

Cultural Genocide : A necessary concept in Anthropology Today?

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the continent of America and in many other countries, a pattern of genocide among indigenous, tribal populations was laid out by European invaders from the 16th century and before. Two levels can be distinguished: physical extermination and cultural genocide. Both are still on-going: tribes in the Amazon rainforest who managed to stay 'invisible' to mainstream society over centuries often face complete collapse within 20 years of first contacts. India's tribal societies, who always existed on the edges of 'civilisation', escaped this extreme level of extermination. But dispossession from their land started during colonial times, and has accelerated since Independence. Displacement by dams and other 'development' projects, and invasion of their territories by large-scale mining projects, involve an immensely painful process of Cultural Genocide, that needs better acknowledgement by anthropologists and the wider society. Cultural Genocide often accompanies Ecocide, a destruction of ecosystems that tribal societies had maintained intact over centuries.

Tribal people in 2012 are on a 'final frontier' of invasion and takeover of their land and territories, as resources get scarcer in a capitalist system whose growth expands beyond what the earth seems able to sustain (*New Internationalist* October 2011, Gaia Foundation 2012). This is the situation in India, and in most other countries where tribal peoples still survive: a multitude of very tough situations indeed, as the quest for resources by mainstream societies - especially by corporations and banks - grows relentlessly.

In many ways, a paradigm of genocide was laid out during the 15th-19th centuries in North and South America, Australia, parts of Africa (including the 'Hottentot' civilisation in South Africa, and many tribes exterminated through the slave trade), and other places penetrated by European traders and colonists.

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India escaped this type of violent, polarised confrontation of invaders and invaded, since tribal societies had always existed on the periphery of mainstream kingdoms, with no attempt to convert them. Quite the reverse: Hindu kings adapted to tribal cults in the sense that they patronised and identified their power with these cults as a means of legitimising their rule (Padel 2010, chapter 5). It was only when the East India Company tried to rapidly increase revenue from land, pressurising Rajas to bring in cultivators who would make land more 'profitable', that widespread dispossession of Adivasis began and exploitation rapidly increased, causing a succession of tribal rebellions from the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries (Padel 2011).

But a second wave of dispossession opened up when India started on a path of rapid industrialisation at Independence. Dams, mines and metal factories have displaced large numbers of tribal communities: at least 10-20 million Adivasis (forming approximately 40 per cent of the total number of displaced people). Out of India's total estimated tribal population of about 85 million, this means that about a quarter or fifth have been displaced from their original land and/or communities (Fernandes, 2006, Mathur 2006, Padel and Das 2008).

Displacement brings about a drastic drop in the standard of living for most Adivasis and many non-tribals in communities whose area is 'invaded' by mines or metal factories. This is evident from *Rich Lands, Poor People* (Report by Centre for Science and Communities, CSE 2008), which shows how India's mining areas are essentially its poorest - the paradox of the resource curse, which applies to resource-regions regions.

Displaced Adivasis have regularly been made lavish promises that are almost never kept (B.D. Sharma 2011). A 'reality gap' exists between reasonable-seeming policies and grassroots realities, some of which are virtually absent from the literature on R & R (Resettlement and Rehabilitation), such as systemic corruption, violent repression and structural violence, goondas, illegal liquor shops, and prostitution. In addition, uprooting communities that have always lived close to nature in a high degree of self-sufficiency causes profound trauma and cultural change. This is where 'cultural genocide' seems the appropriate and necessary concept (Padel and Das 2008. 2011).

These ground realities are also aspects that need to be considered in assessing social impacts of displacing projects, in addition to the otherwise well-articulated ground-work on Social Impact Assessments (SIAs) presented in the previous issue of *Journal of the Anthropological Survey of India* (JASI 2011). At the start, it needs to be adequately appreciated how shoddy has been the standard of a large number of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), basically due to heavy pressures imposed on researchers to give reports seriously underestimating environmental impacts (CSE 2011). While Jairam Ramesh was Environment Minister, many serious irregularities involving faulty EIAs were highlighted, while highly coercive and misrepresented Public Hearings have become a regular feature of how clearance is obtained for contentious projects (CSE 2008 *passim*).

How can social scientists ensure that a higher standard is maintained for Social Impact Assessments, and avoid succumbing to pressures? The fact is that neither ecology nor sociology form part of the training of the otherwise highly skilled engineers, economists and company executives who design mines, factories and dams - let alone of their financial investors. After a talk that Felix Padel gave at the Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata on the subject of 'Aluminium Economics', highlighting social and environmental costs, a professor commented that engineers and economists understood 'approximately 2 per cent' of the impact of their projects on ecosystems and communities.

Appreciation of both sets of impacts tends to be blocked out by the customary technocratic approach. This is the theme of the article published by Jairam Ramesh while he was Environment Minister: the world of economists and corporations, and the world of environmental and social activists represent 'Two Cultures' that barely communicate with each other (Ramesh 2010).

Environmental costs are at times fairly well articulated in the media, where journals such as *Down to Earth* (published by the CSE) often carry in-depth analysis. An anthropological understanding of the impacts of displacement is much less visible in the public domain. How to ensure that the intangible, unmeasurable impacts of uprooting tribal communities and invading their space are adequately assessed?

