

The Other Within

ed. by Tiziano Tosolini



Asian Study Centre

Xaverian Missionaries – Japan

THE OTHER WITHIN

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Introduction

S. TARGA, F. TOSOLINI

As generally understood, alterity may evoke ideas of something outside, far away, different, beyond the border. The title of the book suggests instead that alterity is not a foreign but a pervasive and ubiquitous reality to be found within any supposedly homogeneous space, an unexpected guest entering the most private rooms of any home. The book, following an established tradition of the Asian Study Centre, deals with phenomena of alterity describing them in the context of five different countries of Asia: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan. Given the complexity of the subject under study, the authors of each of the five contributions exercised some element of choice by identifying and presenting only some telling occurrences of alterity at a rather macroscopic level, without any pretension of exhaustively dealing with the issue.

In the case of Bangladesh, among other possible choices, the Rishi have been singled out to epitomize a resilient kind of alterity which is not necessarily founded on ethnic or religious

differences but merely on socio-cultural stratification, a stratification which surprisingly transversally crosses all the otherwise waterproof religious boundaries.

Sorting out experiences of alterity in a much more complex and heterogeneous socio-cultural milieu such as that of Indonesia, three occurrences of otherness have been taken into consideration: the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, the Ahmadiyah religious movement and the Mentawai people. In all these cases the complex interactions which take place when ethnic and religious differences meet become visible.

As for Japan, behind the loudly stated ethnic and cultural homogeneity, the *burakumin*, the Ainu and the inhabitants of Okinawa are a constant reminder of the presence of alterities established on both ethnic (the Ainu and the Okinawa inhabitants) and socio-cultural divides (the *burakumin*).

In the Philippines, the dispossession and exploitation of the land of indigenous people and the concomitant phenomena are a major issue epitomizing the relationship between the dominant group and the marginalized tribal minorities, foreigners in their own land.

Finally, the history of Taiwan bears witness to a situation where centuries of contacts and ensuing conflicts among different peoples have not yet yielded a clear winner. Present day Taiwan is a place where no group is able to obtain a hegemonic position, also because of the shaky condition of Taiwan's sovereignty under the constant pressure of mainland China.

The analysis of the five papers suggests that reasons for the perception of alterity can be found at an ethno-environmental level (i.e. the aborigines who live their culture in a specific natural habitat), at a social level (when some groups are deemed ontologically other because of political and social expediency), at a religious level (different religions or movements inside the same religion) and when ethnic differences are played out in basically the same socio-cultural milieu (the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia).

The book does not pretend to exhaust all the reasons that lie behind the perception of alterity. Yet, the experiences presented and the ensuing comparisons may alert the readers to, and make them more aware of, the manifold presence of phenomena of alterity in the environment where they live. Indeed, the book raises a series of intriguing questions about the meaning and function of otherness in one's life and in the life of the group(s) to which one belongs.

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The Other Within

BANGLADESH

SERGIO TARGA

By South Asian standards Bangladesh is remarkable, among other things, for its homogeneous ethnic composition. As per 2009 estimations, out of a population of 156,051,000 people 97.7% are Bengali while only 1.9% is of tribal origin.¹ For a young state like Bangladesh this homogeneity was good news because it was thought to be somehow conducive to the creation of a unitary Bengali nation. Bengali language and culture became *de facto* and *de iure* the essential tools with which to build the new polity. Such was the impetus at nation building that right from the beginning the minimal and numerically insignificant presence of non-Bengali elements was denied altogether, their otherness refuted in favour of a newly fashioned, strong Bengali identity.² Yet the denied

1. See the “2010 Book of the Year,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 522. The missing 0.4% refers to the Bihari population, which was left behind after the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971.

2. Apparently Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, urged the Hill Tracts’ Peoples to become Bengali and to adopt Bangla as their own language.

otherness of the tribal element in the Bangladeshi polity is not the theme of this paper. The majority Bengali community itself is transversally crisscrossed by streams of “othernesses” that make it less than a homogeneous milieu of people.

Religious belonging, social ranking, historical background, economic standing etc. are some of the transversal divides around which identities are forged and fought out. Needless to say all this disturbs the imagined seamless and ideological unity of the Bengali community. This is why these discomfiting alterities are almost always denied in official parlance. While they do not exist juridically³ they nevertheless make their presence felt everyday. Indeed, these segments continuously negotiate their identity *vis-à-vis* each other and the central hegemonic idea of nation by shifting endlessly from self to otherness according to perceived needs of cultural affirmation, political expediency and opportunism.

They might not as yet enter the perspectives of policy making at the centre, but they are certainly a force to be reckoned with at the rural level. Former untouchable castes, trans-sexual communities, gypsy groups, religious minorities and the myriad of Hindu endogamous communities left over from a-not-so-distant past are some of the segments in mind here, some of the “othernesses” within and encompassed by the Self of the Bangladeshi state. Eventually Bengali nationalism, like any other for that matter, turns out to be no less an imagined essence than its shameless negation of tribal existence and identity.⁴

The present paper wishes to address the complexity surrounding the process leading to the identity formation of a particular Bengali segment of the population, the Rishi or contemptuously the Muchi, a former untouchable caste. This complexity will be briefly researched by foraging through history. Thus from a colonial comprehension we will go back to a pre-colonial understanding of what untouchability was, to eventually end up with modern and contemporary images of Rishi self-consciousness.

It will hopefully be shown how this disturbing Other negotiated its stand between shifting images of ascribed and self-ascribed identities. Steering clear of a certain type

See B.-H Chowdhury, *Building Lasting Peace: Issues of the Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord* (ACDIS Occasional Paper Series, August 2002), 7. At <<http://acdis.illinois.edu/assets/docs/264/BuildingLastingPeaceIssuesoftheImplementationoftheChittagongHillTractsAccord.pdf>>.

3. The constitution of Bangladesh states, *sic at simpliciter*, that all citizens are equal and that any discrimination because of religion, race, caste or gender is against its principles. See *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh* (Dhaka 2000). Art. 28. But is it sufficient to merely state that Bangladesh is free from discrimination of all sorts? Sometimes statements of principles help in hiding and silencing the existence of problems nobody dares to face. After all, caste does not disappear by simply ignoring it.

4. It may have been noticed that I ambiguously shift between “Bengali” and “Bangladeshi” quite freely. The reader should bear in mind that Bangladesh was born out of a secular struggle centred on Bengali language and culture. However, soon after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, Bangladesh slowly abandoned its secular stance and assumed instead an Islamic one. The shift from Bengali to Bangladeshi in government parlance may be seen as the attempt to overcome the ambiguities inscribed in Bengali nationalism by supplanting it with a Bangladeshi one, the latter being more centered on the Islamic identity of the majority of its population. For the purpose of this paper that distinction is deemed irrelevant.

of essentialist historiography, the paper will follow a phenomenological approach, and where possible, provide some theoretical insights as well.

THE RISHI: A FICTITIOUS ALTERITY

The Rishi-Muchi of Bangladesh are to be found all over the country even though their highest concentration is in the South-West in the present-day administrative Division of Khulna. Traditionally associated with leather work in all its phases, from skinning to the final manufacture of leather goods, the Rishi occupy perhaps the lowest rank in the Hindu social system. Former Untouchables, their association with dead animals, particularly the cow, has *de facto* and *de iure* sanctioned their permanent polluted and polluting condition. A tradition of thieving, poisoning of cows and eating of carrion has further marginalised a community which almost invariably is geographically located on river banks and low-lying areas outside the purview of indiscrete eyes. The manufacture of bamboo articles such as baskets together with playing music at religious festivals and marriages are some other very common activities of the Rishi people. It is also quite common to find Rishi in market places working either as cobblers or coolies or hairdressers. Unfortunately, these latter activities too command little respect in Bangladeshi society and so also contribute to perpetuating the Rishi liminal status *vis-à-vis* mainstream society.

While all the Rishi are Muchi the opposite is not true. In Bangladesh there is at least one group of Muchi who do not identify themselves as Rishi but as Ruidas or Robidas. The latter grouping is to be found in the North of the country and apparently ranks higher than the Rishi.⁵ Ruidas, Robidas, Raidas etc. are the variant spellings of the name of a fifteenth century Chamar saint and follower of Ramananda.⁶ Chamar is the name of yet another caste dealing with animal hides to be found all over Northern India and not very much different from the Rishi-Muchi. In the past Chamars and Rishi-Muchi have not always been clearly separated from each other. However, when in fact they have been, the Chamar caste occupied a lower social rank than the Muchi.⁷ It is a fact that today's Rishi do not identify with the Chamar caste. Indeed, Rishi themselves use the word *chamar* as a form of abuse and a swear word. Nevertheless, it remains historically problematic to pinpoint exactly the relationship between the Chamar and Rishi-Muchi.⁸

5. See P. Ghosh, *Banglar Jonojati* (Calcutta: Pustok Biponi, 2007), 214.

6. See G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, reprint 2000), 321. Also H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. 1, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretarial Press, 1898), 176.

7. Ibid., 321. Risley writes: "Rishi, the leather-dressing and cobbler caste of Bengal, by origin doubtless a branch of the Chamars, though its members now repudiate that name and claim to be a distinct caste of somewhat higher social position." H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Vol. 2, (Calcutta: Bengal Secretarial Press, 1898), 95. The explanation for the Rishi higher status is given in the fact that Chamars work the raw hides while Rishi manufacture leather goods. The preparatory work of Chamars is somehow more polluting than the end-work of the Rishi.

8. Even the more recent *Banglapedia* could not but reproduce the same old narrative: "Although Muchi and Chamar really are two different castes, they maintain a very intimate relationship." Gophran Pharuki, "Muchi" in *Banglapedia* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2006), vol. 8, 216 (In Bengali, my translation).

Even the British administrators turned anthropologists were in difficulty when attempting to sort out the question. Both Wise and Risley, for instance, seem to have considered the Rishi-Muchi as the “Bengali Chamars.”⁹ Wise in fact was convinced that the Rishi of Bengal were originally Chamars who had come from outside and who little by little differentiated from the latter due to their long residence in Bengal.¹⁰ As a matter of fact though, my field experience tells me that the Rishi are Bengali through and through. Nothing in their folklore, language or customs makes us think of a possible origination outside Bengal or, for that matter, outside of the North-Eastern part of the Indian Sub-Continent.¹¹ This is not so, instead, with the Robidas-Muchi, who among themselves speak a sort of broken Hindi, betraying their possible North Indian origin.¹²

The ambiguity about the relationship between the Muchi and Chamar was also reflected in the acts of the British administration. In the census of 1872 Chamar and Muchi were enumerated together. Inexplicably, in the census of 1881 they were listed separately, and then in the census of 1891 they were listed together once more.¹³ It is difficult to say what the administrative purposes behind this exercise at enumeration were. It is nevertheless clear that in so doing a particular identity was being imposed on a marginal population, without in the least caring about the self-ascribed identity of the Rishi-Muchi themselves.

The British administration and its ethnographers, strong in their knowledge-power, had the right to restructure and define caste borders and identities; a power extending far beyond the political realm, invading and manipulating the self-image of communities and cultures as well. Or rather, the power to manipulate self-images, identities and their ensuing cultures was the basis of British political power in India. This imposition was reflected in other official acts too. Cosimo Zene, in his extensive study on the Rishi community, found out that “in some *dalil* (land documents) collected in Dumuria, the Muchi-Rishi of that area were addressed officially as ‘Chamar’ in 1914 and 1917. Later their name changed to ‘Rishi’ and only recently the name used is that of ‘Das.’”¹⁴ Incidentally, the word *das* commonly means “servant,” “slave” in Bengali.

9. See C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 40.

10. See J. Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal* (London: Her Majesty's printer Harrison and Sons, 1883), 360.

11. To my knowledge, the Rishi-Muchi caste is known not only in Bangladesh but, as expected, in West Bengal also. Besides, Rishi-Muchi communities are recorded also in the states bordering Bengal, i.e. Assam, Meghalaya etc. See Office of the Registrar General, India, *Meghalaya: Data Highlight: The Scheduled Castes* (Census of India 2001). At <http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/scst/dh_sc_meghalaya.pdf>; *Assam: Data Highlight: The Scheduled Castes* (Census of India 2001). At <http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/scst/dh_sc_assam.pdf>.

12. See M. Das, personal communication, 30 May, 2010. The reference here was to a group of Robidas living in the districts of Joypurhat, Nilphamari, Dinajpur etc., in the north of Bangladesh.

13. See P. Ghosh, *Banglar Jonojati*, op. cit., 217. See also C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 40 note 6.

14. C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 40–1. See also A. Das, *Lancito Dalit Somaj* (Khulna: Paritran, 2008). Here it is reported that in the land survey of 1927 the word Rishi is not to be found. Instead the words “Chamar,” “Chormokar” and “Muchi” are found. Only in the land record of 1962 the previous designations disappear giving space to the title “Rishi.” It will be only in the 1988 record that “Rishi” will be done away with and replaced with the word “Das” (see 105).

In all this the Rishi-Muchi are remarkable for their absence. They are a pure object of administrative manipulation. Their otherness *vis-à-vis* the powers that be is pure fiction and simply the construction, invention and imagination of political expediency of British administrators first and of their learned Hindu informants afterwards.¹⁵ After all, the existence of an “identity-less” people is only the prelude to the existence of a “super-people” provided with a surplus of it in terms of history, tradition and culture. Yet the numbers of the Rishi-Muchi people were and still are consistent enough to be reckoned with. In the 1872 census, “Rishis are enrolled as Chamars, or Mochis, among the semi-Hinduized aborigines. In Bengal they number 393,490 persons, and are chiefly met with in the twenty-four Pergunnahs (*sic*), Burdwan, Nadiya, and Jessore, while in Dacca 24,063 are returned.”¹⁶

In the census of 1881, when the Rishi-Muchi were enumerated separately from the Chamars, they totalled, for Bengal, 325,676.¹⁷ In the 1891 census the Rishi-Muchi return for Bengal was of 404,194. In the 1901 census the figure for both Chamar and Muchis in Bengal was 548,913. In 1911 it was 591,786 and 569,966 in 1921 of which 417,594 Rishi-Muchi. In the 1931 census the Rishi-Muchi of Bengal numbered 414,291.¹⁸ These numbers of course must be evaluated carefully. Yet it is clear that despite a supposedly high birth rate the Rishi population did not increase accordingly. In 50 years (1881–1931) the Rishi increased only by 88,615 units, that is, a mere 0.54% per year. This certainly had to do with a high mortality rate of an extremely weak population, easily and oftentimes prey to natural disasters, epidemics and famine.

“The 1931 Census was the last officially to record the Muchi-Rishi presence in Bengal. In the later Censuses of 1941, 1951 and 1961, the Rishi have been recorded together with the other Scheduled Castes.”¹⁹ Besides, East Pakistan first and Bangladesh later were not in the least interested in such statistics and, to the best of my knowledge, to date there is no reliable and sure data to bank on. There does, however, exist a good—although conservative—estimate as far as the Muchi population of Bangladesh is concerned.²⁰ This refers

15. Generally speaking, census enumerators were chosen from the upper castes. There were in fact few eligible people coming from backward classes. These upper caste people often had biased or prejudiced views, if not outright contempt, for the low tiers of society who were often misrecognised and frustrated in their status claims etc. See S. Basu, “The Colonial State and the Indigenous Society: The Creation of the Rajbansi Identity in Bengal” in S. Bandyopadhyay, A. Dasgupta and W. van Schendel eds., *Bengal: Communities Development and States* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1995), 53–4.

16. J. Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*, op. cit., 360.

17. See C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 41, footnote 16.

18. All these numbers are taken in the main from the research of C. Zene, *ibid.*, 41–2.

19. *Ibid.*, 43, footnote 29. In the *Bangladesh District Gazetteers: Khulna* (Dacca: Bangladesh Government Press, 1978) it is reported that in the Khulna district (then including present day Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat districts) “the number of Scheduled Caste was 6,79,403 in 1961 and accounted for 27.75 per cent of the population. Their number was 6,68,373 or 32.20 per cent of the population in 1951”, 78. It is difficult to make out who these scheduled castes are. However, they might not necessarily include the Pods and Chandals (i.e. Namasudra) that are instead listed with the Hindu castes (see 80).

20. I suspect that the following estimates take into consideration not only the Rishi-Muchi but also the Robi-das-Muchi.

to the year 1975 and was put forward by Peter McNee, a Baptist missionary who carried out extensive research in Bangladesh. His calculations would put the total number of the Muchi at 256,009.²¹

Further and more recent (1981) local surveys would put the figure of the Muchi population in the former Khulna District at 42,000.²² This represents already about a 37% increase on the estimate of 5–6 years earlier by McNee.²³ Furthermore, another local survey carried out by Zene in 1989, in the same area surveyed by Lupi in 1981, found an increase of 9.4% on Lupi's figures as well.²⁴ As a matter of speculation, if we were to apply the nearly 46.4% increase on McNee's estimation (i.e. 256,009) as found in the figure referring to the old Khulna District, in 1989 we would obtain a Muchi population of 374,797.

I think that we would not be far from the truth if we were to estimate the present Muchi population of Bangladesh to at least 500,000. Indeed, this figure worked out on McNee's 1975 estimation, is still very conservative. First, McNee's estimation was based on the 1921 census figures, in which, besides the Muchis, also the Chamars were counted as 38,115. In all probability and for reasons I will try to expound on later, this number will be absorbed in the Muchi Caste. McNee indeed calculates the number of the Chamars in 1975 at 54,000,²⁵ but then fails to account for them. Secondly, the figure of 256,009 refers to 13 districts of Bangladesh out of 17. Lastly, more than 20 years separate the estimation of 374,797 to the present day. If we were to apply a conservative 8% increase²⁶ on a decadal base, we should add again about 60,000 units to the total.²⁷

For the time being we must of necessity content ourselves with these estimations in the wait for new surveys and research. Nowadays, however, as will become clearer later in the paper, "Dalit identity"²⁸ is attempting to emerge over and above the single identities of

21. Actually the figure given by McNee is 217,000; see P. McNee, *Crucial Issues in Bangladesh* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1976), 11. However, adding up the disaggregated numbers of the Muchi population as presented district wise in the Appendix B (179ff) the total Muchi population of the 13 districts given amounts to 256,009. Still more puzzling, Zene himself quoting McNee writes of 234,315 Muchi (C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 43).

22. P. Lupi, *Rishi Survey in Khulna and Satkhira* (Tala: unpublished manuscript, 1981 quoted in C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 43).

23. See P. McNee, *Crucial Issues in Bangladesh*, 222.

24. See C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 43, footnote 31.

25. P. McNee, *Crucial Issues in Bangladesh*, 9.

26. This is the actual growth rate by which Scheduled Castes increased in each of the two decades 1941–1961. See P. McNee, *ibid.*, 9.

27. It is said that because of the politics of partition, the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 and the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1975 many Hindus left the country in search of a better fortune in India. However, it is my contention that those who left Bangladesh belonged more to the High Caste Hindu population than to the Scheduled Caste people. The latter had nothing to lose remaining in Bangladesh, not so, perhaps, the more well-to-do among the caste Hindus.

28. The word "Dalit," popular and common in India, comes from Sanskrit and means "grounded," "suppressed," "crushed," or "broken to pieces." It was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the then "untouchable" castes. See the website of Paritran at <<http://dalitbangladesh.wordpress.com/dalit-2/>>.

former untouchable groups. It is estimated that in Bangladesh there are between 3.5 and 5.5 million Dalits or Scheduled Caste people, among which, of course, the Rishi-Muchi as well.²⁹ It remains to elaborate on the possible solution to the question of the relationship between the Rishi-Muchi and the Chamar. What at first may seem just an unimportant academic fascination with superfluous trifles might in fact turn out to be more revealing and important. The starting point is the conviction that “identity is usually grounded in difference, and built up through simultaneous constructions of externalized ‘Others.’”³⁰ These “others” are fictitious in the sense that they are posited only as props to the identity being built.

The basic identification of Rishi-Muchi with Chamar put forward by early British administrators and ethnographers does not necessarily respond to ethnic or anthropological queries. Instead, it builds on a particular conception of caste, politically useful to the imperial project being experimented. In fact “identities tend to homogenize differences,”³¹ and make them functional to a socio-political project. When Risley and Wise impose their own understanding on the Rishi-Muchi-Chamar identity, they are not only describing but also creating the object of their enquiry. We cannot forget that “classificatory devices... are not just innocent objective descriptions, but projects of specific groups at particular times for acting on social reality...”³² and in our case there were two interest groups behind the censuses, ethnographic researches and the spate of Indological studies favoured by the British Empire. On the one hand, there was a colonial attempt to comprehend Indian reality to better rule over it; on the other hand, there were the indigenous literati elites³³ who got the chance to recreate that same Indian reality to suit and support their own social status and claims. The end result was the creation of imagined historical identities of castes and communities in general, supported by the learned interpretations of obsolete scriptural notions of status and social ranking.³⁴ *Dharmasastras* after all are books on *dharma*, “whose primary object is to tell, not how things actually were, but how things ought to have been.”³⁵

Consequently, the knowledge of caste produced in this way was tainted in more than one respect. The irruption of colonial power on the scene emptied caste of an essential component, that is, political power. Deprived of it, caste became relegated to the realm of religion, transformed into an a-historical, unchangeable, immutable essence. It was assumed that caste represented an undifferentiated group of people, a sort of mono-

29. See IDS, *UPR Bangladesh 2009*. Pdf file, 2. At <www.ids.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old.../upr_Bangladesh.pdf>.

30. S. Sarkar, “Identity and Difference: Caste in the Formation of the Ideologies of Nationalism and Hindutva”, in S. Sarkar, *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 358. Original emphasis.

31. *Ibid.*, 358.

32. *Ibid.*, 368.

33. The informants already mentioned above.

34. See S. Basu, “The Colonial State and the Indigenous Society: The Creation of the Rajbansi Identity in Bengal”, *op. cit.*, 45.

35. S.V. Ketkar, *History of Caste in India* (First published in 1909. Reprint, Delhi: LPP, 2002), 124.

lith.³⁶ What is more, caste got entangled with racial explanations. Anthropometry was thus brought in to justify the Aryan and Dravidian divide within the Indian population. Racial explanations eventually came to justify and legitimise that superior races rule and inferior ones are ruled.³⁷ Obviously, those who had to pay the price of these attempts at social engineering were the members of low classes, who found themselves locked up in waterproof compartments called castes. And this at a time when the colonial regime by destroying the political and economic basis of the traditional caste system was contradictorily creating scope for an increased social mobility.³⁸ This mobility however was not an opportunity for the Rishi-Muchi or for other castes like them.³⁹

In short, what Risley and Wise, to name but a few, missed out in their disquisition or definition of the Rishi-Muchi-Chamar was what Bandyopadhyay calls “differentiation and transience” as applied to them or to any other caste. In fact “a caste was not (and is not) a homogeneous group with a given identity, nor were its relations with other castes and with the Hindu society in general ever static.”⁴⁰ What is more, caste was not the only source of identity for Indians. Religion, nationality, class belonging etc. all contributed, each in turn or in interrelation, to fashion and refashion identities. If all this is considered, it becomes fairly obvious that even an untouchable group like the Rishi-Muchi might come out with a more nuanced identity, as it will be the task of the rest of this paper to show.

THE RISHI: A COMPLEX IDENTITY

Wise writes: “Rishi and Mochi are synonyms of the same caste, but the members repudiate the name of Chamar. There can be no doubt, however, that they belong to the same race, although long residence in Bengal has altered them in several respects.”⁴¹ These three lines are pregnant with meaning.

36. See S. Bandyopadhyay, “Development, Differentiation and Caste: The Namasudra Movement in Bengal, 1872–1947,” in S. Bandyopadhyay, A. Dasgupta and W. van Schendel eds., *Bengal: Communities Development and States*, op. cit., 91.

37. It is interesting to notice the vehemence of a contemporary Indian pundit against the racial interpretation of caste: “The discovery, or rather the invention (for this is what we ought to call it) of racial lines in the present varna system of Hindu society, made by European scholars on the basis of Vedic literature, deserves severe condemnation...” in S.V. Ketkar, *History of Caste in India*, op. cit., 78, footnote 3.

38. See S. K. Sarkar, “Caste, Occupation and Social Mobility: A Study of the Kansaris in Colonial Bengal,” in S. Bandyopadhyay, A. Dasgupta and W. van Schendel eds., *Bengal: Communities Development and States*, op. cit., 66. For the increased mobility created by the colonial regime see also S. Bandyopadhyay, *ibid.*, 90.

39. In Bengal, these opportunities of upward mobility will be grabbed by castes like the Namasudra, the Rajbanshi and the Kansaris. The former two castes accompanied their claim to a more respectable place in society with a transition to more acceptable occupations, usually agricultural. The spread of literacy and education together with a better economic standing were the basis of many caste movements in Bengal. See S. Sarkar, “Caste, Occupation and Social Mobility: A Study of the Kansaris in Colonial Bengal,” op. cit., 377.

40. S. Bandyopadhyay, “Differentiation and Transience: History of Caste, Power and Identity in Bengal,” in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay ed., *Bengal Rethinking History* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 253.

41. J. Wise, *Notes on the Races, Castes and Trades of Eastern Bengal*, op. cit., 360.

First, we are told that “Rishi and Mochi” repudiate the name Chamar. I wonder why and how the Censuses of British India still reported the word Chamar. Obviously, if the Rishi-Muchi repudiated it and nevertheless we actually find it in the Censuses, this cannot but be the work of enumerators themselves. Secondly, the fact that Rishi-Muchi-Chamar all are involved with the same leather trade becomes the reason for ascribing them all to the same race. Occupation becomes the basis of ethnicity. The prejudice behind such a comprehension is explained by Risley himself: “A caste engaged in a filthy and menial occupation must on the whole have been recruited from among the non-Aryan races.”⁴²

Of course both Risley and Wise do notice differences among the members of this caste, but these are simply explained away either by referring to their long permanence in Bengal or by listing the subdivisions to be found within this caste.⁴³ After all, a caste was conceived as a homogeneous group of people and in our case the homogeneity of Rishi-Muchi-Chamar was provided and safeguarded by race. Accordingly, space and time could not essentially modify a caste’s constitution. In reality just a few kilometres from one Rishi village to another was sufficient to establish differences difficult to explain referring to a monolithic comprehension of caste.

Actually, and this was true not only for the Rishi-Muchi, social ranking, economic standing and their interrelationships with other communities varied quite a lot from place to place, so that, generally speaking, what was true of one Rishi village might not necessarily have been so of another. What is more, even within the same village community, many differences could be seen among its members. Often social transformation involved some Rishi families of one village and not others. Some families eventually abandoned their traditional occupation and took to other, more socially acceptable, professions etc. Changes were transversal to a community so that uneven transformations took place in the same environment. A degree of social mobility was indeed present even among the Rishi-Muchi of Bengal. Obviously, it was a controlled mobility, the mobility of a fish in a bucket: it may choose to swim at different depths, but cannot choose to go and swim in the ocean.⁴⁴ Unlike upper caste Hindus, the Rishi-Muchi like any other unclean untouchable group,⁴⁵ were allowed a sort of, I would say, downward mobility only.⁴⁶ And this might justify both similarities and differences among the Rishi-Muchi.

42. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, op. cit., Vol. 1, 176.

43. For this listing see P. Ghosh, *Banglar Jonojati*, op. cit., 212–14.

44. Risley’s comment on this is worth noticing: “By virtue of his occupation, his habits, and his traditional descent, the Chamar stands condemned to rank at the very bottom of the Hindu social system; and even the non-Aryan tribes who have of recent years sought admission into the Hindu communion are speedily promoted over his head.” H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, op. cit., Vol. 1, 180.

45. The distinction between *sat* and *asat shudras* is found in the *Brihaddharmapurana*, an *upapurana* dated to thirteen century Bengal. The *asat shudras* are those castes from which Brahmans and high caste people are forbidden to take water and food. See Raj Sekhar Basu, “Caste System and Untouchability.” In *Banglapedia* (Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka 2006). At <http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/C_0055.HTM>.

46. Zene would call this same process as “segmentation and internal divisions.” See C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 46.

The attempt at ameliorating one's own social standing produced, I think, differentiations among Rishi-Muchi themselves. Then as now, even though fading out at present, the Rishi-Muchi classified themselves into two main sub-castes called "*Barâ-bhâgiyâ* and *Chhota-bhâgiyâ*."⁴⁷ This terminology, far from indicating the proper name of a caste simply describes the changes and transformations undertaken by its members and was used by the Rishi-Muchi themselves.⁴⁸ I doubt that this distinction could have been accepted by caste Hindus, for whom the Rishi-Muchi did remain *ochut* or *asprissya*⁴⁹ in either of their two qualifications.

In Bengali, *boro beghi* means "belonging to the great part" while *choto beghi* means "belonging to the little part." The former sub-caste was made up of Rishi-Muchi who took to agriculture as their new profession; the latter instead comprised Rishi-Muchi who had maintained their traditional leather business and also the role of musicians at festivals and marriages. Obviously, the *Boro Beghi* ranked higher than the *Choto Beghi* on the social ladder. Apparently, these sub-castes were endogamous. Nowadays, only senior Rishi people know of these distinctions and, if asked, they invariably state that they belong to the *Boro Beghi* grouping.

The attempt at amelioration (i.e. sanskritisation or brahminisation process) produced other and further subdivisions as well. In the past, for instance, beyond the *boro* and *choto beghi*, there were also the *Bauni* and the *Nirbauni* Rishi. The word "*Baun*" was apparently a corrupted form of the word "Brahman," the members of the highest caste, and, specifically in this context, the priests. Those Rishi who had a priest officiating for them were reckoned socially higher in status than those without. The *Bauni* were again farther subdivided in *Nijbauni* and *Porbauni*: the former were those Rishi whose priest was taken from among themselves ("*nij*" is Bengali for "self"). The *Porbauni* were instead Rishi who availed themselves of the services of a priest coming from outside their group ("*por*" means "other"). The latter were the highest on the Rishi hierarchical ladder.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the Rishi could be hierarchically listed in this way.

Among the *Boro Beghi* the *Porbauni* are highest and are followed by the *Nijbauni*. Among the *choto beghi*, the *Nirbauni* are the lowest of all. Classifications were also born out of local conditions as well, thus subdivisions found in one place were not necessarily to be found in a different place. Zene, for instance, reports distinctions among the Rishi of Dumuria, in the Khulna district.

He speaks of three subdivisions: the *Bhadra Samaj*, the *Sidur Samaj* and the *Hogla*

47. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 96.

48. I happened to find out that the "*Barâ-bhâgiyâ* and *Chhota-bhâgiyâ*" classifications have been used for other castes as well. See H.H. Risley, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, 315; here it is said that the Hari, a sweeper caste of Bengal, among its subdivisions also has that of the *Barâ-bhâgiyâ* and *Madhya-bhâgiyâ* (i.e. "great and middle parts"). Similarly for the Kumhar of Bengal (the potters' caste): they are reported to maintain the *Barâ-bhâgiyâ* and *Chhota-bhâgiyâ* subdivisions (*ibid.*, 518).

49. These two words are Bengali for "untouchable."

50. For these distinctions and classifications see L. Paggi, *I Muchi di Khulna e Satkhira* (Khulna: unpublished manuscript, 1991), 13-4.

Samaj.⁵¹ “*Samaj*” is Bengali for community, group or society. “*Bhadra*,” meaning polite and educated, refers to the highest group in this Rishi hierarchy. These Rishi-Muchi have apparently mended their ways and try hard to conform to the social and religious rules of Hindu society. The *Sidur samaj* comes later in the hierarchy. It is so called because this grouping allows remarried widows, contrary to Hindu tradition, to wear the vermillion (i.e. *sidur*) on their forehead.

The *Hogla samaj* is the lowest grouping, uneducated, and exclusively engaged in traditional leather work. According to Zene both the *Sidur Samaj* and the *Hogla Samaj* (from the name of an aquatic grass) belong to the *choto beghi* while the *Bhadra samaj* to the *boro beghi*.⁵²

All these and other classifications,⁵³ fast becoming obsolete at present, must be properly understood. Often based on local conditions, they are not to be considered as fixed and universally recognised by the Rishi-Muchi themselves. On the contrary, the same Rishi group might be recognised as belonging to one subdivision by a group of Rishi and as belonging to a different one by another. Apparently, strategic considerations played a considerable role in this, what we might call, game of “hide and seek” of Rishi identity. In this game the actors are not the Rishi-Muchi alone but also the members of the majority community around them. I doubt that the latter cared or knew about the internal subdivisions of the Rishi. To them Rishi-Muchi-Chamar were always the contemptible neighbours to be maintained at a distance, no matter their efforts at sanskritisation. As for Risley and Wise, Rishi-Muchi-Chamar were just the same thing in virtue of their identical filthy work.

In reality things were and are more complicated. Beyond the ascribed identity of the “encompassing society,”⁵⁴ the Rishi conceived of themselves in differing ways and adapted themselves to different environments. The situation of today is no less complicated than it was in the past. Even at a quick glance it is evident that the Rishi-Muchi community in Bangladesh is quite variegated and far from homogenous. Despite their self-ascription of a same “Rishi” identity there is, for example, a very marked difference among the Rishi of Dumuria and Kesobpur upazilas and the Rishi farther South, of Paikgacha, Assassuni and Koyra upazilas. The latter would resemble more the Chamar stereotype, while the former would better identify with the *boro beghi-bhadra samaj* of which mention has been made above.

51. See C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 46. As far as these three subdivisions are concerned I rely in toto on Zene’s research.

52. Ibid., 48.

53. For example, Paggi Luigi speaks of the existence of a *Bhadra Kul* in the Rishi of the Chuknagar area. Chuknagar is about 15 Km to the West of Dumuria. *Kul* is Bengali for “family, hereditary group etc.” in L. Paggi, *I Muchi di Khulna e Satkhira*, op. cit., 64.

54. I have borrowed the expression from Asaduzzaman. While talking of the Dhaka Sweepers, he refers to the identity of *methors* given to the sweepers by the “encompassing society,” something refused by the sweepers themselves. This is similar to the Rishi’s refusal of the *chamar* identity! See A. Asaduzzaman, *The “Pariah” People* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2001), 3ff.

Geographically, the Rishi villages of the deep South are organised around no more than 20 families at a time, while the Rishi agglomerates of Dumuria-Kesobpur are much bigger, gathering no less than 80 families and more. This of course relates to the different economic structure of the two areas. The Rishi of the South are still predominantly engaged in the traditional leather work, so the diminished availability of cattle has determined the dispersal of Rishi families in small nucleuses distant about 10 Km from each other.

The Rishi to the North, instead, have generally abandoned their traditional occupation and taken to agriculture and other activities. Big concentrations of Rishi do not give rise to economic competition as it would instead in the South. The differences among the Rishi of the two geographical areas are such that at first sight these could be ascribed to a different ethnic background or provenience.⁵⁵ Yet, the two groups of Rishi do exchange brides and grooms. It is possible that geographic considerations and different economic opportunities in the two areas have determined different kinds of development. However, we have already mentioned above that in Bangladesh not all the Muchi recognise themselves as Rishi. The Robidas of West Bengal and Bangladesh are a case in point. Here, the different identity is however justified by a different ethnic background: in all probability at least some if not all of the Robidas of Bangladesh have migrated to their present Bangladeshi location from somewhere in North India. All things considered it remains possible, though improbable, to maintain that the Rishi-Muchi of Bangladesh may have originated from different ethnic backgrounds.

The Rishi-Muchi of Dhaka seem, for instance, to constitute a community quite different from the Rishi-Muchi of the Khulna Division. Even though nobody can tell for sure, it is apparent that the present Muchi of Dhaka come from a different place. They were very likely taken to Dhaka after the city was declared the capital of Bengal in 1608 at the time of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605–1627). The Muchi caste was one of the 12 service castes brought in to service the new capital.⁵⁶ To this day this community is organised around the *panchayat*, a social organisation still to be found in India, but obsolete in Bangladesh.

This *panchayat* is, of course, totally unknown to the Rishi-Muchi of Khulna. This indicates that the Rishi-Muchi of Dhaka come from outside of Bangladesh, perhaps from somewhere in present-day West Bengal.⁵⁷ In fact, while the term Muchi or Mochi is known all over North India (similarly the word Chamar), the word Rishi is specifically

55. Another striking difference worth mentioning is that the Rishi of the South have developed a sort of linguistic code, nearly a different language to protect themselves from external enemies. This linguistic code is totally unknown to the Rishi of Dumuria and Kesobpur. For a sample of words of this “code” see A. Das, *Lancito Dalit Somaj*, op. cit., 135–36.

56. See P. Saha and P. Rathindra Nath, *The Socio-Economic Situation of the Cobbler Community (an Untouchable Class of Our Society) in Dhaka City: An Overview* (Dhaka: Sharee, 2002), 3. At <<http://www.dalits.nl/pdf/Cobbler-Community.pdf>>.

57. I would not go too far away in looking for the place of origin of the Dhaka Rishi. The latter name in fact is known and used only in what used to be united Bengal and bordering areas.

used for the Muchi of Bengal. At least as far as Bengal is concerned, I would consider the Rishi identity as the specific and self-ascribed caste identity of the Muchi-Chamar of Bengal. It is this word Rishi that through the centuries has acquired hegemonic status over and above the terms Muchi-Chamar, at least in Rishi self-consciousness. This does not mean that Chamar and Rishi-Muchi belong to one and the same race; it may simply explain how it happened that Chamars completely disappeared from Bangladesh.⁵⁸ Very likely they started assuming the Rishi identity for the sake of sanskritisation. Eventually, in Bangladesh we come to deal with a fairly big Rishi community which is however far from homogeneous in its components.

To further enforce the Bengali origins of certainly the main bulk of the Rishi population⁵⁹ we may now go back to Risley. While describing the *Barâ-bhâgiyâ* and *Chhota-bhâgiyâ* sub-castes he says that the *Barâ-bhâgiyâ* "are again divided into Uttar-Rârhi and Dakin-Rârhi."⁶⁰ Apart from the fact that I have never come across such a subdivision, I do find it interesting that South and North Rârhi refer to an old geographical area located to the South-West of the Ganges. This area would certainly comprise parts of both West Bengal and Bangladesh, namely, parts of the present Khulna Division. This would also explain the reason for the high concentration of Rishi in the areas of what used to be the Central Provinces of united Bengal.⁶¹

THE RISHI: BETWEEN CONSENSUS AND REBELLION. A DISPUTED IDENTITY

It has been mentioned above that the Rishi as well as other unclean Untouchables were allowed only a sort of downward mobility. This statement now needs expanding. The relative social mobility which historically has been experienced by other castes and groups in Bengal, in practice has been denied to former Untouchables. It is the question of untouchability which must be dealt with now.

Untouchables are not a caste among the others, but are *avarna*, outcaste, and in this guise they should be approached. "We need to move 'beyond caste' in order to identify those human groups who are not even considered worthy to belong to the castes and are thus defined as 'Outcastes', and hence 'Untouchables.'"⁶² Their alterity should be taken

58. There are no Chamar left in today's Bangladesh, yet in the Census of 1921 we still had 38,115 listed Chamar. See P. McNee, *Crucial Issues in Bangladesh*, op. cit., 9.

59. See also B. M. Khalekuzzaman, *Tala Upazila Itihash o Oitijyo* (Dhaka: Ittadi Grontho Prokash, 2006). The author here speaks of the Rishi of Tala upazila as the "original inhabitants of the area" (37).

60. H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, op. cit., Vol. 2, 96.

61. "In the 1891 Census 404,194 Muchi-Rishi were registered in Bengal, of whom a good seventy per cent (285,141) were living in the districts of Bardwan, twenty-four Parganas, Nadia, Jessore and Khulna..." in C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 41.

62. C. Zene, "Self-consciousness of the *Dalits* as 'Subalterns': Reflections on Gramsci in South Asia," forthcoming, 14.

seriously even in academic discourses, and not just considered a fiction of an all absorbing and devouring Self, be it the Brahman, the nation or the state.⁶³

At this point, a number of considerations should be acknowledged.⁶⁴ First, it must be said that untouchability has a history, so that the untouchability of, say, the *dharmasutras* (from 500 to 300 BC) is not the same as that of later *dharmasastras*.⁶⁵ Second, “untouchability should be understood as a complex of several avoidances of which untouchability has merely become the collective label.”⁶⁶ Third, untouchability is here understood as pollution and inauspiciousness, something which can ruin the system of polycentric and isomorphic *loci* of lordships, by spoiling the capacity and competency (*adhikara*) of human agents to properly act in their respective domains. The caste system is in fact a chain of lordships where “groups and domains overlap rather than order themselves into separated hierarchical levels.”⁶⁷

In this chain everyone is a master and owner of something, starting from the king all the way down to the *candala*. *Candala* is the collective name used in *dharmasastras* to refer to Untouchables indistinctively. Interestingly, attempts to identify these *candalas* with particular ethnic groups have failed. Apparently, ethnicity was just one, and perhaps, not the most important, characteristic of untouchable identity. In this respect *dharmasastras* distinguish three types of *candalas*: the savage *candala* of the forest; the domesticated type of *candala* living in the outskirts of villages and cities; and the *candala* result of *pratiloma* sexual relations (hypogamous relations) between a Brahmin female and a Sudra male. Despite this classification, however, there was no real ontological difference between the three types. Eventually the concept of *varnasamskara* (i.e. caste miscegenation) will be employed to justify the existence of the *candala* in all its forms.

63. In this sense I do not share Dumont and Moffat’s characterisations of caste as the total system of Indian culture and history. Untouchability is indeed related to caste but not just as the “puppet” of Brahmins’ absolute purity. See L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste system and Its Implications* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). M. Moffatt, *An Untouchable Community in South India: Structure and Consensus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

64. I am aware that what follows is an agglutination of statements which would need expansion and justification. I regret that the limited scopes of this paper make that impossible.

65. The oldest *dharmasastras* such as the Laws of Manu date from somewhere between 200 BC and 200 AD. Late *dharmasastras* are dated from 700 to 1000 AD.

66. M. Aktor, *Ritualization and Segregation* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, unpublished PhD dissertation, 1997), 90. This same author has listed 16 avoidances which make up the complex of untouchability as found in *dharmasastras*: 1. *Abhojyannatva*: one whose food should not be eaten; 2. *Adrisyatva*: one who should not be looked at; 3. *Agamyatva*: one who should not be approached (sexually); 4. *Apapatratva*: one with whom a person should not exchange food vessels; 5. *Apratigrihyatva*: one from whom nothing should be received (gifts, material goods etc.); 6. *Asambhaasyatva*: one with whom conversation should be avoided; 7. *Asprisyatva* 1: one who is untouchable in terms of direct touch; 8. *Asprisyatva* 2: one who is untouchable in terms of contact through some material; 9. *Asprisyatva* 3: one who is untouchable in terms of closeness (without contact); 10. *Asravyatva*: one whose voice should not be heard; 11. *Bahyatva*: one who is spatially segregate; 12. *Karmanadhikara*: having no rights to perform rituals; 13. Being one with whom there should not be any company; 14. Being one who should wear the marks of identity; 15. Being one with whom contact is unwanted in ritual contexts; 16. Being one with whom contact through water should be avoided (121).

