Bukusu and Amazonian Perspectives on Harmonious Relations with the Other

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Abstract

The article follows the theme of dealing with adversaries and conflict resolution. As an exercise in intercultural philosophy, the paper explores the philosophies of two different regions, the Amazon of South America (Jivaro and Yanesha/Amuesha people of Peru) and Western Province of Kenya, East Africa (with a focus on the Bukusu people). Exploring the insights of other researchers as well as drawing upon interviews by the author, the article explains each group's philosophy of conflict resolution referencing myths, folktales, proverbs, and interviews with sages. In the case of both communities, practitioners of peace must engage in bravery to reach out to others and address them with a message of peaceful relations. The Yanesha have a founding myth that emphasizes the role of a woman in establishing harmonious relations, whereas the Bukusu folktales emphasize men's leadership.

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In this paper, I will draw upon two main areas of research: (1) the sage philosophy research of the Bukusu community in Western Kenya, including my own (and others') research with several Bukusu sages from the area, and (2) the research on various Amazonian peoples of the Americas, with an emphasis on the work of anthropologists Fernando Santos-Granero and Richard Chase Smith. In both cases, I am exploring our response, as individuals or groups, during difficult interpersonal situations toward enemies—those that threaten us or oppose us—or to close rivals or members of our own community who antagonize or greatly annoy us. Already, scholars are widely familiar with writings on this topic from Jewish and Christian perspectives.[1] Even

[1] For Judaism, Reuven Kimelman explained that the Palestinian Aggadists discussed how to help an adversary to decrease enmity. If your enemy's donkey falls under a heavy load, help him lift the donkey. Do not engage in reciprocal imitative violence. If your enemy is hungry, feed him; in this way "you will heap hot coals on his head." In other words, you surprise him or her with the action of kindness. This disorients them because they expect you to hate them. See Reuven Kimelman, "Nonviolence in the Talmud," in Robert L. Holmes and Barry L. Gan *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2012), 23–32.

For Christianity, Eileen Egan describes the encounter/visit of St. Francis of Assisi and Brother Illuminato with Sultan Melek-el-Kamela, leader of the Muslim forces during the Fifth Crusade in 1219. They traveled weaponless and by foot (in contrast to the armed Crusaders traveling on horseback). See Eileen Egan, *Peace Be With You: Justified Warfare or the Way of Nonviolence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 75–76.

Hindu and Buddhist counsels on nonviolence are relatively well known.[2] The history of nonviolence in Africa is perhaps less well known, but nonetheless has an extensive history.[3] I want to contribute insights from my field research in Africa as well as my reflections on other sources. I will begin the article with some examples from Amazonia that piqued my interest in this difficult topic. Then I will turn to my own and others' research on the Bukusu in Kenya (and a few sages from other geographically close Luhya groups) to explore their suggestions.

Before everything, let me be explicit about how these studies are connected to philosophy as a discipline. Santos-Granero, an anthropologist with great interest in philosophy, has a tendency to draw upon the ideas of philosophers in many of his papers and books. He argued that, for example, the Amuesha, an indigenous community of Peru, are

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[2] As brief examples, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, has written many books on peace. He said, "When you begin to see that your enemy is suffering, that is the beginning of insight." Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 120. Regarding Hinduism, Mohandas Gandhi's counsel in his "Means and Ends" essay is rather well known. If a robber burgles one's house, Gandhi counsels keeping one's doors unlocked and possessions readily available. This is to encourage the robber to change his mind and open up his problems to the house-owner, so that a solution (to unemployment, for example) can be found. Arming oneself against robbers would only escalate the problem. See Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Means and Ends," in *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), 9–15.

[3] That is the topic of an earlier article of mine. See Gail Presbey, "Philosophy of Nonviolence in Africa," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence,* ed. Andrew Fiala (New York: Routledge, 2018), 64–79.

philosophers. Drawing on the ideas of Paul Radin, he argued that so-called "primitive" persons (as Radin called them in the early twentieth century) have highly developed philosophies that deserved greater study. Not only do their myths convey important philosophical ideas (metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical) but the community members themselves can articulate these philosophies. [4] Regarding the Bukusu of Western Kenya, they are one of many ethnic groups of Kenya that were interviewed as part of H. Odera Oruka's sage philosophy project. The project began at the University of Nairobi in Kenya in the 1970s with a book including many of the interviews, as well as debates on the philosophical merits of sage philosophy published in 1990.[5] Odera Oruka wanted to ensure that the philosophical insights of these (often rural and elderly) sages were recorded, transcribed, and then studied by those in academia who might otherwise think or presume that philosophy was a field engaged in only by Europeans. I had a chance to do some research with Odera Oruka in the 1990s (before his death at age 51 in 1995). I

[4] Fernando Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love: The Moral Use of Knowledge amongst the Amuesha of Central Peru* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1991), 6–7. In this 1991 work he refers to the community as Amuesha, but in more recent publications he uses the term now widely in use and preferred, that is, Yanesha. These are two names for the same group of people.

[5] Henry Odera Oruka, ed., *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 1990; Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991). References in this article are to the 1991 Nairobi edition.

continued researching with the help of Chaungo Barasa and other Kenyans.

At the heart of the debate that I see emerging in the philosophies of these geographically far-flung regions is the philosophical question at the base of various practices of reconciliation. For the Amazonian peoples described in Santos-Granero's "Of Fear and Friendship," especially in his examples of the Jivaro people, practices of making friends with enemies is based on forecasted danger and concrete ways to lessen fear and build confidence. Santos-Granero notices that the instrumental aspect of these friendships defies the definition of friendship offered by Michel de Montaigne. However, this leads Santos-Granero to insist that Montaigne's definition of friendship is narrow and solely based on a singular cultural context.[6] But the Amuesha, a group based in the Peruvian Amazon, is the subject of a separate book by Santos-Granero. With this I argue, we see that the Yanesha have a philosophy of love and generosity that embraces strangers in a way that is philosophically quite different from the instrumental nature of the Jivaro. Turning to the examples of Bukusu sages that I have interviewed, I see there a third emphasis on the role of deeper understanding of each side toward each other and a promotion of a certain

[6] Fernando Santos-Granero, "Of Fear and Friendship: Amazonian Sociality Beyond Kinship and Affinity," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no.1 (February 2007):8–9.

conception of fairness that leads to the restoration of good relations between aggrieved parties. The Bukusu approach has much in common with current practices of mediation. There is a role for all of the three kinds of approaches to difficult interpersonal and inter-societal relations. This paper shows that all three approaches are theorized and practiced in at least some indigenous communities.

In this way I hope that my paper will be understood as an exercise in intercultural philosophy. As described by Ram A. Mall, intercultural philosophy aims at harmonizing concepts without privileging any particular conceptual system. Various philosophies (which are embedded in traditions and have viewpoints) are treated as different but not radically distinct pointers to the True Philosophy. Knowing the details of where and when they arise are important—not meaningless details to be cast off in search of pure abstractions. Intercultural philosophy resists the temptation to compare the whole world to Europe and in that way reinforces the idea of Europe's centralization. In this case, Amazonian and Bukusu insights all contribute to the topic of practical philosophy or ethics regarding how to treat others (especially antagonistic others) in a way that all persons could benefit from studying them.[7]

[7] Ram Adhar Mall, "The Concept of an Intercultural Philosophy," *polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 1 (2000), accessed November 24, 2018, http://them.polylog.org/1/fmr-en.htm.