The irony is that long-term sustainability is the essence of many of the communities who are being dispossessed from land they have lived from over generations. Mainstream stereotypes perceive tribal societies as relics from the past. On the contrary, could it be that these societies still have much to teach the mainstream, about how to live more sustainably, taking from nature with restraint, and sharing it equally? Could they point the way towards a more sustainable future for human societies? (*New Internationalist* 2010, Corry 2011)

Two Levels of Genocide

The pattern of genocidal invasion goes back at least 2,000 years. Boudicca (Boadicea), as queen of the Iceni tribe in eastern England (approximately present-day Norfolk), rebelled against Roman rule in 60AD when tax demands became unbearable through enslavement of people who could not pay. She managed to unite several tribes, and wipe out a Roman legion, but after more legions defeated her, her Iceni were enslaved and exterminated *en masse*. In India, three centuries earlier, Ashoka's invasion of the Kalinga people in Odisha caused a comparable massive loss of life and liberty - by his own calculation, 100,000 killed, 150,000 enslaved, and many more dying of disease and famine afterwards (Padel & Das 2010).

Similarly, when invaders from Spain conquered the Canary Islands, after a century of contact, they exterminated and/or enslaved the entire population of the native people living there, known as Guanches, whose previous population is estimated at 80,000, and whose culture, which was highly sophisticated though characterised as 'hunter-gatherer', was completely erased during and shortly after the final conquest between the 1480s and 1540s.¹

This became the paradigm throughout the Americas, with many variations. *Red Gold* (Hemming 1978) and *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* (Brown 1970/1975) give the main history for Brazil and the USA respectively, *Ishi Between Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian* (Theodora Kroeber 1961/1975) tells the poignant story of the last survivor of the Yahi or Yana tribe in California, native to the area around the 1849 gold rush. Ishi "came in" in 1911 after decades of 'Indian-hunting' had exterminated his people, followed by solitary existence. He lived his final years in an ethnographical museum, sharing his knowledge with researchers about his extinct tribe's culture.

The word 'genocide' was first used in 1944 during the Second World War to refer to the treatment of Jews by Nazis. Soon it was also being used for the treatment of Armenians in Turkey, and for the history of native tribes in America. Literally the word means killing a *genos*, Greek and Latin for a people or culture. One can differentiate two distinct meanings: the literal, physical extermination of a people - a meaning that applies all too accurately to many tribes in America - and the killing of a culture.

When tribes were defeated in North America for example, survivors were confined to reservations, where, over the next century, systematic attempts were made to eradicate their culture by various means. These included the now notorious technique, which missionaries of different denominations colluded in throughout North America and Australia, of separating children from their families and sending them to boarding schools. As described by Lame Deer, a Lakota medicine man who lived through this system and came out the other side:

In those days the Indian schools were like jails and run along military lines, with roll calls four times a day.... We were forbidden to talk our own language or to sing our own songs.... To the Indian kid the white boarding school comes as a terrific shock. He is taken from the warm womb [of his family] to this cold, strange place.... [Even now,] in these fine new buildings Indian children still commit suicide, because they are lonely in all that noise and activity. I know of a ten-year-old who hanged herself. Those schools are just boxes filled with homesick children. The schools leave a scar.... (John Fire & Richard Erdoes 1972/1980: 33-37)

'Killing the Indian in them to save the Man' was seen as a proper, humanitarian policy by missionaries convinced of the superiority of European culture - a policy defined as 'culturicide' by American anthropologist James Fenelon in his book about genocidal impacts on the Lakota, and Lakota resistance.

'Genocide' has a strong emotive force compared with 'culturicide' or 'ethnocide', which are likely to remain fairly academic concepts. This emotive force is why some wish to use the G- word, while others dislike it. The Armenian genocide remains a banned concept in Turkey for instance, while the Sudanese government resists calling treatment of the Nuba or Darfur tribes 'genocide' for obvious political reasons.

We would suggest that this emotional force is one reason why the term 'cultural genocide' is strictly correct and appropriate for processes going on now among tribal peoples in

many countries, including India. Cultures and communities that have sustained themselves and existed over centuries are now disintegrating fast due to imposed changes, including large-scale involuntary displacement. This destruction is almost invisible presently in the mainstream media, and therefore passes almost unnoticed by most members of mainstream society. Even at the grass-roots, so derogatory are mainstream attitudes towards tribal cultures in Orissa and neighbouring states that, for example, the majority of non-tribals employed as school-teachers in Adivasi schools tend to show little or no interest in learning about Adivasi culture. The learning process - even when it becomes more sensitive by e.g. introducing textbooks in tribal languages into tribal primary school classes - tends to be uni-directional, with little reciprocity.

The history of the cultural as well as physical genocide in America needs to be much better known. When Darwin visited South America for example, he stayed at a military camp in Argentina whose soldiers were systematically exterminating the native tribes. The hunter-gather tribes whom Darwin met in Tierra Fueva survived only another 30-60 years before cowboys invaded their land and started killing them off. So many cultures have faced obliteration in the continent of America - some through physical extermination of the population, others by undermining the cultures, especially their knowledge and value systems. As Wallerstein shows in *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (2006), the world capitalist system justifies its hegemony over other cultural forms through a value system that claims to be universal but is actually partial and often extremely biased.

The universalist claim goes back to Christian apologists for the conquistadors' slaughter of the native Indians in America, such as Juan Gines de Sepulveda's text, the 'Just Causes of the War Against the Indians'. Bartolome de Las Casas argued persuasively in 1550 against Sepulveda's view that mass extermination of indigenous peoples was justified and compatible with Christian theology. Missionaries saved lives, where European soldiers, settlers, plantation owners and slave-traders brought total genocide. Even in Las Casas' system though, conversion was the norm, and the native peoples of Brazil were brought into huge mission stations, Reductiones, where they were converted and 'civilised' - and where large numbers died of disease. Ultimately, the Reductiones were abandoned as one after another, native cultures ceased to exist in the face of invasion, dispossession and extreme forms of exploitation.

