Dismantling Domination:
An Epidemiological Approach

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Introduction

The assumption prevails that violence is inevitable, even necessary. To suggest that coercion and destruction are not unavoidable expressions of "human nature" evokes skepticism and derision from those who are victims of violence, those who make policies about it, and those who feel compelled to use it. But is there actually a way out of the epidemic of violence?

Each of us must struggle for optimism from a different point. The experience of violence itself creates an emotional reality that undercuts the possibility of belief in its elimination. But because violence has causes, it is preventable.

Prevention begins with reorganizing the concept. Violence is not a mysterious force that erupts unless clamped, but a direct result of strings of causality, often stretching back to the family, which bears domination as its salient motif. Just as germ theory plunged infection rates with the introduction of antiseptic, transformation will require an epidemiological approach. We can in fact identify, as if viewing germs under a microscope, the predictable antecedents of violence.

This prophylactic revolution begins with attention to the introjects of domination within ourselves, so that our intelligence is released to further critique it and our energy is released for establishing change. The experience of complete safety is a prerequisite for healing. Becoming an advocate for *resisting violence in **all** its forms* also unleashes a deep healing process. And it is radical; rather than seeking to control outbreaks of violence, the task becomes to transform whatever necessary to prevent the harm and domination that bring them about. Without this shift, peacemaking will remain a patch on the contradictions of our current unsustainable "domination system." [1]

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Explanations of Violence

Although we are accustomed to distinguishing between good and bad violence (ours and theirs), violence from any quarter is… violence. And the causative threads of individual and mass aggression are intertwined. Efforts to distinguish varieties of violence (defense vs. terrorism, domestic vs. international) usually serve to create cosmetic cover for the ugly principle of domination of which each is an expression. The customary social construction we have all agreed to thus far is a retributive lens. We typically see the offender - our scapegoat. But victims and perpetrators (be they villianized or heroized) are both trapped in the ugly and unnecessary script of domination. Anyone immersed in the good- versus- evil meta-narrative of our culture is prone to seeking good guy /bad guy formulas, but, as a matter of survival, we desperately need a whole-field, anti-harm approach to treating violence.[2]

Biology

Biological explanations of violence, in which aggression is a process based in neurological structures, are rapidly achieving hegemony. Blumenreich calls the construction that aggression is inborn "ethological" (1993, p. 30). In this view, aggression is a natural product of the functioning animal brain, presumably present to a greater or lesser degree in each individual. Another explanation has to do with the biology of the moment. Physical factors like heat, odor and crowded conditions can trigger aggression, as can brain lesions, drugs and environmental stress (Blumenreich, 1993, p. 21). Chemical sequelae in the brain can reinforce aggressive response patterns by rewarding aggressive behavior with a "rush."

Cases of organic dysfunction and genetic vulnerability should not be cited to avoid the implications of harm-induced dysfunction. Biology may cause some events, but it is more often shaped by them. Sandra Bloom has written that "the present focus on genetics as an absolute is simply a way to avoid the socioeconomic and political implications of the alternative viewpoints (Bloom, 1998)." However accurate biological descriptions of the chemical and neural events surrounding aggression may be, and however helpful to our pharmaceutical arsenal, they do not fully explain the causes of aggression, that is, how the chemical sequelae came to be.

Frustration

A second construction holds that aggression results when the desires surrounding normal survival drives are denied (1993, Blumenreich, p. 30). A whole range of frustrated needs are possible culprits, including the conflict between what is seen to exist and what the person thinks should exist -- whether that prototype is a good or cruel reality (1988, Kupfersmid, p. 29). (The sadist feels pleasantly confirmed in nihilism each time he or she recreates this internal reality by causing harm.) Again, this *sui generis* explanation of violence as a result of denied wishes seems to have a choke-hold on the obvious, but does not suggest possible ways of solving our violence epidemic.

Social Learning

Another theory ascribes aggression to experience, reinforcement, and modeling (Blumenreich, 1993, p. 21). We learn how to behave by watching and imitating those around us. Hostility is encouraged by the endorsement of cultural norms, which determine our expectations and teach us the appropriate response to frustration. That culture affects violence suggests a seed of a solution, not because changing our culture is easy but because it is less determined than our biology.

Window in Development

Developmental theorists provide added weight to the argument for approaching change through culture by showing that biology can be permanently shaped by cultural milieu. These theorists ascribe propensity toward violent behavior to developmental insults sustained in childhood, for example by the deprivation intrinsic to an emotionally distant or disorganized family (Blumenreich, 1993, p. 30). Socialization continues throughout life, but at key developmental phases its imprint can sink more deeply. Instead of stopping at chemical "causes," these researchers point out that experiences with attachment in early life shape the neural

pathways and chemical sequelae in the mind related to hostile response. An "injured" person experiences high levels of anxiety in subsequent years, with aggression as an instinctive response to anxiety.

