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Imagining the next 100 years of war

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Prologue

Imagine, for a moment, finding the levels of destructive and lethal violence in US society impossible to accept. Imagine how you could change this. Real changes, not abstract heuristic discussions. Imagine how, exactly, you could change the society so that the major cause of death for the young was not violence; that one out of four people were not mugged each year; that one out of three children did not grow up in a violent home, with some several thousand losing their lives to this violence a year; that some one-third of young women's and men's lives were not marred by sexual assault. Imagine, further, how you might integrate the violent and the assaulted within a viable social universe. What strategies, exactly, might you recommend to a family who had lost one member at the hands of another? Keep murderer and kin apart for eternity? Reconcile? How?

Introduction

Theorists have devoted tomes to discussing the role humans play in creating their worlds of meaning and action. As we progress from country formation to nation, from civil wars to peace, from renaissance and enlightenment through modernism to contemporary visions we see not biology, not the immediate hand of God, but the work of humans in fashioning new worlds and new sensibilities. Regardless of the ultimate role of biology or religion, when it comes to the realities of culture, we recognize that people create themselves; they create cultures. This is so widely accepted that we forget that we haven't a clue how we do this.

Return to my first question: imagine creating contemporary US society without the pathological levels of violence it now suffers. Answers do not come readily to mind. We find ourselves faced with a conundrum: we are the authors of our realities, and the violence in our realities is not healthy. It would appear that we author violence into our midst. Given the fact that most people honestly abhor violence, an impossible contradiction is set into motion: if we are the authors of our lives, then violence must be given, fundamental, eternal – for how else are we to explain its place in our lives? And with this cleverly rational device, we delete our ability to imagine finding the levels of violence in US society impossible to accept, to imagine how, exactly, we could change the society. We delete, as I will discuss, the potential of the imagination: a crucial ingredient of creating – whether this creating involves new ideas or new worlds. For the first step in creating something wholly new is to imagine, in essence to create, the realm of the possible, and how ephemeral possibility can be fashioned into tangible reality.

This may be a rhetorical exercise at academic meetings. It is not for those whose lives are at risk on the frontlines of wars. For a person fighting colonial rule in Zimbabwe, fighting post-independence wars in Mozambique and Angola, fighting to stay alive in Rwanda, fighting postmodern crime in Johannesburg – to say, “imagine a society without destructive and lethal violence” is a matter of survival. In the face of utter destruction, creation moves from being a heuristic academic discussion to an imperative act of survival.

I learned about the imagination and the constitution of self and society from Mozambicans in the most unimaginably de-humanizing conditions – modern warfare. I did not learn about these in the Academy. The imagination suffered a fall from grace, curiously, though I offer no pretence of a cause and effect relationship, at the time of the rise of the modern Academy. In fact, by the present era, the imagination was so disreputable that in writing on its relationship to world-building and the creative constitution of the self in the midst of destructive violence (Nordstrom 1997), I followed Corbin (1971) in labeling it the “creative imaginary”.

Known and unknown possibilities

I have suggested that to create, one must first imagine what is to be created from a horizon of known (and thus already created) possibilities and an infinity of unknown (and thus unthought) ones. But images hinge on the imagination, and this imagination has been reduced to a paltry and comic shadow of creativity in contemporary western philosophy. In medieval times the imagination was defined as a cognitive function more world-constituting than reason in both Christian (Scarry 1994) and Persian texts (Corbin 1969), though it held a second place to “godsight” or holistic knowing. The enlightenment reversed that order, placing reason above the imagination in a hierarchy of sense and knowing. With the advent of existential philosophy, the imagination was demoted to an impoverished rendition of the observed world: a pale imitation of the really there (Sartre 1948). Post-modernism hammered the final nail in the coffin of the imagination with theories exploring the “image” as a culturally eviscerated tool working to fashion hyper-empty notions of self and society (Baudrillard 1983). In its link with image and imagination, creativity itself becomes suspect.