Native Amazonians

In a recent article of his "Of Fear and Friendship," Santos-Granero focused on how Amazonian people (including the Gê, Araweté, Jivaro, and Tupí-Guaraní) constantly work to create and nurture relationships with people who are not relatives and may even be enemies. On a widespread basis, they establish formal friendships with each other (sometimes calling each other "trading partners") so as to better establish trust and mutual security through sociability.[8] He has also researched the Amuesha of Peru (who nowadays prefer to call themselves Yanesha, meaning "we people"),[9] who articulate a detailed philosophy through their use of myths, which they themselves explain. A key theme of their philosophical insights would be the short-sightedness of selfish motives and how highlighting and reinforcing community leads to stability and happiness.

To further develop the point of Santos-Granero, he especially focuses on "formalized personal friendships that are established with enemy peoples" that fit his definition of friendship which has three criteria: that the two groups "seek

[8] Santos-Granero, "Of Fear and Friendship."

[9] "The Amuesha traditionally occupied the region in the high central jungle of Peru between 9.7° and 11.1° S and 74.6° and 75.6° W in the present-day departments of Junín and Pasco, along the valleys of the upper Perene and Pozuzo rivers, the headwaters of the Palcazu River, and the southernmost headwaters of the Pichis River. Today their territory is between 9.7° and 10.8° S and 75° and 75.6° W. This reduced territory is also occupied by thousands of colonists." See encyclopedia.com, https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/amuesha.

out each other's company, exhibit mutually helping behaviour, and are joined by links of mutual generosity and trust that go beyond those expected between kin or affines."[10] Often the motive for friendship is personal safety, and it may actually be fear of a powerful adversary that becomes the impetus for formalizing friendly relations. For example, among the Jivaro, these trading friendships are often struck "between enemy groups who raided each other in the past in order to take head trophies."[11] These friends may start their relationship with informal visits and exchanges of small presents, but as time progresses they will meet formally and exchange large presents. As Bodley explains, this is a way to give strangers who are potentially dangerous men from rival ethnic groups ". . . a legitimate non-kin, non-enemy identity."[12]

To have friendly relations with large numbers of peers is a safety net. In explaining the motives for friendship between strangers or acquaintances he goes as far as to say that "friendship is the only civil alternative to predation and mutual destruction."[13] People risk their lives to trade with each other, not so much to get the objects of trade, but because the relationship built is crucial. Jivaro trade friends

[10] Santos-Granero, "Of Fear and Friendship," 2.

[11] Ibid., 4. The Jivaro live "in the Montaña (the eastern slopes of the Andes), in Ecuador and Peru north of the Marañón River." Encyclopedia Britannica, "Jivaro People," 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jivaro.

[12] J.H. Bodley, 1973. "Deferred Exchange Among the Campa Indians," *Anthropos* 68:595, as cited in Santos-Granero, "Of Fear and Friendship," 4.

[13] Santos-Granero, "Of Fear and Friendship," 15.

offer safety while visiting: they let nearby potential enemies know that the visiting trader friend is under their protection. They will give refuge to their friend in their house. Traders in this way become socially secure in a context of predatory others.

While friendship characterizes relationships between trading partners, it also characterizes shamans' relationships with various animals (considered humans) and spirit powers. Shamans are competitive with each other and they consider geographically close, but socially distant shamans to be harmful and engaged in witchcraft. But geographically farther shamans are seen as either potential enemies or friends. Shamans are always interested in engaging these other faraway shamans to ensure friendship and help in times of trouble. The Jivaro want to trade "magical darts" from other shamans. These darts are believed to assist them in curing illnesses and ward off attacks of enemy shamans. Yanesha shamans are always assessing whether other shamans are friends (in an alliance) or rivals. In these contexts, shamanic friends depend on each other. Shamans also try to befriend spirits by going on a dream quest (for the Tapirapé) or by using psychotropical plants (as do the Matsigenka). The spirits, likewise, may be dangerous; but if mutual trust is engendered, these spirits will help the shaman heal and ward off danger.[14] Clearly, these practices of friendships among

[14] Santos-Granero, "Of Fear and Friendship," 5-6.

shamans and various spirits depend on a certain metaphysical conception of the world as a place filled with such spirits.[15]

This search for friendship and mutual security in a dangerous world is reflected in the myths of the Yanesha of Peru. Today their numbers and their territory have been drastically reduced, but they still remain a community. In 1991 Santos-Granero wrote a book-length study of Amuesha folk tales, arguing there that the Amuesha were philosophers, and that they themselves could articulate their own philosophy as contained in their folk tales. Santos-Granero drew upon the philosophy of Paul Radin (author of the 1929 book *Primitive Man as Philosopher* based on his studies of the Winnebago, now known as the Ho-Chunk Nation) to argue that the Amuesha should be studied as indigenous philosophers of the Americas. The thesis of Santos-Granero's1991 book, *The Power of Love*, is that Amuesha lifestyle together with social and political actions can only be understood in the context of their philosophy and religious beliefs.

For the Yanesha, love is an important concept that guides their social interaction as well as their political structure. While there are two kinds of love, divine love (of a more powerful being to a less powerful one) and human love

[15] While I can't go into the details of these spirits for this paper, they have been described in recent studies not only by Santos-Granero but also by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. See "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3(2004): 463–484.

(between equals), each one plays an important role. Love is expressed through generosity. Embracing this kind of philosophy and its resultant political structure helped the Yanesha initially repel the missionaries and colonizers for a period of 100 years and eventually helped them partially assimilate while promoting their own unique salvation theology. Some scholars insist that Yanesha religious practices may have been influenced by (especially Franciscan) Christianity (and perhaps their key mythological figure, Yomper Santo, plays a role similar to Christ). Nevertheless, their philosophy and religious practices are deeply Amazonian-based and cannot be considered merely derivative of Christianity.[16] Santos-Granero noted that there were useful historical records of Yanesha beliefs and practices that date back to the 1700s. He bases his study on those historical records as well as current practices.

Santos-Granero claims that he was intrigued by the Yanesha's unique situation of being an Andean priestly society. Unlike its Andean neighbors, they were not centralistic and authoritarian in structure. Due to Amueshan

[16] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 293. For more on Yomper Santo, see a documentary film by Espiritu Bautista and Richard Chase Smith, "Yompor Santo" at http://www.ethnovisions.net/EV/Yompor_Santo.html.As it is explained there, "Yompor Santo was a revolutionary leader who fought against Spanish colonial power. More widely known as Juan Santos Atahualpa, Yompor Santo was believed to be the grandson of Grandfather Yos and to have supernatural powers. He taught the Yanesha the arts of war and peace. Yompor Santo led a massive regional insurgence in Central Peru against the Spanish colonizers and missionaries from 1742 until his death in 1756."

society's continuing existence in the twentieth century, he was able to study them without reliance on earlier sources that were possibly Eurocentrically distorted. He came to the conclusion that the Yanesha were able to develop mechanisms to keep abusive power in check due to their philosophy, which emphasized the importance of knowledge and morality for the legitimate wielding of power.

