

The Tomorrow of Violence

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The political parties waged their battles in the spirit spaces, beyond the realm of our earthly worries. They fought and hurled counter-mythologies at one another... At night, over our dreams, pacts were made, contracts drawn up in that realm of night-space, and our futures were mortgaged, our destinies delayed. In that realm the sorcerers of party politics unleashed thunder, rain flooded those below; counter-thunder, lightning and hail were returned. On and on it went, in every village, every city of the country, and all over the continent and the whole world too. Our dreams grew smaller as they waged their wars of political supremacy. Sorcerers, taking the form of spirits and omens, whispered to us of dread. We grew more afraid. Suspicion made it easier for us to be silent. Silence made it easier for us to be more powerless. The forms of dominance grew more colossal in the night-spaces. And those of us who were poor, who had no great powers on our side, and who didn't see the power of our own hunger, a power that would frighten even the gods, found that our dreams became locked out of the freedom of the air. Our yearnings became blocked out of the realms of manifestation. The battles for our destiny raged and we could no longer fly to the moon or accompany the aeroplanes on their journeys through rarefied spaces or imagine how our lives could be different or better.

—Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*

The impact of violence and trauma on societies during wartime is widely recognized. But exactly how violence configures a society, and how long trauma can affect people and the larger social universe they live in, is less well understood. In many ways, this question is not asked: if I were to ask how much the civil violence and cultural anomie in the United States today is a product of the violence people have been exposed to during the wars of the last century, many people would find this the most marginal of investigations. But new research is challenging us to investigate the links between violence, trauma, and postwar peace. We are finding that violence is not only enacted in the present—the immediacy of an act of harm—but violence has a tomorrow.¹

To understand the enduring legacies of political violence, it is useful to start with an exploration of violence “in the present,” as it is experienced. Political aggressions may become enflamed, threats may be flung back and forth, military exercises may take place—but war comes into being only when violence takes place. Harm: an intentional act of destruction, reproduced in the minutia of daily living and the constructs of what it means to be human. One of the best descriptions I have heard of the impact of war’s trauma comes from a young woman I spoke with at the height of the war in Mozambique:

I don’t know if anyone really knows war until it lives inside of them. A person can come in and see the war, fear the war, be scared of the violence—but their life, their very being, is not determined by the war.

This is my country, the country of my parents, my family, my friends, my future. And the war has gotten into all of these.

I know everyone has suffered a loss in this war: a family member killed, a loved one captured and never heard of again. But it goes much deeper than this, to the very heart of the country, to my very heart. When I walk on the road, I carry nervousness with me as a habit, as a way of being. When I hear a sharp noise, I do not stop and ask “what is that?” like a normal person. I fear my life is in jeopardy. And I do this for my family as well. Whenever I am parted from them I have this gnawing worry: will I ever see them again, is something terrible happening to them at this moment? I

cringe for my very land, soaked in blood so it can’t produce healthily. This lives in me—it is a part of my being, a constant companion, a thing no one can understand if they only visit here and worry about their own safety from one day to the next.

I want to leave this country, to go away and work or study... I want to get away from all this, to run from it for a little while.

But the even stronger feeling is that I can’t stand to leave my country, for I can never leave the war. I will carry the war with me, and that inflames within me a passion to be here, to be a part of my country and help even in its worst moments. For if I leave, when I come home my most cherished things may be ashes, what is a part of me may have died, and I wouldn’t have been here to know, to have tried to do something. The passion that makes me want to flee my country’s problems binds me to my country so that I can’t bear to leave.

Or, as a Mozambican man who had suffered the frontline ravages of war said, “The life of war is a damaged (*astragado*) life.”

Certainly, war at its most basic entails pain, dismemberment, death, and the politics of force. But people don’t engage in or avoid war because of the sheer *fact* of death, dismemberment, and the politics of force. The mere *fact* of death is largely meaningless in and of itself. It takes on meaning because of its emotional content. We *feel* death as meaningful.

“If I were to ask you what the single most important thing to know is to best understand this country, what would you say?” I asked Mia, a nurse in Kuito, Angola, in November 2001.

“You need to understand death,” she said. “Everyone here is on intimate terms with death, everyone has lost someone they love to the war... death walks everywhere with people.”