Running concurrent to these philosophies is that of general psychology, which places creativity in the rare spark of genius. The few, and the elite, are the visionaries that carry the rest of humankind into a new world. A fruitful marriage of the elite view of creating social order and cultural progress with the Hobbesian notion of the dog-eat-dog world of the average citizenry has girded much of our extant political philosophy: governing institutions are

necessary to maintain the thin veneer of civilisation that provides order to the unruly self-centered anarchistic masses, and controls instances when that veneer breaks and chaos erupts. Here, governing elites are critical to not only the health, but the very continuance, of self and society. Mozambicans, as we will see, turned that very equation on its head. And in another curious parallel, the imagination has emerged into the theoretical limelight of the Academy in a wholly new way as ethnography hit war and social violence head-on.¹

Far from being abstracted and angst-invoking, imagination in these new explorations is presented as world-building. These new works have come largely from people working in the contexts of severe political and social violence. Castoriadis (1987) has long been a lone voice against the demise of the imagination, arguing that society is constituted through the radical imaginary. C. Wright Mills sought to revitalise Academy through the same imaginative means. Both have been joined more recently by scholars whose work range from ethnic violence in global frameworks (Appadurai) to the specifics of ethnic violence on the frontlines of Sri Lanka's war (Kapferer). Perhaps seeing worlds destroyed and cultures undermined has necessitated understanding the forging of new and vital worlds, for front lines casualties and researchers alike.

To understand this point entails understanding how people on the frontlines of war experience violence versus how those hearing of war at a safe distance perceive it. There is a common misconception among those who have not been exposed to direct violence that war is a circumscribed action. While recognising that it is unsurpassed in brutality, this notion sees violence as largely confined to sites of battles, from bombing and military combat to torture chambers hidden behind prison walls. For those beyond the scope of the battles, at another location, or at another time after the battle has raged to a stop, war – at least the effects of war – cease to exist.

This is a patented fantasy, manufactured to hide the extensive costs of military actions on the lives and cultures of the world's populations. Simple

1 These sensibilities are fairly recent. I am reminded of a debate I had with a philosopher just as I returned from several years in Mozambique at the height of the war there. He was explaining to an audience that in the throes of violence, people first survive, then they think. Philosophy was the handmaiden of the peace and time to develop insight - a view well suited to those within the Academy. I countered that all my fieldwork at the frontlines of wars demonstrated that people think to survive. Philosophy, the creation of worlds of meaning, is crucial to a threatened existence. This sounds like a small point in a very large public discussion on thinking, meaning, and acting in the world, a point best left second to more critical issues of the pain of war and the dilemmas of post-war reconstruction. But delving into the core of relationships between political violence and creating viable social and political systems has led me to resurrect this slice of conversation between philosopher and anthropologist to illuminate a key feature of political power.

military strategies give life to these fictions: one person is tortured to terrorise the many into political acquiescence (the use of dirty war terror has accompanied the vast majority of the wars of recent years). Schools, hospitals, and places of succor are bombed to undermine a society's ability to function at all (ninety percent of all casualties today are civilians – youths and adults equality – and civil infrastructure is a primary war target). Generalised sexual violence is endemic (the sexual torture of both women and men have harmed and killed minions in recent decades).

Terror on the community

In such conditions, daily life is the site of battles, and fear, deprivation, and resistance common and often debilitating companions to those living in war-zones, regardless of exactly where a formal military action might be occurring. War is a reality, not an action. Destruction is a fact of general life, not an isolated military outcome in a circumscribed location. A simple example can help to clarify what I am describing here:

In a number of wars I have personally witnessed, schools were bombed. The pictures outsiders see on the news show a bombed out building, and aid organizations respond with materials and personnel to rebuild the structure. But such reporting and aid misses the point. A school is bombed to wreck terror on a community. A look from the inside brings a whole new set of considerations to the fore.

Consider Mozambique, during the post-independence war there that took a million lives from the mid-1970s to 1992. Civil institutions were primary targets, and some one-third of the country's schools and clinics were closed or destroyed by war. A school is a part of everyday life; it is a grounding point of society. If it can be bombed, dirty war intends to point out, so too can anything else. The threat of imminent destruction – of food sources, of medical aid, of home and self – becomes an inescapable fact of existence. If schools are targeted, so too are schoolteachers.

