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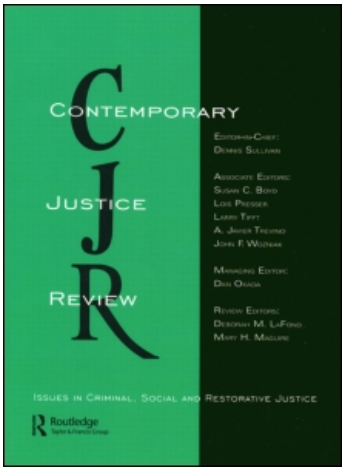

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The Shanti Sena 'peace center' and the non-policing of an anarchist temporary autonomous zone: Rainbow Family peacekeeping strategies

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This article utilizes ethnographic methods and government documents to examine the self-policing and peacekeeping strategies of the Rainbow Family, a non-violent acephalous intentional community that holds massive weeklong gatherings around the globe. It is a case study that examines the efficacy of these methods, comparing them to those traditional police agencies employ under similar conditions. It contextualizes these strategies by examining other utopian and anarchist communities and movements such as Critical Mass bike rides. This study demonstrates how smiling, chanting, listening, social pressure, and social capital all play into forming a more effective and less violent approach toward peacekeeping.

Keywords: Rainbow Family; peacekeeping; self-policing; Shanti Sena; alternative policing

Introduction

This article examines the self-policing and peacekeeping strategies that the Rainbow Family of Living Light employs at its annual weeklong Gatherings of up to 30,000 people. Rather than maintaining selective membership or admittance rules that would make these Gatherings violence-free, the Family instead maintains an open-admissions policy and, as part of its healing mission, has consciously reached out to violent and disruptive people. Hence, its Gatherings are not simply free of violence but actively apply non-violent conflict resolution strategies to confront and harmonize violent behavior. In this way, the Gatherings are actively non-violent rather than passively non-violent. Rainbow Family members who confront violence become what the Family terms, 'Shanti Sena.' Their tactics have proven, over the Family's 38-year history, to be more effective than traditional police tactics in defusing violent situations and gaining compliance with group norms and values. This article examines the efficacy of Shanti Sena tactics and related Rainbow Family survival strategies, while comparing them to the less effective compliance tactics that traditional police agencies employ at and near Rainbow Gatherings.

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Rainbow Family background

Since 1972, the Rainbow Family of Living Light, an acephalous nonhierarchical nomadic society, has been holding large temporary gatherings in remote forests around the world to pray for world peace and to create a model of a functioning utopian society. Their goal is to reform the mainstream society that birthed them, which they call 'Babylon.[1]' They also term their Gatherings as 'healing,' aiming to provide a healthy supportive atmosphere for all who come. What began as an American movement morphed into a global phenomenon in the 1980s with Rainbow Gatherings now on every continent except Antarctica. The Gatherings form what anarchist theorist Hakim Bey terms a temporary autonomous zone, or TAZ (Bey, 1991, pp. 100–101), liberating time rather than a permanent space. For the duration of the Gathering,[2] the Rainbows seek to celebrate an autonomous culture independent of Babylon. During that liberated time, their utopian experiment plays out.

The Rainbows see their gatherings of up to 30,000 people, led by an all-inclusive consensus council, as small-scale actualizations of a utopian vision encompassing nonviolence, egalitarianism, sustainability, and an anarchist vision of a full participation democracy. While Rainbows grapple with issues such as what actually constitutes environmental sustainability and what role governing councils should play at Gatherings, they have, since their inception, always been united behind a defining ethos of nonviolence. Today's international Rainbow Family has a four-decade-long history as a 'peaceable people' (cf. Amster, 2003, p. 17; Dentan, 1992, 1994; Niman, 1991, 1997; Solnit, 2009, pp. 295–299).

From their onset, Rainbow Family Councils reaffirmed the Family's mission to not only practice nonviolence but also actively promote such nonviolence in the larger world by establishing the Gatherings as models of peaceful coexistence, successfully employing nonviolent conflict resolution strategies when engaging violence and potentially violent situations. Rainbows view 'Babylonian' policing models as inherently violent, either directly employing violence or threatening violence. Hence, in order to keep the Gatherings nonviolent, Rainbows avoid calling in traditional armed police agencies, even when confronting violent provocations.