People don’t kill soldiers and civilians in war to reduce population numbers; wars aren’t won that way. Wars are lost and won because people fear death, because they have a horror of dismemberment, because they feel the burdens of oppression so strongly that they are willing to risk life and limb. People don’t fight or flee war because of the

sheer fact of violence. They fight or flee war because of what violence "feels" like.

And how does violence feel? People facing violence on the front lines say it feels like existential crisis, like hopelessness, like the loss of the future. It feels like impossible contradictions of resistance within oppression, like the struggle of humanity within terror. Violence is about im/possibility, about the human condition and the meaning of survival (Nordstrom 2004). This is why wars are fought with bloodletting, why torture takes place, and why neither violence nor war is limited to the physical carnage of the battlefield.

Violence is set in motion with physical carnage, but it doesn't stop there. Violence reconfigures its victims and the social milieu that hosts them (Feldman 1991; Daniel 1996; Green 2000; Nordstrom 1998, 1999). It isn't a passing phenomenon that momentarily challenges a stable system, leaving a scar but no lasting effects after it has passed. Violence becomes a determining fact in shaping reality as people *will* know it, in the future.

Part of the way violence is carried into the future is through creating a hegemony of enduring violence across the length and breadth of the commonplace world, present and future. The normal, the innocuous, and the inescapable are infused with associations of lethal harm. The main tactic is the use of ordinary everyday items in the production of terror. Kitchen items, household goods, water sources, and tools become weapons of torture and murder. Public spaces are cast as strategic battlegrounds: the maimed and murdered are often left in communal areas. Main thoroughfares, community centers, religious sites, public parks, schoolyards, and markets become places where the war is "brought home" to people. Places traditionally associated with safety, and items traditionally used in the production of the ordinary, are recast not only as lethal but as inhumanely so. When a kitchen knife is used to mutilate a family member, or a post office becomes the site of a massacre, kitchen knives and post offices become attached to the production of violence in a way that will last far beyond the conclusion of the war. It is unlikely those witnessing these atrocities will use a similar knife or enter a post office without reexperiencing the impact of war for the rest of their lives.

In the final analysis, if violence has enduring effects on the whole

of a society, effects that will shape postwar as well as wartime life, then we must rethink the whole issue of who are winners and losers, and even what the terms *winners* and *losers* mean. Popular culture has long offered the image of military leaders presiding over a desolate pile of rubble—the kingdom they have decimated in order to wrest control. This image is perhaps nowhere as developed as in the case of nuclear war. But there is another reality less easily captured in popular image or academic proof, and that is the leader presiding over a broken and maimed society, a decimated cultural stability, a tortured and traumatized daily reality. It is only in the last century that we have learned to chart the progress of physical trauma on the body; we are still in scientific infancy in charting the progress of cultural trauma on the body politic. We are far from knowing if cultural wounds lead to ongoing cycles of social instability and violence.

SHATTERED LIVES: THE FIRST FRONT OF VIOLENCE'S LEGACY

They arrive without money but with stories written on the parchment of their hearts which they don't recite easily. They are stories which have crept out of the edges of civil wars and scattered into the fleeing wind. You can read the words in their eyes, stained by despair; in their mouths, silenced and tightened by horror. You can even read the words in their torn and weary clothes. (Pinnock 2000:10)

Richard Mollica, who has devoted considerable attention to the plight of war-traumatized people, captures well the clash of old expectations and new sensibilities:²

My feeling was an example of what novelist Herman Wouk has called "the will not to believe." Such a response is a common reaction to accounts of human cruelty and emotional suffering, and it is one of the reasons that political leaders, humanitarian aid workers and even psychiatrists have failed to appreciate the depth of war's trauma. The model used to be a rubber band. War is hell, but we thought that once a conflict ended, those affected would snap back to normal. Physical injuries would linger, but the anxiety and fear that accompany any life-threatening event should disappear

once the immediate danger passes. The general public had much the same attitude. In essence, the message from the outside world to war's victims was: Be tough. Just get over it.