Some hundreds of tribes survived longer by fleeing to the 'interior', becoming 'invisible peoples', or taking on a warrior ethic to fight off invaders - until the late twentieth century, when the 'last frontiers' began to be penetrated by settlers, loggers, gold miners and missionaries - especially those of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and New Tribes Mission, who formed the programme of evangelising and translating the Bible into every tongue - a history exposed in *Is God cm American?* (Soren and Aaby 1981)

Cultural Genocide - what does it mean now?

But can a culture be killed? After all it is an inherent feature of human societies. The answer to the question of the death of a culture is also associated with the problem of our

inability to define what exactly culture is. There are reportedly well over 200 scientific definitions of this concept. Some believe that culture is external to us and you can read and interpret it like a text, others understand it as a symbolic system that exists only in our heads. This lack of clear criteria defining culture is such that even when we speak the same language and use the same terms, we can operate with completely different assumptions about the essence of culture. For some, the core of culture is religion and myth, for others language, while for others it refers to a way of life. Now, as in the past, many anthropologists resist the idea that a culture is dying, seeing what some call 'genocide' as a form of social change.

William Merrifield, Anthropology Coordinator at the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), stated in 1976 that 'ethnocide is a myth. People die, but cultures do not; they change' (Hvalkof and Aaby 1981: 175). Thomas N. Headland - another SIL Anthropology Coordinator - asked 24 years later, in 2000, by Magdalena Krysinska-Kaluzna, if he agreed with Merrifield's statement, said:

I do remember Merrifield's argument there. He has a good point because the term 'ethnocide' is a figure of speech. He is right, one cannot literally kill a culture, because a culture is an abstract concept anyway, and not a biological organism. The main problem with accusing someone of ethnocide is that this metaphorical term is impossible to define to both sides' satisfaction. If I introduce literacy to a preliterate society, and the people accept it as a new community value, I cause culture change. Is that ethnocide? When anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon distributed hundreds of steel machetes to the 'stone-age' Yanomamo during his 20 years of fieldwork with them in order to gain their help, was that ethnocide? I would say no to both examples. But when some missionaries [not SIL] kidnapped children from their Indian parents in Colombian families in the 1930s, and put them in their boarding schools where they could teach them Christianity and Spanish, and where they punished them if they caught them speaking their Indian language, was that 'ethnocide'? Well, yes. But Merrifield was responding to anthropologists who accuse missionaries of ethnocide if they introduce anything to an Indian. Strange, because the same anthropologists were going out and living with newly contacted Indians, too, and paying the Indians in trinkets and blankets themselves. Were anthropologists not also committing ethnocide ₂

The case appears to be complex conceptually and terminologically, with questions over distinctions between ethnocide, cultural genocide and genocide. Each of these terms describes efforts to destroy a social group. While genocide refers to physical extermination, ethnocide and cultural genocide refer to destruction of group identity and/or culture without killing people physically. Ethnocide means the destruction of the group ethnic identity, as in a programme of total assimilation of individuals into the dominant society. Although the group as such disappears, cultural elements can, of course, survive.¹ In the case of cultural genocide, we deal with the destruction of cultural practices and a social system, regardless of whether members of that culture will survive, and with what identity. A named identity may survive, while its cultural context is eliminated (Hall and Fenelon

2004: 164-165). Fenelon advocates the term 'culturicide' (1998: 20), showing its relationship with other terms and processes as follows:

Social Systems Continuum of Domination

Culturicide: Parameters and Modeling in Continuum of Domination

<— Strongest Weakest ---->

Genocide

Cultural Genocide

Cultural Assimilation

CULTURICIDE

Cultural Suppression

Coercive Assimilation

Elite Acculturation

Acculturation

Bi-culturation

(Authoritarian)

Multi-culturation

(after Fenelon, 1998, p. 43)

The opposite of cultural genocide is the survival of a culture, meaning the cultural continuity of a group, and thus the cultural distinctiveness and continuity of cultural transmission, which allows the free reproduction of culture. To enable it to survive, there can be no full and destructive acculturation relevant to the core values of the cultural system.

The most important and most difficult question in this context is: where does 'normal' cultural change end and cultural destruction begin? If each transformation and each new 'state' is simply a form of social change, how to refer to the fact of vanishing of cultures, discernible throughout history and prehistory? Shifting relationships between dominant and subordinate cultures is clearly a vital element here.

Cultural dominance refers to a certain type of social relationship that can be defined as exerting pressure or imposing change, by members of a stronger or larger culture, over a subordinate population. The dominant culture can be seen as aiming to subdue, absorb, or isolate the subordinate culture(s) (Mucha 1999: 26): 'The dominant culture is like the complex "basic cultural pattern", regarded as the only legally valid in a given society, which occurs in human activities. Transmission of the dominant culture is mainly through the education system' (ibid. p.29).

In James Fenelon's definition, cultural domination is 'action, structure or ideology resulting from dominant cultural groups or nation-states, utilizing any coercion, direct suppression, or strategic elimination of cultural practices over dominated cultural groups' (1998: 37). Dominant cultures impose their cultural patterns over 'weaker' ones, requiring them to accept the dominant culture's vision of the world, values and norms (ibid. pp.25-87). A particular aspect of this phenomenon is how the dominant culture tries to impose its conceptual categories onto others groups (Said 1991).

Dominant cultures tend to impose forced changes in societies with different cultures, at times eliminating these societies altogether. The aim is to ensure that subordinated cultures take over certain dominant cultural patterns, or patterns beneficial to the dominant group. 'Antagonistic collectivities lead a continuous struggle for the possibility of imposing a view of the world which would be the most compatible with their particular interests' (Wacquant 2001: 19).