The myth entitled "Sanrronesha" describes how the Amuesha became a society. It is a story of a woman named Sanrronesha' who travels to the afterworld (*sanerr*) to find out what happened to her murdered husband. She exhibits curiosity, determination, and bravery, and is not censored for it (as are Eve in the Genesis creation story or Pandora in the ancient Greek myths). As the story goes, Sanrronesha' and her husband lived in an early time before society was founded. During this time, no one could trespass on anyone else's property and families kept to themselves. Her husband, while hunting, went onto another's property and was killed. Sanrronesha' became sad when her husband did not return; and she questioned a bird to find out where her husband had gone. With help, she and her children make it to the land of the dead, where she sees her dead husband—his head filled with maggots. In this land, the only food is fermented blood. The woman and her children observe from a hiding place how the murdered ones drink fermented blood, play music, dance, and celebrate. She hurries back to her home where, remembering what she had seen and the songs she had heard,

she prepares fermented beer and invites her neighbors for song and dance. As Santos-Granero explains, "It was thus that the people entered into friendly social relationships. The woman told them that they should not kill each other anymore: that they should establish friendly relations and become like a big family, for she had seen what people looked like after they had been murdered. . . . So it was because of *coshamnats* sacred songs and music that we entered into social relations."[17]

The contrast between this account and Thomas Hobbes' account of the "state of nature" is quite striking. Hobbes describes individuals leaving the war of all against all to join the social contract, but by asking his listeners to imagine people fully grown, he has asked them to block out of their imagination and memory the fact that people are born of women and enter the world as helpless infants. Feminist philosophers have explained that the 'war of all against all' is a male fantasy because it presumes adults, mentions no families, and is modeled on male diffidence and aggression. Even when Hobbes (rarely) refers to children born of women in the 'state of nature,' the first thing he imagines in this moment of vulnerability is a contract between mother and child—the mother agrees to spare the child's life if the child pledges deference and obedience. But it's not realistic to think of the infant as an autonomous contractor. And Hobbes'

[17] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 38.

presumption that the mother threatens her own child with death also seems to go against widespread experiences of mother-child bonding. In fact, holding a child can help a mother to overcome her own post-partum depression.[18]

In contrast to the Hobbesian account of the creation of society, we have this Yanesha tale that explains how a brave woman traveled to the land of the dead (here focusing on her autonomy) and came back with a "recipe" for sociality and a way to avoid future murders. Indeed, the gathering and cooperation to grow (in common) the ingredients for beer and how to brew it, and to sing songs and dance is a key practice of the Yanesha culture. The emphasis is on nurturing community.

Santos-Granero insists that "Sanrronesha" addresses two philosophical issues of universal importance. It points to the establishment of the social order based on "reciprocal relations of exchange," a social order intended as an alternative to a coercive centralized state. The myth also expresses the Yanesha theory of human nature: In the story, humans are able to transcend normal knowledge and experience to gain esoteric, sacred knowledge. It also expresses Yanesha values, insofar as it contrasts a chaotic past of individualism and war with a new and preferable "state of

[18] For criticisms of Hobbes by feminist philosophers, see Christine de Stefano, *Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) and work by Carol Pateman such as *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford University Press, 1988).

affairs characterized by the glorification of the collectivity, the stress on homogeneity, peace and the exaltation of life."[19]

Santos-Granero, making explicit comparisons and contrasts between Yanesha theories of human nature with those of Thomas Hobbes and Hsun Tzu, claims that the Yanesha position on these topics is that without social organization, human nature tends toward evil; but in the social context, humans fully become "people" when they live together harmoniously.[20] The two Yanesha moral principles that distinguish them from their neighbors are the practice of "unrestricted generosity and generalized reciprocity."[21] The myth tells the story of Yanesha prior to the creation of their society in a state of nature when each person could not trespass on the land of others. The myth promotes the singing of sacred songs and playing of music (*coshamnats,* that is, traditional sacred music) while consuming manioc beer as a way to promote friendly social relations.[22] Unrestricted generosity is demonstrated in the myth of "Sanrronesha" because when she returns to the land of the living, she invites her neighbors to a feast, teaches them the songs, and even invites the murderer of her husband to participate in the musical celebration. Generalized reciprocity is shown through each household contributing beer and food to the celebration.

[19] Santos-Granero*, The Power of Love,* 39–40, 47.
[20] Ibid., 41–43, 46.
[21] Ibid., 44.
[22] Ibid., 36–38.

Giving and receiving are central that they become ritualized acts.[23] No longer are Yanesha people shut up within their own plots of land; now they interact with each other in a highly ritualized but enjoyable way. As with the earlier Amazonian examples, this creation of friendships with strangers or potential enemies is a way to be safe and feel at home in the world.

The myth of Sanrronesha is not merely a story; its message is repeatedly enacted. Simon Nganga explains that "ritual 'reveals' myth, and myth sacralizes ritual": ritual is "in itself repetitive of myth."[24] As an Amuesha man told Richard Chase Smith in 1970: "We hold large celebrations where we present different kinds of dances and music . . . There is much happiness among us; we share roast meat, manioc beer and coca leaves. In this way we demonstrate friendship and good friendly relations among our people."[25] Smith has written about the importance of music for the Yanesha; Daigneault has furthered his research by studying songs by Yanesha women.[26]

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[23] Santos-Granero*, The Power of Love,* 44–45.

[24] Simon Nganga, *The Funeral Performances Among the Bukusu of Kenya: A Contribution to Communicative Genre Analysis* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2018), 39.

[25] Richard Chase Smith, *The Amuesha People of Central Peru: Their Struggle to Survive.* (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs Documents, 1974), 15.

[26] Richard Chase Smith, "The Language of Power: Music, Order, and Redemption," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 5, no. 2 (Autumn–Winter 1984):129–160. Also see Anna Luisa Daigneault's account of a women's sacred song, called the Mellañoteñrech Song. She includes an English translation of its verses. She notes that Santos-Granero

Unlike Hobbes' account of the state, Santos-Granero draws upon Mauss and Sahlins's concept of stateless societies as offering a non-coercive alternative social order based on "unrestricted generosity and generalized reciprocity." He also suggests that the Yanesha approach to social relations is in line with these two thinkers.[27] Santos-Granero shows how there is a philosophy of the person embedded in practices and conceptions of traditional dress. The *cushma* or long cotton tunic was considered a symbol of the corporeal dimension of the self. There are two aspects to the non-corporeal form of the self, the shadow (*yechoyeshem*) and the *yecamquëñ*, which is "the incorporeal essence of the self which is an individual manifestation of the all-encompassing soul of the supreme divinity which is the primordial source of life of the universe."[28] At death, the person's soul goes to heaven, while their shadow could possibly lurk around earth. The afterlife has

and Smith relied mostly upon male sources. See Anna Luisa Daigneault, "An Ethnolinguistic Study of the Yanesha' (Amuesha) Language and Speech Community in Peru's Andean Amazon, and the Traditional Role of Ponapnora, a Female Rite of Passage" (PhD dissertation, University of Montreal, Department of Anthropology, September 2009), https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/4055/Daigneault_Anna_L_2010_memoire.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y.

[27] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 48.

[28] Ibid., 89. When Smith arrived in the 1970s, he noted that Amuesha rarely wore their cushmas which were "heavily adorned with bands of bright seeds and beads and dried bodies of brilliantly colored birds" (Smith 1974, 16). One man explained he no longer wore his *cushma* because when he did, Peruvians called him "*chuncho*" which means inhabitant of the eastern forests (with connotations of cultural and racial inferiority) (Smith 1974, 16, 34).

two hills, one heavenly and one hellish, the latter ruled by Yosoper (a figure probably influenced by Christianity's Lucifer, Santos-Granero suggests). Heaven is a place where the souls drink manioc beer and listen to *coshamnats* sacred music. The Yanesha encourage people to wear their *cushmas*, at least during the evening, so that when Yompor Ror returns to earth he will recognize them and help them to resurrect or rejoin their bodies. Santos-Granero concludes that wearing the tunic is both a symbolic representation of the corporeal aspect of the self, but also an important part of the ethnic self.[29]

Santos-Granero then describes their religious practices and social organization. Santos-Granero explains that he was able to describe the Amuesha priest/temple complexes of the first half of the twentieth century by relying upon the oral accounts of elderly informants.[30] A *cornesha* or priest must have two attributes: *muerenets* (love and compassion, discussed above) and *cotapchnats*, "the action of 'advising'" or "the transmission of good ideas, thoughts and reflections."[31] The kind of strength or power that a priest has comes from his good thoughts. A *cornesha* would build a temple complex and then organize ceremonial events that would ensure the blessings of the divinities. These ceremonies would also

