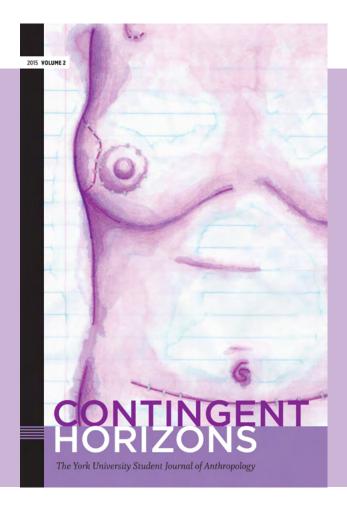# Mindfulness and Reverence in Peace Building: A Khmer Buddhist alternative to Bateson's purposive-consciousness

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CONTINGENT HORIZONS

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Mindfulness and Reverence in Peace Building
A Khmer Buddhist alternative to Bateson's purposive-consciousness

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This is an exploration of Buddhist mindfulness as a means of conflict resolution and peace building. Drawing on monks' efforts in post-genocide Cambodia as its case study and inspiration, this essay considers firstly, traditional environmental security conflict theories and secondly, Batesonian purposive-consciousness. Given the limitations of both these approaches in articulating the Khmer case, a theoretical framework for Buddhist mindfulness as peace building is called for. Mindfulness is explored by examining legal notions of "standing" as an alternative mode of theorizing conflict and peace. Reverence and the sacred are explained as key concepts in effective peace building, particularly through the examples of tree-ordinations and peace marches. Given that, at the heart of this enquiry, lies the deeper question of how we can live more peacefully and less violently on this earth, connections are drawn to environmental issues and to anthropology's nature-culture paradigm. The conclusion is that at the heart of conflict lies a dichotomous world-view, and at the heart of peace building is not the erasure of this dichotomy but, more importantly, the practice of reverence.

KEY WORDS Buddhism, Cambodia, conflict resolution, environment, Gregory Bateson, mindfulness, sacred

After the Cambodian genocide, Supreme Patriarch Premdach Maha Ghosananda led peace-marches, also known as truth pilgrimages, starting from the Thai border and across the Cambodian countryside. Inspired by these historical events and driven by an effort to examine the philosophical dimensions of Cambodian monks' peace-making efforts, this paper is an *exploration* of themes raised by these events. In a nutshell, this paper is about conflict and healing. It is an exploration of why violence occurs and what helps heal in post-violence contexts. What are the mechanisms by which peace marches can be successful in preventing fighting from breaking out? In Cambodia, why did families walk for over twenty kilometers just to see the monks pass by? What is it about Buddhist teachings that might be helpful in reconciliation and peace building? And, more broadly, what implications does all this have to how we inhabit the earth, how we live with the land?

The writing style of this essay is expressly reflexive.[1] It is intended to form an invitation to you, to participate in this journey of exploring the entwinement of ideas around

mindfulness, reverence, the sacred, and violence. Thus, the writing is molded as flowing suggestions rather than crafted as explicit argument (and to this end, the precision of the argument articulated in the subtitle may be misleading). Regardless, there remains a structure to this journey: first I sketch the context in which these peace marches arose and then make some connections to traditional international security literature on environmental conflict. However, traditional conflict-studies literature is limited in its application here, and I argue for more anthropological approaches. Section II delves once more into brief historical review, of these post-genocide peace-building efforts in Cambodia, and then articulates Gregory Bateson's formulation of consciousness in his *Steps To An Ecology of Mind* (2000). I consider Bateson's approach as an alternate lens through which to examine peace and conflict. However, even this has its limitations, and I suggest a framework of conflict-resolution mirrored in the case study itself: that of Buddhist mindfulness. Section III explores this form of mindfulness and its relevance to peace building, and here, I examine the implications of reverence and sanctification. Section IV returns to and develops the case study of peace marches, in preparation for the Concluding Thoughts, which further brings these strands together. The precision in writing style of this introduction is hopefully absent from the rest of this paper; as explained earlier, this paper is also an attempt to explore a more reflexive style of writing that invites reflection rather than persuasion — in the hopes of mirroring a form of writing closer to Buddhist mindfulness than to Batesonian consciousness.

Section I

The Context: Dhammayietra and Shante Sena

On April 12th 1992, over a hundred refugees and monks crossed the Thai border and re-entered Cambodia on foot, beginning what would soon become internationally celebrated as a peace movement (Poethig 2004). Thousands of families in the Cambodian countryside were elated to see not only the orange-robed monks, absent since their expulsion by the Khmer Rouge in 1975, but also the "largest group of peaceful people they had seen in years" (Bhikkhu 2009:47-48). Throughout the countryside, the monks performed the traditional Buddhist water blessing ceremony, sprinkling water to symbolically wash away tragedy and sin. A month later, on May 13th, despite the land mines and the ongoing fighting, over a thousand walkers — for the original refugees and monks had been joined along the way by supporters — finally arrived in the Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia (Bhikkhu 2009). This repatriation after more than twenty years of exile was led by none other than the elderly monk, Maha Ghosananda, the Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia (Bhikkhu 2009).

From this repatriation blossomed an annual pilgrimage of truth, the Dhammayietra. For the next several years, supporters walked amidst land mines and between armies. Caught in the crossfire between government soldiers and Khmer Rouge insurgents, they continued to walk, and they continued to spread the message of peace (Poethig 2004:203-207). Maha Ghosananda led the monks in re-teaching the Buddha's teachings. As Kathryn Poethig explains (2004), during the fifth Dhammayietra in 1996, the walk focused upon the connections between the continuing civil war and violence, illegal logging, and deforestation. During this peace march, Maha Ghosananda ordained trees at every village they

passed, explaining to the villagers that, "When you kill the tree, then you kill the monk" (Bhikkhu 2009:67).