In Mozambique (in the post-independence war of the mid-1970s to 1992), Renamo targeted schoolteachers; some for kidnapping and forced labor at military bases, some for humiliation through rape, and some for death as a threat to anyone ostensibly supporting the country's infrastructures. If school and schoolteachers were targeted, so too were schoolchildren. Even if they could flee the actual destruction, they could never flee the reality of force and violent oppression in their lives – the whole point of dirty war. If you destroy people's worlds, dirty war philosophy reckons, you can replace them with one of your own making – people will accept anything over chaos. A bad known is preferable to an unknown, the theory goes.

Dirty war is based on a premise, widespread however faulty, that meaning is largely inherent (given by biology, given by God, given by the cultural universe as a whole), and if people and the social institutions they depend on are crippled, so too is the *will* of people. Thus crippled, this theory purports, people will accept an externally imposed meaning system over the proverbial fear of chaos. Of course, dirty war is ultimately doomed to fail, for people do not simply accept the will of an oppressor (Nordstrom 1997). The interesting point here is that people resist by creating. The vast military philosophy undergirding dirty war fails to comprehend fully that people are the architects of their worlds, and their place in it.

'Architects' is used here in its most fundamental sense. The bombed out schools and targeted teachers of Mozambique's war provides a continuing example. Those far from the frontlines conceptually as well as physically may see broken buildings that can be repaired, teachers that will thrive once the peace accord is in place, and students that will return thankfully to continue with their schooling and career goals with the return of peace. These views ultimately rest on a series of (untested) fundamental assumptions about the nature (and I choose this word specifically over culture) of the self and the larger political world. These assumptions tend to take self and society as given.

Thus, while self and society can be harmed during the vicissitudes of war, both return to a stable state – the resting pulse of society's and self's normalcy – once threat and harm are removed. Given this perspective, it seems logical to provide material support: in this case the building materials for new schools (or clinics, or factories) and the classes to train new teachers (or health care personnel, or technicians) to staff them. Mozambicans, for the most part, saw a different reality during the war. Merely "building schools" – meaning here the tendency to provide material aid – was an ideological shorthand for *not-knowing* the reality of war. What is not-known cannot be solved.

Average Mozambicans see the mere rebuilding of society's infrastructures as leaving in place two dangerous features capable of undermining peaceful solutions to political violence. First, nationwide, across more than a dozen language and cultural groupings, people recognize that violence is a cultural system that is reproduced in society, regardless of peace accords, until innovative cultural solutions are instituted to "unteach" violence, as Mozambicans said to me.

Returning to the example of the destroyed schools, Mozambicans sought to institute classes to deal with the traumatization of violence for all primary school children in the country, whether they could afford to rebuild actual

schoolrooms or not. From the Ministry of Education to local level teachers' groups, Mozambicans would argue with aid organizations to be able to use limited resources for educating teachers and students to help societal reconstruction over the providing material resources and traditional training programs alone.

The recognition that stopping war and healing its crippling wounds required far more than merely providing material resources could be found the length and breadth of Mozambique. It was not restricted by gender and age. At one of the schools still operating precariously on the frontlines, I asked school-youths to write a poem about their experiences of the war. Many had firsthand knowledge, as this poem by Herminia shows:

A bitter afternoon
Children, youth and adults
Victims of war.
Burning fire
Fire that glows and burns
The innocent people
The innocent soul
Everything bitter and sad
In that zone of Muaquina
Muaquina in ashes
Ash mixed with blood
Blood of children that die
Without blame.

