalo and Kuikuru make highly valued shell necklaces and waistbands. The Yawalapití also create shell decorations. The Trumaí engage in salt production. Likewise, the Mehinaku make salt from water hyacinth plants, a trade specialty that requires a substantial labor input. Gregor (1990, pp. 111–112) emphasizes that:

> Trade means trust, since items offered may not be reciprocated for several months or more. Trade means mutual appreciation, since craft objects, unlike our manufactures, are an extension of the self which the maker hopes will be admired. Trade is a social relationship that is valued in and of itself, and is a conscious reason for maintaining monopolies. As one of my informants explained to me: ‘They have things that are really beautiful, and we have things that they like. And so we trade and that is good.’

Widespread intermarriage is a second contributor to peaceful, non-warring relations among upper Xingu peoples (Basso 1973; Fry 2006). The Yawalapití, for example, do not seek spouses from their own village, but instead marry among the Kamayurá, Kuikuru, Kalapalo, and Mehinaku. Among the Kuikuru, 30% of marriages are with persons from other tribes; among the Mehinaku, the figure is about 35%. One man expressed his intertribal identity by gesturing so as to divide his body down the middle, “This side…Mehinaku. That side is Waurá” (Gregor and Robarchek 1996, p. 173; NB: Waurá is an alternative spelling of Wauja). The presence