Maha Ghosananda's teachings took place within the context of a post-Khmer-Rouge society. Upon the Khmer Rouge's ascent to power, the new government evacuated the cities and put the population to work: clearing the forest to generate more farmland (Bhikkhu 2009). Monks were also expelled or executed; under the regime of the Khmer Rouge, the number of monks in the country dwindled from around 65,000 to 3000 (Bhikkhu 2009:39). One of Santidhammo Bhikkhu's sources, Maha, notes that those who escaped the Killing Fields fled to refugee camps across the border in Thailand, where "streets were crowded, sewage flowed in open gutters, food and water were scarce, and most refugees huddled inside their tattered cloth tents" (2009:38). Perhaps equally harsh was the banishment of Buddhism; "to many [Cambodians], eliminating Buddhism is eliminating … Khmerness. Living without Buddhism is living without tradition and culture" (Sam 1987:90).

In those refugee camps, every time Maha Ghosananda or another orange-clad monk passed through the camp, "the gloom that had enveloped the camp instantly turned into excitement," for refugees were reassured to see the long-since forbidden devotion and reverence (Sam 1987:38). As Yang Sam (1987:38) continues to describe, when Maha Ghosananda once distributed the Metta Sutta, Buddhist teachings that instruct compassion and forgiveness towards one's oppressor, the refugees were so overcome with emotion that they "fell to their knees, prostrated, wailing loudly, their cries reverberating throughout the camp." The freedom to show reverence and devotion, that had been forbidden for so long, moved the refugees.

In 1990, the US finally withdrew support from the Khmer Rouge, and the consequent signing of the Paris Agreement in 1991 resulted in the closing of refugee camps in Thailand and the repatriation of more than approximately 300,000 refugees (Bhikkhu 2009:44). Just prior to this, Bob Maat, an expatriate in Cambodia, had founded the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation with a Khmer monk, Venerable Yos Hut Khemacaro (Poethig 2004). It was this coalition that organized the first Dhammayietra and invited Maha Ghosananda to lead it. Maha Ghosananda called truth the first casualty of war; thus the Dhammayietra, a "pilgrimage of truth," is synonymous with a walk that is the opposite of war: a pilgrimage that births peace (Bhikkhu 2009:44). In a publication by the Dhammayietra Center for Peace and Nonviolence, Venerable Kim Teng (1994) explains that the Shante Sena Forestry Association, formed with the support of Maha Ghosananda, was dedicated to training volunteers in Buddhist teachings on mindfulness so that they could carefully conduct environment and peace-related work. Shante Sena literally translates as "army of peace," and their efforts were informed primarily by Buddhist teachings (Teng 1994).

Traditional environmental security literature

The tone of conflict has shifted in the last few decades, especially since the end of the Cold War, from being centered on ideological struggles to being centered on resources (Richards 2005; Bateson 2000). As Venerable Kim Teng (1994), the leader of the Shante Sena Forestry Association writes, "Even if political parties cease fighting over politics, fighting over scarce natural resources will increase, particularly as rainfall diminishes and

people become desperate." Though some research shows that there is "no direct connection between deforestation and war" (Richards 1996:115), post-Cold War conflicts have been centered on poverty and environmental pressures (Richards 2005; Homer-Dixon 1991). These new wars, coupled with the post-Cold War need for "overfunded militaries to legitimize their existence in the face of clamoring for the Peace Dividend" have resulted in a surge of interest around environmental security (Peluso and Watts 2001:11).

Within environmental security literature, two classic theorists' works are relevant here: Thomas F. Homer-Dixon's (1991) and James Fairhead's (2001). Homer-Dixon's framework for "relative-deprivation conflicts" resembles the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The Vietnam War displaced the Cambodian population and depleted the nation's natural resources, inevitably resulting in Cambodia's economic deterioration (Peluso and Watts 2001). Many factions abounded, and the "sense of economic injustice" (Homer-Dixon 1991:110) felt by those who had fled the cities caused them to band together to form the Khmer Rouge, to overthrow the state, and to create Democratic Kampuchea. James Fairhead's (2001) framework further serves to explain the mass population displacement and deforestation that occurred *under* Democratic Kampuchea; for after expelling all inhabitants from the cities in waves of mass-marches, the Khmer Rouge set the population to work on clearing forests for agricultural land and on farming (Bhikkhu 2009:35). Given the natural resources that the Khmer Rouge were aware of (presumably timber, agricultural land, fish stock, and maybe gemstones), and given the political ideology of Democratic Kampuchea, it should come as no surprise that Khmer Rouge policy focused upon exploiting Fairhead's "immobile materials" (2001:226) and coercing — or, in this case, creating — "tied labor" (2001:229). The exploitation of "immobile materials" had gone so far that since the Khmer Rouge ascended to power, the amount of forest in Cambodia had fallen from 73% to 40% (Ghosananda 1995).

Cultural models, cosmology and world-views: A call for more anthropology

While the frameworks outlined by Homer-Dixon and Fairhead are relevant to the conflict in Cambodia, there remain striking limitations to these theories. For they mistakenly take cultural values and world views as static over a given period of time and even, to an extent, over different regions. The environmental security literature may explain the political and economic causes of environmental conflict, but it fails to consider not only the culture of conflict and the anthropology of conflict (see Peluso and Watts 2001; Richards 2005) but also the anthropology of the environment (see Descola and Pálsson 1996; Dove 2014; Dove and Carpenter 2008; Ingold 2000) and political ecology (see Robbins 2012).

Recognizing the non-static nature of societal values in the context of conflict studies is important. For instance, the Cambodian genocide can even be explained as a conflict between two different Khmer cultural frameworks: the gentle ethic of Buddhist non-violence teachings; and the violent ethic that descends from the rulers of the Angkorian times (Ovesen 2005). As Hinton argues, until the Khmer Rouge came to power, the two cultural models had coexisted in separate spheres, but under Democratic Kampuchea, "the violent ethic was legitimated in everyday communal interactions," thus allowing for the sheer, debilitating violence that became the genocide (Ovesen 2005:32). Ovesen (2005) also emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural frameworks, for the Khmer conception of power does not come with the baggage of good and evil as it does

in the West; rather than power being subject to morality, as Anderson notes, power is awarded through divine ordination. Those with power act however they desire, "because this is what power permits you to do. And if you cannot any longer act as you please, it is a sign that you have lost your power" (Ovesen 2005:34). Ovesen uses this cultural view of absolute power to argue that "violent acts committed with impunity by politicians or their hired hands come as no surprise to anybody," and therefore, the four years of genocide should be regarded in the context of the rest of Cambodia's violent, power struggle-filled history (2005:36).