Cultural Destruction is often done in the context of cultural domination. When a subordinate group is forced to accept ready-made patterns of the dominant culture, the survival of their culture is threatened. The greater the threat, the greater the degree of changes related to the sphere of symbols and values (Krysiriska-Kaluzna 2008).

In both Americas, domination processes have involved imposing western culture onto indigenous cultures, using various kinds of destruction, including cultural genocide. These processes began over 500 years ago. The basic history of the conquest and fall of the indigenous Inca and Aztec civilisations, and the desperate struggles for survival and freedom by several North American indigenous peoples is widely known. Less so the fate of indigenous tribes in the Amazon region.

The conquest of the region by Spanish and Portuguese conquerors began in the late sixteenth century. By the 1650s, many Amazon tribes were affected by demographic collapse, associated with the rapid spread of smallpox and other diseases coming from Europe. Outbreaks of infectious diseases - then as now - often preceded direct contact with the invaders, which increased in violence as European colonisation spread. In Brazil, groups of *bandeirantes* (standard-bearers) began to go into the interior during the seventeenth century, searching for slaves and precious metals. *Bandeirantes* defied the Jesuits, who tried to protect indigenous groups by settling them in villages and teaching them 'the arts of civilisation' (Rabben 1998: 26). Portuguese slaving expeditions reached a peak during 1737-1755 (Ferguson 1995: 79-80, Rabben 1998: 26), and although Indian slavery was officially abolished in 1755, it actually existed well into the nineteenth century.

The situation was similar in other countries of South America. One of the bloodiest periods in recent history of some groups inhabiting the Amazon was the rubber boom which began around 1860 (e.g. Taussig 1984, 1987). Whole indigenous groups (often with the help of acculturated indigenous groups) were taken into slavery and forced into an extraordinarily cruel form of slave labour to collect rubber. Some groups who managed to escape to distant areas were able to survive by living in seclusion, away from whites and other indigenous groups. It is likely that many if not all of the approximately one

hundred isolated groups still living now in the Amazon and Gran Chaco, are the descendants of these communities, which during the rubber boom decided to escape to places 'in the interior', as far as possible from all mainstream routes.

As a result of the rubber boom, several entire tribes became extinct, such as the Inapari (Huertas Castillo 2002). Those groups that did not already live in isolation soon became all too familiar with the dominant society. Vast concessions were given by the government to ruthless rubber barons who systematically used one group of natives to subjugate other groups. Enslavement, exploitation, liquidation, death through disease and forced movement: together these processes caused dislocation and depopulation on a vast scale, swiftly reducing the indigenous population of affected regions by as much as 90%. To survive, individuals of wholly different ethnicity would often congregate as groups, forming 'new tribes' of survivors (Cloudsley 1992: 36).

The most obvious reason for Brazil's 'march to the West' was settlers' attempt to gain new — meaning native people's — lands. This was often accompanied by deliberate extermination. In the south of Brazil, in Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, there were specialised killers, called *bugreiros* or 'savage-hunters', who were involved in 'removing' Indians from land which settlers wanted to use. A striking example is the actions of one of *bugreiro* who in 1888 killed two thousand of the Kaingang, poisoning pools of water with strychnine in the village of Paranapanema. He was never punished for this act (Hemming 2003: 26).

The history of the conquest of indigenous groups is, of course, not only the history of wars, battles, large-scale physical death and collapse, but also of cultural survival and rapid change. Processes of profound cultural change were experienced by all the groups who came into contact with the new, dominant, and so-different culture. According to anthropologists, 'hostile' groups, which either long-avoided contact, or — like the Brazilian Kayapo — protected their territory and their independence by cultivating a warrior ethic, were more fortunate, surviving destruction 'in greater numbers and in better health than more pacific indigenous groups' (Schmink and Wood 1992: 261, quoted in Rabben 1998: 44). Yet even as we write, in March 2012, Kayapo communities who have survived till now, face forced displacement by the vast Belo Monte dam on the Xingu river. Unfortunately, the achievement of indigenous groups' cultural and physical survival until the second half of the twentieth century does not mean that threats from the dominant society ceased to exist. Direct, cultural and structural violence interweave every stage of the history of relations between indigenous groups and the mainstream in the Amazon region, forming an intrinsic element in the history of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia and Venezuela.

An example of the tragic fate of Amazonian indigenous peoples, and its continuation today, is the situation of the Yora tribe in Peru. Until 1984, a group of about 400 Yora people had lived in isolation from the national society. Starting in 1981, and despite Yora warnings, prospectors and seismic researchers from the Shell oil company began to move into the territory of this contact-avoiding tribe. The Yora responded with attacks. In 1984, four Yora men were captured by loggers, bound and brought to the town of Sepahua on the Urubamba river (Shepard 1999). Given gifts by town residents, Catholic missionaries

and Shell employees, these four were then driven back to the Yora area. After four months, they returned to Sepahua with the hope of obtaining more gifts. Soon, epidemic respiratory infections broke out among the Yora: whooping cough, influenza, tuberculosis and malaria were diagnosed.

During their first visit to the Yora, Summer Institute of Linguistics doctors took 130 people away with them, of whom 40 to 60 died (Zarzar 1987). Wahl says that between April 1984 and July 1985 about three hundred Yora people died (Wahl ed. 2001). In the settlements located on the Manu river, mortality was probably even greater. Over the Manu Chico and the Alto Manu only empty plots were found - it is not known if their users died as a result of an epidemic, or fled before it reached them.