Field testing non-violence in an all-inclusive society

The Rainbow Family's commitment to nonviolence and the avoidance of requesting aid from violent police agencies are not unique. What sets the Family apart, however, from most other nonviolent utopian groups is their dual commitments to nonviolence and open membership. To the Rainbows, anyone who shows up at a Gathering is a Family member. Since the Family is a subculture born of Babylon, engulfed in Babylon, and with open fluid borders between its Gatherings and Babylon, Rainbows are quick to remind visitors that what is 'out there' in Babylon is also 'in here' at the Gatherings. Over the years, rapists, child predators, muggers, thieves, and violent drunks have visited Rainbow Gatherings. In describing these visitors, I'm careful not to use terms like 'unwelcome guests,' because Rainbow tradition welcomes everyone to the Gatherings, especially those who clearly need to be healed. In this respect, the Family is following anarcho-pacifist ideals outlined in 1877 by Peter Kropotkin (2002[1877]), who argued that membership in a society that offers a simple and friendly helping hand is far more effective than a prison or mental institution in deterring or reversing anti-social behavior, which he said stemmed from societal alienation. He writes:

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> Today we live too isolated. Private property has led us to an egotistic individualism in all our mutual relations. We know one another only slightly; our points of contact are too rare. But we have seen in history examples of a communal life which is more intimately bound together … By force of circumstances they must aid one another materially and morally. (Kropotkin, 2002[1877], p. 233)

Kropotkin argued that modern industrial society was alienating people from that 'original community' and causing violent anti-social behaviors. He saw a Rainbow Family-like structure as the antidote:

> A new family, based on community of aspirations will take its [the original community's] place. In this family people will be obliged to know one another, to aid one another and to lean on one another for moral support on every occasion. And this mutual prop will prevent the great number of anti-social acts which we see today. (Kropotkin, 2002[1877], pp. 233–234)

Like the nineteenth-century Belgian peasant village of Gheel,[3] cited by Kropotkin for admonishing society to 'Send us your insane. We will give them absolute freedom,' (Kropotkin, 2002[1877], p. 234) the Rainbows have likewise opened their community to people who they see as 'needing healing.' Rainbows argue that this modern-day emulation of Gheel sets the family apart from Babylonian authorities who confront violence with more of the same violence, feeding a hopeless cycle. Like the residents of Gheel, Rainbows confront violence with peace and love, difficult as that sometimes may be. Twenty years ago, Joseph Schwartzbaum, an elderly Jewish concentration camp survivor who regularly attended Gatherings, explained to me:

> If you fight evil with evil, you are acting evil. If you fight, kill the killer, kill, kill, it's a constant killing so we are caught in a process of killing. So violence can never bring peace, hatred can never bring love, peace can bring peace. (Niman, 1997, p. 115)

The Rainbow Family's open-admissions policies have given the Family something that, for a nonviolent culture, is an embarrassing anomaly – a violent ghetto. 'Wet' and often violent drunks attend Gatherings, but usually confine themselves to the Family's 'A-Camp' (the A is for alcohol), a fixture unique to US Gatherings. A-Camp, which is always located at the perimeter of the Gathering, serves as the last stop in Babylon before entering the nonviolent Rainbow world. For many Rainbows, the disruptive antics at A-Camp (cf. Grant, 2003, pp. 203–231) are too much to bear, hence they stopped attending Gatherings. Other Rainbows, however, argue that it is the presence of A-Camp that makes the Gatherings truly nonviolent. The logic goes like this: While other historic utopias have been nonviolent, the existence of the violent A-Camp makes the Rainbows unique among historic utopias, giving them the opportunity to not just preach nonviolence to a nonviolent population, but to actively confront violence. Hence, in the face of real-time violence, Rainbows have the opportunity to actualize their rhetorical commitment to nonviolence and to demonstrate the real-world practicality of nonviolent conflict resolution strategies (cf. Niman, 1997, pp. 126–129; Niman, 2011, Epilogue Part 1).