67. Ibid., 221. The whole question of polycentrism, units of lordship, *adhikaras* etc, has been elaborated by R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Ethnic groups, occupational ones and the fruit of *pratiloma* relationship were all explained with reference to the same *varnasamskara* device. The contemporary *pratiloma* relationship functioned as a template for the past of both ethnic and occupational groups, whose “ancient origins” were pinpointed in past *pratiloma* relationships.⁶⁸ In so doing the legislators guaranteed ethnic groups a degree of integration by relating them to the caste society in the expanding polity and at the same time, by negating the existence of a fifth *varna*,⁶⁹ they safeguarded tradition by upholding its four *varna* model. But what was untouchability?

“Untouchability of caste cannot be isolated from the untouchability which is practised in the home and in other spheres of life.”⁷⁰ Aktor insists in saying that, before ascribing the untouchability complex to particular groups of people, rules of untouchability already existed and were practised within the domestic domain. Menstruating women, childbirth and death were critical and temporary events which needed to be segregated (i.e. made untouchable) to guarantee the prosperity and wellbeing of the household and of its prime agent, the twice-born male householder.⁷¹ These rules of segregation in time came to be transferred permanently to demographic groups. At this social level the *patitas*⁷² and particularly the *candalas* came to represent the permanent Untouchables.

While the *patita*, similar to a menstruating woman, needed to be segregated because it disrupted the social system by breaking its rules, the untouchability or segregation of a *candala* was in order to secure its services. “This is connected with the fact that the *candala* is the only one from whom the special tasks of handling and removing impurities can be demanded. In order to prevent such a labour force from getting absorbed in the society by upward mobility it has to be segregated.”⁷³ And this was done through a number of “economic” restrictions. *Candalas* could own only dogs and donkeys; land was not within the domain of their *adhikara* neither was movable wealth or raw materials. Basically, they were condemned to a life of mere subsistence.⁷⁴

Yet, the segregation of untouchable groups was not and could not be absolute. *Dharmasastras* are replete with pragmatic injunctions on what to do not to avoid *candalas* but what to do to be purified after having had contacts with them.⁷⁵ “The concern was about safeguarding and regulating a necessary interaction, not about excluding it.”⁷⁶ In fact segregation or untouchability was the result of negotiation between two opposite interests: the necessity of interrelation on the one hand and on the other the necessity of

68. See M. Aktor, *Ritualization and Segregation*, op. cit., 96–104.

69. W. Doniger with K. B. Smith, *The Laws of Manu* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 104.

70. M. Aktor, *Ritualization and Segregation*, op. cit., 3.

71. Ibid., 88.

72. *Patita* is Sanskrit for “fallen.” It indicates former caste people who lost their caste membership because of particular unlawful behaviour (*adharma*).

73. M. Aktor, *Ritualization and Segregation*, op. cit., 89.

74. See Ibid., 177–81.

75. See Ibid., 89.

76. Ibid., 85.

their segregation proper. It must be emphasized that “the *candala* is the only one within the scope of daily interactions who is untouchable by birth, that is permanently... He alone is fully productive in his state of untouchability in contrast to menstruating and confined women, mourners and criminals. These two aspects, permanent untouchability and productivity, are connected.”⁷⁷

When untouchability eventually became an inborn quality,⁷⁸ segregation was professionalized and an exploitable labour force was thus made available to lords of different sorts. In fact not all *candalas* could be “appointed” as official removers of pollution. Most of them were condemned to look for alternative employment thus swelling the groups of daily labourers.⁷⁹ During early medieval times this exploitable labour force proliferated with the proliferation of untouchable groups. The washerman, leather worker, dancer, reed and bamboo worker, fisherman, barber etc. (also known as *antyajas*, “persons of low descent”) were added in late *smritis* to the list of untouchable groups. The traditional occupation of *candalas* included hunting, working on the cremation grounds, executing criminals, guarding frontiers and performing some sort of police work in villages.⁸⁰

Later (i.e. 700 to 1000 AD) *candalas* come to farther specialise and enlarge their professions, and this very likely in connection with a stronger hold of Hindu politics on their agrarian societies, in the context of a feudal setup.⁸¹ As already hinted at above, medieval Indian politics relied on a chain of lordships which linked together the householder on the one hand and the godhead on the other, passing through the earthly king. Each domain had his lord, so the household had the householder, the kingdom had its king, and the universe its god. In each domain the capacity for proper action or agency was ontologically linked to ritual and to the segregation of impurity and inauspiciousness naturally threatening each and every domain.⁸²

Rituals ensured each lord and master the segregation of what was “untouchable.” This was the menstruating woman for the household, the *candala* for the village and the *mleccha* (the foreigner) for the country. Dominance was built at each and every level of this isomorphic parallelism through a segregating ritualization. Untouchability had to be

77. Ibid., 90.

78. Theories about the origins of untouchability are many. Yet, these narratives have several arguments in common: Untouchables come from segments of aboriginal populations which got integrated into an expanding Aryan society. Sharma in particular dates the beginning of untouchable groups from before the Mauryan period (320 BC) and links their origin to social developments and economic changes. See R. S. Sharma, *Pracin Bharote Shudro* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagci & Company, 1999), 133–34.

79. Quigley distinguishes between “ritual function” and “actual occupation.” Most Untouchables cannot sustain their life only by carrying out their ritual function, so they are forced to take up various kinds of unskilled labour. See D. Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 10.

80. See M. Aktor, *Ritualization and Segregation*, op. cit., 106.

81. See R. S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995), 49–61.

82. For this kind of understanding see R. Inden, “The Ceremony of the Great Gift (*Mahadana*): Structure and Historical Context in Indian Ritual and Society,” in *Asie du Sud: Tradition et Changements*, (Colloques Internationaux du C.N.R.S., 582, 1979), 131–36.

removed and Untouchables were invented to accomplish that. Untouchables, by removing the impurity fatal to the *adhikaras* of human agents and their domains were necessary to the performance of proper rituals, the latter being themselves constitutive of both households and polities. Sad as this may be, untouchability became rooted in an ontology which sacrificed portions of mankind to the benefit of the rest. In this necessary sacrifice lies the ambiguity of Untouchables' identity *vis-à-vis* that same society which exists through them but nevertheless is forced to deny them.

Ambiguity is indeed what first comes to mind while studying Rishi identity. Ruud writes on a Muchi community in West Bengal: "They have been accorded the lowest position in the ritual hierarchy, as the most polluted and polluting of all Hindu castes. Their services, however, are vital to the ritual cleanliness of others, a fact that makes their position 'ambiguous' in that they are indispensable for Hindu society but shunned, drummers whose presence is required yet dangerous and polluting."⁸³ The fact is that this ambiguity is mostly deduced by external observers, be they historians or anthropologists alike, on the basis of theories of caste and untouchability like the one proposed above. But do Rishi actually interpret themselves "ambiguously"? If so, do they manage to exploit their ambiguous stance to their own benefit?

Obviously the discourse must necessarily be nuanced and differentiated. My understanding is that a homogeneous Rishi caste does not exist if not as a figment of anthropologists' imaginations. As a matter of speculation, I would dare say that the Rishi community of Dhaka might somehow be aware of their liminal position and take advantage of it. The existence of the *panchayat* organization among them, in fact, makes me think of a strong or relatively strong societal cohesion among them which has its historical roots in the fact that these Rishi were imported to service the new capital. Their "employment" by the then city authorities made them aware of their worth and importance. To use Quigley's words, their "ritual function and actual occupation" coincided.

The Rishi of Dhaka, that is, had the chance to be part of the system of overlapping lordships, had their own domain, as low as that may have been, and thus were able to develop a competence (*adhikara*) and an identity. This apparently did not take place with the Rishi of the Khulna Division.⁸⁴ The latter, being autochthonous to the land they still inhabit, never entered the purview of the system or if they did, they did so only marginally. Yet, this does not imply that the Rishi of Khulna were spared the crushing experience of being considered untouchable. On the contrary, they were indeed deemed to be so but without at the same time being able to "reap" as it were, the sort of beneficial side-effects of being Untouchables employed in their ritual function. In other words, the Rishi of Khulna possibly did not experience the necessity of their "existence" to the system of lordships

83. A. E. Ruud, "The Indian Hierarchy: Culture, Ideology and Consciousness in Bengali Village Politics," in *Modern Asian Studies* 1999, 33/3: 708.

84. This is an idea which needs further research to be verified and substantiated. I am employing it here to try and make sense of the striking heterogeneity to be found among the Rishi.

that Hindu, and not only Hindu, polities were.⁸⁵ In fact, what is today's South-Western Bangladesh has always been marginal to the influence of Brahmanic culture. This area always remained a periphery even when empire and kingdoms of a certain consistency were created.⁸⁶ In a way, the Rishi of Khulna might indeed and properly be represented as the true *avarna*, one of the truly undigested alterities of the chain of lordships that the caste system is. By not entering en masse into the service of lords of different kinds and natures, the Rishi of Khulna maintained a certain degree of freedom which however at the same time confined them to the periphery of society.

As already noted, it is not accidental that most Rishi hamlets in the Khulna area, particularly in its Southern-most portions, are located in low lying areas, river banks etc., that is, in places where open social intercourse was and is prohibitive. Here it becomes difficult indeed to see how the necessary interconnection with main stream society gets conjugated with the similar but opposite necessity of segregation. What appears here is just outright segregation with no concern whatsoever for integration, partial as it may have been.

The absence of a political referent, however, has not forbidden the Rishi from absorbing the religious and moral codes attached to the system. What is more, the absence of the political dimension, which the caste system was born to foster and reproduce, caused further segregation both physically, as already seen in the pattern of Rishi settlements, and psychologically. In fact, the Rishi employed in their ascribed ritual function could find a scope in their utilization for this function; but the Rishi beyond that utilization were just useless, good for nothing, untouchable scum. In my view this situation has impeded the development of a unitary identity, be it of caste or of anything else.

Unlike other similar untouchable communities of Bangladesh, say for instance, the Sweeper or Horijon, the Rishi of Khulna do not maintain a strong community identity and when possible they silently ignore their social origins. Untouchability for the Rishi of Khulna not only brought poverty and unspeakable debasement but it also managed to destroy their human dignity, producing a fragmented identity, in their never ending struggle for survival. "It is precisely the complex, degraded and contradictory experience of Untouchables that has made it so difficult for outside observers to epitomise their situation."⁸⁷ Interestingly, the partition of the Indian Sub-Continent in 1947 first, and the

85. The caste system as a "chain of lordships" was the template for state formation in early medieval times at least in North India. This means that the religious affiliation of monarchs and their families did not really matter. Take for instance the Pala kings of Bengal and Bihar: they were fervent Buddhist yet they built an empire lasting 400 years by employing *dharmā* and castes, as their building tools. See S. Targa, *The Pala Kingdom: Rethinking Lordship in Early Medieval North Eastern India* (London: University of London, unpublished MPhil dissertation, 1999).

86. See for instance the kingdom of Jessore headed by Maharaja Pratapaditya (1561–1611). Besides, the whole area now falling within the Khulna district is known for its many and ancient Buddhist relics. This once again points out the low degree of Brahminisation of the whole area. See S. C. Mitra, *Jessore-Khulnar Itihash* (Khulna: Rupantar, 2001, reprint).

87. O. Mendelson & M. Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.

independence of Bangladesh in 1971 later, did not produce any visible change in the self-ascribed identity of the Khulna Rishi. For many of them the secular stance first and the Islamic one later of the new Bangladeshi state became a concrete possibility to forget one's past and make others forget about it by losing one's own traces in the anonymity of the new polity.⁸⁸ Indeed, the fragmentation experienced previously continued also in the new political realities, where the Rishi, at most, in the new democratic environment, tried to make capital out of their newly discovered numerical strength.

The Rishi of Khulna may not have developed a strong caste identity, they may even have produced fragmented identities, nevertheless, these and other outcomes flowing from their known status of untouchability may simply be strategies employed to accomplish just one thing: survival. For instance, in the relationships between the Rishi and their non-Rishi influential neighbors, the former employ subservient strategies taking full advantage of the system which has enslaved them. "By enacting the subservient role with the required deferential manners they can to an extent assert their interests."⁸⁹

What Rishi do in fact is to play out the role of the weak, defenceless, poor and ignorant person. Touching the feet, he will address him or her using kinship terms which would further enhance the status of the interlocutor but consequently diminish that of the Rishi person. Playing on his own dependence on the interlocutor, he will evoke some kind of *rajadharma*, according to which the Rishi acknowledging his servant status appeals to his lord's patronage. This reciprocation used to be the unwritten right of servants who could meekly request its actuation. Now, this raises questions. Is this Rishi behaviour the result of the hegemonic dominance of caste culture? Does this Rishi behaviour challenge or reinforce this cultural construct? Or to put it in a different way, are subaltern Rishi autonomous enough from the system to be capable of challenging it?

These questions are relevant because they directly impact on the issue of Rishi identity. Indeed, if the Rishi manage to cut out an autonomous space from where to challenge the *status quo* of their exploitation, it may be said that their otherness is safeguarded from the all-absorbing hegemonic self of caste culture. This could be the case if what I said above about the Rishi being the true *avarna* turns out to be correct. Nevertheless, "the notion of untouchability is only meaningful inside common domains. There is no point in segregating people as untouchable if they are not part of such domains."⁹⁰

Although the Rishi of Khulna may not have experienced the political dimension linked to their subordination to the degree to which their fellow caste men and women in Dhaka have done, nevertheless, they have indeed absorbed the culture leading to that subordination. "That subordinate groups themselves participate in the creation of their

88. This Rishi strategy might have been helped by the attitude of the new polity as well. It may therefore also be true for Bangladesh what Oliver Mendelson and Marika Vicziany referred to as "contemporary India's ubiquitous avoidance strategy" towards its former untouchable communities. See *ibid.*, 51.

89. A. E. Ruud, "The Indian Hierarchy: Culture, Ideology and Consciousness in Bengali Village Politics," *op. cit.*, 712.

90. M. Aktor, *Ritualization and Segregation*, *op. cit.*, 191.

own environment and to an extent both create and recreate the values of their own subordination, should not surprise us. But such a process should always be seen as a process, as dynamic and open to contestation and change.”⁹¹ After all, hegemony is always the result of an unstable mix of both consent and coercion. Rishi actions should be thus seen in the dialectic ambiguity of hegemonic knowledges and practices.

As Zene reminds us, what appears to be “replication” of and “consensus” on dominant cultural models, in the Rishi agency must be seen in relation to coercion. “‘Replication’ and ‘consensus’ need to be analysed in conjunction with ‘coercion,’ since ‘the fear of coercion may itself be persuasive in inducing belief.’ In this sense, ‘replication and consensus,’ rather than being interpreted as ambiguity, can be understood as counter-hegemony—or as a ‘war of position’—often taking the appearance of fragmentary tactics of the weak, or the ‘art of pulling tricks.’”⁹²

What often has appeared to social workers, government officers, missionaries etc. as the Rishi’s shameless “opportunistic attitude” may just turn out to be a very well thought out strategy of contestation and survival, the “trace” of a Rishi otherness not fully absorbed, assimilated or manipulated by the dominant cultural Self.⁹³

It should be clear by now that a kind of “black and white” answer to the above questions is not possible. Apart from what has already been said, we must recognize that we are dealing here with layers of overlapping consciousness producing what I called fragmented Rishi identity, or perhaps better, composite Rishi identities. The horizontal heterogeneity of the Rishi of Bangladesh is thus met with the vertical heterogeneity of their multiple and often contradictory layers of consciousness. Eventually, with Gramsci we cannot but recognize that Rishi action, like their history, is “necessarily fragmented and episodic.” The more fragmented it is, the lower the stage in the process of becoming subaltern.⁹⁴

THE RISHI: BETWEEN NEW RELIGIOUS AND/OR POLITICAL IDENTITIES

From the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day, two relatively new trends can be observed in the fragmented world of Rishi composite identities. Surprisingly, Rishi abject subalternity has not managed to completely stifle Rishi aspiration to freedom, and

91. A. E. Ruud, “The Indian Hierarchy: Culture, Ideology and Consciousness in Bengali Village Politics,” op. cit., 726.

92. C. Zene, “Myth, Identity and Belonging: The Rishi of Bengal-Bangladesh,” in *Religion*, 2007, 37: 265. Original emphasis. Oliver Mendelson and Marika Vicziany, referring to Scott’s research in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), comment: “Resistance is not an all-or-nothing state to be discovered only in rebellion or other brazenly assertive behaviour,” in O. Mendelson & M. Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, op. cit., 51.

93. For the whole question regarding Rishi autonomous space *vis-à-vis* dominant culture see C. Zene, “Self-consciousness of the *Dalits* as ‘Subalterns’: Reflections on Gramsci in South Asia,” forthcoming.

94. The word subaltern is here used in a technical sense. It refers to its conceptual elaboration in the Subaltern Studies collective as started and led by R. Guha. Gramsci’s quotation is taken from C. Zene, “Self-consciousness of the *Dalits* as ‘Subalterns’: Reflections on Gramsci in South Asia,” forthcoming, op. cit., 4ff.

despite the heavy cultural burdens brought to bear on the Rishi's self-consciousness, the latter continue their perhaps fragmented, disorganised and sometimes aimless search for their stolen human dignity.

These attempts have impinged directly on the religious and political domains, the spaces in which Rishi identities, it appears, are being renegotiated and bargained for. While in India for many former Untouchables, the two domains converged and represented two different moments of the same struggle for a self-ascribed identity,⁹⁵ in Bangladesh the struggle for a new religious identity has historically preceded the political one. Only recently, although still partially, the two domains in which Rishi identity is being negotiated, appear to have somehow converged.⁹⁶

The Rishi's attempts to reconstruct a new religious identity for themselves, as might be expected, followed different paths and modalities. For many, it was just a question of revisiting their own Hindu tradition. Sanskritisation and the attempt to assume the respectability related to the main tradition of Hinduism was one of these. Traditionally, the Rishi follow a semi-Hinduised religion in which place of honour is apportioned to the god Shiva and the goddess Kali. There exists somehow a sort of parallelism between the liminality of these two godheads and the Rishi themselves. Sanskritisation for many Rishi has thus meant the assumption of a Vaisnava leaning in their religiosity, where this time Khrishna, Vishnu, Rama etc. are the principal godheads. For many others again, the reconstruction of a religious identity has meant to look for it in altogether different religious traditions, be they Islam, Buddhism or Christianity.

As far as Bangladesh is concerned, the majority of Rishi who followed this path basically opted for Christianity, even though here and there it is known of individuals converting to Islam as well.⁹⁷ It is difficult to say nowadays how many Rishi became members of the different churches. As of June 1975, McNee calculated that the Christian Rishi were 2.96% of the total Rishi population.⁹⁸ We might perhaps be dealing today with something like 8% of the total Rishi population. Be this as it may, the real question behind this, which many Western observers would simply call religious tinkering, is why the Rishi feel it necessary, even before advancing political recriminations or demands, to formulate their identity in a religious garb or language. Clearly, the question does not refer to the success or failure of the Rishi who have turned to religion to recover their lost humanity. On

95. The reference here is to Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The latter on 14 October, 1956 as a last effort to fight against untouchability converted to Buddhism together with around 500,000 of his supporters. However, in a speech at a massive Mahar Conference held on the 31st of May, 1936 in Mumbai, Ambedkar had already stated that "Equality can be achieved only when inter-caste dinners and marriages take place. This means that the Chaturvarnya must be abolished and the Brahminic religion must be uprooted. Is it possible? And if not, will it be wise to expect equality of treatment by remaining in the Hindu religion?" in *Jaybheem.com* at <<http://www.jaibheem.com>>.

96. The statement refers to the Chuknagar experience as it is being conducted. Both religious and political aspects are pursued, so that a possible conversion to Christianity is accompanied by pride in one's own tradition. As a result, new Christians from the Rishi group do not change their surname anymore.

97. These individual conversions are often linked to and forced by marriage with Muslim girls.

98. P. McNee, *Crucial Issues in Bangladesh*, op. cit., 13.

the other hand, to refer to the opportunist attitude of the Rishi who changed religion in exchange for economic advantages does not seem to do justice to most Rishi people who, as a matter of fact, did not change their religious tradition but only refined it, as it were.

The question indeed is previous to all that and, I think, its answer should be looked for in the culture of subordination of the Rishi. Zene's insight is important here: "If 'religious language' is reserved by hegemonic powers to maintain the subaltern's subjugation, then it seems logical... that subalterns use this very language to re-affirm themselves and their human dignity."⁹⁹ By definition, untouchability, beyond political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions, has indeed a religious justification. Rishi often may not be aware of the former aspects of their segregation, nevertheless they are undoubtedly well aware of the religious underpinning of their condition. This comes as no surprise at all; this awareness is in fact something induced, part and parcel of the dominant cultural model. Thus, when the Rishi manifest themselves in a reformed religious language, they are simply trying to utilise those same religious categories this time employed to their rescue.

In short, *dharma*, being part of the hegemonic cultural universe of the Indian Sub-Continent, is here appropriated by the Rishi who, in so doing, declare their non-segregated status *vis-à-vis* divine beings and other human beings as well. Of course, there remains a degree of ambiguity, that is, it remains to see how "new" the "new religious garb" of Rishi identity really is. "It would be surprising indeed if poor and exploited Untouchables were able to make a clean intellectual and psychological break from this system on the ground that it condemned them to a clearly subordinate position."¹⁰⁰ The Rishi who turn to the Vaisnava flavour of Hinduism often do so to recover a lost higher status and to make amends for their present situation held to have originated in the first place from Rishi bad behaviour or actions (*kukarma* or *akarma*).¹⁰¹ In this sense, Vaisnavism does nothing new but reinforce the *status quo*, helping the Rishi only to rise a bit higher on the social ladder.

Similarly, the outright change of religious allegiance of many Rishi does not necessarily mean that the new religion is assumed as a conscious affirmation of personal dignity, above and beyond a religion which enslaved them. On the contrary, often it seems that the new Christian religion becomes an excuse for the Rishi to lose and to cause to lose their own historical traces and thus forget their own background of provenience as something which they are not proud of and feel ashamed to speak about. The habit of changing surnames on becoming Christians bears this point out clearly.

99. C. Zene, "Self-consciousness of the *Dalits* as 'Subalterns': Reflections on Gramsci in South Asia," cit., 16.

100. O. Mendelson & M. Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, op. cit., 20.

101. It is characteristic of Vaisnava Rishi to abandon their old leather trade, assume vegetarianism as a new philosophy of life and lead a more sober, cleaner and purer existence. In this paper I do not intend dealing with the Myths of origin ascribed to the Rishi. However, I am aware that this literature offers an interesting perspective on the Rishi and their identity. Zene has extensively dealt with this subject. See C. Zene, "Myth, Identity and Belonging: The Rishi of Bengal-Bangladesh," op. cit., 257–81; C. Zene, *The Rishi of Bangladesh*, op. cit., 454–59; L. Paggi, *I Muchi di Khulna e Satkhira*, op. cit., 8.

This general attitude of the Rishi admittedly seems quite striking if compared with, say, the attitude of the Dhaka Sweepers. “What appears to be common among both categories of ‘converts’ (i.e. Vaisnava and Christians, ed.) and most of the *Telugu* non-converts, is that they reject the ideas of *karma* and *dharma*, purity and pollution as being of divine or cosmological origin,”¹⁰² and moreover “the religious values... of migrated Sweepers in general, and the converts in particular, in fact oppose that of the Brahmans or higher caste Hindus.”¹⁰³ This does not appear to be certainly the case for the majority of Rishi in the Khulna Division, even though some of them, converted or not, may indeed harbour different religious ideas, more similar to those expressed by the Dhaka Sweepers. We cannot forget the fact, as seen above, of the composite and multilayered Rishi consciousness. The Rishi are not a monolithic, homogeneous bloc; their consciousness about being a community often does not go beyond the borders of their own village, let alone their consciousness of being a “caste.” A fragmented consciousness is what we confront even in the religious field so that sometimes what it is true for one Rishi village may not be so for another. However, despite the necessarily different explanations behind Rishi “conversions” it remains true in every case that “conversion” is a way to *paritran* or salvation, in whatever guise that may be conceived.

What has just been said of the Rishi’s dealings with the religious domain is only a defective facsimile of Rishi political self-consciousness. As expected, even in the political domain the Rishi do not present a unified history but a myriad of localised, particular stories. But before dealing with this important last issue, we should go back to the beginnings of Untouchables’ political consciousness.

The post-colonial and post-structural critique of Indian scholarship has somehow highlighted the fact that caste and conversely untouchability have been created or invented basically by the British administrators turned scholars. The excessive and undue weight given to caste in Indian civilisation has produced an essentialised conception of things Indian in which Indians themselves have been robbed of their own agency.¹⁰⁴ The Census became the vehicle and tool of much of British colonial scholarship. Indeed, the colonial power invented caste in the sense that it detached the political and economic aspects behind it, reducing caste to the well known dichotomous contraposition of purity and pollution. In fact the colonial power replaced the Indian polity with its own brand of colonial state by detaching political lordship from the essential ingredients of caste constitution. Caste eventually turned out to be only a religious device, devoid of political dimensions, going through history without being influenced by it.

I am not really interested here in the critique and counter critique of Indian historiography. My point in mentioning this colonial history is that Untouchables were not

102. A. Asaduzzaman, *The “Pariah” People*, op. cit., 178.

103. *Ibid.*, 185.

104. Many authors subscribe to this brand of thought. See N. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); R. Inden, *Imagining India*, op. cit.

invented out of nothing by the British. They indeed existed much earlier. But the British invented the Untouchables in the sense that they gave them an all India perspective and constituted them as a new political “other” to be reckoned with.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Indian Untouchables got the chance of creating a new identity cutting across caste barriers and in theory embracing all of India. The British administrative practice of the census accomplished this and provided the impetus for what would become the start of a possibly new and unified untouchable history. After the 1931 census, the Untouchables became in fact the “exterior castes” acquiring thus a socio-political place in the then polity and, possibly, in all the polities to come. “The British had provided the instruments with which the Untouchables could assert themselves as a political collectivity, rather than merely pressing their moral worth as individuals.”¹⁰⁵ And this was fully exploited by Baba Saheb Ambedkar in his fight to obtain a separate electorate for Indian Untouchables in the 1930s.¹⁰⁶ This fascinating history is what lies behind the political cries of today’s Rishi of Bangladesh.

To the best of my knowledge, during the Indian liberation movement, the Rishi did not get involved with the politics of untouchability as propounded by Baba Saheb Ambedkar. From the little I know on the subject, the Rishi participated in the liberation movement on the side of caste Hindus, supporting the communal organisations and movements of the *Hindu Maha Sabha*, the *Sanghatan* and the *Suddhi*,¹⁰⁷ and thus forgetting, not unexpectedly from what we already know, to reclaim for themselves a separate identity. It will take another fifty years and more for the Rishi to start maturing and nurturing something which might lead to a separate political identity.

At least for the Rishi people of the areas comprising Dumuria (Khulna), Tala (Satkhira) and Kesobpur (Jessore), which we may consider the Rishi heartland, political developments were determined or at least favoured by the presence of a Catholic Mission in Chuknagar,¹⁰⁸ the latter being strategically located right in the middle of the three upazilas just mentioned. These developments, always ambiguous and fragmentary, went through a process of self acknowledgement and of community identity formation to eventually end up, always ambiguously and tentatively in the transversal creation of a Dalit identity, above and beyond their own proper group of belonging.

In all probability the Rishi’s initial political steps find a first big manifestation in the Rishi *Somabesh* (i.e. Rishi Gathering) organised from 1985. This first gathering was held in Laksmampur (Tala, Satkhira) under no specific banner. The leader of this very first gather-

105. O. Mendelson & M. Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*, op. cit., 29.

106. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) also affectionately called “Baba Saheb” was the unchallenged leader of Untouchables during the liberation movement in India. He is still looked upon by Untouchables everywhere as their leader and inspiration. An untouchable himself (a Mahar by caste) he was the chief architect of the Indian constitution.

107. This is what appears from the Jesuits’ Diaries of the Satkhira mission. See A. Germano ed., *The Starting of the Mission in the Diaries of the Jesuit Fathers (1918–1947)*, (Khulna: unpublished manuscript, 1998), 4 Volumes.

108. Fr. Luigi Paggi S.x. started the Chuknagar mission in the spring of 1980.

ing was Gour Das, called Gour Master because of his being a teacher.¹⁰⁹ The second Rishi *Somabesh* was held in Noapara (Tala, Satkhira) on 21 March 1998, under the leadership of Parittran. The date is meaningful in that it is the International Anti-Discrimination Day. This second *somabesh* was officially named “Dalit-Antyaj Jonogosthir Rally O Maha Somabesh” (i.e. Rally and Great Gathering of the Dalit-Antyaj people). The third Rishi *Somabesh* was held the same year on 10 December, on the International Human Rights Day, this time organised by the teachers of the Tuition Programme in Chuknagar. The last Rishi *Somabesh* will then be held again in Chuknagar the following year on the same occasion of 10 December, under the banner of the *Antyaj Jonogosthir Adhikar Bastobayon Parishad* (The Committee for the Realisation of Antyaj People’s Rights).

The 1998 and 1999 Rishi *Somabesh* managed to stir up great enthusiasm among the Rishi, who, for the first time gathered in public places, shouting fearlessly and proudly their own Rishi identity and venting their desires for human recognition and dignity. Behind this activism, a number of organisations were quite responsive, at least providing much needed financial assistance: Uttaran first and Bhumij later, two local non-Rishi NGOs provided help in this. It is difficult to say how far these organisations were sincere in their effort to sympathise with the Rishi.¹¹⁰ Yet, their presence, at least in the beginning, helped protect the Rishi movement still in its infancy.¹¹¹

It has certainly been noticed that from the second Rishi *Somabesh* of 1998 a different nomenclature was being employed, perhaps the signal of a shift in the consciousness of those Rishi youth. The word Rishi, the proper name of a former untouchable group, was being replaced by two words: *dalit* and *antyaj*. These words of Sanskrit origins referred collectively to all untouchable groups taken in their globality.¹¹² In the 1999 *somabesh* the old Rishi name will be once again deployed: apparently, the fact that basically only Rishi participated in the gatherings caused the reversion to the old name. It should also be noted that in 1998 two other gatherings had been organised. The first centred on Parittran and the second revolved around the Chuknagar Mission. Despite the fact that the participants in both gatherings were the same as were the organisers and all were or had been

109. This first meeting, under the name of Rishi *Sommilon* (i.e. gathering) (1985), was a bit *sui generis*. It was first of all a small gathering which was organised for two basic reasons. The first was to counteract a Protestant church which at the time was entering the Rishi village of Laksmanpur disrupting the social cohesion of the Rishi group. Gour Master wanted to show that the problems of the Rishi could not be solved employing or deploying new religious allegiances. Fr. Luigi Paggi was invited to the meeting to show the Protestants a different way to deal with the Rishi community. The second reason was to protest Muslim misbehaviour and offences towards Gour Master himself while acting as Chairman of a Caritas project (the building of a road). Luigi Paggi, personal communication, 15 June, 2010.

110. The fact that both Uttaran and Bhumij, particularly the latter, depended on Fr. Luigi Paggi for the provision of some foreign funds, casts a shadow on the sincerity of their helping hand.

111. It must be mentioned that the Rishi involved in the movement have always been suspicious of the true intentions of external players, fearing the age-old experience of Rishi being manipulated by others, always objects and never subjects of their own lives.

112. *Antyaj* literally means those who are last in the caste system.

pupils of the same Chuknagar Mission school, from the beginning of the Rishi movement a sort of competition developed among the Rishi youth as to who was to lead.

This internal leadership struggle has been the cause for the little progress made in Rishi emancipation up to the present day. Considering then that Parittran organised its gathering nearly always on 21 March, while the Chuknagar teachers chose instead 10 December, might point to the different emphasis laid on the course of action to be undertaken by the two different leaderships: directly polemical and political in the case of Parittran, more sociological and culturally oriented in the case of the Chuknagar group.

These gatherings were obviously the end result of a process which had started much earlier. The backbone of the Rishi movement which reached its peak at the end of the '90s was the Tuition Programme sustained by the Chuknagar Mission but carried out by mostly Rishi youngsters for Rishi youngsters. The programme targeted school-going Rishi boys and girls and provided them with much needed educational support.¹¹³ The educational scope of the programme, based on two-hours of teaching per day in schools located in Rishi villages around Chuknagar, was accompanied by awareness inputs on hygiene, cleanliness, human dignity, gender equity etc.

Almost unnoticed, on 21 March 1997, *Parittran* (i.e. Salvation, Freedom) was founded by a group of students coming out of the Tuition Programme. Importantly, Parittran was the brainchild of Rishi and non-Rishi students of Laksmanpur in the Tala Upazila.¹¹⁴ Their general aim as it appears from Parittran's bylaws is: "To arouse and awaken the Dalit groups' (also know (*sic*) as outcaste or untouchable groups) own awareness and strength; to develop their financial and social resources so that they may empower themselves; to help them eradicate caste and gender discriminations and the exploitation which comes with them; to start a social revolution to achieve a free and equal society where dalits enjoy their citizens' rights."¹¹⁵ Similar to Parittran, in those years other Rishi NGOs saw the light of day, once again signalling a new organisational strength never known before by the Rishi and coming out of a new awareness and identity. Dalit, born in 1998, was one of these.

Both Parittran and Dalit have originated from missionary environs and influences. However, while Parittran was the result of local developments and initiatives, Dalit was directly engineered from above by a number of missionaries, who until recently used to maintain a heavy stake in its operations. Despite the fact that Dalit was already in existence during the momentous years of the Rishi *Somabesh*, it never took active part in their inspiration or organisation.¹¹⁶ From the beginning Dalit, having access to large amounts

113. "Salvation through education" was Fr. Luigi Paggi's motto. See L. Paggi, *I Muchi di Khulna e Satkhira*, op. cit., 31.

114. Interestingly, the founder and director of Parittran, Milon Das, is the son of the Gour Master who organised the very first Rishi gathering in 1985.

115. *Constitution of Parittran*. (Laksmanpur: unpublished manuscript, 1993), Art. 7.2.

116. This obviously points to the fact that among the missionaries there existed different views on how to tackle the Rishi question.

of money because of its connection with missionaries, oriented its activities towards providing services to Rishi communities in particular. Parittran instead, always in dire financial straits, from the beginning assumed a political slant and its work impacted directly on human rights, caste discrimination etc. Needless to say, the late addition of Dalit augmented the competition among the different Rishi leaderships and consequently the struggle among them.

The last Rishi *Somabesh* in 1999 was organised by the usual Rishi students but this time under the name of *Antyaj Jonogosthir Adhikar Bastobayon Parishad* (The Committee for the Realisation of Antyaj People's Rights). The word *Antyaj* first used by Parittran in the 1998 *somabesh* was becoming fashionable, and rightly so. A Bengali word of Sanskrit origin, *antyaj*, in the minds of those youth was meant to signify not just one group but all former untouchable groups, even though at this time this was only a utopian dream. As a matter of fact only Rishi and very few Behara¹¹⁷ participated in these meetings. The initial *Antyaj Jonogosthir Adhikar Bastobayon Parishad* born in Chuknagar, was short lived and practically quite ineffective. On paper at least, the Parishad remained for a number of years, it managed also to organise a couple of meetings, but eventually it disappeared.¹¹⁸ However, the idea it represented remained and was taken up by Parittran which between 2001 and 2002 established the Antyaj Parishad with branches in 11 upazilas.¹¹⁹

These branches of the Antyaj Parishad, apart from the initial enthusiasm of the first months, never became operative, and in effect remained only on paper. Yet, it is noticeable that despite the fact that all these *parishads* were completely and only constituted by Rishi, they did not drop the *antyaj* appellation. Secondly, the creation of *parishads* in areas decisively outside the limits of the Chuknagar Mission and of its influence signaled the attainment of a degree of maturity and autonomy of the movement.

Contemporary to this geographical expansion another kind of expansion must be highlighted. Parittran while enlarging its constituency at the same time successfully engaged in a wider dialogue with members of the civil society in Dhaka. The start of such dialogue can be fixed to 9 September 2003, when Parittran representatives met Meghna Guhathakurta, at the time lecturer in the Dhaka University and director of RIB (i.e. Research Initiative Bangladesh) in Jessore. The new connections, originating from this latter and eventful encounter, involved eminent jurists, professors, social workers, human rights activists and politicians. These all helped the Rishi movement come out of

117. The Behara are a former Hindu caste converted to Islam whose traditional work was to bear the palanquin at ceremonies. Even to this day in Bangladesh, despite their Islamic identity, they are disparaged and shunned by main-stream society.

118. This disappearance did not mean the end of the Chuknagar Mission and of its influence on things Rishi. As a matter of fact, the teachers of the Tuition Programme have continued to mark, year after year, the 10th of December and the 21st of March as meaningful moments of Rishi self-awareness. Besides, the Tuition Programme continues to be a factory of Rishi leadership.

119. Monirampur (Jessore); Kesobpur (Jessore); Dumuria (Khulna); Paikgacha (Khulna); Tala (Satkhira); Kolaroa (Satkhira); Satkhira Sadar; Asasuni (Satkhira); Kaligonj (Satkhira); Debhata (Satkhira); Shamnagar (Satkhira). See the letter of Milon Das to Achinto Saha, director of Bhumij, 22 October, 2008.

its infancy and parochialism and assume a national outlook. Little by little it was being realised that the fight for the human rights of the Antyaj Jonogosthi was not just an internal question of the Rishi themselves but of all the citizens of a more just and equitable Bangladesh.

To date, the climax of the dialogue with the civil society of the country was reached on the occasion of the Anti-Discrimination Day, on 21 March 2008, in Tala, when the Dalit Somabesh organised jointly by Parittran and the Antyaj Parishad went off very successfully. The *somabesh* was attended by Dr. Kamal Hussein, writer of the Constitution of Bangladesh and jurist of international fame.¹²⁰

The intensification of connections locally with more and more Rishi hamlets and nationally with more and more people and organisations gave rise to the idea to constitute a national platform from where to vent Antyaj Jonogosthi claims. The idea became concrete in April 2008 when, with the support of the Nagorik Uddyag of Zakir Hussein in Dhaka, a national convention of former untouchable groups was called. The result of two days of discussions (21–22 April) was the creation of the BDERM (i.e. The Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement) which gained immediate affiliation with the IDSN (i.e. The International Dalit Solidarity Network). This national convention was attended by several groups of former Untouchables, among whom on the one hand the Rishi and Sweepers and on the other the Namasudras and other “clean” groups. Worthy of notice was the discussion centred on the term “Dalit.”

While the Rishi strongly pushed forward their agreement to use the word, not so the Sweepers who instead proposed the use of the word *Horijon*, of Gandhian extraction.¹²¹ Eventually a compromise was reached in the BDERM formulation where “excluded rights” basically meant the Sweepers. Unfortunately, this meeting which should have been a major break-through in the struggle for human recognition of former untouchable populations turned out instead to be a nightmare. Soon after the creation of the BDERM, Nagorik Uddyag and its director forcefully took over the newly formed institution and manipulated it to their own advantage. When the Rishi and Sweepers leadership in the BDERM refused to be just puppets in the hands of the Nagorik Uddyag, they were unlawfully thrown out of the BDERM—by now the personal belonging of Zakir Hussein. The latter held new elections and the new BDERM leadership was chosen from the quiescent Namasudra leadership.

120. This gathering of 2–3 thousand Rishi people was actually held on the 29 March because on the 21 the eminent guest had a previous engagement.

121. The term *Horijon* (people of God, Vishnu) was introduced by Mahatma Gandhi to indicate so called Untouchable castes. However the term was basically rejected by Dalits themselves on the basis of two considerations. The first: the term *Horijon*, apart from its patronizing flavour, is a religious one which has its tradition and meaning within Hinduism. The second: traditionally *Horijons* in South India were the sons and daughters born in Hindu temples, out of sacred prostitution, their mothers being the so called *devadashi*, or servants of the deity. In fact in Bangladesh *Horijon* does not indicate outcaste groups in general but has become instead the name of one such group, the Sweepers or, contemptuously, the *Methors*. See the website of Parittran at <<http://dalitbangladesh.wordpress.com/dalit-2/>>.

The IDSN was informed of these events but it refused to take any step whatsoever, choosing to go ahead with its dealings with the BDERM, by now emptied of its true Dalit component. Both the Rishi and the Sweepers in a last ditch effort to re-appropriate the BDERM held an election on 5 September 2009, where people from the two communities were elected as officials. Unfortunately, even this last attempt was not successful, and the BDERM now goes on its own way representing Dalits who refuse to be represented by it. In this respect Zene's words are quite telling: "These groups just as other subalterns, are exposed to manipulation by unscrupulous 'entrepreneurs'—the 'jackals of development'—who see them as exploitable assets on the international market."¹²²

The whole experience linked to the "still birth" of the BDERM was not however entirely negative. First, the word Dalit was now accepted as the new (at least for Bangladesh) proper name for the Antyaj Jonogosthi; it got currency and a sort of validation through its use in the media. Second, although the national convention organised by the Nagorik Uddyag revealed the great fractures between the different former untouchable communities, it also helped establish a good relationship between the Rishi and the Sweeper leaderships, which to date is holding up well and remains pregnant with possible future developments. Third, the Rishi, at least, further realised that their own integration depends on them and not on external players whoever they may be. The Rishi's age old fear of outside manipulation has once again been warranted. Besides, the events related to the BDERM showed clearly that not all "friends" out there in Dhaka were ready to stand by the Rishi and the Sweepers at the cost of ruining traditional and long standing friendships with "fellow civil society members" such as Zakir Hussein.

Contemporary to the developments related to the BDERM fiasco, Parittran was engaging once again in the construction of a different kind of network. On 6–7 March 2009, during a national convention jointly organised by Parittran and the Antyaj Parishad, with the financial support of the Manusher Jonno Foundation, in Jessore, it was unanimously decided to change the name from Antyaj Parishad to Bangladesh Dalit Parishad. It was then also decided to extend the new Parishad's operations to all the districts of the Khulna Division. This was successfully carried out within a year from the convention held in Jessore. The new BDP like the old Antyaj Parishad basically gathers its membership from the Rishi community which for the first time in its long but mostly uncharted history may start developing a meaningful concept of group identity.¹²³

The brief reconstruction of "political" events which led the Rishi to first identify with the term "Antyaj" and then eventually with the term "Dalit" may perhaps coincide with the phases of Rishi identity formation, from ascribed to self-ascribed, the description of Rishi as passive agents to Rishi as active ones. However, it must not be forgotten that

122. C. Zene "Self-consciousness of the *Dalits* as 'Subalterns': Reflections on Gramsci in South Asia," op. cit., 22.

123. The BDP gathers Rishi representatives from all the districts of the Khulna Division, the reputed heartland of Rishi in Bangladesh. To my knowledge, this is the very first time that, say, Rishi of Satkhira (South) were able to forge and entertain a relationship with Rishi of Kustia (North).

self-awareness is not distributed in equal measure throughout the Rishi population of Bangladesh. Community identity formation is a continuous but uneven process.

What we have been describing above eventually boils down to elite consciousness, the very refined yet very circumscribed consciousness of a few Rishi, the vanguard of the Rishi movement. Nothing wrong with this if this enlightened Rishi elite is aware of the tasks ahead. The caste movement of the Namasudra in nineteenth century Bengal can teach quite a lot to the Rishi leadership of today.