Section II

April 1994 marked the formation of the Shante Sena Forestry Association in Cambodia (Ghosananda 1995). This Peace Army's goal was to carefully train 30 volunteers; to develop "their hearts before we develop anything else"; and to teach them Buddhist meditation so as to "help cultivate concentration as a solid foundation upon which to build ecological teachings and nonviolence techniques" (Teng 1994). The curriculum was designed such that the participants learned both compassion and wisdom, for "if they only develop compassion and inner strength without technical expertise regarding forest preservation, they ... may actually cause harm" (Teng 1994). "The training period for the Shante Sena volunteers is very important," for the idea behind the movement was founded upon personal change and growth (Teng 1994). The Shante Sena movement exemplifies an attempt at shifting one's cosmology. Examining the significance of this movement — and of the Dhammayietra peace marches — requires not a framework of environmental security but rather a culturally-infused awareness of the situation that can appreciate different ontologies: a theoretical model that allows us to examine Maha Ghosananda's efforts in Cambodia. I propose we will be more fruitful if we use the critical lens of Gregory Bateson's to examine the escalation and possible resolution of conflict.

Gregory Bateson's consciousness in cybernetics

Gregory Bateson's *Steps to An Ecology of Mind* (2000) explores the role of consciousness in regarding nature, cultural adaptation, and ecological crisis. Cybernetics outlines systems that are interconnected, that have feedback loops allowing for self-correction, and that may also be jeopardized to the point where self-corrective measures fail as a result of human meddling (2000:447), as Bateson feels is the case with the imbalance today: pushed to the point that "we cannot trust Nature not to overcorrect" (2000:500). When we attempt to understand and explain these cybernetic systems, Bateson draws a distinction between purposive thought and systemic wisdom, between consciousness and unconsciousness (2000:440).

Though all elements of the cybernetic system are interconnected, any analysis or conscious examination of the processes at work *requires* making the assumption that a change in a particular aspect of one's life will not completely alter another aspect; there are so many interconnections that it is impossible to explain relations without over-simplifying the system.[2] Here lie the limits to purposive thought and conscious understanding.

There are three causes of crises for Bateson: technological progress, population growth, and errors in the values of Occidental culture (2000:498). Though one may take issue with

what Bateson means by the third factor of conflict, our cultural world-view of purposeful consciousness has always been around, he argues, and never has the technology been as effective in allowing for the apparent success of purpose-driven thought (2000:440). He argues that the Industrial Revolution has shifted our world-view.

Bateson's consciousness is purpose-driven and is a "short-cut device to enable you to get quickly at what you want; not to act with maximum wisdom in order to live, but to follow the shortest logical or causal path" to get whatever it is you desire most (2000:439). The hubris associated with this is the assumption that we know what is best for us. Perhaps the biggest flaw with this assumption is that we desire that which is best for us.

Take the Green Revolution, for example, where we were driven to maximize surplus instead of being driven by awareness of our limitations; instead of accepting both abundance and scarcity as a matter of course, we strove to produce the highest-yielding varieties (Dove and Kammen 1997:98). As scholars have argued, environmental crisis can be furthered by both the pride associated with and the drive for maximizing output and technology (see Bateson 2000; Dove and Kammen 1997).

Bateson is criticized for presuming a homeostatic culture and a balanced world, an assumption that, as Michael Dove and Carol Carpenter explain, has long since been discredited in anthropology (2008:60). Bateson juxtaposes "undisturbed systems" (2000:436) with the "balanced ecological system" (2000:437). Undisturbed systems are those unaffected by humans, and for which the only exponentially diverging variable is a species' population; balanced ecological systems, on the other hand, are those for which any human-induced disturbance will disrupt the equilibrium into exponential change. Whether the system resettles upon another point of equilibrium or whether it goes beyond "the point of no return" depends upon which factors and feedbacks affect the changing variable (2000:437). Academic interest in the study of disaster including famine, deforestation, climate change, floods, etc. has shifted from premising societal equilibria to disequilibria (Dove 2014; Dove and Carpenter 2008). The new view of disequilibrium, that Scones terms as "new ecology" (Dove and Carpenter 2008:20), emphasizes the role of disturbances in society and underscores the existence of "dynamic, historical, and partly unknowable relationships between society and environment" (2008:20). Thus, recent environmental anthropological scholarship, including anthropological literature on weather and climate change (Dove 2014; Low and Hsu 2007; Strauss and Orlove 2003), takes changing systems as foundational, thereby unsettling Bateson's premise of balanced ecological systems.

But there is simultaneously a subtlety to Bateson's use of homeostasis, for Bateson justifies his premise of homeostasis. He explains that if we follow a system based upon conscious purpose, as most of us do today, "emergency is present or only just around the corner" (Bateson 2000:442), implying that an otherwise homeostatic system appears to be filled with emergencies (or disturbances) because we view the homeostatic system with purposive consciousness. Thus this framework is not incompatible with modern anthropological criticism of homeostasis, especially with respect to natural disasters. That is, inevitable exponential changes appear like crises (or as a non-homeostatic system in constant flux) *only when* we premise control as a result of consciousness, of will. Rather, if we think within the cosmology of systemic wisdom, which Bateson defines as "the

knowledge of the larger interactive system — that system which, if left undisturbed, is likely to generate exponential curves of change" — then we are left with a very complex system. But, as Bateson explains, since we are observing it locally and not globally, we do not regard anything as a crisis; rather, it is merely the natural self-correcting course of the complex system.