But children themselves realised that violence is a culture that reproduces itself across time and circumstance, and that war cannot be separated from living if it is to be quelled. The following poem is by Herminia's classmate Imarciana:

In this exact moment
Someone is building one more nuclear trick
Someone is planning a possible war
Someone crafts an explosive for an act of terrorism

In this exact moment
Someone is beating someone
Someone is quarreling with someone
Someone is plotting a revenge against someone
Someone is being oppressed and exploited

In this exact moment

A neighbor passes by someone without greeting him
A husband files for divorce in the court
A wife prepares her children to live without their father

In this exact moment

There is a war in the heart of millions of youngsters, adults,
and old men, And most of them don't launch an atomic bomb
against another because they don't have one

In this exact moment

Peace is dying

For these children, simply rebuilding a schoolhouse or signing a peace accord will not address the cycles of violence that weave across their lives blurring any meaningful distinction of military and domestic threats. For these children it is an innovative act, an act of creative imagination to depict a world of violence linking the clash of militaries and the agony of domestic pain. They label war what many in the USA very uncreatively define as acceptable, as peace. For them, recreating a viable social universe involves imagining life, and conflict resolution, without pathological violence of either the military or civil kind.

Redefining cultural principles

The second dangerous feature the Mozambicans sought to fight in rebuilding society was the tendency of those providing material resources to leave in place the same institutions and institutional cultures that perpetuated political violence in the first place. During the war the vast majority of civilians chose to fight precisely by not employing violence as it had been used against them. They chose instead to redefine society and the cultural principles undergirding the politics of power. This is in fact a potent solution. When people choose sides in a war, when they use the saline kinds of institutions and attendant violence against others that has been used against them, they reproduce the political system and all of its justifications.

In redefining society, people instead delegitimized the social and political structures on which violence was constructed. When civilians were tortured and bombed, the majority responded not by taking up arms, but by instituting networks of healing centers to treat casualties and to teach non-violence, or more literally, to "unteach" violence. When crops were torched and starvation set in, most responded not with revenge, but with setting up

innovative trade and barter systems. When the peace talks bogged down time and again, artists came to the fore not with violent threats, but with graphic representations of suffering and war atrocities that humiliated the warring militaries. When communities were destroyed, average Mozambicans responded not by cowed acquiescence to force, not by leaving the definition of community and security to the political and military bodies, but by taking it upon themselves to reconstitute community, the body politic, and security according to their definitions of peace.

In rebuilding town and citizenry according to innovative solutions to social and political upheaval, Mozambican citizens were in effect saying they did not need political institutions to forge community structure and keep social order. They took political agency on themselves and away from governing and military institutions. They challenged the entrenched ideals that elite governing bodies are necessary to protect people from, in Hobbes' words, their own short and brutish lives. These values of the Mozambican citizenry are in many ways heretical to any formal state structure. If average people in the midst of devastating political violence, failed governing institutions, and social disorder are themselves capable of creating not only viable, but innovative social and governing systems, how necessary are the extensive controls of formal governing institutions and the elites that populate them? How permanent, how critical, is the very notion of the state?

This discussion leads back to my first sentence: Imagine finding the levels of destructive and lethal violence in the United States impossible to accept, and how change could be inaugurated. Real change. What seems inordinately difficult to accomplish in peace time USA is exactly what Mozambicans accomplished in the midst of one of the worst wars of contemporary times. Unable to simply rebuild social universes, political institutions, or the most profound sense of self as they existed before becoming canthers of war and targets of violence, they had to fashion the wholly new. To simply rebuild using the cultural templates available was to rebuild a society crippled by violence.

In the absence of all governing institutions and in the most devastated of conditions, the average citizenry created a viable society capable of withstanding the violent attacks of the governing (politico-military) systems without being co-opted by them. Essentially, they called the philosophies grounding the very notion of state into question. And they reaffirmed the place of the imagination in the *self*, as an attribute of *people*, not in the elite few. With this, they took a step beyond formal theories on the cultural construction of reality to demonstrate how the wholly new can emerge as an act of creation.

Unteaching violence

Mozambique is one of the few countries I have worked in that has been able to maintain its peace accord. I think that the innovative cultures of unteaching violence and social revitalisation people constructed during the war are a large part of the explanation. Citizens, the proverbial masses, imagined not only a future, but the means to bring it into being.