First, Rishi leaders must be aware that a successful Dalit movement can be stirred up only when economic ambition and protest against oppression embodied by two distinct sections (viz. the elite leadership and the masses) of the same Rishi population meet. Only then the community's boundaries get sharper.¹²⁴

Second, leaders alone cannot do much, the mass is necessary. The Namasudra movement, for example, was already dying out by the '30s for the simple fact that its leadership got detached from the Namasudra peasantry and their aspirations. The former became Calcutta based and enmeshed with constitutional politics which had very little to do with the Namasudra masses.¹²⁵ Rishi leadership risks something similar if Dhaka becomes the centre of their interests forgetting the real problems the Rishi back in the villages face every day.

Third, the integration of Namasudra leadership with the politics of the Congress from 1937 eventually culminated in the dissolution of a separate identity for the Namasudra. In the 1946 election, in fact, they disappeared completely as a separate entity.¹²⁶ The Rishi might get help from whoever is ready to give it, but they must be aware of the political risk of being co-opted and absorbed by political parties.

Fourth, the Namasudra movement eventually fragmented into at least two factions.¹²⁷ This is a real risk and one already encountered by the Rishi movement as well. The present situation of competition, distrust and enmity between Dalit and Paritran is a bad omen for possible future developments.

Obviously, all that shines is not always gold, nevertheless, even the Rishi have come a long way in the attempt to understand themselves and the world around them. "Delhi is still very far,"¹²⁸ but from Candal to Chamar to Muchi to Rishi to Antyaj and finally to Dalit a long way has indeed been walked, a long walk only to announce that Rishi too are human beings.¹²⁹

124. See S. Bandyopadhyay, "Development, Differentiation and Caste: The Namasudra Movement in Bengal, 1872–1947," *op. cit.*, 92.

125. *Ibid.*, 103.

126. *Ibid.*, 106–9.

127. *Ibid.*, 103.

128. This is my translation of a Bengali proverb which says: "*Dilli bohu dur*." It is used to say that, despite much effort, something is still very far from being accomplished.

129. C. Zene, "We too are Humans (*Amrao je manus!*). The Rishis' Struggle for Human Identity" (*soas Working Papers in the Study of Religions*, 2000), 69–98.

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INDONESIA

MATTEO REBECCHI

Numbering thousands of islands spreading along its enormous extension, and geographically positioned at a crossroads of important commercial routes, since ancient times the Indonesian Archipelago has been a conglomerate of diversities, a mosaic composed of an immense amount of ethnic groups, cultures and beliefs. At present, the variegated composition of races and cultures visible in the capital city of Jakarta, which represents the cultural intersection of all the components of Indonesian society, mirrors the plurality of cultures living in the Archipelago. This diversification characterizes the religious world too, which is made up of an infinite number of traditional beliefs that coexist with the great monotheistic religions. However, the Javanese (the most numerous and influential ethnic group present in the Archipelago), and Islam (which amounts to more than 85% of the Indonesian population) are the most conspicuous elements of this multicolored cultural and religious scenario.

The variegated composition of the Indonesian people has often

been characterized by the pacific coexistence of the differences within society. Harmony in relationships is an important value in Asian cultures, and Indonesia is no exception. However, such peaceful togetherness has not always been accomplished: both interethnic and interreligious conflicts have occurred in the history of the country, and are still a current threat, showing that harmony among differences is a hard task to achieve. Moreover, the strong dominance of some groups over others has produced discrimination, exploitation and intolerance, undermining the unity of the Nation.

While attempting to study the reality of alterity within Indonesian society, it is obviously impossible to reach a complete understanding of the marginal groups present in the country. For this reason, we will choose only three of them, which can give us an overall view of the minority phenomenon, both from the ethnic and religious perspective.

The first one is the Chinese, a consistent ethnic group, which has a strong influence on Indonesian culture, politics and economy, despite being considered “foreign” and not wholly integrated in the Indonesian world.

The second one is the Ahmadiyah, a movement which struggles for Islamic renewal, but which is also persecuted and stigmatized as “heretic” by some Islamic fundamentalist fringes.

The third one is the ethnic group of the Mentawaians, which represents one of the best examples of the populations that colonized the Archipelago in ancient times, a beautiful culture that, unfortunately, is on the verge of disappearing.

ETHNIC CHINESE

It is believed that, since the twelfth century, some Chinese communities were already present in the Indonesian Archipelago as the result of migrations which never stopped during the centuries, and which followed two main routes: through the Philippines, down to Moluccas, Borneo and Sulawesi; and through Vietnam-Malaysia and Singapore, down to Sumatra-Java and Borneo. In 1293, some 20,000 soldiers were sent to Java by the Mongol Emperor against King Kartanegara and some of the troops did not return home because they found a new life in Indonesia. Later, between 1405 and 1433, several expeditions led by Admiral Zheng He visited Java and gave rise to new commercial relationships between China and Java in the trading of pepper, clove, mace, sandalwood and other products. Since then, commerce continued to flourish, except for a period of time between 1450 and 1567, due to the policy of the Ming which attempted to reduce private trades in the area.¹

1. Some historical data can be found in J. Suhandinata, *WNI Keturunan Tionghoa dalam Stabilitas Ekonomi dan Politik Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009), 21–150; M. G. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia* (Jakarta, Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008), 3–8. Some recent archeological discoveries, such as a sunk boat transporting Chinese ceramics found in the Java Sea some years ago, demonstrate that commercial links between China and Indonesian Archipelago were already established in the tenth century. See “Belanja ‘harta karun’ dari Sriwijaya,” *Koran Tempo*, May 7, 2010, 4.

Initially, the Chinese immigrants were soldiers or traders, and in some areas also farmers, mainly men. Those who settled down in the Archipelago married Indonesian women, produced a Creole population, the so-called *peranakan*, which was easily assimilated, and lost their Chinese identity in the context of the local culture. Later, new migrations of whole families gave birth to Chinese colonies, the so called *totok*, which were able to preserve their cultural identity, language and traditions, and remain bound to their homeland as Chinese living abroad.²

The voc and Colonial Periods

The arrival of the Dutch at the beginning of the seventeenth century gave new opportunities to the Chinese in the Archipelago, who became traders, plantation owners—especially in Sumatra—tin miners in Bangka and gold seekers in Borneo. During the voc (Dutch East India Company) period, the Dutch hired the Chinese as functionaries in mines and plantations, or middlemen between the Company and local people. Soon the Chinese gained the esteem of the Dutch because of their dedication, reliability and ability at work. The voc Jenderal Pieterzoon Coen, Governor of Dutch East Indies, who established the voc headquarters in Batavia, and for this reason is looked upon as the founder of modern Jakarta, had the chance to praise them by saying that you don't need to mind the Chinese because you will not find more dedicated men in this world.³ The Chinese community became very strong in Batavia, reaching half of the population in the city and considerably contributing to the building of the modern town, the future Jakarta.

Unfortunately, the relationship between the Chinese and the Dutch experienced bad times too. In 1740 the reduced request for cane sugar on the European markets caused an increase in unemployment among Chinese workers around Batavia. Protests broke out and ended in bloodshed. Some 5,000 Chinese (10,000, according to some sources) were killed during clashes with the Dutch soldiers during three days of ethnic slaughtering.⁴ After the massacre, the Chinese population was forced to settle in the Glodok area, which became the Chinese ghetto. The Chinese were no longer allowed to move freely and a special permit was needed to leave the Chinese area, or to visit a Chinese ghetto in another town. The segregation system only came to an end in 1905.

Meanwhile the economical power of the Chinese grew fast. They easily achieved the monopoly over opium production and money-lending. At one point, even the Sultanate

2. To this day, Indonesian born Chinese are still called *peranakan* and *totok*: the *peranakan* are those who have already been assimilated by the Indonesian culture, whilst the *totok* are those that can still speak the Chinese language and keep alive the homeland's traditions. It is still usual for *totok* parents to give their boys and girls in marriage only to a Chinese who can speak Chinese.

3. See A. Dahana "Etnis Tionghoa: Citra Buruk yang tidak pernah Berakhir," *Media Indonesia*, December 10, 2001, 25, cited in J. Suhandinata, *wni Keturunan Tionghoa dalam Stabilitas Ekonomi dan Politik Indonesia*, op. cit., 307.

4. It is believed that two-thirds of the Chinese population of Batavia were killed during the massacre. See M. G. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, op. cit., 22; J. Suhandinata, *wni Keturunan Tionghoa dalam Stabilitas Ekonomi dan Politik Indonesia*, op. cit., 99–102; <<http://bentara.asia?p=877>>.

of Solo, in Central Java, became a debtor of the Chinese. The Chinese became owners of plantations and of large extensions of land, employing local workers, but at the end of the nineteenth century discriminative policies forbade them from buying and owning land and imposed a severe taxation regime upon them. The implementation of such discriminative regulations shows that there was little truth in the widespread idea that the Chinese received special privileges from the Dutch and had a head start when independence was proclaimed in 1945.

On the whole, the Dutch implemented a *divide et impera* policy, which aimed to separate the Chinese from local ethnic groups, and encourage them to act as middlemen between the Dutch and the locals. The Chinese were considered by the government as a concrete threat to commercial trade and should never be given the possibility of having real political power. Instead, they were employed as governmental functionaries and tax-collectors, all roles which induced local people to look at them as exploiters of and collaborators of the colonial power. The Government also instituted the *Kantoor voor Chineesche Zaken*, the Chinese Affair Office, as an instrument of control over the Chinese, who were categorized as Eastern Foreigners and then separated as an alien population. Basically, society was divided into three groups: the Europeans, the East Foreigners and the locals, the so-called *pribumi*. Therefore, the Dutch policy, which promoted the separation of the Chinese from other ethnic groups, made the colonial power indirectly responsible for an increase in anti-Chinese sentiments, which would lead to outbreaks of violence and intolerance in the near future.⁵

After Independence

On 17 August, 1945 Indonesia declared its independence and Sukarno became its first president. The newly-born Republic was based on the principles of the *Pancasila* which, at least theoretically, guarantees the pacific coexistence of different ethnic groups and cultures, through the acknowledgement of equal rights for each Indonesian citizen.⁶ Formally, the *Pancasila* principles cancelled the former division into three classes, Europeans, Eastern Foreigners, and Locals (*pribumi*), even though prejudices and anti-Chinese sentiments continued.

Sukarno's policy of keeping equal distance from the Western and Soviet blocks drove Indonesia closer to the People's Republic of China. Besides, ethnic Chinese were given free access to any kind of public role in the country and some could even take part in the Government of the Republic. A group of intellectuals founded the Consultative Body on Indonesian Citizenship, the so called BAPERKI, namely an organization that promotes the integration of the Chinese in Indonesian society by having them recognized as one of the ethnic groups that make up the Indonesian People along with the Javanese, Bataks,

5. See R. W. Hefner, ed., *Politik Multikulturalisme. Menggugat Realitas Kebangsaan* (Yogyakarta: Impulse-Kanisius, 2007), 49–55.

6. See M. G. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, op. cit., 41–4.

Dayaks etc. Yet, even if the atmosphere during the Sukarno's era was not unfavorable to the Chinese, in 1959, under the pressure of local businessmen and traders, the government implemented the so-called *benteng*⁷ (castle) policy, which was meant to support *pribumi* traders and retailers by banning the Chinese from running commercial activities in villages below the level of *kabupaten* (districts). This restrictive policy compelled some 100.000 Chinese to flee Indonesia and look for a better life in the land of their ancestors. The *benteng* policy, however, turned out to be a failure, since the Chinese were able to keep on managing the private business in the country by the use of *pribumi* straw-men.⁸

The Discriminative Policy of Suharto's Government

The repression of the Communist *coup d'état*, which took place in 1965, the so-called G-30-s (September 30 Movement) paved the way for Suharto's ascent. The General seized power some months later, and since then the struggle against the common enemy, namely Communism, became one of the main points of Suharto's propaganda. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was banned and its leaders killed or imprisoned, whilst other organizations suspected of sharing the Communist ideology were abolished. BAPERKI itself, which supported the idea of a socialist government, was banned and the entire leadership imprisoned.⁹

Soon the anticommunist repression gave rise to an anti-Chinese movement. According to Mely G. Tan, "in September 1965, when the abortive coup occurred, plunging the society into chaos and virtual anarchy, the ethnic Chinese again were caught in the middle, becoming convenient scapegoats."¹⁰ If, before the *coup d'état*, being Chinese had meant only being rich, tight-fisted and greedy, after the repression the Chinese were stigmatized as Communist and antipatriotic too. The suspicion that the People's Chinese Republic could have supported the Communist rebellion led to doubts about their allegiance to the Nation: they were suspected of being spies of Beijing's government. In 1967 diplomatic relationships with China were suspended until 1980. Moreover, the *ius sanguinis* principle which regulated citizenship in China, according to which every descendent of a Chinese person was considered a Chinese citizen, independently of which country he was living in, was taken as yet another reason for distrusting Chinese loyalty to the Indonesian Republic.

The Government instituted a special office under the Intelligence Services to deal with the "Chinese Problem" (in Indonesian *Masalah Tionghoa*).¹¹ Thus, ethnic Chinese were no longer considered an integral component of the Indonesian People, but instead a "problem" inside the Nation, the Trojan horse of Chinese Communism threatening the

7. Ibid., 11–3.

8. Ibid., 120–23.

9. Ibid., 8.

10. Ibid., 12.

11. See I. Wibowo, ed., *Masalah Cina. Retrospeksi dan Rekontekstualisasi* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama–Pusat Studi Cina, 1999).

young Republic. If Independence could wipe out the division into classes, it was nevertheless unable to integrate the Chinese and *pribumi* for the consolidation of the fragile unity of Indonesian society.

Moreover, the Chinese, who were commonly seen as rich,¹² greedy and indifferent to the needs of the non-Chinese, were forced to endure discriminatory measures: they had to pay more than the *pribumi* for the same services and were compelled to pay bribes to have their documents issued or receive protection from the local mafia or the military. Chinese companies were unfairly taxed and were obliged to give monetary support to the Government. Some Chinese lobbies chose to cooperate with Suharto's family and entourage in order to obtain favors and security.

If Sukarno's policy pushed towards a better integration of the ethnic Chinese into Indonesian society, the *Orde Baru* (Suharto's government) promoted the so-called *asimilasi*, namely, the "disappearance of the ethnic Chinese as a cultural unit and their absorption into the local cultural groups,"¹³ by forcing them to abandon their traditions, beliefs, culture and language. Some people, including the Muslim Chinese Junus Jahya, which became a member of MUI (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), theorized that the best solution concerning Chinese discrimination would be their mass conversion to Islam. The government implemented its *asimilasi* policy by trying to cancel any sign of Chinese culture, banning the use of Mandarin and other Chinese languages both in schools and publications, closing Chinese schools and prohibiting the use of Chinese ideograms in public. Ethnic Chinese were "advised" to change their original names and adopt Indonesian ones. Chinese festivals, the Chinese New Year and *barongsai* dances were forbidden. Confucian rites were no longer permitted and many of the ethnic Chinese opted to convert to Christianity or declared themselves Buddhists in order to comply with bureaucratic requirements.¹⁴

Dual citizenship, allowed in Sukarno's times, was forbidden after 1969, but those who chose to become Indonesian citizens still had to endure further bureaucratic discriminations. As a matter of fact, the ID card on its own was not enough to prove the Indonesian citizenship of the Chinese, who were obliged to apply for an additional certification, namely, the *Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia* (SBKRI). Furthermore, a special code written on the Identity Card could easily reveal the ethnic identity of the Chinese to any public officer, thereby exposing them to demands and bureaucratic obstacles. The SBKRI document was declared to be no longer compulsory by Suharto in 1996

12. In fact, in many areas, including Jakarta's suburbs, many ethnic Chinese still live below the poverty line. See J. Suhandinata, op. cit., 342.

13. See M. G. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, op. cit., 85.

14. The Indonesian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and beliefs, but in actual fact, until 2000 only five religions were officially recognized: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism and Catholicism. In the year 2000, the government added Confucianism to this list. Any Indonesian must embrace one of the official religions otherwise he could encounter bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining documents such as an ID card. Atheism is virtually forbidden.

and this decision was confirmed by President Habibie in 1999, but today it is still often required by administration functionaries.

Rhetoric and the art of playing with words has always been a powerful instrument for influencing the opinions of the masses in any totalitarian regime and, in this respect, Indonesia is no exception. Wishing to emphasize his power over the Chinese, Suharto replaced the commonly accepted word *Tionghoa* (“Chinese” transliterated from Mandarin language), and imposed the word *Cina*, which the majority of the Chinese regarded as being disrespectful.¹⁵ The decision was taken during an Army seminar that took place in Bandung on 25–31 August, 1966, with the aim of overcoming the *pribumi*’s sense of inferiority towards the Chinese. The word *Tionghoa*, which until then had been the common word used in newspapers and magazines, suddenly disappeared or was virtually forbidden after August 1966, and only two magazines (*Indonesia Raya* and *Suluh Marhaen*) had the courage to keep on using the old word *Tionghoa*. Only after the fall of Suharto in 1998 did the term *Tionghoa* become popular once again.¹⁶

The financial crisis which affected South East Asian Countries in 1998 triggered the protest of students against Suharto’s regime. On 12 May, 1998, four students were killed by the police in Jakarta (one of them was Chinese) and the ensuing riots plunged Jakarta into complete anarchy in the space of just a few days, especially on May 13 and 14. The Chinese once again became the target of violence. In Jakarta alone, 294 people were killed and some 1,000 disappeared, or were burned alive in buildings set on fire; 1,344 buildings, houses and stores were destroyed. During the riots more, than 180 women, most of them ethnic Chinese, were raped and at least 20 of them died as consequence of sexual attacks.¹⁷ According to the depositions of witnesses, these crimes were somehow organized and perpetrated by groups and “no authorities (police or military) responded to the frantic calls for help.”¹⁸ Under the pressure of the evidence collected by the *Tim Relawan* (Team of Volunteers), an NGO led by the Jesuit Fr. Sandyawan, the Habibie’s government admitted the existence of such crimes and set up a fact-finding team in July 1998 but today, twelve years on, victims are still waiting for justice.

Democracy was introduced after the tragedy of 1998 and the ensuing fall of Suharto brought about a less discriminative atmosphere within Indonesian society. President Habibie and his followers implemented new regulations in order to cancel the division between *pribumi* and *non-pribumi*, so that ethnic Chinese were at last formally recognized as Indonesian citizens with the same rights and duties as other native groups.

Indonesia has already put Suharto’s totalitarian regime behind and has chosen democracy based on the equalitarian and pluralistic principles of *Pancasila*. But it will be

15. According to I. Wibowo, the name “*Cina*” comes from the Latin “*Sina*” and refers to the cruel Qin dynasty, which caused great suffering to the Chinese. See I. Wibowo, ed., *Masalah Cina. Retrospeksi dan Rekontekstualisasi*, op. cit., 102–06.

16. See G. M. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, op. cit., 196–99.

17. F. X. R. Gunawan, *Skandal Seks Sebagai Simbol* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2000), 126–56.

18. M. G. Tan., *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, op. cit., 87.

possible to achieve “unity in diversity,” the dream of the fathers of the Nation, only if all the components of society make concrete and sincere steps toward the acceptance and acknowledgement of the other. For the *pribumi*, it will be necessary to recognize the ethnic Chinese as Indonesians, accept them as citizens, appreciate them and give them the opportunity to express their talents, especially in the fields of business, as useful resources for the country’s development. It will also be necessary to change any discriminatory law on ethnic grounds and offer the Chinese a real chance to join the Army, the police and share in administrative and governmental responsibilities. Moreover, the truth behind the violence of 1998 must be ascertained in order to help the reconciliation process. On the other hand, the ethnic Chinese must strive to forgive and accept the *pribumi* as brothers, and overcome prejudices, suspicion and fear.

Some Remarks from a Religious Perspective

As we have just seen, the Chinese traditions, which were forbidden during the Suharto era, are now experiencing a new revival with the support of more liberal laws. In the year 2000, Confucianism was added to the list of official Indonesian religions. Many of the Chinese are, or declare themselves to be, also Buddhists after being forced to abandon Confucianism in the past. Since ancient times, groups of Chinese adhered to Islam too and even contributed to the spread of the Quranic Religion in the Archipelago. It is believed that Chinese Muslim colonies were already present in Java in the fifteenth century. According to some scholars, one of the first nine Islam missionaries of Java (the so called *Wali Songo*) may have been an ethnic Chinese, whilst the sultanate of Cirebon (Java) may have shared a Chinese origin too.¹⁹ At present, however, conversions to Islam are quite rare.

On the contrary, conversions to Christianity are frequent, especially in large cities. The Parish of St. Yakobus in Jakarta, for example, celebrates 400 adult baptisms (most of them Chinese) every year. The same trend is visible in Universities, so that the Diocese of Jakarta organizes pastoral activities for the catechumenate in colleges, showing that the message of the Gospel still attracts the Chinese. Joining the Church also means finding a new spiritual family with members from all kinds of ethnic origin (Confucianism or Buddhism environments are rather exclusively “Chinese” colored). Therefore, the Church, parish or Christian groups can become training fields where both the Chinese and the others can learn, in an atmosphere of fraternity and communion, a “method” for mutual integration and fruitful collaboration.

THE AHMADIYAH

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyah movement, was born in 1835 in Qadian, Punjab, 100 km from Lahore, a descendant of a Persian family. Since his early

19. G. M. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*, op. cit., 75–6.

years, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was fascinated by Islam and religious matters. He worked as a clerk in the city of Siaikot and in 1868 was back to Qadian looking after his family's land. After his father died in 1876, he was able to dedicate himself fully to religion. He was very concerned about the condition of Islam at the end of the nineteenth century, when European Colonial powers were dominating Islamic areas, and Christianity seemed to succeed and spread almost everywhere. He was also worried about materialism and atheism as concrete threats to the true faith.²⁰

He met the founder of a Hindu renewal movement of Arya Samaj and engaged in debates about the truthfulness of Islam, but he was also involved in discussions with Christian missionaries working in his territory. In 1880, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote the book *Barahini Ahmadiyah*, an apologetic work considered by contemporaries to be one of the best books in defense of Islam.

The Doctrine and Mission of the Ahmadiyah

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad first experienced persecution in 1891 as a consequence of his doctrine concerning the death of 'Isa (Jesus), which was considered to be incompatible with Islamic orthodoxy. According to the traditional doctrine, 'Isa al Masih, the son of Maryam, did not die on the cross, as the Christians believed, but was taken instead to heaven where he lives at the side of Allah waiting for his return for the last judgment at the end of time. He will return with a companion, namely Imam Mahdi, who will carry out judgment with the sword. According to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the doctrine of 'Isa's death is attested by the Holy Quran itself, whilst only the *Hadits*, which have an inferior doctrinal authority, say that 'Isa was taken alive to heaven in his physical body. According to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, 'Isa escaped the experience of the cross and continued his mission of spreading the true faith, reached India and died at the age of 120 years in Srinagar, Kashmir, where his tomb is still visible today.²¹

It is important to observe that the Mirza Ghulam Ahmad doctrine is also incompatible with the Christian belief according to which 'Isa (Jesus) died on the cross and was raised from the dead. In this respect, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claims to demonstrate the falsity of Christian doctrine on the basis of Biblical and Buddhist sources, and also on other scientific data.²² According to him, the Gospel does not attest the death of 'Isa on the cross. 'Isa was truly nailed to the cross, but when the sky darkened and the earthquake took place, the disciples had the opportunity to take Jesus down from the cross and save him, since the Roman soldiers and the crowd ran away overcome by fear. A mysterious and powerful medicine healed 'Isa's wounds, he suddenly recovered and had the chance to meet his disciples during the following days, as in the Emmaus' episode. Later, 'Isa came in touch

20. See Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia (Aliran Lahore), *Qanun Asasi* (Yogyakarta: Pertjetakan Darkuti, not dated), 40–53.

21. See Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Almasih di Hindustan. Terhindarnya Nabi Isa a.s. dari Kematian di Tiang Salib dan Perjalanannya ke Hindustan* (Bogor: Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia, 1997), I–XVII.

22. Ibid, 1–95.

also with Buddhism in Hindustan and only after studying it did he write the Gospel. For this reason, according to him, contemporary Buddhism is the result of an adaptation of Christianity in the Eastern context, whilst Christianity is a kind of Buddhism developed in Western cultures. In this respect, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad identifies Jesus as a second Buddha or as one of his disciples.²³ In order to justify his Gospel's hermeneutics, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad declares that not the whole Gospel can be considered true. All those parts which do not overlap Mirza's religious view should be considered as false additions made by 'Isa's disciples: a well-known example of this is the "unlikely" episode of the sinner woman who dared to touch the holy 'Isa (Lk 7:36–44).

Another controversial issue concerns the return of Imam Madhi on judgment day. According to traditional doctrine, Imam Mahdi will come, together with Nabi 'Isa, to accomplish three tasks, namely to judge and kill unbelievers, break the cross, and kill the pig. The first task will be accomplished by beheading those who do not accept Islam, and for this reason Imam Mahdi is envisaged as holding a sword. The breaking of the cross should be interpreted as the victory of Islam over Christianity, whilst the killing of the pig symbolizes the purification from every kind of impurity.

However, according to the teaching of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Imam Mahdi will not come with the sword in his hand. On the contrary, he will carry out the purification in a peaceful way, through teaching and convincing argumentations. He considers the *Jihad* as an interior struggle against sin in the human soul. On the basis of the Quranic teaching that "there is no compulsion in religion,"²⁴ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad did not think of *Jihad* as a means of spreading the Religion and, although it is true that the Prophet made use of the sword, he did so only in order to defend Islam. Thus, violence can be tolerated and permitted only if the faith is put at risk, or if people are prevented from embracing Islam.

The last, and probably the most controversial, point of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's teachings concerns his function as a *Mudjaddid* (renewer) of Islam. At a certain point, the founder of the Ahmadiyah Movement declared explicitly that he understood, during a spiritual vision, that the 'Isa Almasih (substantially identified with Imam Mahdi too, and expected to arrive for the day of judgment at the end of time) was in fact Mirza Ghulam Ahmad himself.²⁵ He therefore declared himself to be the awaited 'Isa, the one entrusted to carry on the mission of the spiritual and peaceful *Jihad* for the renewal of Islam and the conversion of unbelievers to God. In consistency with his own doctrine 'Isa Almasih truly died and did not live for two thousand years at the side of Allah, but a similar figure, namely Mirza Ghulam Ahmad himself, with the same 'Isa's virtues, attitudes and duty to carry out, had already come into the world.

23. Ibid., 86; 94–5.

24. QS 2:256.

25. See J. H. Lamardy, "Belajar Kembali Menjadi Bangsa: Kasus Ahmadiyah," in Elza Peldi Taher, ed., *Merayakan Kebebasan Beragama. Bunga Rampai Menyambut 70 Tahun Djohan Effendi* (Jakarta: ICRP-Kompas, 2009), 651; Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Almasih di Hindustan*, op. cit., XIV.

Aware of his vocation, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad fully committed himself to teach and work for the spreading of Islamic faith, especially in Europe and in those countries still untouched by the Islamic message. Thus, the Islamic mission became one of the most prominent characteristics of his movement. Once, during a vision, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad saw himself preaching in London, in the English language, the message of the Holy Quran with convincing argumentations. On that occasion he felt the call to preach Islam especially in Western countries and, even if he was unable to carry out this task personally, his writings and his followers would have fulfilled that dream.²⁶ In 1901 *The Review of Religions*, an English magazine that aimed to help Muslims draw enlightenment from other religions, was issued for the first time and it was also acknowledged to be a pioneer publication for the spreading of Islam in the West. Islamic diffusion started in England through the *Working Muslim Mission* due to Mirza's disciple Kwadya Kamaluddin, who stated before leaving for London: "I am going to conquer Europe by means of this," pointing at the Holy Quran. In 1922, the German Muslim Mission was founded and guided by Maulan Sadru-d-din, who opened the first mosque in the center of Berlin and published the first translation of the Holy Quran in German. Later, the Ahmadiyah mission started also in USA, Latin America and Asia.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad died in 1908 and was succeeded by Shadr Anjuman Ahmadiyah, but after his death an internal conflict caused the Ahmadiyah to split into two groups: the Ahmadiyah Lahore and the Ahmadiyah Qadian. The former venerates Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a holy man, full of the Word of God and *Mudjaddid*, namely, one who renews Islam, but still believes that Muhammad is the last and definitive prophet. Those who do not follow his teachings are still respected as brothers, believers and Muslim. The second group, the so-called Qadian Ahmadiyah, was led by the Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's son Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad. The Qadian became much more radical, believing that the founder of the Ahmadiyah was not only a simple *Mudjaddid*, but a true Prophet who came after Muhammad. All those who do not believe this are considered *kafirs*—namely unbelievers. Obviously, the idea that a prophet can come after Muhammad, who is firmly believed to be the last Prophet in orthodox teachings, is strongly rejected by other Islamic groups. This controversial doctrine would trigger outbursts of violent reactions and even open persecution against the Ahmadiyah in several countries, including Indonesia.

The Development of the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia

The arrival of the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia occurred in two separate waves. The Lahore Movement was brought to Central Java in 1924 by two disciples of Mirza, Maulana Ahmad and Mirza Wali Ahmad Baig. They were travelling to China, but once in Singapore they knew that Christianity was successfully spreading in Central Java and for this reason they suddenly renounced their previous task in order to preach Mirza's thoughts in Indonesia,

26. See Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia (Aliran Lahore), *Qanun Asasi*, op. cit., 77ff.

founding the so-called Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia (Indonesian Ahmadiyah Movement). They had the chance to talk during the meeting of the Muhammadiyah (one of the biggest Islamic movements in Indonesia) in 1924 and received a warm welcome. The Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia started issuing articles and publications and also translated the Holy Quran into Dutch. In the 1960s, Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia published the translation of the Holy Quran in Javanese (the translation was written in Holland but published in Indonesia) and later in the Indonesian Language. The Center of Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia was established in Western Java, in the city of Bogor. In 1928, for the first time, the Ahmadiyah's teachings were prohibited in the Muhammadiyah environment.²⁷

The second wave of the Ahmadiyah mission in Indonesia was carried out by the Qadian fringe, the so-called *Jamaah Ahmadiyah*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some students were sent from Western Sumatra either to Cairo or to the Mecca with the aim of deepening Islamic teachings. Some of them were also sent to India, since news about Islam renewal movements in India had already reached Indonesia too. The first contacts with the Ahmadiyah Movement in India convinced some of these students to ask some Islam missionaries (*mubaligh*) to be sent to Indonesia. The first *mubaligh*, Maulvi Rahmat Ali, arrived in Aceh on 1925 and soon moved to Padang, where the first center of Qadian Ahmadiyah was founded.

For decades the development of the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia encountered opposition, but not any significant persecution. As a result, the Ahmadiyah teachings spread and found disciples in eminent personalities too. H.O.S. Cokroaminoto, an exponent of the Islamic party *Sarikat Islam* and spiritual guide of the future President Sukarno, was close to the Ahmadiyah. He was a member of the Muhammadiyah movement in Surabaya, East Java, when the Ahmadiyah was still accepted within this large Muslim movement. It was during this time that he translated the Holy Quran into the Malay Language on the basis of the English translation "*The Holy Quran*," which was written by Maulana Muhammad Ali, the president of the Lahore's Movement. It is believed that the Ahmadiyah's thoughts somehow influenced the nationalistic sentiment of some eminent intellectuals, such as Cokroaminoto, Sukarno and Agus Salim, the president of the Islamic party *Sarikat Islam*, and future Foreign Minister. These intellectuals and politicians were attracted by the ideas of Islamic renewal, the translations of the Holy Quran in modern languages and the dream of spreading Islam all over the world by unifying all Islamic Countries in a Panislamic project. The famous slogan of Sukarno, "The birth of a Prophet brings about a revolution," is attributable to the Ahmadiyah. Several exponents of the Ahmadiyah became involved in the governance of the Nation and, both during the Sukarno and Suharto eras, the Ahmadiyah did not face serious opposition.²⁸

27. Ibid., 94–121; <<http://studiislam.wordpress.com/gerakan-ahmadiyah-indonesia/>>.

28. See J. H. Lamardy, "Belajar Kembali Menjadi Bangsa: Kasus Ahmadiyah," in Elza Peldi Taher, ed., *Merayakan Kebebasan Beragama*, op. cit., 651–60.

The MUI's Fatwa and the Persecution

The first concrete threats against the Ahmadiyah arose at the end of Suharto's period. In 1980 a *fatwa* from *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI)²⁹ declared that the Ahmadiyah's teachings deviate from orthodoxy. The totalitarian control exerted over religious matters by Suharto's government in some way protected the Ahmadiyah from persecution, but there is no doubt that this *fatwa* gave the ideological justification for future discriminations. In 1981, a letter from the Saudi Arabia Embassy to the Department of Religion explicitly asked to avoid the public employment of Ahmadiyah, since its teachings had deviated from the true Islam. A subsequent declaration of the Religion Department in 1984 confirmed that the Ahmadiyah Qadian must be considered heretical and advised its members to return to the true Islamic teachings.

At the fall of Suharto the new climate of democracy and freedom made the radical groups, who longed for the creation of an Islamic Nation ruled by *shariah*, more free to commit anarchical actions against "heretical" sects, including the Ahmadiyah itself. In 2001, on Lombok Island, some 100 people attacked and destroyed houses, a mosque and a prayer house belonging to the Ahmadiyah. One man died during the disorders. Since then, several regional governments issued declarations against the Ahmadiyah forbidding teaching, prayer and activities.

In 2005 the educational center of the Ahmadiyah of Parung, close to the city of Bogor, in Western Java, was attacked and the Ahmadiyah were forced to leave the territory; 15 people were reported injured during the clashes. In Lombok, new attacks took place in 2002 and 2006, when 81 houses and 8 stores belonging to the Ahmadiyah were destroyed; 383 people were forced to flee and at present are still waiting for satisfactory accommodation. In Kuningan, Western Java, disorders occurred in 2005 and at the end of 2007, where some Mosques were closed or damaged and 4 people were reported injured during the riots. In Pagauban a Mosque was destroyed under the eyes of the police. During these and other episodes involving the Ahmadiyah, some of its members were compelled to abjure and profess once again the Islamic creed under the threat of violence.³⁰

On 1 June, 2008, some 200 members of FPI (Islamic Defense Front) violently attacked the pacific demonstration of AKKBB (National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Faith), accusing the demonstrators of supporting the Ahmadiyah. Some of the AKKBB members were injured and, although these incidents took place in front of the presiden-

29. *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Council of Ulama) is a governmental committee of Islamic leaders and intellectuals with the task of helping Islam in Indonesia to walk on the right path of orthodoxy. Established by Suharto in 1975, it was mainly meant as a politic instrument of control over radical and extremist groups. *De facto*, MUI has increasingly become a governmental office in charge of issuing *halal* certifications for food and declaring *fatwas* in moral matters.

30. See J. H. Lamardy, "Belajar Kembali Menjadi Bangsa: Kasus Ahmadiyah," in Elza Peldi Taher, ed., *Merayakan Kebebasan Beragama*, op.cit., 660–63; some other data can be found in the document *Mata Rantai Tindakan Aniaya Terhadap Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia*, *pro manuscripto*, undated and available at the Indonesian Conference of Religion for Peace Center (ICRP) in Jakarta.

tial palace, in the very center of Jakarta, once again the police were not able to intervene in order to prevent clashes and defend the victims.

What is surprising about all these events is the disinterest and omission of the State and police in defending the Ahmadiyah. In some cases, the victims who saw their houses, stores and mosques destroyed or burned down, not only did not receive any help from the security forces, but they were even convicted and imprisoned. Undoubtedly, the worst aspect of this affair is the legal coverage given to fanatical groups by means of the current law on blasphemy, which practically supports and justifies the persecution of the Ahmadiyah and other groups that are considered as deviating from mainstream Islam. The law, issued in 1965 and approved in 1969, states that a group whose teaching offends one of the officially recognized religions in Indonesia should be forbidden and prosecuted, and practically gives way to anarchical actions against sects and minority groups carried out by fanatical and extremist organizations, which always go unpunished.

Many people, including Muslim intellectuals such as Djohan Effendi and Musdah Mulia, NGOs and other groups, disagree with the content of this law, asserting that the State has no authority to establish whether a belief is right or wrong. The problem of orthodoxy is entirely a religious matter and, provided a doctrine does not threaten public order, it should not be criminalized.³¹

This law is considered discriminative towards all minority religious groups, especially those that are not included in the list of the six recognized religions, because any idea or doctrine which does not collimate with the teaching of a major religion can virtually be declared an act of blasphemy,³² in evident conflict with the freedom of belief and worship guaranteed by §29 of the country's Constitution. Moreover, violent incidents in the recent past have already proved that this law justifies and protects radical and anarchical groups, and more violence is expected to break out unless this law is repealed.

Unfortunately, the attempted Judicial Review, which several organizations proposed to the Constitutional Court on 19 April 2010,³³ was unsuccessful. Almost unanimously, the Constitutional Court declared that the blasphemy law is not against the Constitution and is still needed for preserving public order and harmony among religions in Indonesia. On that occasion, among its nine members, the Catholic Maria Farida Indrati Soeprapto was the only dissenting voice within the Constitutional Court.

31. See D. Effendi, "Solusi Masalah Ahmadiyah Indonesia," *Koran Tempo*, Saturday, January 12, 2008.

32. One of the victims of this discriminative law is the popular poet, film director and journalist, Arswendo Atmowiloto. As director of the tabloid Monitor, he was incarcerated for five years after the magazine published the result of a poll on popular figures in Indonesia, in which the Prophet Mohammed occupied only the eleventh position, far below the presidents Sukarno and Suharto.

33. Among the petitioners for judicial review we can number some social and religious organizations, the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia and some Islamic intellectuals, including the former president, Adhurrachman Wahid. See several articles on this topic in *Majemuk*, 43, April 2010, 7–31; *Hidup*, May 23, 2010, 4–11; A. D. Hapsari, "Court Upholds Blasphemy Law," *The Jakarta Post*, April 4, 2010, 1.

THE MENTAWAIANS

The Mentawai Islands make up an Archipelago of four main islands (Siberut, Sipora and Sikakap which is divided into two nearby islands separated by a narrow strait forming the North and South Pagai), located 100 km offshore Western Sumatra. Covering a surface of 6,700 Km², the population of the Mentawai Islands numbers some 65,000 people. Despite being positioned not too far from Western Sumatra's coast, the Mentawaian culture has preserved its traditional and original characteristics free from alien influences. The first consistent contacts with ethnic groups from Sumatra and other Indonesian areas only took place at the beginning of the last century.

Difficult communications, and the almost total absence of roads and means of transportation, have preserved the Central and Western part of Siberut Island in almost perfect isolation, and to this day it is still possible to meet and witness the original culture of the Mentawaians. For this reason, the Mentawaian culture has attracted the attention of anthropologists and researchers as one of the oldest and most original ethnic groups present in Indonesia. By contrast, the Southern part of the Archipelago (Sipora and Sikakap Islands) has already been transformed by frequent contacts with Sumatra and by the invasive presence of logging companies, which are exploiting local resources and deeply affecting traditions and customs.

The Mentawaian Society

The origin of the Mentawaian society is a matter of contention among scholars and no definitive conclusion has yet been reached. The Mentawaian culture represents an original and peculiar case within the vast cultural Indonesian Archipelago. Some of the Mentawaian characteristics, both somatic (hair, eye shape, skin color) and cultural (permanent tattoos, use of bow and arrows), seem to have nothing in common with other populations living in Sumatra and on other Indonesian islands.

Two main theories attempt to solve this ethnologic mystery. The first theory sees the Mentawaian ethnic group as originating from Polynesian roots. The second, and the more likely, theory affirms that the Mentawaians come from a Proto-Malay population belonging to the late (Neolithic)³⁴ stone age, which settled down in Sumatra and in the rest of the Indonesian Archipelago more than three thousand years ago. A thousand years later, a new Malay group, namely, the *Dongson*, came down to Sumatra and occupied the rest of the Indonesian Archipelago, giving birth to the modern ethnic groups of the Batak, the Java, the Dayak and the Toraja and bringing Hinduism to Indonesia. The *Dongson*

34. Traces of Mentawaian Neolithic culture are not easy to find because of the scarcity of stones in the territory, but the anthropologist Reimar Shemeld reports the finding of a stone axe in 1970 and dated as belonging to the late stone age. At the present time, iron machetes, axes and other iron tools can be found all over the islands, even in the most remote areas but, most probably, iron was imported in relatively recent times by traders who came from Sumatra. See R. Shemeld, *Mainan bagi Roh* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1991), 23; T. S. Hernawati, *Uma. Fenomena Keterkaitan Manusia dengan Alam* (Padang: Yayasan Citra Mandiri, 2007), 11.

also introduced the rice culture system and iron utensils to the Archipelago. Since the *Dongson* transmigration did not touch the Mentawai Islands on its descent through the Indonesian Islands, the Neolithic Mentawaian culture was preserved as probably the purest example of the first populations to colonize the Archipelago.³⁵

The traditional Mentawaian society is divided into clans (*suku* in Mentawian language), consisting of a group of 10–20 families, which are characterized by egalitarian relationships among their members. The figure of the *rimata*, namely, the clan chief, does not really stand out from the others except during special ceremonies.³⁶ If there is a matter to settle or a decision to take, the Mentawaians meet and discuss the problem for a long time, trying to reach an agreement.³⁷ If the matter is especially important and it is not possible to reach a common solution, the clan may divide into two new groups. It is rare for conflicts among people or clans to end in violence or bloodshed because the Mentawaians mostly love peace. Traditionally, there are no traces of such ideas as slavery and freedom, since every person is by nature a free human being.

The traditional social structure is very simple and the idea of the village, which is rather common in other similar cultures, does not exist.³⁸ The clan has its center in the *uma*, the large house where common celebrations take place, but usually each family lives isolated in smaller houses (*lalep*), close to the fields and the pig breeding territory, which is located along the rivers. In traditional society, every person must be able to live alone and survive in the jungle. Therefore, specialization and division of assignments are rather absent, except for the special function of the *kerei*, namely, the medicine-men or shaman. The only clear differentiation of assignments in society is between women and men, each according to their different physical strength and characteristics. Every man must know how to build a house or a boat, hunt and produce flour from the *sagu* palm, whilst every woman must know how to cook, cultivate *taro* and other crops, and both men and women are in charge of raising pigs and chickens.

The Mentawaian life is based on agriculture, fishing and hunting. The main crops are the *sagu* (a starchy palm which substitutes rice in the Mentawaian menu), *taro*, cassava and bananas. Rivers provide shrimps and small fish. Men hunt wild boar, monkeys and deer. Every family raises wild pigs, which are allowed to roam free during the day and are taken back to their cages for feeding at the sound of a sort of bamboo bell late in the

35. R. Shefold, "Kebudayaan Tradisional Siberut," in G. Persoon and R. Shefold, eds., *Pulau Siberut* (Jakarta: Penerbit Bhartara Karya Aksara, 1985), 13–5; S. Coronese, *Kebudayaan Suku Mentawai* (Jakarta: PT Grafidian Jaya, 1986), 9–13.