Shame

Shame theorists such as James Gilligan and John Braithwaite see violence as a misguided attempt at justice. They hint that even apparently sadistic and gratuitous harm is predicated upon the perception of prior injury (Gilligan, 1996). Lion describes aggressive behavior as "an ego function, an adaptive mechanism by which the individual deals with an unbearable sense of fragility and helplessness." (vii, 1972)."

Support for a New Framework

These theories already reframe the problem of violence, removing it from our current understandings within the domination principle, which focus on blame, punishment, and a rigid conception of individual responsibility. Instead we may locate violence in a new frame which is not only nonviolent, but actively concerned to make justice without sacrificing anyone's skin. Among many others, Wink; Bailie and Girard; Kraybill, Laue and Cormick; Bloom, Hermann and Bills; Jackins; Ehrenreich; the Gilligans; Mindell; as well as the many streams contributing to systems thinking, have become part of the tissues of this perspective. A shift in emphasis emerges from the synthesis of their ideas, which will affect the way we locate violence on our cultural map and therefore approach intervention.

Normal Response to the Unbearable

Trauma theory bridges Manichean divisions — personal and medical insights consummate in a profoundly political imperative, thereby linking categories that other interests might prefer to keep separate. Although my conclusions are based on a psychiatric diagnostic category called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, I do not mean to suggest that every perpetrator of violence is simply expressing a symptom of PTSD. It is worth asking ourselves, however, to what extent harm and its attendant sense of helplessness is necessary in the creation of a perpetrator of any kind.

First recorded (and later denied) by Freud, the aftereffects of exposure to severe abuse were rediscovered and legitimized in studies of "shell-shocked" war veterans. Particularly when people are traumatized in early life, the effects of trauma interfere with all types of development. Intelligence is occluded as persistent learning and concentration deficits develop (Bremner et al., 1996 in Bloom, 1998cy p. 10). Severe symptoms, frequently misdiagnosed, include dissociation, multiple personalities, learned helplessness, addiction to danger, and painful "body memories," Effects are contagious to surrounding systems and future generations. Many survivors identify with the aggressor and become victimizers themselves.

Survivors may cope by developing syndromes that later prove maladaptive. They may become addicted to their own stress responses, compulsively exposing themselves to further traumatization. Inexplicable secondary symptoms may add to learned helplessness and shame. Traumatized people frequently experience unworthiness and personal responsibility for pain (Bloom, 1997cr, p. 111). The traumatized mind loses necessary faith in the benevolence and safety of our world (Bloom, 1997cr, p. 70).

The nervous system responds involuntarily to danger with a "fight or flight" arousal that shuts down thought. In trauma, the mind's ability to contain terror is overwhelmed, permanently modifying the physiology of the brain. (Bloom, 1998cy, p. 11). A recursive loop of inner experience can form in which the past is experienced as the present and the body believes it must continue to fight for its life (Bloom, 1997cr, p. 40). In other words, the experience lives on in a sealed-off chamber of the mind, to be accessed whenever details associated with the experience recur, or to emerge repetitively in unbearable nightmares, intrusive flashbacks, panic attacks or other, behavioral, signals from the unconscious, such as re-enactment (unconsciously re-staging the past) or self-harm.

This "chamber" has no access to the knowledge learned during normal states. Thus, for example, a plan for escape conceived by a battered wife in the safety of a therapist's office is unavailable when the danger actually occurs. But the memory of trauma is not only separate, it is also qualitatively different from normal memory, because it is in a more primitive part of the brain having to do with sensation and emo-

tion, not meaning and language. Especially in cases of abuse of pre-verbal children, there is no channel through which to integrate the intense, incomprehensible "memories" imprinted through trauma (Bloom, 1997cr, p. 30).

Human beings require other human beings to resonate with their emotions and to help contain feelings that are overwhelming. Particularly as children, we depend on others for regulation of our internal biological systems (Bloom, 1997cr, p. 75). *Even normal experience, in the absence of secure attachments, traumatically shapes neural circuitry*. When the trauma is being caused by a caregiver, the result is even more complicated, because danger automatically strengthens social bonding (p. 49). For abused children and torture victims, the more danger an abuser creates, the deeper the attachment becomes.