Bateson's solution to ecological crisis is humility or "systemic wisdom" (2000:452). This Batesonian sense of systemic wisdom is also broadly supported by recent scholarship in spiritual ecology, which examines the importance of environmental values and religious traditions in relation to today's environmental crisis (Grim and Tucker 2014; Sponsel 2012). In both, there is an emphasis on the importance of world-views, and Bateson implies the need to change one's own world-view. Even though Bateson discusses three specific causes of conflict, he does not believe that any reductions in technological and population growth will help at this point (2000:500). Rather, the power to fix the problematic nature of purposive consciousness lies with the individual. "Freud's royal road to the unconscious" may have referred primarily to dreams, but Bateson feels that dreams, the creativity behind art, the perception thereof, and religion all bring out the unconscious in the individual (2000:444). His parallel between creativity and unconsciousness is something often discussed in the field of education.

A major drawback to Bateson's framework, however, is the question of how to solve a problem if the cause lies beyond the immediate, local vicinity. How does Bateson propose humility as a solution to a problem whose cause may lie with an international demand for diamonds? Bateson's solution of unconsciousness alone does not address this, and something more is needed.

For a possible solution, we turn here to a contemporary of Bateson's: Walker Percy, an American writer who, like Bateson, was also interested in semiotics. Percy, in his 1975 essay, "The Loss of the Creature," discusses the role of conscious theory and creativity for a student who discovers something new and is in a state of appreciation and wonder. Just as Bateson's "purposive consciousness" seeps into the Percy's student, the student's consciousness of the discovery "cannot escape their consciousness of their consciousness" (Percy 1975:487). That is, since the education system we follow today trains us to be systematic and purposeful in our work, the moment of unconsciousness present in the creativity of discovery (and, as Bateson would say, the unconsciousness found in art, dreams, poetry, and religion) is instantaneously replaced with consciousness, thus negating the unconscious. Percy, too, acknowledges that Bateson's unconsciousness is well-known "in the fantasy-consciousness of the popular arts" (1975:484).

Percy proposes a few solutions to how we can re-introduce awe in a student's discovery, and one of them is relevant to expanding the aforementioned drawback to Bateson's framework, namely how to relate consciousness/humility to problems enmeshed in non-local and international networks. The most helpful suggestion, for our purpose here, is the "dialectic movement that brings one back to the beaten track but at a level above it" (Percy 1975:483).[3] That is, one is not only conscious of one's discovery, but one is also aware of the context of the discovery in the world; one is aware of the limitations to this consciousness. Or, to translate it to other words, as Buddhism teaches, one practices mindfulness.

Buddhist mindfulness versus Batesonian consciousness

The *Merriam-Webster Online English Dictionary* defines "Mindfulness: the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis; also: such a state of awareness."[4] Mindfulness is being aware of being aware. It is very different from Percy's consciousness of the unconscious or from Bateson's consciousness. The dictionary's primary definition of consciousness is:

> 1. a : the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself
>   b : the state or fact of being conscious of an external object, state, or fact
>   c : awareness; especially: concern for some social or political cause.[5]

Consciousness here necessarily centers on something — like being conscious "of something within oneself" or "of an external object." This is similar to Bateson's use: for example, being conscious of how certain systems in the world function; being conscious of the environment as an external thing; and being conscious of the role that resources play in our world. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is the state of awareness of the conscious; it is what Percy terms "at a level above [consciousness of the discovery]" (Percy 1975:483). The Shante Sena teaches that meditation allows for mindfulness, for "meditation enables us to be aware of the effects of our actions, including those destructive to our environment" (Teng 1994). Mindfulness is that which enables us to understand the limits to our consciousness, and it necessarily involves humility.

The mindfulness that Maha Ghosananda teaches transcends Bateson's consciousness argument's inability to explain phenomena whose causes lie beyond the immediate and local. Bateson's solution of acting unconsciously does not address this, for mere unconsciousness cannot be aware of global implications. Rather, the way the Shante Sena was structured, and the way Maha Ghosananda's Dhammayietra was conducted, exemplifies an astute awareness of local politics and international actors (Poethig 2004:210). At the same time, the world-view is not "conscious" of "resources" in the way that Thomas Homer-Dixon (1991) and James Fairhead (2001) were. Rather, the Buddhist teachings of mindfulness entail regarding the forests and trees with reverence, for the dichotomy between man and nature as owner and resource is blurred.

This blurring of the boundary between nature-as-resource and man-as-owner evokes one of the theoretical foundations of anthropology: questioning the validity of the *nature–culture dichotomy*. Anthropology recognizes that Western societies, to generalize here, tend to regard nature as distinct from culture. However, this is not a universal distinction, nor are "nature" and "culture" necessary valid or distinct categories even when they are used "in the west" (see Dove and Carpenter 2008:2–12; Strathern 1980). Environmental anthropology in particular "sits astride the dichotomy between nature and culture, a conceptual separation between categories of nature, like wilderness and parks, and those of culture, like farms and cities" (Dove and Carpenter 2008:2). William Cronon (1996) unsettles the Western presumption of "nature" particularly eloquently in his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." He suggests that we tend to romanticize and exoticize the far-away and elusive "nature," thereby discrediting the everyday and mundane; this can actually be quite unfair. For instance, the false narratives

of "wild" and "nature" can disempower indigenous peoples who have been interacting with and managing (what an outsider might mistakenly term) "wild" landscapes for centuries (1996:15-16). It can render both these people and the land "ahistorical," thereby stripping away their agency and authority as historical actors: the romanticism dangerously presumes a static world (Cronon 1996:19-20; Fairhead and Leach 2008). Many of the anthropological examples that unsettle the nature-culture dualism come out of literature on conservation and development conflicts (see Fairhead and Leach 2008; Robbins 2012). Beyond unsettling the dichotomy, anthropological contributions have also sought new ways of constructively moving beyond the dualism (see Descola 2013; Descola and Pálsson 1996).