36. In Sikabaluan I had the opportunity to meet an old *rimata*, who lived in extreme poverty with his blind wife; he was quite forgotten and neglected by his relatives and fellow clan members.

37. Reaching agreement through discussion is something that is greatly valued in Indonesian culture and it is commonly expressed by the concept of "*Musyawarah untuk Mufakat*" (deliberation on the base of consensus), which has become one of the points of the *Pancasila*.

38. The villages at present all over the Mentawai were promoted through governmental projects that aimed to develop and "civilize" the area. In addition to some limits, the village brings some advantages to the traditional life-style, such as the possibility of having schools and some healthcare facilities. In some territories in Simatalu (North Siberut), some clans still refuse to live in villages.

afternoon. Traditionally, the pig represents the primary wealth of every family and is used for transactions, dowry and sanctions. This custom was common, especially in the past, when money was still unknown. Thus, possessing a large amount of pigs makes people proud because it is a sign of prosperity. But pork is also the most delicious meal available in the jungle and is therefore considered to be the best dish a family can serve during rituals, ceremonies and parties.

The Mentawai family is traditionally monogamic. The preparation of a wedding involves the families of both candidates. Several meetings take place before the wedding, during which the family of the girl is asked to consent to her marriage and an agreement is reached concerning the dowry, which both sides will pay to the counterpart. The dowry traditionally consists of *sagu* and *rattan* fields, fruits trees, large pans and other objects and, naturally, a number of pigs.

The payment of the dowry is an important part of the contract between the two families and gives consistency to the marital bond.³⁹ The fact that the two families present gifts to the counterpart clearly shows that both sides enjoy the same degree of consideration. This also helps to eliminate the idea that the family of the boy actually buys the girl, as commonly happens in other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Besides, the boy and girl may freely choose their partner and may even refuse a candidate preferred by his or her parents.

One of the peculiar characteristics of the Mentawaians is undoubtedly the permanent tattoo that covers the whole body of both men and women. The tattoo has the main function of adorning the body and is clearly visible, since traditional clothing is minimal, consisting only of a loincloth for men, and a skirt made of leaves (now substituted by cloth) for women. The tattoo has different shapes according to the areas of the body it covers. Special symbols can be added to signify a particular ability in hunting, or the identity as a *kerei*. The process for making the tattoo is quite long and complex.

The family of the candidate should have enough pigs to pay the tattoo maker, who works in various stages because the process is rather painful and produces fever attacks and infections. The instruments for drawing tattoos are quite simple: a pointed stick is struck lightly to inject the ink under the skin.

The Mentawai tattoo is very peculiar in the Indonesian context because it is unknown in other areas of the Archipelago, whilst body paint (temporary) is common in other populations. Moreover, some scholars believe that the Mentawai tattoo should be considered as the oldest example of permanent tattoo in the whole of human history, even older than the ancient Egyptian tattoo.⁴⁰ Nowadays, however, the tattoo, as well

39. Fr. Ottorino Monaci, who has spent more than thirty years in the Mentawai Islands as a missionary, told me that the Christian idea of marriage based on mutual love has modified the tradition of paying a consistent dowry. The new custom has in some way weakened the marital bond, resulting in an increased divorce rate. On the dowry, see also T. S. Hernawati, *Uma*, op. cit., 70–4.

40. R. Shefold, *Mainan bagi Roh*, op. cit., 101–06; I. Rinaldi “Sikerei, Penjaga Adat Mentawai,” *Kompas*, Saturday June 5, 2010, 24.

as other traditional Mentawaian customs, such as teeth sharpening, are on the verge of disappearance.

Arat Sabulungan: The Traditional Religion

The Traditional Mentawaian Religion, the *Arat Sabulungan*, is characterized by the idea that virtually everything has a soul and spirits are present everywhere.⁴¹ The main religious task of a Mentawian is to live in harmony with the spiritual presences that inhabit houses, fields, rivers or the jungle. Disturbing or offending them can trigger their anger and cause misfortune, illness and even death. Almost everything has a soul called *bajou* and, for this reason, cutting a tree or killing a pig can harm or offend them. Thus, special prayers must be said to assure the *bajou* that what one is doing is not meant to hurt it. For example, before cutting the throat of a pig in a ritual ceremony, the Mentawaians explain to him why they are killing him, that he should accept his destiny, since he had been fed by them for a long time and that he should even be happy to join his ancestors.⁴² A complex system of taboo and prohibitions regulates the harmony between the spiritual world and human life, while amulets and fetishes provide protection from evil influences.

The human soul is identified with different terms, but it is not categorized with systematic precision: *Simagere* is the spirit present in human beings (but the same word refers also to spirits of animals, things or even phenomena, such as the rainbow or a clear sky); *Ketcat* is the human soul which continues to exist after death; *Pitto'* is the spirit, usually an evil spirit,⁴³ that emanates from dead bodies in a cemetery.

Evil spirits that threaten and scare people are called *Sanitu*. They are given the name of the places where they live, sometimes locations where a person died in an accident or by violence. Possessions or infestation by evil or good spirits, as well as the *trance* for the shamans, are rather common phenomena. Some people claim to see *sanitu* and the *kerei* (shamans) can normally see and feel the presence of the spirits, especially during rituals.⁴⁴

The person in charge of becoming the bridge between human society and the spiritual world is the *kerei*, the shaman or medicine-man. Both men and women can become *kerei*, but they are more commonly men. One becomes *kerei* by vocation, not because of his own decision. Usually, the candidate to shamanism falls ill and the *kerei* acknowledges that the disease is a sign of his call to shamanism and, therefore, cannot be cured by normal herbal medicaments or through a healing ceremony. The candidate faces two options:

41. According to their location the spirits are called: *Taikamanua* (the spirits of the sky); *Taikaleleu* (the spirits of the forest); *Taikabaga* (the spirits of the earth); *Taikabagakoat* (the spirits of the sea); *Ina'nkaoinan* (the mother spirit present in the river), etc.. See S. Coronese, *Una religione che muore, La cultura delle isole Mentawai nell'impatto con il mondo moderno* (Bologna: Editrice Missioaria Italiana, 1980), 77–9.

42. R. Shefold, "Kebudayaan Tradisional Siberut" in R. Shefold, ed., *Siberut*, op. cit., 21.

43. R. Shefold, *Mainan bagi Roh*, op. cit., 125–38; S. Coronese, *Una religione che muore, La cultura delle isole Mentawai nell'impatto con il mondo moderno*, op. cit., 69–81.

44. A tentative categorization of the *sanitu* can be found in D. Cambielli, *Sanitu Mentawai* (Sikabalan: *pro manuscripto*, 1977).

he may either accept the call and become a *kerei*, or die.⁴⁵ The candidate then undergoes the initiation rites and starts his introduction to shamanism by learning from senior *kerei*. The main function of the *kerei* is healing diseases by using herbal medicaments, but even more by rebuilding the spiritual harmony which had been broken by the violation of a taboo, or an offence against a spirit. It is generally believed that disease occurs when the soul of the sick person has left his body. The function of the *kerei* is to call back the lost soul and invite the good spirits, especially those of the ancestors, to join the ceremony and help the healing process.

This rapid review of the world of the spirits can lead to a hasty categorization of traditional Mentawaian religion as pure “animism.” Nevertheless, it must be said that such a definition overlooks the fact that the Mentawaians believe in one personal God, creator of the universe and Lord of human life (for example it is God who kills anyone who swears falsely after calling Him as a witness during the *tippu sasa* ritual).⁴⁶ His name is *Ulaumanua*, which means “over the skies,” emphasizing His power over all the spirits and over all creation. Initially, the missionaries themselves did not notice the existence of this supreme spirit in Mentawaian cosmology and, for this reason, they wrongly used the term *Taikamanua* to translate the word “God.”⁴⁷ However, besides the problem of the correct translation of the concept of “God,” there is no doubt that Mentawaian religion cannot be defined as mere “animism” but, rather, “monotheism,” making it suitable for inclusion among the religions approved by Indonesian law. This could overcome suspicions and disrespect towards Mentawaian traditions that have been instigated by Indonesian functionaries over the years.⁴⁸ On the other hand, it must be said that *Ulaumanua* is actually a God who is distant from human beings and does not really care about them, intervening

45. Becoming a *kerei* is not an easy task because, besides the honor of becoming an important figure in Mentawaian society, the function of a *kerei* entails a number of burdens, such as the obligation of curing sick people and a complex taboo system.

46. The *tippu sasa* is the pledge ritual. The spirits are called to witness and will punish the person who swears falsely. During the ritual, a rattan stick is cut by the swearing person, who solemnly declares that he deserves to share the fate of the rattan if he fails to tell the truth. See T. Caissutti, *I mentawaiani* (Sikabalan: *pro manuscripto*, not dated), 18–9.

47. In the Christian translation of the Bible, the word God is mistakenly translated with the word *Taikamanua* (Those who live in the skies) and not *Ulaumanua*. I personally suspect that the wrong translation occurred because the first protestant missionaries, who were concerned with translating the first Christian prayers, needed to translate the word “God” in the prayer “Our Father.” This prayer bears the idea that God lives in the skies (Our Father who art in heaven). Therefore, the word God was translated with the term *Taikamanua*, which actually means “Those who live in the skies”, missing the correct concept of God already present in the traditional Mentawaian cosmology: one God creator of the universe, living over the skies created by Him. Mentawaian myths describe the *Taikamanua* as inhabitants of a village located in the sky, composed of men and women, living as human beings and having normal intercourse with humans on the earth and even being able to marry them. At the present time, a deeper knowledge of the Mentawaian language and cosmology has already demonstrated the mistake. Nevertheless, people are already familiar with the term *Taikamanua* and the effort to return to the correct name *Ulaumanua* in a liturgical context seems quite impossible. For the myths about *Taikamanua*, see B. Spina, *Mitos dan Legenda Suku Mentawai* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1981), 223; 449.

48. The first point of the *Pancasila*, the inspirational chart of the Nation, is the belief in one God. Therefore, the six religions approved by Indonesian law must be Monotheistic. Other beliefs are forbidden (this was especially true in the past) or scarcely tolerated. Often, traditional beliefs are not even considered to be true religions.

in their lives only in exceptional matters (such as the *tippu sasa* ritual). Consequently, the religious concern of the Mentawaians focuses more on maintaining harmony with the number of spirits that are present almost everywhere, instead of establishing a relationship with *Ulaumanua*, which is basically perceived as being beyond human reach.

Entering Modernity

The first contacts with Sumatran visitors and traders or European explorers took place during the eighteenth century, but it was only in 1901 that the first Dutch administration established its headquarters on the Islands. It was during the same year that the first protestant mission began operating in the Mentawai through the work of pastor August Lett⁴⁹ and his companion, A. Kramer, whilst only after World War II did the first colony of Islamic Minangkabau traders, who arrived from Padang (Western Sumatra) settle down in the Islands. In 1954, the first Catholic mission was founded in Siberut on the initiative of the Xaverian Fathers, Fr. Aurelio Cannizzaro first, and then two brothers, Fr. Pietro and Fr. Angelo Calvi. The ALI sisters opened their first policlinic in Siberut in 1958.

The first group of foreigners who came into contact with the Mentawaiian population were traders from Sumatra, initially Malay (from Bengkulu) and Chinese, and then Minangkabau (from Padang). Trade undoubtedly helped the Mentawaians to improve their lifestyle, especially through the introduction of iron (for knives, machetes, axes and pans), which was unknown on the islands, clothes (original cloths were made of leaves or cortex), beads for ornaments and other tools. Nevertheless, besides the benefits they brought to the islands, it was for traders to deceive and exploit the naïve Mentawaians, who were not familiar with money and were not aware of the real value and richness present in their land, such as precious wood, *rattan* and other natural products. Currently, trade on the islands is mostly in the hands of the Islamic ethnic group of Minangkabau (from Western Sumatra), who are generally looked upon with suspicion, live separately from the local inhabitants and are usually addressed with the term *sasareu* (foreigner).

A form of exploitation that has been threatening Mentawai culture for some decades now is the deforestation perpetrated by logging companies, which have already almost destroyed the rainforest in Sipora and Sikakap, and are now operating on Siberut Island. These companies indiscriminately cut the forest and take away the best wood, which is then traded either in Indonesia or abroad. The result is the unlimited destruction of the millenarian forest without any serious commitment to reforestation (no control is exerted by the local government, which is often in collusion with the companies themselves). The Mentawaians accept the presence of these companies because they obtain easy money only by giving permission to log on their land, but they do not even imagine that, in years to come, it will be impossible to find good wood for their houses and canoes (the Mentawaians have always seen trees as growing spontaneously and have no concept of

49. Pastor Lett was killed some years later when he was trying to mediate between some Mentawaiian and Dutch soldiers.

a forest eventually disappearing). Deforestation threatens with extinction also the herbs for medicaments and animals, some of which are species that exist only on the Mentawai Islands.

The Indonesian government has been mostly absent and inefficient in dealing with underdevelopment in the area. Corruption and collusion with traders and logging companies has led to inefficiency and disinterest towards the real problems and exploitation of the territory. Unwise attempts to push the Mentawians towards a more “modern” lifestyle by teaching them to cultivate rice instead of *sagu*, or by inviting them to leave their traditional houses to live in villages made up of small houses provided by the government—mostly on the coast (the Mentawian traditionally do not live by the sea) and far from their fields—have not produced good results.⁵⁰

As far as religion is concerned, the pressure of Islam on the Mentawaian people is quite strong. A fair number of clans have converted to Islam and some people do so out of self-interest, since it is easier for Muslims to find governmental employment. Moreover, since 1954, there have been attempts to eradicate the *Sabulungan* religion (forcing the Mentawaians to choose one of the official religions) and the old Mentawaian tradition, which were considered to be primitive and out of line with the *Pancasila* principles. The *Sabulungan* religion was formally forbidden, as well as *kerei* activities, the traditional use of loincloths and tattoo. Men were compelled to have their hair cut, whilst traditionally it was kept long. In fact, these regulations only slightly affected traditional lifestyle and beliefs, especially in the interior of the jungle, where they are still very much alive today.

The efforts of the government to improve education and healthcare have focused on building structures, such as simple hospitals in main centers and schools that are now already present in most of the villages. Unfortunately, the lack of control and commitment of the governmental employees, doctors, teachers and functionaries, have left the population in several areas virtually without the most basic medical care and educational services.

In the past, the local government was based in Pariaman, in Sumatra, and was dominated by the Minangkabau ethnic group, which is traditionally Islamic and to some extent hostile to the Mentawaians. Since the beginning of the new millennium, the local parliament and the administrative center has been transferred to Sipora Island, and now most of the governmental functionaries are Mentawaians. Since then, some improvements have been made to transportation and services, but results are still far from being satisfactory.

The Catholic Church in the Mentawai Islands

As we have already mentioned, the first Christian missionaries who settled down in the Mentawai were Protestant. It was only fifty years later that the first Catholic parish was founded in Siberut. The spreading of the Good News was warmly accepted by the Men-

50. See T. Hernawati, *Uma*, op. cit., 128–29.

tawaian people and, today, most of the population has already embraced Christianity in Catholic or Protestant churches. In this respect, we can observe that acceptance of Islam in the Mentawaian context has been uneasy, probably because Islam is still identified with the Minangkabau, who are often stigmatized as profiteers. Moreover, a religion that forbids pork is inconceivable in Mentawaian culture, where pork is considered to be the main (and most delicious) meal for celebrations and rituals.

Due to the scarcity of pastoral personnel, most of the responsibility for evangelization is shared with lay people. Since the beginning, missionaries entrusted pastoral care to teachers who were in charge of the schools in villages and of catechetical formation. Besides, in every village the community appoints a person, the so-called *baja gereja* (the eldest of the church) who, with his council, deals with the ordinary pastoral care and organization of the community. So far, these lay people, despite their simple education, have been able to develop the church and keep it alive, even in areas such as Simatalu (North-West Siberut), where Mass can be celebrated only twice or three times a year. The formation of the *baja gereja* is carried out in periodic meetings in the parish centers.

In spite of some unavoidable mistakes due to lack of knowledge or experience, the proclamation of the Gospel has been carried out by respecting the positive values of the Mentawian culture, by studying the local language, customs and traditions. Missionaries have also given attention both to education and healthcare, providing teachers for elementary schools in almost every village. After some decades, most of the functionaries bearing responsibilities in the local administration are the fruits of the initial education they received in boardinghouses and schools run by the church.⁵¹

The Gospel's proclamation on the Islands has undoubtedly been facilitated by the Government's pressure, which strived to destroy the "primitive" *Arat Sabulungan* and compelled the Mentawaians to choose one of the "official" religions. However, if the Mentawaians have embraced the message of Christ even in the most remote villages of the forest, it is because they have discovered Christ as good News for them. According to Fr. Bagnara, the message of the Gospel has made the Mentawian people more aware that *Ulaumanua* is not as distant, scary and indifferent as they used to believe.⁵² People living a religiosity focused basically on human efforts to maintain the right balance and harmony with the spirits, have become more aware of the paternity and love of a Father who protects, forgives and looks after His beloved children. This awareness has also had a positive influence on the relationships among the Mentawians themselves. Some old people who witnessed the passage to Christianity say that, in the past, visiting another village could be dangerous because of the presence of enemies; now the atmosphere has changed and there is more peace and more fraternity.

51. Currently, there are three Polyclinics and several Kindergartens run by the ALI and KYM sisters. The Church also has 4 Elementary and a Junior High School, and a number of elementary schools, mostly reaching only the fourth class, in villages in the interior of the Islands. A tailoring course for girls is active in Sikabaluan.

52. M. Rebecchi, "Gli inizi a Sikabaluan. Intervista a p. Giuseppe Bagnara (2 e ultima parte)," *Quaderni del Centro Studi Asiatico*, 2008/2: 79–80.

CONCLUSION

Since the beginning, the Indonesian Archipelago has been a melting pot of ethnic groups, languages and beliefs which have cohabited for centuries with the numerically dominant presence of the Javanese ethnic group and Islam. The Dutch tried to keep this universe of diversities united with the sole aim of defending its economic interests. This attempt failed to bring about ethnic and religious unity in diversity. On the contrary, the *divide et impera* policy of the Dutch, as we have already seen, actually deepened the divisions among them. The independence from foreign dominators in 1945 was the result of the common struggle of all the components of Indonesian society united for freedom; all the forces present in the future Republic could converge, regardless of their beliefs or ethnicity. After Independence, Sukarno's propaganda tried to keep alive the nationalistic spirit and the memory of the fight for freedom as a means for building a sense of national identity. After the attempted *coup d'état* in 1965, Suharto made efforts to build a sense of national identity by focusing on opposition to a new common enemy, namely, Communism. All the components of the nation were called to unity, but once again on the basis of fear and a defensive attitude. Furthermore, the radical groups, including Islamic fundamentalist fringes, were controlled by the military power and any dissident political opinion was silenced.

With the advent of democracy and freedom in 1998, all the tensions within society suddenly came to the surface and put the unity of the nation at risk. Ethnic and religious conflicts broke out in East Timor, Aceh, Papua and North Moluccas. Islamic fundamentalism moved in and is now attempting to infiltrate and influence the moderate and liberal Islamic groups in Indonesia. Intolerance, attacks and intimidations against other religious Islamic minorities, which are looked upon as being heretical, such as the *Aham-diyah*, have taken place in different areas. Some Islamic groups are also struggling for the introduction of *Shariah* and the transformation of Indonesia into an Islamic State, which would endanger the freedom of religion and faith.⁵³

Therefore, there is no doubt that, after the fall of Suharto, Indonesia has been facing the possible recrudescence of old conflicts and tensions, which have only been partially solved or only temporarily put aside. New and concrete steps towards the unity of the Indonesian People and a mature and pacific coexistence of differences, as well as the respect and attention for all minorities present in the country, is already a must and a need for the future of the Nation.

So far, the unity of the Indonesian people has been mostly promoted on the basis of a defensive attitude, namely, the fear of an external threat or enemy (colonial power or

53. The policy of power decentralization that was implemented during the last decade has allowed radical Islam to introduce *Shariah* oriented norms at local level. An illuminating book on the international attempts to spread Islamic Fundamentalism in Indonesia is the work of K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid, ed., *Ilusi Negara Islam. Ekspansi Gerakan Islam Transnasional di Indonesia* (Jakarta: 2009, Gerakan Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Wahid Institute and Maarif Institute).

Communism). A heavy-handed policy has often been used to preserve this unity from the influence of dissident opinions. Now, however, this defensive attitude must be overcome: it is already time to leave behind the struggle “against” an enemy, whoever it may be, and start calling all the components of Indonesian society to unity in order to fight “for” something positive that will lead to the wellbeing of every member of Indonesian society.

The way and method for reaching a pacific coexistence of differences and development must be searched for in the cultural richness of the Nation, a culture that is by its very nature tolerant and pluralistic, which gave birth to the principles of the *Pancasila* and dreamed the ideal of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in diversity) as the true face of the Nation. It is already time to put these positive cultural virtues to work and move from primordial attitudes, such as self-identification in a tribe, ethnicity or religion, towards a new awareness of being part of the plurality of differences that the Indonesian Nation has always been, and be proud of this multicolored communion. The fear of the “other,” of the “different,” should be overcome by a mature openness, which perceives both “me” and the “other” as gifts that can live together, collaborate with and enrich each other.

In some cases, the difficult path towards the harmony of diversities will need concrete actions of reconciliation, justice and ascertainment of the truth, especially where discrimination and violence have taken place. On the side of the victims, there will be the need to forgive and overcome the prejudices which inevitably affect them, and a willingness to collaborate, share talents and resources with all the components of Indonesian society for the good of all. Besides its cultural richness, Indonesia also possesses a special tool that has so far sustained the difficult path towards harmony, namely, the principles of the *Pancasila*. When the Indonesian Republic was founded on 17 August 1945, those principles were considered to be necessary to guarantee respect and dignity for every person and group that make up Indonesian society, thus avoiding any kind of discrimination. Amazingly, the fathers of the country did not opt for the foundation of an Islamic Nation based on the *Shariah*, and although Islam represents more than 85% of the Indonesian population, it was not given a prominent or special legal status. Now Indonesia should maintain a strong defense of the *Pancasila* against any threat in order to preserve freedom and dignity for all minorities. Moreover, as we have already seen, in connection with the law on blasphemy, Indonesia needs to commit itself to a review of all the discriminating regulations and laws that are still inconsistent with the *Pancasila* principles.⁵⁴

Finally, the *Pancasila* asserts quite resolutely the need for “social justice for all the people of Indonesia.” Thus, besides avoiding any form of discrimination, the *Pancasila* also stresses the care that the whole Nation should devote towards its most unfortunate and

54. See F. Magnis-Suseno, “A Common Word and What It Could Mean”, in Trolls, Christian W., Reifeld, Helmut and Hewer C.T.R, eds., *We Have Justice in Common. Christian and Muslim Voices from Asia and Africa* (Sankt Augustin/Berlin: 2010. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.), 27–33; S. Musdah Mulia, “Società Civile, Islam e Cultura della Convivenza,” in V. Martano, ed., *Unità nella diversità. Il modello indonesiano per una società del convivere* (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2009), 115–19.

weak members. The ideal of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* dreamed by the fathers of Indonesia calls, not only for equal dignity and mutual respect, but also for a concrete commitment to promote justice, welfare and development for everyone, especially the poor and the weak, including those groups that are still living on the margins of society. The concrete care of all the components of the Nation for minority groups will be the barometer for measuring the civil maturity of the country.

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JAPAN

TIZIANO TOSOLINI

When, in 2005, during his inauguration speech for the Kyūshū National Museum, the then Foreign Minister Asō Tarō (who became also Prime Minister between 2008 and 2009) described Japan as “one nation, one civilization, one language, one culture, and one race, the like of which there is no other on earth,”¹ the major Japanese newspapers bluntly accused him of nationalistic fanaticism. If we take a close look at Japan’s history, however, we would see that Asō Tarō’s remark is far from being an isolated case. In 1986, Prime Minister Nakasone Yushiro proudly declared that Japan was a “homogeneous” country and that the rapidity of its economic success, unlike that of the United States of America, was due to the fact that there were no minorities in Japan; on the contrary, Japan’s strength consisted in having “one ethnicity, one State, and one language.” In 1968, the writer Ishihara Shintarō, later elected Governor of Tokyo in 1999, confidently wrote: “There is no other

1. In <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20051018a7.html>>.

country like Japan, people who are virtually monoethnic, who speak the same language which is like no other country's, and which has a unique culture." The internationally renowned essayist Yukio Mishima echoed him in 1976 when he declared that "Japan is a country rare in the world in that it is monoethnic and monolingual."²

The voices of these Japanese intellectuals and politicians are also shared by renowned Japanologists such as Edwin O. Reischauer ("The Japanese today are the most thoroughly unified and culturally homogenous large bloc of people in the world, with the possible exception of the North Chinese... Race looms large in the self-image of the Japanese, who pride themselves on the 'purity' of their blood, despite the obvious mixture that went into the forming of Japanese people as late as early historic times")³ and Roger Buckley ("No other major industrial society has anything approaching the racial homogeneity of Japan").⁴

Undoubtedly, the ostentation of categories like the uniqueness of a given race, the uniformity of a certain language, and the recurrent vindication of the superiority of one's own nation can hardly be ascribed to Japan alone. As often happens in the history of any other country, the belief or illusion of being part of a uniform and compact group, and the idea—unverifiable, in any case—of belonging to a pure and uncontaminated lineage, play a fundamental role in the formation and consolidation of national identity. These separations and distinctions, these ideological and conceptual contrasts, are at the basis of the typical clan mentality that is essentially characterized by the opposition between "us" and "them," and discrimination between those who belong to the mainstream group and those who are excluded from it because they are considered strange or strangers. No wonder, then, that Japan too, despite the recurrent assertion of its unity and uniqueness, hosts within its borders some "others" that were more often isolated and marginalized rather than accepted and cared for.

Who are the "others" of the Japanese? There are the foreigners, of course, and all those who came (and are still coming) from overseas. Then there are the "others" among the Japanese. There are ethnic Koreans and Chinese who live in Japan, and although it is fair to say that that they have made the Japanese much of what they are—culturally, materially and in the case of the Koreans, genetically—they are constantly excluded from the make up of the "true" or "authentic Japanese" by reason of their racial identity (although the Japanese are not a race, as they often claim, but rather an ethnic group within the Mongoloid race).

Next, the economic bubble of the 1980s brought a wave of Japanese-Brazilians, or *nikkei*, who moved to Japan (which they consider "the land of yen and ancestors") in

2. In J. Lie, *Multietnic Japan* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1; 131.

3. E. O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today. Change and Continuity* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle), 33; 396.

4. R. Buckley, *Japan Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 82.

5. Cf. I. A. Akimitsu, "Between Privilege and Prejudice: Japanese-Brazilian Migrants in 'The Land of Yen and Ancestors'" in D. B. Wills, and S. Murphy-Shigematsu, eds, *Transcultural Japan. At the Borders of Race, Gender, and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 113-34.

search of fortune and a better standard of living. These Japanese-Brazilians, despite their Japanese descent, proved to be an “other”, too, for they were considered to be no longer purely Japanese since they had lost the ability to move with ease within the complex formalities of the Japanese language and, also, because they were not born and raised (and, above all, educated) in Japan. The bubble also drew many thousands of laborers from the Philippines, Peru, Chile, Africa, central Asia, and the Middle East—the first such population Japan has ever had: others, obviously.⁶

Besides this extraordinary list of individuals from abroad, and the considerable variety of laborers from underdeveloped countries—as well as from countries that were colonized by Japan, starting particularly from the Meiji era (1868-1912), when the imperial power extended and exerted its control over Taiwan, part of Sakhalin Island, the Kuril Islands, Micronesia, the Korean peninsula, and Manchuria—there are also some “others within” who were, and still are, the victims of silent discrimination and ancient prejudices. First and foremost, the *burakumin* (部落民 “hamlet people”), a term which came to replace denigrating words such as *eta* (穢多 “abundant filth”) and *hinin* (非人 “non human”). Physically indistinguishable from other Japanese (which makes the national prejudice against them even more bizarre and ridiculous), the *burakumin* descend from a particular group of people which, in the past, held jobs considered to be extremely “impure” or “contaminating,” such as executioners, gravediggers, butchers, and tanners.

Japan makes a fetish of the minor and almost insignificant physical characteristics that differentiate Japan’s ancient inhabitants, namely the Ainu and the people living on the Ryūkyū Islands (one of which is Okinawa). Feared and fought for thousands of years (i.e., ever since the Yamato clan—from which the Imperial House arose—became Japan’s dominant group), the Ainu were gradually driven northwards until they found refuge in Hokkaidō. Today they live in isolated villages, in some forgotten corner of what used to be their ancestral land, surviving on subsidies and trade in carvings, fur, and folk artifacts. And although their past saw some Ainu leaders struggling to preserve the identity of their people, it was not until 6 June, 2008 that the Japanese government finally recognized the Ainu as “Japan’s indigenous people” (*senjū minzoku* 先住民族), as a minority enjoying inalienable rights.

As for the Okinawans, their fate was sealed in 1609 when Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa shogun, commissioned a warrior clan from Kyūshū (the Satsuma) to invade the Ryūkyū Islands. From then on, the “official” relations between Japan and Okinawa can be reduced to five historical dates: 1879, when the Meiji government replaced Sho-Tai (king of the

6. According to a report released recently by the Justice Ministry, the number of registered foreign residents in Japan hit a record high of 2,217,000 at the end of 2008, marking an increase of around 50% in the last decade. The registered foreign population accounts for 1.74% of Japan’s total population. Chinese nationals accounted for the largest group of foreign residents at around 30%, or 655,000 people, followed by Koreans at 589,000, Brazilians at 313,000, Filipinos at 211,000 and Peruvians at 60,000. Most foreign nationals resided in Tokyo, with 402,000 registered, followed by Aichi and Osaka prefectures. Cf. <<http://nambufwc.org/2009/07/11/registered-foreign-population-in-japan-hits-record-high-221-million/>>).

Ryūkyū Islands) with the governor of the newly established Okinawa Prefecture; 1945, when Okinawa became the only home territory on which the Japanese fought the Western allies; 1952, when the Tokyo government granted the Americans twenty more years of sovereignty over the island; 1972, when Okinawa reverted back to Japan (and it is said that on that occasion Emperor Hiroito casually offered to let President Nixon keep them); and finally, 1993, when the newly enthroned Akihito became the first Emperor to visit Okinawa.

Before we move on to analyze the events concerning these three minorities, these Japanese “others” that have sometimes seen their alterity considered as something less than human (two of the several denigrating terms used throughout the centuries to indicate the *burakumin* are, in fact, *ningai* 人外—“other than human”—and *yotsu* (“four”) a term which refers to a four-legged animal—while the Ainu are perhaps the only group of internal others to which the Japanese occasionally refer to as *gaijin* 外人 (“outside people” or “strangers”), it must be said that the number of individuals belonging to these groups is relatively small. According to recent statistics, there are about 2-3 million *burakumin* and 25,000 Ainu in Japan, while Okinawans number about 1.4 million. If we consider that Japan’s population is currently estimated at 127,076,183,⁷ it is quite difficult to believe that these minorities will be able to exercise a substantial influence on national politics (like African-Americans, Hispanics, and Jews in the United States); it is also unrealistic to think that they will be able to control a substantial share of the economy (like the Chinese in Malaysia or the Philippines); and it is highly improbable that they will be in a position to fight for independence (like the people of East Timor or Sri Lanka). Therefore, the minorities that we decided to explore in this paper are an integral part of the Japanese social scene, even though they seem destined to remain trapped in a past that will cyclically remind them of their diversity, and caught in a future devoid of any real acknowledgement of their peculiar identities, thus relegating them to the margins of any process of decision-making concerning the prosperity of Japan.

THE BURAKUMIN

Of all the groups of “others” present in Japan, the *burakumin* are undoubtedly the least conspicuous and, perhaps precisely for this reason, the most peculiar. Scientists and scholars went to considerable lengths (e.g., blood tests, physiognomic studies, etc.) to prove that the *burakumin* were somehow different to the mainstream Japanese; that they were descendants of Koreans or of an aboriginal race from the Sakhalin, or even that they were related to one of the lost tribes of Israel.⁸ Needless to say, none of these pseudo-scientific studies, which easily border on the ridiculous (as do almost all the analyses

7. Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, August 11, 2009, *The Daily Yomiuri*, August 13, 2009.

8. I. J. Neary, “Burakumin in Contemporary Japan,” in M. Weiner, ed. *Japan’s Minorities. The Illusion of Homogeneity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 64.

proposed by the so called *nihonjinron*—or theories on the Japanese—which attempt to justify the uniqueness of the Japanese by means of lab experiments, linguistic analyses, anatomical tests, geographical surveys, and spiritual vivisections), led anywhere. The *burakumin* are still an invisible other.

What seems certain is that the *burakumin*'s ancestors were engaged in socially humble activities related especially with death or animal products. The first written testimony of the term "*eta*" dates back to the thirteen century and reports that the word was derived from a mispronunciation of the term "*etori*," an expression used to indicate all those people whose main occupation was slaughtering animals and feeding them to falcons and dogs. In 860, especially under the influence of Buddhism (whose first moral precept was to respect the life of every sentient being), the Department of Falconry was abolished and the *eta* were left without their principal sources of livelihood. Many of them managed to survive by taking on the menial occupations of butchers, leather workers or executioners (as well as jesters and minstrels), all of them activities which the civil and religious society considered to be extremely "impure", "defiling" and "contaminating."⁹

Despite their increasing marginalization, the *eta* experienced relative prosperity and popularity during the Ashikaga (1338-1573) and Momoyama (1568-1603) periods. Often the various feudal lords would compete with each other to secure for themselves the *eta*'s precious tanning skills (hence their other nickname, *kawata*: leather workers) and their unrivaled expertise in producing armors, saddles, leather-shields and in forging weapons made of bone and gut. By offering them attractive incentives (such as the free use of plots of land for cultivation), the warlords invited them to live on their estates, thus giving rise to the expansion of the *eta* community both in Western and Eastern Japan. Gradually, the *eta* diversified their occupations and became skillful producers of wicker baskets and straw sandals. Many *eta* communities began to move and settle near the tumuli around the densely populated areas of Nara, Kyoto, and Osaka, thus coming to include within their group those who were tomb-guards at the time.

Only under the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) did the *eta*'s social status become a legal matter. In a society which had suddenly become obsessed with social positions and ranks, the *eta* had none; they were not even part of one of the four classes that constituted the backbone of Japanese society and on whose basis people's dignity was established, namely: warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants (*shinōkōshō* 士農工商).¹⁰ By failing to fit into any hierarchical structure, the *eta* soon became *ningai* "other than human" and the object of fierce ostracism. In this new social scenario, they could be easily recognized because they were not allowed to have the same hairstyle as other citizens; they had to use a piece of rope, instead of the regular sash, to gird their *kimonos*; and sometimes they

9. See G. A. De Vos and H. Wagatsuma, *Japan's Invisible Race: Caste in Culture and Personality* (California, University of California Press, 1972), 18-20.

10. For a detailed description of the *eta* and of the other social classes during the Tokugawa period, see the accurate analysis by M. B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 121-26.

were forced to wear leather patches on their clothes as a sign of identification. The *eta* were forbidden to marry people outside their own group, they could not leave their own village, build homes with windows facing the street, enter temples located outside their neighborhood and they were not allowed to eat, or even sit, together with the *ryōmin* (良民), the “acceptable people.”

In 1868, the Meiji Restoration finally brought an end to the rigid feudalism of the Tokugawa (based on Confucian principles and doctrines) and reopened Japan’s borders to the rest of the world after almost two centuries of isolation. Among the various reforms concerning the political, social, and economic structure of the country, we should mention the so-called Emancipation Edict (*kaihōrei* 解放令), formerly called the Edict Abolishing Ignoble Classes (*senmin haishirei* 賤民廃止令).

In 1871 this Edict abrogated the *eta*’s status of outcast by fully recognizing them as “new citizens” (*shinheimin*, 新平民). However, the “official emancipation” of the *eta* did not even come close to ending the prejudices and discrimination against them. On the contrary, having declared that all citizens were equal in the eyes of the law, the oligarchs of the time instituted a registry of data about the rank held by each individual in the former feudal classes.

The *eta* were now given the name of *burakumin*, that is, people living in well-identified villages and communities. In some way, the position of these “new citizens” did not change much; in fact, it worsened, for they not only lost the monopoly on their trade (of leather or sandals), but for the first time they were forced to pay taxes and do military service like any other citizen. As dwellers of the special ghetto-villages (*tokushu buraku* 特殊部落), the *burakumin* were easily identifiable as the descendants of the ancient outcasts, thus becoming an easy target of violence at the hands of all those for whom the Edict meant only political uncertainty and economic straits.¹¹

It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that, influenced by Western liberal and democratic movements and by groups of Socialist and Christian inspiration promoting ideas of justice and equality, the *burakumin* began to give life to several associations with the purpose of defending their own rights and fight against the deep-seated feelings of discrimination harbored against them by the rest of the population.

The first attempts at self-emancipation date back to 1903, with the establishment in Osaka of a movement called the Greater Japan Fraternal Conciliation Society (*Dai Nippon Dōhō Yūwa Kai* 大日本同胞融和会), made up of over 300 *burakumin* from all over the country. In 1922, in the wake of a radical movement established during the English

11. After the 1871 Edict, violent anti-*burakumin* uprisings broke out. Many people, in fact, continued to consider the *burakumin* “less than human.” In the early twentieth-century’s “popular notion,” *burakumin* had “one rib-bone lacking; they have one dog’s bone in them; they have distorted sexual organs; they have defective excretory systems; if they walk in moonlight their neck will not cast shadows; and, they being animals, dirt does not stick to their feet when they walk barefooted” (in H. Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 303). On this see also Sue Suumi’s novel *The River with No Bridge*, which deals explicitly with the discriminations suffered by the people of an *eta* village.

civil war, 2,000 *burakumin* gathered in Kyoto to found the Leveler's Society (*Suiheisha* 水平社), an equal rights movement whose banner displayed a red crown of thorns on a black background. Their manifesto, written by Mankichi Saiko, the son of a Buddhist monk of the Jōdo Shinshū School, combined Marxist slogans and religious aspirations in an original way. Read in Kyoto on 3 March, 1922, the text of the manifesto opened with the famous cry "*Tokushu Burakumin* throughout the country: Unite!" and ended with the words: "The time has come for the blessing of the martyrs' crown of thorns. The time has come when we can be proud of being *Eta*."¹²

The association endorsed three main principles of social equality: liberation as a process of self-acceptance and self-emancipation; the freedom to choose one's occupation and the determination to achieve economic independence; and finally, the respect of human dignity and the commitment to actualize the highest human ideals.

The true political birth of the *burakumin*, however, happened only twenty-five years later, in 1947, when—in the first elections under the new Constitution—no fewer than nine *burakumin* were elected to the National Diet. A key figure among them was Jiichiro Matsumoto (1887-1966), the undisputed leader of the *Suiheisha* movement until the end of the 1920s and "father of the *buraku* liberation." Matsumoto was elected senator for the Socialist Party and was appointed Vice-President of the Japanese Senate, thus becoming the first *burakumin* permitted to enter Fukiage Palace for an audience with the Emperor (although it is said that Matsumoto kindly declined the invitation). The activity of the *Suiheisha* Society, devoted mainly to openly and publicly denouncing all discrimination against the *burakumin*, came to a sudden halt in 1942, when its leaders and activist were called to fight in World War II.

A few months after the surrender, from the ashes of the *Suiheisha* Society arose the National Committee for Buraku Liberation (*Buraku Kaihō Zenkoku Iinkai* 部落解放全国委員会), which was renamed the Buraku Liberation League (*Buraku Kaihō Dōmei* 部落解

12. I. J. Neary, "Burakumin in Contemporary Japan," op. cit., 67. Here is the full text of the manifesto: "*Tokushu Burakumin* throughout the country: Unite! Long-suffering brothers! Over the past half century, the movements on our behalf by so many people and in such varied ways have yielded no appreciable results. This failure is the punishment we have incurred for permitting ourselves as well as others to debase our own human dignity. Previous movements, though seemingly motivated by compassion, actually corrupted many of our brothers. Thus, it is imperative that we now organize a new collective movement to emancipate ourselves by promoting respect for human dignity. Brothers! Our ancestors pursued and practiced freedom and equality. They were the victims of base, contemptible class policies and they were the manly martyrs of industry. As a reward for skinning animals, they were stripped of their own living flesh; in return for tearing out the hearts of animals, their own warm human hearts were ripped apart. They were even spat upon with ridicule. Yet, all through these cursed nightmares, their human pride ran deep in their blood. Now, the time has come when we human beings, pulsing with this blood, are soon to regain our divine dignity. The time has come for the victims to throw off their stigma. The time has come for the blessing of the martyrs' crown of thorns. The time has come when we can be proud of being *Eta*. We must never again shame our ancestors and profane humanity through servile words and cowardly deeds. We, who know just how cold human society can be, who know what it is to be pitied, do fervently seek and adore the warmth and light of human life from deep within our hearts. Thus is the *Suiheisha* born. Let there be warmth in human society, let there be light in all human beings".

放同盟) in 1955.¹³ The awareness campaigns promoted on a national scale by the Buraku Liberation League forced the then Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke (1896-1987) to agree that the ongoing discrimination against the *burakumin* was, to put it mildly, “regrettable” and compelled him to introduce appropriate measures. In 1958 the Liberal Democratic Party, which was in power at the time, instituted a Committee for *dōwa*¹⁴ politics with the intent of promoting a series of State-funded projects for the improvement of the social conditions of the *burakumin*. The research commission on *dōwa* politics produced a document that came surprisingly close to the goal set by the Buraku Liberation League. This document affirmed that the widespread prejudice about racial and ethnic diversity of the *burakumin* had no scientific basis, that the *burakumin* problem was not a burdensome feudal legacy which would disappear, as if by magic, with the development of advanced capitalism, and, finally, that an authentic and lasting solution to the endemic problem of discrimination could not avoid taking into account the causes of such a phenomenon, for to ignore or underestimate the problem was the best way to perpetuate its effects.

In 1969, the recommendations of the commission were accepted by the government, which enacted a ten-year intervention plan whose framework was authorized by the Law on Special Measures for *Dōwa* Projects (SML), thus initiating a series of Assimilation Projects (*dōwa taisaku jigyō* 同和对策事業) focused on three main areas of intervention: to improve the social and living conditions of the *burakumin* (by building new houses to replace the old crumbling neighborhoods where the *burakumin* lived, and new structures such as schools, clinics, libraries, and swimming pools); to promote a system of grants to be paid directly to the families as an incentive for the education of their children (along with offering further economic help on special occasions, such as weddings and the birth of the first child); and finally, to implement an awareness project aimed at modifying the all too negative perception and attitudes among the general public toward the *burakumin*. All these projects were completed in 2002, with an investment of 12 trillion yen and an actual improvement of the life conditions of the *burakumin*.