During the first years after making contact, the Yora suffered from completely new diseases, such as pneumonia. Some apparently died from hunger, becoming so weak that they could not acquire food by themselves. Some trekked down the Manu and the Mishagua rivers to seek for help from the Machigenga Indians and Meti settlers. The tribe's physical survival was threatened. Not a single child was born during 1985-1986 (Wahl ed. 2001).

In the late eighties the Yora moved to Sepahua. Many orphans were then taken away by the Metis, who made them into servants. The Yora finally decided to leave the town and settled on the river Mishagua. In 1986, Glenn Shepard witnessed a group of about fifty Yora who sailed down the Manu in canoes in search of help. All were sick. Here is how Shepard describes their stay in the village of Boca Manu:

The people of Boca Manu were generous with food, clothing and other gifts, but took it upon themselves to cut the hair of several of the Yora men. Men with long hair were teased by both mestizos and acculturated indigenous men, who would comment, 'You look like a pretty girl, I think I'll have you!' They grabbed the Yora men from behind and made lewd motions. I found it especially sad how quick the acculturated Indians used to ridicule the Yoras' nudity, hairstyle and exotic adornments. As the resident anthropologist, I preached to local people about the virtues of respect for cultural diversity, but to little avail. Eventually, a medical team came to take the group to a health post and later return them to their home village. In subsequent trips to the region, I have witnessed the cultural demise of the Yora group. Several orphans were taken on as servants by mestizo households, and remain there today, separated forever from their own ethnic group. (Shepard 1999:38-9)

Another example of indigenous groups at risk of losing their culture are the Nukak Indians. Traditionally, Nukak inhabited areas of the upper Papunaua and Inirida rivers in the southern Guaviare basin in Colombia. Before contact with Colombian national society, the Nukak, whose language belongs to the Maku-Puinave family, numbered about 1,200 people, divided into seven smaller groups. They were nomads - reportedly the last nomads in Colombia - so continuation of Nukak cultural patterns, both in technical, as well as in symbolic spheres, demanded setting aside a large area for their exclusive use. Around 1995, Nukakowie set up an estimated 68 camps annually, with an average distance between successive places of residence of seven kms.

First contact with part of the Nukak tribe was made by Protestant missionaries of SIL and the New Tribes Mission in the late 1960s-1970s.⁴ Significant changes in the life of this group started in the 1980s when coca growers arrived in the Guaviare region, attracted by the climate and distance from 'civilisation'. The presence of so many colonists growing coca interested the army, which arrived on site to destroy crops. Army penetration, in turn, attracted the leftist guerrillas of FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* - Colombian Armed Revolutionary Forces). In this way the Nukak found themselves in an area affected by the Colombian civil war. Nukak were forced to flee their own land and seek refuge in the towns and villages of white people (Munoz Rojas and Zambrano, 1995; Mahecha Rubio, 2005; Politis, 2007; Henao 2008).

In the first five years after making contact, the Nukak faced demographic losses near 40% of the population, mainly as a consequence of a respiratory infection that started with tin. The age groups most vulnerable to decimation were people over forty and less than five years old, so there were many orphans in this population. In fact, nearly thirty children and adolescents were adopted by local peasants, and some women formed relationships with peasants. All of this at once led to the interruption of the transmission of technical knowledge and rituals, and loss of confidence in their own shamanic practices (Mahecha Rubio 2005: 104-5).

In 1997, it was estimated that there were approximately 500 Nukak left (Survival International 1997, Politis 2007). These still had little resistance to previously unknown diseases, whose recurrent outbreaks were still killing them. There was also a new threat: in May 1997, the Colombian army announced that it intended to use a group of Indian soldiers to be trained in the techniques of 'survival in the jungle'. Designated Nukak lived in a military base, despite the protests of the indigenous rights organisation ONIC, which feared that this policy could make Nukak targets for the guerrillas. After a number of international campaigns, the Colombian government signed an Act giving the Nukak title to their land in 1997-8.

During these years, Nukak had become dependent on settlers for access to metal tools and medical care. From time to time, they began to leave the forest and work on coca plantations in exchange for food and tools. Many colonists still 'adopted' indigenous children, taking them from their families, in effect as servants (Survival International 1991 and 1997, Politis 2007). It is estimated that within ten years after the establishment of permanent contact with the non-indigenous world, the Nukak lost about 65% of their population. Their mobility decreased significantly, but alcohol consumption among male adolescents increased. Changes in social structure - due for example to sexual liaisons with colonists while working on their farms - began a process of disintegration of social ties among local groups. Nukak began to be ashamed of their own culture, leading to a rapid loss of practices from the sphere of symbolic culture.⁵

In March 2006, after a long journey aimed at finding refuge in the forest, about 70 Nukaks arrived at the town of San Jose, joining fellow tribesmen who had previously settled there, and lived on the outskirts of town. The new group had fled violence inflicted by the Colombian army, right-wing paramilitary and leftist guerrillas. This was the third flight

since 2002: a total of 220 Nukak had now left their original territories - about half the tribe, who numbered an estimated 390-500 people. Indians arrived at San Jose in poor health and malnourished. In early April 2006, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees announced that Nukak were threatened with extermination. A similar message was issued on 5th May by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (Krysinska-Kaluzna 2008).

So in the case of Yora and Nukak, the death of a significant part of the group highlights a risk of complete cultural extinction. Those who survive the initial process of forced contact face complex pressures from the dominant culture. Social structure, traditional values and world- vision are breaking down due to a wide range of influences, including diseases, and approach or invasion by several groups from mainstream society, including missionaries, colonists, security forces and guerillas. The technological and numerical superiority of the dominant society exerts pressures that force changes.