Over the decades, A-Camp has served not only as a field test for nonviolence but has also served the Family's healing mission, acting as a conduit to recruit violent self-destructive alcoholics into the Family. While the Family's overall success rate in helping A-Campers overcome their addictions is low, A-Camp has been a conduit for some alcoholics to overcome their addictions and move into the Gathering proper. Those who

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have made the transition often prove to be among the Family's most energetic and committed volunteers. To Rainbows, who call the Gathering, 'home,' being at A-Camp is 'almost home.' They see the fact that A-Campers travel great distances to be nearly home as hopeful and indicative of a desire for healing. A-Camp represents the type of violent group that peaceful movements and communities in the USA have traditionally failed to effectively reach out to. According to peace studies anthropologist Robert Knox Dentan, 'None of these peace groups has recruited successfully among … the people whose lives are most painfully disrupted by violence.' Hence, he explains, 'Pacifist ideals that apply only to those already fairly safe from violence are not going to transform society' (1994, p. 95). The Rainbows have maintained an open gateway between A-Camp and the peaceful nurturing Gatherings. Those who have successfully transcended that boundary have found something akin to the healing community that Kropotkin describes and, hence, experienced a life-changing transformation.

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Shanti Sena: participatory policing

While Kropotkin envisioned an egalitarian utopia where 'anti-social acts need not be feared in a society of equals,' he admitted that there will be 'those individuals with evil tendencies whom existing society will pass on to us …' His ideal community, he believed, would prevent such people from exercising these tendencies 'quite efficiently by the solidarity of all members of the community against such aggressors' (2002[1877], p. 235). This ideal, in essence, is the blueprint for what Rainbows call, Shanti Sena, from the Sanskrit phrase that translates roughly as 'peace center.' Unlike with a traditional police force, you do not *call* the Shanti Sena when you see a problem, you *become* the Shanti Sena. In theory, *all* Rainbows are Shanti Sena reserves waiting to self-activate, and, hence, should be ready to intercede as needed, eliminating the need for an organized security force.

Rainbow-style voluntary policing is not uncommon among groups forming temporary autonomous zones. Critical Mass urban bicycle rides, which create mobile TAZs,[4] have their own version of Shanti Sena, which they call, 'corkers.' Corkers are ride participants who 'leave the flow of the ride for a while' and stop, essentially acting as a traffic cop, 'in calm posture, a few feet from the front of stopped cars which would otherwise enter an intersection in use by Critical Mass' (Carlsson, 2002, p. 232; McClusky, 2003, 2004). Like Shanti Sena, ordinary people emerge from the general population as corkers when they see a need for a police-like task, in this case, an 'uncorked' intersection that presents the threat of a car–bike collision. Unlike traditional police, however, their authority stems not from a badge, but from 'smiles and eye contact' made with motorists (McClusky, 2003, 2004).

Shanti Sena, too, use smiles and eye contact, as well as friendly touch, when appropriate. When such tools alone cannot defuse a potentially violent situation, Shanti Sena often employ an 'Om circle,'[5] which consists of a circle of peacekeepers holding hands and chanting the harmonic syllable 'Ommmmmm.'[6] Rainbows use the non-dictionary verb 'Omming' to describe the practice of forming Om circles around agitated or threatening people. Recognizing an Om circle as non-threatening and harmonizing, however, is often a learned cultural trait. Those unfamiliar with the practice can see the circle as threatening – especially if they do not realize that they can walk right through and beyond it. And there is an argument among Rainbows that it can be coercive, if not applied gently. Even so, Rainbows consider the circles as 'nonviolent,' since, they explain, the key to an effective Om circle is love. Showing

love, according to Rainbow tradition, is the best way to diffuse violent situations. Once the circle soothes a tense situation, the remaining conflict can be mediated with an impromptu council, where social pressure either shames belligerent parties into compromise or where balance can be restored to human relationships through mutual listening and sharing. Such circles follow an ancient social script common among nonhierarchical tribal groups (cf. Dentan, 2008, pp. 144–145; Pepinsky, 2000, pp. 177–178). These Shanti Sena Councils, like Om circles, must be loving, since the idea behind them is to nurture upset people with the hope that they will quickly see the futility of their anger, rather than see the council or circle as something to escape or rebel against. This love patrol is the antithesis of the Babylonian norm of an armed squadron of police or a court with the authority to jail or kill its charges.