Unfortunately, the massive subsidies distributed by the government to the *burakumin* had also the undesired effect of transforming the prejudice against them into grudges and resentment: to this day, many Japanese still carefully try to avoid these indistinguishable “others.” The well-to-do families of young people who are about to get married are

13. The other important group that fought for *burakumin* rights was the All Japan Federation of Buraku Liberation Movements (*Zenkoku Buraku Kaihou Undou Rengōkai* 全国部落解放運動連合会, abbreviated to *Zenkaiaren*), affiliated to the Japanese Communist Party. The *Zenkaiaren* was born as a reaction against the ousting from the League of the members who opposed the idea of denying state welfare to all those who did not belong to the Buraku Liberation League. Unlike the Buraku Liberation League (which had joined the now defunct Japanese Socialist Party), the *Zenkaiaren* intended to promote *burakumin* independence, collaborate with the working classes and the marginalized, and cooperate with the neighborhood communities through the so-called “integration theory.” The movement broke up in 2004, after announcing that the *burakumin* problem had finally been solved.

14. *Dōwa* (同和) is a term that replaces the derogatory *burakumin* and calls to mind the concepts of assimilation and equity.

still accustomed to hiring private investigators to probe their respective family trees. In the 1970s it was discovered that thousands of copies of a “shadow registry” containing the names (old and new) and locations of 5,600 *burakumin* villages were distributed all over Japan through a mail-order shopping system. Some of the major companies of the country (Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Mitsubishi) were found to have consulted this registry in order to scrutinize and select their employees. Obviously, the production and sale of this text were prohibited, but the doubt remained about the existence of other registries; a doubt which became reality when similar volumes were discovered in eighty other firms.

Interestingly, the Buraku Liberation League did not want the *burakumin* simply to become ordinary Japanese citizens and thus absorbed into a society purified and redeemed from their difference. On the contrary, they wanted to achieve a situation of equality with respect to the majority of the population, so that the *burakumin* could be welcomed as a well defined and identifiable group, one with its own dignity and history. Accordingly, for many years the Buraku Liberation League pleaded with the United Nations to have the *burakumin* recognized as a legitimate “minority” within Japan, and encouraged *burakumin* people to reveal their identity by openly acknowledging their descent—something which is rather simple to do since, as we saw, it is sometimes only a matter of letting others know where one lives.¹⁵

This “unveiling” of one’s identity was encouraged particularly in schools. Students were asked to write a brief statement to be read in class in front of their classmates and professors. Almost from the start, however, this attempt caused controversy among both parents and students, for what was the point of this declaration if the others in the community expected it? And, above all, what could it possibly mean to admit being a *burakumin* if this admission *per se* had no real meaning (since the *burakumin* share no distinguished ethnic characteristics)? Thus, the *burakumin* sought a viable alternative to this strategy of proud self-assertion by passing among other Japanese the way Chinese and Koreans passed for centuries: trying to get a decent education and secure a job while concealing their origins as much as possible. But this solution did not seem so easy either, for what could it mean for the *burakumin* to try to hide or camouflage themselves among the rest of the population? To pass is to leave behind a fictitious distinction (but if this was the case, if, that is, there was no difference between a *burakumin* and a Japanese, why pretend?), or does this passing mean accepting the prevailing prejudice (and if so, why hide)?

15. In 2008 *Google Earth* included a few historical maps of Japan in its on-line collection, thus accidentally revealing the detailed areas where former low-caste communities were located. In fact, the maps (depicting the city of Tokyo—or Edo, as it was called at the time—during the Tokugawa period) could be superimposed on and compared with the modern satellite images, thus showing in which metropolitan areas the *burakumin* still live. Furthermore, in one of the maps, a Tokyo neighborhood was expressly labeled “*eta* ghetto-village.” The anger and outrage caused by this episode in Japan prove once again that the *burakumin* problem persists and regularly resurfaces. Cf. <<http://blog.taragana.com/index.php/archive/old-japanese-maps-in-google-earth-unveil-caste-secrets-provoke-fear-of-abuse/#more-8760>>.

The double alternative pursued by the *burakumin* indicates how their relation with Japanese society remains complex and problematic. To this day, despite the progress made, and the positive data indicating that inequality is not as marked as it used to be, that their income levels have improved and are slowly approaching those of the other social classes (in 1993 only 52% of *buraku* households received livelihood security support compared to 76% of 1975), or that the entry of *burakumin* children into senior high schools (91.8%) is very close to that of the mainstream (96%)... one cannot help noticing the still widespread diffidence and mistrust of the population toward these “invisible others.” For, despite all the projects and strategies implemented to defeat the still all too pervasive discrimination, *burakumin* children do not perform as well as others in school. The chance that they may grow up to join the organized crime group *yakuza*, or take the dead-end tunnel of alcoholism, is still considered very high. And interestingly, the professions available to them seem to be the same as those held by their ancestors, albeit readapted to the modern-age context: garbage collectors, septic cleaners, and junkyard operators.

If this is the situation still haunting the *burakumin*, what scenarios are open to them in the foreseeable future? Two, perhaps. The first predicts that “a solution to the ‘buraku problem’ would be a situation where it would be possible for people to find out about my buraku background either from me or a third party and to react to that information with indifference or mild interest. It would not be information that I would want to hide from them or my children. This situation does not exist in Japan yet, but we are probably closer to it than we were fifty or even ten years ago.”¹⁶

The other scenario, certainly more complex but no less relevant, consists in improving the situation not so much through new domestic policies, or by making the *burakumin* feel proud of who they are and by encouraging them to see their diversity as something valuable, but rather by raising Japan’s awareness of the place and role it occupies in the world. If Japan wishes to project an image of itself as a responsible nation, a country at the leading edge in the field of ecology, and as an example of peace and harmony, then it will have to start revising and rectifying its own troubled relation with the idea of civil and human rights. Put differently, in order to be favorably accepted among the international community, Japan too will have first to welcome and accept the *burakumin*, these “invisible others,” at home...

THE AINU

The newly elected Prime Minister of the Democratic Party, Yukio Hatoyama, in his programmatic speech to the Diet on 26 October, 2009 stated that “the politics of fraternity that I am promoting aims to create a society in which everyone can play a role without discrimination or prejudice; this will mean promoting gender equality in all aspects of

16. I. J. Neary, “Burakumin in Contemporary Japan,” op. cit., 82.

life, including employment and child-rearing. It also seeks to promote cultural diversity to enable everyone to live with dignity, such as by respecting the history and culture of the Ainu people, who are indigenous to Japan.”¹⁷

This quick political recognition of the Ainu as people indigenous to Japan is the result of a long and troubled history of emancipation that has seen the Ainu share the destiny of other groups around the world (such as, for example, the Native Americans in the United States, the Aborigines of Australia, the Inuit, the Maori, etc.) which, dispossessed of their native land and resources, were almost entirely wiped out by laws and decrees that hinder the practice of their traditional lifestyle.

The origins of the Ainu people (which means “human being” in their language) are lost in the mists of time, although for a long time scholars argued that the Ainu were a proto-Caucasoid group that immigrated to Japan in prehistoric times. Others claim that they are the descendants of an ancient people from South-East Asia that lived in Japan during the Jōmon period (14,000–400 BC). Whatever the case may be, their “official” history begins in the Asuka period (538–710), when the powerful Yamato clan, sponsoring a stricter centralization of the political system and applying a more rigid penal and administrative code (*ritsuryō* 律令), forced the Ainu (which some also identify with the Emishi, or “barbarians,” the unconquered and rebellious people who refused to submit to Japanese power) to move northwards, cross the Tsugaru Strait, and settle in a land which they renamed *Ainu Mosir* (“the quiet land where human beings live,” the future Hokkaidō).

In those lands, the Ainu came into contact with and assimilated the cultural practices of the Satsumon and Okhotsk groups, which at the time occupied Hokkaidō, the Kuril and the Southern part of Sakhalin Island. Other scholars argue, instead, that the Ainu culture did not so much assimilate and replace the culture of Satsumon and Okhotsk, but rather that it developed and emerged as a distinct group from the Satsumon: proof of this are the stunning similarities between the Satsumon’s culture and the one which later came to be expressed by the Ainu.

We do not know for sure which hypothesis is more likely to be true; what we do know for certain, instead, is that the earliest written documents describing the Ainu as the native inhabitants of Hokkaidō (which the Japanese knew by the name of Ezo) date back to the thirteenth century. The Ainu were hunters, gatherers, and salmon fishers (unlike the *wajin*, or Japanese, who grew rice and were farmers). The social organization of the Ainu was based on both matrilineal and patrilineal kin-groups, with clear status distinctions. Each community had a leader (*kotankorokur*), who was chosen on the basis of both inheritance and ability to mediate in disputes based on customary law.

The Ainu lifestyle was characterized by a rich and mystical relationship with the land and with natural phenomena. Their most important religious ritual was the sending-back (*iyomante*) of the bear (an animal symbolizing Ainu identity) to the forest, the realm of

17. “Prime Minister Outlines Philosophy of New Government,” *The Daily Yomiuri*, 30 October 2009, 18.

the gods. The preparation and performance of the ceremonies was assigned to men, while women exercised the important role of shamans. In the field of the arts, they stand out for their rich epic literature (*yukar*), a great variety of folk tales (*wepeker*), and an account of the creation of the Ainu people which is rather different from the one we find in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonji*, texts which had already been contaminated by the apologetic hue of imperial ideology and which were concerned with the creative activity of Izanagi and Izanami and the central figure of the sun-goddess Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami.¹⁸ Furthermore, all these narratives were expressed in a language only vaguely related to Japanese.

In the fifteenth century the Ainu began trading goods with the Japanese, while maintaining their traditional hunting and fishing activities. Violent confrontations immediately broke out between the two groups, due not only to the Japanese attempt to monopolize and control the trade, but also to the progressive invasion and expropriation of Ainu land at the hands of the powerful Matsumae family, which by 1551 had already moved into the South of the island. When in the 1790s the Tokugawa shogunate had to counter the Russian influence in the region, it assumed direct control of Hokkaidō and it tried to assimilate the Ainu. The shogunate established some garrisons and tried to persuade the Ainu to become integrated because the government needed to claim Hokkaidō as a part of the Japanese territory. The lack of funds to implement this plan forced the government to give control of the island back to the Matsumaes, who not only forbade the Ainu from integrating with the rest of the Japanese population, but also began a policy of exploitation against them through forced labor and resettlement. Diseases, poverty, and starvation decimated the Ainu population, which decreased from 26,000 to 10,800 between 1817 and 1854.

In 1869 the Meiji government renamed the island Hokkaidō, and in 1871 it began a policy of mass migration of former samurai and farmers in order to exploit the island for agricultural purposes. In the same year, as happened with the *burakumin*, the government imposed on the Ainu the status of “New Citizens,” forcing them to adopt Japanese names and forbidding them to fish salmon (their traditional food), hunt, wear their traditional clothes, use their language and tattoo themselves. In 1877 the Ainu territory was renamed “nobody’s land” and was incorporated into the newly-born Japanese State. The authorities then promoted a strategy of displacement of the Ainu communities from their fertile lands into secluded reservations, thus making them easier to control.

At this time, the numerous abuses and the violence against the Ainu were justified and tolerated by appealing to pseudo-scientific theories, which tried to demonstrate the congenital inferiority of these “old natives” (*kyūdojin* 旧土人), as they were contemptuously

18. According to Ainu mythology, the divine *Kamui* created the world as a great ocean lying on a huge trout. The tides were the breath of this fish cyclically expelling sea water, while the earthquakes were caused by the fish’s movement. One day *Kamui*, watching this water world from above, decided to send one of his messengers to give birth to islands. When the animals saw how beautiful the world was, they convinced *Kamui* to let them roam free in that place. Later *Kamui* created the Ainu people and sent Aiona, the divine man, to the earth to teach them how to hunt and cook.

called. As Siddle remarks, “for the officials and educators concerned with Ainu policy, and for the bulk of impoverished Japanese immigrants who moved into the ancestral land of the Ainu, destitution and social breakdown among the ‘natives’ (*dojin*) were attributed, not to specific colonial policies, but to the innate propensities of the Ainu themselves. It made sense to most that the Ainu were a ‘dying race’ losing the ‘struggle for survival’, especially since social Darwinism enjoyed the status of scientific truth in Meiji Japan. Conversely, the speed with which Japan embraced Western ideas and embarked upon expansion and development in Hokkaidō proved the superiority of the ‘Japanese race’. The innate inferiority of the Ainu both justified and explained their subordination.”¹⁹

Thus, the Japanese bureaucrats promoted “inverse” eugenic theories aimed at biologically assimilating (rather than eliminating) the Ainu through the practice of mixed marriages. In this way, Ainu blood came to be mixed with that of the “Yamato race,” and this fusion was to determine an evolution of their progeny, for “mixed-blood children take after the superior race and are born almost as Japanese.”²⁰ This attempt was doomed from the start, however, for the strong prejudicial attitudes of the Japanese continued to consider the Ainu as innately inferior.

The central government’s response to the “Ainu problem,” in spite of the skepticism voiced by social Darwinists, was to assimilate this people by force, and as quickly as possible, to the rest of the population. In 1899 the government passed the Former Native Protection Act (*Hokkaidō Kyūdojin Hōgo-Hō* 北海道旧土人保護法), in which the Ainu were guaranteed social and educational welfare and were granted plots of land in an attempt to turn them into farmers. The lands granted to the Ainu, however, were much smaller and less fertile than those that had been given to Japanese settlers. Moreover, the government claimed the right to confiscate the land that had been fallow for fifteen years. The Japanese government also promoted an intense politics of assimilation of the Ainu by abolishing the special schools for Ainu children (established with the help of missionaries such as John Batchelor, who tried to safeguard the Ainu language) and by integrating them directly into Japanese primary schools. At the same time, the government issued heavy fines to all those who contravened the prohibition of hunting or fishing and forced the Ainu to take up only the humblest occupations.

The first true organization of Ainu people in Hokkaidō, the Ainu Association (*Hokkaidō Ainu Kyōkai* 北海道アイヌ協会), was founded on 24 February, 1946 with the pledge that it would increase the amount of social wealth in Ainu Communities and “work to improve the social status of Ainu people and to develop, transmit and preserve Ainu culture in order to establish the dignity of the Ainu people.”²¹ However, the Ainu still remained disproportionally unemployed and underemployed even in the 1960s due

19. R. M. Siddle, “The Ainu. Indigenous People of Japan,” in M. Weiner, ed. *Japan’s Minorities. The Illusion of Homogeneity*, op. cit., 28-9.

20. R. M. Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu in Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 94-7.

21. From the web page of the Association: <<http://www.ainu-assn.or.jp/english/eabout04.html>>.

to their endemic situation of poverty and prejudice. On 13 April 1961 the Ainu Association changed its name to Utari Association (*Hokkaidō Utari Kyōkai* 北海道ウタリ協会),²² with the purpose of promoting social welfare and improving the Ainu's standards of living by extending the road network and building public facilities. With the help of the Socialist Party, and later of the Communist Party, the Association began its battle to obtain assistance and assimilation programs similar to those enacted by the Law on Special Measures for *Dōwa* Projects of the *burakumin* and, from 1974 to 1980, the Hokkaidō Administration gave life to the so-called Hokkaidō Utari Welfare Measures, a financial plan (renewed in the following years) of over 12 billion yen. Despite these exceptional measures, the Ainu family income still remained lower than the national average, and the only occupations available to the Ainu were the least remunerated (fishing, agriculture, the tertiary sector, and construction). Significant improvement, however, could be observed in the education field, with an increasing higher percentage of young Ainu managing to gain access to secondary education and universities.

In the late 1960s and 70s, some Ainu activists, dissatisfied with the assimilation policies advanced by the Utari Association, sought the recognition of Ainu ethnicity and fought against discrimination. In 1972 Yūki Shōji, a former member of the Utari Association board of directors, created the Ainu Liberation League with the avowed purpose of opposing, ideologically as well as legally, groups or people discriminating against the Ainu. In 1977 a professor was sued for making racial comments against the Ainu people; in 1981 the *Japan Travel Bureau* officially apologized and promised to provide appropriate training to its employees for having posted an advertisement in a national newspaper inviting tourists to visit Hokkaidō, defined as the land of “hairy people.”

Meanwhile, the young activists of the Utari Association began to promote and defend their cultural heritage by pressing for the implementation of the Ainu New Law (*Ainu shinpō* アイヌ新法), a draft law adopted by the Utari Association in 1984 listing all the rights which would enable the Ainu to gain full Japanese citizenship, including guaranteed political participation at both local and national levels; economic benefits in the form of a “self-reliance fund,” based on the principle of compensation for historical dispossession and to be administrated by Ainu themselves; and, finally, the right to cultural identity, especially the use and revitalization of the Ainu language.

Since 1987, when the Ainu also joined the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations based in Geneva, these rights have been increasingly understood and presented within the context of the ongoing juridical struggle to define and establish indigenous rights in international law.

22. The change of name, from Ainu to Utari, did not indicate a change in the purposes of the Association (which remained fundamentally the same), but pointed rather to a controversy surrounding the older name. In fact, “the name alone lent itself to puns, as *inu* means ‘dog.’ *Ainu* could therefore equate to ‘*A-inu!*’ (look, a dog!). As late as April 1986, a social studies comic book published by a Tokyo press and used as a teaching aid in schools depicted children saying ‘Look, a dog is coming!’ when an Ainu child approaches.” Cf. N. Gottlieb, *Language and Society in Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111.

The Japanese government replied reluctantly to these requests, officially recognizing the Ainu as an “ethnic minority” (*shōsū minzoku* 少数民族) only in 1991, and only on the occasion of the third report to the United Nations for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In fact, in the first report of 1980, the Japanese government coldly stated that in Japan there were no “ethnic minorities” as defined in article 27 of the Convention.²³ It was not until 2008, just before the G8 summit that took place at Toyako-chō in Hokkaidō, that the government finally recognized the Ainu as Japan’s “indigenous people.”

This recognition, though long-awaited and desired by the Ainu, represents only a partial victory. For while they have become juridical subjects who are free to practice their traditions, the Japanese State claimed for itself the power to define what comprises “authentic” Ainu culture while at the same time reifying it in a traditional form. By binding Ainu identity to this conventional notion of traditional culture (the “true Ainu” are those who speak the Ainu language, perform popular dances, fish salmon in a traditional manner or carve bear-shaped figurines) the State has left ordinary Ainu to harmonize this imposed authenticity with the actual reality of everyday life. Furthermore, the State has attempted to depoliticize the “Ainu problem” and disconnect it from the international struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples, thus preventing the Ainu from truly exercising their own rights and overcoming centuries of ideological and physical marginalization. The Sapporo Court’s verdict on the construction of the Nibutani dam is emblematic in this regard. In March 1997, the Court decided to close the case brought by two Ainu activists (Kayano Shigeru and Kaizawa Tadashi, both from Nibutani), against the Hokkaidō Development Agency in which they argued that the forcible appropriation of their land (including the Saru River, which is believed to be sacred) to construct a dam was not only illegal but represented also an offense to Ainu religion and culture.²⁴

After an endless series of audiences and hearings, judge Kazue Ichimiya recognized the ethnic minorities’ right to exercise their culture without impediments and ordered the Japanese government to pay closer attention to indigenous groups. Although many jurists interpreted this ruling as a historical event in the Ainu people’s long struggle for emancipation (the sentence recognized them as an indigenous people and demanded that the State respect their cultural identity), the Court simply acknowledged the Ainu primarily in terms of respect for their cultural identity and practices, without going so far as to endorse their right to self-determination in political matters, land, or resources.

23. Article 27 states that “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language”. Cf. <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>>.

24. In this regard the statement by Kayano Shigeru (1926-2006), the first Ainu to become a member of the Japanese Diet is noteworthy: “We the Ainu People have no recollection of ever having sold or lent this big island of Hokkaidō to Japan. If the Japanese government says that we have sold it to them, let them show us the documents or call forth the witnesses. If they say we have lent it to them, let them show us the terms of the agreement.”

Proof of this is the fact that the judge, after ascertaining that the construction of the dam had been completed, did not invalidate the expropriation of the land but, on the contrary, allowed the dam to remain operational.

In spite of sporadic articles in national newspapers and perfunctory appeals by the politicians of the hour, to this day the Ainu remain a mystery for most Japanese. A survey promoted by the government in 2003 revealed that two thirds of the Japanese population had no knowledge of human rights issues concerning the Ainu, and of the 34% who did, the “Ainu problem” was understood primarily in terms of “culture preservation.”

Deprived of their ancestral *Ainu Moshiri*, forced to fight against a fate that still labels them as a “dying race” (*horobiyuku minzoku* 滅びゆく民族), used in cultural festivals and parades to entertain tourists, or employed as tour guides in museums displaying the remains of a culture now entirely stifled by modernity, the Ainu seem almost unable to avert the disappearance of their own identity in the vast Yamato majority. Indeed, the time seems to have gone when the Ainu proudly used to tell, in their mother tongue, one of their dearest and most ancient *yukar upopo* (legends), a narrative which perhaps today has become the saddest and most bitter of all, the one chanting ancient verses that begin with the words: “The Ainu lived in this place a hundred thousand years before the Children of the Sun came.”²⁵

OKINAWA

For a long time the Japanese felt roughly the same about Okinawans as they did about the Ainu: hunters, gatherers, fishers, and traders, they presented no threat with their way of life or with attacks on the Yamato majority. Possibly descendants of the Jōmon people from South-East Asia, they moved to the Ryūkyū Islands (an archipelago situated between Kyūshū Island and Taiwan of which Okinawa is the largest island) and over the centuries established an independent kingdom which was ruled by only four dynasties: the Shuten (1187-1260), the Eiso (1260-1349), the Satto (1349-1496), and the first period of the Shō dynasty (1406-1470). The second period of this dynasty, begun with Shō En and lasted more than four hundred years, until its last king, Shō Thai, was forced to abdicate to make way for the Meiji State in 1879.

The kingdom of the Ryūkyū Islands featured an advanced social system, could boast a long history of cultural connections with China and a vast network of commercial relations with Korea, China (to which Okinawa paid a tax for a long time), and many other South-East Asian nations. A complex system of religious and political interconnections contributed to link the several islands of the archipelago to the interests of the throne. Moreover, while the king ruled over secular affairs, the spiritual power was entirely handled by a priestess (or by the king’s sister), who presided over a national structure of

25. Quoted in K. V. Sjöberg, *The Return of the Ainu: Cultural Mobilization and the Practice of Ethnicity in Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 9.

religious practitioners (almost exclusively of women) named *kaminchu* (god's people), and who had regional control over the religious lives of their constituents.

The political independence enjoyed by these islands came to an end in 1609, when Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Tokugawa period, commissioned the Satsuma warrior clan to invade Okinawa, kidnap the king and force him to acknowledge Japanese supremacy before sending him home. From an economic standpoint, the Satsuma encouraged the kingdom to continue its economic relations with China, enabling the Satsuma to exploit the trading privileges of the Ryūkyū kingdom within the Chinese controlled trade routes. In this way, while in 1629 the shogunate closed most of Japan's borders and restricted much of its trade to the island of Dejima, where Dutch and Chinese traders were based, the Satsuma managed to continue to trade with South-East Asia through the agency of the Ryūkyūs.

Due to political tensions between China and Japan, the Satsuma clan decided to conceal from the Chinese their control of the archipelago, thus allowing the kingdom to retain the many and strong Chinese influences that had preceded the seventeenth century (such as the Confucian social system, Chinese dress, trading practices, writing system and class and marriage practices). In 1879 Japan definitively annexed the kingdom and the name Ryūkyū was replaced with "Okinawa". The new rulers immediately imposed social regulations that, in the Japanese collective consciousness, contributed to the idea that the inhabitants of these islands were culturally backward and linguistically inept. Moreover, due to their geographic position, the islands were considered economically underdeveloped and strategically insignificant, being situated at the periphery of the great and "new" empire that was taking shape under the Meiji Restoration.

The kingdom of the Ryūkyū Island suddenly became one of the numerous outskirts areas of Japan, forced to adjust to all the linguistic, cultural, administrative, and social changes imposed by the Tokyo government. Faithful to its "assimilation" politics, Japan slowly introduced Okinawans to the artifacts of modernization (electricity, the telegraph, steam energy), thus causing the typical social phenomena (e.g., the urban proletariat) that were taking place in the great Japanese industrial areas. It was evident that, as Iha Fuyū (credited as the father of cultural, linguistic, folkloristic, and historical Okinawan studies) wrote in 1911, "Okinawans are born at a disadvantage, and have to learn to articulate their needs in the language of the masters if they want to achieve recognition."²⁶

After imposing a State-controlled and standardized system of education, the Japanese government began to change the political structures of Okinawa's villages by conforming them to those of the other Japanese prefectures, and established a vast police system aimed at controlling the greatest part of the population. Despite all these changes of a decidedly administrative nature, the Japanese, by means of a capillary and suffocating ideological propaganda, succeeded in their intent to instill in the Okinawans the desire to

26. Cf. Iha Fuyū, *Ko Ryūkyū* (Old Ryūkyū) published in 1911. This book is considered to be one of the best works on Okinawan studies.

be truly part of Japan. Through this “politics of desire,” the Okinawans started to imitate the Japanese in almost everything: from language to clothing style, from the proclamation of the Imperial Rescript on Education emanated on 30 October 1890, to social customs and practices. This kind of indoctrination was gradually amplified by the media, thus kindling in the population the desire to conform to the spirit of the Japanese nation. And although Japan’s rule over the islands was authoritarian, and at times even despotic, many Okinawans tried to take advantage of this situation in order to improve their educational, social, and working conditions. Many others, however, feeling the economic pressure of increased taxation, poor crops, and failing markets as competition from the mainland increased, chose to leave Okinawa to seek better opportunities abroad, either in Japan itself or in other Asian countries.

The all too fragile illusion that Okinawa had indeed become an integral part of Japan was definitively shattered during the last months of World War II. It was then that the Okinawans realized that the Japanese considered them irrelevant, insignificant and disposable: during the famous Battle of Okinawa (nicknamed “Typhoon of Steel” for the fierceness of the fight, the intensity of the firepower and the number of battleships and armored vehicles used by the Allies during the attack), it is estimated that 120,000 civilians were among the victims of the battle—a quarter of the entire population of the island. Some of the inhabitants, persuaded by the Japanese propaganda that the Americans were bloodthirsty soldiers capable of all kinds of atrocities, killed their own families or committed suicide to avoid capture. Entire families of Okinawans hurled themselves from sea cliffs, others were used by the Japanese troops as human shields against the Americans, others still were murdered to rob them of their food and supplies. By then it had become clear to everyone, as Okinawa’s former governor Ota Masahide stated, that “the Japanese army was prepared to sacrifice Okinawans for the sake of delaying an Allied landing on the mainland of Japan,”²⁷ so that by the end of the battle the survivors dreaded the Japanese more than they did the American army.

During the peace negotiations, the island was sacrificed to the interests of both the Americans and the Japanese. The latter, who still considered Okinawa a relatively unimportant and potentially untrustworthy colony which, moreover, was never part of the “true” Japan, immediately surrendered it to meet U.S. regional security needs. So, while through the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 8 September 1951 (which formally decreed the end of the occupation), Japan regained its sovereignty and was *de jure* readmitted into the international community, Okinawa’s stewardship was transferred to the United States. Japan willingly accepted the Japanese-American Security Treaty since the greatest part of American military bases were tucked away in a little Southern island where all the problems related to their presence could be easily ignored by the majority of the population. And since the Okinawans were excluded from the terms and conditions of the Japanese Constitution promulgated in 1947, they ended up being, almost literally, stateless people.

27. M. Ota, *Essays on Okinawa Problems* (Gushikawa City: Yui Shuppan, 2000), 42.

The forced coexistence of U.S. military and Okinawans immediately proved to be difficult and anything but peaceful. While attempting to concede some human rights to Okinawans, the United States began to confiscate their land (most of the times without any financial compensation) in order to build military bases. Only in the 1950s did the Americans begin to partially reimburse the local land owners stripped of their assets, and this only in order to sedate the numerous riots and protests that were beginning to break out on the island. Disastrous air accidents (such as the one that took place in 1959, in which an American plane crashed into a school near the Kadena Air Base, killing 11 children and 6 adults and injuring 120 people), along with the suspicion and mistrust undermining the relations between militaries and civilians, soon revived the popular protest against the American occupation. Okinawa now started to ask more insistently and more forcefully to revert to Japan: in this way—or so the Okinawans believed—the island would finally be able to free itself of nuclear weapons²⁸ and some of the military bases would be downsized and relocated on mainland Japan. These hopes remained in vain until the late 1960s, when the United States and Japan together announced that Okinawa would become once again a Japanese prefecture—an event that took place on 15 May 1972, thus ending 27 years of American rule on the island.

However, the reversion of Okinawa to Japan did not coincide with the dismantling of the American military bases and outposts,²⁹ which are operative to this day with as many as 22,000 Marines (and 24,000 other personnel) stationed on the island. On many occasions the Okinawans openly expressed their disappointment about the general unwillingness to find a permanent solution to this problem. On 8 September 1996, in a much debated referendum concerning the presence of American troops in Okinawa, no less than 469,770 voters favored the limitation of the number of American bases on the island and only 43,672 voters opposed that resolution. On 20 July 2000, on the eve of the G8 summit, 25,000 Japanese once again protested against the presence of the twelve

28. Although the news was never confirmed, some speculate that before Okinawa was restored to Japan, the Americans had 1,200 nuclear devices hidden in their bases. It is also said that from the end of the war the Japanese government closely adhered to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles (*hikaku san gensoku* 非核三原則, stating that Japan shall neither possess nor manufacture nuclear weapons, nor shall it permit their introduction into Japanese territory), stipulated in 1967 and endorsed by the Diet in 1971. However, according to a Japanese ambassador, in 1969 Nixon (with Kissinger as mediator) signed a secret agreement with Tokyo according to which the Americans were allowed to introduce nuclear devices in Okinawa even after its restoration to Japan. None of the two sides ever confirmed the news, although this would reflect the way in which both the United States and Tokyo have treated Okinawa to this day.

29. Most of the bases were not handed over even after the prefecture's reversion to Japan in 1972. As of March, 2008, Okinawa hosts approximately 74.2% of the total land area exclusively reserved for U.S. military facilities in all Japan. There were 5,584 criminal offenses committed by the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement)-status personnel which were recorded from the reversion to December of 2008. 559 cases of these were for heinous crimes such as murder, robbery and sexual assault. Moreover, since Okinawa's reversion, 487 U.S. military aircraft accidents have been recorded: 43 of these caused death or serious damage, with the number of dead or missing totaling 50. This has provoked a great deal of concern from the residents of the local communities around the bases, and also from the citizens of the entire prefecture. The danger of overcrowded U.S. bases in the densely populated urban environment was once again made apparent in August 2004, when a U.S. Marine corps helicopter crashed into the Okinawa International University campus.

American bases on the island, while in November 2009—a few days before U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Japan—over 20,000 Japanese voiced the need to revise the terms of the U.S.-Japan relations agreement sealed after the war and urged the American President to withdraw all of the United States Marine Corps from Okinawa³⁰ (or, at the very least, not to endorse the project to relocate the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station to the nearby Camp Schwab, in the city of Nago, for such relocation would cause environmental damages of incalculable proportions).

Not all Okinawans agreed that they should get rid of the military bases once and for all. Their reasons, as one can easily guess, were and are of an economic nature. In fact, after the war Okinawa had remained at the periphery not only of the political power, but also of the economic miracle that was transforming Japan into the second world economy: there simply were better places for corporations to invest than an atoll whose capital, Naha, is eleven feet above sea level. Consequently, the economy of the island came to depend on only three factors: handouts from Tokyo, tourism, and the American military bases.³¹ For a long time the bases were the major source of employment and income, but mainland visitors have overtaken G.I.'s as the American century wanes. Today half of Okinawa's income is from official subsidiaries, less than a quarter from tourism, and about 10% from the American occupiers.

Paradoxically, however, in the postwar period the Americans handed the inhabitants of those islands an unexpected gift: after sixty years of forced Japanization, they encouraged Okinawans to reclaim some control over their history, culture, and identity. There was nothing altruistic or noble about this—in fact, the Americans' wanted only to dismantle another aspect of the blind nationalism that led Japan to enter the war. There is no doubt, however, that this fact benefited the people of Okinawa, who immediately started to revive their language and culture and send their best young intellectuals (the generation now governing Okinawa) to earn doctorates, not so much in Tokyo or Osaka but in the best American universities. The people of Okinawa began to rediscover themselves just when Japan was trying to heal its own war wounds and was beginning to turn into a society of lost, anonymous and rootless city dwellers.

In 1960 Kunio Yanagita, the well known founder of Japanese ethnological studies, published a book called *The Way of the Sea* (*Kaijō no michi* 海上の道), in which he advanced the theory that the ancient inhabitants of Japan came from South-East Asia and later reached the rest of mainland Japan. Therefore, the Japanese could rediscover a more authentic version of themselves right on these islands, in a primordial culture that

30. "Okinawan Message to President Obama: Withdraw the Marines" in <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Study_Group_on_Okinawan_External_Affairs-/3254>.

31. As one of the Air Bases' Web Pages boasts: "Kadena Air Base is the hub of airpower in the Pacific, and home to the Air Force's largest combat wing—the 18th Wing—and a variety of associate units. Together they form "Team Kadena"—a world-class combat team ready to fight and win from the Keystone of the Pacific. Nearly 18,000 Americans and more than 4,000 Japanese employees and contractors make up Team Kadena. The base's estimated economic impact upon Okinawa's economy is more than \$700 million annually." Cf. <<http://www.kadena.af.mil/>>.

historically was contaminated first by Chinese influence, then plundered by the samurai, and finally sold out to the Western world. Kunio Yanagita further claimed that the language spoken in Okinawa (called *Shuri* in its purest form, the one commonly used by the aristocracy and rulers of the Ryūkyū kingdom) was older than Japanese: in fact, in it there was no trace of the “honorific speech”—hence of all those linguistic stratifications and categorizations between speakers—that is so common in the Japanese language. This linguistic peculiarity would have influenced also the social structure of the island, in which one can still find traces of the ancient matriarchal system and in which the relationships between people are more direct and sincere, since they are regulated by *honne* (one’s inner feelings and intentions) rather than by *tatemae* (the *pro forma* aspects of social relationships).

Of course, Kunio Yanagita’s theories remain mere conjectures, and yet many Japanese have since begun to look upon Okinawans with a certain envy and jealousy, as the massive interest in Okinawan music and culture that took place in Japan during the 1990s seems to indicate. Many of the Japanese tourists who visit the island are attracted not only by its immaculate beaches and crystal-clear waters, but also by its ancestral culture, to which they feel somehow attuned and in which they try to glimpse their own true image in order to find the necessary elements to improve Japanese society. As the philosopher Shunsuke Tsurumi wrote: “In Okinawa we may find clues not only for the reconstruction of past Japan, but also for the construction of future Japan. The culture of Okinawa, where women play a central role in religious rituals and in the formation of basic social values, may contribute to a reformation of the male-centered society of the other islands, which... failed with the loss of the war.”³²

In this way, Okinawa, being more conscious of its own identity, proud in pointing out its diversity with respect to the rest of Japan, and more uncompromising in laying claim to its own territory, seems to have a better chance than others (especially the Ainu) of maintaining and safeguarding its own cultural specificity while entertaining a constructive and egalitarian dialogue with the government in Tokyo. If this happens, Okinawa—this tiny island, whose surface, 2,275.91 km², almost equals that of Tokyo—will have gained the right to be proud for having resisted with all its might the cultural and social integration imposed on it by two of the most influential world powers: America and Japan.

THE “OTHERS” AND RELIGION

In retracing the events of all these “others” that Japan conceals within itself, in outlining their invisibility and marginalization in society, we must have certainly noticed the almost total disinterest shown by the various traditional religions (Shintō and Buddhism) in their painful struggle for emancipation. This fact is certainly astonishing, but, we must

32. S. Tsurumi, *An Intellectual History of Wartime Japan, 1931-1945* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986), 108-9.

add, the lack of involvement of institutionalized religions in the plight of the Ainu people and the Okinawans is altogether understandable, if not wholly justified.

For not only do both minorities have and practice a religiosity of their own (connected to Shamanism), but some scholars also argue that this religiosity was very influential in the formation of the so called *Koshintō* (古神道),³³ that is, “ancient” or “old” Shintō, which the experts sometimes also call “pure Shintō” (and from which the present-day Shintō later developed). The system of thought of this particular form of *Ur-Shintō* shows stunning similarities with the animist practices and beliefs of the Ainu and of the people of the Ryūkyū Islands: nature and human beings, for instance, are intimately related, and God is nothing other than the totality of nature expressing itself through spiritual entities called *Kamui* (in Hokkaidō) or *Shiji* (in Okinawa).

Moreover, we find constant references to ancestral lands, the dwellings of the gods (*Kamui Moshiri* for the Ainu and *Narai Kanai* for people of the Ryūkyū Islands), while death is only a mere change of form (from bodily to spiritual). Accordingly, it would not be farfetched to think that this religious system, practiced by the Ainu and the Okinawans, may be one of the few elements that emerged untouched from Japan’s ongoing attempts to integrate and homologate these people.

The *burakumin*, on the contrary, were subjected to a systematic and intense religious ostracism (especially during the Tokugawa period). Since official Shintō considered them “impure” due to their involvement with occupations dealing with death and blood, they were barred from visiting the same shrines used by the rest of the population. Even the great Shintō reformer Atsutane Hirata (1776-1842), who demagogically declared that all Japanese (not only the Emperor) were descendants of the gods, argued that the *burakumin*’s separation from the rest of the Japanese population necessarily derived from the innate baseness and impurity of their social rank.

In Kyoto (1715) and Tokyo (1719) surveys of the *burakumin* population were carried out and the registers drawn up were ordered to be kept separate from the other registers. The use of these registries is very important if we are to understand the subsequent history of discrimination against the *burakumin*. In fact, “if one was a handler of meat or dead bodies, or engaged in other polluting activity, then one would be ritually impure for a time. After a period of time, the impurity would or could, through certain ritual activity, be expunged and no longer relevant. Yet, with the use of the registries, the incidence of pollution within certain occupations became stigmatized and permanent in that not only was an individual deemed as inherently impure, but so too was his or her family name”.³⁴

33. C. Scott Littleton, *Understanding Shinto: Origins, Beliefs, Practices, Festivals, Spirits, Sacred Places* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2002); I. Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

34. Quoted in L. D. Alldritt, “The Burakumin: The Complicity of Japanese Buddhism in Oppression and an Opportunity for Liberation,” in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 2000:7, <<http://www.buddhistethics.org/7/alldrittoo1.htm>>.

As for Buddhism, we are faced with two different reactions to the “*burakumin* problem.” Historically most Buddhist Schools rejected and discriminated against the *burakumin* for a simple doctrinal matter, namely that these outcastes violated the Buddhist taboo against killing and death through their occupation. But all Japanese people turned almost exclusively to Buddhism for the celebration of funeral rites, and it is precisely in this field that Buddhism exercised particular forms of discrimination against the *burakumin*. For instance, the temples located in *buraku* communities were labeled “impure temples” (*eta-dera*) and were not allowed to communicate with temples in non-*buraku* area; the posthumous names of the deceased (*kaimyō*) that were entered in the registries were made public to those who wished to find information about a family’s ancestry; at times some special characters were carved on the surface of tombs so as to let people know that it belonged to a *buraku* family;³⁵ and finally, the *burakumin* were taught that it was their bad *karma* that placed them in this unsavory life and that forbearance and endurance were necessary if the next life was to be favorable.³⁶

Two Buddhist Schools are worth mentioning, however, for their noble decision to welcome *burakumin* among their adepts: Shinran’s Jōdo Shinshū and Nichiren. Both Schools practiced a kind of religiosity that was accessible to the common people and argued that liberation was available to everybody, independently of their social condition. Even today they are the two main Buddhist Schools to which *burakumin* belong.

Obviously, this idyllic religious position was not free of dangerous doctrinal misconceptions. Suffice it to mention that when the government forced the entire Japanese population to become affiliated to a Buddhist temple—according to the formula: “The imperial family is in Tendai, the peerage is in Shingon, the nobility is in Jōdo (Hōnen’s followers), the Samurai is in Zen, the beggar is in Nichiren, and Shin Buddhists (Shinran’s followers) are at the bottom”³⁷—the Jōdo Shinshū branch called Hongan-ji started discriminating against the *burakumin* to try to efface the derogatory name, “the Dirty School,” by which it was beginning to be known.

It was not until 1969 that the Hongan-ji organization openly recognized before the *Suiheisha* Society that in the past they had discriminated against the *burakumin* and that in doing so they had betrayed their mission and had become insensitive to the suffering of others. The Jōdo Shinshū, though, is not the only School that recently had to admit publicly that there is a profound religious discrimination in Japan against the *burakumin*. Also the General Director of the Sōtō Zen School, Machida Muneo, at the Fourth World Conference on Religion and Peace that took place in Nairobi in 1984, had to apologize for having denied (and hence perpetuated) the fact that in Japan there was a “*burakumin*

35. W. Bodifort, “Zen and the Art of Religious Prejudice: Efforts to Reform a Tradition of Social Discrimination,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1996, 23/1-2:9.

36. “Is Buddhism Free from *Buraku* Discrimination?” in *Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute, Buraku Liberation News*, 1996, 92:10.

37. Quoted in Toshinori Kasahara, “Shin Buddhism and the Buraku-min...” Honolulu, Higashi Hongan-ji Headquarters, 1996. Cf. <<http://www.shindharmanet.com/writings/burakumin.htm>>.

problem” and that the Japanese government implemented discriminatory policies against the *burakumin*.³⁸

The effort of the Christian churches in support of Japanese minorities certainly came late, and only recently have these churches started to pay specific attention to the problems faced by the *burakumin* and the Ainu. Among the pioneers of Christian engagement in favor of these minorities are some Protestant churches that bravely embraced their cause. For example, the three-yearly assembly of the National Christian Council of March 1982, whose theme was “Jesus Christ with the Least of These,” explicitly affirmed that if the meaning of the Christian ministry must of itself take into account the needs and necessities of those considered “least” in Japanese society, then the concern for and commitment of the Ainu’s aspirations for freedom and cultural identity must be a central concern in their ministry. To this end, the Council decided to set up the Center for Christian Response to Asian Issues, which is committed to promote and support the movements fighting for the recognition and respect of the Ainu people and their culture.

As for the *burakumin*, we can say that the Catholic commitment to their cause (apart from the sporadic gestures of solidarity manifested by isolated groups or individuals) began in the 1980s, thanks particularly to the drive of the National Peace and Justice Commission, which contributed to focus the Church’s attention on the problems of discrimination present in Japan. A further drive came from the First National Incentive Convention for Evangelization of 1987, which by concentrating on the social problems of the Christian communities, promoted new forms of solidarity toward those who are marginalized and new ways of raising awareness about discrimination against minorities.