Indeed, that was the thinking about most traumatic events, from child abuse to rape. Now we know better. (Mollica 2000:54)

Data suggest that violence traumatizes the perpetrators of harm as well, a fact Grossman (1995) has written about extensively—pointing out the high rates of mental illness, substance abuse, suicide, and social maladjustment among veterans. This impact appears to be global, as captured in a conversation with a local African medical practitioner working in a severe battle zone:

We healers, we have had to set up new ways of treating people with this war. This war, it teaches people violence. A lot of soldiers come to me. Many of these boys never wanted to fight, they did not know what it meant to fight. Many were hauled into the military, taken far from their homes, and made to fight. It messes them up. You see, if you kill someone, their soul stays with you. The souls of the murdered follow these soldiers back to their homes and their families, back to their communities to cause problems. The soldier's life, his family, his community, begin to disintegrate from the strain of this.

But it goes further than this. These soldiers have learned the way of war. It was not something they knew before. They have learned to use violence. Their own souls have been corrupted by what they have seen and done. They return home, but they carry the violence with them, they act it out in their daily lives, and this harms their families and communities.

We have to take this violence out of these people, we have to teach them how to live nonviolent lives like they did before. The problem would be serious enough if it were only the soldiers, but it is not. When a woman is kidnapped, raped, and forced to work for soldiers, when a child is exposed to violence in an attack, when people are submitted to assaults and terrible injuries, this violence sticks to them.

It is like the soldier carrying the souls of those he has killed back into his normal life, but here, the soul carries the violence. You can see this even with the young children here who have seen or been subjected to violence: they begin to act more violently. They lose respect, they begin to hit, they lose their bearings—this violence tears at the order of the community. We can treat this, we have to.

We literally take the violence out of the people, we teach them how to relearn healthy ways of thinking and acting. It is like with people who have been sent to prison. They go in maybe having stolen something, but they learn violence there, they learn it because they are subjected to violence. We treat this too, in war or in peace, violence is a dangerous illness.

And the thing is, people want to learn, to heal. This violence, it tears them up inside, it destroys the world they care about. They want to return to a normal life like they had before. Most work hard with us to put this violence behind them. Those people who profit from the wars, they teach this violence to get what they want, without regard to the effect on people and communities. It is our job to thwart this violence, to take it out of the people and the communities. We are getting good at this, we have had a lot of practice.

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) in Johannesburg, South Africa, has been doing interesting research on the relationships between industrial development and trauma. Graehm Simpson, the director at the time I spoke with him, explained to me that their researchers are finding that workers exposed to violence suffer trauma that affects productivity in the most basic sense, and entire industries can in this way suffer the ravages of war after it is over. Researchers have shown that industries that do not provide resources for trauma cannot sustain the same productivity as those whose workers have not undergone trauma, or those that provide resources for trauma. Industries that do not deal with issues of trauma have higher illness and accident rates, lower productivity and greater quality problems, and greater disturbances in working conditions.³

To speak of increasing industrial viability is not a mere exercise in capitalist gain. Suffering the depredations of a wounded economy constitutes an ongoing ordeal in itself, and for many it constitutes a powerful form of violence. In war, it is difficult to untangle the various traumas people are exposed to. Amid carpet bombing and torture of civilians, it is easy to overlook the fact that the situation is far more nuanced, and that impoverishment is traumatizing in itself.

This lesson was brought home to me when I returned to visit Mozambique for the first time after the war's end. It had not occurred to me previously that many citizens might find it as hard to find food, work, and shelter in these immediate postwar years as they had during the war. "When the war is over, we will be able to return to normal life" was such a refrain in the war years that the logic of this "truism" was seldom questioned. The "truth" was simple: the war itself was the cause of all deprivation, and its end would herald the end of deprivation. This is the economic version of the rubber band model Mollica discusses for trauma in the quote above: with the end of war, life "snaps back" to normal. Unfortunately, as the Mozambican newspaper *Domingo* wrote on June 6, 1997, cities and people's lives must be reconstructed "one stone and then the next." People may not be able to find food and shelter during this building process.

The impact of postwar deprivation became visible in 1994 when I visited Enna, one of the first friends I made upon arriving in Mozambique. Trained originally as a medical anthropologist, I decided the easiest way for me to begin to understand the daily movements and realities of the people and the county when I arrived was to spend time at a local health post. I chose one near my residence and explained to the staff there that I wanted a "crash course" in the languages, cultures, and daily realities of life in the area. They agreed to adopt me, and the clinic became a kind of second home for me. For several years, in addition to allowing me free run of the clinic, the nursing staff asked me along on vaccination campaigns and emergency field trips to various other locales. Under normal peacetime circumstances, such travels would be routine. But in war, when health and education professionals were being explicitly targeted for assault and killing by rebel soldiers, these nurses demonstrated remarkable courage. Cars and petrol were seldom available for medical forays in those war days, and the nurses

often set out to visit neighboring villages and communities on foot. Sometimes we would walk the better part of the day on such trips.