Shanti Sena tactics work, in large part, because the Shanti Sena is not an alien occupation force, like suburb-dwelling police officers patrolling an inner-city community. Shanti Sena are first and foremost Rainbow Family members, usually driven by that kinship identification to volunteer for Shanti Sena duty. They are acquainted with and often recognized by members of their own Rainbow community. Such mutual familiarity of peacekeepers with their community, and of community members with each other, is often at the core of crime prevention and community policing strategies. Shanti Sena understand Rainbow Family values, needs, and communication idiosyncrasies and, hence, are better equipped than a non-Rainbow police force to use social pressure to gain compliance to their requests – which are usually reasonable and in accord with Rainbow Family values.

A key element in Rainbow peacekeeping strategies rests with the rules or norms the Shanti Sena seek to enforce. Put simply, they are minimally intrusive and reasonable – simple things like do not engage in commerce at the Gathering, do not drink alcohol, do not steal and do not fight. More important than the rules themselves is how they are adopted. In accordance with the anarchist principles that govern Gatherings, every Rainbow has an equal say in creating, defining and maintaining group norms and values. These are not laws imposed by a distant government but instead are a set of norms over which Gathering participants feel a sense of ownership and with the enforcement of which they have an inclination to cooperate. Hence, individuals have 'a deeper sense of the meaning and purpose' of the rules:

> The benefits of conceiving the social contract as an organic, ongoing agreement derived through direct participation and consensus decision making are manifold, not the least of which is to encourage an environment in which cooperation and not competition becomes the predominant aim of both the group and its individual constituents. (Amster, 2003, p. 19)

By enforcing a set of shared values crafted and adopted by popular consensus, Shanti Sena avoid the alienation and conflict associated with enforcing edicts that are at odds with community values. In the USA, such conflicts have historically poisoned community–police relations (Manning, 1988).

While Shanti Sena non-violence is tactically effective, the reasons for Shanti Sena adherence to non-violence are deeply rooted in Rainbow values. Any Rainbow Family sanctioning of violence would undermine their core commitment to promoting nonviolence. This absolute commitment to nonviolence runs contrary to the norm for policing in 'Babylon,' where, 'the sanctioning of violence in America grows from the mandate of the police to control social order at whatever cost' (Manning, 1980, p. 136). When police tactically surrender to violence, they legitimate violence and legitimate

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a society that accepts violence. Shanti Sena, in their 38-year adherence to tactical nonviolence, have avoided this slippery slope, allowing the Family to maintain a nonviolent ethos that is central to their communal identity.

Conflict with traditional police: a case study

While the Rainbow model of police-less policing has a strong track record for efficacy, it still baffles and frightens bureaucrats. For Babylonian police, the absence of traditionally recognizable law enforcement authorities, in and of itself, presents a threat to their notion of order. Governments apparently construe the nonviolent acephalous Gatherings as a great enough challenge to the legitimacy of rule by force, as to constitute a 'violent' attack that requires violent repression. This pattern is cross-culturally common (cf. Edo, Williams-Hunt, & Dentan, 2009). Apparently, just the existence of a Rainbow Gathering TAZ poses an existential threat to government control. A population's acquiescence to authority depends on its acceptance of the state's claim that only its monopoly of force can protect people from each other and guarantee their welfare. A peaceful TAZ undermines that claim while confronting law enforcement agencies with a vision of their own obsolescence. Without an authority structure they can recognize, governments tend to construe all such TAZs as violent (cf. Solnit, 2009). This violence is a 'factoid' in the original sense of the word: something which should be true if a cherished theory is correct and which therefore, adherents of that theory believe to be true, whatever the evidence (Niman, 2011, Epilogue 2).[7]