The nature of social learning insures that this dynamic will be recreated in future relationships, a phenomenon known as "reenactment," unless trauma is resolved. People who have been mistreated will often compel a psychiatric staff to abuse them again or repeatedly expose themselves deliberately and unconsciously to danger, because they cannot help but do so. Says Sandra Bloom, *"We are bound to tell the story of our unresolved past through our behavior in current relationships*" (1997, p. 149). Freud first termed this "repetition compulsion" (p. 57).

Violence as One Verbalization of Pain

The deep and still increasing documentation on PTSD paves the way to understanding violence as a message, not just in those on the far end of the continuum of traumatization, but in all perpetration, and even in all behavior. Through our acts, we try to communicate to others. Sometimes we behave deliberately, sometimes spontaneously and clearly, and sometimes our inner person signals in code, without our conscious awareness of the meaning of our behavior. Violent behavior, then, is expressive of an ineffable longing for the restoration of safety. As Bloom writes to the psychiatric community:

> If healing requires safety and violence causes illness, the prevalence of illness is a message we seem to be ignoring. We are insulating ourselves as a society from the truth

about ourselves as a culture by dismissing psychiatric patients' behavior as biological, pathological and illogical rather than as a signal that something is wrong (Bloom, 1997cr).

Arthur Mindell also claims that violence is a message both about the state of society as a whole and about the pain of the violent person. Since oppression is pandemic, personal problems are a reflection of oppressive societal patterns.

We can conclude from this that *we must decode the meaning of violent acts if we are to solve the problems to which they call our attention.* By bringing the meaning to awareness, we can address it instead of responding in kind as in the old framework for interpreting violence. For Mindell, a world in which the oppressed get revenge by oppressing oppressors is not a better world. Transformation requires the same solicitous attitude toward perpetrators as toward victims! This mentality of "eldership" is the heart of a new perspective on violence in which people are embraced regardless of the conflict roles they move in and out of, or perhaps because of them, because all the roles are valuable:

> Climbing up, falling down, stepping on one another, oblivious to our actions – no matter what we are and do, you as an elder see us all as your children. Fate requires some of us to sleep, others must conflict, applying force to change this world of oppression, rank and pain. (195)

Mindell embraces the terrorist as a freedom fighter and indeed embraces all angry people as bearers of a message we need to hear and as beloved children. "Revenge is a form of spirituality, a sort of spiritual power meant to equalize social injustice." (78) All voices in a conflict are embodiments of archetypes and people are needed by the world just as they are, as representatives of those archetypes. Mindell writes:

> Privileged people say that community is created through loving one another, through sharing food and doing things together. Many of the disenfranchised have another story to

tell. For them, community begins with bathing the world in hatred. (80)

But is *all* violence a message from the collective unconscious or an encoded expression of pain? What about greed? A war refugee told me, "God and fate were blamed for this, but the real motive was territories and stealing properties. I even sometimes have a feeling that the real nationalists were used. Their hatred made them perfect for the front lines." (Puljek-Shenk) Not only violence in wartime, but also the structural violence of latent periods arises for the expedient purpose of maintaining exploitation. What story, then, does economic oppression signal to us about its perpetrators?

Greed is also a result of pain, arising as it does from a sense of incompleteness and insecurity, which makes one vulnerable to the belief that ownership brings fulfillment and safety. Freire describes how the oppressor has no identity or existence apart from possessing at the expense of the oppressed — "to be is to have." He describes the insatiability of the oppressor's objectifying passion: "In their unrestrained eagerness to possess, the oppressors develop the conviction that it is possible for them to transform everything into objects of their purchasing power" (40).

The insatiability Freire describes arises from a vacuum of alienation and insecurity within. Our cultural systems instill this vacuum in each successive generation, perhaps so successfully because the dangerous environment in which our organism evolved impacts us still today. In her book, *Blood Rites*, Barbara Ehrenreich (1998) has pointed out that, "The original trauma, meaning of course, not a single event but a long-standing condition - was the trauma of being hunted by animals and eaten." (47) Trauma theory-style, we have identified with our aggressors to the point of eradicating or confining all our natural predators. But our deep sense of helplessness remains. Thus, violence is an expression of a biologically embedded drive for safety. The location within our brain whose activation puts us in the powerful emotional state of terror is always a part of us, a kind of permanent genetic "memory." The unconscious fears it manufactures drive us to make ourselves feel more safe and strong, sometimes far beyond what we really need and at the expense of others.