All this theory relates to finding different ways of conceptualizing a human-being's relationship to the rest of the world, for we cannot take "nature" and "culture"; this can be viewed, as I do in this essay, through the lens of human-and-tree. As Bateson himself explains, Martin Buber's "I-It" relationship, so characteristic of placing more importance upon purpose than upon love, between man and tree becomes an "I-Thou" relationship between man and tree (Bateson 2000:452).

Given this, there are a few more things to further explore: what does it mean to show reverence to a tree or to a forest? How precisely was the Dhammayietra performed and what was taught? And in what ways did the Dhammayietra demonstrate awareness of international and domestic politics and players?

Section III

Reverence and murder

To *revere* is "to have great respect for (someone or something): to show devotion and honor to (someone or something)."[6] Reverence is an example of Buber's "I-Thou" relationship; this is regarding a tree as one would regard a monk or a minister. What happens when one loses reverence for something? Drawing inspiration from Christopher D. Stone's introduction and Garrett Hardin's foreword in *Should Trees Have Standing?* (1974), I argue that a lack of reverence is what allows for violence. However, we do not call it murder if we fail to revere. Hardin (1974) and Stone (1974) explain a similar argument using *legal standing* instead of *reverence.* Slaves were once without *legal standing,* Hardin (1974) explains, and illustrates this by the example of Ancient Greece, where it was once not considered a crime to murder a slave. In the Greek Classics, when Odysseus returns from Troy, he executes a dozen slave girls; yet Hardin (1974:x) argues, one cannot conclude from this episode that Ancient Greece was completely devoid of any moral code (the argument goes that fidelity, a different form of moral code, was important there; Odysseus' wife remained faithful to him during his long absence). Thus, according to Hardin, the violence of Odysseus executing a dozen slaves is less an issue of *morality* and more one of *standing*. Odysseus' slaves, in that time period, were not granted the same legal standing as other humans were, like Odysseus and his wife. Humanity and personhood were limited to certain humans, and since certain humans were not granted standing, their lives were not revered as much as other humans' lives.

There are many parallels between current anthropological enquiries into personhood and both this particular Greek example and the general argument by Stone (1974) and Hardin (1974) in *Should Trees Have Standing?* In post-human anthropology (much of which

has come out of thinking with the environment and finding ways to re-theorize nature and culture as explained above), the personhood of non-human beings is taken seriously. Many anthropologists find ways of theorizing seriously the aliveness of animals, trees, and even matter itself (see Barad 2003; Bennett 2010; Ingold 2007, 2013; Kohn 2007, 2013; Latour 1993; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Whether this type of reverence to more forms of life is termed 'agency,' 'standing,' or 'aliveness,' there are similarities between these current theoretical approaches in anthropology and the questions in the legal sphere raised by Stone and Hardin (1974)

Regardless of what words and theoretical framework one chooses to use, there is a quality of reverence involved, I argue, and that only with reverence and only with valuing life are murder and violence prevented. Maha Ghosananda's teacher, Nichidatsu, warned that murder "is the greatest tragedy of all tragedies in the human world" (Bhikkhu 2009:29), and the only prohibition to murder was cherishing the value of life, as "true spirituality" teaches (Bhikkhu 2009:29).

Further, it is the prohibition of murder that makes us civilized and human; and since reverence is what prohibits murder (Hardin 1974; Stone 1974), it is reverence that ties society together, for "this fundamental prohibition of murder is the basis for ultimate civilization of humanity" (Bhikkhu 2009:29). Without reverence (for family, for other humans, for all life), what cause is there not to murder everything to the point of extinction? Nichidatsu taught that the fundamental prohibition of murder "is the ultimate issue that must be addressed in order to deliver humanity from its otherwise potential of extinction" (Bhikkhu 2009:29).

Reverence can thus be used for peace building, since reverence prevents murder. The Buddha apparently once prevented war from breaking out by walking onto a battlefield (Bhikkhu 2009:47). Two relatives of his were fighting over access to the Rohini River during a time of drought. Just as the war was about to start, the Buddha asked his relatives which had more value: blood or water, and when they responded with blood, he said, "for the sake of some water, which is of little value, you should not destroy human lives, which are of so much greater value and priceless" (Bhikkhu 2009:47). Similarly, some believe that Maha Ghosananda prevented violence from breaking out at a refugee camp in the early 80s by asking all adult members, former Khmer Rouge soldiers included, to adopt the Eight Precepts of Buddhism (not killing humans, animals, anything; not taking another's property, etc. — acts that show reverence) for a single day (Bhikkhu 2009:40).

The call, then, is for *how to shift* what a particular society values. Perhaps it appears like a question of proselytizing—but it is more careful a question than simply that; it is a question of how to engage and apply this academic reflection towards peace-building efforts. The question thus becomes one of how to shift a view from, for instance, using a tree as a resource to one of practicing reverence or giving a tree standing.

Shifting our 'ethic': An example of trees and standing

The issue of a tree having "rights" in the modern sense of the word first arose in the 1972 law case of Sierra Club v. Morton (Hardin 1974:xiii). The Supreme Court ruled that Sierra Club did not have the standing to sue on behalf of the valley; rather, United States Supreme Court Justice Douglas re-framed the entire debate as a very simple one: if

Mineral King, the valley, had been granted its own *legal standing,* then the case could be considered (Stone 1974:73). This harkens once more to recent anthropological reflections on personhood, as mentioned earlier.