Today's US National Rainbow Gatherings draw a heavily armed paramilitary federal police force, arguably playing an unnecessary role, at a cost to taxpayers of, according to former US Forest Service Director of Law Enforcement John Twiss, approximately one million dollars per annual Gathering (Associated Press, 2008). Since late 1997, these expenditures fall under the province of a bureaucratic construct the Forest Service calls 'The National Incident Management Team' or 'NIMT' (NIMT, 2008, p. 4). The NIMT is based on the Forest Service Incident Command Team model, usually deployed in response to natural disasters such as forest fires, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions. While their activities are mainly confined to the Gathering perimeter, where they establish vehicle inspection checkpoints, they also stage occasional incursions into the Gathering interior, usually looking for marijuana use or public nudity.[8] A 2008 American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) investigation into US Forest Service treatment of the Rainbow Family at the 2008 National Gathering in Wyoming documented systematic abuses of the Rainbows not only at that Gathering, but determined that 'This type of harassment and general overzealous enforcement appear to have been the pattern in the USFS relationship with the Rainbow Family' (ACLU, 2008, p. 3).

The ACLU investigation stems from a 3 July 2008 NIMT assault on Kiddie Village, the Rainbow Family camp and kitchen for families with children – essentially the Family's day care center. Law enforcement officers (LEOs), in a 'speed-walking' pursuit of a person they suspected of sharing marijuana, followed their suspect into and subsequently shot up Kiddie Village with irritant-filled projectiles they identified as 'pepper balls.' The official USFS story, echoed nearly verbatim by the Associated Press (Neary, 2008), begins, 'About 400 members of the Rainbow Family threw rocks and sticks at ten federal officers on Thursday night as they tried to arrest one member of the group at its annual gathering in western Wyoming, the US Forest Service

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reported.' The article explains that the incident began when LEOs 'apprehended one person described as being uncooperative.' The arresting officers were then surrounded by a 'mob' of 'about 400 Rainbows' who 'began to advance, throwing sticks and rocks at the officers,' forcing the officers to employ 'crowd control tactics.'

Statements collected in a subsequent Department of Agriculture Office of Inspector General (OIG) 'Use of Force' investigation (OIG, 2009) provide more detail. One testimony begins with a '5–10 minute fast walking pursuit' of a man suspected 'of having marijuana.' This pursuit led to Kiddie Village, where the officer testified that he saw a woman 'move quickly past his security position' and interfere with the pursuit and arrest of the suspected marijuana smoker. Officers arrested the woman and were then reportedly surrounded by obscenity-shouting Rainbows. The LEOs drew their Tasers and 'aimed them at the ground.' The 'mob' reportedly advanced on the officers, causing them to discharge pepper ball weapons into the ground. 'Riotous' Rainbows supposedly pursued the LEOs and their prisoners through the woods for 30 minutes, pelting the officers with rocks. According to this testimony, Rainbows were 'running ahead through the forest, clearly in an attempt to outflank' officers in 'an aggressive action' (OIG, 2009, pp. 7–11).

Another officer testified that he 'deployed multiple pepper ball rounds to the chest and legs of subjects who were interfering or were assaultive, over the next 15–20 minutes,' adding 'These individuals in the riotous crowd displayed an advancing aggressive fighting stance, clenched fists, were tossing rocks, and made threatening statements to the officers …' A third officer testified to having drawn her Taser and pointed it at an individual who 'advanced' toward her (OIG, 2009, p. 11). A fourth LEO testified to shooting Rainbows 'who were not complying with the orders to get off the trail.' He 'only targeted non-compliant subjects and ensured he had a clear shot at his target prior to firing' (OIG, 2009, p. 12). Despite multiple LEO reports of Rainbows assaulting officers with sticks and stones during their half-mile 15–20 minute hike to exit the Gathering, no officers were injured (NIMT, 2008, p. 33).