[29] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 89–90. YomporRor is a divinity; Yosoper is the Creator God's evil brother.
[30] Ibid., 282.
[31] Ibid., 250.

involve food and drink for the attendees. To host such large events, a priest relied upon voluntary labor.[32]

While the Yanesha had an earlier major success involving a century of resistance against the colonizers who had commandeered Yanesha labor (especially under the leadership of Yompor Santo'), their autonomy was eventually eroded by German missionaries engaged in coffee plantations. One Yanesha priest finally interpreted the new waves of deaths due to epidemics as revenge for Yanesha armed resistance against the settlers, and so they laid down their arms.[33]

For the Yanesha, hatred is avoided because it is considered the source of criminal acts especially, when combined with wrath, those responsible for murder. As far as the ordinary use of language is concerned, the Yanesha often interchangeably use the adjectives for "murderer" and "non-loving/generous/compassionate person" when describing Yompor Rret—the first solar divinity who killed many Yanesha through natural catastrophes and was replaced by Yompor Ror. A loving and compassionate person is someone who can control their negative emotions. In addition to murder, people can be harmed through sorcery, either by a professional sorcerer or by an average person who cannot control their emotions. A person who has been a victim of

[32] Ibid., 250–51.
[33] Ibid., 26.

this kind of sorcery can receive help in finding the source of the bewitching and can be aided in counteracting the attack.[34]

Santos-Granero ends the chapter by insisting that during his entire time in fieldwork, he never witnessed an act of physical violence. He also never heard a Yanesha person report an act of violence without also expressing disapproval of the violence. He notes, however, that some of the conflict that is inevitable in society is re-routed to the "metaphysical" plane, where it is considered to be cases of sorcery and where it is dealt with by specialists. He concludes with this observation: "The morally unambiguous discourse of love and peacefulness of the Yanesha priests, which disapproves of violence of any kind, contrasts in this sense with the morally ambiguous discourse of shamans, where metaphysical violence is an accepted everyday fact which should either be neutralised in self-defence, or exerted against one's enemies."[35] While he rightly notes that the Yanesha do not completely live up to their philosophy of harmonious nonviolence, he does nevertheless credit the Yanesha with resisting escalating the "spiraling increase of violence," even in cases of murder.[36] For example, Se'po's father refused to avenge his daughter's death by physical or metaphysical

[34] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 221–224.
[35] Ibid., 228.
[36] Ibid.

means and thereby demonstrated the Yanesha moral values of self-control, love, and unrestricted generosity.[37]

Mary Ruth Wise explains the character and role of the priests, and the values of the community:

> Traditionally, there were no strong political leaders; instead local socioreligious leaders (*cornesha'*)—priests—gained authority and prestige by their generosity and wise leadership in worship and community matters . . . Even before the last *cornesha'* died in 1956, if there was no local *cornesha'*, an older man who had lived in the community the longest was generally recognized as the leader. Generosity is still one of the main avenues for gaining respect. A would-be leader and coffee planter will impoverish himself by generosity to his workers. The high moral value placed on generosity is thus effective in preventing potential entrepreneurs from taking advantage of their less fortunate relatives and neighbors . . . The Amuesha highly value peace . . . Even when outsiders

[37] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 224–228. As Santos-Granero explains, Se'po was only twenty-one years old when she died. When she felt ill, her husband took her to a Peruvian general practitioner, but he could not cure her. Se'po's father believed that a man living downriver (understood as a place where people are prone to wrath and hate) had used powerful magic to try to win Se'po's love and that caused her death. Santos-Granero explains that Se'po's father chose to believe a version of the story of the cause of his daughter's death that helped him to avoid a feud demonstrating that he had control over his emotions.

> dispossess them of their land, the Amuesha will avoid a fight if at all possible. Homicide and theft were almost unknown in aboriginal times.[38]

Another example of how unrestricted generosity can contribute to friendly relations and reduce feelings of hatred is the story of how the Yanesha overcame their feelings of hatred toward white men. The Yanesha informants explained that once white men became generous and gave them tools and textiles, the Yanesha dropped their hatred and began reciprocal relations giving the white men foodstuffs. Clearly, this seems to follow the pattern of trading with enemies until they become friends, just like in the case of the various Amazonian groups covered in Santos-Granero's study. Still, there has been a steady dispossession. By the time of the mid-1970s, the Amuesha had no land in the fertile valleys, but lived in what the government called the "Jungle Region."[39]

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[38] Mary Ruth Wise, "Amuesha." *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed November 24, 2018, https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/amuesha.

[39] Santos-Granero, *The Power of Love*, 29, 45. In another work, Santos-Granero discussed at further length the Amuesha relationships with three groups antagonistic to them, that is, the Pano people (who raided them and stole their wives and children), the Incas/Andean people (who ruled them despotically), and the whites from Europe. In each case trade was involved, sometimes through intermediaries (as with the Pano). Sometimes the Yanesha referred to these exchanges as "anti-exchange," that is, receiving something worthless in exchange for valuable labor. See Fernando Santos-Granero, "Time is Disease, Suffering, and Oblivion: Yanesha Historicity and the Struggle against Temporality," in *Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Carlos Fausto and Michael Heckenberger (Gainsville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 52–58.

Richard Chase Smith, an anthropologist who has now lived in Peru for over forty years, wrote a 1973 study on the Yanesha ethnic group. He noted that the generosity of the Yanesha would extend to use of their land. Even when the government had insisted on the concept and practice of "private property," the Yanesha would allow those who had a need to plant vegetables on their land.[40] However, Smith notes that with the government "land reform" of 1969 that resulted in the (anonymous, bureaucratic) changing of land demarcations and the denial of land to thirty Yanesha families in Quillazu and Sipizu—the formerly peaceful society that had never quarreled began to suffer from "a chaos of misunderstandings, bad feelings and resentments."[41] Smith notes that the Yanesha were continuously losing the means they needed to survive as they did traditionally; at the same time, they were marginalized by the monetary economy. Out of desperation, families allowed their daughters to get jobs as maids in Lima; Smith worried that this would turn into a cultural genocide, as the women of the community disappeared during child-bearing years. Smith thinks that this cultural genocide was justified in the eyes of other Peruvians as a case of modernizing development. Missionaries told the Yanesha that they had no beliefs because they would not

[40] Smith, *The Amuesha*, 19.
[41] Ibid., 20.

uphold the "whiteman's interpretation of God."[42] One could see Santos-Granero's philosophical study of the Yanesha as a way to counteract popular misconceptions of the Yanesha as backward and heathen.

The Yanesha sacred site north of Quilazu and next to the Palmazu River was once the site of many Yanesha religious celebrations. It is there where one could find "Our Father Yompere' with his wife, Our Mother Mamas, his three sons and a group of his followers" who were "all converted to stone in remote times by Our Father the Sun."[43] In the 1930s, *Kornesha'* Domingo oversaw many celebrations there. But then the Government banned the celebrations and threatened to arrest *Kornesha'* Domingo who had to flee. By the 1970s, the religious site had been excavated; the sacred stones were knocked over (and one was dynamited in search of gold); and the sacred house was burnt down. The Government of Peru takes a paternalistic interest in Yanesha and thinks their poverty is due to Yanesha disorganization, minimizing the role of land theft and purposeful cultural genocide.[44]

[42] Smith, *The Amuesha*, 30.; see also 42–44. According to Daigneault, the practice of young Yanesha girls going to the city for work greatly reduces the number of young women who participate in the *ponapnora* ritual, a rite of passage that girls underwent after their first periods, and could take from one to six months to complete. During this time period, young girls were educated in Yanesha traditions and values. See Daigneault, *An Ethnolinguistic Study of the Yanesha',* 90–91.