The conversations on such walks tended to revolve first around food: finding food, buying food, cooking food, what was available, where, and for how much. Then the discussions went to the traumas of war's violence: what kinds of assaults were taking place, how people were affected, who had been harmed, and what people needed to survive the assaults and attendant traumas. Talk would then turn to family. Families, everyone agreed, were profoundly affected by war but were also the means of making it to peace. I remember one conversation we had during a daylong walk to another village, given its bearing on Enna's postwar experiences:

"So, Carolina, in your culture, what is the relationship between husband and wife? I mean really."

I began to answer on some abstract level, talking about the many kinds of relationships there were, an answer that immediately bored them, and they interrupted me: "It's not like that here. Not with the war, not with what the violence does to us all. It's your own family you look to when it comes down to it. It's our brothers and our mothers and our sisters who will be there. Husbands you have to have, but you can't count on them. They are not the central bond. We have a saying here: War breaks the marriage home, the marriage bed, in two."

"Yeah," Enna said, "mine is a real asshole."

All the other nurses looked at her in sympathy and agreed with sad smiles.

"Why not leave?" I asked.

"It's just not that easy," they responded. "You may never see the man unless he is asking for money or sex, he may be away with five different girlfriends, and they get all the money—but still the society is easier on you, more supportive, if you have that husband. It can be harder still on your own."

Enna reminded me of the conversation when I saw her years later, after the war's end. She had invited me to her home and was visibly embarrassed by her circumstances. After the war, her husband had left for good and had taken the home and all the possessions. Enna's three children stayed with her. Though she was the head nurse at the health post, she did not make enough money to support her family. A relative

had allowed Enna and her three children to occupy a room of a cramped and dilapidated old house. They and their meager few possessions overflowed the room. There was no food in the house at all:

I don't know how it has come to this, Carolina, but I cannot offer you even a grain of rice. I think I am beyond feeling embarrassment. Perhaps it's the constant worry, the ever-present hunger, my children's cries. I look around here and I can't believe it's all come to this. And I see no solution. Even during the war when I was married to the asshole and he only came home drunk to get money for his other girlfriends, when I was the only one really bringing in a salary—I could put food on the table for my children, dress them to go to school. Somehow the ways to get food and things seemed to dry up.

And it's not just being single. How could it be worse after the end of the war? But it is, so many of us are suffering this way. And our families we talked about that day walking—that's still our hope, but the truth is, the war has broken up families so badly it is hard for anyone to help. No one has a full family anymore, no one has a farm like they used to, no one has people working like they could be if there hadn't been war. I got a room in this house because my relative herself can't make ends meet. Even though I bring in more mouths to feed, together perhaps we can explore more possibilities to get things, to make it.

It just doesn't make sense, we struggled so hard to just hold on during the war to get to peace, and now that we have it, our lives are worse. How can this be? And the thing is, I feel as beaten down, perhaps more so, as I did from the war. Then, at least, I thought "it will end with the war, and then all will be well." Now with peace and my life being even worse, I can't think what will bring an end to this and how my life can improve.

Numerous people echoed Enna's words in the early postwar years, saying they were suffering economically as much now as they had during the war. And this suffering was, in many ways, as hard to bear as that

during the war. One person summed up a theme I was to hear many times, and in a number of countries struggling through the postwar reconstruction period:

I suffered during the war, worrying about violence to my family. Now I worry about not being able to feed my family. Both are forms of violence, both worry a person equally. Both are devastating. Both, if not solved, can inflame further violence. We need to solve this present economic problem with the same commitment to resolution as we did the war. Or we will have another war.

As Graehm Simpson at the CSVK put it:

We are not dealing with a postwar post-traumatic problem, we are dealing with a continuous trauma problem, and will continue to do so until we begin to solve these pressing social and economic ills that were set into motion by war and continue today.