The ACLU (2008, p. 1) interviewed veteran and 'casual' or 'first time' Gathering attendees, and 'Wyoming Residents that just wanted to see "what was going on."' Their 'reporters' included 'doctors, lawyers, National Guard members, a nurse, and a retired local carpenter.' The investigators also studied videos that Rainbow Family members shot using cell phones and small digital cameras, comparing video evidence to first-hand reports. They concluded that problems commenced with the arrest of a woman, who, as armed officers entered Kiddie Village, 'went up to one of the officers and asked a question.' The ACLU report states that 'there is no indication of what was said' in this exchange. 'This woman was then thrown to the ground, handcuffed and surrounded by several officers.' (p. 3) The ACLU concludes that 'at no time was it apparent that there were 400 individuals in the area' and 'at no time are there any rocks or sticks seen [by witnesses or on video] being thrown at the officers,' though 'one reporter states he may have seen 'one stick' thrown' (ACLU, 2008, p. 3).

Sequenced together, the LEO statements cited by the OIG investigation describe a chaotic police action with officers shouting contradictory commands, spraying aerosolized irritants and shooting people who they encountered on the trail as they exited the Gathering. As people moving down the trail in the opposite direction came close to this mobile melee, LEOs threatened to shoot them for approaching on the trail, shot them for remaining on the trail or identified them as a threat for leaving the trail and either 'running' through the forest in an 'aggressive' manner or moving through the woods in a 'stealthy' manner (OIG, 2009, pp. 10–12).[9] These confused officers

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escalated a routine marijuana arrest into an event where they caused the traumatization of innocent victims through their seemingly arbitrary use of weapons fire (cf. Kalafer, 2009). By contrast, the Rainbow Family Shanti Sena who responded to this incident appeared far better coordinated. They quickly formed a cordon separating the violent federal officers from the people in Kiddie Village and convinced them to clear a path for the officers to exit, while persuading young Rainbows to exercise restraint and not fight back against the LEOs. Some Shanti Sena peacekeepers performed this duty while federal LEOs shot them repeatedly in the back with pepper balls. A subsequently released internal Forest Service report indicates that officers were ready to employ 'deadly force' against Rainbows in Kiddie Village (NIMT, 2008, p. 11). Against this backdrop, the Rainbow Family's spontaneous Shanti Sena peacekeeping action may very well have saved lives on 3 July 2008.

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Seasoned for violence

Relying on the same evidence, the ACLU investigation and the subsequent OIG investigation issued five months later appear at first glance to reach opposite conclusions. The ACLU condemned the Forest Service officers for abusing the Rainbows, while the government's internal OIG report exonerated their actions. At second glance, however, both reports are actually in line with each other, with the OIG report concluding, 'Investigation determined that actions taken by the FS LEOs, including their use of non-lethal force against the crowd, followed FS procedures, and were consistent with their training and FS policy' (OIG, 2009, p. 4). This is the problem (Niman, 2011, Epilogue Part 2).

Federal law enforcement agencies trained officers on duty at the Wyoming Gathering in a full complement of violent compliance techniques, including 'Striking and Close Quarter Defensive Tactics, Pressure Points, Weapon Retention, Takedowns, Ground Defense, Arrest Techniques, Baton Control Techniques, Edged Weapon Awareness, Oleoresin Capsicum Spray [and] Use of Force' (FLETC, 2009). The LEOs, however, appeared to lack training in nonviolent compliance techniques such as those the Shanti Sena applied to better effect during the event. There is also no evidence that the LEOs received any training in mediation or communication.

'The primary [Forest Service] objective for the 2008 National Rainbow Gathering was to provide a safe environment for officers and the participants, as well as, minimizing the environmental impacts from the event' (NIMT, 2008, p. 10). The Forest Service, in the wake of the Kiddie Village incident, removed all uniformed personnel from the Gathering, keeping them away for the next two days. Their absence successfully achieved their primary objective, articulated above, of making the Gathering safer for Rainbows and for themselves. This is evidenced by years of data showing that Rainbows have historically been abused primarily by LEOs (cf. Niman, 1997), and by LEO testimonies to the OIG documenting that they feel threatened and stressed while at the Gatherings. Witnesses to the Kiddie Village incident support this last fact, claiming to have seen terror in the eyes of the LEOs. Video evidence of the event also documents the fear level among officers. A review of internal government documents (Bridger Teton National Forest, 2008; NIMT, 2008, p. 11; Twiss, 2008; US Marshals Service, 2009, p. 3) indicates that both their training and their communication from superiors contained misleading information to induce fear of the Rainbows, despite their peaceful history and the centrality of nonviolence in their cultural identity (Amster, 2003, p. 17; Dentan, 1992, 1994; Niman, 1991, 1997; Solnit 2009, pp. 295–299).