Those fears can also, re-enactment-style, drive us to collectively create a world of danger instead of peace just when the latter is within our reach, because that is what feels "right." A culture can become so organized around unresolved pain that it mistakes its pathology for normalcy. After documenting the extensiveness of violence, Bloom writes compellingly that:

> All of our cultural systems for making meaning are infiltrated with this lethal virus, contaminated in a such a way that we now mistake the "virus" for normal "cells", for normal human feeling, acting, believing, and being. In fact, human culture has become trauma-organised, organised around the unrecognised, unmetabolized and untransformed thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of a post-traumatic response (1998cy, p. 31).

Our culture preaches a story in which to be human is to be naturally greedy. Howard Barker has written, "We are reviving a medieval social theology in which human nature is deemed incurably corrupt in order to reconcile the poor with poverty, the sick with sickness, and the whole race with extermination" (Bloom, 1997cr, 240). Seeing greed as a temporary pattern that a person has allowed into their life and refusing to dehumanize that person might be just as hard to do as granting humanity to violent criminals. But this is the new lens I suggest.

Domination Is Violent and Will Engender Violence

If we begin to hear violence as the verbalization of pain, we will note that imposed and unwelcome control itself creates violence. The germ of domination has infected us to the point that our whole organization as a world organism has become unbalanced. We have taken the Biblical mandate to "subdue and fill the earth" to lengths of destruction that threaten our own health. As a kind of repetition or self-harm compulsion, we nihilistically seem to almost welcome this.

We are reluctant to admit how undemocratic our present democratic states really are, with their impositions (such as the loss of clean air) and covert removal of choice. Freire lists some myths used to maintain elitism in this age of democracy:

The myth that the oppressive order is a "free society"; the myth that all persons are free to work where they wish; the myth that this order respects human rights and is therefore worthy of esteem; the myth that anyone who is industrious can become an entrepreneur — worse yet, the myth that the street vendor is as much an entrepreneur as the owner of a large factory; the myth of the universal right of education; the myth of the equality of all individuals . . . ; the myth of the heroism of the oppressor classes as defenders of [right ideology] against [wrong ideology]; the myth of the charity and generosity of the elites . . . ; the myth that the dominant elites… promote the advancement of the people, so that the people, in a gesture of gratitude, should accept [their] words . . . ; the myth that rebellion is a sin against God; the myth of private property as fundamental to personal human development . . . ; the myth of the industriousness of the oppressors and the laziness and dishonesty of the oppressed… (120-121)

Mindell speaks of power in terms of rank, noting that unconscious rank or denial of it is infuriating to the out-ranked (p. 64). He describes sources of rank, such as: skin color; gender; sexual orientation; education; religion; age; expertise; profession; health; psychology (feeling secure and cared for is a form of psychological rank) and spirituality (another type of exemption from anxiety). He writes, "if you use rank consciously, it's medicine. Otherwise it's poison" (p. 64).

Using rank unconsciously, you will send "double signals," or evince "secondary processes… you might not want to identify with if you realized you were saying them" (54). The hidden signals of those in power, despite rhetoric of equality, say "Your needs are not as important as mine." Higher-ranking people then experience "terrorism" as unfair. But any misuse of rank will elicit anger and hate, creating a confrontational "fire." Violence is the inevitable result of depersonalizing control and misuse of rank.

A System Within a Field

We learn control and domination through the millions of social messages we begin absorbing from infancy and perpetuate it with re-enactment and silence as adults. The loop seems unbreakable:

If you violently oppose the sick system you become part of the sickness. If you do not oppose the system, you collude with it. The dilemma is apparently unsolvable and therefore, members of the system must enter a kind of group trance in which they agree together silently and unconsciously not to see the inherent sickness in the system, not to discuss or critique its underlying assumptions and never to comment on its contradictions (Bloom, 1998m, p. 4).

It is difficult to take on a piece of the system without tripping far-reaching forces of social resistance. To start down the path of nonviolence is paradoxically an existential choice to join the front lines of what often feels like an futile struggle. Witness Bloom's metaphor:

Think of it as an energy flow that has to keep circulating for the entire system to stay 'lit up.' But within our present paradigm, there is always one of more blocks to the flow of energy, and without that sustenance people – and systems – burn out (1997cr, p. 188).

By the same token, *individual behavior is deeply affected by the power of structural and systemic forces.* Mass violence is not due to the evil of any one individual. Herbert Kelman points out that:

[G]eneral psychological processes — such as those concerned with cognitive functioning, reactions to stress, or the behavioral effects of reward and punishment – explain the behavior of… individual actors . . . ; but these individuals act within organized social structures." (Kelman, p. 192)

While Western culture prefers to see "character" as a fixed monolith, physics and Buddhism suggest that, like reality itself, person-

ality is a new product of numerous forces and absences in every moment. Without detracting from individual agency or responsibility, the individual as a component in an operating system has conceptual validity. Stanley Milgram's findings in the "Eichmann Experiment" testify to this.