Can we, on a global scale, assess the harsh realities of our present, and visualise the future with enough imagination to stave off what many realists might call inevitable violence, as the Mozambicans have done? What patterns of violence characterize the world today? I have argued elsewhere that while each instance of violence is shaped by the cultural and historical conditions in which it emerges, the vast sets of international relationships that link warzones have created shared cultures of war and resistance throughout the world that also shape local realities.

Mozambique fits into a larger global pattern where many militaries rely on dirty war tactics, civilian targeting (as I pointed out above, ninety percent of all casualties today are noncombatants), human rights violations (consider the fact that children are tortured in equal numbers to adults in the world today), gender violence (eighty percent of refugees are sexually violated), and the use and harm of children (more children are killed in war today than soldiers).

But these relate to peace time problems. People suffer the ravages of "dirty little wars" in the midst of their daily lives, though not everyone would apply the Mozambican sensibilities in calling these a form of war. The larger global pattern parallels that of war in perhaps too many ways: in many locations civilians are more likely to be killed by violence than by illness or accident. They suffer human rights violations (security forces in over half the world's countries breach human rights in dealing with civil populations), gender violence (one third of all women world-wide suffer domestic violence, and the sexual torture of men and women in prisons plagues many countries²), the use and harm of children (despite child labor laws, some 200 million children work most full days, and the number of child prostitutes exceeds two million).

The number, intensity, length, and lethality of wars have increased steadily over the last century. The targeting of civilians has likewise been increasing at a dramatic rate. Studies of violence are in their infancy in many ways: we have no certain idea to what extent war time brutalities can undermine peace time health, or how the impetus to violence in one arena configures the

2 Studies have shown a strong correlation between gender violence in peace general (peacetime societies) and societies with high incidences of violent warfare.

other. If Mozambicans are right that cultures of violence are inculcated in society through exposure to violence – in effect, that war “teaches violence which thereupon permeates civil society and domestic life”, then mere peace accords alone will leave dangerous patterns of violence within society unchecked. War time and peacetime violence become somewhat arbitrary distinctions if the violence of one reconfigures that of the other. Wartime brutality becomes insidiously enmeshed in everyday life across war and peace. Peace time violence sets in place frictions that can re-erupt in social and political violence.

Left unchecked, the prognosis for the next 100 years is not bright: cultural logic indicates that dirty war tactics, human rights violations, and gender and youth violence are likely to continue to plague both wartime and peacetime populations. These are cultures that have been set into motion through the global interplay of power politics.

On the bright side, as both the Mozambicans and scholars such as Castoriadis stress, culture can be radically reconstituted through the radical imaginary. Futures, once envisioned, can be created. The entrenched belief that violence is inevitable, given, and inherent in the human condition has undermined many efforts to imagine a future less crippled by brutality.³ Mozambicans successfully challenged these political notions. They recreated the imagination as inherent to the human condition.

I have worked in a number of warzones worldwide, and Mozambique is the first place where I encountered such philosophies of average people being the font of world-building on a countrywide basis. Here such philosophies achieved the status of shared culture translated into cross-cultural practice. Perhaps violence has reached such pathological levels in the world that survival depends on revitalising the role of creative world-building, of the imagination, to envision and create more healthy futures. Mozambique might be at the forefront of a cultural trend to, literally, “unteach” violence and forge new ways of dealing with dangerous social and political entanglements. In this case, outrage at the unjust levels of violence visited on the many by the armed few, whether in wartime or peacetime, could unseat the now vaunted position of dirty war in the next century. The battle will be an easy one: state authority is threatened by movements that give political and cultural agency, autonomy, and integrity to “the masses”.

3 As I mentioned earlier, many political systems are founded on the belief that politics is necessary to control the nasty Hobbesian brutes that make up the masses of (uncertain) humanity. They have embraced the notion that the creative imagination necessary to world-building is a rare gift bestowed on the very select few. The rest of us play out lives over which we have no control, and the future will look much like the present.