Giving non-human objects standing and considering the personhood of more-than-human beings is currently an important question in anthropology (see De la Cadena 2010; Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Tsing 2011). The legal dimension of this question is something also addressed in Christopher Stone's introduction to *Should Trees Have Standing?* (1974:8). For law to be stable, it must be based off of ethics, and when ethics change, so then does the law change (Hardin 1974:xii). Stone explains why it appears laughable to consider a tree to have standing (or why it was once laughable to entertain women's legal rights), for "until the right-less thing receives its rights, we cannot see it as anything but a *thing* for the use of 'us' — those who are holding the rights at the time" (Stone 1974:8). Perhaps the closest of the historical paradigm shifts to that of giving a tree standing is giving a fetus standing. Stone notes, for instance, that when a society fails to revere infants, infanticide can be widespread (1974:3). Even today, there remains disagreement about whether a fetus is to be revered as human life or not, as evidenced in the presence of abortion debates. If it is revered as human, then it is treated differently. But the present Occidental ethic, as Stone (1974) explains, sees a fundamental difference between the fetus and the tree, in that the fetus eventually becomes a human while the tree does not. Now, if the ethic is regarding all life as equal, as Buddhist philosophy does (Teng 1994), then giving a tree standing is not as laughable an idea as it may seem.

The first aspect of giving a tree legal standing is to give it legal-operational rights (Stone 1974:11). If a stream that is being polluted by a corporation has no legal standing and the individual cost to each independent landowner is too low for the landowners to individually file a suit, the problem is resolved if the stream, like the corporation, is its own legal entity; then, a guardian acting on behalf of the tree may file the law suit, and this ability to stand in court as a separate legal entity is part of Stone's definition of legal-operational rights (1974:12).

The second aspect is giving the tree psychic/socio-psychic rights (Stone 1974). This aspect illuminates the fact that law follows our ethic; giving a tree legal standing would reflect a change from the view that nature exists for the sole purpose of satisfying man. However, Stone warns against placing one's faith blindly in a change of environmental consciousness, for curbing the degradation due to population growth and other needs via legal and economic means is needed in addition (Stone 1974:47). Environmental consciousness alone cannot reverse any adverse processes, for, as Murphy explains, despite beliefs in the Taoist conception of unity, "ruthless deforestation has been continuous" in China (Stone 1974:47). Instead of trying to erase a nature-culture dichotomy and change our consciousness, we should strive to give trees legal standing — but "whether we will be able to bring about the requisite institutional and population growth changes depends in part upon effecting a radical shift in our feelings about 'our' place in the rest of Nature" (Stone 1974:48). Changes in legal conceptions mirror changes in our world-view or myth, and if the Supreme Court were to award standing to a tree, it "will contribute to a change in popular consciousness" (1974:53).

Recalling Bateson's inability to address how a shift from conscious to unconscious would allow us to understand problems whose roots lie in the international domain, Stone addresses this by stressing that a shift in ethic to Taoist or Pantheist teachings alone is insufficient; we must also carry this ethic into the legal and economic spheres (1974:51).

However, returning to an older world-view such as "pantheism, Shinto, and Tao … are all, each in its own fashion, quaint, primitive, and archaic" (Stone 1974:51); rather, a more helpful world-view would be one that encompasses all of modern, scientific knowledge — a myth that uses recent discoveries in "geophysics, biology, and the cosmos" (1974:51). The solution Stone proposes is a world-view that regards the earth as a highly complex system, as its own organism even (1974:53). This is reminiscent of scholarship that comments on the relevance of pan-global religious ethics for the environment, coming out of the field of Religion and Ecology, such as Brian Swimme's and Mary Evelyn Tucker's (2011) *Journey of the Universe* and the connections drawn to James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis (Swimme and Tucker 2011), and other similar work (see Grim and Tucker 2014; Tucker 2003).

Regardless of whether a more pan-global ethic is possible or desirable, it is certainly clear from Stone and Hardin (1974) that giving a tree standing fundamentally requires a particular group of people to undergo a shift in ethic. While Stone underscores the importance of carrying this ethic out in the legal sphere, and though Stone warns against returning to an "archaic" ethic (Stone 1974:51), there is little doubt that a society's ethic is continually changing, and molding its direction of change can help implement practical policy that not only copes with the current environmental condition but also helps build a world of peace.

Sacred spaces

There is a clear relation between reverence and the sacred. The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* lists the synonyms of reverence as "adore, deify, glorify, revere, worship, venerate," most of which are words that imply the sacred or divine.[7] An awareness of interdependence creates respect and reverence, and a non-legal-operational way of promoting this reverence is by creating sacred spaces. That is, while Stone (1974) implies that a shift in world-view and consciousness is insufficient, Bateson (2000) implies that a shift in ethic is *precisely what we need*. Stone says that what we need is a shift in ethic, but we *also* require a shift in legal and economic terms of thinking (1974). While it may very well be the case that Stone's legal shifts might propel the shifting ethic, how else can the ethic be changed; what other ways are there of "creating consciousness"? My suspicion is that creating sacred spaces may well do this. Therefore, we return to Cambodia to consider Maha Ghosananda and how to create sacred spaces.

As part of the effort to re-teach Buddhism, Maha Ghosananda and the Shante Sena sanctified, or imparted sacredness to, the forest (Teng 1994). The Shante Sena's goals included re-foresting and creating a "meditation forest" in the Svay Rient province. They also wished to "encourage the villagers to appreciate the value of the forest and understand the importance of protecting the forest" (Teng 1994). This sanctification taught reverence, and this creation of sacred space was used as a method of peace building. While this may have had the unintended consequence of creating a mental divide between the sacred

forest and the common tree, Maha Ghosananda *ordained the common tree as sacred* and taught the villagers to treat it as they would a monk. William Cronon warns that we in the West have long since turned the concept of wilderness into the sacred; we have imparted upon it mystical qualities, and we now fail to realize that a tree in a mystical grove in the forest is the same as a tree in our backyard (1996). The creation of a separate meditation forest and the protection of the forest may sound like Cronon's caveat of creating the sacred and forgetting the common. In the Dong Yai forest in Buriram, Thailand, for example:

> Villagers are struggling to protect the province's last rain-catchment forest from illegal loggers and the government's plan to initiate commercial eucalyptus plantations. They have held 'tree ordinations,' tying yellow robes around sacred trees and white ones around the whole forest [Teng 1994]

Ordaining a tree is regarding the tree *itself* with the same respect as one regards a monk with; it is not having a monk standing in the way of the logger and the tree. It is an attempt to create an environmental consciousness — not an attempt to produce a legal block between logger and tree. This is the same distinction that Stone draws between a new ethic versus a legal change (Stone 1974:53); the two feed into each other, but the ethic is vital for progress, just as sanctifying the tree is necessary to legally defend it.