In this study, on the instructions of the experimenter, 48% - 85% (depending on the formality of the setting) of subjects delivered what they thought was a painful and dangerous shock to a "subject" who gave the wrong answer. Those who declined to administer the shock dismissed themselves quietly and raised no questions with Milgram or his superiors (Charny 14). *Human beings are invested in and responsive to the prevailing norms of a milieu.*

Systems will always act to preserve themselves against change. Kelman lists all the folks who have a vested interest in the continuation of conflict:

> the armaments industry, the military establishment, paramilitary and guerrilla organizations, defense-related research laboratories, and political groups organized to pursue the conflict, . . . political leaders who have played a prominent role in pursuing the struggle and . . . scholars, writers, and journalists who have specialized in chronicling, analyzing, and perhaps even resolving the conflict (p. 221).

The notion of momentum this description impresses applies equally to the *identity systems* that generate coordinated (group, or "ethnic") violence. History becomes a juggernaut, a charge passing through generations as traumatic memory is transferred, in the hope that it can be mourned and resolved or avenged in the future. History is reduced to an explanation of entitlement to revenge. "It is as if time collapses and feelings about ancient events are condensed and intertwined with current events" (Volkan, "The Tree Model," p. 345).

Because the scaffolding of violence pervades culture systemically, solutions to violence must treat the whole milieu as the "patient," rather than simply the identified patients who act out the violence of the domination system. In 1953, in a book about the therapeutic community, Maxwell Jones wrote "In the field of mental health, most attention has been given to psychotherapy; some to mental hygiene, but very little as yet to the

design of a whole culture which will foster healthy personalities (Bloom, 1997cr, p. 1)." Such a culture would provide adequate safety from harm. Instead, harm is accepted and justified in our culture — at least when it is perpetrated by powerful people.

Good and Bad Violence

Gil Bailie notes that there is a battle underway about which harm is justified, and that the powerful have lost the moral authority by which they have traditionally justified their violence. He argues that stratified culture itself is founded on human sacrifice, the main purpose of which is to make any other violence taboo:

> The primary function of the sacred is to so privilege one form of violence, and to confer upon it such transcendent prestige, that a profane imitation of it becomes unthinkable (Bailie, p. 86).

Perhaps sacrificial slaughter originated, as Ehrenreich has written, with the appeasement of wild beasts that hunted early humans. Perhaps demonizing the enemy came about to justify territorial conquest after the rise of food production led to increased population pressures. In any case, Bailie argues that civilization as we have structured it cannot function without scapegoating.

This is how sacrifice has always worked: the disowned parts of the many are projected onto one, originally a human and later a substitute such as a sheep, whose elimination cleansed the group of its failings. This "scapegoating" is still at work in modern processes. Lifton describes genocide, for example, as a part of a "cure" that is as total as the felt sickness. Identification of a persecuting enemy becomes a necessity for therapeutic cleansing. (p. 470) To Germans hungry for self respect and positive identity, Hitler promoted his regime not as the creation of the authoritarian police state it was but as the "dawn of an era of recuperation and regeneration of German community life" (Lifton, p. 471).

In what we call ethnic violence, someone *mobilizes survivors' latent victim-mind,* linking their personal survival to the survival of the group. Personal self-esteem is linked to respect for the group, which is linked to destruction of a purportedly disrespecting or threatening group.

In this way, members of the other group not only become deserving of harm and death, their elimination performs all the purifying functions of ritual sacrifice. Ironically, then, mass killing would seem to come from a deep urge toward vitality (Charny, p. 336). Scapegoating once produced moral power and cathartically bonded the society, uniting observers into an intense sense of belonging. Harmony replaced rivalry at the expense of a criminal, opponent, or even a leader. The morally indignant punishers of crimes are oblivious to the absurdity of the fact that they are perpetrating the same act.

State violence works to sanction extant inequality by maintaining a monopoly on "good" violence, describing its own terrorizing or violent acts as positive antidotes to acts of unspeakable evil. But of late the sameness of good harm and evil harm has been exposed. Which harm is good and which is bad is becoming difficult to unequivocally distinguish.

Part of the reason, Bailie claims, is that norms are shifting from identification with the perpetrator to evaluating reality through the eyes of the victim. As Ron Kraybill writes of holistic peacemaking praxis, it "seeks to view reality through the experience of those who are weak and vulnerable rather than those who are powerful and dominant (1996, p. 139)."