Epilogue

This analysis has left me with a nagging thought: two historical trends I have just discussed here seem to have evolved in tandem. The first is the philosophical fall of the imagination from a position of creating self and world, found in medieval texts, to a mere pale reflection of the perceived (real) world today. The second is the rise of the state, of its governing institutions and philosophies, as paramount to human order. I began this paper by noting that the fall of the imagination paralleled the rise of the modern Academy.

While positing no cause and effect relationship, I find myself curious about the association of these three trends. In carving out a niche for themselves, did academics carve out control of the imagination, in its radically constituting aspect, that is to say, in its ability to fashion philosophy and the future? With the idea that creativity rests only in the spark of the creative few, only those few elites lucky enough to carry this spark are seen as competent to lead. Academics, so defined, forge the known from the unknown. Their role is thus critical to the creation of possibility and the forging of the future. The best the rest can hope for is to live in an era and area emboldened with the leadership of visionaries.

In this worldview, creativity and imagination are limited goods, and by definition they are limited from the "masses". Logically, then, "the masses" become defined apart from "the impetus for political definition and change". The loss of the imagination as a creative force inherent to people, to mass humanity, strikes a blow at political will in general. Has the Academy helped strike this blow in seeking to separate "true knowledge" from "folk or popular knowledge", in defining the radical imaginary as their province alone? Perhaps the greatest act of academic imagination is to release the concept of imagination as world-constituting from its definitional mooring in the elite few and the Academy and see it as inherent in the human condition.

If any association holds among the three historical trends – the fall of the imagination and the rise of the Academy and the modern state – then the recent (however limited) reintroduction of the imagination into the Academy through theory, and into practice through the acts of people like the war-weary Mozambicans, heralds the potential for a more creative definition of where the next 100 years will take us.

21st Century Epi-logue

I return to this article seven years after it was written – seven years and countless changes in war and terrorism, in notions of power and the creative imagination. As I look out across a world changed by a new face of terrorism, by new wars, and by new alliances of thought and action, I find the dynamics on the ground of violence have changed little from those described in this piece. In fact, they have intensified. The interplay of power and survival are still as acute. But one thing has changed, and not for the better: the creative imagination critical to rebuilding self and world in war is far less visible now than it was seven years ago. The 21st century face of violence, from the rise in attacks on civilians worldwide to state-based wars, such as the USA-led war in Iraq and the Russian war in Chechnya, have polarized people across the globe's continents.

In this polarization, the process that I wrote about above has become even more entrenched. Let me explain: If the Academy and the Imagination are inversely related in the world today, so too are the State and the Imagination. Academics' embeddedness in the state, however laudable, means that the state is, quite literally, the paramount site of power and privilege as they live these, and in turn, academics privilege the state. It becomes the foci, the definitive point, of research. Academics are as invested in the state as it is in them. A state is an abstract notion that is given substance by virtue of being recognized as substantive. A state needs academics to theorize it into being.

War needs justification, and so too do the states that wage wars. If the State – as a political category – is to survive onslaughts, it must appear the pinnacle of human political endeavor. So too must the institutions that undergird governments. Political policy, democratic process, military strategy, and civilian ethos must, in the battles of war, be presented as unassailable: enduring, successful, powerful, permanent. Who goes to war saying their policies are questionable, their democratic ideals impermanent?

Creative imagination, by definition, calls all claims to final authority (from set policies to reigning worldviews) into question. To assert there is a better way is to undermine the state's claim to representing the highest achievement possible in the contemporary political world. Furthermore, to assert that creativity resides in the uncharted frontiers of civilian society – in the turbulence and wisdom of 'the masses' – is to challenge the state's supremacy of governance. Thus, as the USA led war in Iraq spills across sovereign borders – as it resonates with other wars worldwide from Palestine/Israel to Chechnya through Burma to the Colombia 'war on drugs' – the state and its policies are constructed as unassailable. Imagination is laid to rest. I have been surprised in the rush of events marking political violence in the

21st century how little room remains for the creative assessment of policy and political practice, how little tolerance there is for imagining new political and military possibilities.