[43] Smith, 17.

[44] Ibid., 17, 30-32.

The recent work of Espiritu Bautista and Richard Chase Smith, recording testimony of Yanesha elders and creating documentaries, has been part of an effort to preserve Amuesha/Yanesha culture and philosophy. The documentaries were a project of *Instituto del Bien Comun*; Richard Chase Smith is its Executive Director. One should also note that *coshamnats* sacred music and songs continue to be performed at public meetings, such as the Yanesha's ethnic political organization, the Federación de Comunidades NativasYanesha (FEC-ONAYA).[45] It's also important to note that now the Oxampapa-Ashaninka-Yanesha Biosphere Reserve preserves much of the Amuesha/Yanesha traditional lands.[46] Smith argues that indigenous people are "natural stewards" of natural resources and should not be thought of as adversaries of conservation.[47]

[45] See the entire video series created by Instituto de Bien Comun at http://www.ethnovisions.net/EV/YANESHA_series.html. Also see Daigneault, *An Ethnolinguistic Study of the Yanesha'*, 64.

[46] A website advertising tourism in the area explains that Chontabamba is "Ubicado al margenizquierdo del río de Oxapampa, se encuentra poblado por indígenas yaneshas y familias de colonos, quienes vivenen plena armonía" (translated by Google translate as, "Located on the left bank of the Oxapampa River, it is populated by indigenous Yaneshas and families of settlers, who live in full harmony.") https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=es&u=https://peru.com/viajes/conozca-peru/oxapampa-pasco-destinos-viajes-paquetes-turisticos--fotos-viajes-noticia-533576&prev=search

[47] ArcNews, "Preserving Indigenous Lands to Ensure a Collective Future," Spring 2016, https://www.esri.com/about/newsroom/arcnews/preserving-indigenous-lands-to-ensure-a-collective-future/.

As this paper transitions to the next section, we will see how there is a role in the Bukusu community for an advisor, one who tries to bring the community together in harmonious relations. The roles are not exactly the same as the Yanesha priest's, but there are some interesting parallels. In both contexts, the wise counsel of an elder man is respected. The priest (or sage or counselor) is usually known for simple living and generosity.

Kenyan Sages

Following the theme of responding peacefully to conflict or enmity, I will look to the Western Province sages I interviewed for insights regarding establishing amiable relations between themselves and others who could otherwise be considered enemies. I will also look at examples of interpersonal cases of reconciliation of enemies. Two sages are from the Bukusu community, and one (Ali Mwitani Masero) is from the nearby community of the Banyaleof Kakamega who moved to live with the Bakhayo people at Nambale.[48] The Bukusu people are one of the sub-groups of a larger ethnic group called the Luhya in Kenya, mostly found in Western Province.[49] According to Chrispinus J.C. Wasike,

[48] See Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy*, 92–93.

[49] According to historian V. G. Simiyu, the Bukusu people according to their own oral tradition began around Mbayi Silkwa around the fourteenth century. They moved around, settling for a long time in the seventeenth and eighteenth century at Bukusu Hill (and thereby got their name, the Bukusu, which was used when they traded with other Luhya groups at Lake Victoria).

"members of the Luhya community love to call themselves as '*abandu ba mulembe*' (people of peace)," even though he notes that the Luhya terminology was of recent origin (in the 1940s) and the various sub-groups of the Luhya do not always get along peacefully.[50] Wasike notes that Bukusu pride is not based on exclusivity; "as a community the Bukusu proudly refer to themselves as '*siyanja barende*' (those who love strangers)."[51] Wafula Muyila notes that the Bukusu people assimilated with many outsiders due to their hospitality and generosity. This was so well known that Mumia, Chief of the neighboring Wanga sub-nation, said the Bukusu are like the "thighs of the elephant," strong but also warm and generous. But Muyila explains there was also a security agenda in the Bukusu outreach to (and assimilation of) so many neighbors. If there was ever a problem with another community, the Bukusu could count on having some from within their group

Their current homeland is on the Kenyan side of the Uganda-Kenya border. See V.G. Simiyu, "The Emergence of a Sub-nation: A History of Babukusu to 1990," *Transafrican Journal of History* 20(1991): 125–44. Namulundah Florence also provides a history of the Bukusu people. See Namulundah Florence, *From Our Mothers' Hearths: Bukusu Folktales and Proverbs*(Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2005), 18–30.Note: The Bukusu people call themselves the BaBukusu.

[50] Chrispinus J.C. Wasike, "Textualizing Masculinity: Discourses of Power and Gender Relations in Manguliechi's Babukusu After-Burial Oratory Performance (khuswala kumuse)," (PhD dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2013), 28.

[51] Wasike, "Textualizing Masculinity," 172. He cites his source as "Interview with Manguliechi in 4 December 2010."

who could gather information and help them understand the situation.[52]

While I was in Kenya in the 1990s and early 2000s, I had a chance to participate in interviews with Kenyan sages as a participant in a Kenya-based sage philosophy project that was started by H. Odera Oruka. I have documented the history of this project elsewhere.[53] In the Bungoma area of Western Kenya, I was able to interview several sages with the help of Chaungo Barasa, a good friend of Prof. Odera Oruka's whose family came from that area. Barasa had earlier helped Odera Oruka with some of the interviews included in his book, *Sage Philosophy*. Barasa himself was also interviewed for *Sage Philosophy*.[54]

I will focus on three sages that Barasa and I interviewed. The first is Wanyoni Manguliechi, who advocated a philosophy of unity. He explained how politicians in Kenya bring discord and division. He discourages self-seeking behavior and notes that historically white Europeans came to Kenya with a

[52] Wafula Muyila,"Traditional African Communalism and the Neo-Communal Spirit in Africa" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nairobi, 2004), 94–95. Muyila also notes that strict age-set rules ensured that conflict within the age set was minimized. Also, respect based on seniority ensured that intergenerational conflict was minimized. Wafula Muyila, correspondence with the author, September 10, 2019.

[53] Gail Presbey, "Sage Philosophy," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 2014, accessed November 25, 2018, http://www.iep.utm.edu/afr-sage/.

[54] Henry Odera Oruka, ed., *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 1990; Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991). Reference to the 1991 edition,147–156.

motivation of "the stomach" meaning self-gain. Manguliechi counsels against such values, and he recounts several Bukusu proverbs to illustrate his point. Ali Mwitani Masero is a sage who is also a traditional healer and a Muslim Imam. In both theory and practice, he counsels peace and unity. Saulo Namianya describes ethical norms of sharing and details the ritual of brothers sharing meat referring to practices of fair distribution in the family as key sources of conflict resolution.

Chaungo Barasa organized my two interviews with Wanyonyi Manguliechi. Barasa explained to me why Manguliechi was very much the kind of person that Odera Oruka would have liked to include in his study on sages (although as Barasa explained, he was very difficult to meet and so he was not interviewed in time for the earlier sage philosophy project of the 1980s). Barasa said, "Manguliechi will meet you, suppose you are a Luhiya. You tell him you are from Kakamega, maybe from Idakho. He then goes on to tell you, reaching as far back as far as five hundred years ago, about where you originated from. He is very much informed about Luhiya history."[55] As Manguliechi explained to me, it is important for him to know several histories to have a wide selection of choices of lessons to draw from different pasts to shed some light on the problems of the day.

[55] Barasa Chaungo, interviewed by the author, Kakamega, Western Province, Kenya, August 12, 2002, interview in English, tape and transcript in possession of the author. For this interview Luhya is spelled with an 'i'.