Cronon's (1996) warning of creating a separate sacred space is heeded by Maha Ghosananda and the Shante Sena (Bhikkhu 2009; Teng 1994). While the creation of a separate meditation forest may resemble the mystical grove that Cronon warns against, ordaining an average tree in every village is more an attempt to create a sacred space out of the regular — not isolating the sacred far away into the wilderness. The Shante Sena volunteers were trained in "Buddhist meditation to help cultivate concentration as a solid foundation upon which to build ecology teachings and nonviolence techniques" (Teng 1994), for Buddhist teachings do not merely sanctify the wilderness. Rather, they "emphasize respecting ... plants, animals, and minerals" (Teng 1994). The Buddhist doctrine of regarding the ordinary and everyday as sacred parallels Bateson's idea of operating in the unconscious. Instead of creating a separation between human and sacred, and instead of drawing a line between nature and culture, mindfulness of one's environment stimulates sanctification thereof.

Section IV

Monks and politics: What it means to walk

There are different aspects to what peace marches signify. Some scholars view it as a form of peaceful warfare (Richards 2005:4), which is in sync with the literal translation of Shante Sena: Peace Army. This expression was first coined by Mahatma Gandhi, whose famous salt march was an "implied rejection of the technological developments that had enslaved India and that led to world wars and atomic nuclear conflagrations" (Bhikkhu 2009:29). Maha Ghosananda's teacher, Nichidatsu, had also been a friend of Gandhi's, and he taught Maha Ghosananda the importance of a monk walking amidst the people on a

daily basis, for it provided a "face-to-face encounter with the common people" (Bhikkhu 2009:29). Nichidatsu had learned the importance of walking from a Japanese Buddhist ascetic walking tradition, kaihogyo, where he spent:

> a thousand days walking in the mountains of Japan, beating a drum and chanting. He would routinely walk 40 kilometers in a day. 'The true monk does not stay in one place,' he taught Ghosananda. The Cambodian Theravada tradition embraced a similar practice, known as *thudong*, in which the monk spends a good part of his life walking the forests, practicing meditation in imitation of the Buddha. [Bhikkhu 2009:29]

Two decades later, Maha Ghosananda walked among his people as a means to re-teach and restore Cambodian Buddhism (Bhikkhu 2009:30).

Though the peace marches clearly had non-Khmer influences such as Nichidatsu's and Gandhi's, the case can also be made that walking as a form of creating peace is a fundamentally Buddhist concept. Firstly, walking meditation is one of the oldest forms of Buddhist meditation, for the Buddha himself taught walking meditation in the *Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness* (Silanada 1996). While sitting meditation involves focusing on the breath and withdrawing oneself to some degree, walking meditation requires focusing on each step and being mindful of the outside world. In this regard, what is more perfect to teach mindfulness to the Cambodian people of the outside world than walking meditation? Secondly, if the Buddha prevented a war between his relatives over rights to the use of water by walking onto the battlefield, the Dhammayietra is merely following in the Buddha's footsteps (Bhikkhu 2009:47). During the Dhammayietra, Maha Ghosananda, the monks, and the laypeople who joined them, did something similar by walking through active war zones, areas filled with land-mines, and by even getting caught in the crossfire until both the government troops and the Khmer Rouge rebels apologized to the monks (Bhikkhu 2009:58). As Maha Ghosananda said, "Peace is growing in Cambodia, slowly, step by step … Each step is a meditation. Each step is a prayer" (Poethig 2004:198).

Monks and politics: Political involvement and transnationalism

But even if the idea of Buddhist walking meditation inspired the Dhammayietra, how politically motivated was the Dhammayietra? Maha Ghosananda expressed that:

> The Dhammayietra was not a political demonstration or some new innovation into Cambodian Buddhism; it was simply following the example of the Buddha, who had long ago walked onto the battle field in an effort to end a war, and bring reconciliation to two hostile factions of his own clan. [Bhikkhu 2009:46]

Yet Maha Ghosananda's walk was inspired by Nichidatsu, who had certainly been friends with Gandhi (Bhikkhu 2009:46). Similar walks (e.g. Gandhi's famous salt march) have been conducted with a clear political agenda. Monks in Cambodia have historically been politically involved to varying degrees.

Theologically, there is one school of thought that instructs monks to be disengaged from politics; there are two dimensions to the wheel that represents Buddhist thoughts

on life: one is the political/national sphere, and the other is the personal sphere (Sam 1987:40). Regardless — or perhaps because of this separation — monks who do not appear politically active are trusted by the people (Sam 1987:90), sometimes even more than politicians and kings are. It is unsurprising that monks are trusted more than politicians and kings are — not simply because they are supposedly politically less-involved but also because they do not wield violence and power in the same way that politicians wield it (see Ovesen 2005). Regardless, the revolution that placed the Khmer Rouge in power would have been impossible without support from some groups of monks (Bhikkhu 2009:35-36):

> As Khmer Rouge forces entered the city, Supreme Patriarch Huot Tat went onto Phnom Penh radio and asked the military to lay down their weapons. Huot Tat was one of Ghosananda's teachers when Ghosananda was a young monk. 'The war was over,' Huot Tat said. 'Peace had come to Cambodia.' After the radio address, he returned to the temple at Onaloum Pagoda where he was taken into custody. [Bhikkhu 2009:35]

The next day, he was executed by the Khmer Rouge, allegedly crushed by a bulldozer (Bhikkhu 2009:36). Given the trust that Khmer people held for the monks, it is unlikely that the military would have laid down their weapons unless the Supreme Patriarch of the country had asked them to; and the Khmer Rouge would probably not have received as much support from the people if some of the monks had not supported them.