Bailie claims that empathy for victims *as victims* is uniquely Biblical and that as the "biblical virus" infects societies, the previous order slowly loses its moral authority. Increasingly, people attempt to capture the moral high ground by claiming the status of victim; "Few are eager to be tarbrushed, but to *have been* tarbrushed is to enjoy a social status that buckets of old leaf could not hope to bestow." Even regimes must justify their brutality in terms of protecting victims.

Bailie cites the very violence that convulses us as evidence of the weakening ability of the sacrifice to maintain order. The perspective of the victim exposes the supposed sacrality of punitive violence as illegitimate, and the unity becomes unglued, leading to overwhelming levels of violence. Everyone claims sacrality for their violence on the new basis of victim rights. But how strange; the victim role only travels and proliferates, and violence only increases.

It is difficult to free oneself of the idea of the "justified violence." Paulo Freire is speaking up for victims when he writes that there are two types of violence, and that the violence of the greedy oppressor who uses it to get or maintain personal gain cannot be defined with the violence of the freedom fighter.

> Acts which prevent the restoration of the oppressive regime cannot be compared with those which create and maintain it, cannot be compared with those by which a few men and women deny the majority their right to be human (39).

But violence, as a unitary entity, swallows the just and the unjust alike. The moment violence is perpetrated by an oppressed person, violence flows on with increased proportions from the oppressor through the oppressed and the oppressed are perpetrators, however fair their actions feel. Counterviolence is violence re-dressed in a different truth, *but it confirms the harm-worthiness of human beings.* It says, in effect, "All are worth protecting, except this one class of people (the oppressor, the criminal, the enemy, etc.)." A person occupying the oppressor role or the criminal role has other roles too, both potential and present. As Mindell writes, peacemakers must operate by ". . . noticing oppressors, victims and healers. Awareness stops us from putting halos on victims."

Violence legitimizes harm almost by definition and confirms the message that "might is right." It permeates our cultural reality, beginning with the experience of punishment in childhood, and will flow forward unless checked by its antithesis.

Many people feel threatened by this perspective — "I'm sorry that the axe-murderer's mommy didn't hold him enough; he's still going to fry." This attitude itself is a manifestation of unresolved internal wounds or distress. We want to restore our own shattered sense of safety by lashing out punitively. Criminals provide us a socially sanctioned outlet for these powerful needs. Mindell observes that:

> We support the badgering of witnesses in our courts and mudslinging in the political arena for the same reason we watch violent films. Our culture is hungry for heroes and heroines who risk their lives for the sake of vengeance. We look for

bullies who model self-defense and destroy their opponents. Why? Because we have abuse issues that have not been worked out; because we have been hurt and could not defend ourselves (134).

We abhor our own vulnerability. Although no longer in the victimized position, we become trapped in the fight-or-flight loop. As Charny suggests, in situations where death is all around, "It seems almost instinctive that if one wants to gain something [aliveness] that is in short supply, the thing to do is to push others out of the way" (107). Keen quotes a Vietnam veteran; "There is joy, pure joy, in being alive when so many around you are not. And from the joy of being alive in death's presence to the joy of causing death is unfortunately not that great a step" (138).[3]

Thus victims create victims and violence is increasing every day. Bailie's solution to ending scapegoating is to reinvent culture by overcoming rivalry through "God-centeredness." We cannot renounce sacrificial structures, he claims, without renouncing the selfish priorities that make them necessary.

I would argue that although it works for many individuals in certain social conditions, stoic self-renunciation will not in the long run work to reduce violence any better than sacrifice. In fact, that path makes denial and projection of unwanted shadow parts of the self even more likely.

Instead, we need to breathe into the fears — of scarcity and danger — that drive rivalry and violence. We need to de-role the frightened and angry victim behind the perpetrator. The basic soothing of attachment between a mother and infant which says "there is enough for you, all is well," is a message we have the capacity to make true for everyone for our whole range of social, psychological and biological needs at this point in human history.

This dream is not new — it is a dream shared by many, many people. But our fatal mistake has been in thinking we need to use violence to realize it, instead of seeing that when we do, it cannot, by definition, come true.

Conclusions

Our new frame tells us several things as peacemakers. First, violence creates violence by robbing victims of safety and self-esteem, creating further violence through repetition compulsion and attendant overwhelming symptoms.

Second, violence is an ally as well as a problem, both because it tells us where the problem is and because it is an attempt to reduce pain, not a conscious decision to increase it. War has been described as "mass insanity that initiates a *curative* [emphasis mine] process*." (An Overview*, p. 41)

Third and fourth, violence notifies us that control and oppression are present, and that we need to focus on the whole field or system and not isolate 'problem people.'