In the Amazon, like in many other places in the world, representatives of indigenous groups, subjected to pressures of 'education' and 'development', often begin to be ashamed of their 'savagery' and become 'civilised' in accordance with the standards of dominant national societies, whose 'final cultural pattern' often seeks to eliminate the cultural practices of dominated groups, seeing these as 'backward' and 'uncivilised'. Many aspects of indigenous knowledge are compatible with the latest ideas of the dominant culture, as is shown in *Blackfoot Physics* by quantum physicist F. David Peat (1996), or Fritj of Capra's *The Web of Life: a New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (1996). For many indigenous cultures, it is already too late: by the time mainstream culture begins to appreciate them, they cease to exist.

Cultural Genocide in India today

The uncomfortable history of the onslaught upon tribal peoples worldwide is a highly neglected subject. America emerges as a continent of nation states, each founded on a process of genocide - especially the USA. There are obvious similarities to the situation in India today, as well as some major differences. For a start, because trade was actually continuous before the Portuguese and other Europeans came to India, culture contact here lacked the terrible element of completely new diseases that wiped out populations throughout America.

The fate of the various groups of Andaman Islanders shows a continuum of genocide and resistance - tribes who, unlike most tribes in mainland India were, and still essentially remain, hunter-gatherers. The Great Andamanese, who first came under British contact when the islands were settled as the '*Kala Pani*' penal colony from 1858, have faced complete extinction. The Onge, who resisted and then accommodated, have undergone a drastic decline in their cultural vitality as well as in their population, involving a decline in women's fertility. The Jarawa, like tribes in the Amazon region, survived for over a century by resisting overtures with hostility, but are presently in a much-debated state of cultural flux or breakdown, with many lives apparently lost through introduced diseases due to recent contacts; and a major link road, banned by India's Supreme Court yet still taking tourists on Jarawa sightings (Mukerjee 2003).

Meanwhile, the Sentinel Islanders still resist all approaches by sea and air with bows and arrows. This is a unique situation in the world - inviting thoughtful comparison with the situation of the estimated 100 remaining 'uncontacted' tribes who have managed to remain invisible in the Amazon and wider forest of South America. Allowing the Sentinelese to maintain their independence, in knowledge of the fate of the other Andaman Islanders, does great credit to the Indian Government.

As for central India, British colonialists used military force to 'pacify' many 'jungle tribes'; and when these accepted 'subjugation', how did British administrators induce a more complete subordination? The dominant ideology in the 1830s as much as the 2010s, involves an almost fundamentalist belief in markets. The first high-level administrator who formulated a Kond policy immediately after their military subjugation, set up markets so as to promote their intercourse with us, and by giving them new tastes and new wants... [to] afford us the best hold we can have on their fidelity as subjects, by rendering them dependent upon us for what will, in time, become necessities of life.' (G.E. Russell, 1836, quoted in Padel 2010: 179)

Sure enough, many cultural changes are associated with trade and material culture. Many tribes used to either make their own cloth from bark fibre or had long-standing relationships with weaver castes who supplied them. Gradually, these products gave way among most tribes to factory-made cloth. The Juang tribe in north Odisha was unusual for refusing to wear cloth. Women wore skirts of leaves - until a British 'civilising' campaign of the 1860s-70s enforced mass burnings of these leaf-skirts, and 'donations' of cloth. Women of the Bonda tribe still maintain an extraordinarily distinctive dress, wearing a thin strip of loin-cloth and a mass of necklaces that part-cover their breasts. Several government 'clothe-the-Bondas' campaigns have brought mixed results.

Bondas and Juangs are among 75 tribes in India still classed as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' (PTGs) - a classification that is supposed to protect them from outsider penetration and exploitation - or is it actually meant to hasten the process of their 'advancement'?

The experience of two other PTGs in Odisha highlights this paradox. For over 20 years the Paudi Bhuiya Development Agency has been forcing Paudi Bhuiya down from the mountains, into resettlement villages where their economic misery and cultural decline is all too evident. This is a tribe of shifting cultivators, who have actually preserved outstanding forest in the Khandadhara and neighbouring mountain ranges in north Odisha. Paradoxically, the Forest Department has been pressurising them constantly to give up shifting cultivation on the spurious grounds that it destroys the forest - just as British administrators over many years tried to force the Baiga tribe (far to the west, in Chhattisgarh-Madhya Pradesh) to abandon shifting cultivation and take to the plough, which had been taboo in Baiga culture.

But is there another reason for this forced displacement of Paudi Bhuiya from the Khandadhara forest? The mountains are rich in iron and manganese ore, which leading iron and steel companies are after, including Posco. In fact, the Orissa Mining Corporation (OMC) has extensive leases in Khandadhara, where mining has expanded rapidly over the past 20 years, destroying large stands of forest (Pratap and Das 2008). Since 2008,

the OMC has leased the Kurmitar mine there to another entity, the Kalinga Commercial Corporation (KCC), which, according to its website, exceeded all targets to mine over a million tonnes of iron ore in 2010- 11. One of the 22 peaks of Khandadhara is now completely bare of forest and top-soil, and flow through the famous waterfall of Maa Kanteshwari - Odisha's highest waterfall at about 800 feet - has already diminished, while the KCC is already exporting large amounts of iron and manganese ore to China and other countries:

during the F.Y 2009-2010, the company has exported more than 2 lakhs MT of iron-ore fines. The company is also receiving encouraging enquiries from different overseas buyers and has materialized one consignment of Manganese ore to a Korean Company.⁶

In the case of the Dongria Konds, there has been no question of forbidding them to practice their traditional shifting cultivation. However, in line with Vedanta's contested bauxite-mine plans - strongly opposed by most Dongria - the Dongria Kondh Development Agency made Dongrias take part in construction work for new tarmac roads right into the heart of the Niyamgiri range, paid for the Prime Minister's Road Construction fund. It was remarked by many Dongria that the timber mafia were among the first new users of these roads during 2009-10. In 2011-12 Dongria villagers have reported frequent visits to their villages by armed police of the Central Reserved Police Force (CRPF), who accuse them of helping Maoists, and frequently enter their houses - whose entry is normally subject to strong cultural restrictions - taking away possessions by force. In early March 2012, three Dongria men reported being taken off a local train, taken to a CRPF camp, tied up and interrogated there for ten hours about Maoist presence in Niyamgiri.