The term "socially engaged Buddhism" may have been coined by Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, during the Vietnam War (Poethig 2004:198), but, as Maha Ghosananda argues, the first act of socially engaged Buddhism was performed by the Buddha himself when he stepped onto the battlefield (Poethig 2004:202). Maha Ghosananda argues that the Buddha's act as a conflict mediator should encourage other Buddhists "to leave our temples and enter the temples of human experience that are filled with suffering" (Poethig 2004:202).

The Dhammayietra was successful locally because it "looked Khmer" in addition to being themed around relevant social issues and placing emphasis upon "self-disciplined nonviolence and meditation" (Poethig 2004:208). As Kathryn Poethig explains, it appeared Khmer because it was "perceived as a reconstruction of the pre-revolution Khmer moral order" (2004:208).

However, the transnational and international support that it garnered belie the purely Khmer façade, for engaged Buddhism of this sort has always been transnational in nature (Poethig 2004:209). Firstly, Poethig argues that the philosophy preached is not particularly Khmer in origin; it may be based upon Buddhist philosophy, but this is philosophy that was also preached by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other peace activists. Further, the amount of NGO and international support the Dhammayietra and the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation received discloses the expatriate support: a challenge to the "notion that 'local' movements, especially in the South, can be unhampered by 'global' interests" (Poethig 2004:210).

It is precisely the international and transnational dimensions of the Dhammayietra and the other Buddhist conflict mediation attempts that explain why these attempts are successful. Without the international perspective coupled with the local, Buddhist

and Khmer image, these attempts would fall prey to the same problem with Bateson's framework: addressing international causes of conflict within a localized world-view. The careful planning of the Dhammayietra and the Shante Sena in presenting themselves as local movements, even while the organizers were well-aware of international dimensions, exemplifies not Bateson's consciousness but rather Buddhist mindfulness.

Concluding thoughts

This transnational religious movement is reflective of the shifting ethic; it is "part of the trend towards an increasingly global civil society in which political moralities (such as non-violent approaches to civil conflict) are transmitted by transnational religions" (Poethig 2004:199). It is part of Stone's and Douglas' defense of giving trees standing.

In the post-Khmer-Rouge era, the monk-led and internationally-supported efforts at peace-building and nation-building fostered mindfulness within the people. Meditation was promoted through walking; forgiveness of and love to the oppressor were preached. The Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation carefully planned these transnational movements and presented them as Khmer ones. This went a step beyond Bateson's framework; the unconscious was replaced with awareness of the conscious. This mindfulness in turn promoted reverence by creating sacred spaces out of the ordinary.

Mindfulness as a concept offers something more — something more than consciousness does — that allows us to deal better with the infinite complexity of the world. If we presume consciousness and if we attempt manipulating the environment or society to get whatever we desire for the world or whatever we think is best for the world, we may risk perpetrating the same violence. If we wish to use a system of purposive consciousness, we must incorporate the environment into the legal-economic framework, as Stone suggests (1974:29). It is imperative to be aware (mindful) of our cultural assumptions — so that we may heed any limitations to our assumptions.

I recently walked into a bookstore and picked up Shel Silverstein's (1986) *The Giving Tree,* a beautifully-illustrated story about a boy who grew up with a tree; the boy kept returning to the tree, which was elated to see the boy and give him whatever it could, to provide for his material needs: apples, branches, wood, etc., so that the boy could become rich, travel widely, and retire happily. The concluding moral in the book was that when the boy was finally too old to pursue material gains, he sat on the stump of the tree, and they were both happy together (Silverstein 1986). I was initially excited to see the relationship between man and tree, and between man and nature; but the book progressed: the tree was so willingly subdued, the ungrateful boy continued taking what he could from the tree, and the book left me with a colonial aftertaste. Yet the boy was not entirely stewarding the tree; the tree chose to protect the boy and give him whatever he desired. Silverstein created a tension between man's stewardship of the environment and a generously-giving environment, and I had naïvely assumed the tension would be resolved by erasing the nature-culture dichotomy. But when Venerable Phrachak, a world-renowned monk said:

> We must learn that the forest is life itself. We must learn that we are the same as
> the leaves, no more important, no less important. We must allow the leaves, the

branches, the bats to be our teachers ... Monks need the forest as fish need water.
[Teng 1994]

I realized there was indeed a nature-culture dichotomy here too. The problem, how-ever, is not the dichotomy. The solution to this tension lies not with whether we premise a dichotomy between man and nature — but rather with whether we take apples from a tree as a resource or whether we are sincerely grateful to the tree for what it chooses to provide us with; whether it is "arboricide" to kill a tree; whether we regard the tree as a fellow living-being and with reverence; and whether we revere — and are mindful of — what we view as nature.

Notes

1 This essay was first written at Yale in 2009 for an undergraduate Environmental Anthropology seminar, taught by Prof. Michael R. Dove. This class and essay were my introduction to anthropology, and while my thinking has since grown, I have chosen to keep the structure and argument of this essay largely unchanged; some of the sources might also be older for this reason.

2 Bateson does not explicitly claim this; however, I would argue that his description of "ad hoc measures" and the DDT example indicate this (see Bateson 1970:497)

3 By "consciousness of the discovery," Percy means, if I read him correctly, the same as what Bateson terms "unconscious"; Percy's "consciousness of the consciousness" is what Bateson calls "consciousness."

4 Merriam-Webster Online, under the word "mindfulness," http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindfulness, accessed April 4, 2015.

5 Merriam-Webster Online, under the word "consciousness," http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness, accessed April 4, 2015.

6 Merriam-Webster Online, under the word "revere," http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/revere, accessed April 4, 2015.

7 Merriam-Webster Online, under the word "reverence," http://www.meriam-webster.com/dictionary/reverence, accessed April 4, 2015.

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