Furthermore, in 1984 the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan established a Committee for Buraku Issues which, through the publication of several documents, spelled out the main lines of the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the *burakumin* problem. Among other things, the Committee proposed to establish within each parish and each religious and missionary order a research group on issues specifically concerning the *burakumin*, and to introduce in the Catholic educational institutions a period of formation on human rights and of awareness-building about the problems of minorities. All these appeals and activities indicate that the Church, despite the growing attention to

38. W. Bodifort, “Zen and the Art of Religious Prejudice: Efforts to Reform a Tradition of Social Discrimination,” op. cit., 1-2. Five years earlier, in Princeton, New Jersey, during the previous World Conference on Religion and Peace in, Machida had convinced his fellow delegates in the Conference’s Human Right Commission to remove any mention of the plight of the outcastes in Japan from the text of the final report. According to the Buddhist newspaper *Chūgai Nippō* 中外日報 (11 October 1979) Machida first told the members of the commission: “In Japan today an ‘outcaste problem’ (*buraku mondai*) does not exist. As a Japanese I know this very well. There are some groups who use the ‘outcaste problem’ or ‘outcaste liberation’ as a pretext to create uproars, but the actual situation within Japan is that no one encounters discrimination. The government does not engage in discrimination. No one else engages in discrimination. It is just that until a hundred years ago during the feudal period such discrimination existed to a certain extent, so that some biased emotions persist. But no one actually practices discrimination. Therefore this passage must be removed. It is a matter of Japanese national honor.” Ibid.

problems related to the minorities, is still a step behind in actively participating in the process of liberation of the *burakumin*.

CONCLUSION

On 24 January 2006, after meeting with the representatives of the various minorities and visiting different institutions, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on racism and racial discrimination, Doudou Diène, drafted a report in which he confirmed the presence of racial discrimination and xenophobia in Japan affecting particularly three groups (the national minorities—the *burakumin*, the Ainu and the Okinawans; people and descendants of former Japanese colonies—Koreans and Chinese; foreigners and migrants from other Asian countries and from the rest of the world) and accused Tokyo of negligence in dealing with this serious and alarming reality.³⁹

For instance, in Japan there is no anti-discrimination law (even though article 14 of the Constitution clearly states: “All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin”), and the recent resolution of the Diet about the recognition of the Ainu people is less a genuine conviction than the result of pressures from without. The clearest manifestations of such discrimination—continues Diène—are, first, of an economic and social nature (all surveys show that minorities live in situation of marginalization in their access to education, employment, health care, housing, etc.), secondly of political nature (the national minorities are invisible in State institutions), and finally of a historical and cultural nature (which effects principally the national minorities and the descendents of former Japanese colonies).

The United Nations Special Rapporteur’s recommendations were essentially four: to recognize that there is an endemic racial discrimination in Japan and to express the willingness to combat it; to adopt a national law against all forms of discrimination and to establish a national commission for equality and the respect of human rights; to revise history textbooks that perpetuate the prejudice against minorities present in Japan; and finally, to strengthen solidarity bonds among the various minority groups.

As was to be expected, the replies to Diène’s report were largely divergent: some commended his courage in finally having brought to the world’s attention a problem that Japan had been deliberately concealing, ignoring and perpetuating, while others deconstructed and demolished the text—word by word—highlighting all the passages in which Diène is guilty of excessive shallowness, if not of plain historical ignorance, and an utter lack of experience in reading Japan’s complex situation.⁴⁰

Whatever one’s reaction to this report may be, it seems clear that today Japan finds

39. Doudou Diène’s report can be downloaded at: <<http://www.imadr.org/multi/erd/>>.

40. A survey of opinions on the Diène report can be found at: <<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Honda-Katsuichi/1882>>..

itself at a crossroads: either it will affirm the existence of these “others” whose backgrounds differ from that of the majority, thus deepening its understanding of the conditions faced by minority groups, the underlying social, economic and political structures involved, as well as the history and distinct cultures of those groups, or else it will keep its eyes shut and continue to repeat the old mantra that Japan is a homogeneous country, intrinsically monoethnic and monolingual, in the hope that more and more people will buy into it.

Today this crossroads takes on the connotations of a test: the challenge to deal successfully with the problem of multiculturalism in a serene, serious, and respectful way, by recognizing how these “others” represent an enriching element, rather than a contaminating factor, for Japanese society. To welcome this challenge would mean for the Japanese to recognize that their history is also a history which has witnessed a recurrent exploitation and alienation of these “others,” and that recognizing and addressing this deplorable situation can only increase the respect and admiration of the international community towards Japan. There is always the possibility to respond to the shame caused by the faults of one’s fathers with the creativity of those who are willing to change, instead of remaining victims of their own past, as the public apologies of the several religious Schools amply testify.

The strength and courage to initiate this process of conversion are to be sought within Japan itself, as it recognizes its weaknesses and allows its citizens to freely share their individualities, thus rediscovering their unquestionable dignity and uniqueness. In order to do so, Japan could listen to and rely on all those “others” that to this day it has ostracized and made the object of discrimination: these are all “others” that Japan could certainly trust, for their history of marginalization made them not only experts in suffering, but also, and above all, patient masters of liberation.

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PHILIPPINES

EUGENIO PULCINI

The purpose of this article is to summarily describe how, in the Philippines, the majority-minority dichotomy (together with its attendant problems of marginalization and discrimination), has been a creation of history, due to economic, religious and political factors, namely Indigenous Peoples' non-integration into colonial structures. The dispossession and grabbing of Indigenous Peoples' (IPs) land (ancestral domain) by "outsiders" who covet their rich land for profit, has led to IPs displacement and the loss of their unique identity and culture. During these last few decades, the legal recognition and protection of IPs rights, including self-determination and cultural integrity, have been the on-going effort of Indigenous Peoples' organizations (IPOS), civil society and religious based groups to allow native peoples to exist not just on the margins of the nation-state but as a significant and meaningful portion of humanity.

"The life of indigenous people in the Philippines is becoming more difficult and complicated in this present age. Being an

IP (Indigenous Person) is a continuous struggle, which requires time, effort and sweat to preserve culture and worldviews which are now being destroyed by various factors: large-scale mining, illegal logging, plantations within ancestral lands, militarization, discrimination, displacement and lack of recognition of IP worldviews... Capitalists benefit while IPs suffer... IPs remain at the bottom of Philippine socially stratified society despite all the struggles they have had and their voices remain unheard by society... Does it mean that IPs will have to spend their whole lives craving for respect, recognition and acceptance?”¹

These words of Kristine Mae Sumali, student of the *Pamulaan Centre for Indigenous Education*² summarize very clearly the present situation of most IPs in the Philippines, condemned to be strangers in their own country, despite being the present-day descendants of the pre-colonial inhabitants of these islands who have managed to resist centuries of colonization from different political and religious powers. All along this historical process they have managed to retain to some extent their social/cultural identity distinct from the dominant society, which makes them continuously vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the processes of development. In the Philippines of today, the words *katutubo* (the *tagalog* word for “native”), tribe, cultural minority, IP... are often associated by many to mean, primitive, uncivilized, uneducated, backward, so expressing all the widespread prejudices and preconceived notions still deeply embedded in society.

It sounds very ironic that centuries of foreign domination have made Filipinos very conscious of the freedom they should have as a sovereign nation, “and yet the very people who kept their freedom intact and never came wholly under any colonial rule until recent times—*Filipino* tribal communities—are losing their freedom to the Filipino majority,” alien in their native land.³ On the other hand, to date, the Philippines is the only country in Asia that has officially used the term *Indigenous Peoples* and recognized their rights as such.⁴ As optimistic as this may sound, the question remains: is it enough? As the case is always, to have good legislation is just an important first step, but not the final objective.⁵

1. J. Aranas, “Pamulaan Center for Indigenous Peoples Education. Seedbed of Peace.” *New City*, 2010, 45/6: 10–1.

2. Pamulaan Centre is a College for Indigenous people, the first of its kind in the Philippines, located in Davao City. Pamulaan—which means “seedbed”—is not just for the IPs of Mindanao. It is open to IPs from Luzon and the Visayas and to non-IPs working for IPs. In <<http://pamulaan.assisi-foundation.org/>>.

3. Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 1998).

4. With the 1987 Philippines Constitution’s mandate, the Philippines had enacted Republic Act 8371, also known as *The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act* (IPRA). It is the embodiment of the government’s formal recognition of the rights of the country’s various indigenous peoples (IPs) and indigenous cultural communities (ICCs), foremost of which is to hold titles to their territories or ancestral domains, or The Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADT), after proper identification and delineation according to the law.

5. According to representatives of IPs in the Philippines, IPRA “is a landmark piece of legislation which promises to change the course of history of indigenous peoples in the Philippines.” However, after more than ten years since its enactment, its success and failures in terms of implementation are being evaluated and still causing many controversies.

There still is a long way to go to craft implementing rules and regulations. We shall return to this theme later on.

The Philippines is the eighth most multi-ethnic nation in the world, a rich tapestry of ethnic diversity.⁶ All together, a total of 114 distinct peoples inhabit the Philippines and constitute a significant segment of Philippine society. They are considered to be between 10 to 15 % of the population and the main tribal groups are concentrated in the regions of Mindanao (61%) and Cordillera (33%), home to the country's major natural resources. From time to time, the world's press has taken up the cause of Philippine ethnic groups. Namely, the devastating eruptions of Pinatubo brought the plight of the *Aëta* (or *Negritos*)⁷ to world attention. About 40,000 people, living around the volcano, were forced to abandon their original territory for the lowlands and the cities; a step that has caused serious social consequences for the group, until now.

According to the rationale of this paper, we define IP in the Philippines based on the formulation decided upon by the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA)⁸ and various United Nations documents, summarized as follows:⁹

- a) IPs/ICCs belong to communities whose members practice a culture or life ways

6. Beside a considerable number of communities of American, Arabic, Chinese, Indian and Hispanic descent, the Philippines has ten distinct major indigenous groups: Bicolano, Ibanag, Ilocano, Ivatan, Kapampangan, Moro, Pangasinense, Sambal, Tagalog and Visayan. There are also several aboriginal races such as the Badjao, Igorot, Lumad, Mangyan and Negritos. Each one of these minority groups consist of various sub-groups totalling more than 100 ethnic groups.

7. In Southern Luzon the *Negrito* are the tribal predominant group, of which up to 25 major groups have been identified, mostly distinguished by their Australoid physical features. They are thought to be the most ancient population group in South-East Asia, and are more numerous in the Philippines than anywhere else. Anthropologists have established a possible relationship with the Papuas of New Guinea, and similarities with the Australian aborigines. There is no clear evidence as to the origins of these diminutive (never taller than 5ft/1.5m), frizzy haired and dark to black-skinned people. All we have is their own names for their individual clans: *Ati*, *Atta*, *Agtá*, *Ita*, *Aëta*, *Aete*, *Dumagat*, *Sinauna*. They are not certainly a homogeneous ethnic group. Historically, they were the least influenced by Christianity and Hispanization. Neither were they Islamized. They either withdrew to the hinterlands in the face of colonization or they stood their ground successfully. Some groups continue to live their semi-nomadic aboriginal life, practicing their traditional religion focused on the spirits of nature around them. At the same time most *Negritos* groups have come to terms with their Christian neighbors, living as settled rice and vegetable growers, and working as laborers and household helpers. In <<http://www.peoplesoftheworld.org/text?people=Aeta>> and <<http://www.sil.org/silewp/1997/004/SILEWP1997-004.html>>.

8. IPRA defines indigenous peoples as follows: "A group of people or homogeneous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and cultures, become historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICCs/IPs (indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples) shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains," (IPRA, Chapter II, § 3h).

9. Cf. "Indigenous people/Ethnic minorities and Poverty reduction—Philippines," Asian Development Bank <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Indigenous_Peoples/PHI/default.asp>.

that are different from the mainstream. Members of the group also share a common language;

b) They define themselves (self-ascription) and are defined by others (ascription by others) as belonging to a distinct cultural group;

c) The communities have lived in a defined territory, which they describe as their ancestral domain or ancestral land, since pre-colonial or colonial times;

d) The communities have been marginalized because of their resistance to assimilation by colonization, and continue to suffer marginalization from the mainstream, including the state, because they differ from it;

e) They should be regarded as those with a social or cultural identity distinct from the dominant or mainstream society, which makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the processes of development.

Inherent in this definition are factors such as historical continuity, self-identification, and group membership which are characterized by occupation of ancestral lands/domains; common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands; culture in general or specific manifestations of it; and, finally, language and residence, whether in their lands of origin or evicted from it. In a particular way, the concept of self-identification is inextricably related to group membership, identity, and history. The thread that weaves these factors together is the IPs' attachment to land and territory.¹⁰

DEALING WITH AND UNDERSTANDING IDENTITIES

Due to the absence of up-to-date cultural mapping and to the tenuous way in which IPs identities have been constructed by themselves and others (for political, religious, and other reasons), there is still no consensus as to exactly who are the IPs in the Philippines.

This problem of "contesting identities" is best illustrated in the case of the IPs of the geographic region known as Mindanao where even supposedly monolithic categories such as the *Moro* are not immutable. There are also other overlapping layers of identities that cut across ethnic and religious boundaries. Thus, the best that can be achieved is an attempt at categorizing peoples based on (mostly) external criteria, rather than self-identification. In Mindanao society, ethnic identity forms the core of all other layers of socially constructed identities. That is, an individual is identified first by his or her ethnic affiliation.

The spread of Islam in Mindanao-Sulu created a differentiation among its native peoples between those who became Muslim (also called *Moro*) and those who did not (now called *Lumad*).¹¹ The dichotomy between *Moro* and *Lumad* is a historical creation—i.e.,

10. Ibidem.

11. *Lumad* is a Visayan term which means "born of the earth." *Lumads* are regarded as the original inhabitants of southern Philippines until the introduction of Islam, in the mid-fourteenth century. The term *Lumad* now refers

a result of the process of Islamization. Accordingly religion too became a key element in the differentiation and construction of these identities. The terms *Muslim* and *Moro* have been used interchangeably to refer to those people who have adopted Islam as a religion and a way of life. However, *Muslim* refers to a universal religious identity, while *Moro* defining IPs denotes a political identity distinct from the Islamized peoples of Mindanao and Sulu. The Spanish colonizers originally used the term *Moro* for peoples of Mindanao who shared the religion of the *Moors* who had once colonized Spain. The term *Moro* was used in the same derogatory way as the term *Indio* for Filipinos from Luzon and the Visayas whom they converted to Christianity.¹²

This same kind of reasoning, although based on slightly different phenomena can be used regarding the IPs of the Cordillera (Northern Luzon), one of the poorest and most marginalized regions of the country. The Cordillera peoples, collectively known as *Igorots* (mountain dwellers), refer to the name of indigenous people groups living in the highlands, foothills and river valleys of the Cordillera mountain ranges of Northern Luzon. They are grouped into six ethno-linguistic groups, the *Bontoc*, *Ibaloi*, *Ifugao*, *Isneg* (or *Apayao*), *Kalinga*, and the *Kankana-ey*. They are mainly swidden or wet-rice cultivators who grow their crops both on irrigated terraces and swidden farming. In more recent years, these groups have been integrated into the outside market economy with the growth of commercial gardening of temperate vegetables. Some of them—Kalinga-Isabela, Isinay, Bugkalot, and Malaweg—are in danger of losing their cultural autonomy, with substantial erosion of indigenous identity, caused by an advanced state of assimilation into the national mainstream

The native inhabitants of the Cordillera have occupied and sustained their territories since time immemorial. They have maintained their culture, distinct languages, and sociopolitical systems. Not having been effectively colonized by Spain spells the difference between a Filipino minority like the peoples of the Cordillera and the majority of the colonized Filipinos. This difference persisted even when American colonization and succeeding Filipino governments pervaded all aspects of socioeconomic and political life in the Cordillera. The IPs institutions persist even as they accommodate external influences.

Religion played an important part also for the *Igorots* in the differentiation and construction of their identities, together with other criteria. Christianity was first introduced to the *Igorots* of the Cordillera by the Spanish colonizers and missionaries. The IPs' tena-

to the non-Muslim, non-Christian IPs of Mindanao that still adhere to their traditional cultural patterns or life style. They are a complex patchwork of indigenous groups. The *Lumad* communities stress that they are different from the Moros and don't recognize the Moro as being indigenous. Depending on how groups are identified, there are at least 13 islamized ethnolinguistic groups indigenous to Mindanao and other 18 non-Muslim or Lumad. To simplify, *Lumad* groups may be clustered into a) The Manobo cluster, b) The Bagobo-B'laa-T'boli cluster, c) The Mandaya cluster, d) The Subanen and e) The Mamanwa. There is much inter-penetration among the groups, especially between the Manobo, Bagobo and Mandaya.

12. Cf. M. Stancovich, ed., *Compromising on Autonomy—Mindanao in Transition*, Accord, issue 6 (London: Conciliation Resources, 1999).

cious resistance repelled the Spanish presence, as the missionaries and colonizers failed to establish Christianity and to acquire ownership of their gold mines. Such resistance gave the *Igorots* independence from Spanish authorities on the one hand and rendered them a minority, on the other,¹³ strangers in their own land. The *Igorots* chose to maintain their freedom and entered the twentieth century independent yet marginalized; none could have foreseen that their descendants would be labeled as minorities. The Spanish authorities may have failed to evangelize the *Igorot* Peoples but instead were successful in creating the lowland-highland divide.¹⁴

Thus began the majority-minority dichotomy. It could be affirmed that the IPs in the Philippines are, to a large extent, a creation of history. National minorities became so as a result of their *non-Christianization* or *non-Islamization* and non-integration into the political, social and cultural colonial structures.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The background of this brief historical excursus concerning the situation of the IPs in the Philippines is their life and relationship with the land from time immemorial, what is commonly known as Ancestral Domain.¹⁵ In fact the IPs' loss of freedom and respect centres on another loss: that of their culture and their lands. The two are actually one, so closely interlinked as they are in the IPs' lives. Truly the ancestral domain has always been a matrix of meaning to the lives of IP communities because their livelihood, heritage, culture and identity are rooted in their relationship with it, which goes back thousands of years.

The people whom the Spanish found here were for 400 years simply called *Indios*. An effective political and cultural hierarchy was established on the *islas Filipinas*, in which the true inhabitants were right at the bottom, labeled as *Indios*, below the *mestizos* (half-breeds), the *Insulares* (Spanish born in the Philippines) and the *Peninsulares* (the Spanish born in Spain). Spanish colonization of the Philippines in the early sixteenth century focused on opening the IPs areas to agriculture and converting the inhabitants to Christianity. The Spanish colonial government was ordered to open gold mines in the mountains even as it tried to control trade in the lowlands by forcing people to cultivate tobacco.

13. W. H. Scott, *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1987), 7

14. Spanish records show that, for three centuries, these mountain dwellers fought for their liberty with every means at their disposal and that this resistance was deliberate, self-conscious, and continuous. Cf. L. L. Taray, "Understanding Ancestor Reverence in the Benguet Tradition," in *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 2008, 8/1: 61–72, <<http://www.philjol.info/index.php/APSSR/article/view/7061987>>.

15. Ancestral domains are defined as areas generally belonging to indigenous cultural communities, including ancestral lands, forests, pasture, residential and agricultural lands, hunting grounds, and worship areas. These lands are required to have been occupied, possessed, and utilized by IPs or their ancestors since time immemorial. They include lands no longer occupied exclusively by indigenous cultural communities but to which they had traditional access, particularly the home ranges of indigenous cultural communities who are still nomadic or shifting cultivators. Ancestral domains also include inland waters and coastal areas and natural resources therein.

Their subjects were forced to live in *pueblos* (or *reducciones*). Those who rejected this and retreated into the hinterlands were called *remontados*, from the Spanish verb *remontar* meaning “to flee to the hills” or “go back to the mountains.” For confederating and resisting Spanish intrusions, the natives of the mountains were called *tribus independientes*, (literally, independent tribes). They were labeled barbarians, *non-Christians*, pagans and other derogatory names—an attitude that even the assimilated Christians in the lowlands would eventually internalize.

Both under the Spanish and the American administrations many laws were premised on a discriminatory perception of IPs as *Non Christian Tribes*. At stake, of course, were the natural resources of the ancestral lands—agricultural, timber and mineral. From their experience with the American Indians, the American colonial administration classified the Filipinos as “Christians” and “non-Christians”—i.e. *pagan tribes*, *cultural minorities* or *hill tribes*—in order to facilitate administrative and social control. In 1901, the *Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes* was established in order to institutionalize effectively the “non-Christian” label differentiating tribal Filipinos, from the Christian majority. Moreover, Christian Filipinos, who possessed the wealth of the country and controlled the political system and social services, had finally declared *tribal Filipinos* as “cultural minorities.” In addition, during this period, the new colonizers took a deep ethnographic interest in the IPs and this has contributed over the years to the literature on the indigenous communities.

The colonizers’ strong discriminatory perception is reflected for instance in 1919 *Rubi vs. Provincial Board of Mindoro* Supreme Court decision, which described the indigenous *Mangyans* as “possessing a low degree of civilization and intelligence.”¹⁶ The same philosophy was evident in the speech of the then Commonwealth President, Manuel L. Quezon, to the National Assembly in 1935 where he asserted that: “They, the national minorities, no longer exist to an extent sufficient to justify the continuation of the Bureau of Non Christian Tribes. Considering the marked advancement in the civilization and general progress of the special provinces the so-called non-Christian problem has been reduced to one of solidification and development and our present efforts are directed towards the simplification of government agencies so as to ensure efficiency.”¹⁷ The basic pattern of this socio-political-cultural scale has remained intact to this day.

16. *The Mangyans* is a collective term to describe the peace loving original inhabitants of Mindoro, who dwell in the island’s interior, even nowadays hardly accessible. Due to the influx of migrants and land grabbers, they have retreated into the interior. They are usually clustered into the Northern Mangyan and the Southern Mangyan. The anthropologists divide them into at least six ethnic groups and there are great differences between them, i.e. the *Hanunuo*—the true *Mangyans* as they define themselves—who have developed pottery, weaving, embroidery and basket making to a high level, and use a syllabic script which was formerly in other parts of the country; or the *Alangan* who still live in almost stone-age conditions, roaming as hunter-gatherers through the forests of Mount Halcon. Cf. V. Schult, *Mindoro, A Social History of a Philippine Island in the 20th Century* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1991). Cf. also <<http://en.wikipedia.org/index.php?title=Mangyan>>.

17. Quoted in “Philippines Indigenous Peoples ICERD Shadow Report for the consolidated fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth Philippine ICERD periodic reports”; cf. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/PIP_Philippines75.pdf>.

Prior to Spanish colonization, indigenous communities already had customary concepts and practices of land use and ownership. The indigenous concept of landownership was one of collectivism, where private ownership by one or a few individuals seemed alien. The customary laws of the ethno-linguistic groups embodied this basic rule, but there were also variations.¹⁸ The IPs' strong attachment to their land and resources led to intermittent conflicts (the so-called tribal wars) with other groups that violated their territory. At varying levels, these communities had developed social and political structures to regulate their relations within their communities as well as with outsiders. However, the idea of majority-minority dichotomy and its attendant problems of marginalization and discrimination were absent. These problems emerged during the colonial period: in fact with the advent of Spanish colonization, the "minorization" of the indigenous peoples started.

The Spaniards introduced laws that contradicted, even denied, customary concepts of land use and ownership. They introduced the *Regalian Doctrine*, first, through a policy of *encomienda*. These were land grants by the King of Spain, but were managed by an *encomendero*. The latter was tasked to collect tribute (taxes) and enforce the economic policies of the Crown. Later, the Spanish Crown enacted the *Maura Law*, which reiterated that all *pueblo* lands were protected lands; they could not be alienated because they belonged to the King. In spite of these colonial policies, those who refused to live in the *reducciones* continued their customary practices with regard to their land and resources.

The Americans essentially retained the concept of the *Regalian doctrine*. They made laws that reinforced the state's control over the public domain, citing the reason, among others, that there was no effective system of land registration during the Spanish period. They reintroduced a reservation policy comparable with that applied to the American Indians; gradually occupied the areas that were never brought under the Spanish flag in the previous era and introduced the notion of public lands, mineral lands and timber lands over which the colonial state claimed jurisdiction considering all unregistered land as *public land*. There were a series of laws and decrees, which virtually aimed at extinguishing IPs' title to land ordering that all unregistered lands become part of the public domain, and that only the State had the authority to classify or exploit the same. These laws gave the Americans the right to acquire public land for mining purposes and decided that Mindanao and all other areas of fertile lands that the State considered unoccupied, unreserved, or otherwise un-appropriated public lands became available to homesteaders and corporations, despite the fact that the IPs were in these lands.¹⁹

Postcolonial administrations of the Republic of the Philippines did not turn away from the Western concepts of land use and ownership. The 1935 Constitution stated

18. Among the *Manobo*, *Mamanua*, and *Hanunuo* groups—in the Mindanao-Sulu area—land was considered as communally owned by the people forming the community. However within the *Subanon*, only the paramount god, Apo Gumalang, had the right to own land. This was also the case with the *Kalingas*, for whom only Apo Kabunyan, the high god, could claim ownership over land. These people saw themselves only as caretakers of their resources.

19. Cf. "Indigenous people/Ethnic minorities and Poverty reduction—Philippines," op. cit., ch. 3, 9-11.

that all agricultural, timber, and mineral lands of the public domain, waters, minerals, coal, petroleum, and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, and other natural resources of the Philippines belong to the State. This constitutional mandate gave rise to a number of laws that continued to deny IPs' customary land use and ownership. The most controversial of these laws was *Presidential Decree (PD) 705* of the Revised Forestry Code, enacted in May 1975 by Marcos, which further delimited landownership among IPs, so that even ownership of rice terraces of the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera (for example), became questionable. IPs were accused of environmental destruction, specifically deforestation, due to their practice of *kaingin* (slash-and-burn) agriculture. This decree stated that "no lands of the public domain with a slope of 18% or more shall be classified as alienable and disposable, nor any forest land 50% or more in slope, as grazing land. Lands 18% or more in slope that have already been declared as *alienable and disposable* shall be reverted to the classification of forest lands... to form part of the forest reserve... that when public interest so requires, steps shall be taken to expropriate, cancel effective titles, reject public land applications, or reject occupants thereof."²⁰

PD 705 made the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera virtually "squatters in their own land," because most of these lands are located in mountainous areas that are within the 18% slope rule. From sovereign stewards of their territory in pre-colonial times, by a series of edicts the indigenous communities became illegal occupants of "public lands."

The 1987 Philippine Constitution too retained the *Regalian Doctrine*²¹ and, at the same time, also contained provisions that recognized "the rights of indigenous cultural communities within the framework of national unity and development" (Art. II, § 22) and the creation of autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and in the Cordillera (Art. x, §§ 15–19).

However, the state's constitutional recognition of indigenous rights did not fundamentally change the situation of the indigenous population. This has become evident in the implementation of government policies and programmes in their territories, like reforestation programmes, in which the inhabitants are requested to plant certain species of trees causing—as inevitable consequence—the non availability of useful areas for them to continue agricultural activities needed for their own subsistence. Or like the Mining Act of 1995, which essentially allowed greater control of the Philippines' geological/natural resources by transnational and local mining corporations. The agreements embodied within the law, like the granting of royalty payments for the right to mine in IPs' lands, have favoured the apparent expropriation of these lands as the local people yield to corporate mining interests.²² Environmental disasters from mining activities, like

20. § 1, Art. XIII, 1935 Philippine Constitution and § 15, Revised Forestry Code. In "Indigenous people/Ethnic minorities and Poverty reduction—Philippines," op. cit., 17.

21. All "lands of the public domain, waters, minerals, coal, petroleum, and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy, fisheries, forests or timber, wildlife, flora and fauna, and other natural resources are owned by the State." Constitution 1987, § 2, Article XII.

22. Displacements of indigenous peoples have also resulted from mining operations that necessitated the trans-

the Marcopper mine accident in Marinduque²³ Province where mine tailings found their way into rivers, have sparked a series of protests against the Mining Act, and continue up until today.

In 1997, following the 1987 Constitution's mandate, Republic Act (RA) 8371 of the IPRA was enacted. A landmark piece of legislation, the IPRA promises to change the course of history of indigenous peoples in the Philippines.

This legislation seeks to alleviate the plight of the country's "poorest of the poor" by correcting, by legislative *fiat*, the historical errors that led to the systematic dispossession of and discrimination against IPs. The Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of IPRA were approved on 9 June, 1998. The IPRA law enforces the 1987 Constitution's mandate that the State should craft a policy "to recognize and promote the rights of indigenous peoples/ICCs within the framework of national unity and development," and "to protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social and cultural well-being."

The key features—inclusive of programmes, projects and activities to be developed—that distinguish the IPRA from previous efforts of the Philippine government to recognize IPs rights are described through the fourfold agenda of recognition and protection of ancestral domain/land rights, self-governance and empowerment, cultural integrity, and social justice and human rights.

IPRA REPUBLIC ACT 8371

Right to Ancestral Land and Domain

The law restores the rights of IPs over their ancestral lands and ancestral domains. These lands are required to have been "occupied, possessed, and utilized" by them or their ancestors "since time immemorial, continuously to the present" (§ 3b). These are required to have been "held under a claim of ownership, occupied or possessed by ICCs/IPs, by

fer of occupants. Among those affected are the B'laan of North Cotabato, Subanen of Zamboanga del Sur, Aetas of Central Luzon, Igorots of the Cordillera region, and some groups in the Cagayan Valley. Cf. J. Guan and R. B., Guzman, "IPRA: legalizing Dispossession?" *IBON Special Release*, 1999, 42.

23. Marinduque is an island 170 km South of Manila. The history of Marcopper mine is tragic. First, in 1993 a dam at the mine collapsed, releasing a flood of toxic silt and water. The disaster killed two children, destroyed homes, drowned livestock and contaminated farmland. Second, three years later, on March 24, 1996, a mine drainage tunnel burst, releasing three million cubic meters of sulfidic tailings into the Makulapnit and Boac Rivers and Marinduque's Western ocean causing the worst man-made disaster in the Philippines' history. The Marcopper Mining disaster directly affected several municipalities which were relying heavily on fishing and farming. Marcopper's destructive impact did not only lead to the death of Marinduque's rivers but also the contamination of the populace. Not to mention the lives that have been lost. More than 4,500 people were affected and the communities were left with a dead river system, contaminated environment and very ill population. Cf. <<http://www.oxfam.org.au/explore/mining/our-work-with-communities/marinduque-island-the-philippines>> and <<http://bulatlat.com/news/3-44/3-44-nomore.html>>.

themselves or through their ancestors, communally or individually since time immemorial, continuously to the present” (§ 3.1).

Enumerating the rights of IPs over their ancestral domains/lands, the law mentions the right of ownership, right to develop and manage lands and natural resources, right to stay in territories and not to be displaced therefrom, right to regulate entry of migrants and other entities, right to safe and clean water, right to claim parts of reservations, and right to resolve conflicts according to customary law (§§ 1–8, Rule III, Part II). IPs also have the right to transfer (ancestral) land or property among members of their community, and to redeem those that have been acquired from them through fraudulent transactions (§§ 1, 2, Part III). The law also stipulates that the IPs and their communities have the responsibility to maintain ecological balance and restore denuded areas.

Right to Self-Governance and Empowerment

The IPRA upholds the rights of indigenous peoples to self-governance and empowerment. These are the right to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development; to use commonly accepted justice systems, conflict resolution mechanism, peace building process, and customary laws; to participate in decision making; to maintain and develop indigenous political structures; to have mandatory representation in policymaking bodies; to determine their own priorities for development

IPs may now also utilize a vital instrument for their empowerment—the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). The IPRA states that IPs shall, within their communities, determine for themselves policies, to accept or reject development programmes, projects and plans to meet their identified priority needs and concerns.

Right to Cultural Integrity

The IPRA and its IRR put forward procedures and mechanisms for the recognition of indigenous peoples’ right to cultural integrity. They provide the conceptual framework for cultural integrity, the specific rights pertinent thereto, and the procedures for the recognition of these rights, including the right to indigenous culture, customs, and traditions; right to establish and control educational learning systems; recognition of cultural diversity; right to name, identity, and history; community intellectual rights; protection of indigenous sacred places; right to protection of indigenous knowledge; and the right to science and technology.

Social Justice and Human Rights

Recognition of and respect for fundamental human rights are also safeguarded by the IPRA. The law contains specific provisions that ensure that indigenous peoples, just like other human beings, will enjoy these rights: the right to life, development, and civil liberties; political rights; freedom of association; nondiscrimination; equal protection; and right to peace and social justice. The law guarantees IPs’ right to basic social services:

right to employment, vocational training, housing, sanitation, health, social security, infrastructure, transportation, and communication.

FROM IPRA TO THE PRESENT

The IPRA, following a constitutional mandate (Art. 16, § 12), created the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), the government body mandated to implement the law.²⁴ All things considered, more than ten years after the enactment of the IPRA, stakeholder assessment of its implementation yields poor if not dismal results. The NCIP has been unable to perform its tasks well.

It took several years before setting up and putting into place prepared and efficient structures and staffing.²⁵ Lack of clear leadership has led many times to the absence or non-performance of NCIP's policymaking.

More than in one case there were indications that the processes of issuing titles and certificates to allow mining and other activities have been compromised if not corrupted. A concrete manifestation of NCIP's weakness has been the slow pace of processing and approval of Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT)/Certificate of Ancestral Land Title (CALT) applications.

As of December 2008 only 96 CADTs had been issued, covering 2.7 million hectares. Of these only 19 have been fully registered by the NCIP national office, corresponding to less than 0.6 million hectares. In other words, after 11 years of the IPRA's implementation, less than 8% of the estimated 7.5 million hectares of ancestral domain has been registered. Eleven years after the passage of the IPRA, and twenty-one years after the Constitution recognized Indigenous Peoples' land rights, the failure to uphold these rights in practice is indicative of cynical neglect.²⁶

It is easy to imagine, considering the powerful interests in play, the reactions of the economic forces at work that have continually posed a threat and all kind of obstacles to the genuine implementation of this law.²⁷

24. IPRA, § 38 describes NCIP as "the primary government agency for the formulation and implementation of policies, plans and programmes to promote and protect the rights and well-being of the ICCs/IPs and their ancestral domains as well as their rights thereto."

25. On August 2001, a new set of NCIP Commissioners had to be appointed through a consultative process and the full support of several IPs' organizations, civil society. Just recently, a few weeks ago, the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous people (ECIP) asked the new President Benigno Aquino III to overhaul the NCIP and appoints leaders with integrity, competency and familiarity with Indigenous Knowledge, Systems, Practices and Spirituality.

26. In the same period, the Government has moved rapidly and aggressively to secure rights over indigenous lands for foreign mining companies and other business enterprises. Laws and regulations have been passed to speed up the process for securing mining licenses in these lands and to guarantee positive outcomes. A mining company can receive the approval to extract mineral resources from and operate in an ancestral domain in less than 4 months, while an indigenous community must wait 6 years or more for its rights over its own ancestral domain to be recognized. "Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination Philippines Indigenous Peoples ICERD Shadow Report" in <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/ngos/PIP_Philippines75.pdf>.

27. The Supreme Court on 6 December 2000 dismissed a petition against the IPRA filed in 1998, right after the

In his book *The Lumad's Struggle in the Face of Globalization*,²⁸ Karl Gaspar observes that while plantations, logging and dams were the main culprits that displaced IP communities from their ancestral domains and wrought havoc in their way of life in the 70s and 80s, the spectre since the 1990s until today is large-scale mining and energy-generation projects that, ironically, are strongly supported by the government. Impoverished communities versus the so called globalized multinational corporations; cultural (moral and spiritual) articulations versus legal statutes; grassroots voices versus government policies: as experienced in former times, economic interests, with the support of politicians, are to be implemented ruthlessly.

The IPRA is totally different in tone from the 1995 Mining Act. In fact, the mining and power industry immediately expressed their apprehension over IPRA and its implementation by the NCIP indicating that had been an alarming exodus and withdrawal of foreign mining companies due to the “inherent vagueness of the IPRA” and the apparent “lack of commitment by the Government to actively support the development of the mining industry.”²⁹ Strange as it may seem, the Philippine Government—allured by a possible economic growth through job creation and increase of revenues—staunchly supports the Mining Act passed in 1995, encouraging the entry of large-scale mining companies in different parts of the country even if opposed by the local governments. They can't foresee the possibility of achieving economic ends with the different modalities that IPRA and its IRR try to suggest/implement. IPs are seen simply as an obstacle to economic interests. The long years of legislative action leading to the IPRA's approval and the ensuing debate during its implementation have undoubtedly increased awareness of the public (including the IPs themselves) on the issues and concerns of IPs. They have drawn the attention of the State as well as civil society (non-government organizations (NGOs), churches, and academic institutions) to the “plight” of indigenous peoples, who had long been denied a space in national Philippine politics.³⁰

While the IPRA has resulted in the proliferation of IPOs and support NGOs, its enactment has caused mixed effects on indigenous communities and also engendered disuni-

promulgation of IPRA and its IRR, by a retired Court Justice. The implementation of the law was withheld three years. However, the separate decisions of the Supreme Court justices who voted (7-7) to dismiss the petition, expressed substantive points that essentially upheld the *Regalian doctrine*. They stressed that the IPRA merely gave IPs surface rights over their ancestral domains. The resources therein, they add, are still owned by the State.

28. K. M. Gaspar, *The Lumad's Struggle in the Face of Globalization* (Davao City, Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2000).

29. “As cited in a 2007 report published by the Society of Saint Columban after a 2006 fact-finding mission composed of several institutions from Europe, 16 of 24 priority mining areas cover indigenous communities. In the Cordillera Region, dominantly populated by indigenous people, 15 mining applications pending with the DENR cover 61% of the region.” In M. C. L. Victor, “Threatened by the government,” World Mission, 2009, 24 at <<http://www.combonimissionaries.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/threatened-by-the-government.pdf>>.

30. New indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs) at national level were established to give support to the IPRA Law. Two of them are: the *Katutubong Samahan ng Pilipinas*, the Coalition for Indigenous Peoples Rights and Ancestral Domains (CIPRAD). The latter is a network of 15 IPOs and five NGOs, including the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP) of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

ties among the IPs.³¹ One source of discord is how to view the IPRA. The IPOs and NGOs that support the IPRA argue that, despite its imperfections, they are convinced that this legal instrument can be used as a stepping-stone toward a “more progressive level of political discourse.” Others, like *The Cordillera Peoples’ Alliance*, do not share this view labeling IPRA a “master act of deception” because of the persistence of *Regalian doctrine* in the law, with the State ultimately retaining full ownership and control of all lands.

Some experts/students of the IPRA Law and those who understand and know very well the IPs’ world view maintain that IPRA fails to consider the fact that IPs are not a monolithic block. There is a need to balance the idea of collective ownership of a resource and the reality that there are, in fact, vertical differentiations among the IPs themselves. In some areas, *indigenous leaders* have gradually given way to *indigenous dealers*—opportunists who have signed *Free Prior and Informed Consent*³² with businesses on behalf of their people in order to get something out of it. “IPRA is theoretically very helpful to the indigenous people, but what matters most is the implementation and sustainability of the law as time goes by... The rights enumerated in the IPRA are good enough but they still need implementing guidelines, because they may vary from tribe to tribe or from one indigenous cultural community to another... The commitment of the government also entails dedicating resources for the implementation of the law so as to enable the NCIP to finally fulfill its potential as a powerful agency safeguarding the rights of IPs to their ancestral domains and helping preserving their culture... The lack of resources may well be a manifestation of how serious the government believes this issue is.”³³

Because indigenous territories are rich in natural resources, IPs have been suffering also disproportionate impacts of militarization. The practice of embedding military detachments or paramilitary forces with mining and logging operations and plantations within or in close proximity to indigenous communities has become increasingly common in areas targeted for development programmes or counter-insurgency operations.

This militarization of IPs’ lands has been recognized as “a grave human rights problem” by the then Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, Professor Rodolfo Stavenhagen. In his 2003 country report, he pointed to the direct link between the militarization of indigenous lands and development aggression, noting that: “Indigenous resistance and protest are frequently countered by military force involving numerous human rights abuses, such as arbitrary detention, persecution, killings of community representatives, coercion, torture, demolition of houses, destruction of property, rape, and forced recruitment by the armed forces, the police or the so-called paramilitaries, such as Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUS).”³⁴

31. For the mixed effect of IPRA on indigenous communities, cf. “Indigenous people/Ethnic minorities and Poverty reduction—Philippines,” op. cit., 22–3.

32. One of the legal safeguards of IPRA.

33. UP Forum 2006. IPRA through the years. In <<http://www.up.edu.ph/upforum.php?issue=16&i=123>>.

34. In “Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination Philippines Indigenous Peoples icerd Shadow Report”.

The degree of influence which the mining and other companies exert over the military was also witnessed by the same Rodolfo Stavenhagen, during his visit to the country in February 2007.

IPs frequently suffer from harassment because of suspected association with the *New People's Army* (NPA), a Communist rebel group. Because of the rugged terrain and poor infrastructure of many indigenous territories, rebel groups are often active in these areas. Consequently, the military often incorrectly associate rebel activity with IPs who—despite themselves—have already had their share in the phenomenon of politically motivated assassinations and enforced disappearances, which are happening throughout the country.

The *Lumad* of Mindanao and the *Igorot* of the Cordillera are among the most affected groups with members of indigenous leadership structures especially targeted. The extra-judicial killings of IPs and the continuing threats to indigenous leaders have surprisingly not weakened the IPs' movement for respect and recognition of their collective rights, especially for their land and resources.³⁵ In some areas, the military has established recruitment quotas, such as in *Kalinga* Province, which has led to the forced recruitment of IPs into paramilitary groups. The military has also exploited the lack of jobs and tribal land disputes and other conflicts to draw recruits into the paramilitary forces. This has become an effective *divide et impera* strategy, further weakening the unity, cohesion and cooperation of indigenous communities.³⁶

In the context of national development programmes, the militarization policy from the Government is a clear sign of the failure to uphold IPs' rights to land and self determination.

CATHOLIC CHURCH AND IPs

The history of colonization in the Philippines—where the Christian religion reaches more than 80% of the population and the Catholic Church is the main denomination—shows how religion has been consistently used to perpetuate the “inferior position” in varying degrees of tribal peoples and—more generally—of IPs. Colonial culture, together with religion brought a variety of restrictions and oppressions that sought to eradicate or to rob IPs of their identity, not without some very harmful experiences. However, in spite

35. “Of the total 137 indigenous persons killed since 2001, thirteen (13) are women, four (4) of whom were pregnant at the time of their death, and nineteen (19) were minors. Most of the victims were arbitrarily fired upon or summarily executed during military counter insurgency operations. Some were killed in incidents of massacre, including children and women. A number of the victims were farmer-hunters who were out in their fields and forests when killed. Also included are those who died in the course of evacuations and those killed during police/military operations such as in incidents of demolition.” In “Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination Philippines Indigenous Peoples ICERD Shadow Report,” op. cit., 63.

36. Cf. “The Human rights situation of IPs in the Philippines” in <[http://www.internaldisplacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/%28httpDocuments%29/3CFC82DD9F21169AC125749B00360363/\\$file/IPRM_PHL_UPr_S1_2008_IndigenousPeopleRightsMonitor_uprsubmission.pdf](http://www.internaldisplacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/%28httpDocuments%29/3CFC82DD9F21169AC125749B00360363/$file/IPRM_PHL_UPr_S1_2008_IndigenousPeopleRightsMonitor_uprsubmission.pdf)>.

of more than four centuries of evangelization and radical introduction of another worldview, animist practices and the religion of the ancestors were not totally eliminated and the process of cultural adaptation and synthesis is still evolving.