To cover Manguliechi, I will also draw upon the study of him by Wasike, which includes an appendix that has Wasike's translations into English of some of Manguliechi's orations. Manguliechi is well known for speaking at funerals (*khuswala kumuse*), where he comforts those who grieve. He is considered to be capable of interceding on behalf of the deceased to ensure they reach the afterlife safely. [56] Manguliechi fulfils three roles: "*omukasa* (elder), *omukayi* (arbitrator/peacemaker) and *omukambisi* (wise counselor)."[57] Funeral orations give Manguliechi an opportunity to reinforce Bukusu traditions and moral values. As Simon Nganga explains, there is a tradition of Public Comforting in Bukusu traditional religion.[58]

Wasike explains that Manguliechi is known as "'*Omukayi*'—the Peacemaker."[59] This "peacemaker" carries authority, as shown by the walking stick which marks the bearer as an arbiter of disputes, and which can also be shaken at persons as a dangerous curse if they do not heed his words.[60] "In his own words, his job entailed the duty of '*khukaya kamaya ne bulomani*,' which means 'arbitrating in fights

[56] Wasike, "Textualizing Masculinity," 82.

[57] Ibid., 195.

[58] Simon Nganga, *The Funeral Performances Among the Bukusu of Kenya: A Contribution to Communicative Genre Analysis* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Münster, 2018), 109–138.

[59] Wasike, "Textualizing Masculinity," 86.

[60] Ibid., 91.

and disagreements.'"[61] I will now explore his role as arbiter and educator, based on interviews Barasa and I had with him in 1995 and 1998 (Manguliechi passed away in 2012).

In an interview I had with Wanyonyi Manguliechi in 1998, he explained to me how he has always encouraged unity (*buambani*) among people and how he tries to decrease enmity. As he explains, he sometimes uses proverbs and stories to make his point. There is a Bukusu story and proverb for almost everything.

> I tell them that unless we unite, we shall be befallen by what befell the wild pig in a sweet-potato garden (*"Kakhakhunyola Kakanyola Embichi Musipwondi"*). Wild pigs went to steal potatoes; unfortunately, a trap had been set for them and one of them was trapped. Because of lack of unity, the rest ran off, abandoning one of their own to the wrath of the potato garden owners who killed it. So if we have no unity, the same can befall us in the face of our enemies.[62]

There is another Bukusu proverb about the need to unite (or else face danger), and there is a story about a man named Mwangale who epitomizes the person that never bothers to

[61] Wasike, "Textualizing Masculinity, 81.He cites his source as "Interview with Manguliechi in 4 July 2008."

[62] Wanyonyi Manguliechi, interviewed by author, Bungoma, Western Province, Kenya, December 29, 1998, translation on site by Chaungo Barasa, translation from tape by Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o.

help others, and had to face danger alone as a result. As Namulundah Florence explains, proverbs and folktales are important: Bukusu folktales convey the importance of social cohesion and harmony. Stories often begin with chaos or adversity and then move on to conflict resolution.[63] Respect is central to avoiding conflict.[64] Namulundah shares a Bukusu proverb that says, "*Chinjekho naberanta*" ("Mockery and conflict go hand in hand.")[65]

Manguliechi went on to explain that the need for unity begins at home, with the different clans within one's own ethnic group (there are several clans within the Luhya, with Bukusus being one of them), but there is also a need for unity with other ethnic groups to avoid the problems that he goes on to elaborate. Referring to the Lumboka-Chatembe War, he noted that Nabongo Mumia of the Wanga Kingdom agreed to fight against the Bukusus, a contributing factor to British conquest of the region.[66] However, out of the defeat of that war, there was nevertheless another example of how people were saved by the value and practice of unity.

> After the Lumboka-Chetambe war, a number of Bukusus were taken as hostages to Elureko, Mumias. Six elders were chosen to go and

[63] Namulundah Florence, *From Our Mother's Hearths* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 2.
[64] Florence, *From Our Mother's Hearths,* 17.
[65] Ibid., 244.
[66] Manguliechi, interviewed by Presbey, 1998.

> negotiate for their release—Nasiuma, Makhaso, Wandabwa, Busolo, Namachanja, and Maelo. However, whereas five of these only indicated their relatives and family as their people, Namachanja declared that all the hostages were his people; he thus secured their release and was made chief of the Bukusu.[67]

Manguliechi also explains that once defeated by the British (Manguliechi calls them the "whites,") the Bukusu were challenged to get along with them, but they made their situation clear: they "told the whites that since the whites had vanquished them, they should rule the Bukusu people humanely and justly in order to have God's blessings."[68] They organized a ritual with traditional meaning to drive the point home. The ritual involves cutting a dog in half, but the Bukusu do not eat dog meat. According to Manguliechi, "The dog is used to demonstrate the seriousness of the commitment to maintaining peace with the conviction that 'if it must take eating dog-meat to maintain peace, we are ready to do so!'"[69]

Manguliechi thinks that politicians are the ones who sow division, and that most decide to enter politics because they are interested in their own self-gain. He calls it concern for

[67] Manguliechi, interviewed by Presbey, 1998.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

"the stomach" and he has counseled members of his community to resist going into politics, because he fears it will change them. As he explains, "According to the Luhya, '*Enda Endeyi*'—the stomach is deep; however much you put in, potatoes, ugali etc, it never gets full."[70] He even outlined other key social evils and why they should be avoided or addressed:

> "*Bubeyi*"—lies; "*Bunywanywa*"—impudence; "*Bueeyi*"—adultery; and "*Bukhupani*" —fighting. All these social evils displease God to the extent that they create conflict—"*bubirani*""— and erode friendship"—"*lisima*".[71]

The above are examples of how Manguliechi tirelessly tried to harmonize the Bukusu community and to avoid internal strife and jealousy.

More examples of Manguliechi's efforts are chronicled by Wasike in his dissertation on Manguliechi. From his fieldwork in late 2007 to 2008, he was able to record six funeral orations of Manguliechi and several interviews. These occasions for oratory gave Manguliechi the chance to tell stories and make his point about Bukusu values and morality. He counseled them not to drink beer and fight others. Doing so would be like two elephants in the forest. The violent one hit and broke

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[70] Manguliechi, interviewed by Presbey, 1998.
[71] Ibid.

its tusk on a tree. This is related to the proverb which says, "the tusk of a too aggressive elephant never grows long."[72]

As Wasike continued to explain, Manguliechi also advocated that the BaBukusu people should unite with all the Luhya tribes. He mentioned that in Bukusu history, there had been a lot of wars "because we had a lot of wealth"—he stipulates that Bukusu wealth was in their livestock (and he humored his audience by calling the different livestock animals by the names of well-known Kenyan banks).[73] His concern regarding divisive politics encouraged him to try to bring together feuding politicians from their area, Michael Wamalwa Kijana (who, as head of the FORD-Kenya political party had been appointed Vice President by Mwai Kibaki) and Minister of Parliament Mukhisa Kituyi. There had been a rivalry between the two men and Manguliechi tried to reconcile them to each other so they could work together to build their party, FORD-Kenya (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya). At the funeral of Wamalwa in 2003, he told the audience, "Recently I had heard that Wamalwa and Mukhisa do not see eye to eye. I tried without success to have them come to see me. I took it upon myself and made sojourn to Nairobi to tell them loud and clear like a record player for them to hear."[74] Addressing the topic of the need

[72] Wasike, "Textualizing Masculinity," 293.

[73] Ibid., 285–86.

[74] Wasike's translation of Manguliechi, in Wasike "Textualizing Masculinity,"197.

for continued unity now that Wamalwa was gone, he used an analogy of hunters: For one to be successful in capturing their prey, they must work together instead of turning their spears against each other. He suggested that for the sake of unity Hon. M.P. Musikari Kombo should take over leadership of FORD-Kenya.[75] Soon afterward, Kombo was elected to the leadership of FORD-Kenya. From Manguliechi's point of view, his forays into politics were always to promote unity.