Returning to Simpson's earlier observation on the relationship between industrial productivity and trauma, it becomes easier to see that enduring traumas in a society can inhibit social rebuilding so important to a society's viability. These hindrances can, in turn, inflict further suffering on a society, which then generates ongoing traumas. To separate issues of postwar development and economic viability from war trauma, as has been our wont in modern Western economics and psychology, is, as recent research is indicating, a dangerous folly.

Mollica's work in Bosnia and Cambodia (2000, 1999) shows similar patterns. The Harvard psychiatrist found in his work with Bosnian refugees living in Croatia that "one in four were unable to work, care for their families or participate in other socially productive activities" (2000:57). Mollica goes on to note that such trauma can have enduring, multigenerational, effects: "Researchers have noted higher rates of PTSD in the children of Holocaust survivors compared with a nontraumatized Jewish comparison group." And he concludes: "Like chronic diseases such as malaria, mental illness can weigh down the economic development of a country" (57).

THE HOME FRONT: THE SECOND TOMORROW OF VIOLENCE

I wish I could write something about the way the full moon rises, yellow, over the high buildings; how it glides up silently from behind the forlorn office blocks but I can't.

Instead I feel the hot breath of war puff into my face and make my eyes sting with the ash of burning villages; ash from the burning of thatched roofs, ash from the torched corn stores. War has crept in on its belly through the long grasses of the dry season and crossed the dry riverbeds to come close, close to me here in the city where bush war should not reach. War wants me to see that it is more powerful than anything good, that it cannot be held at bay by non-war. Non-war is just a butterfly or soft petals. Strong wind or beating sun shields it.

But war, war howls with the taka-taka-taka of machine-gun fire tearing up the edges where sunset meets night; tearing up the curtain behind which life is supposed to be safe. It is the numberless refugees marching down like a column of ants to reach Skyline and safety. It is Bernard's untold nightmare. It is the terrible stories unfolding next to a steaming enamel teapot and baked maize bread in Princess's flat. (Pinnock 2000:34)

Issues of trauma and violence in postwar years are visible on a second and related front. It would seem that violence does indeed beget violence. In times of war, domestic violence rises precipitously (Nordstrom 1997a). The impact of this trauma even during war is not well understood. The majority of war-trauma research focuses on people harmed by soldiers or mercenaries. Few focus on people harmed by civilians within their own homes and communities in times of war. Centers for victims of torture and sexual violence in war generally work with victims of political violence, not domestic violence, though hospital data show that the wounds and attendant traumas of nonpolitical domestic violence can be as severe as those sustained under military torture and attack.

We are then left with the question: Does the increased domestic violence commonly experienced during wartime stay at increased levels in the postwar years if these problems are not addressed? And a second question then emerges: How do we attend to these problems? Statistics worldwide show that roughly one-third of a country's population experiences domestic violence, though individual countries vary from far

less to more than two-thirds of the population. If trauma from political violence impairs societal recovery, it is likely that trauma from any violence will have the same effect.

The CSVR in Johannesburg has long recognized the relationship between political aggression and community suffering and violence. In the post-apartheid years, the center provided psychological services to some of the most violence-afflicted communities in the area. Domestic, child, criminal, and sexual violence in the decade following the political transition in certain locales in South Africa were among the highest in the recorded world. Counselors at the center providing support for children for one aspect of violence—for example, the trauma of exposure to political or civil violence—found that the children had experienced a number of other forms of violence as well, and the different forms could not be disentangled. One of the counselors explained:

We set up programs to help children deal with the impact of violence. Ostensibly, we may have a program for children dealing with the ongoing repercussions of political violence and transition. And when we speak with the children, we find out that to them, they are dealing with layers and layers of violence, each of which carries a devastating impact. Children will explain to us that as they are dealing with whatever immediate problem we are working with, they have been walking to school and seeing murders, dead bodies, violent assaults. They themselves have been subjected to rape, to domestic violence, to street crime.

It's not just the children, this is common throughout the population: we set up a program to deal with a serious problem, and we find trauma upon trauma affecting people's lives. You can't disentangle these, you can't separate out one or two and say, these are what we will focus on, these are what we will treat. All these types of violence and trauma in people's lives link into daily experience for them.

