

the human male, and that accordingly both should share the burden of child care equally. I fear, however, that the denial that mother love is part of our biological heritage could persuade parents to put the burden of responsibility onto the shoulders of caretakers outside the home. And sometimes governments seem all too willing to gather children as early as possible in their institutions in order to socialize their future citizens in a certain way.

The theses of mother love being a result of cultural achievement and not a primary biological disposition secured by phylogenetic adaptations sounds absurd to ethologists who know the phenomenon and its physiological underpinnings from numerous other vertebrates. In particular, the idea that "primitives" might not love their children seems too outrageous to acknowledge or even mention, were it not for the possibility that such generalizations are echoed in the secondary literature and can be abused as an excuse for emotional child neglect by parents. It seems necessary therefore to bring this situation to our attention and to point to the need of the child, particularly during its first three years of life, to have steady reference persons at its disposal.

The idea that in some traditional societies collective childrearing is customary dates back to Margaret Mead. She wrote "In Samoa the child shows no emotional allegiance to its father and mother" (1935). On the first day that I was in Samoa, visiting Derek Freeman in 1967, he showed me how a small boy who desperately wished to follow his mother on her fishing excursion had to be forcefully restrained by his siblings. Mead's statement is derived from superficial observation. As in most other tribal societies, Samoan children are embedded in a social web. A child has many contacts during the day with people other than the parents – children, adult males, and females alike. Small children are thus taken care of by many people, but this does not mean that they are bonded to all of them equally. Mothers and fathers remain the preferred reference persons. In G/wi and !Ko Bushmen, Eipo, Yanomami, Himba, and Trobrianders, where I have documented social interactions during the last 25 years, mothers were always the preferred reference persons in situations of distress, and the safe basis from which the toddlers ventured out and to whom they returned when in doubt or fear.

What about the fathers? From Margaret Mead we have the well-known statement that fathers are a biological necessity, but a social accident. Again, from what I have observed amongst tribal people, the bellicose Eipo and Yanomami as well as the

allegedly peaceful Bushmen tell us a different story. Fathers are also preferred reference persons. I often observed that toddlers and small children amongst the Yanomami protested when their father left in the morning to go out for a hunt, even though the mother was present. And what about the affective attachment of the mothers and fathers to their small children? Are there indications that they love them less than parents do in our society? To make it short: There are none whatsoever!

It is true that parents in these societies often lose their children, usually in the first five years of life, but P. Wiessner (personal communication) in interviewing !Kung San mothers and fathers about the loss of children was told by most parents interviewed that it took 6 months to a year after the loss of a child before they felt that they had stopped grieving and began to feel emotionally stable again. Death of children in such societies is only facilitated by the knowledge that almost every family experiences it, and by the great support given to the parents by the community.

But what about infanticide? Is its occurrence not in clear contradiction to what I have stated above? In those cultures which we have studied, infanticide is not carried out "lightheartedly" at all. There are strong inhibitions to be overcome. In the vast majority of cases, infanticide is not a question whether a child should live, but of *which* child should live, a slightly older sibling, who still needs breastmilk to survive, or the newborn. With high mortality in the first year of life and one or two years of love and care already invested in the older sibling, the outcome of this decision is usually in favor of the older child, particularly if it is strong and healthy.

Napoleon Chagnon provides a moving example of such a decision: A pregnant woman whom he knew well had given birth, but she reappeared without the baby. He inquired what had happened. I quote: "What happened to the baby?" I whispered to Bahimi. We sat huddled under the eaves of the great sloping roof in the circular village. . . . Bahimi's cheeks were smeared with black 'sadness,' a crust of dirt mixed with tears, to signify her mourning. Across the village, women were returning home with firewood. Bahimi gazed at them without seeing. 'She exists no more. . . . I . . . I . . .' more tears welled up her soft brown eyes, and I knew then that she had killed her daughter at birth. Kaobawa, her husband, the village headman, pressed my arm gently and whispered softly: 'Ask no more of this my nephew. Our baby is still nursing, and he needs the milk'" (Chagnon 1976: 211).