This inordinate threat perception wears on the nerves of LEOs who work long shifts patrolling the culturally unfamiliar Gatherings.

Federal LEOs are often confused by nonviolent Rainbow Family responses to their heavy-handed tactics. In Babylon, police officers often disperse crowds by arresting or applying violence to random individuals, causing their cohort to scatter. While this tactic might prove effective with a riotous spring break crowd or after a sporting event, it has the opposite effect on Rainbows. Attack one, and many will stand in solidarity with the victim, albeit nonviolently. Civil rights activists employed this same strategy during the struggle against segregation, and Mahatma Gandhi's followers used it to defeat the British Empire. But to federal law enforcement officers at Rainbow Gatherings, the specter of a crowd circling or dropping to their knees in prayer, apparently fearless in the presence of weapons, adds to their terror (Niman, 2011, Epilogue Part 2).

In a similar vein, police stopped and ticketed two cyclists at the rear of a 2003 Critical Mass bike ride in Buffalo, NY. While the officers wrote traffic tickets, the remaining hundred-plus cyclists passed the hat and collected money for the two cyclists to pay their tickets, handing them the money as officers were still writing the tickets. Police responded by ticketing one of the donors for jaywalking. The remaining participants donated more money, causing the two officers to transmit an officer-in-distress call, apparently finding the riders' lack of fear as frightening. When more police arrived, they immediately arrested a rider. Rather than disperse, the other riders questioned the police about the arrest, causing the confused police to panic and violently attack the peaceful cyclists, who did not fight back (Jackson, 2003). As with the Rainbows, the police were incited not by violence, but by the absence of fear among members of the group, which in turn seemed to terrify them. As with the Rainbows, a much worse situation was averted by the cyclists' collective refrain from violent response. Being a temporary autonomous zone, like the Rainbow Gatherings, allowed the cyclists to scatter at the height of the violence and regroup a month later for a more tranquil ride.

Conclusion

Both Rainbow Shanti Sena and federal LEOs find their traditional tactics at their weakest at precisely the point where these two divergent cultures converge. Shanti Sena tactics are effective with Rainbows because Rainbow values support them, and, hence, Rainbows respect them. This support and respect bestow Shanti Sena with the social capital needed to easily gain compliance from Rainbows. The social forces that come into play when a disruptive Rainbow realizes that his or her actions mandate a Shanti Sena response, such as an Omming, often prove stronger than Babylon's weaponry. Forest Service LEOs, however, do not necessarily share Rainbow Family values and are not usually trained to understand or respect Shanti Sena or recognize and understand their nonviolent tactics. Hence, conflicts with Forest Service LEOs present the Shanti Sena model with its most difficult challenge. Ultimately, Shanti Sena are more successful in convincing Rainbows to maintain their nonviolence in the face of LEO threats and violence than they are in persuading the LEOs to cease their violence. Hence, during the Kiddie Village incident, Shanti Sena volunteers faced toward and communicated with the Rainbows, while being shot in the back by the LEOs.

Another major challenge to the Shanti Sena model is the inevitable manifestation of over-eager volunteers whose serial Shanti Sena actions make them appear as a sort of Rainbow Police agency. While Rainbows grapple with the periodic emergence of

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a nascent Shanti Sena 'force,' federal bureaucrats welcome and promote the idea of an organized Shanti Sena organization. Such an entity provides them with a collaboration partner they can understand and recognize, while undermining the democratic anarchy that so frightens them. Hence, Forest Service bureaucrats often seek out what they see as Shanti Sena representatives to negotiate with, instead of bringing their concerns before a democratic Rainbow Council.

Despite deep-seated values that preclude the formation of any sort of organized peacekeeping organization, Rainbows sometimes strategically play along with the bureaucrats, representing the Shanti Sena concept as a 'security force' when they believe that such a force is needed to appease Babylonian law enforcement officials. Internal Forest Service documents from the past 30 years evidence their promotion of 'a peacekeeping group or security team called Shantisena [*sic*]' who manage 'the internal peacekeeping at the Gathering site' (Colville National Forest Reports, 1981, cited in Niman, 1997, p. 121). Manifesting a Shanti Sena wizard has historically been to the Family's advantage, keeping Babylon's police generally at bay and outside of the Gatherings.