The center has been centrally involved in working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It was clear to everyone entering this work that people who had been violated during the apartheid years would exhibit varying degrees of ongoing trauma, and the CSVR,

like other organizations working with the TRC, set mechanisms in place to help people deal with the impact of trauma in their lives. In this work, the center discovered as well the importance of what it calls secondary trauma, that suffered by people working with the victims of violence. The center found that it needed to provide support networks to both the victims of violence and those who worked with them.

CRIME: THE THIRD FRONT OF VIOLENCE

Okkie Bignaut was a mercenary and fought in most of the wars up Africa—the Belgian Congo, Rhodesia, Angola. He fought on whichever side paid him the most. He took payment in whatever form it came, money, raw gold, diamonds. In the Congo he followed in the wake of fleeing colonists and swung into homes which people had abandoned in mid-meal. He and his group of soldiers pushed forward with their bayonets, drinking and plundering. They killed anything which whimpered or moved and they took whole table-loads of silverware, tied up in tablecloths and slung over their shoulders.

When he fought in Angola he changed sides as it suited him, Unita and the South African army in the wet months and the MPLA in the dry months. He helped shoot up the migrating herds of elephants which flowed across the Caprivi Strip like a river. This is how he came to make a fortune of money, with ivory.

Now he is just a disgusting and crazy old man. He stinks and can't keep half a thought going. He wears his hair in a long, greasy, grey ponytail and his eyes are sunk deep in his head. Veins throb at his temples and he spits at people when he's angry. He rolls dagga and is always puffing on a joint. Under his bed he keeps his fortune of banknotes stuffed in suitcases. (Pinnock 2000:43-44)

Postwar trauma is visible in yet another way. In many countries, the years immediately following wars are plagued by high crime rates, in part because of the structures of violence put in place during the war. A number of interrelated factors cause this rise. War-decimated economies do not improve sufficiently with peace to provide the essentials for a population. In addition, war profiteers do not give up their gains with peace but move to new terrains of exploitation. They are joined by unscrupulous military and political people who either have been ousted from power or are in the current ruling regime and are seeking to maximize their power through corrupt earnings. A war-traumatized population produces some people who are sufficiently injured to the

use of violence that they "grab money colored with blood" (MacGaffey and Bazanguissa-Ganga 2000). The layers of effect run both wide and deep. Speaking with me on this, Zaais Van Zyl, the deputy director of public prosecutions in Johannesburg, said:

The impact of crime is more extensive than most of us recognize. It impacts just about every aspect of our daily lives; it has an impact on economic growth, on the general well-being of society, even on skilled people leaving the country.

The impact of crime is much bigger than the government would like to—or can afford to—admit. The true picture of crime is not being shown to us. And trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, is an aspect of crime that we are only beginning to comprehend—and it affects all of us touched in any way by crime.

So why is the rate of crime so high? You might say the moral fiber is gone. Look back to the [apartheid-era] indoctrination from the Nationalist Party; look at what this indoctrination meant to people, meant in their lives. You can speak of this too with the ANC, PAC, Communist Party. There was so much violence during the struggles that people got used to it; there was no choice. So many of us have seen so much violence. We become blunted.

The political violence is supplanted by violent crime now, and the impact continues. Too much violence, too much stress, and in the end comes a day and boom, PTSD hits. Four thousand South African police have been boarded [deemed medically incapacitated] for PTSD here. And they die, die in the hundreds.

This extends out across the society. Take people who have seen necklacing... what can you do? Life just goes on; you walk down your street and you see someone necklaced, and you have to go on with your life. But it is extremely traumatic. It is a horrible and very slow death: it can take days to die. The impact is severe on those who see it. Or take child abuse: how can you see a child horribly harmed and not have it cause trauma in you too?

One of my real concerns is PTSD in the prosecutor's office. You have a case of necklacing, or horrific child abuse, and you do what you can to stop this violence, but the cases still get to you. You can't see all this day in and day out without it taking a real toll. Maybe the worst is worrying that you know someone killed a child, for example, but you don't win the case, and the person goes free. And so we lose our best lawyers, our best prosecutors. The ones who care. They get traumatized, and they leave.

The way many of us deal with this trauma, whether it is the victims of crime, those who see too much violence, or those of us who try to prosecute it, is to withdraw, to put on the blinkers and just look straight ahead, just get down the road and through our day, to have less social interaction, to be with others less, to go home and close the doors. And this itself is stressful, this way of life and work heightens the trauma, rather than diminishing it.