He counseled people to live in harmony like ants loving one another and walking together. However, a sly person often causes a rift between people by spreading misinformation. He told the story of the "*wanakhamuna*," the sly person (often represented in stories as the hare) who deceives various parties for self-gain. The *wanakhamuna* "will set people against each other, blackmail [people], and then antagonize people."[76] He told a story of how the hare got the leopard to believe his falsities to the point that the leopard lost his wife and the hare gained her. Notably, part of the hare's trick (in addition to outright lying) was that he encouraged the leopard to refuse to greet his in-laws.[77] As Wafula Muyila notes in his study of the Bukusu, greeting

persons is considered essential: it symbolizes the peace and harmony of the greeters and their respective families. For

[75] Wasike, Ibid., 198.
[76] Ibid., 279.
[77] Ibid., 279–280.

these reasons, not to shake hands would be a serious affront.[78] Manguliechi's main point in the sharing of this story seems to be that we should be vigilant and skeptical regarding such sly persons: Don't fall for their verbal traps. Don't follow their advice to behave aloof and suspicious toward our families and even strangers.

Ali Mwitani Masero is another Luhya sage from Western Province. He was born in 1939 and is from the Banyala clan of Kakamega. He moved to Busia in 1983. Masero has often had challenges in reconciling aggrieved parties in his community. He is a healer and a Muslim Imam. In a 1995 interview, he explained to me that group unity is not automatic; it must be worked on patiently. Sometimes the disputes are within the same family. He recounted of how one family had resorted to calling each other names and blaming each other in a dispute (involving a son's needing funds to be married and whether he could sell family land for that purpose). Even traditional healers were at odds with each other and he was called in for negotiations. In this variety of scenarios, his success at resolving the issue is due to his ability to prod the participants in the quarrel to stop avoiding the key issues and get to the heart of their dispute. If he thinks one party is not thinking constructively about an issue, he advises them to go home and think over the issue and come back later. When a dispute is finally resolved, he continues to

[78] Muyila, "Traditional African Communalism," 81.

visit the parties to ensure a follow-up to see that the agreed upon resolution is being carried out. He thinks most of the problems he encounters in his community are due to jealousy, rashness, or the spreading of lies and gossip. The best antidote for jealousy is to exercise fairness, whether it is tension in the family (between brothers, or co-wives) or between communities (such as land disputes between the Luhya and Teso).[79]

Regarding rashness, he explains that he often plays the role of cooling people's tempers so that they can attend to the details of their dispute, see their own group's errors, and reach a compromise. For example, Masero had to step in for the Bakolwe and Babenge clans' land dispute to help decrease the tension before both parties could resolve their dispute through dialogue. There is even a Bukusu proverb that is intended to counsel patience: "*Nijiyukhane kaya ameno*—"The quick and greedy eater burnt his teeth."[80] From Masero's perspective, he thought that the Bakolwe and Babenge clan dispute began as a disagreement between two individuals and worsened with members of their respective communities joining in. These clan members had a tendency to uncritically support the person from their own ethnic group without

[79] Ali Mwitani Masero, interviewed by author with Chaungo Barasa, Kimilili, Western Province, Oct. 6, 1995,translation from tape by Shadrack Wanjala Nasong'o.

[80] Ibid. Thank you to Wafula Muyila for help with the Bukusu language and for help with translating and understanding Bukusu proverbs.

looking into the fine details and merits of the case. A more thorough inquiry brought out subtleties of the situation and a focus on fairness came up with a resolution that both sides could agree upon.

Masero explains that he also draws upon historical precedents when convincing his disputants that their forefathers had "hearts of humility and perseverance"; had they not, the Bukusu community could not survive to this day. He also draws on stories of people who chose wrong methods of addressing their wrongs in the past to caution aggrieved parties that their planned expression of their grievance may make matters worse. Masero explains that he tries to "emphasize the idea that acquisition of property through force ended with the end of inter-tribal and inter-clan warfare, cooperation and collaboration is now the right path to prosperity."[81] Masero himself wants inter-tribal disputes to end and is in favor of inter-tribal marriages. He has helped orphans from different ethnic communities as well. As he explains, "We may retain our individual community identities but remain united in such a way that we are free to interact with others socially, economically, and politically."[82]

I want to comment at this point that examples like Masero's show that we should not err in presuming that rural areas with ethnic enclaves are peaceful and unified places. In

[81] Masero, interviewed by author with Barasa, 1995.
[82] Ibid.

each community, there is strife at multiple levels, from interpersonal to interfamilial to ethnic and regional conflicts. But there are busy mediators addressing instances of disunity at all levels. Masero's approach focuses on third party intervention. Usually, the disputants are too upset with each other, creating a need for someone like Masero to intervene and talk to both parties. Masero himself explains this need:

> It is a question of individuals not being able to see the faults at their own back hence tending to think that whatever they do is always right. It takes a third party to point out faults/mistakes in our convictions. If it is a fight between two brothers a resolution may be arrived at by bringing them together to a negotiating table and involving other brothers or elders in the community. It should not be seen as though the outside is intervening alone single handedly.[83]

But in the case of the Yanesha and other Amerindian people, their stories involve disputants directly reaching out to each other and devising ways to get along with each other. There is less of the intransigent parties needing a third party as intermediary.

Masero admires people who are catalysts of communities working together, saving together, and bettering themselves through collective efforts. However, he sometimes runs into

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[83] Masero, interviewed by author with Barasa, 1995.

individuals who do not appreciate collective endeavors and therefore do not participate in them as well. He has strong opinions about such persons.

> Those in the community who are unwilling to work together with others to promote collective community interests are bad people who should be castigated and even banished from the community! They should be reported to the government to be known as people who are unwilling to support collective endeavors for community development. However, you cannot use force to change such people. What you do is demonstrate to them by example that working in tandem with others is good for instance by coming in to assist him in whatever project he is undertaking. In this way, he will see the sense in collective efforts and he will be won over.[84]

An interview with Masero from the 1980s is included in Odera Oruka's *Sage Philosophy*. There we can see that Masero engages in philosophy differently from what his interlocutor expected. When he was asked what is good for humans, he answered *eloba* (or *liloba*) meaning soil. The soil is the source of our food and the foundation for our houses. When he was asked whether wisdom or happiness (*busangasfu*) is the better good for humans, he disagreed. "You cannot seek

[84] Masero, interviewed by author with Barasa, 1995.

wisdom. Wisdom is just what you cultivate in the world as you live . . ."[85] He clarified that wisdom could not be learned in school, but is the result of a person learning lessons from life through cultivating their interior wisdom. Regarding happiness, Masero challenged the idea that it could be "found" (in a certain place). He talked about the ephemerality of states of happiness that are propped up or punctured by praise and blame. He then stated that individual happiness did not make sense. "For only a people—a society—can be happy; when all its individuals live together in harmony and in unity."[86]

Interestingly enough, Odera Oruka's *Sage Philosophy* also contains an interview with Simiyu Chaungo—born in 1914 and is a Luhya of the Tura sub-tribe. He was also asked the same questions as Masero. When asked what is the highest good for humans, he said *liloba* (land or soil) for similar reasons as Masero. When he was asked if happiness were the highest good for man, the sage accepted that happiness was good but refused to believe that it was the highest good. Oruka's book further explains, "The sage appeared very reluctant to discuss this issue further . . . to him it sounded naïve to suggest happiness as the most good for man."[87] Regarding wisdom, Simiyu Chaungo clarified that while soil or land is the highest material good, wisdom (*makesi*) was the