Tourists have recently been banned from Dongria villages. It is true that 'tribal tours' are often culturally extremely insensitive. But is this insensitivity the real reason for banning tourists, or is it a tactic aimed at cultural subjugation in line with mining plans? It seems that the new roads, built on promises of 'development', are now being used to bring armed police to Dongria villages at least six times a month.⁷ Could anthropology play a role in ensuring a more sensitive, reciprocal model of tourism in tribal areas?

The situation among these 'PTGs' is typical of the situation in tribal India as a whole. Where dams and mining/metal factories have displaced Adivasis or penetrated their areas, promising prosperity, they have brought a poverty far worse than anything known before - the 'resource curse' pattern affecting some of India's resource-richest regions, brutally clear in *Rich Lands, Poor People: Is Sustainable Mining Possible* (CSE 2008).

And where Adivasis, and many non-tribal villagers also, continue to resist displacement and invasion, they often meet ferocious, sustained repression. Police firings on protestors in Maikanch (Kashipur) and Kalinganagar killed 3 and 14 people respectively in December 2000 and January 2006, while injuring many more. These visible deaths are taken by the community as a whole as symbolic of a much wider onslaught. A number of people are known to have died due to the police blockades in Kalinganagar and the Posco steel plant site villages. But if one investigates the situation of Adivasis already displaced, one finds an even more disturbing picture, involving a high death rate among especially the old and the young among oustee populations. Villagers displaced by the Upper Indravati

reservoir in southwest Odisha, for example, say that all their elders died within a few years of their forced removal, that none of the promises they were made have been kept, and that they live now in dire lack of basic substances, including food, water and medicines, sorely missing the relatively high standard of living they enjoyed before (Sahu 2009).

B.D. Sharma, ex-Commissioner of the Scheduled Tribes and Castes, characterizes the situation facing Adivasis in his latest book as an *Unbroken History of Broken Promises* (2010), drawing comparison with the situation in America, fleshed out by an-depth experience of India's legislation as well as grass-roots realities.

Another major cause of cultural genocide is the Maoist-Operation Greenhunt conflict, which promotes a serious polarisation or split among the ST population (those with the status of Scheduled Tribe). The policy of enlisting Adivasis as SPOs (Special Police Officers) on a monthly salary of about Rs.4,000/-, though banned by the Supreme Court with reference to Chhattisgarh, still exists there, and the Chhattisgarh model has been copied in Jharkhand, Odisha and other states, as a main means of fighting the Maoists, even though the Supreme Court banned it on the grounds that it is essentially a recipe for civil war - the centuries-old colonial technique of using one tribe or section of a tribe, to wipe out opposition from another, 'hostile' section. Alongside 'Security', today's Integrated Action Plan for dealing with the Maoists also funds 'Development', as a means of undermining the Maoists' appeal.

But this begs the question: what has been Adivasis' actual experience of development projects? 'Developments' on offer in South Chhattisgarh include displacement by Tata and Essar steel plants; a massive increase in iron-ore mining, when the Bailadila mines since the 1960s have presented a model of large-scale ecological collapse and cultural genocide; and the Bodghat dams on Indravati - a project defeated in the 1980s when 42 villages and a tribal population of 10,000 were to be displaced by a single dam, but revived in 2005 as a series of seven dams, and given environmental clearance in 2009 despite threatening to destroy the most biodiverse river ecosystem remaining in peninsular India, alongside a much larger number of communities. This is why an estimated 20,000 Adivasis came to Jagdalpur on 1 June 2009 to demonstrate their opposition to this project.⁹

Underlying this unfolding history in many regions is a basic conceptual or ideological problem. In a sense, the missionary impulse of converting people has morphed into a programme of 'improving' them or 'bringing them forward' through 'Development'. The very idea of 'conversion' is intimately connected with the idea of empire (Nock 1933), and the kinds of imposed change that cause cultural genocide.

So can we move *Beyond Developmentality*? (Deb 2009) Today's prevailing 'Social Construction of Reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1966) - promoted partly through *Manufacturing Consent* in the media (Chomsky and Herman 1999) - involves an extremely one-sided model of 'Development', and the belief system promulgated by colonial anthropology, sometimes referred to as 'social evolutionism': the idea - taken on by theorists of the Left (including Marx) as well as Right - that societies necessarily develop along one line, through set stages, from 'primitive communism', through 'feudalism', to capitalism.

Charles Darwin had shown how thousands of species evolved through the laws of nature. His work showed thousands of interdependent paths of development, not one superior path. It revealed mankind as part of nature, not separate from it, challenging the dominant Christian ideology on this issue.

By contrast, the application of evolutionist thinking to society imagines a single line of development from 'primitive' to 'modern', blocking out the grassroots details, including the enforced decline of hundreds of indigenous cultures. In line with this thinking, the concept of certain peoples or regions as 'Underdeveloped' was first presented by President Truman, in his inaugural speech as President in 1949: As Esteva puts this,

On that day, 2 billion people became underdeveloped...[The concept] took on an unsuspected colonizing virulence.....Since then, development has connoted at least one thing: to escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment.....For those who make up two thirds of the world's population today, to think of development - any kind of development - requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries. (Esteva 1992: 6-7)

Development and Underdevelopment are key concepts used to impose a uniform model of rapid growth, employing the World Bank's classification of countries into 'Developed', 'Developing' and 'Underdeveloped', and culminating in today's 'New World Order', characterised by extreme forms of exploitation and inequality.