My goal is to get trauma support for my prosecutors, the lawyers, here. You can't win a fight against crime with people burned out with PTSD from dealing with the most horrible aspects a society has for years on end. You give them support for this, and we are better able to work against the violence and crime in our country. For in truth, it is still a war zone here. (Zaais Van Zyl, pers. comm.)

CYCLES...

Todo o angolano sente, no corpo e na alma, os efeitos directos e indirectos da guerra. Na verdade, a guerra mata, mutila, empobrece, destrói e avilha, transformando os angolanos em Homens sem amanhã.

Every Angolan feels, in body and soul, the direct and indirect effects of war. In truth, war kills, mutilates, impoverishes, destroys and debases, transforming Angolans into Humans without tomorrow.] (Macieira 2001)

There is thus a series of linkages in issues of violence: political violence sets in place a number of economic and cultural infrastructures that foment postwar crime; political violence as well provokes a rise in domestic violence, which in turn corresponds to crime and civil

violence. If countries such as Argentina during its dirty war are any lesson, increased crime and civil violence tend to provoke cries for authoritarian control, often stimulating police and military repression (Suarez-Orosco 1992).

The increase in political violence sets the cycle into play yet again. This cycle is not set in biology: this is not a doomsday scenario where violence gives rise to violence until a society is so undermined by disruption that it becomes nonviable. But it becomes prudent to ask whether societies can become so undermined by sociopolitical violence that, without active work to reconstruct more peaceful alternatives, they become generally unhealthy and wither.

It becomes equally prudent to ask how cycles of increasing sociopolitical violence can be stemmed. The decisions a society makes as to how peace will take place literally construct the possibilities of that society's future. For example, in some societies there is a strong argument to meet increasing postwar violence with increasing police "force." If there has been a tradition of police brutality and military human rights abuses in that country, violence continues to be inculcated into the structures of the society and justice systems, often with long-term and potentially devastating results.⁴

Solving the enduring legacies of violence, some suggest, depends more on improving economic conditions and dealing positively with traumatized populations. Carlo Scarmella, who headed the United Nations humanitarian assistance program in Angola in 1996, spoke to me about the process of postwar transition to a peacetime society. He noted that the vast majority of international aid went to infrastructural considerations such as the physical demobilization of soldiers, the repatriation of refugees, and the rebuilding of hospitals and schools. Then he continued:

But I'm beginning to wonder if rebuilding confidence isn't even more basic. The best of physical resources won't aid a traumatized society [that doesn't] see a solution to the devastating impact of political violence.

Like violence, trauma is not a set biological expression with a single "best" cure. There is no international model of support that can be applied across time and space, culture and circumstance. Yet in

watching nongovernmental organizations work in war-traumatized societies, I have seen how good this world is at rebuilding *things*. Schools, clinics, water holes, roads, and the like are the foundations of aid work and community rebuilding. But humans are human not because they live in houses (so do termites), engage in agriculture or industry (so do ants), or employ medicines and technology (so do chimpanzees). They are human because culture—systems of meaning—provide the foundation for all these beliefs and actions. It is precisely what makes us human that we are least proficient at providing.

There are few training manuals on how to rebuild shattered selves, confidences, futures. There are few theories on how to heal the cultural casualties of war and violence. There are few courses to teach people how to care about a school that has been built, how to believe in the future of a crime ridden-community, how to stop ongoing cycles of violence that last long into the postwar years. Madalena Silva, an Angolan working for Save the Children in Malange, Angola, in the group's traumatized children's program, spoke to me when Malange was coming under attack in the war of the late 1990s:

People talk of giving clothes, food, jobs, and buildings to the displaced, the demobilized, and the war-afflicted. They talk always of material things to be used. But few talk about these things of the heart. If you don't talk of things of the heart, you may well find it impossible to achieve these material needs.

During the worst of the war years, Mozambican people said the war's violence had destroyed their "future" (Nordstrom 1997b). They meant this in the most literal of senses: the destruction of home, family and hope had left people in a gaping void of the "present" where a "tomorrow" seemed a luxury beyond grasp. A tomorrow, that is, free of devastating violence. "Without a future, what are people?" Mozambicans asked. This undermining (or perhaps land-mining) of the future contributes to further aggressions: many Mozambicans said to me, "If a person has no sense of a future, there is little to stop him from engaging in the worst kinds of violence." It was in the act of creating a future that Mozambicans found a solution to violence.