Providing an ersatz Shanti Sena organization to appease Babylonian police agencies, however, undermines the concept of a nonhierarchical spontaneous Shanti Sena, with the line between 'ersatz' and 'actual' dangerously blurred. Hence, Rainbows who volunteer for the task of interfacing with law enforcement agencies sometimes return into the Gathering acting more like confrontational police officers than like Shanti Sena. Rainbows respond to such tendencies by encouraging more active Shanti Sena participation from the general population, especially among groups, such as women, that are often underrepresented in traditional policing agencies. These diverse groups of fresh volunteers often overwhelm whatever authoritarian vibes the police-like Shanti Sena might put out. In a similar vein, councils often recruit and dispatch new Shanti Sena volunteers bringing music, food and love to hotspots such as A-Camp (cf. Grant, 2003, p. 230; Niman, 1997, p. 123).

Not all conflicts, and especially those with government authorities, can be harmonized by Shanti Sena actions. In those cases, conflict is not necessarily resolved but averted or escaped as the Rainbows dissolve their TAZ at the conclusion of each Gathering and disperse into Babylon, only to reappear with essentially the same city in another time and place. Where revolutionaries aim to control territory, the TAZ avoids prolonged conflict with the state and instead 'liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere' (Bey, 1991, pp. 100–101). A utopian experiment can persist through the regular movement of 'the entire tribe' (p. 102). To police authorities, the apparent retreat of the Rainbows might appear as surrender, which would satisfy their quest to control or dominate the Family. Or at the very least, police agencies might view their problem as over, since the Rainbows are gone, albeit to another time or place. Demographers refer to this practice as a 'fission–fusion' (cf. Dentan, 1992, 1994, 2008, p. 116; Fix, 1975; Neel, Salzano, Junquerira, Keiter, & Maybury Lewis, 1964). For the Rainbows, it is at the core of a nonviolent survival strategy that has allowed the Family to persist for 38 years while spreading itself and its Shanti Sena peacekeeping model around the globe.

Notes

1. Rainbows borrow the term 'Babylon' from the Rastafarian movement, who in turn gleaned the term from the Book of Revelation.
2. US National Gatherings officially last a week, but with set-up and clean-up can stretch out over a two-month period.

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3. Kropotkin claims such 'liberty worked a miracle. The insane became cured. Even those who had incurable lesions became sweet, tractable members of the family.' Like a Rainbow Gathering, Gheel offered its guests full membership in a nurturing supportive community. The Gheel experiment ended in 1856 with the construction of a more typical infirmary, after the murder of the village's Burgomaster (A report on the care of the insane poor: II. Old Gheel, 1905).
4. Critical Mass is an acephalous movement of bicyclists that gather, usually at a predetermined monthly time, for a mass ride that swells to fill thoroughfares, usually crowding out automotive traffic and liberating a safe car-free space for cycling.
5. Rainbows use Om circles not only for peacekeeping, but also for opening meetings and councils, and in preparation to eat a communal meal.
6. This is one of the most important mantras in Tantric Buddhism (e.g. Evans-Wentz, 1960, 1967, pp. 127, 301, 312, 320–322, 340), believed to open the user's mind to a higher dimension (Kapleau, 1966, p. 346).
7. In the case of the Rainbow Gatherings, this evidence is overwhelming. This non-force of instantaneous Shanti Sena has a strong 38-year track record for peacekeeping – as evidenced both in media reports and nearly four decades worth of US Forest Service reports documenting and statistically summarizing activity at the Gatherings, many of which were released to this author in compliance with the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Such recently released documents are available for download at an archive hosted by Buffalo State College in New York (http://buffalostate.edu/peopleoftherainbow).
8. Usually found in swimming and washing areas.
9. Video evidence also documents witness allegations of LEOs pointing Taser weapons at the faces of Rainbow Family members.

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