Fifth, as long as we continue to scapegoat perpetrators, we will be caught in the grip of violence.

All of these insights boil down to the same thing; the domination system must be dismantled in human minds and cultural patterns before violence can ever be reduced. We must know the true name of our enemy in order to defeat it, and a fresh dream will precede this victory.

Cultural Contradictions

Franke Wilmer relates this anecdote:

This summer I had a conversation with a Tutsi woman from Burundi . . . she said that Tutsis and Hutus had "learned" from colonialism that the West considers it perfectly normal for one group to claim itself superior to another and to justify brutality . . . on that basis (personal email).

History books, full of conquest, similarly contradict Western values of equality and autonomy, a dissonance rarely noted. Media violence and the trance of video games present the same conundrum, as does the increase of "surplus" or outsider people (immigrants, the homeless, prisoners, the poor, the very young, old, or sick). Our social institutions do not operate for people and violence pervades every level of society, despite our supposed shock over tyrannical dictators and school shootings. We are quick to mouth universalist values and bestow the language of human rights to misguided cultures, but we name murder only when it suits us: in Rwanda, Bosnia, Armenia or Auschwitz, but never in South Dakota, Hiroshima, Harlem or Iraq. We are still trying to keep the dis-

tinction between "good" and "bad" violence alive.

Violence is Violence

But violence is a single phenomenon:

> Every day, our [media] bring the results of human violence into our living rooms . . . . But the information we receive is fragmented, unconnected to any larger picture. …it is very difficult to make sense out of what we are seeing. But all violence is interconnected. Family violence leads to social violence, which leads back to family violence. The personal is truly political… a public health methodology is the only way we can contain the plague which faces us (Bloom).

Again, this medical comparison indicates that violence is not an inexplicable given.

Throw Open the Hothouse of Shame

Instead, its roots lie in lessons retained by a traumatized society. Violence is rooted in individual emotional experience:

> Shame is the primary or ultimate cause of all violence… I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed, and that did not represent the attempt to prevent or undo this 'loss of face,'… [which] is experienced subjectively as the death of the self. People will sacrifice anything to prevent the death and disintegration of their individual or group identity (Gilligan, pp. 110, 97, 76).

Knowing this, can we set up a society that is not a hothouse for just this kind of experience? Can we instead create a structure that makes validating emotional experience the norm for everyone?

Evelin Lindner intelligently points out that, "Humiliation should be understood as not simply an extreme or marginal condition, but a central feature of the social order" (1999, p. 1). She argues that "the capacity to humiliate and be humiliated are aspects of a dense web of 'hot' filaments wired into the tissue of culture, giving it a potentially explosive character that is too little recognised" (1999, p. 1).

Whatever biological phenomena accompany violence, its causes are structural because it is conserved cultural patterns that create situations traumatizing to individuals. As workshop designers know, safety can be built into a "society" structurally, despite participants' previous socialization within the domination system.

De-legitimize It

In spite of the fact that the field of conflict resolution is organized to spread peace, it fails to recognize the extent to which the domination system permeates its own culture. To represent the interests of peace requires more dissonance with a violent milieu. We need to delegitimize *all* forms of violence, or we have nothing to counter the harm-worthiness of human beings.

It has been determined that violence within hospitals is context-based, involving patients, staff, and the institutional climate. Traditions and assumptions, not clinical imperatives, determine the use of coercion (Goren, 1996r, p. 1). Just as in psychiatric hospitals staff beliefs about restraint determine its frequency (not patients' diagnosis or behavior), (Fisher, 1994, p. 1587), (Weiss, 1998f), we need to approach the reduction of violence *by changing our beliefs about our own entitlement to use it.*

Refusing to accept any violence as legitimate will mean expanding loyalties outward until our primary identity is our common humanity, and perhaps even a more expansive identity that includes the systems on which all life depends. Roche maintains that our own "human rights" have no meaning if other humans do not have them too.

> We may see on television the human tragedies of our time in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Iraq – indeed in all the squalor and horror that pass for human habitation in both rich and poor countries around the world — but we do not comprehend that such immense suffering is the consequence of public policies that tolerate massive violations of human rights. We have not yet

reached a level of civilization that demands the same protection for the rights of the Bosnian child, the Rwandan farmer, the Haitian worker, as we demand for ourselves (Roche, pp. 135, 136).

Don't De-legitimize People

Violence characterizes the structure of all culture and we will not succeed in eliminating it by clamping down on it or scapegoating it away. We need to be more honest with ourselves about how power and domination are operating in the way that we grant rights and sympathies to certain groups and individuals, and the stories we tell ourselves about the harm-worthiness of others.