POSTSCRIPT

And in the end, of course, a true war story is never about war. It's about sunlight. It's about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and march into the mountains and do things you are afraid to do. It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow. It's about sisters who never write back and people who never listen. (O'Brien 1990:80)

In struggling to understand trauma and its impact on societies, researchers face as well the sheer fact of dealing with trauma in the midst of their own research lives. I am reminded of an incident in the central province of Bie in Angola during the war of the late 1990s. I was betrayed by a group of small children, who wanted to show me how to dig for "buried treasure." Bombs falling on the bank during particularly horrific fighting several years earlier had hit various objects inside rooms and carried them into the dirt below the floor. The children discovered they could dig for these items and then, if they were lucky, trade them for food or sell them to UN troops stationed there.

Sitting digging in the dirt with a group of children creates a sense of camaraderie, and our conversation ranged over a number of topics both serious and frivolous. I asked one girl if she grew up in the area. She said yes in a way that caught my immediate attention: I knew without question from the look on her face that she had thought back to the time of the devastating fighting that had reduced the town to ruins, and that she had in all likelihood lost some, perhaps all, of her family. She was probably a war orphan, selling these "treasures" to survive.

I searched for the right thing to say—something that would reduce, not add to, her pain. Everything I had read about talking to people on emotionally sensitive issues came to mind. And all the material, bar none, said not to ask a question, not to say anything that might be emotionally distressful if emotional support services and counseling were not available. I am an anthropologist, not a psychologist, and we were in a bombed-out building in the middle of wartime Angola, far from support services. But I realized in that moment that the question "How distressing is it *not* to ask?" had not been raised. People like this girl have seen the horrors of war. They have lost loved ones and feel the pain in the most profound ways, something they live with every

moment of every day. To not ask might seem like denying them the truths of their lives. Like not wanting to hear. In this light, what had always seemed like unassailably excellent wisdom—"Don't ask unless you have psychological support available"—now became a conundrum. It could also appear to be the product of Western epistemologies that abstract theory, that take the laughter and the tears from academic knowledge, that make not listening acceptable when what people want is to have the truth of their lives understood. To "not ask" can imply that acknowledging the pain, the injustice, is worse than living it.

Notes

1. This article is based on more than ten years of research in war zones, predominately in South Asia and southern Africa, conducted between 1988 and the present. The work here focuses primarily on more than five years of fieldwork in southern Africa (Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa) between 1988 and the present.
2. See also Mollica et al. (1999).
3. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation is working with businesses to show that providing support for people who have been exposed to serious violence, far from a drain on resources, will in fact boost productivity, quality, and overall success.
4. I am reminded in this context of Nigeria's peacekeeping forces. I was in southern Africa when the military coup of 1997 took place in Sierra Leone. The Organization of African Unity condemned this action, as did much of the world. Nigeria sought to intervene with peacekeeping forces. The presses in southern Africa found this intervention ironic: "Nigeria's forces, cited for corruption and brutality, serving as 'peacekeepers'? What kind of peace," journalists asked, "was this going to be? Hardly the civilians of Sierra Leone suffered enough?" For an excellent discussion of institutionalizing military violence in post-conflict societies, see Hamber (1997).

11

Confessional Performances

Perpetrators' Testimonies to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Leigh A. Payne

If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.

—Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*

This, Aaron's confession to committing evil in *Titus Andronicus*, represents a type of confession rarely witnessed outside fictional accounts.¹ Confession generally implies admission of wrongdoing and contrition. Aaron acknowledges his acts as evil and utters an apology, albeit an ironic one. Perpetrators of past authoritarian state violence, however, do not offer these types of confessions. Most do not confess at all; they neither admit to their past acts nor apologize. Few perpetrators break the code of silence that protects them from public incrimination. Those few who make public statements tend to deny past violence, and particularly their role in it. They tend to attribute violence to false and malicious rumors. If they concede that violence occurred, they blame rogue elements within the state security apparatus. Very few perpetrators accept responsibility for past violence, and those who do rarely consider their acts evil or even wrong. Even those who express remorse try to excuse those acts as explicable within the context of war. Some,