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[85] Masero quoted in Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy*, 96.
[86] Ibid., 96–97.
[87] Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy*, 114.

highest mental good; it was "wealth of the mind."[88] When asked for his one word for wisdom to share with humanity, the sage said: "Mirembe. Do not fight. Find peace and live in it. Peace. Peace is good soil for man to grow."[89]

One of the sages I interviewed near Bungoma was Saolo Namianya. He was born in 1913 and a member of the Omulunda clan of the Bukusu. Since he was a teenager, he says that his peers turned to him to resolve disputes. He has been doing this since then. He was quite advanced in years when I interviewed him in 1998. He explains that his counseling abilities are a gift from God. He can come to a helpful decision regarding people's troubles if his head and heart are in harmony. He listens and seeks the truth. He does not accept gifts from either side in a dispute. He says that what causes most strife in the world is people's speech. "I therefore see my role as facilitating the leveling of tongues among people so as to eliminate misunderstanding and the conflicts that go with it. Once the tongues are leveled, they live in harmony and peace with each other, as they are now more amenable to listen to peace counseling."[90]

He notes that there was once a greedy person named Musima who had a habit of stealing. A *baraza* or open air

[88] Odera Oruka, *Sage Philosophy*, 117.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Saulo Namianya Manyonge, interviewed by author, Bungoma area, December 27, 1998, translation on site by Chaungo Barasa, translation from tape by Shadrack Wanjola Nasong'o.

meeting was held; and Namianya counseled the man to give up his greedy ways. He explained that a greedy person is like a hyena in a flock of sheep. Even if they have already eaten some sheep they always want to eat another one. Unfortunately for Musima, he did not take heed of the warning. He stole and butchered someone's cow. Angry farmers then beat him to death. After that, cases of "immense greediness and blatant theft" have become rare. [91] He described traditions that involved ways to get a thief to confess called "Akhulia Silulu." This was a ceremony that was held in a variety of ways based on the person's possible charge, but it always involved a Murembe tree. Persons who were suspected of foul play were asked to tap the Murembe tree and say that if they were the guilty party, "let evil befall me."[92] According to Namianya, engaging in this sort of trial was not a case of using medicine or witchcraft. As he explained, it is similar to one who swears in public; if one is the culprit, one will die of a guilty conscience. But Namianya thinks there are better ways to find out if a person is harming the community. Friendly drinking will more likely get a person to admit to their actions and is preferable to frightening them.

Namianya was involved in a struggle that had enveloped many families in his area. A large sugar company called Bookers (Mumias Sugar Company) had signed contracts with

[91] Manyonge, interviewed by author, 1998.
[92] Ibid.

many farmers in the area to grow sugar on their land. Unfortunately, the company was very slow in harvesting the cane and provided late payments. Additionally, they were not very transparent with their practices. They would not tell families the tonnage of the sugar crop harvested from their land and charged many deductions. Namianya thought that the sugar company presumed that farmers were ignorant and powerless. He has tried to go to Parliament and meet with people about what he sees as corruption, but he has not yet had any victories. His big concern was that families like his own needed money so they could buy food and pay for their children's education. It seems that when it comes to battling large corporations, only some sages with insights on fairness can get the parties to agree to act fairly.[93]

While there were many practices of witchcraft in Namianya's area, he believes that people only resorted to witchcraft if they knew in some sense that their cause was not just but still wanted a certain outcome for selfish reasons. So, when people come to him he assures them that he is not going to use any witchcraft or special powers. "In assisting people to resolve their problems, I do so without using any forms of medicine or witchcraft because using such would be destructive not helpful. When people resort to you for assistance, you are the medicine, and you should not

[93] Manyonge, interviewed by author, 1998.

introduce any other forms of medicine."[94] One could say that Namianya (and the other Bukusu sages) engages in a form of philosophical counseling; quite a few sages I interviewed see themselves as providing rational and commonsense advice and perspectives to persons who might otherwise, out of desperation, turn to medicine or witchcraft.[95]

Conclusion

There are some interesting comparisons and contrasts when looking at the wisdom regarding conflict resolution among the Amazonian peoples and the Bukusu and other Luhya sages. As Mall cautions us, in any group (the Amazonians or Luhyas, for example) there are diverse views; and we shouldn't reduce their voices to unity. I hope that this paper has captured some of the diverse philosophical opinions and insights of these two communities.

What is the connection between being a priest or spiritual figure and a sage with philosophical insights on how to live life best? As Namianya said, he does not engage in any witchcraft or use any medicine. He only counsels people to watch what they say—be truthful but not harsh—and develop fair practices and good relations. Manguliechi also

[94] Manyonge, interviewed by author, 1998.

[95] I develop this theme in another paper, see Gail Presbey, "Sage Philosophy and Critical Thinking: Creatively Coping with Negative Emotions," *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* 2, no.1 (Spring 2004):1–20, http://npcassoc.org/journal/table-of-contents/vol-2-no-1.

has a similar message. But Manguliechi, as a *Khuswala Kumuse* practitioner (one who speaks at funerals), has an added spiritual role as the one who guides the spirit of the departed to successfully join the ancestors. He also educates the public on death and consoles the family experiencing the loss. Ali Mwitani Masero is also a healer. In our interviews, he did not dive into more detail as to how he healed people. He did, however, describe to us a time of trial early on in his life when he discerned his calling to healing.[96] I mention or recap all of this because in the case of the Native Amazonians, their attempts at friendships across divides involve many spiritual ideas and practices. While I could not go into detail regarding the Yanesha and the different roles for their shamans in contrast to the roles for the *cornesha* or priests, it does seem that the Bukusu sages have a role closer to the priests, insofar as both are looked up to as counselors and as those who practice what they preach with a gentleness and generosity.

In the case of both communities, practitioners of peace must engage in bravery to reach out to others and address them with a message of peaceful relations. In the Bukusu example, these three men are specialists who are sought after by their peers for their advice and help. The Native Amazonian examples have protagonists who chart their courses on their own. They dare to reach across divides on

[96] However, Odera Oruka's *Sage Philosophy* does go into some detail regarding that story. See page 92.

their own. They create community through their own acts of generosity and trustworthiness. While for the Yanesha, they do (or did, up to the 1950s) have a priestly practice of the cornesha. These cornesha/priests live out the idea of selfless generosity and coordinate monthly festivals. The cornesha did not have the same social role as the Bukusu sages. But according to Santos-Granero, the community members turn to elderly men of good standing in the absence of cornesha. The video documentaries (created by Espiritu Bautista and Richard Chase Smith) of Yanesha people conveying their stories and insights show both women and men as those who remember and cherish the insights of their ancestors.[97]

This leads to an interesting question, whether every society has sages or not. Surely both of these communities have philosophies. It is also interesting to note the role of women. In the case of the myth of Sanrronesha', it is a woman who founds society by hosting the first social event. Such constructions are rare in the European philosophies usually taught in philosophy classes. According to Florence, such narratives are also rare among Bukusu folktales with the folktales' tendency to emphasize "men as the foundation of communities" while the absence of males or acting against male edicts brings chaos.[98] This is just one of many reasons

[97] See Espiritu Bautista and Richard Chase Smith, "Yompor Santo'" and other documentaries at http://www.ethnovisions.net/EV/Yompor_Santo.html.

[98] Florence, *From Our Mother's Hearths,* 16.

that a fruitful intercultural approach to philosophical studies on these topics can help us gain insight on the perennial philosophical problem of engaging with others in difficult conditions—that is, more insight than a more narrowly construed Eurocentric approach. This paper is only the tip of the iceberg of a large topic of global approaches to conflict, but I hope that it is a start.

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