In this context, what, specifically, is my updated vision of the next 100 years of war? The horizon of possibilities is infinite: violence is crafted into action through the minds, and not merely the bodies, of humans, and as such, the potential of the as-yet unthought is unbounded. But human activity tends to follow patterns of trajectory: it was a logical step to assume that as the industries producing the technologies of World War I would themselves become the targets in World War II, along with the people who worked in them. It was not a far step to see the demoralizing bombing raids of WWII working into cultures of dirty war and the attempt to terrorize populations into submission.

Looking at the world today, I can give three examples of future scenarios:

1) Transnational corporations (TNCs), both legal and illicit, are reshaping sovereignty and the control of landmass. They are not tied to the land ownership/resource control/sovereignty equation as traditional national industries were. The fact that they represent 50 percent of economic action today underscores their power. How does this play into the violence of tomorrow? The less scrupulous of these - and already a number of TNCs have militias - may focus on controlling critical industrial and economic resources (from minerals and oil to human labor). Weak state collapse in resource-rich locales would be the ideal for transnational profiteers. Violence, then, would not be the killing of bodies, as in WWI, nor the construction of terror, as we find today. Violence would be directed at creating chasms - in creating, quite literally, voids - in civil and political authority in order to wrest control of economic process.

2) A second potential future for violence builds pathologically from the ideas behind the use of terror warfare today. Terror warfare moves killing from targeting bodies to targeting what might be termed the substance of humanity. The killing and terrorizing of bodies may well evolve into an attempt to undermine the proverbial Geertzian "webs of significance" that give meaning to people's lives. Honor, dignity, family, work, survival become the targets of war. The complete undermining of water, food, trade, communication, and service (such as medical) systems would be central to the goal of state and civil collapse.

3) The first two scenarios are not optimistic. The third presents a positive outcome against violence, one that builds on the idea that violence is neither functional nor essential to the human condition. While those invested in con-

trol through violence prefer that violence appears absolute (in the sense that violence overpowers nonviolence), it is not. In many ways, the power of violence depends on the illusion of absolute-ness.

There is a curious irony in this: for those who wage war, an enemy picking up weapons to fight is far less threatening than a group of people who collectively decide violence is not legitimate. State power is invested in militaries, and militaries are invested in the control of violence. To wage war against such a military may produce dead bodies, but the founding ideological beliefs that link state, military and the control of violence remain intact. But to challenge the very founding beliefs in the state/violence equation is to question the very legitimacy of the governing elite. People may choose to “fight” by rebuilding society, revitalizing concepts of humanity, and re-forging notions of power and place.

In this context, the conclusion of the original article still holds strong. In the face of hegemony and political violence, the creative will percolate up through the ideas and actions of the embattled and the ordinary, through the roiling citizenry.

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Imagining the next 100 years of war

Carolyn Nordstrom

Imagine, for a moment, finding the levels of violence in US society impossible to accept. Imagine how you could change this. Imagine how you could change the society so that the major cause of death for the young was not violence. What strategies, exactly, might you recommend?

With examples from her own experiences of the post-independence war in Mozambique, Carolyn Nordstrom points to the fact that what seems difficult to accomplish in peace time USA is exactly what Mozambicans did in the midst of one of the worst wars in our days. Unless innovative cultural solutions are created to “unteach” violence, the cultural system of violence will be reproduced in society, regardless of peace accords.

The prognosis for the next 100 years is not bright, says the author. But culture can be radically reconstituted through the radical imaginary. Futures, once envisioned, can be created.

Carolyn Nordstrom is associate professor of anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, USA. Her principle areas of interest are the anthropology of war and peace in the contemporary world, and illegal economies and power.

Life & Peace Institute (LPI) is an international and ecumenical institute for peace research and action, based in Uppsala, Sweden. Founded in 1985 by the Swedish Ecumenical Council, LPI aims to further the causes of justice, peace and reconciliation through a combination of research seminars, publications and conflict transformation programmes.

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- Religion, conflict and peace
- Human rights and economic justice
- Nonviolent conflict transformation



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