Indeed, in these last decades, mainly after Vatican II, a sincere and progressive awareness process has deepened the realization about the Catholic Church's contribution, especially during the colonial centuries, to the discrimination and prejudices being experienced until the contemporary times by IPs. As a matter of fact, this process has generated a "new" mandate for a more attentive, respectful and Christian presence and interaction of the Church among the IP communities.

It was in 1974, at the second assembly of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference, that the Church was challenged to respond to the plight of the IPs in the Philippines. At that time there was widespread unrest in Mindanao. The Muslim rebellion was at its height and the invasion of foreign and local businesses made the problem worse, affecting both Muslim and non-Muslim alike who were caught in the crossfire between Muslim and Christians militants plus the Philippine military. Extreme poverty, land loss and the struggle for survival were problems not only of the Muslim population, but also of other indigenous communities in Mindanao as well as other areas of the country, forcing communities to live on the margins of society. A more united and organized response to the IPs' concerns was needed and the Catholic Church decided to institutionalize its journey with IPs through a full-fledged committee, creating the Episcopal Commission on Cultural Communities—which today is the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous People (ECIP)—with special responsibilities for an apostolate among tribal groups—including non-Christian tribal communities—and indigenous communities.

As it is enshrined in the Constitution and By-Laws of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, the ECIP "shall work for and with tribal Filipinos in their efforts to: secure justice for themselves, protect their ancestral domains, preserve their cultural heritage and shall foster among the Christian majority a greater awareness and appreciation of tribal Filipinos and thus help lessen deep-seated prejudices against them."³⁷

National consultations were held, other desks were created to initiate and coordinate the apostolate and to attend to the needs of the cultural communities. Several partnerships have been formed with indigenous communities, government agencies, national organizations and NGOs to respond to the needs for livelihood opportunities and provide technical and organizing assistance to IPs' groups in the area of education.

Certainly, the commitment has steadily grown to understand better the situation of indigenous communities from the viewpoint of IPs themselves; to listen more deeply to their voices and to work out culturally appropriate development plans which could empower indigenous communities to choose their own development path. Nowadays, the ECIP is providing general assistance to sixteen different dioceses and forty IPOs aiming towards an effective assertion, protection and promotion of IPs' rights.

37. In M. C. L. Victor, "Threatened by the Government," *op. cit.*, 25.

Through the ECIP, the Church is persistently drawing attention to the worsening conditions of the more than 100 ethno-linguistic groups living in the Philippines today, situations that border at times on the dehumanizing of IPs. During these past years, the ECIP too has been consistently identifying the loss or uncertainty of ownership and control of ancestral domain, displacement due to the intrusions of mega-projects into ancestral domain and lack (or absence) of basic social service such as health, education or infrastructure as three of the major problems confronting IPs today.

Some of the most recent criticism from the ECIP has been about IPRA and NCIP's inaction, namely their failure in the proper implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act and the lack of effectiveness in carrying out its mandate and purpose. In particular the ECIP stressed that the "Certificates of Ancestral Domains Titles" (CADTs) have not done any good for the IPs. "Even though CADTs have already been given to some IP communities, intrusions and land grabbing continue unabated."³⁸

It has also denounced the "systemic recruitment" of IPs into the Citizens Armed Forces Geographical Units (CAFGUS), Civilian Volunteers Organizations (CVOS), the National Peoples' Army (NPA) and other paramilitary groups, condemning the militarization of many indigenous communities. "To involve them in military or NPA activities is to make their communities potential permanent battlegrounds... Let us declare tribal lands as zones of peace—free from armed men."³⁹

Furthermore, the government's mindset on natural resources has been under heavy criticism from the Catholic Bishops' leadership who are privy to many of the events that are happening among the poor, especially among IPs and their natural environment. The CBCP has repeatedly called for the Abrogation of the Mining Act of 1995 and the repeal of the National Policy Agenda on Revitalizing Mining in the Philippines which former President Gloria Arroyo issued in 2004.

They have also invited President Benigno Aquino III to change the management system of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) due to its inherent contradiction: exploiting natural resources both at the expense of the physical environment and the IPs' Ancestral Domain rights and causing indigenous communities to suffer more instead of being protected.⁴⁰ It is an open secret that the mega diversity of the Philippines tropical forest, marine and coastal resources is threatened by over-exploitation and destruction. To IPs who rely on the bio-diversity of their ancestral domains, government policies on natural resources are putting at risk their survival as distinct peoples.

38. In *Monitor*, 2010, 14/14: 6. Cf. <www.cbcpmonitor.com>.

39. Accordingly, said Bishop Utleg—chair of ECIP—indigenous recruits were being given sacks of rice and mobile phones to act either as informants for the military or for the NPA. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breaking-news/nation/view/2007092490450/Stop_recruiting_tribal_folk%2C_bishops_tell_gov%92t%2C_communists>.

40. In *Monitor*, op. cit., 1.6.

CONCLUSION

“*Walay kalibutan kung wala kay kalibutan*” is a *visayan* common saying that can be translated with “There is no world unless you have a world.” It refers directly to the experience and level of consciousness that an individual person and/or a community has in relationship to a concrete and determined place which, at the end, defines people’s identity. In an affirmative way it could be re-interpreted: you have a culture when you have a place! The beauty of every place in the world is in its own culture.

The truth contained in this saying has been fully observed by indigenous people in the affirmation of the land as sacred. Centuries of *ancestral domain*—*human* interaction has made the ancestral domain not only a physical space in which to live but a cultural space from which indigenous knowledge systems, sacred memories and a unique culture and way of life have originated; something that embraces them and encompasses their identity and sense of belonging. By virtue of the re-affirmation of their identity, IPs have been able to survive in a very harsh and hostile environment for centuries even when they were made to feel foreigners in their own land.

Their distinct land-based culture, customs, beliefs and traditional values had been handed down from one generation to another. Accordingly, it is from this experience that phrases like “land is life” or “the land owns us” or “do not buy the land of our ancestors” are evoked in the hope to remind all Filipinos of their origin and destiny, memory and survival, communion and solidarity, with God, ancestors and among themselves, values all should in fact share.

It is a sad fact that for many of the 14½ million IPs of indigenous communities in the country, the future seems to hold only two possibilities of survival: either they are driven still further into the interior, or they adapt to share in the development process, which sooner or later will destroy their own cultural identity. Indeed, whenever there is a race for rights over indigenous lands and resources, IPs are consistently on the losing side.

As a matter of fact, colonial powers, national governments and private economic interests, have failed to understand that land is a very essential element in the worldview of the IPs and that there is a direct relationship between their cultures and their Ancestral Domains. The harmful effects of militarization, the increased acceleration of dispossession of IPs and exploitation of their lands by greedy outsiders and the sluggish implementation of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act, depict a broad pattern of disadvantage and domination which ultimately will lead to the destruction of the way of life of these minorities.

Centuries of experience have proven the soundness, feasibility and effectiveness of the indigenous practices. The stewardship of the forests and other natural resources in the upland regions can be attributed to the customary traditions of IPs, their way of living and their practices that have preserved and nurtured for centuries the well-being of their ancestral domains. Living in awe and respect with nature’s mysteries, they have been effective and watchful caretakers of the land helping in sustaining and preserving

life in their regions. Nowadays, it cannot be denied that awareness of the problem of IPs has become more acute in the Philippines. Newspaper reports, specialized journals and magazines, official reports from international news agencies about the ethnic groups and the threats to their territory are seen more and more frequently.

IPs' rights are bound to be further hit and violated by the pressure of a growing wave of aggressive "development" programmes not framed within the milieu of their culture.⁴¹ They are simply a system of exploitation to extract the wealth, such as water, minerals, oil and forest resources from IPs' domains. We believe that a special effort is needed by all to ensure IPs' better and greater participation where their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) voice is clear and frank. When, as it seems to be the case of the Philippines, the so-called Western civilization—re-baptized as "globalization"—takes over and manipulates the destiny of *minorities*, there is the constant danger to destroy the fragile balance because of "development" aggression and naked greed in the race to secure strategic natural resources which are being depleted at an unsustainable rate. Today individualism, power struggles, ambition and competition are new form of threats that are seeping into the way of life of many IPs communities.

As exotic strangers in their own country, with a skin-colour which "modern" Filipinos are not particularly fond of, many of the tribal Filipinos are unable to resist the blandishments of the modern world and allow themselves to be swindled out of their land through dubious contracts and/or internal divisions. Others are forced to cope with the harsh demands of a moneyed economy even in ways that violate their own way of life and often drown in the *single market* of globalization. They are increasingly being dragged within the reach of *homogenizing* globalization, acquiring materialistic tastes and changing their life style. Some are used as crowd-pulling representative of national diversity in tourists' advertisements.

More and more hotels—and resort managers—are building "cultural shows" into their entertainment programmes. Unfortunately IPs are discovering at their own expense, that tourism wants to please tourists and not to take care of IPs or of their domains which have always provided for their basic needs. The story of the *Lumad* and *Katutubo* is older than Philippine history itself and despite everything IPs continue to exist at the margins of the nation-state. We know culture is never a finished product: all cultures are dynamic and adapting themselves to ever new situations.

We are talking here about a living tradition, a dynamic culture and spirituality in which—for IPs too—there are new areas of application as well as continuities with the

41. Many indigenous communities live permanently in the crossfire between rebels and the army. On the wall-maps of international human right watchers and conservation groups, the Philippines have been highlighted for quite some time. Furthermore, Gerard Clark, writing about ethnic minorities and indigenous people in Southeast Asia, describes government policy in mainstream development strategies which tend to generate conflicts between states and ethnic minorities and such strategies are often ethnocidal in their destructive effects on the latter. G. Clark, "From Ethnocide to Ethnodevelopment? Ethnic Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia," in *Third World Quarterly*, 2001, 22/3: 413–36.

past. These new areas must be taken very seriously also by the Church through a process of *interculturalization*, without stereotyping indigenous religions as static voices from the past but acknowledging their survival potential, that is, the dynamism of these traditions which repeatedly had (and have) to adjust to the challenges posed by other people and the changes taking place in human history.⁴²

As missionaries there is the need to learn lessons from this experience of cultural diversity and marginalization, discovering again how to find a home—and to feel at home—in the tradition and culture of the *other* and how to contribute in shaping a society made up of different faith systems, histories and worldviews. No-one can consider her/himself excused from such a process being aware that the present and future common good of the Philippines depends on it.

Finally, IPs' history is not just a story of hardship and despair; it is also struggle and celebration. In this line, instead of perpetuating the myth of *vanishing indigenous tribes*, we would like to end looking at Filipino IPs not only as victims but also as victors in a robust and resilient struggle to keep their ancestral domain and their way of life, their land and their worldviews. The struggle for self-determination has taken many forms and it is a right now enshrined in the Philippine constitution. IPs have shown us how much there is at stake. The problem of minorities is like a microcosm of our society as a whole, where the process of humanization continues to fall victim to naked power and to vested dominant economic interests under the "sunshade" of globalization and/or development.

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42. A case in study—in negative—can be considered the practice of Korean missionaries, representing protestant denominations, who, without training or knowledge of indigenous cultures, are spreading anger and frustration in Mindoro, among the *Mangyans*. Building fancy churches, without congregation, they are known for their fierce proselytism and their abundant funding. Some of them are probably abusing the system by posing as missionaries, which blackens the name of each missionary organization in the Philippines. Cf. M. Gibb, "Philippines: Missionary Business," in *World Mission*, 2009, xx1/229: 32–7. At <http://www.worldmission.ph/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=326%3Aphilippines-misionary-business&catid=87%3Adecember-2009&Itemid=72>.

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TAIWAN

FABRIZIO TOSOLINI

Bao Dao (寶島), “Treasure Island,” is one of the appellatives given to Taiwan. A name that evokes fabulous adventures, undecipherable maps and also the never-failing pirates. This metaphor may be useful to offer a first and general interpretation of the history of the different peoples and cultures that during the ages came on the island and contributed to the shaping of its unique identity.

A SAGA OF LANDINGS

In order to understand the complex present socio-cultural situation in Taiwan, the best approach is to offer a cursive overview of the many migrations to the island, resulting in a sort of cultural stratification the main features of which are still visible today.¹

1. “A given territory may undergo a series of changes in its landscape as successive people of varying abilities move in. This is known as the sequential occupation, one important concept in modern geography,” in C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan* (Rimini: Il Cerchio 2000), 5.

Prehistoric and Indigenous Peoples

Anthropologists estimate present-day Taiwan to have been populated for approximately 30,000 years.² Distinctive jade ware, and corded pottery of the Changpin, Beinan and Tapenkeng (Dapenkeng) cultures show a marked diversity in the island's early inhabitants.

The ancestors of the actual Taiwan Aborigines are believed to have been living on the island thousands of years before major Han Chinese immigration began in the Seventeenth Century AD. Negritos too may have lived in Taiwan before the beginnings of Austronesian cultures.³ The Taiwanese Aborigines are Austronesian peoples, with linguistic and genetic ties to other Austronesian ethnic groups, such as peoples of the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Oceania.

Taiwan's Austronesian speakers were traditionally distributed all over the island. Today, the bulk of the contemporary Taiwanese Aborigine population resides in the mountains and the cities. The issue of an ethnic origin unconnected to the Asian mainland has become one thread in the discourse regarding the political identity of Taiwan.⁴ The total number of Aborigines on Taiwan in 2009 was almost 500,000,⁵ which is approximately 2% of Taiwan's population.

The Formosan languages present all the main variations found in the vast area of the Polynesian languages. This suggests that the ancestors of the present-day Aborigines lived in Taiwan earlier than commonly believed, and that their language family took shape before the migrations to Madagascar on one direction, to the Pacific Islands on the other.⁶

Although nothing is known of earlier history of the Aboriginal tribes, the Records of the Dutch East India Company report of the existence of the Kingdom of Middag, in

2. "Archaeological Theory; Taiwan Seen As Ancient Pacific Rim," *Taiwan Journal* published 19 November 1990, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Taiwan>.

3. Genetic testing suggests that the Negritos at least partly descend from a migration originating in eastern Africa as much as 60,000 years ago. This migration is hypothesized to have followed a coastal route through India and into Southeast Asia, which is sometimes referred to as the Great Coastal Migration. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negrito>>. On the Negritos in Taiwan, see Jules Quartly, "In Honor of the Little Black People," *Taipei Times* <<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2004/11/27/2003212815>>.

4. M. Stainton, "The Politics of Taiwan Aboriginal Origins," M. A. Rubinstein, ed., *Taiwan: A New History* (New York: East Gate: 2006), 27–44.

5. "At the end of June 2009, the official indigenous Austronesian population was around 499,500. Of this number, around 30,000 did not identify themselves as belonging to a particular group." <<http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/cho2.html#People>>.

6. According to linguist Robert Blust the Formosan languages form nine of the ten principal branches of the Austronesian language family. Although linguists disagree with some details of Blust's analysis, a broad consensus has coalesced around the conclusion that the Austronesian languages originated in Taiwan. R. Blust, "Subgrouping, Circularity and Extinction: some Issues in Austronesian Comparative Linguistics," *Selected papers from the Eighth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics* (Taipei: Academia Sinica 1999). This theory has been strengthened by recent studies in human population genetics. See J. A. Trejaut, T. Kivisild, Jun-hun Loo, Chien-liang Lee, Chun-lin He *et al.*, "Traces of archaic mitochondrial lineages persist in Austronesian-speaking Formosan populations," *PLoS Biol* 3(8) (2005): e247. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formosan_languages>.

the central part of Taiwan, established by the Popora, Babuza, Pazeh and Hoanya tribes. The kingdom was semiautonomous under the Dutch, and often at war with the Chinese, who finally conquered it in 1732.⁷ Today there are fourteen recognized⁸ Aboriginal tribes in Taiwan. Data concerning the Aborigines is subject to debate, because of its political significance.

The indigenous peoples of Taiwan face economic and social barriers, including a high unemployment rate and substandard education. They have been actively seeking a higher degree of self-determination and economic development since the early 1980s. In 1996 the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) was promoted to a ministry-level rank within the Executive Yuan.⁹

A revival of ethnic pride has been expressed in many ways by Aborigines, including incorporating elements of their culture into commercially successful pop music. Efforts are underway by indigenous communities to revive traditional cultural practices and preserve their languages. The Aboriginal tribes have also become extensively involved in the tourism and eco-tourism industries.¹⁰

Early Chinese Immigration

There are records of Chinese presence on the island during the post-Han period (Kingdom of Wu, 230 AD), during the Sui and Tang Dynasties (expeditions in 605 and 607 AD under the Sui; and a literatus who lived on Penghu island around 805), in the following time of disunity in the Period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907–979). Under the Song Dynasty the archipelago of Penghu was under the jurisdiction of the Fu Jian Province. About this time the Hakka (a Chinese group with peculiar history and cultural features) began to migrate to Penghu and Taiwan.¹¹

By the end of the twelfth century they numbered about 1,000. The migration was contextual to the development of coastal areas during the Southern Song Dynasty, although only with the Yuan Mongol Dynasty there was a governmental administrative office in Penghu, thus marking the beginning of Chinese political authority in the area (first

7. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Middag>.

8. The number of the tribes has been increasing in the last ten years. A recent list distinguishes between recognized tribes (Ami 阿美族 AmeiZu, nearly 181,000 (2008), the largest tribal group), Atayal (泰雅族 TaiYazu, about 79,000 (2008), the second-largest tribal group), Paiwan (排灣族 PaiWanZu, 87,000 (2008) the third-largest), Bunun (布農族 BuNongZu; around 51,000 (2008), the fourth-largest), Rukai (魯凱族 LuKaiZu, 11,800 (2008), Puyuma (卑南族 BeiNanZu, 11,600 (2008), Saisyat (賽夏族 SaiXiaZu, 5,800, Thao (邵族, ShaoZu, 660 (2008), the smallest group), Tsou (鄒族, ZouZu, 6,600 (2008), Truku (太魯閣族, TaiLuGeZu, 25,000 (2008), recognized on January 15, 2004), Sakizaya (撒奇萊雅族, SaQiLaiYaZu 5,000 to 10,000) Sediq (賽德克族 SaiDeKeZu, (5,700), recognized on May 31, 2008) Kavalan (瑪蘭族) KaMaLan Zu), Tao (達悟族 DaWuZu, known as Yami 雅美 YaMei, 3,600 (2008), <<http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/cho2.html#People>>, and unrecognized tribes (Babuza, Basay, Hoanya, Ketagalan, Luilang, Pazeh/Kaxabu, Popora, Qauqaut, Siraya, Taokas, Trobiawan), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwanese_aborigines>.

9. <<http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/cho2.html#People>>.

10. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Taiwan>.

11. "The earliest record of Hakka people in Taiwan dates back to the invasion of the island by Chen Leng in 610 AD. As a pirate, Chen brought his soldiers and explorers from Kwangtung (Canton)."

recorded in 1350).¹² Kublai Khan unsuccessfully tried to invade Japan via Penghu (1281 and 1292).

Under the Ming: the Great Minnan-Hakka-Guangdong Immigration

At the beginning of the Ming, as part of the battle against piracy, the Chinese settlers were ordered to move back from Penghu to their native lands. But in 1403, due to the good relationships between Japan and the new Emperor Yong-le (永樂, emperor from 1402 to 1424), Taiwan Straits witnessed the revival of Chinese interest for sea adventures and trade. They served as the route for all seven voyages (1405–1433) of the eunuch Zheng He (鄭和) with his huge ocean junks. But Japanese-Chinese piracy was again rampant about the first half of the sixteenth century,¹³ until their leader Lin Dao-qian (林到乾) was driven out of Penghu in 1562. He fled to present-day Tainan region, and from there exploited the Aborigines before leaving the place. About the end of the century the Japanese threatened to invade Taiwan; however they only succeeded in setting up a small Japanese colony in Jilong (Keelung).

Surprising as it may be, the first large-scale immigration of Chinese to Taiwan from the coastal areas of the mainland was sponsored by pirates. Zheng Zhi-long (鄭芝龍 1604–1661) inherited from its founder Li Dan (李旦) the leadership of a pirate confederacy. He moved with great ability among the interests of the Dutch, the Japanese and the Ming Dynasty. After defeating the imperial forces, he surrendered to the governor of Fujian and was promoted admiral of the Ming Navy in 1630. When Fujian suffered from a severe famine, he suggested to be put in charge of gathering some thousands of starving people and shipping them to Taiwan for farming. A colony of about 30,000 Chinese was initially formed on the island. The Dutch welcomed them, since they needed skilled farmers to increase food production. Their number increased with the political destabilization of China mainland at the end of the Ming Dynasty, till they reached an estimated number of 100,000 at the end of the Dutch rule on Taiwan, almost matching the estimated population of Aborigines.

The majority of Chinese migrants were Hakka and Minnan (Hoklo). The Hakka started coming to the island during the Song Dynasty. Their origin remains obscure. Perhaps in order to flee warfare or the domination of Inner Asia tribesmen, they left Henan and Shanxi where they originally lived, to slowly move southward and finally settle down in Guangdong in the thirteenth century. An extremely industrious people, they are deeply bound to family ties and keep some distinctive features, such as never allowing their women to bind their feet; their language presents similarities both with Cantonese and Mandarin.

The Minnan (Hoklo) people come from Fujian and speak the Chinese dialect of the

12. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 13.

13. It is the time in which Portuguese ships appeared on the Straits, directed to Japan. Among the travelers the first missionary to Japan, St. Francis Xavier, who, however traveled aboard of a Chinese junk.

southern part of the province. They arrived in Taiwan in the wake of Zheng Zhi-long's resettlement plans and drove the Hakka people away from the fertile coastal lands, squeezing them inside the territories of the Aborigines. The Hoklo (present-day Taiwanese) and the Hakka dialect are mutually unintelligible. Since customs also differ, contrasts were frequent among the two main Chinese immigrant groups, and from time to time flared up in armed clashes, with thousands of victims on both sides.

At the end of the seventeenth century, a sort of stability in the basic ethnic components of the population of Taiwan was reached, which lasted until the second half of the twentieth century. According to a survey of the beginning of the nineteenth century, about 82% of the Chinese population was Minnan, 13% was Hakka and 5% Cantonese.

Some attempts at bringing them back on the mainland notwithstanding, the Chinese groups which settled down in Taiwan considered themselves as the core element of the population of the island, with the right of opposing any other "foreign invasion." Indeed, from the seventeenth century onwards, all the subsequent migrants to Taiwan were in some way considered as foreigners who had less right to stay on the island than the original inhabitants. Resistance against them would depend on the different resources of the natives.

In the case of the Aborigines, their opposition to invaders was not enough strong to force them out; on the contrary, some of them were even willing to accept rules and patterns of life coming from abroad. The Chinese pushed them towards the interior of the island, robbing them of the most fertile land. They confined the Aborigines in a sort of cultural and even geographical limbo. Indeed, the Aborigines could see their territory more and more eroded by the Chinese, while they were themselves driven into those highlands which were not favorable to agriculture. In the case of the Chinese, resistance to foreign attempts at controlling them was always strong, leading to continuous armed clashes. The first half of the seventeenth century is also the epoch in which the basic pattern of multidirectional ethnic, social and cultural relationships among the inhabitants of the island took shape. This is due to the fact that on the island, besides the differences between the Chinese and the Aborigines, the contrasts among the Minnan, Hakka and Guangdong people also played a significant historical role. Even inside the (ethnically homogeneous) Chinese population the perception of an irreducible alterity became an interpretive key strong enough to determine or influence their choices with reference to one another and to the peoples of different ethnical provenance, be they Aborigines, Japanese or Westerners.

The First Foreigners: The Spaniards and the Dutch

At the beginning of the seventeenth century Dutch traders tried to settle in Penghu, while Spanish ships docked in the North, in Jilong (1626) and DanShui (1629).¹⁴ Their purpose was trade and they were mutually concurrent and therefore hostile—as there were hostili-

14. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 23.

ties with Japanese traders.¹⁵ The Dutch drove the Spanish soldiers out of Taiwan in 1642, attempting to colonize those territories of the island that they could more easily control. The response of the Aborigines they came in touch with, after some initial resistance, was generally positive: they accepted their creed, and learnt the language and customs of the newcomers. After 1636 the natives were on the whole submissive.

Not so the Chinese, who made the fortunes of the VOC Company by tilling bigger and bigger portions of land. They could only rent it from the Dutch, who, on the other hand, were more interested in growing sugar cane for export than in rice. A failed uprising in 1652 caused the death or imprisonment of almost 10,000 Chinese and natives, men and women. In the end the son of Zheng Zhi-long, the famous Zheng Cheng-gong, after his war against the Qing on the continent had turned increasingly unsuccessful, besieged and captured the Dutch basis in Taiwan, Fort Zeelandia, in 1662.

Under the Rule of the Zheng Family. The Dongning Kingdom

Before capitulating to the Qing, from 1662 to 1683 Taiwan was under the rule of the Zheng family: first Zheng Cheng-gong (February–June 1662), then Zheng Jing (鄭經 1662–1681) and finally the latter's son Zheng Ke-shuang (鄭克 1681–1683). Zheng Cheng-gong allowed the private possession of the land and turned the territory under his control into a military colony, with soldiers farming the land.¹⁶ When the Qing decreed the coastal evacuation from Shandong to Guangdong, he offered the affected farmers the opportunity to resettle in Taiwan. From 1662 to 1664 there were six waves of emigration; literati crossed too.

The Confucian educational system was established, which provided a steady stream of qualified officers. There were improvements in farming, farming industry, shipbuilding, production of slates for roofs, maritime trade, especially with Japan,¹⁷ which netted enormous profits. As a further aspect of the process of sinicization going on in the period, Mahayana Buddhism was also introduced. This process witnessed its final act when the Qing Emperor, Kang Xi decreed the annexation of Taiwan to the Chinese Empire in 1684,¹⁸ not as a province, however, but as a prefecture of the province of Fujian.¹⁹

15. Contrasts flared between the Dutch and the Japanese till 1639, when the Tokugawa Shogunate decided the closing of the country. After that time almost all Japanese settlers left Taiwan.

16. This policy was in conflict with the interests of the Aborigines, because it reduced their hunting ground and caused armed rebellions. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 78.

17. Starting from 1617, the English East India Company too showed interest in trading with Taiwan. However, after initial agreements in 1670, a contrast in policies with the Zheng administration did not allow any further expansion. The Dutch East India Company too did not succeed in creating trading routes. Maritime commerce was one of the main assets of the Zheng Kingdom (in a contract of September 10, 1670, the English call Zheng Jing "King of Tywan," C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 90), which they would not let slip into others' hands.

18. The fact was not automatic: on many occasions, the Dutch, allied with the Qing against the Zheng family, had been told that the island would be given back to them. Apparently, Taiwan was still considered as no man's land.

19. The new rulers kept practically all the institutions established by the Zheng family: administrative districts, capital city, taxation, Confucian education. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 129.

Although the govern of the Zheng Family over the island was short-lived, it proved to be decisive in order to create among Taiwan Chinese (mainly the Minnan population) the deep-rooted claim to be the ones who have the strongest right to determine the destiny of a land that they perceived as theirs. Needless to say that such a claim overlooked, when it did not deny, the more original right of the Aborigines. Besides, the clash of the Zhengs with the Qing also set another basic pattern of ethno-cultural relationships inside Taiwan: the contrast between the Chinese on the island and those who landed on it from other provinces of the Continent.

212 Years of Qing Rule (1683–1895)

The Qing authorities tried to limit immigration to Taiwan and barred families from traveling to the island. Illegal immigration continued, but many of the men had few prospects in war weary Fujian and thus married locally, resulting in the idiom “(They had) Tangshan (Chinese) grandfather, but no Tangshan grandmother” (有唐山公無唐山媽). The flux of migration towards the island brought about new Chinese settlements in the North basins and the East Coast. The Qing aimed at the sinicization of the Aborigines. The tribes who were willing to accept Chinese rule²⁰ were grouped in villages with elected headsmen. There were appointed interpreter-liaison officers, and also some Chinese merchants who were allowed to enter their reserves. These officers and the merchants worked together to exploit the Aborigines, thus leading to numerous uprisings and revolts. Altogether 12 campaigns were carried out during the Qing to suppress such rebellions. In any case, a not inconsiderable number even among the “tamed” Aborigines felt not at ease in their new situation and moved East, into a buffer zone closer to the mountains inhabited by the other tribes not yet under Chinese control. These groups experienced a deep crisis of identity and security.

Towards the nine Aboriginal tribes of the mountains there was a totally exclusory policy: the Feng Shan Ling (封山令 Mountain Seclusion Decree) in 1729 closed them out of Chinese civilization. They were forbidden to leave their territory and no Chinese was allowed in; no intermarriages were permitted; guardhouses were established to control the passes to the reservation territory. In 1766, however, a bureau of Aborigines affairs was created; and the Japanese invasion in 1875 forced the Qing to abolish the Feng Shan Ling, resulting in a new development of rice farms in most of the former reservations.

The most troublesome group, however, were the Chinese. Taiwan's social instability is summed up in the following data: 55 incidents of communal armed strife from 1768 to 1890, of which 17 between Hakka and Minnan, 28 others between Quanzhou and Zhangzhou Minnan people, and still others between Minnan of the same provenance.²¹ These

20. Curiously enough, the assimilation process was described by means of the metaphor of cooking, with “raw savages” and “cooked savages,” time before the famous work of Lévi-Strauss (cf. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Trans. by John and Doreen Weightman, New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

21. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 137.

incidents caused hundreds, sometimes thousands of deaths and were put to an end always after heavy and often bloody government suppression. The close to 40 anti-Qing uprisings were almost all started by members of the Tryad (天地會 *Tian Di Hui*), the secret society created by Zheng Cheng-gong to continue the struggle to restore Ming rule.

In 1721 a self-proclaimed Ming restorer, Zhu Yi-gui, guided a successful insurrection, conquering the capital and installing an independent government, which however lasted only 50 days. A cause of his defeat was the dissension with the Hakka general, who withdrew his 20,000 troops and later joined the Qing in the fight against the insurgents.

Another uprising lasted three years (1785–1788) before being put to an end. The rebels raised a 50,000 strong army and were able to conquer almost all the Chinese cities. Still another (1860–1864), during the Taiping Rebellion on the Mainland, was put down with the help of other local militias, raised by the gentry to defend themselves from the insurgents. This shows well the widespread contrasts harboring inside the Chinese community, deeply divided in itself because of provenance, of political loyalties, of the harsh conditions of life. The prefecture of Taiwan had to cope also with the danger posed by pirates, with attempts at landing and naval battles taking place in 1710 and between 1795 and 1810.

Furthermore, in concomitance with the opium wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) Western powers once again focused their attention on Taiwan. At the end of the second opium war, the Treaty of Tianjin opened two Taiwan ports (Taiwan fu and Danshui) to foreign trade. English, French, Germans, Americans, and Japanese tried to take advantage of the situation by establishing small colonies on the Eastern Coast, where there was no formal Chinese rule, due to the “untamed” Aborigines controlling the area. The foreign interest for the island made the Qing government become more aware of the strategic importance of Taiwan. In 1885 the island was elevated to the status of province, with Taipei as its new capital. The defense was strengthened and modernization (agriculture, industry, transportation, postal system, electricity, telegraph) got under way, with the help of foreign experts. The dramatic improvement of Taiwan was mainly due to its first governor, Liu Ming-chuan (劉銘傳),²² who, besides his personal ability, was not afraid of cooperating with foreign enterprises in the task of modernizing the island. What he achieved was continued in the fifty years of Japanese rule (1895–1945). This experience confirms what Taiwan earlier history had already taught: ethno-cultural differences notwithstanding, when cooperation between Taiwan people and foreigners is strengthened, there is an improvement in the overall economic conditions, and possibly also in the quality of life.

1895. *The Republic of Taiwan*

When Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895, the local Chinese government opposed the Treaty and created the Republic of Taiwan. The first Republic of Asia (23 May–27 October

22. “Liu was able to transform a primarily frontier prefecture of Fukien into one of the best administered provinces of China.” C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 163.

1895²³) was readily suppressed by the Japanese armies after heavy fighting. The short-lived experience of the Republic of Taiwan concentrated in itself some of the opportunities and contradictions of Taiwan's history. Borrowing Western political ideals, the new independent state was styled as a Republic, in order to be more appealing to Western powers and gain their recognition (internationalization as a way to assert Taiwan's stance), but also because of the divisions and rivalries among its leaders; it pledged allegiance to the Beijing Court but, at the same time, it tried to increase the independent sovereignty of the people of the island. Among the supporters of the Republic, the Taiwanese Chinese were the most determined, while central government staff and civil servants who had been sent to the island from other provinces left very soon for the mainland. The same applied to the leaders, who fled after their defeat, leaving the people to put up the final stubborn resistance.

Not counting the besieged Dutch at Fort Zeelandia, the defeat of the Republic of Taiwan at the hands of the Japanese invaders was the third time in which a similar historical pattern unfolded, the first two being the unsuccessful fights of the Aborigines against the Chinese, and the failed defense of the island against the Qing. However, the 1895 events contributed to trigger epochal developments on the Mainland, ultimately leading to the fall of the Manchu Dynasty and the proclamation of the Republic of China in 1911.

1895–1945. Japanese Colonial Rule

Fifty years of foreign rule followed, during which a Westernized Japan tried to pursue its own interests in Taiwan by means of strong control coupled with modernization and industrialization. Taiwanese society was caught in a mixed-feelings kind of reaction: the positive results of the Japanese policy were nevertheless the work of a people with which the Chinese had often been at war. Great success was met in agriculture (sugarcane, rice, tea), sanitation (control of plague, malaria), education, industry, trade, finance, transportation, the development of the ports of Jilong and Gaoxiong (Kaohsiung).

Towards the restive Aborigines of the mountains the old Qing policy of constructing a long border-guard line was resumed. It consisted of a chain of outposts manned by armed personnel. From time to time it was moved forward, the ultimate goal being that of forcing the Aborigines into reservations where they would be isolated and controlled. Such a policy had also the aim of inducing them to abandon their traditional ways of living (especially feared was their headhunting practice) and settle down as peaceable farmers. Despite their resistance,²⁴ the Aborigines were compelled to abandon extensive tracts of

23. Admiral Kabayama Sukemori inaugurated his colonial government in Taipei on June 17, 1895. The conquest of the South proved more difficult than expected. Tainan fell on October 21, 1895. But desperate partisan attacks on the Japanese continued until 1902. A revolt in 1896 cost more than 30,000 lives. By 1902, while about 700 rebels surrendered, almost 12,000 were killed. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 190.

24. In 1930, an Atayal attack during a school sport event killed 134 Japanese. The Japanese reaction ended up in a massacre. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 222.

territory, part of which was subsequently given to other settlers, for farming, timbering and mining.

During this period, there were attempts at bridging the ethno-cultural differences among Japanese, Chinese and Aborigines. Lin Xian-tang (林獻堂) and Itagaki Taisuke founded the short-lived Tong Hua Hui (*Dōka Kai* 通話會, Assimilation Society, 1914–1915). However, while Itagaki aimed at the assimilation of Taiwan Chinese by the Japanese, Lin pursued the goal of Taiwan's autonomy, by cooperating with enlightened Japanese leaders to reduce the oppression of the colonial government. Later, Lin founded the Taiwan Wen Hua Xie Hui (*Bunka Kyōkai* 文化協會, Taiwan Cultural Association, 1921–1931), which in two years was able to organize an islandwide front opposed to the colonial rule. On the other side, the Government sponsored Advisory Council for the Governor-General of Taiwan (inaugurated 1921) did not meet with great success. Lin Xian-tang and Jiang Wei-shui (蔣渭水) were active in the People's Party (founded 1927), a split of which was at the beginning of the Taiwan Self-Rule League (1930). Although such trials were not completely successful, the self-rule drive they kicked off forewent the movement for Taiwan's independence from China after 1947.²⁵

In general, the Japanese looked down upon the Taiwan Chinese. The two races kept almost entirely apart from each other, both at a social as well as at a cultural level. Interracial marriages were very few.²⁶ Taiwanese had no opportunity for political self-expression. Taiwan was meant to provide to the needs of the Japanese mainland.

The last years of colonial rule (1937–1945) saw a campaign aimed at the Japanization of Taiwan people, by forcing the use of Japanese in daily life, the use of Japanese names, the adoption of Shintoism and Japanese customs. At the same time, Chinese was banned from publications, traditional Chinese celebrations were discouraged (among which the most important was the New Year according to the Lunar calendar), and a compulsory course was instituted of indoctrination in Japanese spirit.

It was the third time that such an attempt took place on a large scale in Taiwan's history: the first was the sinicization of the Aborigines, which continued for centuries; the second was the Qing Dynasty effort at bringing Taiwan under the sway of the Central Government in Beijing, especially by extending Confucianism and Confucian education. Curiously enough, what was not easily accepted during the colonial rule, nowadays has become trendy. Recently, Japanese culture (styled according to the clichés of market economy) is exerting a great influence, especially among the Taiwanese youth.

After the War. The Last Landing of the Chinese

When Chinese forces landed on Taiwan (October 1945), Taiwanese people expected to come closer to their aspirations for self-rule and independent management of the enterprises they had created. To their dismay, they learnt that they were to be treated as a

25. C. Hung, *A History of Taiwan*, op. cit., 206, 213.

26. *Ibid.*, 239.

conquered territory and subjugated people, who had cooperated with the Japanese. The newly arrived Chinese brought under government control about the 90 per cent of all economic enterprises; the resources of the island were drained away in favor of the mainland. The protests lead to the 28 February 1947 Incident (the so-called “2–28 Incident”), in which more than 20,000 Taiwanese (the cultural and economic elite of the island) were killed.

The Communist seizure of the Mainland and the creation of the People’s Republic of China determined a change in the status of Taiwan. Between 1945 and 1949 it had been considered as a recovered province, the great opportunity for unscrupulous people to make money at the expenses of the islanders. After 1949 it became the only territory ruled by the Republic of China, its only asset that could not be lost. Under martial law for almost forty years, Taiwan experienced a steady progress in all fields, with the land reform as its catalyst. The threat of a Communist invasion was averted by the defeat of their forces suffered at Quemoy in 1949, and by the outbreak of the Korean war (1950). The latter event changed the U. S. stance towards the Republic of China, from absence of any interest after the defeat to the commitment to defend it against a Communist invasion.

The military and humanitarian help provided by the U. S. boosted the morale of Taiwanese people, increasing their belief in a better future. This was a case of foreign aid having positive effects on the life of the island, a pattern that finds some precedents in the past (the Dutch, the last period under the Qing, the Japanese) and is poised to become a key for understanding the present and the future of Taiwan.

Since the Mainlanders were in control of virtually every aspect of public life, it was their task to shape an ideological backing to their rule, an ideal program which would involve Aborigines and Taiwanese. The ideal program of the Mainlanders was resistance to the Communists and reconquest of China. After its succession to the Japanese colonizers in 1945, the Kuomintang (KMT) had tried to suppress any expression of local or ethnic culture; instead, it cultivated the myth that all inhabitants of Taiwan originated from the legendary yellow emperor. Considered as ethnic Chinese, Taiwan’s Aborigines were not only vested with the same rights as all other Chinese on the island, but were also forced to compete in a cultural and political climate that was totally dominated by the Han. They had to learn Chinese, were educated in schools together with the Han and had to give up their traditional life-styles. This created a crisis in identity, which surfaced in the forms of alcoholism, prostitution and criminality.²⁷

Things became more entangled starting from 25 October, 1971, when the Republic of China lost its seat at the United Nations. As a consequence, the majority of nations switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Taiwan became an outcast in international politics, the “other” among the nations, at the mercy of the People’s Republic of China and of its will to recover/re-conquer its lost province, by force if necessary. Although caught in the midst of such dramatic diplomatic moves, the son and heir of Jiang Jie-shi (蔣介石

27. See: <http://www.ritual-and-identity.uni-hd.de/Contributors/Dr_Michael_Rudolph/Sino/index.htm>.

Chiang Kai Sek), Jiang Jin-guo (蔣進國 president from 1978 to 1988), was able to continue on the path of industrialization and innovation at every level of economic and social life. At the same time he lead the country towards full democratization, by abolishing the martial law and lifting the bans on press freedom, by promoting a new, younger and more competent leadership and progressively handing over Taiwan's government to the Taiwanese. Under the presidency of Li Deng-hui (李登輝), the first Taiwanese President (from 1988 to 2000), on the one hand talks were started with the PRC (the SEF/ARATS talks), on the other hand the movement toward full independence gained momentum, reaching its zenith under the presidency of Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁 2000-2008).

With the presidency of Li Deng-hui a profound cultural transformation took place on the island. After four centuries of domination by foreign powers the issue of identity search of "the Taiwanese" now became a theme of growing significance in the political arena. At the same time, there also occurred a re-evaluation of Taiwan's relationship to the Communist mainland, that tried to hinder this development by a more aggressive re-identification of its sovereignty²⁸ and that once again emphasised its conviction of cultural and genetic homogeneity of Taiwan's and China's population.

The re-negotiation of cultural identities in Taiwan and the construction of a particular history and culture that differentiated Taiwan from China also had its impacts on Taiwan's indigenous population. For the first time in the history of interaction of Han and Non-Han, the languages, cultural traditions as well as the different value and moral systems of these ethnic minorities now received attention—an attention that in its last consequence not only involved the official recognition of Taiwan's Aborigines as indigenous people, but that was also accompanied by the implementation of specific cultural and political institutions.²⁹

The drive to independence involved also some noticeable ethno-cultural choices, among which a new attention to South-East Asian nations (besides the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia): not only as lands where to invest Taiwanese capital, but also as places where to look for foreign labor and for spouses, thus modifying the composition of the populace on the island. More than half a million of foreign spouses results in even more Chinese children who may have difficulties at school because of problems in learning their mother tongue from mothers who do not master it. Even more: it means the creation of deep ties with other countries and cultures other than China, which in the future may have an impact on the society as a whole, especially if this trend continues. At the same time, however, Taiwan investments went to Mainland China and to its Special Economic Zones. This created a *de-facto* interdependence that countered the drive towards total detachment from China, a drive that had spurred the war threats of the PRC and alienated the sympathies of the government of the U. S.

28. Noticeably, the imposing military and naval exercises in 1996, before the presidential elections in Taiwan, during which some missiles were shot and landed close to the island. The U.S. Navy ordered two carriers to the Straits.

29. <http://www.ritual-and-identity.uni-hd.de/Contributors/Dr_Michael_Rudolph/Sino/index.htm>.

Chen's presidency ended in a spate of trials for corruption involving the First Family, which caused a loss of support for the Democratic Progressive Party and some electoral defeats. The actual President of the ROC, Ma Ying-jiu (馬英九, KMT, 2008–), has put again on track the talks with the PRC, with some moves that cannot but win the favor even of the Taiwan people. Direct flights have resumed; thousands of Mainland tourists visit the island every week; a Framework Agreement for Economic Cooperation (ECFA) with China has just been signed;³⁰ cultural exchanges are on the rise. President Ma is setting in motion a virtuous circle, where measures directed at both positive relationship and economic advantage create an atmosphere of growing trust and friendship between former arch-rivals.