As one example of social evolutionist thinking, the missionary term 'preliterate' presumes a 'civilising transition' from non-literacy to literacy. It negates many people's pride in non-literate, oral traditions - a prominent feature of every tribal culture unless or until this is undermined. In the words of Russell Means, an outspoken leader of the American Indian Movement:

I detest writing. The process itself epitomizes the European concept of 'legitimate' thinking; what is written has an importance that is denied the spoken. My culture, the Lakota culture, has an oral tradition, so ordinarily I reject writing. It is one of the white world's ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people, (from a speech in 1982, quoted in Padel 2010: 26) The dominant ideology still sees certain cultures as 'more developed' than others. Since negative stereotypes about tribal peoples are usually cast in evolutionist terms, is it possible that individually and/or collectively we could start to undo evolutionist ways of looking at tribal cultures?

For in many ways, tribal societies are extremely highly developed, in different directions from mainstream societies: in principles of sharing, in traditional restraints over resource use, in concepts of Law that stress reconciliation rather than winning and losing, in knowledge of plants and methods of healing, to name just a few areas. Do Adivasi cultures offer a model of long-term sustainability that could help humans survive?

These are societies that still maintain links between the various meanings derived from Latin *cultus*: *cultures* rooted in systems of *cultivation* and *cults* of nature spirits. Cultural Genocide takes place when these links are severed, and the traditional social structure breaks down.

Cultural Genocide goes hand in glove with another process, destructive to the essence of life on earth: the crime of Ecocide, presently in the process of gaining international recognition as a crime against humanity (Higgins 2010). For tribal societies' dispossession also involves a takeover of *resources* that these cultures have carefully preserved as *sources of life*, and destruction of ecosystems they sustained over centuries.

Put another way, the country's ecosystems, from the Himalayas to every area in peninsular India, are under threat from a multitude of takeovers, including rapid depletion of water sources, caused by dams and groundwater levels dropping rapidly due to 'water-mining'. A less-appreciated cause of water-depletion is the mining of mountains that acted for centuries as storehouses of water. As Advasis often ask - what kind of development involves the destruction of ancient mountains? They know better than many scientists that when mountains are mined, many perennial streams, that feed the country's rivers, rapidly dry up. Gopinath Mohanty reported how a Census official said that many Konds answered his question about their religion with the single word: 'Mountains'. Considering mountains as sacred, based on an understanding of their physical role as sources of life, is not a superstition. In the words of a Dongria leader, 'Niyamgiri is not a pile of money standing there - it's our Maa-Baap.'¹⁰

What anthropologists can do in this situation is a lot actually. For a start, they can bring out people's voices, showing how these emerge from a coherent system of knowledge and values. They can also analyse the situation prevailing in tribal areas, and the power structures in place. Recognising the 'reality gap' that exists between what is supposed to happen and what actually happens is another starting point - the difference between what is meant to happen and what actually happens calls for analysis juxtaposing emic and etic dimensions: the imposing of a symbolic construction of resettlement as it is meant to happen, over the little-reported horror of 'Resettlement Realities' (Sahu 2009, Padel & Das 2011).

Many of today's threatened cultures can be characterised as 'Ecological peoples' or (as Russell Means calls them) 'Nature peoples'. This is why many representatives of indigenous cultures came together in Bolivia in April 2011, and made the Cochabamba Declaration asserting the Rights of Mother Earth, asking that these be recognised under UN legislation (EPW 2012).

We, the people and nations of Earth: considering that we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny, gratefully acknowledging that Mother Earth is the source of life, nourishment and learning and provides everything we need to live well;

recognizing that the capitalist system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk....

conscious of the urgency of taking decisive, collective action to transform structures and systems that cause climate change and other threats to Mother Earth: proclaim this Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.... "

Notes

1. Mathilda's anthropology blog, 2008, at [and](#) John H. Bodley's *Cultural Anthropology*: *Tribes, States and the Global System* (3rd ed. 2000).
2. Correspondence by Magdalena Krysihska-Kaluzna, 2000.
3. An example might be the elements of Jewish culture functioning, where the Jewish community did not survive as such.
4. Munoz Rojas and Zambrano 1995: 148; Mahecha Rubio 2005: 104; Politis 2007: 148.
5. Munoz Rojas and Zambrano 1995, Mahecha Rubio 2005, Politis 2007, Henao 2008
6. KCC website at [\(version quoted as viewed February- March 2012\)](#).
7. KBK News 12th March 2012, 'Voice of Niyamgiri': interviews with Dongria Konds at [at](#)
8. 'SPOs ban will apply only to Chhattisgarh: court'. *The Hindu*, 18 November 2011, at [at](#)
9. On Bodhghat: Asha Rajvanshi, 'Assessed impacts of the proposed Bodhghat Hydroelectric project', UNEP EIA Training Manual (1996?), case study no.29, at [ect.pdf](#); *Dams, Rivers and People*, January 2005, p.11, at [; Gautam Navlakha and Asish Gupta](#), 28 August 2009, 'Bastar: The Real Divide behind the impending Dirty War', *Radical Notes*, at [13/39/](#)
10. Padel and Das 2010, chapter 21.
11. On the Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, see [, nature-un/](#) and EPW 14.1.2012, 'If Mountains and Rivers could Speak'.

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