It is clearly our task to recognize *all* violence as such and then create safety for *everyone*. It may be that the shift we need is not an new evolutionary leap, but a fostering of some archaic wisdom, still encoded somewhere in our basic natures, that has been lost through the heritage of trauma infecting the cultures of the last few thousand years. *Violence is not an unavoidable expression of "human nature." Violence is an unavoidable expression of the nature of our cultural and social agreements.*

These are created, and in turn create individuals with certain values, neural pathways, and expectations, who may feed violence back into the culture. Reconfiguring concepts of revenge and harm-worthiness is not a simple matter. We have operated on the scapegoating principle in our attempts to create peace and justice; we can barely imagine not hating the destroyer of peace or conceive of an approach to accomplishing peace that does not isolate "the problem people."

But This is Naïve!

Solving a complex problem in a very complex system will involve identifying numerous causal strings. Every fragmented arena through which violence is perpetrated might seem to present its own endless battleground. Environmentalists lobby and organize in the political arena, feminists advocate for battered women with assistance communities, AA groups facilitate suspension of violence against the self, and missions of mercy address the effects of poverty as protestors and journalists critique its

causes. Creative communities try out local currency schemes, and researchers decry glamorized violence in the media.

I fully recognize not only the complexity of violence but also the tautology of my assertion that we can eliminate violence if only everyone will agree that this is a desirable priority and work for it. Who is this "we?" If it existed, presumably the problem of intergroup violence would not exist; "we" would all be 'one big happy family.'

My main point is simply this; those of us who dream of peace, not only as rest and relief from suffering, but as a basis for wonderful accomplishments by a human society that is itself an elegant construction, must infect the world with a new understanding of violence.

We must insist that violence has no justification, and we must insist on naming violence wherever it is, rather than denouncing the particular parts of the phenomenon of violence that the dominant culture deems most unsavory. We must be fully ready to see the ways in which we locate evil elsewhere, far from home, *and be willing to find harm where it is — not just where we don't want it to be.* We must refuse to accept the received wisdom that we just have to live with violence. The new lens includes hope for actually making change. The peacemaking community at present does not have this hope, or if it does, keeps it under wraps for the sake of respectability.

What Would it Take
to Change Your Lens?

This change of lens or shift of discourse in individual and collective consciousness is challenge enough for a lifetime, even without the challenges attending its practical ramifications. What does it take to create new agreements? What does it take to dream up peaceful systems that solve the dilemmas that violence attempts to answer? What has to happen in you before you can assert unequivocally that violence is unacceptable, unnecessary, and uniformly wrong *in all its forms*? How will you use your power to identify hegemony in narratives about "good" and "bad" violence, without simply reversing the roles?

My hope is that as more people come to see violence as a collective problem (and, first, themselves as part of a collective, not of a paranoid camp), violence will cease to be seen as a feature of the dehumanized,

evil, scapegoated enemy. Violence will instead be commonly seen as a message of pain indicating domination and injustice still to be eliminated, just as we have all but eliminated polio and smallpox.

These scourges were brought under control by restricting their available hosts through inoculation. Were it our goal to make populations resistant to taking on the dominating role, I believe we could find the psycho-cultural equivalent of a vaccine.

But we first must begin to see the dilemma of violence that way; as *unacceptable, as solvable, and as distinct from infected people.*

Notes

1. I thank Walter Wink for the term.

2. A word about my lens: A preoccupation with power and justice brought me to the peacebuilding profession. The class critique inherent in my Mennonite upbringing (never phrased thus or explicitly stated) provides a drive to seek parity of privilege and power. It also provided me with a sense of distinct or alternative community, one which has traditionally refused to participate politically as a way of rejecting the violence agreement. Not surprisingly, Mennonites gravitate towards theologians like Walter Wink, who cast Christ's mission as an ultimately deadly blow to the dehumanizing structure of the "Powers." But the predominant response to power has been passive compliance (so long as it does not imply participation), and complete psychological withdrawal from the state and its projects. Along with communities everywhere, many Mennonite groups try to realize a just world through their own institutions.

3. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Saul Bellow has his protagonist recall taking a life. A Jew in WWII, Sammler had crawled naked from beneath corpses in a pit and remained hiding in the woods. Here Bellow describes Sammler's ambushing of a German. "Freezing in Zamosht Forest, he had often dreamed of being near a fire. Well, this was more sumptuous than fire. His heart felt lined with brilliant, rapturous satin. To kill the man and to kill him without pity, for he was dispensed from pity. There was a flash, a blot of fiery white. When he shot again it was less to make sure of the man than to try again for that bliss" (144).

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