Seen in perspective, the last sixty years of Taiwan's history have been dominated by the issue of the relationship between two groups of hitherto foreigners to Taiwan: the Chinese Mainlanders who retreated to the island in the wake of their defeat at the hands of the Communists, and the PRC, which claims the right to recover it. This relationship has evolved in the midst of a set of unpredictable developments in the international arena; and of an as well entangled internal situation, with Aborigines, Taiwanese, Hakka, and Mainlanders playing in turn antagonistic or supportive roles.

The Unexpected Honorable Guest

The last century has seen the full-fledged development of market culture on worldwide scale. Taiwan too has experienced the struggles connected with keeping up with the economic developments at every level, and with the advantages and disadvantages of market economy. It is however a fact that such a culture has a powerful homologation effect on all societies: it obliterates ancient traditions by creating, always anew, patterns of life which become tradition and then are mercilessly forgotten in an ever shorter time. Whatever analysis of the contemporaneous presence of different, sometimes mutually opposed groups and traditions need to take into account such an ominous and ubiquitous factor, and the possible trends it triggers.

FACES, LAYERS AND INTERACTIONS OF ALTERITY IN PRESENT-DAY TAIWAN

The brief historical summary sketched above, is sufficient to highlight some basic features in the relationships among different components of Taiwan society. The importance of such features is shown by the fact that they are somehow recurrent: they surface again

30. On 29 June, 2010, in Chongching, China. See: <<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/china-taiwan-relations/2010/06/30/262692/ECFA-signed.htm>>. It meets however with the strong opposition of the DPP, the political expression of the Taiwanese Chinese. Such opposition seems the outcome of the perception that the ECFA has strong probabilities of ushering in an epoch of economic prosperity growing out of the positive ties with the Mainland. If this happens, there will be less and less interest in walking on the bumpy road of independence. Therefore the support for the DPP, which has independence among its basics goals is bound to decrease. On the other side, China is willing to make special economic concessions, because of the great prize at stake—unification.

and again, even beyond phenomena that may appear as new, not-yet-seen before. A special aspect of Taiwan's situation is that such interrelations are not peculiar only to some parts of its territory. They involve the whole island, which is small and clearly set apart from other lands. Therefore they have a stronger impact on its social life.

A first feature is the peculiar relationship between the initial waves of Chinese settlers and the Aborigines (the "First Nations of Taiwan," as some among them call themselves). The Chinese seized the land which belonged to them, pushed them back into the barren mountain regions, did not consider them as part of civilization unless they would change their culture: abandon their traditions and learn a Chinese style of life. The memory and awareness of such a process, which started only 400 years ago and basically has not yet come to an end, is still an important factor influencing social and cultural life in Taiwan.

A second feature is the claim by the heirs of the first Chinese settlers to be the core nation of Taiwan, therefore to have the right to self-determination, autonomy from whatever external control and even independence. On the one hand such a claim derives its strength from historical experiences that would confirm it as a right; on the other hand, it comes at the price of denying the even more original right of the Aborigines. Furthermore, this group is not without internal dialectics and contrasts.

A third feature is the multi-faceted result of the complex interactions among the islanders set in motion by the arrival of foreigners.³¹ Under many respects their landing results into a revitalization of economic, cultural, social life, creating new problems but also new perspectives for the solution of old problems. At the same time it affects the power balance among the inhabitants of the island and triggers different reactions, among themselves and *vis-à-vis* the newcomers. Needless to say that the foreigners too had their plans, that they tried to implement also by superimposing their interpretation of the relationships among the ethno-cultural groups living on the island.

In the following paragraphs, attention is given to the main ethno-cultural components of Taiwan society, in order to know more about the way they interact with the other groups, the way they feel they are treated, their hopes and perspectives, the limits and opportunities offered by the swiftly-changing political trends.

Aborigines: What Revival?

Since the arrival of the first Chinese colonizers, Taiwan Aborigines have been either pushed away towards outer spaces beyond the realm of the human or forced into the assimilation to what alone was deemed as human civilization. Unfortunately, the colonizers did not stop at delimitating the two spaces, theirs and that of the Aborigines. They continuously endeavored to enlarge what they considered the human space at the

31. Needless to say that the identification of newcomers to the island as foreigners is debatable: who in Taiwan is authorized to consider others as foreigners? The first Chinese themselves are foreigners migrating into somebody else's lands. Furthermore, even Chinese arrived afterwards are counted as foreigners by the first Chinese settlers.

expenses of the not-human one. As a first, tangible result, the land on which the Aborigines lived was progressively seized, until only what was not usable in agriculture was left to them. When other resources were found in the thick forests of mountain areas (*e.g.* camphor and cypress, water for hydroelectric plants, minerals; and, more recently, opportunities for other cultivations, and tourism), even those remote spots were taken, and the Aborigines exploited in the work of the new industrial projects.

Such a dislodging was not only physical or geographical. It went hand in hand with an interpretation of Aboriginal cultures as savage ones, basically because of the practice of headhunting (which had a cultural and religious significance). The first anthropological research on them was carried out by Japanese scholars,³² still in the frame, at least partially, of colonial rule and projects of expansion.

After the Second World War, the KMT pursued the effort of casting the Aborigines into the mould of Chinese culture, because of the Party's main drive towards the recovery of the Mainland and the consequent need to employ for that purpose all the resources at hand. It was in the frame of the multi-cultural policy inaugurated at the beginning of the nineties (which took off together with the endeavor to escape the Mainland's pressure towards the incorporation of Taiwan into its own territory) that the Aborigines began to rediscover, protect and spread their culture.³³

Such an effort has given some fruits, principally in the field of ethnographic, anthropologic and linguistic research. Ethnographic Museums of the various tribes have been set up;³⁴ traditional culture elements are rediscovered and made accessible to visitors and people interested in indigenous culture, notably by means also of a television channel for the Aborigines, launched on 1 July, 2005.³⁵ Besides, traditional artifacts and food are produced and sold according to the patterns of market economy and culture.

Another important result is the growth in self-awareness among the indigenous population. Aborigines representatives and scholars voice the mind and concerns of their peoples in the national as well as in the international arena.

On the other hand, problems still exist, at many levels. First, the exploitation of land and resources continues undeterred. Major cases in the recent past have been the seizing of land for the cement industry and the disposal of nuclear waste in the Orchid Island, home to the Yami/Tao tribe.³⁶ Besides the already mentioned issues, there are also cases of racial discrimination, cultural appropriation and exploitation, bio-piracy and bio-colonialism.

The main issue, of course, is the control of the land and of its resources, in any pos-

32. <<http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/csacpub/chinaout/01.suenari.html>>.

33. <<http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/ojs/index.php/religions/article/viewFile/375/351>>.

34. See the Digital Museum of Taiwan Indigenous People (DMTIP) at: <<http://www.dmtip.gov.tw/Eng/index.htm>>.

35. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4640567.stm>>.

36. See the related materials and list of recent issues at: <<http://www.taiwanfirstnations.org/>>. This webpage was started in 1998 and is maintained by Mark Munsterhjelm.

sible way. Land is taken from the Aborigines and given to other peoples (generally Han Chinese) for market oriented operations. This may happen under the cover of economic projects, or the creation of national parks,³⁷ or even in the aftermath of calamities such as the earthquake in 1999, or the typhoon which struck the island on August 2009. The relocation of Aborigines “because of safety reasons” implies the loss of their rights on their ancestors’ land and the end of their cultures. They become culturally uprooted, unable to preserve their identities. Their cultural heritage becomes a dead amount of information without any vital connection with the way they spend their lives. They end up “dancing and singing for the benign patriarchs of a sub-imperial power.”³⁸

What happens to the Aborigines living in cities or towns, sharing a more and more Westernized style of life as the majority of the Taiwanese do? Discrimination still lingers, because of poor performance at school (connected with the quality of teaching imparted and with situations at home), which does not allow them to compete in the cultural market. The jobs they obtain are considered menial, and are poorly paid. Low income generates all sorts of social problems. They become second-class citizens, visible in the city, but voiceless. Despite this situation, or rather because of it, they also become a constant reminder of the possibility of leading a different life-style, more simple and frugal, more attentive to the native human values of spending time together, of working in close contact with nature, of enjoying simple celebrations, even of singing and dancing, something of which their rich neighbors do not have direct experience anymore.

The Taiwanese Bedrock

What now in Taiwan are called “the Taiwanese” (to distinguish them from the “Mainlanders”) are not an homogeneous group, even if they belong to the Han people and share the same Chinese culture.³⁹ Their claim to be the original Chinese inhabitants of the island, those who are entitled to consider others as foreigners or newcomers has been built on the hard work to till the land their ancestors seized from the Aborigines, to build the villages and cities where they live, to create infrastructure, to promote cultural and religious

37. See the report on a protest held by representatives of the Bunun because the superintendent of YuShan National Park likened the people living in a village there to mouse excrement: <<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/local/archives/2001/02/15/73764>>. The creation of the Park deprived the Aborigines of their original rights to use the resources of the area; it forced them into a different style of life. Instead of living by wisely collecting the fruits of the forest, they are forced into working for rich winners of contracts from which they are excluded. In the words of one of the protesters, Lanyaho Ishilidwan: “We cannot collect dabagai, a kind of fruit on the vines, which is of high economic value. But the park administration allows Han people rich enough to win the contract to do so. But the Han still need to hire us to climb up the vines up to five floors in height to pick the fruit, but we are always poorly paid while risking our lives for their benefit. The banning of hunting also makes it impossible to complete the teaching of traditional rituals vital to our culture.”

38. See: M. Munsterhjelm: “Happy Aborigines Dance for Benign Patriarchs: Ideologies Implicit in Some Recent Institutional Constructions of Taiwan Aborigines,” Paper presented at: CASCA 2002, University of Windsor, May 4, 2002, <<http://www.taiwanfirstnations.org/tfncasca.pdf>>.

39. Out of a total population of about 23,000,000, Chinese are the 98%. The so-called Taiwanese (本省人 *Benshenren*) are the 84%, the Minnan are the 70%, the Hakka the 14%, the Mainlanders (外省人 *Waishengren*) the 14%, (Data from: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiwan>>).

traditions. In a word, to build up a civilization. They are traditionally distinguished into two main groups: the Minnan (Hoklo), and the Hakka.

In the course of history, their struggle for autonomy has been crowned by success only for some brief moments: the Dongning Kingdom under the rule of the Zheng family, and the short-lived experience of the Republic of Taiwan (1895). Opposing their autonomy were in turn the Dutch, the Qing, the Japanese and the Mainlanders of the Republic of China under the leadership of Jiang Jie-shi. It was under their rule that the facts of 28 February, 1947 happened, creating a major and lasting division between the two main Chinese communities living on the island.

Although the Taiwanese may appear as invaders, they can also be seen as refugees, fleeing harsh conditions on their motherland. In the same way as the Aborigines, they too have a specific cultural heritage, which they jealously keep, and according to which they live. Peculiar ways in which temples are built and their festivals celebrated, public and private rituals, Chinese feast days, agricultural and manufacturing skills, songs and theatre, houses, clothing and pottery, family relationships; all such aspects of life and many more which characterize the Taiwanese way of life are on display all over the island. Taiwanese traditions are alive and strong. Perhaps the continuous struggles the Taiwanese faced along the centuries, and the contrasts with other groups, played a role in strengthening their adherence to their heritage, as a necessary means to survival.

In any case, many clues show that even this tradition, no matter how staunchly adhered to, is facing some challenges. In a sense, the Taiwanese too are caught in the omnipresent nets of the market culture. They too are exploited, in a way similar to the Aborigines: the old-fashioned neighborhoods surrounding the temples are slowly eroded by the development projects; young generations feel the attraction of Western culture; some leave the countryside to live and work in the cities (many among them are women) or go abroad for study and business; foreign spouses bring in different cultural traditions. Such phenomena are open to different and even conflicting interpretations; in any case they are taking place. Today's Taiwanese are not simply repeating the ways of life of the past. Strong attachment to ancestral traditions is counted among their distinctive features, together with hard work, frugality and an innate sense of freedom, which explains the many fights they fought along history, in all directions.

Indeed, this is a peculiar historical phenomenon: a group which constitutes the majority of the inhabitants of a place continually trying to assert its own right and never being able to succeed, except during the short-lived reign of the Zheng family and the months-long life of the Republic of Taiwan.

While contrasts with the Aborigines were and are mainly a matter of conquest or defense of physical space, the fights of the Taiwanese against other groups and even among themselves take place in a shared space, in order to get greater power in an environment where clashing communities are bound to live or die together.

The struggle to reach political power is a permanent feature of the Taiwanese way. It goes hand in hand with a localism that is also continually surfacing, and may even

work against such a goal. This is clearly visible under the Japanese, with the creation of numerous associations and parties; it is witnessed even in the 2–28 Incident, when the Mainlanders dealt a terrible blow to the Taiwanese hopes of shaping a common destiny together with their victorious and yet defeated brothers.

The unmotivated slaughtering of more than 20,000 Taiwanese signals the beginning for the Taiwanese communities of a sort of Long March: inside the country, toward political power and at the level of international relationships, toward full independence.

A key moment in such a drive has been the creation of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986.⁴⁰ Its first members came from the ranks of relatives of the victims of the 1947 incident, from family members and defense lawyers of political prisoners as well as from among intellectuals and artists with experiences abroad. They were strongly committed to political change ensuring the basic freedoms of speech, assembly and association. At the outset the party did not give open support to Taiwan independence: the DPP platform was pro-environment and pro-democracy.

During the 1990s, in the more liberal political atmosphere under the presidency of Li Deng-hui, a Taiwanese Hakka, DPP party members began openly to promote a national identity for Taiwan separate from that of China, making no claims to territories in China or Mongolia. The current official position of the party is that the Republic of China (Taiwan) is an independent and sovereign country: it considers Taiwan independence as a matter of fact, without the need of any formal declaration.

The DPP rejects the “one China principle” as the basis for official diplomatic relationships with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and advocates a Taiwanese national identity separated from mainland China. The DPP argues that its efforts to promote a Taiwanese national identity are merely an effort to normalize what was repressed during the years of authoritarian KMT rule.

At its beginnings, the DPP embodied the striving of the Taiwanese towards the full recovery of their identity in a quasi-religious way, as a mission coming from above. The years in which it was in power,⁴¹ however, showed the limits of a political formation without solid administrative experience in the international arena. On the one hand the PRC maintained an extremely hostile position toward the DPP, even to the point of passing the Anti-Secession Law in 2005⁴² obliging the government to go to war against Taiwan, should it declare independence. On the other hand, the United States did not support President Chen’s line, in order not to jeopardize their diplomatic relationships with China.

During its years as the ruling party, the DPP was accused of being a self-styled Taiwanese nationalist political formation, not adequately sensitive to the ethnographic diversity

40. DPP website (English), <http://www.dpp.org.tw/index_en/>. See also: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Progressive_Party>.

41. Notably the years of Chen Shui-bian’s presidency. President Chen was elected in 2000 and for a second term in 2004, in a situation made more confused by a controversial assassination attempt against him hours before the elections.

42. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Secession_Law>.

of Taiwan's population: where the KMT had been guilty of Chinese chauvinism, the DPP had not been able to offer anything more than Hoklo chauvinism.

Close and yet antagonistic to the Hoklo, the Hakka community too plays an important role in Taiwan's society. Historically, the two communities fought together for the same goals against the same external enemies. They fought also against each other, in order to assess their rights, or to take revenge of inflicted violence. Taiwanese Hakka are about 4 to 5 million people, a significant portion of the total Hakka population, which is estimated worldwide at 30 to 45 millions.⁴³

A major aspect in the battle for the promotion of Hakka rights has been and is language. The protests staged by Taiwan Hakka people in 1988 to oppose the suppression of ethnic languages obtained positive results not only for Hakka language, but also for the other local languages (Taiwanese and the Austronesian languages spoken by the Aborigines). The campaign in favor of a multi-language society implies the awareness of a multi-cultural environment as a resource⁴⁴ against nationalistic polarizations, and a criticism of the pretenses of states of being the sole depositaries of the rights of human communities.

The implementation of freedom of expression in local languages made another step forward with the creation of the Hakka TV, a satellite cable channel operated by Taiwan Broadcasting System (TBS) in Taiwan, launched on 1 July, 2003. It joined the numerous TV channels in Taiwanese and paved the way for the Aborigines TV channel. In this way, the communities which constitute the numerical majority of the inhabitants of the island, but are still counted as a cultural minority, have the means to create for themselves their own image and spread it virtually everywhere through the media.

This fact deserves special attention, because it brings with itself the perception that the problem of ethno-cultural diversity is more complex than it would appear at first sight: what remains of Hakka identity to a member of the Hakka people when his/her native language is forgotten? What happens when the problem of relationships among different groups is shifted from the real also into the virtual world? Are by any chance the media poised to become the principal source of self-identification? Which kind of identification would that be? The fact that different groups with no perspective of inter-mingling (given the absence of sufficient reasons for it) share the limited resources of the same territory creates the conditions for endless fight, a fight that becomes less dangerous (at least apparently) when fought on the Internet.

However, a virtual dimension added to the visible and tangible forms of the dialectics of alterity entails the risk of making such contrasts even more irresoluble and hampering eventual processes of confluence and synthesis. A dead language will be heard from the loudspeakers long after the last real speaker has died, sparking negative or guilty feelings

43. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hakka_people>.

44. J. M. Wei, "Language Choice and Multiculturalism in Taiwan," *Language and Linguistics* 7 (2006), 87–107 <<http://www.ling.sinica.edu.tw/eip/FILES/journal/2008.1.21.94732301.4799688.pdf>>.

among the listeners. If many of the new Hakka generations do not speak their traditional language, many factors can be invoked, among which, however, their personal freedom must also be counted.

Floating Mainlanders

As seen above, the coming and presence of the Mainlanders to Taiwan in the wake of Japan's defeat can be divided into two periods (1945–1949 the first; from 1949 till the present the second). The first years of Chinese rule on the recovered island saw an indiscriminate exploitation of the local resources, and the unjustified annihilation of the local cultural and social elites. As a result, the image of the Mainlanders was tainted in an almost irreparable way.

After 1949 Taiwan became the unique resource of the government of the Republic of China, the only territory under its control, to be protected and valued at any cost. The KMT pinned on its management of the island the few remaining hopes of recovering the lost Mainland. Unexpectedly, the evolution of the international scenario provided the badly needed help: the Korean war let the U. S. realize the strategic importance of Taiwan, hence their aid and cooperation with the ROC at every level. Contextually, the image of the Mainlanders underwent some shifts. Or, better, they understood that they needed find ways to unite the different groups around a common goal. Hand in hand with the economic reforms and growth, and in concomitance with the Cultural Revolution in the PRC, the KMT proposed itself as the warrant and defender of the Chinese civilization and values, not only inside the island, but also on the international stage. This would legitimize its claim to be the only true heir entitled to rule China.

A campaign of homologation was kicked off, which curiously enough repeated some traits of the Japanization project of the last years of colonial rule, and even of the two centuries under the Qing administration. Cultural diversity was curbed, Taiwanese and the Hakka language, together with the languages of the Aborigines were banned from public use, classic Chinese cultural traits (mainly in the forms practiced by Mainlanders) were spread all over Taiwan and made popular.

This cultural attempt too deserves special attention. On the one hand it is true that the KMT held political and military power and used it in a ruthless way, at times; on the other hand the substantial success of such a project requires further explanations. Besides the pressure from the ruling party, the deep-embedded need to somehow recover a Chinese identity after the Japanese rule also played a role, together with other factors. Otherwise it would be more difficult to explain how the KMT was the winner in the first and second presidential elections, and how it immediately regained the lost positions during the terms of President Chen.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the basic statement of the KMT that there is only

45. Even the elections in 2000 and 2004 can be interpreted as not as a real defeat of the KMT, when account is taken of the split inside the party, which paved the way to the first DPP President, and of the assassination attempt against the President and Vice-President hours before the elections of 2004.

one China sets a roadmap which cannot be easily accepted by the Taiwanese, since it leads to unification.

With reference to this main problem of Taiwan, the KMT and the government of the PRC show their consumed experience and a big amount of political skills. Direct flights between Taiwan and the Mainland; the flood of Mainland tourists, who pay in order to receive Taiwan's briefing about many political, social and economic issues; the signing of the ECFA with the PRC, Chinese university students in Taiwan campuses, some big contracts awarded to Taiwan companies: all these facts show that the Communist China is willing to offer Taiwan advantages of any kind in exchange for a preferential relationship, which on the one hand weakens the opposition by the sweet tinkling of money, on the other hand is poised to become irreversible and more and more necessary for Taiwan's economic survival. Who is behind such plans?

The case of the Mainlanders is different from that of the Taiwanese. Whereas the driving force behind the latter's claim to self rule and even independence is a community that is aware of sharing a common history and destiny, behind the KMT there is no such ethno-cultural unity. The landing of the Mainlanders was not the outcome of positive motivations or of a political project. They were just fleeing (as the Taiwanese had done three centuries earlier), under the leadership of a party that did not necessarily represent their cultural identity. Even now the KMT does not embody any hypothetical mainstream Chinese culture and tradition. It is just about politics and a political plan that would bring stability in one of the most critical areas in Asia and even in the world.

Even now, the Mainlanders and their descendants continue showing, under many viewpoints, what they are in the end—refugees not yet well assimilated into the new territory. Taiwanese does not become their mother language; their original forms of Chinese are slowly forgotten for lack of native speakers; they are not in the condition of creating strong feelings of belonging to a place or to a community.

The Mainlanders live in the cities and practice the professions allowed there: civil service, teaching, forms of business, apparently still looking for a place where to settle. Strange enough, such a place does not seem to be Taiwan: a number of them have moved to the U. S.,⁴⁶ or to New Zealand, or to other far away countries, in the hope not to be haunted by opposite nationalistic ideologies, let them be those of the Taiwanese, or of the KMT/PRC.

Aliens and Their Offspring

In the last years the numbers of Taiwan's population have remained substantially

46. In 2009 there were 8,039 persons from Taiwan who obtained legal permanent residence status in the U.S., one eighth of those coming from PRC, about four times those coming from Italy, <<http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2009/table10d.xls>>. "Between 1989 and 2008, approximately 677,000 ROC citizens emigrated. Statistics for the past 15 years show the United States as the top choice for Taiwan's émigrés, followed by Canada, New Zealand and Australia," <<http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/cho2.html>>.

unchanged;⁴⁷ dispute the fact that its birthrate is the lowest in the world.⁴⁸ Besides, among the few babies, one out of eight is born to a non-Taiwanese mother.⁴⁹

This last fact evidences the relevance of a phenomenon which affects some countries in South-East Asia, and notably Taiwan: the presence of foreign spouses and of their offspring. At least as far as Taiwan is concerned, such a phenomenon does not seem to be really new: in a small town in rural Taiwan a foreign resident observed a correlation between the age of foreign spouses and their nationality: the oldest ones come from Thailand; then, according to age, their provenance is Indonesia and the Philippines; the youngest are from Vietnam⁵⁰ and Mainland China.⁵¹ Many reasons explain the choice of a mixed marriage. In any case, one of the most significant outcomes is the increasing percentage of newborn children who are bearers of more than one cultural tradition, with a score of problems and opportunities involved. On the other hand, this has another consequence: in Taiwan there is the same amount of Taiwanese women who are not married, at least not to a Taiwanese. These facts go hand in hand with the more than 100,000 migrant workers present on the island—and also with the more than one million Taiwanese who work in Mainland China⁵² and live there for a substantial part of the year. Such phenomena contribute to the shaping of new experiences of daily coexistence among people with different backgrounds, mentalities, religions.

On the other hand, even among Taiwan residents mixed marriages have contributed during the centuries towards a smooth dilution of ethnic and cultural differences, so that now pure strains of the different races and cultures are more difficult to find. And the trend towards a mixing of races and cultures is bound to increase. Studies abroad and tourism too are important factors affecting the perception of one's identity and of the differences/relationships *vis-à-vis* others living in the same environment. All these phenomena involve the bodily existence of people. They are of great importance, because they slowly smoothen cultural contrasts, starting from the undermining of the most basic reason—race. Their strength is further increased by the concomitance of other two

47. At the end of June 2010 in Taiwan there were 23,138,381 persons, <<http://eng.stat.gov.tw/point.asp?index=4>>, with a slight growth from preceding years, <<http://www.indexmundi.com/taiwan/population.html>>.

48. 1.0 birth per woman <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1945937,00.html>>, or 8.99/1000 births <http://www.indexmundi.com/taiwan/birth_rate.html>.

49. When in January 2007 Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) attended at the official launch of the Government Immigration Agency, he remarked that one out of five married couples involved a foreigner, and one out of eight babies was born to a foreign spouse, adding that such a figure clearly showed that Taiwan is a new immigration society. See: <http://entour.yunlin.gov.tw/tour_en/10news/10news_02.asp?id=810>.

See also: <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1945937,00.html>>.

50. On the issue, see: H. K. N. Thi, *Marriage Migration between Vietnam and Taiwan: a View from Vietnam*, CEPED-CICRED-INED Seminar on Female Deficit in Asia: Trends and Perspectives, Singapore, 5–7 December 2005 (Draft Paper) <http://www.cicred.org/Eng/Seminars/Details/Seminars/FDA/PAPERS/04_HongXoanNguyenThi.pdf>.

51. The town in question is 崙背 (Lunbei Township) in 雲林縣 (Yunlin County). The total population of the township is about 27,000. At the end of June 2010 there were 151 spouses from Mainland China and 136 from other different countries. <<http://lunbei.household.yunlin.gov.tw/population/population03.asp?m2=17>>.

52. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35855.htm>>.

homogenizing factors: the more and more widespread use of the same things everywhere, and the interrelated virtual world which conquers minds and mentalities of people living in far away spots, making them think the same, at the same time.

Since Taiwan, like Japan, relies on industry and technology rather than on natural resources or agriculture, it is also bound to be the first market of its own production. This accelerates the process of modernization, and concomitantly brings with itself a sort of standardization in practically all aspects of life, from the style of new buildings to the way food is produced and sold, bought, cooked and eaten, or people dress, or travel or communicate. To find differences becomes more and more difficult, also because of the desire of many to reach such an homologation, as a symbol of personal advancement on the social ladder, or of being trendy as far as culture or fashion is concerned.

The mental world of people goes hand in hand with the use of things. The new electronic gadgets drive the attention of their users towards selected topics and messages, with the result of standardizing their minds too. Mental mechanisms become predictable and controllable. People all over the world are directed, in a way humanity has never experienced before, toward the same goals. This fact too contributes to the shaping of a shared mind, a new tradition that inexorably supersedes the rich and varied heritage of a cultural past. In the same way as biodiversity is reduced, cultural diversity and variety too are relegated into the periphery of contemporary society. As a result, alterity is bound to smoothly disappear. Only apparently, however, because alterity only ceases to be a shared issue and becomes an individual problem (every single individual faces the irreducible diversity of himself, and the last solitude, that of his own self).

Such processes are visible everywhere, but in Taiwan their effects are relevant to the point of raising the question whether the main ethno-cultural differences are bound to disappear in a near future. Only one clear difference seems to be still surfacing among the younger generations: those who are more closely involved with the market culture show no main signs of local or special distinctiveness other than their belonging to the culture through which they make a living. Those who somehow continue the way of life of their fathers still present the cultural or traditional traits identifying them as distinct groups or communities. Love for Japanese cultural traits among younger generations may also be counted among the unpredictable outcomes of such homologation in the virtual world. An answer picked up from Yahoo reads: "Taiwan is in love with anything that has to do with Japan: the language, the food, the cartoons, the movies, etc. ... The younger generation also likes to imitate Japanese in terms of clothing and appearance, etc. As for the surroundings, as I've mentioned many restaurants, etc. are designed based on Japan. ... for instance at a mall called Kmall across the Taipei train station, all the restaurants on the fifth floor are Japanese."⁵³

Such phenomenon mainly concerns young people, who in a near future may not even

53. Blitzkrieg, answer to: "Difference of Taiwan and Japan in culture, people, surroundings and morals?" Yahoo Answers: 2007. <<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080121222503AATew8Q>>.

remember their present love for sashimi and wassabi. However, it is also possible that it signals some major shifts at a cultural level. In the past U. S. style was more trendy; now the picture is more variegated. Does all this happen because Taiwan people do not want to be identified *tout-court* with the Mainland and try to find their way by leaning towards patterns that they will later abandon, when an independent Taiwanese shared culture will eventually take shape?

Religions between Market and Ethno-Cultural Differences

Generally speaking, religions are among the factors allowing different traditions to keep their distinctive traits even in the midst of social and cultural changes along history. In Taiwan, however, even in the past, religions seem to have played a secondary role in the complex sequence of events involving the dealing with and contrasts among so many peoples and cultures. A significant case is that of the impact of Christianity on Taiwan's ethno-cultural groups during the centuries. As for the contact of Christian message with the religious traditions of the Aborigines, history shows that it was generally smooth. The Spanish missionaries and the Dutch in the seventeenth century, then the Dominicans and the Presbyterians in the nineteenth, then other Catholic and Christian missionaries of the twentieth century did not encounter strong opposition in their evangelizing work. From the very beginning on the Aborigines were open to the Gospel.⁵⁴

This is rather surprising when compared to their relationship with the religious traditions of the Chinese. The interest they showed for such traditions was not so strong; perhaps because of the inextricable connection of Chinese religions with the whole of Chinese culture, to which the Aborigines were reluctantly assimilated. They understood that Christian religion could play a role in helping them keep their original traditions and culture, the fact that it was propagated by foreigners notwithstanding. The impact of Christianity on the Aborigines took a surprisingly positive turn after the end of the Second World War. What happened was a mass conversion, involving elders, shamans, as well as entire families. Between 1950 and 1968 over 100,000 Taiwanese indigenous people converted to Catholicism, a quarter of them from the Presbyterian Church.⁵⁵

On the other side, the answer of the Taiwanese to Christian evangelization was in general negative. After almost one hundred years of missionary efforts, in 1950 the Catholics in Taiwan numbered about 12,000, the majority of them Aborigines living in a few villages to the South of Taiwan.⁵⁶ Even in the case of the Taiwanese the refusal of foreign influence

54. In the seventeenth century there was indeed some opposition, with some missionaries killed; this happened when the missionaries were among the first foreigners the Aborigines were confronted with. O. Lardinois, *Church Alive. The Catholic Church among the Aboriginal Peoples of Taiwan. Past, Present and Future* (Taipei: Kuangchi Cultural Group 2004), 60–1.

55. Ibid., 89.

56. They amounted to 10,431 in the Apostolic Prefecture of Gaoxiong (0.2% of the population); 2,315 in the Apostolic Prefecture of Taipei (0.1% of the population). <<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/dtw.html>>. In 1945 there were 9,737 Catholics in Taiwan, while the Protestants (mainly Presbyterians) were 24,000. Ibid., 73.

extended to religious traditions too, with the difference that the Aborigines were under pressure from at least two different quarters, and tried to use a religion received from some foreigners to shield themselves against the threat they deemed more dangerous. While the Taiwanese tried to shrug off whatever could hinder their efforts of holding the upper hand, at least at home. It is only now that even among Taiwanese conversions take place more frequently.

Christian mission has been more successful among the Mainlanders, practically for the same reasons at work some years earlier for the Aborigines. The fact of being displaced into a foreign territory, the ideological confusion subsequent the defeat at the hands of the Communists, solitude and loss of family relations may have played an important role in favoring the conversion to Christian faith.

In any case, the majority of Taiwan Catholics are Aborigines. The positive response of the Chinese to the Gospel continues to be a matter of personal choice, which does not yet trigger any lasting mass phenomenon. A reason for this may be the attachment to traditional religions and practices, which are felt as warrants of the identity of groups and of their members. This feeling of belonging to one's tradition, and of the difference from others may be slowly eroded by the ubiquitous pressure of market culture, which breaks apart any community ties. Among the traditional Chinese religions, some differences can be observed in the way they enter, affect and interact in Taiwan, from the coming of the first immigrants to the present.

Popular Chinese religion seems to be one of the identity markers of the Taiwanese. The migrants to Taiwan kept their bond to the temples in Fujian and continued on the island the practices of the Mainland. Temples continued to fulfill one of their major roles, that of protecting the spirit of autonomy of local communities against any interference from the outside.

At the other end of the spectrum, Confucianism and the veneration of the City Gods were mainly tools in the hands of the central government in view of controlling the restless peripheries. Although belonging to the same Chinese religious stream, the two traditions were made to play antagonistic social and political roles, depending on the class collocation of their followers. This is, again, an example in which religious traditions are used in view of solving problems which have roots at an ethno-cultural level.

As for Buddhism, in Taiwan it knows a set of developments which are of the greatest importance in order to assess some of the future possible trends of religion all over the world. Historically, Buddhism did not play a major role inside Taiwan's complex ethno-cultural interactions. Buddhists tended to live at the margins of society. This changed with the arrival of the disciples of some Mainland masters of the beginning of the twentieth century. They reshaped Buddhist doctrines and practices into the perfect tool to conquer Taiwan's elite, while keeping the vital link to the mass of followers coming from common people. In the distinctive features of Taiwan's Buddhism the logic of the market applied to religion becomes visible. The reinterpreted doctrines answer to specific needs of the upper classes; different Buddhist groups qualify themselves with clear and distinctive

programs so as to have a diversified offer; they move to the conquest of foreign markets in other continents.

Market culture has invaded all fields of life and evened out all kinds of ethno-cultural diversities by substituting them with social differences inside the same cultural stream, related to the different economic roles. Taiwan's Buddhism has been able to ride such a tide and use it for its purposes. It is not by chance that even Western elites feel the attraction of such a Buddhism, which together, and perhaps even more than Confucianism, is following Chinese expansion everywhere.

Such evolution of Buddhism has set a pattern that other religions follow with success. Among them the Yiguandao and the Falungong, both feared and banned by the government of the PRC, and some independent Christian Churches which thrive in the variegated panorama of religious affiliations of Taiwan society.

The Japanese attempt at exporting Shinto—its national religion—as part of the project of Japanization of the island during the colonial rule deserves mention too: although not successful, such a pattern is not an exception. The Qing administrators did the same with Confucianism, and even the government of the ROC pushed for a revival of mainstream classic Chinese tradition and philosophy, in order to make Taiwan society more homogeneous and easier to rule.

In synthesis, in the interplay of diversities so typical of Taiwan history and present, the role of religions can be summed up under the following headings: religion as a core qualifier of ethno-cultural identity, therefore something to which people tend to adhere in a strong way; religion as a tool to impose the control of a group on other communities and traditions; religion—even a religion coming from abroad—as a tool to resist against cultural (and also physical) colonization by groups deemed more dangerous; religion as a tool shaped according to the logic of market, used to expand the power of some groups.

Another important remark is about the way religions relate to each other in present-day Taiwan. Surprising as it may be, there is a peaceful cohabitation, which, at the level of common people, is substantiated by the widespread respect for others' opinions and beliefs. As a result, there is no fear at disclosing one's religious affiliation and in performing rites and celebrations in public. Religion is not exclusively relegated into the sphere of private life.

A reason for this mutual respect, among others, may be the fact that behind religions there are cultural and ethnic differences, which nobody can even imagine to be able to remove. Religions are not the cause of such differences; they are part of them. They may work in different directions: to make such alterities smoother or to sharpen them to nobody's advantage.

TREASURE ISLAND—A HIDDEN TREASURE

The variegated phenomena observed when considering the way ethno-cultural alterities interact in Taiwan make of the island something very special all over the world. Taiwan

is a place where interactions with people belonging to different ethnic, cultural, religious worlds take place every day. Better still, it is perhaps the only place in South-East Asia where people live such interactions in an atmosphere of reciprocal respect, not only at a social level, but also at the level of the government.

Besides, no single community may aspire to control all the others. It is simply impossible, and history has already proved the unfeasibility of such plans. The three miracles in Taiwan—democracy, economic growth, dialogue among religions—may well have their roots in the perception of the co-presence and necessary co-existence of irreducible alterities and in the reciprocal acceptance and peaceful cooperation that make these differences positively work together.

This is the real treasure buried inside the island, a treasure that is constantly excavated by both inhabitants and visitors.

Ancient and more recent history show also that some situations increase the possibility of contrasts and clashes among different groups, *e.g.* situations of poverty and social instability caused by famine, or other natural calamities, or war. As a consequence, groups of refugees squeeze themselves inside other peoples' space, a space that in this way shrinks, becomes smaller and is unable to provide enough resources for all. This creates opposition among communities, self-closing inside the different traditions, enmity, clashes. Or, because of historical events, some groups coming from abroad and legally entitled to the control of the island, may think that they have the mission of subduing all the others under their sway. Again, opposition to such plans grows. As a result, contrasts become impossible to mend. On the other side, some events, or trends, work also as positive factors of integration among the different traditions. Such events basically are economic plans and developments, which enlarge space, making it capable of nourishing more people.

In these situations, ethno-cultural alterities are not each other's enemies anymore but, on the contrary, they can profitably cooperate together. This is what is happening today in Taiwan, because of the new political trends inaugurated by the KMT and positively supported by Mainland China. The results obtained by such a cooperation make traditional differences easier to harmonize, even if the PRC plans to recover Taiwan cast a shadow on the whole trend and fuel the negative response from the DPP—and generally from those who are afraid of being deprived of the freedom they enjoy in the present political situation.

As far as religions are concerned, Taiwan's experience suggests to interpret religion not only as something dealing with other-worldly affairs, but also as a set of interactions that take place in the present life of people and are inextricably connected with socio-economic, ethno-cultural and political factors. Any religious denomination has to come to terms not only with other denominations, but also with the differences of the communities present in Taiwan which accept the same faith, with their hopes for the future and with their contrasts. For those who wholeheartedly adhere to the core tenets of faith, this would seem a compromise, or even a betrayal. But it can also be seen as a way to

take care of the faithful in their present problems, and to keep up to the most successful trends of the market of ideas.

A comparison with Europe (at least some of its regions) would show that in both places similar phenomena took place, albeit in different epochs. Europe became a melting pot of cultures centuries before Taiwan, and this is one of the reasons why in Europe ethnic contrasts have generally quieted down. Cultural contrasts are still in place, but the different communities identify themselves on the basis of traditions tied to place rather than to race. A fact that highlights the importance place has in order to build up a feeling of belonging and identity. Another factor that has smoothed contrasts is the Christian faith, which has united the different peoples of Europe for centuries through a spiritual bond, even in presence of different traditions.

The absence of such a factor (for a number of reasons Buddhism did not and perhaps could not play a similar role) has made—and continues to make—one's belonging to his ethno-cultural community something absolute, that cannot be negotiated. This contributes to explain the resistance Far Eastern cultures offer to any attempt of deep exchange, interaction, and eventually reciprocal integration. And it also helps to realize how important is Taiwan's experience in this area. Against such a background, Taiwan clearly appears as an experimental field where elsewhere remote possibilities are already tested and yield results. The co-presence of so many and manifold differences on the same small territory helps, or compels everybody to see his own group, or people, with a sense of proportion and not as an absolute for which it is even possible to go to war. Taiwan is learning and teaching how to go beyond any narrow-minded nationalism. This is greatly necessary in a region where even inside the same people tensions may escalate to the point of no return.

Another precious gem of the treasure that can be found and dug out in the island is a kind of free offer of traditions, always open for new buyers. At least as a leisure experience, many can visit the numerous culture parks already open and have a taste of the lifestyles of other cultures. In this respect, it seems especially important what the Aborigines are able to show to others: a simple way of life, in contact with nature in the splendid landscape of Taiwan mountains. Such experiences are like a balm curing the hectic lifestyles of other groups, thus showing the only way to a sustainable future.

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Conclusion

E. PULCINI, M. REBECCHI, T. TOSOLINI

This study, which has attempted to investigate the relationship between the dominant discourse of a majority (whichever it happened to be in the countries under examination) and the various alterities (which, in one way or another, refused to disappear from the scene) has turned out to be quite complex. As a matter of fact, this research has tried to show that “the other within,” far from being a derivative category of thought or a secondary sociological reality, possesses instead a priority status with respect to that kind of identity which thinks of itself always as a monolithic, static and homogeneous elite.

Native or tribal groups, religious minorities, indigenous peoples, cultural diversities, caste stratifications... are all expressions which, by their very existence, do not allow any society to identify itself with a single group, producing instead a kind of cultural arrhythmia which has always survived any attempt at synchronization and/or assimilation. On the contrary, the “other” present in these societies, is like a “bad conscience” that, paradoxically,

helps any identity to acknowledge itself to itself and to understand and articulate any discourse about itself. Without the other, identity would simply not be identity at all.

From an historical point of view, instead, we can see that the alterities analyzed in this study have been and are still considered as a disturbing factor threatening the illusory dream of a uniform and undisturbed mono-ethnicity. For this reason, the minority groups under study have suffered through the centuries the powerful blows of land dispossession, marginalization, ostracism, and even religious persecution. The forces behind this homologizing project have a lot to do with political, economic, and social power and interests, where exclusion is nothing but the logical consequence of indifference: globalization being the most apparent phenomenon of all.

The question now seems to be this: are all these minorities doomed to long forever for respect, recognition, and acceptance? Is it possible to envision a different kind of relationship in which the “other within” is not only passively accepted or tolerated but also contributes in an active way to a mutual enrichment and growth? Obviously, the coexistence among different groups does not always turn out to be negative: the Pancasila ideology in Indonesia and the IPRA Republic Act 8371 in the Philippines, for example, envisage the possibility of a relationship not based on fictitious feelings of superiority, but rather on the appreciation and promotion of what the other is. The various movements trying to protect and foster awareness concerning their otherness (for example, the IPOs in the Philippines, the Parittran and Dalit in Bangladesh, the Buraku League and the Utari Association in Japan) all signal a deeper re-affirmation of their identity as well as a self-determination and respect for their human rights in contrast to the anonymous meta-narrative of the majority.

What all these examples are showing is that there is some hope that the relationships among all the components of a given society need not be conflictual or mutually exclusive: there is much to learn, in fact, from what is different or alien to the accepted world-views and life-styles of the dominant groups. As a matter of fact, another kind of ideology is still possible, though this time a non-violent and more positive one, that is, an ideology that accepts as its starting point the fact that we are a mystery to ourselves, that the dream of a complete self-transparency is just an illusion and a myth. In the words of the philosopher Julia Kristeva: “The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners.” All of us share therefore in the enigma of having been born Rishi, Burakumin, Okinawans, Ainus, Ahmadiyahs, Aetas, Taiwanese Aborigines or Hakkas...

This brings us to the second point of this strange new “ideology”: that of not only accepting to be a stranger to ourselves but also of looking for that stranger that is not in us, for the one which presents itself unexpectedly to us, even for the one we are not prepared to accept or welcome within us. This new approach to the other would enforce a positive attitude based no more on fear and exclusion, but rather on mutual respect, love and truth. Furthermore, this ideology would eliminate all those rhetorical discourses which tend to enclose the other within the boundaries of self-commiserative attitudes, ghetto-like mentalities or museum-style ways of living.

What emerges from this analysis is that, at the moment, this new ideology is simply beyond any imagination because, until now, the only forces at work determining every kind of relation have been those of conflict, segregation, opposition and violence. Do we not need, then, new modes of relationships, new creative ways of approaching the other, new places in which to live, re-create and make visible this attitude? Could it be that this new world-view may also help the Church to re-discover her vocation of being an expert in humanity and missionaries to be faithful to their call of incarnating the Word—the Stranger who came close to us—in different cultures?

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